

Skilled Interpersonal Communication

Research, Theory and Practice

5th Edition



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CHAPTER

OWEN HARGIE

Published in 2011
by Routledge
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex,
BN3 2FA

Simultaneously published in the USA
and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY
10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor
& Francis Group, an Informa business*

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Typeset in Century Old Style by
RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow,
Cornwall
Cover design by Lisa Dynan

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This publication has been produced
with paper manufactured to strict
environmental standards and with
pulp derived from sustainable forests.

*British Library Cataloguing in
Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in
Publication Data*

Hargie, Owen.

Skilled interpersonal communication :
research, theory, and practice / Owen
Hargie.—5th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references
and index.

1. Interpersonal communication.

I. Title.

BF637.C45H33 2010

153.6—dc22

2010010084

ISBN: 978-0-415-43203-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-43204-7 (pbk)

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Communicating effectively: the skills approach

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL, powerful and universal desire amongst humans to interact with others. As expressed by Afifi and Guerrero (2000: 170): 'There is a long history of research establishing the importance that individuals place on connectedness . . . individuals' needs for initiating, developing and maintaining social ties, especially close ones, is reflected in a litany of studies and a host of theories.' The mere presence of another has been shown to be arousing and motivating and this in turn influences our behaviour – a process termed *compresence* (Burgoon *et al.*, 1996). We behave differently in the company of another person than when alone. When we meet others we are 'onstage' and so give a performance that differs from how we behave 'offstage'. We also enjoy interacting, and indeed the act of engaging in facilitative interpersonal communication has been shown to contribute to positive changes in emotional state (Gable and Shean, 2000). While our dealings with others can sometimes be problematic or even contentious, we also seek, relish and obtain great reward from social interaction. Conversely, if we are unable to engage meaningfully with others, or are ostracised by them, the result is often loneliness, unhappiness and depression (Williams and Zaidiro, 2001).

The seemingly innate need for relationships with others has been termed *sociation* (Wolff, 1950). As Ryff and Singer (2000: 31) put it: 'Across time and settings, people everywhere have subscribed to the view that close, meaningful ties to others is an essential feature of what it means to be fully human.' In other words, individuals need to commune with others. Three core types of psychological need have been

identified – competence, relatedness and autonomy – and the satisfaction of all three results in optimal well-being (Patrick *et al.*, 2007). The competence need involves a wish to feel confident and effective in carrying out actions, in order to achieve one's goals. The relatedness need reflects a desire to have close connections and positive relationships with significant others. The autonomy need involves wanting to feel in control of one's own destiny, rather than being directed by others.

In order to satisfy all three psychological needs it is necessary to have an effective repertoire of interpersonal skills. These skills have always been important. Our early ancestors who lived in groups were more likely to survive than those who lived alone, and so the skills involved in developing and maintaining social bonds assumed a central role in human evolution (Leary, 2001). Thus, Forgas and Williams (2001: 7) noted: 'Homo sapiens is a highly sociable species . . . our impressive record of achievements owes a great deal to the highly elaborate strategies we have developed for getting along with each other and co-ordinating our interpersonal behaviors.' Indeed, Levinson (2006) argued that the human mind is specifically adapted to enable us to engage in social interaction, and that we could therefore be more accurately referred to as *homo interagens*.

Another part of the reason for sociation is that: 'The essence of communication is the formation and expression of an identity. The formation of the self is not an independent event generated by an autonomous actor. Rather, the self emerges through social interaction' (Coover and Murphy, 2000: 125). In this way, 'a sense of personal identity is achieved through negotiation with others' (Postmes *et al.*, 2006: 226). In other words, we become the people we are as a result of our interchanges with others (this issue is further discussed in Chapter 2 and explored in more detail in Chapter 9). Interaction is the essential nutrient that nourishes and sustains the social milieu. Furthermore, since communication is a prerequisite for learning, without the capacity for sophisticated methods and channels for sharing knowledge, both within and between generations, our advanced human civilisation would simply not exist. Communication therefore represents the very essence of the human condition. Indeed, one of the harshest punishments available within most penal systems is that of solitary confinement – the removal of any possibility of interpersonal contact.

Thus, people have a deep-seated need to communicate, and the greater their ability in this regard the more satisfying and rewarding will be their existence. Research has shown that those with higher levels of interpersonal skill have many advantages in life (Burlinson, 2007; Segrin and Taylor, 2007; Segrin *et al.*, 2007; Hybels and Weaver, 2009). They cope more readily with stress, adapt and adjust better to major life transitions, have higher self-efficacy in social situations, greater satisfaction in their close personal relationships, more friends, and are less likely to suffer from depression, loneliness or anxiety. One reason for this is that they are sensitive to the needs of other people, and this in turn leads to them being liked by others, who will seek out their company.

In a review of research, Segrin (2000) concluded that interactive skills have a 'prophylactic effect' in that socially competent people are resilient to the ill effects of life crises, whereas individuals with poor skills experience a worsening of psychosocial problems when faced with stressors in life. As summarised by Segrin and Taylor (2007: 645): 'Human beings seek and desire quality interpersonal relationships and experiences. Social skills appear to be an important mechanism for acquiring such

relationships, and where they are experienced, obvious signs of positive psychological states are abundantly evident.' Many of the benefits here are, of course, interrelated, and so it is probable that the network of friendships developed by skilled individuals helps to buffer and support them in times of personal trauma. Those with high levels of skill also act as positive communication role models for others, and so they are more likely to be effective parents, colleagues or managers.

There are other tangible rewards to be gained from developing an effective interpersonal skill repertoire. These begin from an early age, since children who develop good interactive skills also perform better academically (McClelland *et al.*, 2006; Graziano, *et al.*, 2007). Skilled children know how to communicate effectively with the teacher and so are more likely to receive help and attention in the classroom. Their interactive flair also enables them to develop peer friendships and thereby make school a more enjoyable experience. The benefits then continue in many walks of life after school.

In the business sphere there are considerable advantages to be gained from good communication (Robbins and Judge, 2009), and effective managers have been shown to have a strong repertoire of interpersonal skills (Bambacas and Patrickson, 2008; Clampitt, 2010). Surveys of employers also consistently show that they rate the ability to communicate effectively as a key criterion in recruiting new staff (CBI, 2008). Individuals need to pay attention to their *social capital*, which refers to the benefits that accrue from being socially skilled, fostering a large network of conducive and committed relationships characterised by goodwill, trust and reciprocity, forging commitments, and developing a good social reputation (De Carolis and Saporito, 2006; McCallum and O'Connell, 2009).

The relationship between social capital and interpersonal skill has been compared to that between resource stock and resource flow in organisations, in that social capital can be regarded as an accumulated asset, while interpersonal skill is one of the key factors that determine the value of this asset (Baron and Markman, 2000). Entrepreneurs who possess high levels of interpersonal skill have advantages in a range of areas, such as obtaining funding, attracting quality employees, maintaining good relationships with co-founders of the business, and producing better results from customers and suppliers (Baum *et al.*, 2006). Not surprisingly, therefore, skilled communicators have been shown to be upwardly mobile and more likely to receive pay raises and gain promotions (Burlison, 2007).

Likewise, in health care, the importance for professionals of having a 'good bedside manner' has long been realised. In 400 BC, Hippocrates noted how the patient 'may recover his health simply through his contentment with the goodness of the physician'. In recent years, this belief in the power of communication to contribute to the healing process has been borne out by research. Di Blasi *et al.* (2001) carried out a systematic review of studies in Europe, the USA and Canada that investigated the effects of doctor-patient relationships. They found that practitioner interpersonal skills made a significant difference to patient well-being. Practitioners with good interpersonal skills, who formed a warm, friendly relationship with their patients and provided reassurance, were more effective in terms of patient well-being than those who kept consultations impersonal or formal. Similarly, Rider and Keefer (2006) and Tallman *et al.* (2007) have shown that high levels of practitioner interpersonal skill are positively correlated with increases in the quality of care and effective health

outcomes, while ineffective skills are associated with decreased patient satisfaction and increased medication errors and malpractice claims. These findings are corroborated in the field of nursing, where effective interpersonal communication has been shown to be related to improved health outcomes, such as greater patient satisfaction and quality of life (Klakovich and dela Cruz, 2006).

Similar findings recur across professions. Thus, in teaching, interpersonal skills have been shown to be critical for optimum classroom performance (Worley *et al.*, 2007). As aptly summarised by Orbe and Bruess (2005: 6): 'The quality of our communication and the quality of our lives are directly related . . . Our lives are a direct reflection of the quality of the communication in them.' This means that interpersonal skills are at the very epicentre of our social existence. We ignore them at our peril.

But the good news is that we can improve our ability to communicate. A great deal is now known about the key constituents of the DNA of interactive life. Indeed, the academic study of interpersonal communication has a very long and rich tradition, spanning some 5000 years. Pedagogical Luddites of today who complain about the introduction of the 'new' discipline of Communication should pay attention to history. The oldest essay ever discovered, written about 3000 BC, consisted of advice to Kagemni, the eldest son of Pharaoh Huni, on speaking effectively in public. Similarly, the oldest book, the *Precepts*, written in Egypt by Ptah-Hotep circa 2675 BC, is a treatise on effective communication.

Given the early historical focus on communication, it is perhaps surprising that this area was subsequently largely neglected in terms of academic study in higher education, until its resurgence in the late twentieth century. As noted by Bull (2002: vii): 'Communication is of central importance to many aspects of human life, yet it is only in recent years that it has become the focus of scientific investigation.' For example, it was not until 1960 that the notion of communication as a form of skilled activity was first suggested (Hargie, 2006a).

In the intervening years, the fairly obvious observation that some individuals are better social interactors than others led to carefully formulated and systematic investigations into the nature and function of interpersonal interaction. Indeed Segrin (1992) pointed out that the concept of social skill has been investigated by researchers in virtually all fields of social science. This has occurred at three levels:

- 1 Theoretical analyses of how and why people behave as they do have resulted in various conceptualisations of skilled behaviour (see Hargie, 2006a).
- 2 Research has been conducted into the identification and effects of different types of social behaviour. It is this level that the present book addresses.
- 3 Several approaches to training in communication skills have been introduced in order to ascertain whether it is possible to improve the social performance of the individual (for a review of these see Hargie, 2006b).

Over the past 20 years there has been a vast outpouring of research in this field. An important part of this research and scholarship has involved an analysis of the exact nature of the skills process.

THE NATURE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

In terms of nomenclature, different terms are used synonymously to describe this area. The terms 'social skills', 'interpersonal skills' and 'communication skills' are often used interchangeably. The latter, however, can encompass written as well as interpersonal skills, while the former is generally used to refer to developmental or clinical applications. In this text all three terms will be employed interchangeably but the main emphasis is upon the 'interpersonal' descriptor. Thus, interpersonal skills, in a global sense, can be defined as the skills we employ when interacting with other people. This definition is not very informative, however, since it really indicates what skills are used for rather than what they are. It is rather like defining an aeroplane as something that gets you from one country to another.

Attempts to define the term 'interpersonal skill' proliferate within the literature. In order to illustrate this point it is useful to examine some of the definitions that have been put forward by different theorists. In his early work in this area, Phillips (1978: 13) concluded that a person is skilled according to:

the extent to which he or she can communicate with others, in a manner that fulfils one's rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations to a reasonable degree without damaging the other person's similar rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations, and hopefully shares these rights etc. with others in free and open exchange.

This definition emphasises the macro-elements of social encounters, in terms of reciprocation between participants. This theme is also found in the definition given by Schlundt and McFall (1985: 23), who defined social skills as 'the specific component processes that enable an individual to behave in a manner that will be judged as "competent". Skills are the abilities necessary for producing behavior that will accomplish the objectives of a task.'

These definitions tend to view skill as an *ability* that the individual may possess to a greater or lesser extent. A somewhat different focus has been proffered by other theorists, who define skill in terms of the *behaviour* of the individual. For example, Robbins and Hunsaker (2009: 6) iterated that 'a skill is a system of behavior that can be applied in a wide range of situations', while Cameron (2000: 86) stated that 'the term *skill* connotes *practical expertise*, the ability to *do* something'. Proctor and Dutta (1995: 18) extended this behavioural emphasis, to encompass the *goals* of the individual: 'Skill is goal-directed, well-organized behavior', while Kelly (1982: 3) emphasised the dimension of *learning* by defining skills as 'those identifiable, learned behaviors that individuals use in interpersonal situations to obtain or maintain reinforcement from their environment'.

These elements were summarised by Robbins and Hunsaker (2009: 6), who argued that to gain competence in a skill 'people need to understand the skill conceptually and behaviourally, have opportunities to practice the skill, get feedback on how well they are performing the skill, and use the skill often enough to integrate it into their behavioral repertoires.'

In his review of definitions of skilled behaviour, Hargie (2006a: 13) defined interpersonal skill as 'a process in which the individual implements a set of goal-directed,

inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours, which are learned and controlled'. This is the definition adopted in this book. It emphasises seven separate components of skill:

- Skilled performance is part of a transactional *process*.
- Skilled behaviours are *goal directed*.
- Skilled behaviours are *interrelated*.
- Skills should be *appropriate* to the *situation*.
- Skills are defined in terms of identifiable units of *behaviour*.
- Skilled behaviours are *learned*.
- Skills are under the cognitive control of the individual.

Skilled performance is part of a transactional process

Stewart *et al.* (2005) argued that interpersonal communication is characterised by an ongoing verbal and nonverbal process of collaborative meaning-making. In this sense, interaction requires considerable coordination, as each person regulates their actions in line with others (Gonzales *et al.*, 2010). This involves what Pickering (2006) referred to as 'the dance of dialogue', wherein individuals align their talk with one another, and construct shared meaning from the conversation. Balachandra *et al.* (2005) likened certain forms of interaction, such as negotiation, to the process of improvised performance (similar to improvised jazz or theatre) where those involved must pay attention to the moves of others and be flexible in how they respond. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, skilled performance is indeed a *process* that involves:

- formulating appropriate goals
- devising related action plans
- implementing these plans
- monitoring the effects of behaviour
- being aware of, and interpreting, the responses of others
- taking cognisance of the context in which interaction occurs
- adjusting, adapting or abandoning goals and responses in the light of outcomes.

Skilled behaviours are goal directed

They are those behaviours the individual employs in order to achieve a desired outcome, and are therefore purposeful, as opposed to chance, or unintentional. As expressed by Carnevale and De Dreu (2006: 55), 'the human being is an *intentional system*', designed to pursue goals. In his review of the field, Wilson (2006: 100) demonstrated how most scholars 'view communication as a goal-driven process'. Likewise, Huang (2000: 111) noted that, 'the purposes people bring into communication have important consequences on communication processes'. Goals both motivate and navigate the interpersonal process (Berger, 2002; Oettingen *et al.*, 2004). For example, if A wishes to encourage B to talk freely, A will look at B, use head nods when B

speaks, refrain from interrupting B, and utter ‘guggles’ (‘Hmm, hmm’, ‘Uh, huh’; etc.) periodically. In this instance these *behaviours* are *directed* towards the *goal* of encouraging participation.

The goals we pursue are not always conscious, and indeed one feature of skilled performance is that behaviour is often executed automatically (Moors and De Houwer, 2007). Once responses are learned they tend to become hard-wired or habitual, and goal-directed behaviour is then under what Dijksterhuis *et al.* (2007) refer to as ‘unconscious control’. In this way, people automatically and subconsciously regulate their behaviour in order to achieve their goals (Chen *et al.*, 2007). When we know how to drive, we no longer have to think about actions such as how to start the car, brake, reverse, and so on. Yet, when learning to drive, these actions are consciously monitored as they are performed.

In the successful learning of new skills we move through the stages of *unconscious incompetence* (we are totally unaware of the fact that we are behaving in an incompetent manner), *conscious incompetence* (we know what we should be doing and we know we are not doing it very well), *conscious competence* (we know we are performing at a satisfactory level) and finally *unconscious competence* (we just do it without thinking about it and we succeed). This is also true of interpersonal skills. During free-flowing social encounters, less than 200 milliseconds typically elapses between the responses of speakers and rarely do conversational pauses reach three seconds. As a result, some elements, such as exact choice of words used and use of gestures, almost always occur without conscious reflection (Wilson *et al.*, 2000). In relation to the negotiation context, McRae (1998: 123) explained: ‘Expert negotiators become so proficient at certain skills in the negotiating process that they do not have to consciously think about using these skills. It’s as if the responses become second nature.’ However, an awareness of relevant goals does not ensure success. As expressed by Greene (2000: 147):

Action may not be so readily instantiated in overt behavior . . . the inept athlete, dancer, actor or public speaker may well have a perfectly adequate abstract representation of what he or she needs to do, but what actually gets enacted is rather divergent from his or her image of that action.

Thus, skill involves not just the ability to formulate appropriate goals, it also necessitates being able to successfully implement them in practice. In other words, ‘*skill* refers to the degree to which a performed behavior proves successful’ (Miczo *et al.*, 2001: 40). An important part of this, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, is the ability to accurately detect the goals being pursued by those with whom we interact (Palomares, 2009a).

Skilled behaviours are interrelated

Skilled behaviours are synchronised in order to achieve a particular goal. Thus the individual will employ several behaviours simultaneously. For example, as mentioned previously, when encouraging B to talk, A may smile, use head nods, look directly at B and utter guggles, and all of these signals will be interpreted by B as signs of

encouragement to continue speaking. Each behaviour relates to this common goal, and so the behaviours are in this way interrelated and synchronised.

Skills should be appropriate to the situation

Our behaviour is influenced to a very large degree by situational demands (Snyder and Stukas, 2007), and skilled individuals employ context-relevant behaviours. Dickson and McCartan (2005) referred to this aspect of skilled performance as *contextual propriety*. In their review of this area, White and Burgoon (2001) concluded that the key feature of social interaction is that it necessitates adaptation. Indeed, linguistic conceptualisations purport that skill is mutually constructed through dialogue and so can only be understood by an interpretation of how narratives develop in any particular context (Holman, 2000).

From an interpersonal communication perspective, Wilson *et al.* (2000: 136–137) illustrated how effective interaction involves adaptation at all levels:

Speakers coordinate their own behavior with that of their interactive partner. Interparty coordination is evident at microlevels, such as in the timing of mutual smiles . . . (and) . . . at more macrolevels, such as in the adjustment of one's own plans to the apparent plans of one's conversational partner.

In many routine situations, such as filling stations or fast food counters, participants have a good idea of one another's goals and so adaptation is easy. However, in more complex contexts, such as psychotherapy or negotiation, the interactors have to spend considerable time establishing one another's agendas and agreeing mutual goals for the encounter, so that they can adjust and adapt their responses accordingly (Berger, 2000).

Skills are defined in terms of identifiable units of behaviour

In this way, 'skill is reflected in the performance of communicative behaviors. It is the *enactment* of knowledge and motivation' (Cupach and Canary, 1997: 28). We judge whether or not people are skilled based upon how they actually *behave*. Verbal and nonverbal behaviour therefore represent the oxygen of the communicating organism. Skilled responses are hierarchically organised in such a way that large elements, like being interviewed, are comprised of smaller behavioural units such as looking at the interviewer and answering questions. The development of interpersonal skills can be facilitated by training the individual to acquire these smaller responses before combining them into larger repertoires. Indeed, this technique is also used in the learning of many motor skills.

Skilled behaviours are learned

The sixth aspect of the definition is that behaviours are learned. It is now generally accepted that most forms of behaviour displayed in social contexts are learned (Burton and Dimpleby, 2006). From the day of their birth, infants are communicated with as if they can understand. Parents and other carers talk to them and ascribe intentionality to their behaviour (e.g. 'You are hungry and are looking for some milk, aren't you?', 'There, you wanted your rattle, didn't you?'). The function here is to bring the infant into 'personhood' by treating it as a communicating being (Penman, 2000). This is a very important step in the social development of the individual. For example, as the child grows it is taught to read. This begins with the social process of slowly reading and speaking the words aloud, which eventually results in the child learning to read silently. The skill of talking to oneself in silence takes time to master, and is predicated upon the earlier social dynamic of reading with others. In this way, communication is central to the development of cognitive abilities.

Children reared in isolation miss out on these essential learning experiences. As a result they display distorted, socially unacceptable forms of behaviour (Newton, 2002). At a less extreme level, there is evidence to indicate that children from culturally richer home environments tend to develop more appropriate social behaviours than those from socially deprived backgrounds (Messer, 1995). Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory purports that all repertoires of behaviour, with the exception of elementary reflexes (such as eye blinks), are learned. This process of social learning involves the *modelling* and *imitation* of the behaviour of significant others, such as parents, teachers, siblings or peers. By this process, from an early age, children may walk, talk and act like their same-sex parent. At a later stage, however, the child may develop the accent of his or her peers and begin to talk in a similar fashion – despite the accent of parents.

In addition to modelling and imitation, a second major element in the learning of social behaviour is the *reinforcement*, by significant others, of these behaviours when displayed by the individual. In childhood, for example, parents encourage, discourage or ignore various behaviours that the child displays. As a general rule, the child learns, and employs more frequently, those behaviours that are encouraged, while tending to display less often those that are discouraged or ignored. In this sense, feedback is crucial to effective performance (see Chapter 4 for a full discussion of reinforcement).

Skills are under the cognitive control of the individual

The final element in the definition of skills, and another feature of social cognitive theory, is that they are under the cognitive *control* of the individual. As expressed by Cameron (2000: 86):

A 'skilled' person does not only know how to do certain things, but also understands *why* those things are done the way they are. S/he is acquainted with the general principles of the activity s/he is skilled in, and so is able to modify what s/he does in response to the exigencies of any specific situation.

SKILLED INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Thus a socially inadequate individual may have learned the basic elements of skills but may not have developed the appropriate thought processes necessary to control the utilisation of these elements in interpersonal encounters. An important dimension of control relates to the timing of behaviours. Skilled behaviour involves implementing behaviours at the most apposite juncture. Learning *when* to employ behaviours is just as crucial as learning *what* these behaviours are and *how* to use them. As expressed by Wolvin and Coakley (1996: 52): 'Communication skills combine with communicator *knowledge* – information and understanding – to influence the entire process.'

Zimmerman (2000) identified four key stages in the learning of skills.

- 1 **Observation.** Here the person watches others perform the skill, and also pays attention to other dimensions such as the motivational orientation, values and performance standards of the actors, as well as how the repertoires used vary across target persons.
- 2 **Emulation.** At this stage the individual is able to execute a behavioural display to approximate that observed. The display is emulated but not replicated. For example, the *style* of praise used may be similar but the *actual words used* will differ.
- 3 **Self-control.** This involves the actor beginning to *master* the skill. Thus, the tennis player will practise serving until this is fully developed, while a barrister will likewise practise questioning technique.
- 4 **Self-regulation.** Finally, the person learns to use the skill appropriately across different personal and contextual conditions. To continue the analogies, here the tennis player is concerned with placing the serve where it is likely to find the opponent's weak point, while the barrister will consider appropriate questions to achieve the best outcomes from different witnesses.

The acronym CLIPS is useful for remembering the key features of interpersonal skill. Skilled performance is:

- Controlled by the individual.
- Learned behaviour that improves with practice and feedback.
- Integrated and interrelated verbal and nonverbal responses.
- Purposive and goal directed.
- Smooth in the manner in which the performance is executed.

OVERVIEW

Simon (1999) illustrated how our identity and sense of purpose depend on us finding a 'place' in our social world. The ability to achieve this 'place' in turn is dependent to a very large extent upon one's interactive skills. The fluent application of skill is a crucial feature of effective social interaction. In Chapter 2 a model is presented, which sets the study of skill within the wider context of the social milieu. This illustrates how the appropriateness of behaviour is determined by a number of variables relating to the context of the interaction, the roles of those involved and

their goals, as well as personal features of the interactors (age, sex, personality, etc.). It is, therefore, impossible to legislate in advance for every situation in terms of what behaviours will be most successful to employ. The information about skills contained in this book should rather be regarded as providing resource material for the reader. How these resources are employed is a decision for the reader, given the situation in which any particular interaction is taking place.

There are 14 main skill areas covered in this text, beginning with nonverbal communication (NVC) in Chapter 3. This aspect of interaction is the first to be examined, since all of the areas that follow contain nonverbal elements and so an understanding of the main facets of this channel facilitates the examination of all the other skills. Chapter 4 incorporates an analysis of reinforcement, while questioning is reviewed in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, an alternative strategy to questioning, namely reflecting, is investigated. Reflection consists of concentrating on what another person is saying and reflecting back the central elements of that person's statements.

The skill of listening is explored in Chapter 7, where the active nature of listening is emphasised, while explaining is focused upon in Chapter 8. In Chapter 9, self-disclosure is examined from two perspectives; first, the appropriateness of self-disclosure by the professional, and second, methods for promoting maximum self-disclosure from clients. Two important episodes in any action – the opening and closing sequences – are reviewed in Chapter 10. Techniques for protecting personal rights are discussed in Chapter 11 in terms of the skill of assertiveness. The skill area of influencing and persuading has attracted growing interest in recent years and this is covered in Chapter 12, and the related skill of negotiation is addressed in Chapter 13. Finally, in Chapter 14 the skills involved in interacting in and leading small group discussions are examined.

It should be realised that research in the field of social interaction is progressing rapidly and it is anticipated that, as our knowledge of this area increases, other important skill areas may be identified. The skills contained in this book do not represent a completely comprehensive list, but they are generally regarded as being the central aspects of interpersonal communication. In addition, it is recognised that, while these skills are studied separately, in practice they overlap and complement one another. What is definitely the case is that knowledge of the repertoire of skilled behaviours covered in this text will enable readers to extend and refine their own pattern or style of interaction.