

Behavioural analysis in training

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Key learning points

- What interactive behaviours are.
- Why interactive behaviours are valuable to trainers.
- Some key interactive behaviours.
- Using interactive behaviours for behavioural analysis.

Introduction

Most of the information that is learned on courses is conveyed or mediated by language. This may seem like a bold statement – for the readers of this article, the language is English, with all the elements of grammar, syntax and pronunciation that are inherent in English – but there is more, much more, to it than that.

This article will deal with interactive behaviours, which are largely independent of specific content that trainers, through their very professionalism, are highly competent in – namely, communicating so that people learn. Rackham and Honey, and others, developed the content and structure of interactive behaviour.

There are particular oral behaviours that are valuable to trainers across the whole range

of professional communication, such as needs analysis, task analysis, persuasion and negotiation, direct training, coaching and counselling. It is not only trainers who use these behaviours; all people who are effective communicators do. We shall focus on trainers. Trainers, by their very role, automatically become role models for communication. Very few other professionals in an organisation have their communication behaviours exposed to so many people.

Why are interactive behaviours valuable to trainers?

There is a tendency for us to acquire oral behaviours and use them without being clear about which type we are using. We need a specification for interactive behaviours, to know which we are using and to give us the opportunity to choose the behaviours to use in a particular situation.

Learning about interactive behaviours gives trainers a tool to design learning events and to observe the oral behaviours being used by others. Through this, we can assess the effectiveness of the behaviours and combinations of behaviours



being used by trainees in a given situation. We are therefore discussing a behavioural set that is a valuable tool for trainers.

What are these interactive behaviours?

There are a large number of interactive behaviours, and they can be grouped in a number of different ways. To help participants understand when to use these, we divide them, very simply, into **Pull** and **Push**. Participants find it useful to think about what proportion of Pull and Push to use in different situations. For example, in an interview, the emphasis would be on Pull rather than Push; while in a coaching situation, the proportion might shift to a more even split.

Here are the definitions of Pull and Push and a description of the behaviours we have found most useful.

- **Pull behaviours** These engage the other person directly, causing them to respond, or are a response to behaviours generated by the other person.
- **Push behaviours** These are generated by the speaker. They do not necessarily generate engagement or a relationship.

Behaviour analysis

Interactive behaviours give us a tool for analysing behaviour. Managers often describe learning needs in generic terms such as 'They need to manage meetings', or 'He is aggressive'. Such language is useful in everyday conversation, but is too ambiguous to identify learning needs. Interpreting these statements may lead us to miss the essence of the real requirement. Being more specific about behaviours enables us to give the managers what they need, as well as giving them a tool for coaching and assessing the staff members. By practising, observing and feeding back specific behaviours, we can help learners know exactly what they are doing within the context of the generic need.

Example: Meetings behaviours

Chairing meetings breaks down into a number of Pull behaviours, such as making process proposals and suggestions, seeking clarification and testing understanding, seeking content and process proposals, summarising, shutting out and bringing in.

The *team worker* also uses many Pull behaviours, such as supporting, building, seeking feelings and seeking clarification.

This is in marked contrast to the *expert* or *specialist*, who is high on giving information, making content proposals and disagreeing

The observation grid

We can identify the role by the behaviours used. If somebody wants to enhance their natural inclination for a role, they can do this by learning appropriate behaviours.

We can use a grid to observe people during interactions (see Figure 1). This enables us to obtain some statistics, such as the total number of a particular behaviour per person, ratios between behaviours, and ratios between people. The statistics can be for roles, clusters of behaviours, and so on.

What does the incomplete table in Figure 1 tell you about the clarity of Fred's and Jane's information

References

- P. Honey, *Face to Face: Business Communication for Results*, Gower Publishing Limited, 1988.
 N. Rackham, and T. Morgan, *Behaviour Analysis in Training*, McGraw Hill, 1978.
 N. Rackham, P. Honey and M. J. Colbert, *Developing Interactive Skills*, Wellens Publishing, 1971.

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	Fred	Jane	David	Mary
Giving information	IIII III	IIII I	IIII	II
Seeking information			I	IIII
Seeking clarification			II	III
Clarifying	I	IIII		
Supporting			I	II
Disagreeing	II			

Fig. 1: Observation grid

giving? What sort of role is Mary taking? What about the balance between seeking clarification and clarifying? Clearly, no final conclusions can be reached from such a small sample – but it does demonstrate the power of this training tool for recording objectively.

Behaviours in particular situations

The pattern of the Pull and Push interactive behaviours is different in different situations, and for different roles within an interactive situation. It is not that any behaviours are incorrect; some are more appropriate to achieve the outcome required. The classic trainer using Pull behaviours is, by definition, an *asker*, compared to a presenter or lecturer using Push behaviours, who is a *teller*.

We have used behavioural analysis as a methodology to train managers and supervisors in the behaviours of influencing, meetings, consultancy, appraisal, interviewing, assessing and interpersonal behaviours.

Conclusion

The behaviour of others towards us is largely determined by our behaviour towards them. Skill in using interactive behaviours enables us to modify our behaviour and adopt appropriate behaviours to assist us in helping others learn. It follows that interactive behaviours have to be learned and practised, so that we do not fall into unthinking or unproductive modes of behaviour. Interactive behaviours give us choice.



Pull behaviours

Seeking information

When training, we use **open questions, probes and closed questions**.

With an **open question**, we have no idea how the person will answer. They often start with *What, Why, How, When* or *Where*.

- For example, 'Where do you live?' can be responded to in a variety of ways, such as 'In England' or 'Off the A30'.

A **probe** may start *Tell me about*, and is usually more specific than an open question.

- For example, 'Tell me about the manager who gave you that feedback'.

A **closed question** is one that has a Yes or No answer or is restricted by the question.

- For example, 'Do you have a flipchart?'.

The response gives information. The advantage of open questions and probes is that they tap into the other person's agenda, values or beliefs, telling us about them as well. The sort of personality classification you use can be read from the way information is given, and that helps

you to select the way to communicate with the person. For instance, you can deduce whether the person likes detail or the big picture.

Seeking proposals

This is asking another person what should be done. We are seeking an action, not information. The response is usually a proposal. Seeking proposals engages the other person, making them feel valued.

Seeking feelings

This is asking for a statement about the person's emotional state. Most greetings are seeking feelings.

- For example, 'How are you (feeling) today?' or, more directly, 'How do you feel about that?'.

This is often more valuable than what a person 'thinks' about something. Unfortunately, the response often gives information.

- For example, 'I think ...'.

Seeking clarification and testing understanding

This is checking to ensure that we understand what has been said to us. It may take the form of a question (seeking clarification) or a statement (testing understanding).

Seeking clarification usually results in giving clarification. It shows you are interested in what the person has said.

- For example, 'So are you saying that if we ask for clarification it shows our interest?'.

Testing understanding is also used to check that somebody understands what you have said.

Reflecting and paraphrasing

This is stating what the speaker has said in their own words (reflecting) or in our own words (paraphrasing). Both approaches are useful. They demonstrate listening and understanding. Reflecting is very useful to the speaker, particularly when they are struggling with conflicting ideas or complexity.

Reflecting feelings

Reflecting can also be effectively used for feelings.

- For example, 'It seems that you are very happy about the course'.

Reflecting feelings is a very powerful behaviour for building rapport. It is vital in handling a person who is displaying strong emotion. A common reaction is to say something like 'Calm down' (a command), which often exacerbates the situation. If we want the person to exercise self-control, it is usually more effective to say 'I can hear you are angry' or 'I can see you are very excited by that'.

Supporting

This is when we agree. It is normally a response to a proposal or a factual statement. It pulls the person towards us and builds the relationship.

- For example, 'I agree with that' is a powerful message.

Avoid 'I agree with that, but ...' as this is a disagreement. *But* is a very powerful word; it discounts what has gone before it. *And* is more positive; it builds on what the person has said and balances it with what we say. *Even though* shows support and recognises there is some downside.

Try it. Use a two-part sentence and insert each of the three conjunctions.

- For example, 'Behavioural analysis is a valuable tool ... it takes time to learn'.

Building

This is expanding on a proposal.

- Proposal: 'I think we should learn behavioural analysis'.
- Building on the proposal: 'Yes, and perhaps Mandy will coach us'.

Building on a proposal tends to generate agreement.

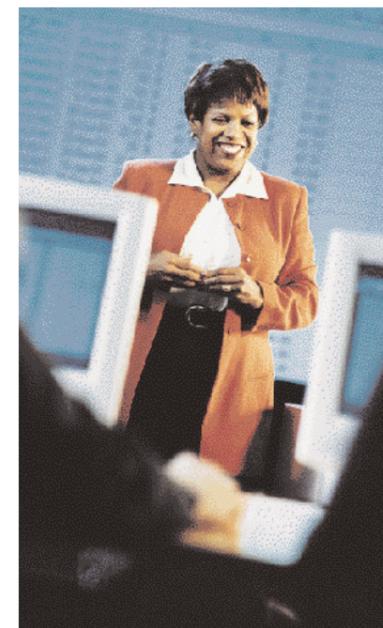
Summarising

This is gathering together the strands of what has been said and succinctly restating it. It is powerful because it demonstrates understanding and gives the opportunity for the speaker to fill in the gaps or emphasise those things that are important to them.

Suggestions

These are proposals made in the form of a question.

- For example, 'Shall we move on to Push behaviours?'.



Push behaviours

Giving information

This is the most common behaviour used.

Giving feelings

This is a statement of how we *feel* about a situation or statement. It is a powerful behaviour. Consider: 'I am happy with that', and 'Those ideas make me uncomfortable'. Hearing these statements from trainees enables trainers to take action to help the person. British men do not express feeling statements as often as women, or as people in general in other cultures. Feelings are usually generated as a result of proposals, or sometimes by information. Both support and disagreement are involved with feelings.

Disagreement can often generate, or be generated by, strong negative feelings.

Disagreeing

The most common form is stating difficulty.

- For example, 'No, we can't run it in F7; the recruiters will object'.

If we find we are doing this, reframe it as a proposal: 'Perhaps we should ask the recruiters in F7 what they think'. Another form involves blocking a proposal.

Making content proposals or suggestions

These are making proposals for action to do with the job.

- For example, 'We should run the course residentially'.

Suggestions are proposals, but phrased as a question.

- For example, 'Should we run the course residentially?'.

Suggestions are more likely to gain agreement. Proposals may result in support, disagreement, counter-proposals or building.

Making process proposals

These are to do with the process, rather than the content of the interaction.

- For example, 'You tell me first about your experience and then I'll talk about mine'.

Clarifying

This is the response that clarifies.

Shutting out

This is a control behaviour to stop a person speaking by interrupting or over-talking.

Bringing in

This is inviting a contribution from somebody.

There are, of course, many more, but these are some of the key interactive behaviours.

Key interactive behaviours

Pull behaviours	Push behaviours
Seeking information	Giving information
Seeking proposals	Giving feelings
Seeking feelings	Disagreeing
Seeking clarification and testing understanding	Making content proposals or suggestions
Reflecting feelings	Making process proposals
Supporting	Clarifying
Building	Shutting out
Summarising	Bringing in
Suggesting	