



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS TRAINING FOR FUTURE PROJECT MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

The importance of interpersonal skills is of growing emphasis in the field of project management as supported by the view of authors and scholars in this paper. The focus has been on technical skills but a balance is now needed as the project manager has to facilitate his team members in a complex, dynamic project environment. The project manager needs knowledge regarding interpersonal skills, and to train his skills according to the growing emphasis in the project management area. In this context different views are discussed, for example the vitality of the proper knowledge of oneself and the lacking of training opportunities. This study concerns the usefulness of 32 hours interpersonal-competence-training, at the *Project teams and group dynamics* course at the MPM-program at Reykjavík University. The results show behavioural changes four months after the course. There seems to be a trend in others (360° evaluation) noticing behavioural changes rather than the student himself. This needs to be studied further.

Keywords and phrases: project management, project manager, interpersonal skills, interpersonal competence training.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Project managers need to control their resources to reach the goal of a project. This means using technical tools and techniques, as well as facilitating team members throughout the life-cycle of a project. Traditional perspective of project management has been on the technical skills to be practiced, but the importance of interpersonal skills is a growing field of study.

In this paper the growing importance of human skills will be explored. Questions concerning the importance of interpersonal skills in project management and the feasibility of interpersonal training of project managers will be asked. The first question will be answered by a review of the literature concerning project management and interpersonal skills. A study was conducted on students in the Master of project management (MPM) program at Reykjavík University, concerning the feasibility question.

Reykjavík University is one of many universities offering a master's program in project management. The program consists of training in both technical and human factors. For the human perspective students attend three courses where the team leader is the central subject. The first course focuses on the project leadership (understanding of self, growth and development). The second course observes the ethical view of project management. The third emphasises project teams and group dynamics. That course provided 32 hours long human-relations-laboratory for the MPM students and the possible results of that will be the aim of this study.

2. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The emphasis has long been on technical skills as being important for the project manager. Here the demand for interpersonal skills in project management is brought to focus. The focus of this paper is firstly on interpersonal skills in project management and secondly on the usefulness of interpersonal skills training in the classroom. The literature review specific to interpersonal skills in that area is presented in this chapter.

Anyone who is not a project manager may wonder what there is to write about the topic. Someone who is a project manager may express wonderment that there is a softer side to the discipline. Those of us who have led large, complex initiatives understand that there must be something that unites a team (Herting, 2011, p. v).

For the purpose of this paper, some concepts are considered similar when examining the literature. These are: human skills, soft skills, people skills and interpersonal skills. They are sometimes quite appropriate when discussing interpersonal skills. Technical skills and hard skills also have similar meaning.

Interpersonal skills are becoming more prominent as can be noticed in institutes like the Project Management Institute in the United States, PMI. It publishes the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®Guide). This book represents good practices in the project management area (Project Management Institute, 2008). In appendix G interpersonal skills are classified as leadership, team building, motivation, communication, influencing, decision making, political and cultural awareness, and

negotiation. Effective project managers carry out projects through the project team and all stakeholders with a balance of technical, interpersonal and conceptual skills. Herting (2011) refers to 425,000 members with PMI certificates in 2008 as project managers in over 170 countries and the PMBOK® Guide being one of twelve well-known worldwide standards. She points out that not until in the fourth edition of 2008 was the emphasis of interpersonal skills brought forward, in appendix G in PMBOK. Because of dynamic organizations, and the people who work in them, the awareness is increasing around the world of interpersonal skills being important elements in successful project management. This acknowledgement of interpersonal skills in one of the most widespread guides for project managers and indicates more significance of interpersonal skills importance than before.

The PRINCE2 REVEALED book, or Projects in Controlled environment, is supported by the UK government as a project management method (Bentley, 2010). The method is used as guidance for teaching and achieving certification. Widely used, not only in UK, but still without focus on interpersonal skills. It may indicate the traditional view on technical skills.

On the other hand the PMBOK (Project Management Institute, 2008) quotes that the emphasis on communication is so that the success or failure of a project can rely on this factor. The book refers to communication as one of the single biggest reasons for the result of the project. Also that effective communication is required among project team members, as with the project manager and other stakeholder. Among important elements in communication it refers to openness, active listening and a knowledge of which interpersonal skills lead stakeholders to communicating effectively.

The traditional focus on the criterion for measuring the success in project management has long been connected to the Iron triangle of time, cost and quality (Atkinson, 1999) or the triple constraints of scope, cost and schedule (Herting, 2011). Dinsmore (1990) contributed the human factor to a classic view of project management more than two decades ago in his book *Human factors in Project management* and pointed out that charts and schedules are useless if the human factors of the project management are not taken into consideration. Today's projects take place in a complex environment. Among the resources that the project manager has are people and their background can be of a vast difference. This concerns people's personality, education, working experience, different generations, different cultures and religion, the individual's strength and weakness. Not to mention gender. Individuals, for example an extrovert (who likes to be around others) and an introvert individual (who gets energy from being by himself) are different. A project manager has to be aware of the fact that he needs technical skills to solve various projects. He also has to understand that good interpersonal skills are vital for good communication with everyone. Better interpersonal skills should help to fine-tune diversity in his team.

For a project manager, it is important to know his own needs first in order to understand how he reacts to forces in the environment. A project manager with developed interpersonal skills should be more alert to the needs of his team members, so he can understand and motivate them when at work. Maslow (1987) defined the hierarchy of needs describing the stages of growth in humans. His theory states that the individual tries to move to a higher level of needs, as he has fulfilled needs at one level. Flannes and Buell modified this theory in the year 1999 to team members needs and motivations

(Flannes & Levin, 2005). They point out that there is a difference between job survival needs, job safety need, and intellectual challenge needs. What motivates one team member might not motivate another depending on his needs. Egan (1976) categorized Maslow's needs into D, for deficiency, which can stand in the way of human development if not fulfilled and B, for being. He added M, for maintenance to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Egan points out that people can be categorized according to these D, B and M categories. The project manager might benefit from trying to understand needs in his environment.

Tuckman's (2001) theory of team development defines five necessary stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. According to Tuckman teams go through those five stages. At the forming stage the group explores the group behaviour, defining the task and what is needed. When storming the team shows possible frustration about the task and the task has to be structured accordingly encouraging collaboration. During the norming team members have accepted the team and the members have bonded. At the performing stage the work is done and the team is productive if the cohesion is strong. At adjourning stage team members know that soon the team does not exist and members may feel anxious about the team being dissolved. The expectation stage and loss or grieving stage may also be added (Jónasson & Ingason, 2011). At the former stage the group has not met yet, but the members do have some expectations. The latter stage is when the team has already been dissolved and members miss their colleagues. According to Tuckman's, Jónasson and Ingason these stages provide some understanding and guidance about what is likely to happen for the project manager and the members. Even though, like Caroselli (2003) assumes, teams process is not a path from stage one to five in Tuckman's theory, the storming stage does not necessarily end conflicts, norms may reflect all stages and steps may even be backward.

Problems regarding authority are considerable for the project manager. Functional managers usually have more authority than project managers, which creates difficulties for the project managers in a matrix organization (a mixture of functional and projectized plan), but interpersonal skills can help to face this challenge (Flannes & Levin, 2005). When the project manager does not have formal power he has to do his best to influence with other sources such as interpersonal skills. Flannes and Levin describe four roles for the project manager: as a leader, a manager, a facilitator and a mentor. They note that a project manager needs to attend to all those roles, and master the relevant interpersonal skills needed for each of them, even though the project manager has a preferable role (or two) to be in. In order to be able to assess a team member's strength or weakness they suggest project managers get familiar with Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The MBTI is a personality assessment, based on Carl Jung's approach, to indicate how individuals perceive and interact with the world. It assesses extraversion – introversion, sensing – intuition, thinking – feeling, judging – perceiving. Flannes and Levin describe how some knowledge about team members' personality might give a project manager a better understanding of how to communicate differently with his team member. For example an extrovert might want to talk about possible solutions while the introvert does not have the same need for discussion. A thinking team member would possibly not value same arguments as a feeling team member would do. A project manager who studies Flannes and Levin's approach might facilitate his team differently which might be valuable.

In facilitating teams and communicating with stakeholders project managers need to evaluate their own power as well as the power of others. They need to be familiar with different power sources. French and Raven's six bases of power indicate: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent (including charisma), expert and informational (Forsyth, 2010). The reward power is based on the ability to give positive consequences or remove negative ones. The coercive power is the ability to punish. The legitimate power is based on peoples' right to do certain things. The referent power might be through association with others who possess power. The expert power is based on proper knowledge or skills. The information power might be based on controlling the information needed by others to reach an important goal. The project manager can use his resources to reward, even though it is debated whether to use some of them like monetary rewards or coercive (threatening). Authority, reward and coercive are position based; personal power can be expertise, informational, charisma, association, dependency, favourable impression and politicking skills (Robbins, 2009). Robbins points out that you do need to assess the power of others and your own power. This actually matters a great deal because project managers need to use power to influence, not least when their authority is limited.

A project manager has to be aware of how important the formation of the team is on all stages in the group's life. A project manager has to realise the underlying forces in the group, and how to react to various circumstances. When the cohesion (the combining force) increases, the team is capable of achieving much more than the individuals would do separately. Positive feedback can be a simple way of increasing cohesion. The power can be either positive or negative, and the majority of a team can influence the minority, and vice versa. Groupthink can appear in teams, when individuals use a standard estimate instead of their own good opinion. What has this to do with the project manager? The project manager has to be on the lookout for signs such as extreme teamwork, obedience or little resistance which might be a sign of groupthink. The project manager should also know that conflict can be valuable and so can re-evaluation. A project manager needs to know which methods prevent groupthink, like getting enough data when solving problems, brainstorming, discussing what might go wrong and developing plan B. "Group cohesion is the strength of the bonds linking members to a group" (Forsyth, 2010, p. 140).

To have a completely identical team might not be such a good idea. Groupthink is one reason. People's different personalities or background are other reasons which can work like a puzzle in a team to get work done effectively. Diversity can increase the creativity with team members' different view. Belbin (2004) provides a model for the evaluating of people's behavioural strengths and weaknesses for certain team roles. His view is that teams need balance where people harmonize well together. Then people will make up for the others lack. The team roles are: a plant, a resource investigator, a monitor evaluator, a co-ordinator, an implementer, a completer finisher, a team-worker, a shaper and a specialist. A person can discover through his model that s/he possesses different strengths that make them fit for different roles within a team. For a project manager it is interesting to look at Belbin's team roles to predict how co-operation and cohesion might turn out. People might be replaced, or additional resources added to the team.

Specific factors categorized as interpersonal skills, have not yet been dealt with in this chapter. Caroselli (2003) has experience as corporate trainer for Fortune 100 companies. To give a comprehensive overview of interpersonal skills elements not yet

been discussed it could be mentioned that she brings, among other things, attention to the importance of: leading and managing others, building alliances, training assertion, being ready with thoughtful feedback, the manner of speaking; such as with sufficient pauses, using right volume of voice and lucidity, knowing ones problem solving style; analytically, creatively or a mixture; as well as of those who you work with, the importance of integrity not least when it comes to convincing others, and being aware what part politic plays in the projects environment. Those factors are of great importance for the project manager and his team members.

Negotiation is an interpersonal skill not to be totally omitted in this discussion. To facilitate change, the project manager may have to negotiate with his stakeholder about resources, time or scope. As important as it is to have open discussion project managers might have to negotiate when conflicts arise.

The purpose of this paper is not to proof technical skills, or effective decision making, as being unimportant to a project manager but to view the importance of interpersonal skills. Based on a vision from scholars and result-oriented leaders in the field the project manager needs to be interpersonally skilful when working with team members in a complex, dynamic project environment. The next section gives an insight on the importance of interpersonal skills versus technical skills in some researches in effective project management.

2.1 Interpersonal skills versus technical skills

Various articles and researches cast light on the growing importance of interpersonal skills. Here authors' different views are examined.

In an interesting article Nurick (1993) speculates about what improves teams performance. He describes advantages such as the flexibility of work teams, but also difficulties, such as diverse point of view, role conflicts, implicit power struggle and groupthink. He notices a tendency in organizations to focus on technical factors, hoping that interpersonal factors will work out by themselves. A lot depends on the careful selection of team members, their development (training and coaching) and relationship between the group and its leader. He assumes facilitating effective project team needs a balance between technical and interpersonal skills.

Gemmill and Wilemon (1994) interviewed 100 technical project team leaders at ten large technology-based corporations in New York. Eight of the ten companies were in the Fortune 500 top industrial companies. According to Gemmill and Wilemon developing a high-performing team is challenging. Besides taking care of the technical side, (planning, supervising, coordinating and controlling) the leaders also struggle with diverse interpersonal factors. Their study shows among other things that effective project leaders need to understand, and be qualified when it comes to hidden interpersonal matters that can destroy the project. Their result is that there is a need for training the leaders of the teams, for teamwork training, for senior managers modelling effective teamwork and for open discussion.

El-Sabaa's paper (2001) studies 126 project managers from three sectors (in agricultural, electricity, and information systems projects) and 94 functional managers from a variety of public and private sectors in Egypt. He investigated how project

managers differ from functional managers regarding the attributes, skills and experiences they associate with successful management performance and careers. He observed among other things that human skill is the most essential skill for project managers to acquire (85,3% average percentile score). The second essential project manager skill is conceptual and organizational skill (79,6%). The third essential skill is technical skill (50,46%). What is interesting from the project manager's point of view is that the greatest influence on his practices is the human skill. Also, according to El-Sabaa's findings the project manager has to have an extensive cross-functional experience. His paper is very compelling and emphasises the importance of the need of interpersonal skills in Egypt.

Cheng, Dainty and Moore (2005) carried out a comprehensive study in the construction sector in UK. The competency profile of superior project managers compared to average managers working within the construction industry was explored in the study. The target was to create a framework of criterion based on the relationship between performance and managers' competencies. The criteria for superior performance results consist of nine factors: 1. Team building, 2. Leadership, 3. Decision-making, 4. Mutuality and approachability, 5. Honesty and integrity, 6. Communication, 7. Learning, understanding and application, 8. Self-motivation and 9. External relations. Cheng's et al. result indicates that the main need for superior project managers are human skills.

Stevenson and Starkweathers' (2010) investigation on project management competency makes it clear that IT executives prefer soft skills (to technical skills). The focus is on the human characteristics essential to achieve success, through identifying and rating preferred IT project management competencies nationwide across US industries. Results from this investigation define six critical core competences (that were indicative of characteristics important to successful project management): leadership, the ability to communicate at multiple levels (not only with team members, but also with stakeholders), verbal and written skills, attitude and the ability to deal with ambiguity and change. The authors were surprised by the low valuation of technical expertise for project managers. One explanation offered is that IT managers do not mind to train the project managers in the company with their own technology, and presumably a certain level of expertise was assumed.

Azim's et al. (2010) paper is based on the ongoing research of project complexity with the purpose of facilitating further understanding of project complexity by highlighting factors contributing to project complexity as reported by the practitioners facing the "actuality" of projects. It focuses on the aerospace sector. Participants are involved in a variety of project settings, exhibiting different types and levels of complexity. Azim's et al. conclusion is that project management hard skills help in organizing, planning, managing and tracking changes. The results further indicate people issues as the main factor in projects complexity. The preliminary findings are that soft skills are vital for the project manager. The authors propose a new triangle, the project complexity triangle based on three areas - people, product and process.

To summarize this discussion Nurick, Gemmill and Wilemon point out that a balance of technical and human factor is needed. Others like El-Sabaa, Cheng, Dainty and Moore, Stevenson and Starkweathers, and Azim et al. observe more emphasis on interpersonal skills than on technical skills. Surprisingly, as the emphasis has long been on technical skills in the project management field. Until now this paper has focused on

answering the question: Of what importance are interpersonal skills in project management? The next part considers the training of interpersonal skills. Are they innate or can interpersonal skills be developed?

2.2 Developing interpersonal skills

This part views interpersonal skills from the developing perspective. Plato, the Greek philosopher, said that an unexamined life is not worth living. This is very appropriate for a project manager who needs to be skilful in interpersonal relations. If we examine what we want from life, if we examine ourselves and how we express ourselves, we need to go into deeper thinking and actions than what we are used to, for discovery. We have to gain knowledge and change. A project manager needs to understand himself, and have good interpersonal skills, in order to be able to facilitate, lead and participate in project teams later on. Effective management puts first things first, people can be thought of as their own effective managers, as the discipline comes from the inside (Covey, 1990).

Project managers need knowledge and training in interpersonal skills (Herting, 2011). Flannes and Levin (2005) in the preface to their book *Essential People Skills for Project Managers* point out that: “Unfortunately, most project professionals, in their educational background or through other training, have had few opportunities to develop a concrete set of practical people skills”. Pant and Baroudi (2008) discuss the emphasis on harder skills in Australian universities and conclude that soft thinking should start in the classroom.

Haukur Ingi Jónasson is the Professor for the *Project teams and group dynamics* course in the MPM-study at Reykjavík University. Jónasson and Ingason (2011) describe interpersonal skills with the following:

Interpersonal skills are the basic principle which makes it possible for people to work with other people in groups. Understanding the nature of groups and interpersonal skill within the group is not gained by itself or by reading books. Understanding is only gained by experiencing group work and the interpersonal skills only by trying one's human relations with others (p. 32, translated from Icelandic by the author of this paper).

Kurt Lewin developed the Freeze Phases (Lewin, 1951). It describes three phases of change. Behaviour has to be unfrozen, people have to get ready to change, they must understand that there is a need to change and get out of their comfort zone. Then there is the change or transition, with support needed and understanding how important the change is. At last the freeze stage when change become the norm. For a project manager and his team members understanding, commitment and support is needed for changing. A project manager should prepare himself and the team before the change. The fear of change can hinder or support, training and information can help. It takes time to get used to new routine and reinforcement is important, so people don't slip back into old habit.

Egan (1976, p. 202) says “Immediacy is a *communication* skill formed from a combination of three other skills. For this reason it is called a “complex” skill. Immediacy is a mixture of accurate empathy, self-disclosure, and confrontation”. The same author points out: “Accurate empathy is perhaps the most critical of all interpersonal skills” (p. 28). Accurate empathy can be explained as responding to others

with understanding when they disclose themselves. Wheeler and D'Andrea (2004) point out that immediacy is hard to master and difficult to teach, being an important but complex skill. According to Egan's, Wheeler's and D'Andrea's discussion interpersonal skills can be hard to develop but on the other hand the project manager will most likely need those skills.

The summarization of this section is that Covey states that the discipline comes from the inside, Herting points out that project managers need knowledge and training in soft skills, Flannes and Levin refer to a lack of educational opportunities for project managers in evolving interpersonal skills, Pant and Baroudi state that soft thinking should start in the classroom, while Jónasson and Ingason define that understanding groups and developing interpersonal skills cannot be gained by itself or by reading, Kurt Lewin's change theory describes the phases of change where people need to get ready and perhaps go out of their comfort zone and Egan points out the possible critical importance of accurate empathy. Wheeler and D'Andrea refer to immediacy, a communication skill that is hard to master and difficult to teach. The study of interpersonal skills competence training on the students at the MPM program at Reykjavík University might cast light on whether the behaviour shows signs of a change after the course. Next part focuses on that study.

3. A STUDY OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AFTER THE PROGRAM

3.1 The focus of the study, methodology and process

How useful is 32 hours interpersonal competence training for training students? The purpose of this study was to investigate the usefulness of the interpersonal competence training at the MPM-program in Reykjavík University. More accurately, to study whether interpersonal skills had changed according to relevant learning outcomes. Egan (1976) describes core interpersonal skills as self-presentation skills, response skills, challenge skills and group-specific skills. The core interpersonal skills are trained with emphasis on accurate empathy and immediacy among other elements.

The interpersonal competence training groups were small, usually with six members, sitting in a circle. The focus was on the moment, here and now and what was said was confidential. Individuals were encouraged to be honest. Only one person spoke at time and others observed. People were a little unsure in the beginning, of what to say, but their confidence usually grew as sessions progressed.

What is being used as criterion for the study in measuring the student's abilities after the course are the learning outcome of the *Project teams and group dynamics* course, see appendix A. Four out of 13 of the learning outcomes can clearly be categorized as interpersonal skills:

- *Can explain self-disclosure and can apply the skills of self-disclosure.*
- *Can practice concreteness in interpersonal relations and express emotion and feelings freely.*
- *Can practice active listening and masterfully apply attentiveness in groups.*
- *Can create and sustain empathic, genuine and respectful presence, and be able to confront others in a constructive way (Haukur Ingi Jónasson & Helgi Þór Ingason, personal communication, 2011).*

Those four learning outcomes are divided into six categories to be measured in this study. For each category the study contained four sub-questions for relevant behaviour.

Table 1. Project teams and group dynamic course: Six categories.

Six factors from learning outcomes	Rated behaviour /sub-factors
1. Can explain self-disclosure and can apply the skills of self-disclosure.	<i>Can reveal oneself and talk about emotions, experience and behaviour. Does not retreat or become aggressive in emotional circumstances. Shows appropriate expression / behaviour in diverse circumstances. Shows honesty.</i>
2. Can practice concreteness in interpersonal relations and express emotion and feelings freely.	<i>Speaks with clarity and preciseness. Uses explicit message: When you are late for work / meeting / home, then I become surprised, because Confronts both positive and negative emotions of other people and deals with them. Asks if in doubt, for example "Do I understand correctly ...?"</i>
3. Can practice active listening and masterfully apply attentiveness in groups.	<i>Listens attentively and indicates listening (eye contact, body language, nods). Repeats and rephrases regularly what is being said. Summarizes. Asks open questions, for example what or how (not questions asking for yes / no answers, not solution aimed questions). Asks for further explanation, if necessary.</i>
4. Can create and sustain empathic,*	<i>Reacts to what is being said, also what is indicated or expressed implicitly. Can from others perspective understand their feelings and circumstances ndicates this by mentioning, if appropriate, without interpreting. Can show empathy (by trying to be in his / hers shoes) and communicates an understanding of what the partner has just said. Is sincere, exact and avoids interrupting.</i>
5. genuine and respectful presence,	<i>Is self-consistent. Indicates when certain behaviour is not respectful. Is there for others. Shows punctuality.</i>
6. and be able to confront others in a constructive way.	<i>Criticizes by being descriptive (describing circumstances / relevant factors). Criticises gradually and of relevant strenght. Confronts critique by repeating what was said, without overreacting. Shows gradually changed behaviour (for example if that behavior was being criticized).</i>
* This learning outcome is divided, see next two row in the table.	

A 360° assessment was sent to 31 students during their final semester at MPM-program and to their colleagues, relatives and other MPM students. Not all students provided contacts for a 360° assessment and thus provided answers only for themselves. Half of students which attended the class or 15 students provided contacts for the 360°assessment. Thus the people participating in the 360° were: the student himself, a spouse or a close relative, a colleague or co-worker, and a co-student in the MPM-program. For the remaining 16 students the same survey was dispatched, without other people assessing them.

All students received a survey by e-mail through surveymonkey.com, sent out four months after the course ended. The survey was open from March 17th to March 27th 2012. Of 75 participants a total of 67 responded, which is 89% rate of responses. The 67 responses derive from 29 students (29 of 31 students are 90% of MPM students responding), 15 persons close to the student, 12 co-students and 11 colleagues or co-workers (38 of 45 participants in the 360 ° assessment gives 84% responding). The survey was anonymous, with 60% women against 40% men. In processing the data the “do not know” responses were omitted. Therefore results show a bit lower number of responses than indicated above.

4. STUDY RESULTS

4.1 Results of behaviour

The course’s learning outcomes were evaluated in order to assess the relevant skills for this study. There are six categories (see horizontal axis on figure 1). Participants indicated how much they (or the persons they are answering for) are showing relevant behaviour after the course by using a scale of: “much more” than before, “more” than before, “same” as before, “little less” than before and “much less” than before.

Figure 1 shows the “average” responses for each of the 6 category. All data is sorted as “I” (shown in blue colour) and “others” (shown in red colour). I for the MPM students, and “others” as a spouse or someone close, a colleague or co-worker and then a co-student. At the horizontal axis the sentence are shortened, for example “much more than before” becomes “much more”. All responses from the study are shown in appendix B. Appendix C exhibits a summary for the six categories (average responses).

The total number of responses (average of sub-categories): 1. Self-disclosure: 63; 2. Concreteness: 61; 3. Active listening: 58; 4. Emphatic presence: 58; 5. Genuine and respectful: 61 and 6. Confronting others: 58

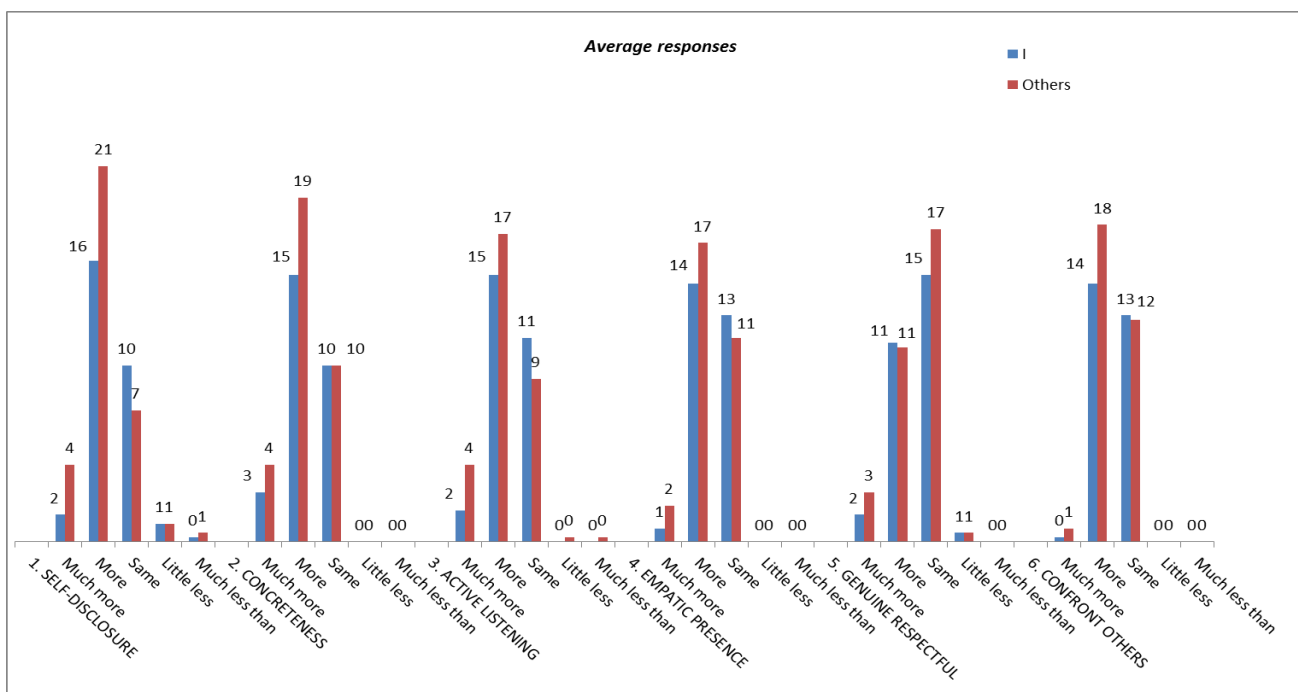


Figure 1. Behaviour changed after the course – the student’s self-assessment versus the assessment of others.

As can be seen in figure 1 behavioural change for all six categories seems to be significant. The most change seems to have occurred for the “self-disclosure” category where 16 students and 21 others say “more”. Then is the behaviour change in “concreteness” category where 15 students and 19 others say “more”. For the “active listening”, “empathic presence” and “confront others” categories the positive results are a bit similar, it shows changed behaviour but not as much change as in the first two mentioned. One category does not gain as much behaviour changes as the others. That is the “genuine respectful” category. For all the categories only a few say “much more” and very few or none say “little less” and “much less”. What is interesting is that others seem to notice behavioural change rather than the student himself.

4.2 Results of questions regarding the course and the training

The study also included questions concerning students’ evaluation of the training and whether the course had proved satisfactory in their opinions. In figure 2 results are presented for how well the course succeeded in training the skills in question of the course.

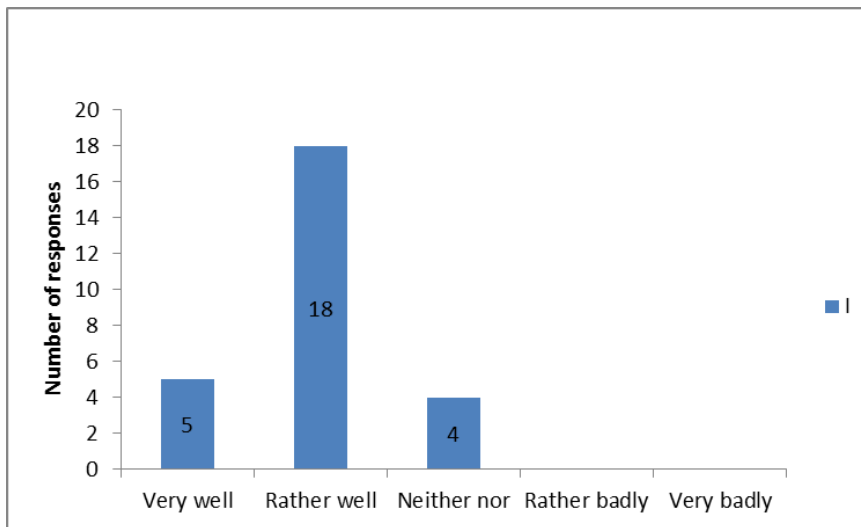


Figure 2. The success of training certain abilities and giving knowledge of concepts at the course.

Only a few students or 5 of 29 rate the training of the course asked about in the study as “very well”. Most students or 18 of 29 rate it as “rather well”. A few or 4 of 29 students think of the quality of the training as “neither nor”, that is neither well nor bad. In figure 3 results for how pleased the students are with the course.

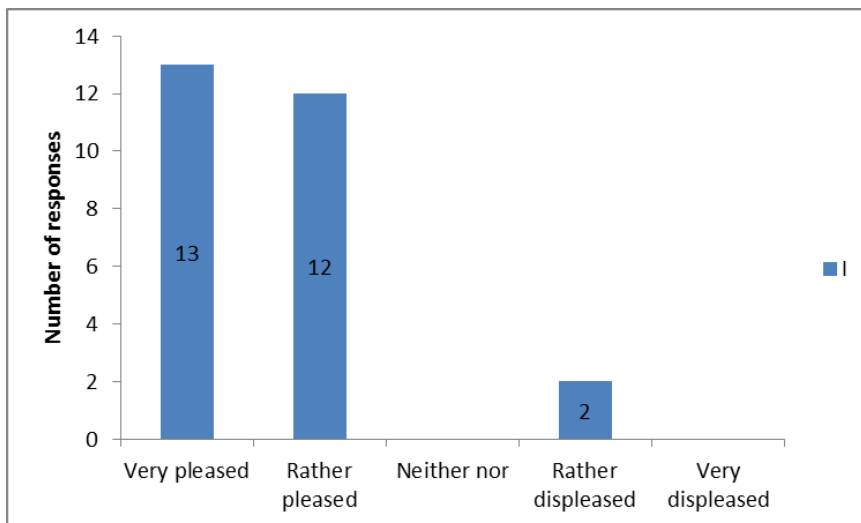


Figure 3. Satisfaction with the course, as a whole.

As it turns out, a big majority of students, (25 of 29 students) are either very or rather pleased with the course taken as a whole. 2 students said that they are rather displeased with the course. Not one student was very displeased. The results for questions concerning improvement of factors concerning interpersonal skills are shown in figure 4.

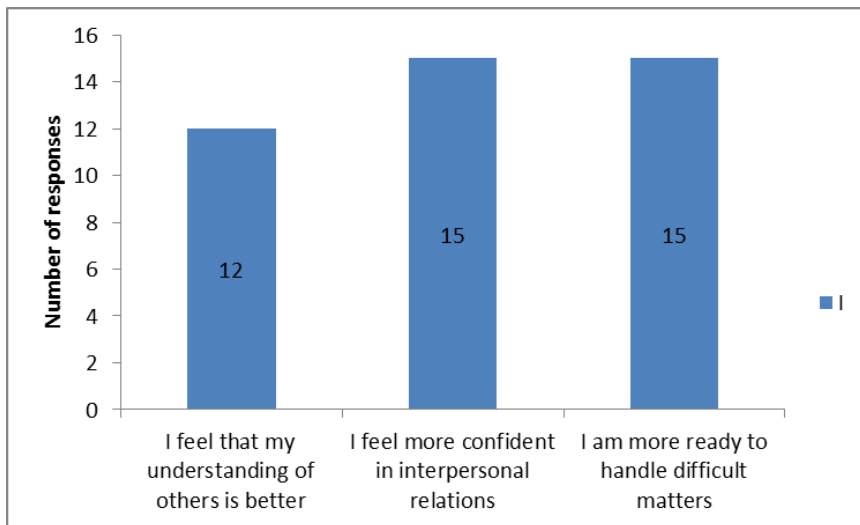


Figure 4. Other things improved on after the course.

As can be seen 15 of 29 students consider themselves feeling more confident in interpersonal relations, 15 of 29 students consider themselves as more ready to handle difficult matters and 12 of 29 students think they have gained a better understanding of others.

One open question: “What was it that you were most pleased or displeased about?” was faulty, as a criterion for “content” or “not content” related to the responses was missing. For most of the answers this did not make any difference. The answers give a better picture of the students view about the training and this course:

- Would have liked better explanation for how to act in training groups.
- Content: interesting and worthy task. Discontent: the group dynamic test was absurd (online text, taken once to get the right answers and again with the right answers).
- Most happy with the training-group.
- Opportunity to try out new things.
- The benefit I saw people get out of the course, even if I did not feel this myself, but the course led someone in my group, I think, to start thinking critically about his opinions.
- Content with the dynamic in my group = the team work, discontent that not everyone showed up the whole time, their absence sometimes lead to an adjustment time for them to be a part of the dynamic again.
- Shocking course, but in a good sense. Taught us to react to difficult circumstances.
- Content with the dynamic in the group.
- Content with the work in my group, but discontent regarding how short the course was.
- To be able to sit in the groups and practice what was being thought.
- The intimacy with others and being put in the circumstances to discuss deeply about things.

Another question was: “Something else which you think that you have improved after the course?”

- I understand myself better, I analyse the circumstances later.
- The course was useful in many ways, but will not transform perception, competence and interpersonal skills. For that a longer time is needed.
- Observing the study, it is important to consider the fact that if the party in question has been doing fine regarding certain issues, then there is often little improvement compared to before the course.
- This course might be longer, ranking 10 ECTS units instead of 6 ECTS.
- Discovered I am trying some things I did not know that were so important when communicating with others. I feel it is necessary to work hard to become better, as a person and a project manager, towards myself and others.

4.3 Discussion

This study gives an idea of the influence of interpersonal skills training on the MPM students’ interpersonal skills. Relatively few respondents indicated that particular skills are used “much more” after the course although students seem to show an increased tendency for every category. Surprisingly, there seems to be a trend in “others” noticing a changed behaviour rather than the student “himself” noticing his own changed behaviour. The attention is drawn to this because it is a contradiction to the opinion that people normally value themselves in a more favourable light than others (Forsyth, 2010, p. 81). The study is based on a relatively small number of participants. This calls for a further investigation that is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is noteworthy that the category, “genuine and respectful”, shows different results than other categories (see figure 1). This category did not gain as much behaviour change as the others. 32 (both I and others) say “same” and relatively fewer or 22 (both I and others) say “more”. One explanation is “shows punctuality”, a sub-category. 44 of 59 say “same”, 11 say “more”, 2 say “much more” and 2 say “little less”, see figure B-21 in appendix B. Punctuality was discussed by the Professor at the course, with emphasis on its vitality in the reading material (Jónasson & Ingason, 2011, p. 163) but not practiced at all in the classroom. It appears as the least changed behaviour in the research.

It seems that the discussed course influence the changed behaviour of the students - for the better. All categories showed changed behaviour. The most change was in “self-disclosure”, the second most was in “concreteness”. Three categories showed a little lesser change, those were “active listening”, “empathic presence” and “confront others”. The “genuine respectful” showed the least change.

Most students were pleased or very pleased with the course. Half of the students feel that they are more confident and better prepared to solve difficult matters. The indication that not everyone was content with the course, gives reason to speculate on improved methods in teaching. Others seem to notice changes better than the individual himself. How can that be useful for the student?

An additional method for this course under question could be that the students themselves need to set goals concerning the relevant elements of interpersonal skills they feel the need to improve on. At related MPM-course concerning self-understanding, growth and development the MPM-students make their own personal strategy but not concerning personal skills specifically. Egan (1976, p. 32) suggests keeping "... a log of the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and behaviours that highlight each meeting and of the thoughts and feelings you have about the groups between sessions" to work on for the student himself with an appropriate agenda for the next meeting to execute.

For the goal setting the student could: view what interpersonal skills to improve on. Carefully choose some goals to work on in daily life and in training-groups at the program. Here the possible tendency from the study of this paper could prove valuable, that is if others notice the changed behaviour rather than the student himself. Choose someone close, like a member for the family or someone from work or school. Their role is to give valuable feedback. Celebrate when the goal is reached (think of supporting reinforcement). A coach might be very helpful in order to try to help the student to succeed in mending and changing habits and behaviour. The coach could be a graduated MPM-student or a project manager with experience from working-life. A mentor might as well be helpful to reach the goals. The goal setting gives the MPM-student opportunity to try out goal setting on him-self in order to achieve success – which is relevant in project management study.

Something to keep in mind regarding the study: Two other courses on the first year of the MPM-study, under the supervision of the same Professor and both focusing on the team leader, can affect in changed behaviour measured in this study. The first course concerning project leadership (understanding of self, growth and development) could result in knowledge about one self. The second course had an ethical focus, possibly impacting elements like honesty (being sincere was one of the sub-categories for self-disclosure).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to view the importance of interpersonal skills in project management. Also to view the emphasis of interpersonal skills when developing those skills and to study whether a relatively short workshop in the MPM-study at Reykjavík University has an influence on the student's behaviour, being noticeable four months after the course.

In spite of the fact that the training is relatively brief, it seems that it has an impact and changed the behaviour of most of the students. Finally this paper suggests some improvements to the interpersonal skills training at the *Project teams and group dynamics* course in Reykjavík University.

There seems to an awakening era in the project management area concerning interpersonal skills. It is vital that the discussed need of interpersonal skills in the project managers working environment is reflected in academic study. That way future project manager can benefit better from their preparation for work in the real world.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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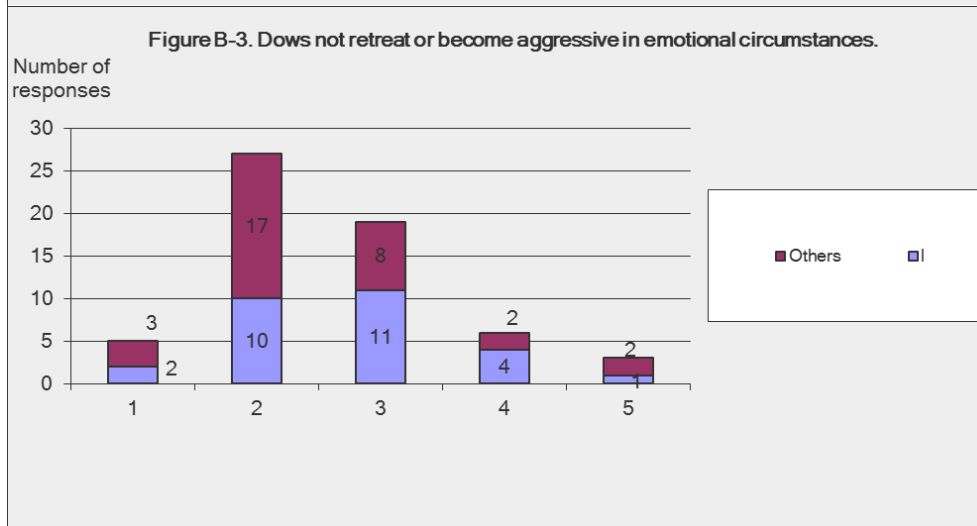
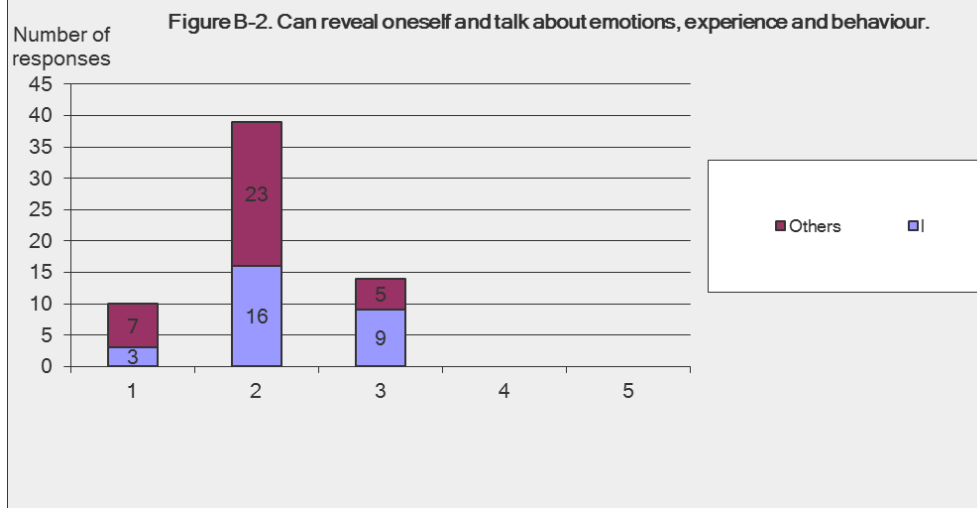
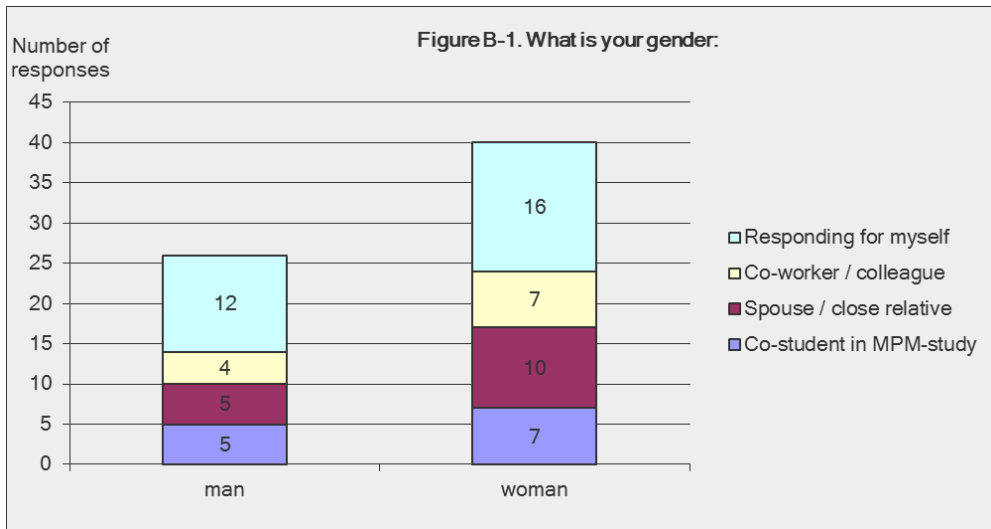
APPENDIX A – PROJECTS TEAMS AND GROUP DYNAMICS COURSE - THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

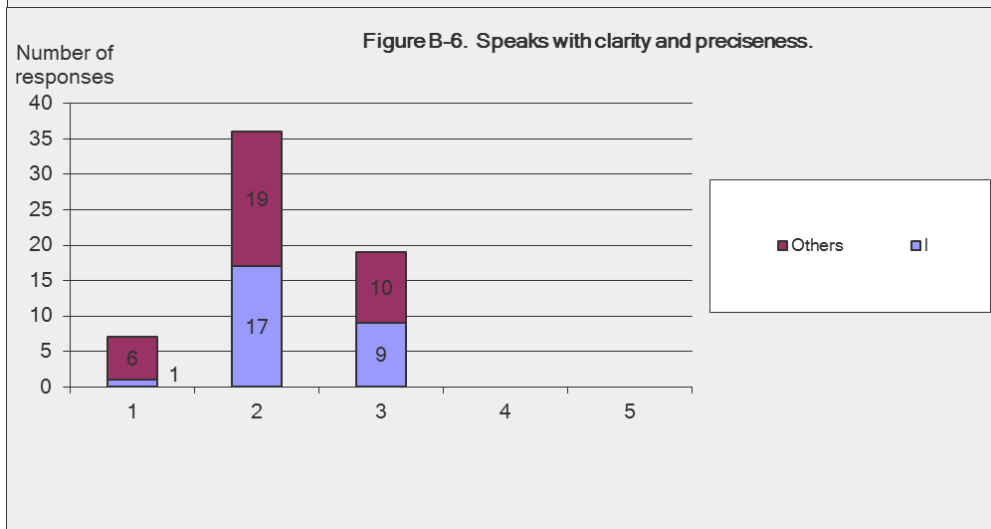
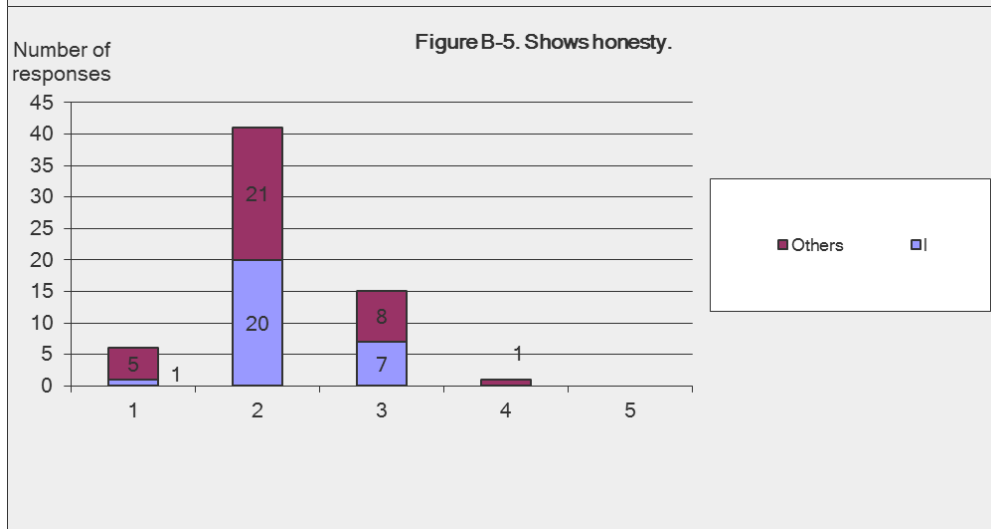
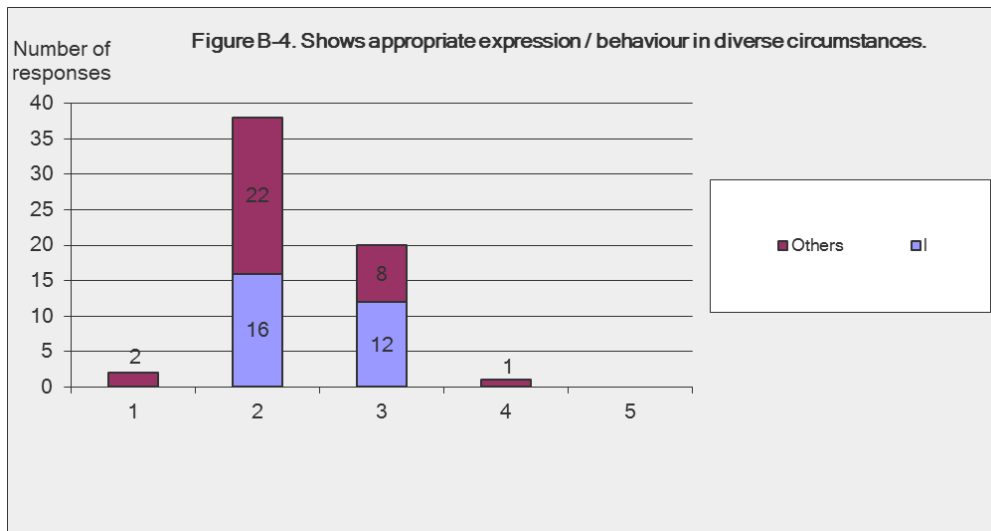
Learning outcomes from the course's description (Haukur Ingi Jónasson & Helgi Þór Ingason, personal communication, 2011).

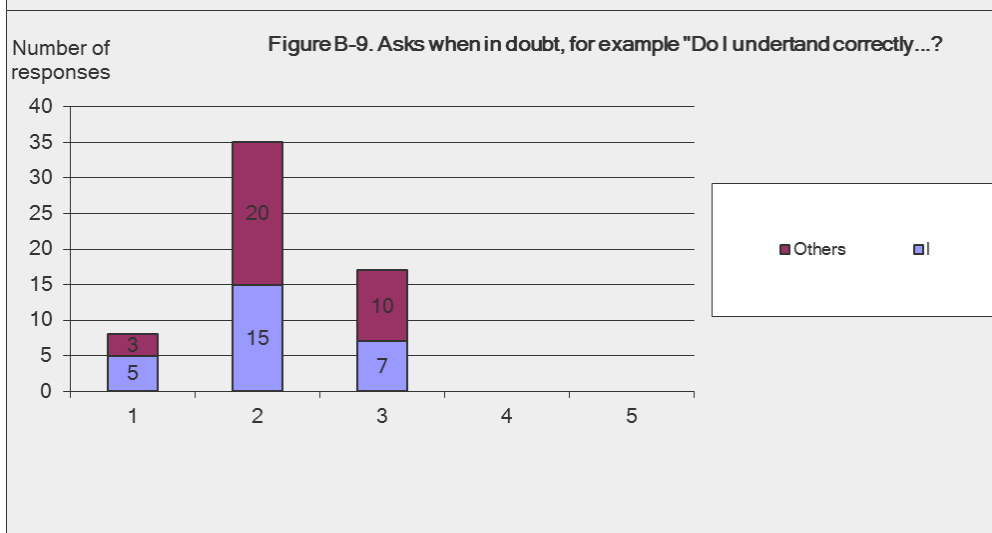
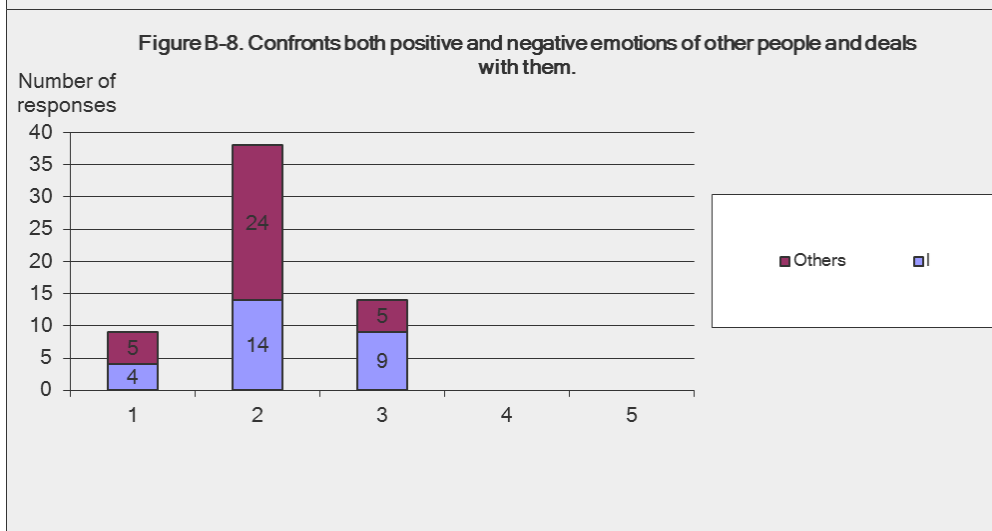
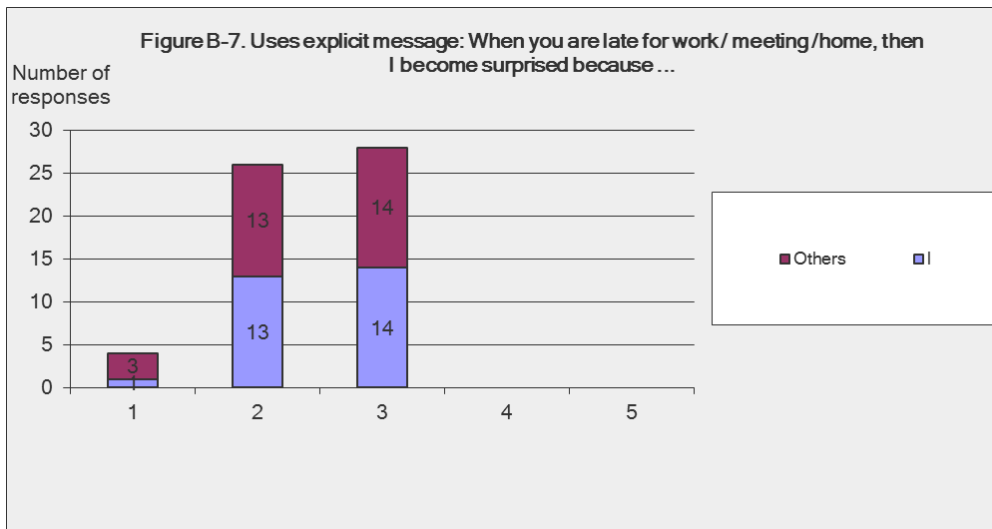
On completion of this course, students should be able to:

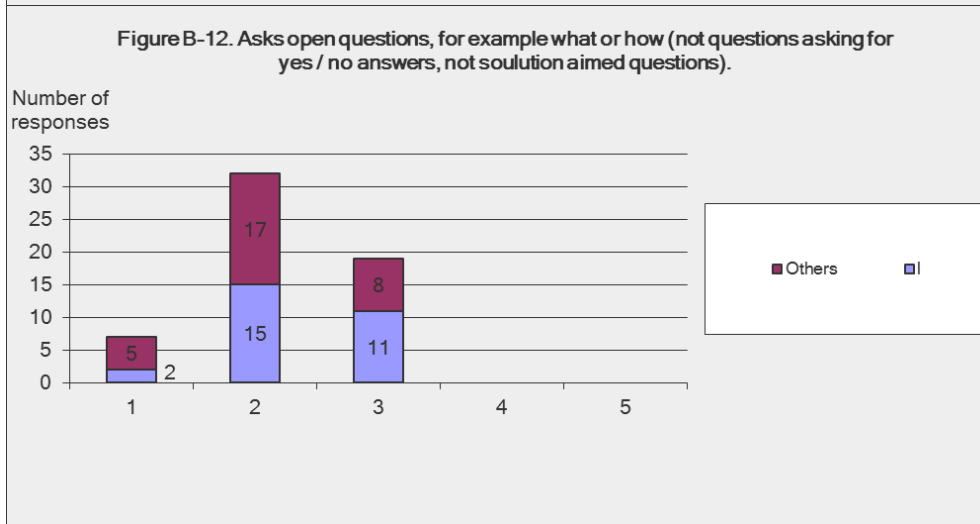
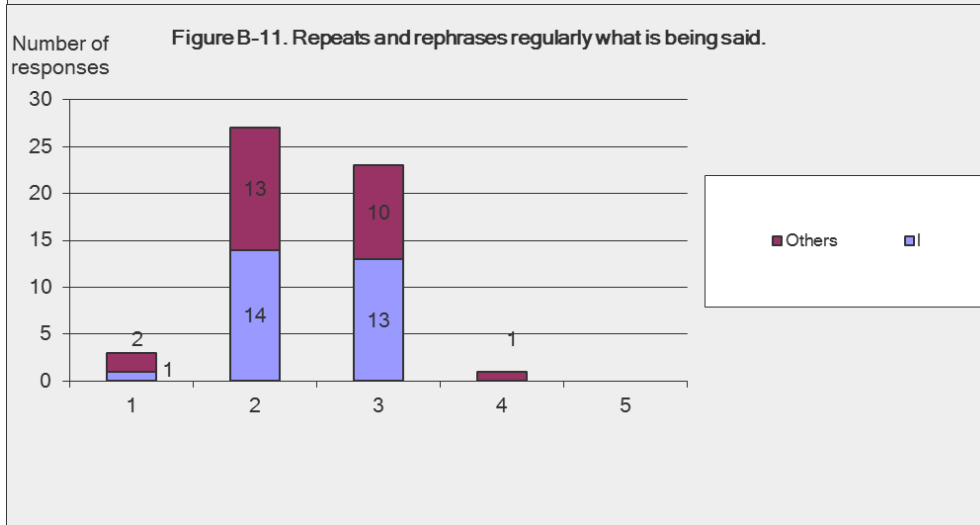
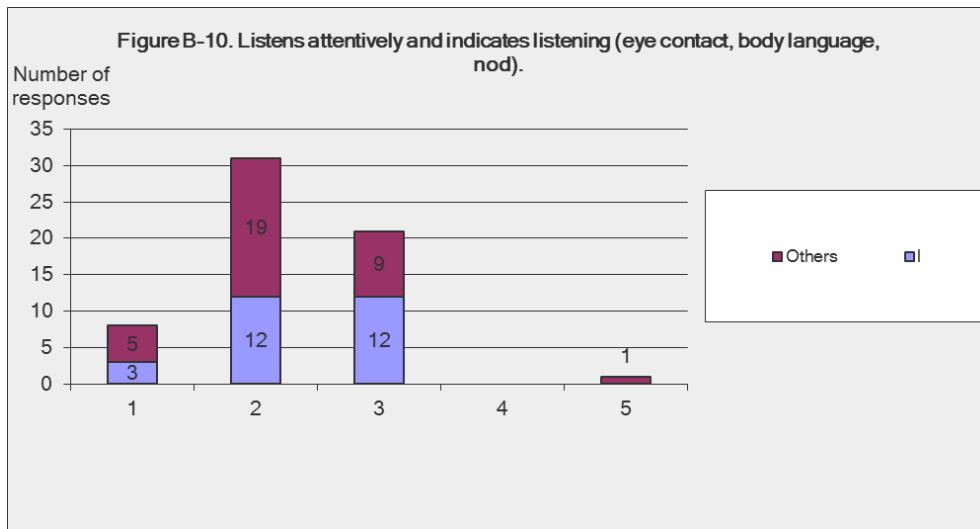
- *Define groups and teams, laboratory-training in interpersonal-relations and all major*
- *Key concepts within the field of group dynamics.*
- *Explain the basics of how research in group dynamics are conducted and be able to discuss the individual within the context of groups.*
- *Can explain self-disclosure and can apply the skills of self-disclosure.*
- *Can practice concreteness in interpersonal relations and express emotion and feelings freely.*
- *Understands the concepts of forming, cohesion, development and structure of groups.*
- *Can practice active listening and masterfully apply attentiveness in groups.*
- *Understands and can discuss the issues of power and performance in relation to group dynamics.*
- *Can create and sustain an empathic, genuine and respectful presence and be able to confront others in a constructive way.*
- *Understands the role of the project manager in groups, conflicts and inter-group relations.*
- *Can describe special interpersonal skills in groups and work in an open group.*
- *Can explain how change and group dynamics are related and discuss crowd and collective behaviour.*
- *Understand the context of groups and the leadership role in small teams.*
- *Can discuss future trends regarding the field of groups and group dynamics.*

APPENDIX B – RESPONSES FROM THE STUDY









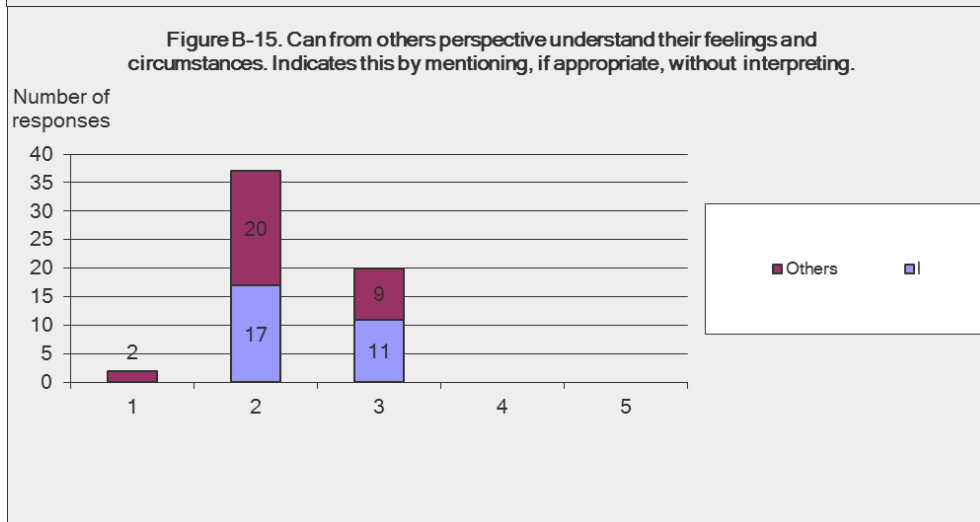
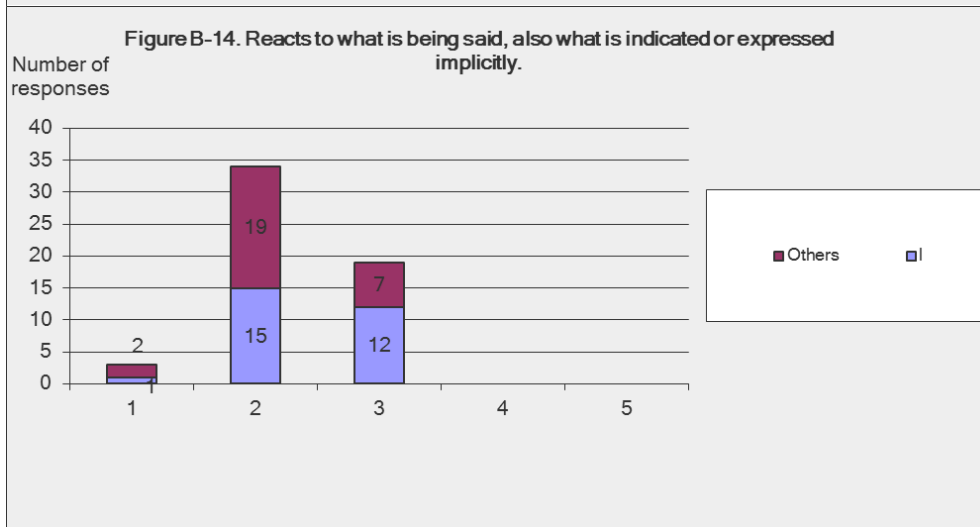
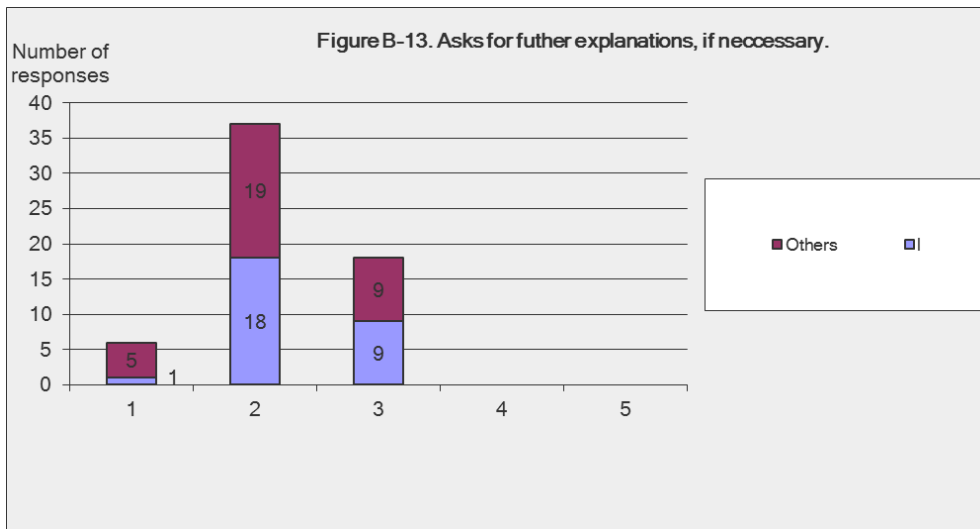


Figure B-16. Can show empathy (by trying to be in the other person's shoes) and communicates an understanding of what the parnter has just said.

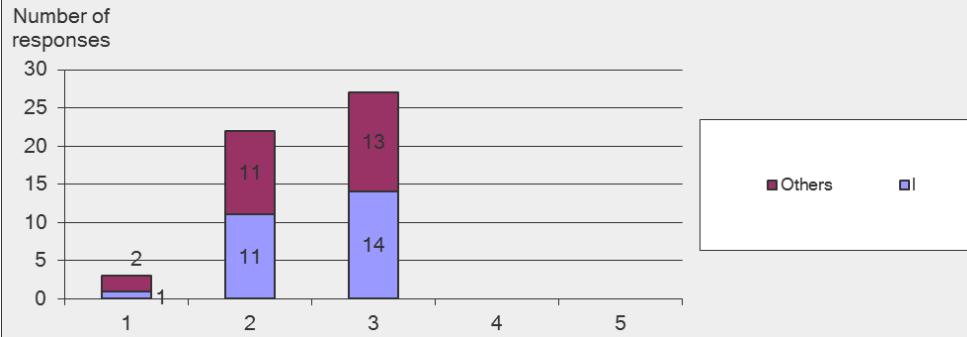


Figure B-17. Is sincere, exact and avoids interrupting.

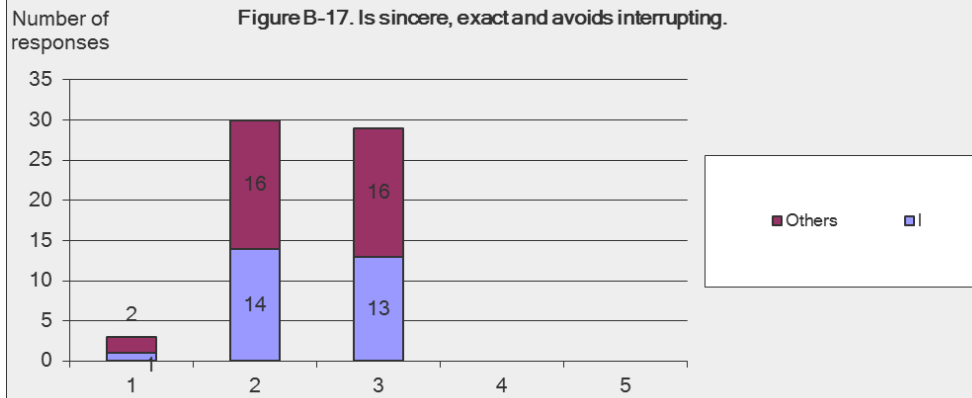
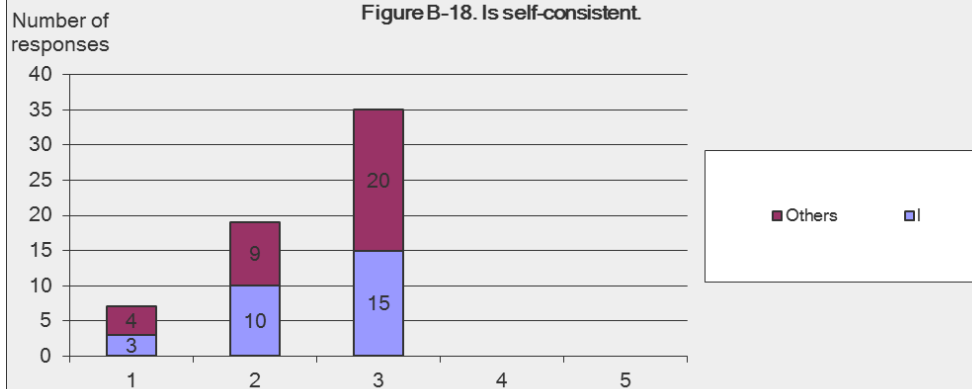
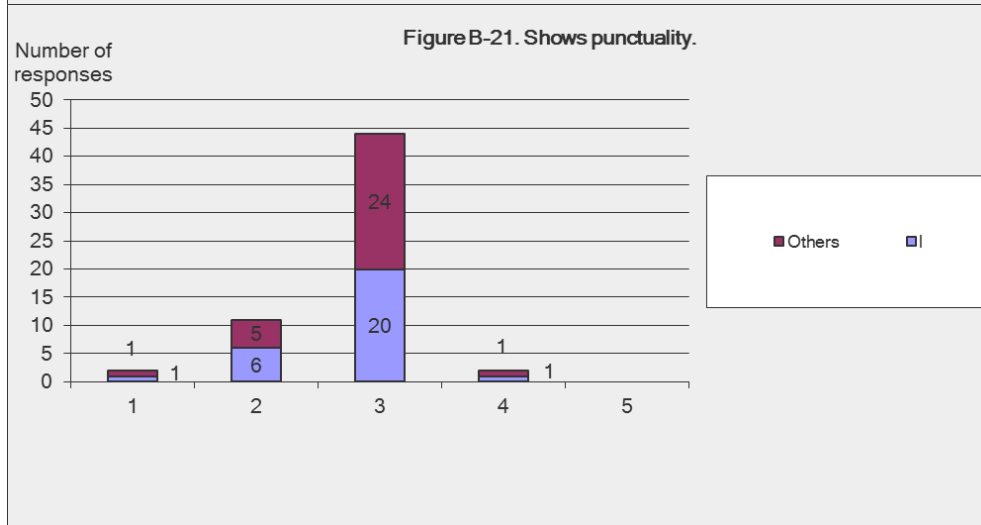
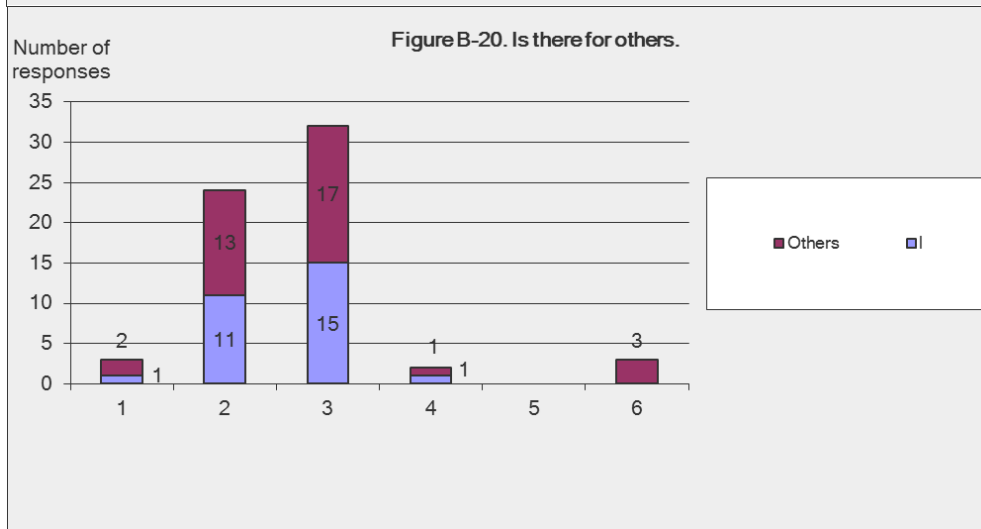
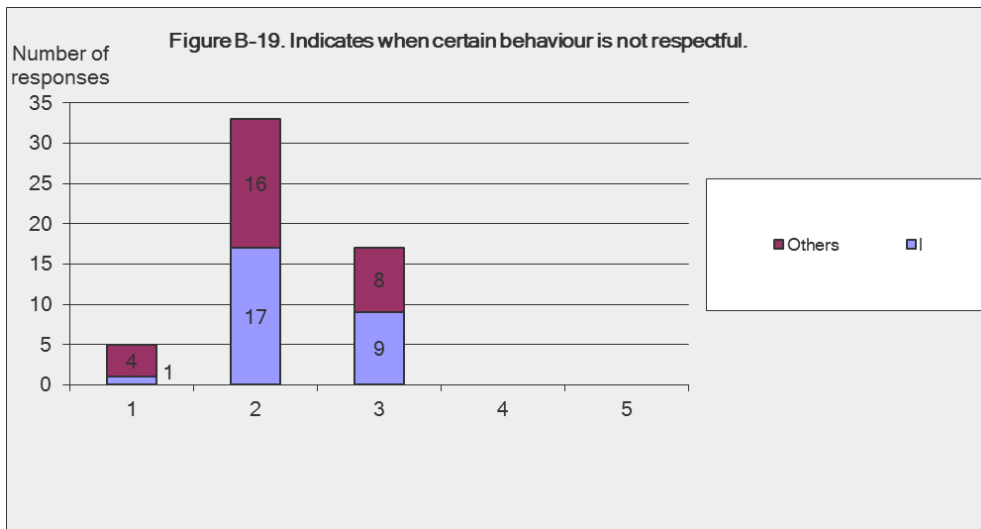
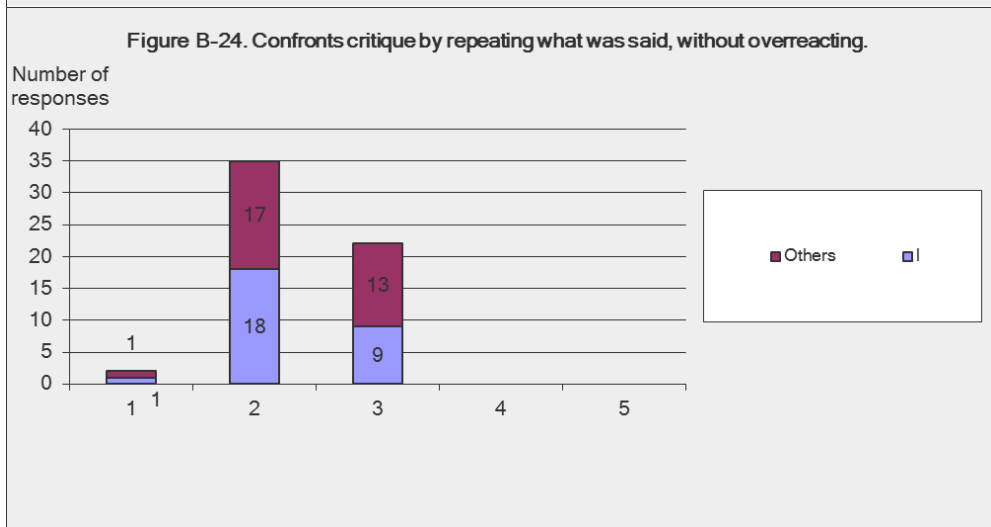
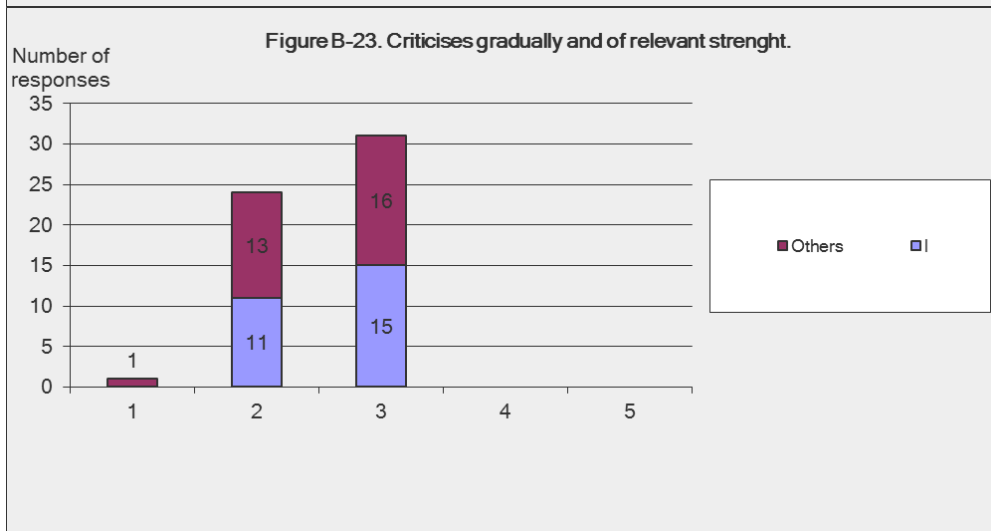
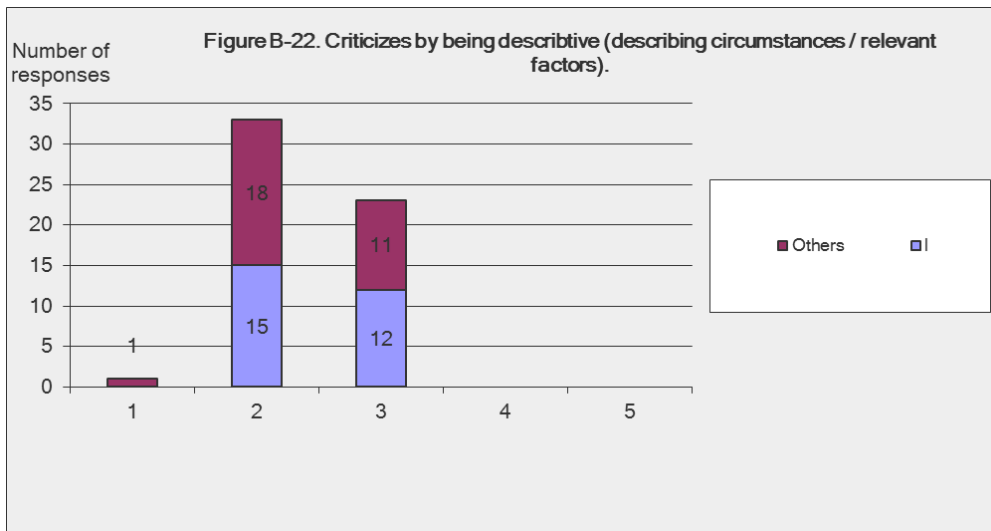
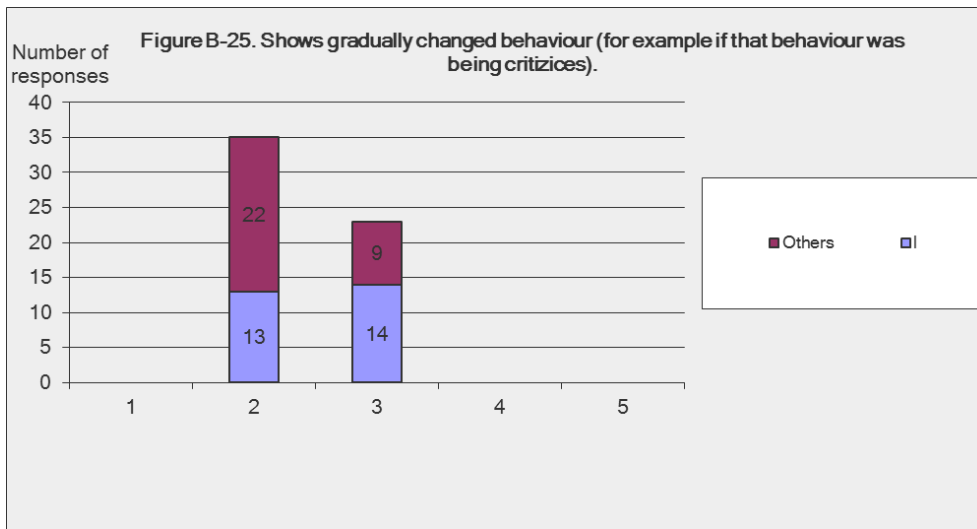


Figure B-18. Is self-consistent.









APPENDIX C –SIX CATEGORIES

