The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour

Michael Argyle


This highly readable paperback takes a very broad look at interpersonal communication, summarising numerous research findings as well as presenting the author's own ideas. While not directly related to technical communication and focussed on face-to-face rather than written exchanges, this book has much to offer the technical communicator. Successful interpersonal relationships are important to most people in modern society, not least those who earn their living in a branch of communication.

The book is divided into twelve chapters. The first five deal with motivation, non-verbal and verbal means of communication, the perception of others, and the effect of personality and situation. These combine to give a solid background in how and why we communicate as we do.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide detailed analyses of relationships between two people and within larger groups. The former is interesting at a personal level, giving an academic perspective to intimate relationships between spouses, family members and close friends. The latter extends from circles of friends to much larger and more formal organisations.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal in more detail with the psychology behind interpersonal behaviour, both the processes found in normal people and the differences found in those suffering from mental disorders. By analysing how behaviour can go wrong, Argyle demonstrates the importance of various facets of the personality.

The closing chapters examine professional situations in which interpersonal skills are important, along with the nature and success of different types of social skills training.

The strength of this book is in the enormous range of studies from which results are reported and the understandable way in which the author makes his case. It is easy to find oneself among the personality types described and to identify with some of the problems such individuals encounter in dealing with other people. Although there is no direct application to technical communication, anything that enables us to understand our readers better, whether as a group or as individuals, must surely be useful. Improved social skills can enable us to work better with colleagues and other contacts. Appreciating the nuances of how we appear to others and how we judge others from subtle aspects of their behaviour can also be helpful in interviewing, whether as interviewer or candidate.

All in all, this is an interesting and informative book at a very reasonable paperback price.

About the author

Argyle established the Oxford Social Psychology group and has conducted research in various aspects of social psychology, specialising in the experimental study of social interaction and its application to wider social problems. He has lectured in thirty-four countries and published many books and articles.