

CASE STUDY

Understanding how interpersonal relationships underpin the workplace

Interpersonal Relationships in Organisations (IRO) is one of Roffey Park's longest running programmes. For over thirty years, Roffey Park has been pioneering the exploration of the dynamics of relationships in the workplace and helping executives understand and develop their interpersonal skills. And, after all this time, it remains a critical element of the successful organisation

Interpersonal relationships are at the heart of Roffey Park's approach to learning, drawing on a long tradition of adult learning and organisational development. We encourage open, candid discussion of the impact of relationships by recreating an organisational structure within the group. By allowing participants to interact with each other naturally, we enable a dynamic, real-time environment that explores how we relate to ourselves and each other:

The IRO programme begins by asking participants to gather feedback from their peers, managers and subordinates. This provides an honest appraisal of core skills, such as the ability to listen, to ask pertinent questions, to understand and fundamentally relate to all levels within the organisation. This then provides a starting point for the programme itself.



Each programme lasts five days and is comprised of three main elements: large group work, small group work and optional workshops. There is also the opportunity to have one-on-one tutorial sessions with Roffey Park's facilitators.

Of these, the workshop sessions provide the opportunity to focus on specific areas of learning, such as psychometric profiling, influencing skills, managing conflict, models of understanding relationships, handling emotions and understanding non-verbal behaviour.

The small group work sessions provide a forum to explore workplace scenarios. Each participant brings an example situation that they work through as a team of three to four. This creates a climate in which risk taking and thinking creatively are rewarding.

The large group sessions are usually the ones that have most impact on participants. There are five of these sessions over the course of the programme and their objective is to openly explore how individuals interact with each other. Without a set agenda, these are fluid and dynamic environments that allow the participants to create their own format and, in doing so, learn about how they interrelate.

IRO Programme Director Andy Smith explains: "Many participants initially find the large group work sessions a little intimidating. There is the instinctive expectation that Roffey Park's facilitators will lead the way and set an agenda. By challenging this, the session allows individuals to learn about relationships from the ones they are actually forming in the room. We find that patterns that exist in the workplace recreate themselves in the group in a short space of time."

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“We evaluated the effectiveness of the programme through questionnaires sent to recent participants to find out how useful the programme had been. Every respondent reported their behaviour had changed on returning to work and 90% of respondents had taken specific action to improve successfully a working relationship they discussed on the programme. Perhaps most significantly, 85% of respondents reported that colleagues at work had commented positively on improvements in their interpersonal skills.”

Participants on IRO can come from any level within an organisation but generally fall into three broad categories. At one end of the scale, participants might be ambitious, task-orientated careerists but aggressive or not as empathic as they could be. At the other end of the scale, participants might be lacking assertiveness or influencing skills. In between are those who understand the significance of interpersonal relationships and want to sharpen and hone their skills.

Falling into the last category is Ashley Azavedo, a banker with HSBC in Dubai. His manager had undertaken the programme a few years ago and encouraged Ashley to look into it as a way of improving his interpersonal skills. Having explored what Roffey Park had on offer, he decided it would be a useful experience.

“I’m always keen to improve my skills at every level and, from the website, I could see that this programme would prove beneficial,” explains Ashley. “I wasn’t entirely sure what to

expect but the flexibility and fluidity of the programme really helped us to get under the skin of how we interrelate in the workplace.”

“It was five days well spent and I certainly achieved something. I’m now a much better listener; whereas beforehand I tended to assume people knew what I was talking about, I now ensure that everyone is in complete understanding and agreement. I’m more conscious of body language and other non-verbal cues that help us to understand each other. My colleagues have noticed and remarked on the improvement and I have already recommended IRO to colleagues. As a banker, we tend to focus on numbers and the business rather than how we work together; Roffey Park has certainly helped remedy this and, in the process, made me a better worker and colleague.”

Andy Smith concludes: “Roffey Park has been helping people explore and understand how they work together for over thirty years with its IRO programme. Even now, it remains fundamentally important for successful organisations so we’re looking forward to the next thirty years of helping people like Ashley understand how they relate to others and how to communicate more effectively.”

Roffey Park runs IRO throughout the year at our residential site in Sussex. For more information:

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