



Relationships EBook

Building Relationships

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Introduction

The ability to develop secure functioning relationships is a cornerstone to success in any endeavour and with the complexities of human nature can be one of the most frustrating experiences of life. Establishing functional relationships is a crucial life skills for obtaining the professional and personal network that will provide the necessary support in achieving your goals. In this essay I explore some key ideas behind how we relate to others and build functional relationships.

Esteem Needs

Abraham Maslow (a famous psychologist) identified a range of needs that need to be obtained for someone to function in a secure state of being. Once basic physiological needs are met, Maslow identifies how we require safety from a predictable routine and a sense of belongingness from the companionship we receive from our relationships. Maslow termed these as 'esteem' needs whereby people act in ways to acquire stable, firmly based relationships for the sake of establishing self-respect, for self-esteem and for the esteem of others. Maslow identified another set of needs that can be built from establishing secure relationships, being: a feeling of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy and being useful and necessary in the world. He also identified this being thwarted by a feeling of inferiority, weakness or helplessness.

Once basic survival and esteem needs are met, Maslow describes how people work towards finding meaning within their work in the world towards fulfilling a sense of self-actualisation where someone is operating to their highest potential in utilising their skills and attributes towards creating works of value within the world.

Building Connection

Bolton (1979) describes how all people yearn for a closer connection, but that this can be compromised by a lack of communication skills. Golman (1998) describes how self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills form the basis of an emotional intelligence at the heart of effective relationship building skills. Bolton identifies two major barriers as judging and sending solutions. To remove these roadblocks, he suggests listening with close attention that is reflected in the presence of your body language, providing supportive reassurance to support others opening up, paraphrasing to let others know you have assimilated the meaning of their words, providing reflective

responses that seek to uncover underlying issues and using assertiveness to produce change without invading others personal space and prevent conflict through clear language and good reasoning. In support of this Goleman suggests showing a capacity for big picture thinking, having political awareness, having a confidence build upon self-efficacy, and being able to apply your intuition.

Psychological Safety

Establishing greater security within a person's environment and relationships leads further to a sense of self efficacy and psychological safety. Bandura (n.d) describes a person's self-efficacy as the most important and pervasive influence upon their personality. With a strong self-efficacy people can overcome grate obstacles in achieving their goals and have high resilience to stress. Jarvis (2005) suggests that people of high self-efficacy are able to visualise positive futures and act upon them to overcome doubts and set-backs to arrive at more successful outcome (May, 2003). Psychological safety is built upon a foundation of universal needs of respect, competence and social status. A recognition of these needs helps build trust and promotes a culture of positive language and behaviours where a person feels respected and appreciated (May, 2003).

Collinson (2003) describes psychological safety as a shared belief that it is safe within a team for interpersonal risk taking. It can be defined as "being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career" (Kahn 1990, p. 708). In psychologically safe teams, team members feel accepted and respected. Psychologically safe team members "feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea." Sinek (2017) promotes creating psychological safety through use of positive emotions like trust, curiosity, confidence, and inspiration to broaden the mind and help us build psychological, social, and physical resources. The term 'psychological safety' was made popular by Amy Edmondson, a Harvard economist, who observed people becoming more open-minded, resilient, motivated, and persistent when we feel safe (Edmondson, 1999). She observed that these practices result in an increase in humour, solution finding and divergent thinking all cognitive processes important for creative thinking.

Braaten (1991) demonstrated two common themes in establishing functional relationships being either an attraction and bonding process between individuals or to the extent individuals are comfortable with self-disclosure and receiving feedback. An empathetic appreciation of others perspectives (Levi, 2014) and appropriate sensitivity in a person's own conduct can facilitate improved connectivity between people and a sense of recognition by others (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), both factors that have been shown to lead to an increase in group cohesion and performance Braaten, 1991).

Duhigg (2017) describes how evolutionary adaptations behind why a sense of psychological safety is important for workplace function. The flight of flight reaction of the brains

amygdala can react to a workplace provocation in a way that short-cuts the normal rational function of the brain. In contrast a workplace that is challenging but not threatening can encourage the brain to release oxytocin and encourage a sense of trust and trust-making behaviour (Ferriss, 2016). At Google a companywide initiative was adopted to promote psychological safety in the workplace (Duhigg, 2017). Google managers used checklist to self-assess their ability be aligned to psychological safety practices, such as: not to interrupt teammates during conversation as that will establish an interrupting norm, to demonstrate their listening by summarising back main points to speakers and admit what they don't know.

Emotional Intelligence

The importance of relationships is investigated further in Daniel Goleman's book on working with emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). Five key areas Goleman identifies as being important in applying emotional intelligence are managing stress to avoid toxic communication, recognising and managing emotions to manage growth, the ability to communicate non-verbally in a positive manner, to use humour and play to build light relief and to effectively resolve conflicts. He describes how in building a relationship, individuals should know how to nurture the bond or connection.

Goleman describes how self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills form the basis of an emotional intelligence at the heart of effective relationship building skills. These skills form the foundation of ways to build connection with others and building rapport from which support to the business will flow. Through creating successful relationships people are able to fulfil what Abraham Maslow termed 'esteem needs' whereby people act in ways to acquire stable, firmly based relationships for the sake of establishing self-respect, for self-esteem and for the esteem of others. From establishing secure relationships there arises a feeling of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy and being useful and necessary in the world.

Attachment Theory

Through understanding attachment theory, we can better understand the underlying drivers behind human psychology that impact upon our ability to form secure functioning relationships. John Bowlby first coined the term as a result of his studies involving the developmental psychology of children from various backgrounds. Attachment is a special emotional relationship that involves an exchange of comfort, care, and pleasure. The roots of research on attachment began with Freud's theories about love, but another researcher is usually credited as the father of attachment theory (Bowlby & King, 2004).

John Bowlby devoted extensive research to the concept of attachment, describing it as a *"lasting psychological connectedness between human beings."* Bowlby shared the psychoanalytic view that early experiences in childhood are important for influencing development and behaviour later in life. Our early attachment styles are established in

childhood through the infant/caregiver relationship. In addition to this, Bowlby believed that attachment had an evolutionary component; it aids in survival. "The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals [is] a basic component of human nature," he explained.

Bowlby's studies in childhood development and "temperament" led him to the conclusion that a strong attachment to a caregiver provides a necessary sense of security and foundation. Without such a relationship in place, Bowlby found that a great deal of developmental energy is expended in the search for stability and security. In general, those without such attachments are fearful and are less willing to seek out and learn from new experiences. By contrast, a child with a strong attachment to a parent knows that they have "back-up" so to speak, and tend to be more adventurous and eager to have new experiences (which are of course vital to learning and development).

Attachment styles are characterized by different ways of interacting and behaving in relationships. During early childhood, these attachment styles are centered on how children and parents interact. In adulthood, attachment styles are used to describe patterns of attachment within relationships to friends, partners and work colleagues. An understanding of attachment theory can have many applications to building secure functioning relationships in life. Initially an understanding of your own attachment type can help identify characteristic approaches you have for building relationships with others.

Secure attachment types experienced stable and loving connection with a significant carer from which a sense of secure self-esteem was able to develop. This self-esteem then created the foundation to support secure relationships with other people later in life.

Anxious-preoccupied types experience heightened anxiety and over attachment to others. This may result in anxiety relating to others that results in isolation or pushing people away within relationships by being 'needy'. Beneficial strategies of these types are using awareness and deep breathing to regulate emotions, extending their comfort zone and having positive re-enforcement to help build more social habits. This attachment style typically develops as a result of early parental relationships not providing the nurturing required and resulting in the child becoming withdrawn and overly relying upon self-soothing due to absence or neglect of attention from parents. Due to the underlying mistrust of other in being able to provide secure attachment, island types become overly independent and have difficulty working through the stages of establishing secure attachment with others.

Fearful-avoidant types experience cycles of heightened attachment and withdrawal in their relationships with others. This volatility often results in edgy behaviour that can lead to disruption in long term relationships. Wave types benefit from developing strategies to regulate emotions and delay responding to move away from impulsive reactions driven by strong emotions. Strategies like take three deep breaths when feeling emotionally triggered before responding or having an exit strategy to get out of situations you know will trigger you and result in undesired outcomes. Wave types often result from parent's attachments that were too needy and created inappropriate levels of attachment often followed by

neglect. This resulted in anxiety in relating to others and an association of strong emotions with creating relationships with others that leaves these types edgy to handle.

Dismissive-avoidant types experience difficulty developing healthy attachments to people are highly individualistic and self-fulfilled. Within relationships with others they seek a high degree of autonomy and have a tendency to show coldness and isolate themselves from others.

Group Cohesion

Group cohesion and a sense of belonging are commonly cited by researchers as two common themes involved in the attraction and bonding process between individuals of a group (Mullen & Cooper, 1995). This is assisted by our trust that each member makes contributions towards the best interest of the group dynamic from the space they are operating from (McLeod and Von Treuer, 2013). As team dynamics progress individuals become increasingly more able to communicate openly, with growing confidence that people will not be emotionally reactive. This trust arises from emotional security within secure relationships with others, an empathetic appreciation of others perspectives and appropriate sensitivity of a person's own conduct and how it can facilitate improved connectivity between group members (Covey, 2004).

The ability to develop group cohesion facilitates the type of binding that allows people to work collaboratively on projects and progress their goals.

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