Chapter 06 - Social interaction

Answers to end of chapter questions

1. ‘The key defining characteristic of social life is impression management’—discuss.

The social world is seen as a stage on which ‘actors’ constantly create and recreate their social selves according to their conceptions of what it is to be a social person (de Waele and Harré, 1976). Interactions between actors are characterized by each monitoring his or her own performance and the performance of others. Personality, from this perspective, is the internal resources an actor can draw upon to construct a ‘social face’. Indeed the personality theory of the future may focus on the goals and competencies that go to make up these resources. Thus personality is seen as a form of social intelligence.

2. From your own experience of working in organizations or studying in institutions, can you give examples of some ‘fronts’. Are some more ‘successful’ than others and why?

One example from my experience of work would be when I was working in a department store. An example of a front was when people working in the departments would construct an identity in relation to the customer, in order to make the customer feel valued. This would involve avoiding any sort of argument or conflict with customers.

3. What are the components of social situations?

From the dramaturgical perspective, much of an individual’s activity at work or in other social situations involves symbolically conveying through sign activity and sign equipment aspects of the personal front he or she has adopted. However, it has also been pointed out that side by side with the expressive, self-presentational goals of social interaction, that Goffman, Harré and others highlight, social situations also usually involve more specific task-related goals such as selling, negotiating or interviewing.

4. It is the features of social situations rather than trait profiles which determine an individual’s behaviour—discuss.

We must distinguish between the role itself and *role behaviour*. The main point here is that, although the role itself is structured (like the script in a play), behaviour in a role can be modified by the expressive concerns of individuals (like an actor interprets a part). A new manager, for example, may want to be the most popular or the most innovative in the firm. In this way, roles provide an arena for the interplay of the practical requirements we have to meet and our own expressive concerns.
5. How do we comprehend other people we interact with?

Skilled individuals develop a model or inner representation of the dynamics of the system they are interacting with. This enables them to predict the future states of the system and responses of the system to their actions. The models were based on conceptual categories developed to translate ‘raw data’ from sources into ‘action-relevant inputs’.

6. If you undertook the construct exercise—consider the following questions:
   a) Did you manage to get twelve and if you did was it a struggle towards the end of your list?
   b) What are they about—personality, behaviour, attitude, ability, role, status, appearance? Are they a mixture of these or do they tend to be concentrated on one of these categories?
   c) Of your list is it possible to see any underlying constructs? In other words, is it possible to reduce the list to perhaps three or four ‘super-constructs’ and what would these be?
   d) Are you surprised by any of your constructs?
   e) Are they similar to your partner’s? And if so, why might this have occurred?

No suggested answer is available as this question is based on the results of a student exercise.

7. In what way is social skill different from and similar to other types of skill?

Gaze was the first aspect of social skill studied by Argyle. He recognized that it performs a number of non-verbal communication functions. We gather information from the faces of others with brief gazes aimed mainly around their eyes. The gaze of other people provides an important additional source of information about their attitudes and feelings towards us. High levels of gaze can indicate a range of feelings towards us from love, through interest, to hate. Argyle and Cook (1976) reviewed gaze studies and found high gaze from another person could indicate the other is: interested in you, of low status, attempting to dominate you, extravert, and not embarrassed. Additional sources of non-verbal information include body posture and body movement.

8. To what extent is it possible to improve social skills?

The hallmark of social skill is when we actively develop models of others while assuming they are actively modelling us.

9. The notions of dramaturgy, impression management and personal fronts suggest our behaviour is not sufficiently consistent to infer the existence of stable underlying traits—discuss.
The way in which these activities construct behaviour is dependent on individual perceptions and understandings. Although there is a certain amount of change from situation to situation, the underlying aspects of our personality determine to a certain extent the roles we adopt in social situations.