



BEHAVE!

What you say and do influences your effectiveness in business, says **Ally Yates**

The learning and development curriculum of most organisations offers a wide range of skills-based courses. For example, you can learn about behaviour-based safety or assertiveness, negotiation or collaboration. The purpose of each programme is to build individual and corporate capability in order to deliver enhanced results.

Individual, targeted, skills-oriented programmes are where most organisations spend the 10% of their 70-20-10 allowance. The investment can be useful, with initiatives providing a square in the patchwork quilt of skill development. What's often missing, though, is the thread which holds the various pieces together.

Rarely do you see a programme focusing on general interaction skills – those behaviours which are the bedrock of interpersonal effectiveness, equipping the learner to become more skilful and successful by applying learning to diverse situations.

As teamwork and collaboration is now a central block in many training patchworks, these general interaction skills are enjoying a dramatic, timely and profitable renaissance. Where they aren't prioritised, you can quickly see the evidence. For example – poorly managed meetings; domineering voices; stunted creativity; unhealthy competition among team members; isolated colleagues; disengagement; a tendency to judge, and a lack of shared clarity.

One of the most powerful ways to develop these much-needed skills is through using behaviour analysis, or BA for short. BA is a research-based tool which allows you to capture everything that's said in any interaction in real time and to then use that data as feedback to develop future verbal behaviour.

It's a powerful tool that helps individuals and teams to understand how they behave, the impact of their

behaviour and the (more constructive) alternatives open to them.

James Evans, the head of IT enterprise architecture for a global mining business described BA as: "An indispensable set of proven techniques for effective and productive interpersonal and team work."

The good news about BA is that most of the time you have control over your behaviour and can exercise choice about what you say and how you say it. Your behaviours influence the impact you have and whether you're seen as the ideas person, a collaborator, the



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best talker or the wallflower, to cite just a few workplace stereotypes.

When people build behavioural flexibility early in their career, it helps set them apart from the crowd and they become a role model for their peers. As people transition from an individual contributor role to being a supervisor and then a manager, so their behavioural repertoire needs to extend.

The more senior someone is in an organisation, the greater their need for behavioural flexibility and the ability to shift their focus to myriad tasks – strategic direction, leadership, influencing, decision-making, building commitment to change. So, the evidence for sewing these behavioural threads is compelling.

BA provides individuals, groups and teams with a shared lexicon for



improving individual and collective performance. Remote teams, multi-cultural teams and local teams can all benefit. It's not where you come from that matters, it's how you use the time together and how you achieve your outcomes.

There are 13 types, or categories, of behaviours that are used in our day-to-day interactions. The first step in creating a quilt that will endure is understanding each of the categories.

1 Proposing procedure

This category involves the suggesting of a new course of action. It relates to the way in which a pair or group is working – or could work. For example, *“Why don't we start by discussing the graduate scheme, then we can come on to the HR plan for the year?”*

2 Proposing content

This involves suggesting a new concept or idea which is actionable, which relates to the topic being discussed: *“Let's create some opportunities for our graduates to work-shadow.”*

3 Building

This category covers efforts to extend or develop a proposal

already made by another person: *“Yes, and we could have them rotate through the different departments.”*

4 Seeking proposals

Asking other people for their ideas or suggestions. For example, *“Which departments would be most valuable for graduates?”*

5 Supporting

Making a clear statement of agreement with, or support for, a person or their statement, opinion, idea or approach. For example: *“That's a great suggestion.”*

6 Disagreeing

Making a clear statement of disagreement with someone else's statement, opinion, idea or approach, or raising objections to such a contribution, as in: *“I don't think that will work.”*

7 Defending/attacking

Attacking another person (as distinct from an issue) directly, or defending yourself against such attacks. Such behaviour is usually judgmental and emotional. For example: *“That sounds like just another way to get someone to do your donkey work, lazy-bones.”*

8 Giving information

Making a statement of fact, opinion or reason to another person: *“We have five graduates joining IT this year.”*

9 Seeking information

Seeking facts, opinions or reasons from others: *“Are all five joining at the same time?”*

10 Testing understanding

Checking out an assumption or checking whether a previous contribution has been correctly understood: *“Did you say five?”*

11 Summarising

Repeating, accurately and in a condensed form (with nothing new) the content of all or part of the preceding discussion: *“We are discussing the graduate scheme. We've had an idea about rotating the graduates through the departments that has had a mixed reception and we know that we have five graduates joining IT.”*

12 Shutting out

Behaving in a way that prevents or shortens another's contribution – most typically, cutting across a speaker by interrupting and/or answering a question posed to someone else: *“Can I just make a point?”*

13 Bringing in

Seeking a contribution from a person who has not contributed for some time, or at all. For example, *“Ian, what do you think?”*

These categories are particularly relevant for team environments. Other interactions that have benefited from BA research include negotiations and selling. Each area of study has revealed a skills-based model of behaviours that differentiates successful performers from their less skilful colleagues, thereby allowing you to focus on behaviours that are proven to be effective.

It should be emphasised that none of the behaviour categories listed here judges the value of a contribution. These behaviours are neither 'good' nor 'bad'; rather, the categories simply attempt to capture what took place. Decisions about the appropriateness of any particular behaviour, or sequence of behaviours, rest with those who participated in the interaction.



The nature of the interaction itself is also relevant. For example, in a brainstorming session you would expect to see lots of proposing content and no disagreeing. In a performance review, there is likely to be a higher incidence of proposing procedure and seeking information. A skilled facilitator would emphasise procedural proposing, testing understanding and summarising.



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The research into behaviour analysis has highlighted how each of these 13 behaviours can be used to greater effect. For example, where disagreeing and supporting behaviours account for less than 10% of the total behaviours someone uses, you are likely to be working with what's known as a 'low reactor'.

Being a low reactor doesn't mean you're a lower contributor, it simply means that you're sparing with your use of supporting and disagreeing behaviours. Most people who fit this descriptor are unaware of their reacting style and therefore unaware of the impact it can have on others.

The impact on your relationships with your team can be very damaging, for various reasons:

- ▶ Lack of recognition for achievement or effort.
- ▶ Difficulty building rapport.
- ▶ You appear detached and indifferent.
- ▶ There's inherent distrust.
- ▶ Your behaviour creates anxiety in others.
- ▶ Decision-making gets delayed because people are uncertain of your position.

And so the list goes on! Understanding that you may fall into the 'low reactor' profile means that you can take steps to engage with others in a more positive and constructive way. If you have a colleague who's a low reactor, BA can help you to develop behavioural strategies for handling them better.

In a working day, there are lots of opportunities to experiment with

behaviour analysis. And the emphasis is on the word 'experiment' because playing with the different categories is an important aspect of learning.

Working with a skilled behaviour analyst is a high impact way to learn about general interaction behaviours and to quickly see results. The analyst is able to capture the contributions from everyone in a meeting and then lead the

group on an exploration of what happened, the impact, and where they may benefit from selecting some different behavioural threads.

The alternative is to self-manage your improvement. By focusing on discrete behaviours, you can

build variety and dexterity into your contributions. Here are some examples of the behaviours you can play with.

Most people don't need to practise giving information

This is the category that is used most often. In fact, most of us would probably benefit from a reduction in giving information – by taking less airtime, avoiding repetition and practising being more succinct. Even if you're a low contributor, seeking a greater share of the airtime, there are more skilful ways by which you can achieve your goal. To do something new, you have to stop doing something you have done before. This makes it easier to focus on doing more of another behaviour category.

Lead with questions

Questioning (and listening to the answer) is one of the most important behavioural skills. Socrates said: "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom." Another memorable phrase is to be "curious, rather than judgmental". When you use questions, you help yourself and others to understand and learn and you show interest in other people's ideas. A guiding principle for interpersonal effectiveness is to: "give less, ask more, and ask better questions".

Notice the positives

Listening to discussions and identifying opportunities for supporting the contribution, idea or opinion of others can have a positive impact on both

your colleagues and the climate, and can positively influence levels of trust.

Who manages the process?

Trying out 'meetings management' behaviours such as proposing procedure, summarising and bringing in will be easier if you are in the role of chair or if no one else is doing this. Good process management will help make your meetings more effective and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say.

A manufacturing manager said: "It's been really helpful for me to learn the behaviours for better process management. I've been able to lead meetings in a more structured and efficient way. The feedback has been very positive and we have reduced the time spent in meetings." Given that most of the working day is spent in meetings of one sort or another, cultivating behaviours that help improve both the process and the quality of the outcome has to be a big step forward.

Share the airtime

Research by Google has shown that high performing teams have a more even distribution of airtime. Smart and skilful team members play an invaluable role in making this happen. As Susan Cain once said: "There is zero correlation between being the best talker and being the person with the best ideas."

If you're a more extrovert or garrulous person, BA can help you to economise on your contributions while maintaining or enhancing the impact. Equally, quieter or more reflective team members can use BA to learn how to get involved in discussions more often and more effectively.

Big change comes from small steps. A patchwork is sometimes referred to as 'pieced work'. It's a type of needlework that involves sewing together smaller pieces of fabric into a larger design. Behaviour analysis is the basis for the corporate patchwork. If everyone in your business was able to shape one or two of these behaviours, contributing one or two pieces to the quilt, imagine the impact. **TJ**

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