

Twelve Choices: A Framework for Interpersonal Process and Strategy

Dr. Rajendra P. Khandekar, Metropolitan State College of Denver

Abstract

The Twelve Choices framework integrates theories by William Schutz and W.R. Bion to offer a way to visualize our choices of emotive overtones in relating to others. Every interpersonal behavior can have one or both of a task component and an emotive component. The emotive overtones in interpersonal behavior can be categorized on four dimensions, with two extremes and a midpoint on each dimension resulting in twelve major labels for emotive overtones. The four emotive dimensions are Control, Affection, Aggression, and Flight. Control dimension has “Pre-emptive (or controlling)” behaviors at one extreme, “Interdependence” in the middle, and “Dependence (or submissive / compliant)” at the other extreme. Affection dimension has “Love” at one extreme, “Empathy” in the middle, and “Apathy” at the other extreme. Aggression dimension has “Aggression towards the other” at one extreme, “Confrontation” in the middle, and “Self-flagellation” at the other extreme. Flight dimension has “Escape” at one extreme, “Humor” in the middle, and “Withdrawal” at the other extreme. Managers may utilize this framework to understand their own and others’ patterns of emotive responses, and to learn about the impact of individual and interpersonal behaviors on group dynamics, and to visualize their options for interpersonal behavior.

Introduction

Organizational behavior (OB) as a field of study addresses the nature and impact of human behavior at various levels of social systems. Thus, we see theories addressing phenomena at individual, interpersonal, group and organizational levels. Often, these theories have been disjoint because they were originally developed in behavioral sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. It is important, therefore, to continually examine opportunities to integrate such theories to bridge gaps so that we may understand relationships between the various levels of social systems.

The phenomenon of interpersonal behavior covers the context of behavior between two people. Of course, a pair of individuals may interact in the context of a group. Thus, just as individual behavior influences what happens between two individuals, a group may also influence what happens between two individuals. These relationships between individual, interpersonal and group levels are the focus of the Twelve Choices framework developed in this paper.

Interactions between individuals are part of task processes as well as emotive processes. In a work organization, people derive satisfaction of their needs as they engage in productive activities. In a family setting or even in a party, there are tasks that must be done, such as ensuring that food is prepared, garbage is taken out, and people are having fun. Thus there is no situation where individuals interact purely for task or purely for emotional reasons.

The important questions then become (a) whether we can “describe” emotive aspects of interpersonal behavior as it occurs simultaneously with task behavior, (b) whether there are choices available with regard to emotive aspects, (c) whether and what impact such choices have on outcomes, (d) whether and how we can relate interpersonal behavior to the phenomena at the individual level as well as group level. We will address all these four questions in this paper.

Interpersonal Dynamics

As systems, a pair of individuals is qualitatively different from the simple addition of two individuals. Individuals, in an interpersonal context, are likely to behave differently from what each would if the individual were to do what they would do on their own. In a similar vein, groups of people, i.e. three or more individuals, are likely to behave in qualitatively different ways from a pair of individuals.

Interpersonal dynamics has been viewed from many angles. Models of communication process between individuals commonly refer to the message, the medium, the transmission and reception, and the types of perceptual filtering that can occur in all these. Models such as the Johari Window are used to illustrate the process of discovery between individuals.

One of the models most relevant to interpersonal dynamics is the FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientations – Behavior) introduced by William Schutz (1958). Schutz rests his theory partially on the need theories by Maslow and McClelland. Maslow theorized that every individual has a “need for belongingness” i.e. every person wants to belong to a group or organization. McClelland theorized that every individual has a need for “affiliation” and a need for “power”. Various other theorists have insisted on a common human tendency to associate with other human beings for reasons of safety, security, and recognition. This point hardly requires extensive proof or argument. The intensity of these needs will of course vary between individuals and even for the same individual over a period of time.

Schutz theorizes that individuals have three “interpersonal needs” – a “need for inclusion”, a “need for control”, and a “need for affection”. These three needs denote an individual’s need to maintain a satisfactory relation between the self and other people in regard to (1) interaction or belongingness, (2) power and influence, and (3) love and affection, respectively. For example, on the “inclusion” dimension, some people seek great amount of contact with others, while some people avoid being with other people. Thus, we may categorize individuals as having a continuum of needs from “high” level of need to “low” level of need.

On the dimension of each need, Schutz further distinguishes between behavior that an individual “expresses” towards others, and behavior that the individual “wants” from others. Thus, there is a need for “expressed inclusion” as well as “wanted inclusion”. In effect, we can view these as resulting in behaviors along six interpersonal needs, and an individual’s equilibrium represented on each need with a measurable score represented by abbreviations where “e” refers to “expressed”, “w” refers to “wanted”, and “I”, “C”, and “A” refer to Inclusion, Control and Affection.

	Inclusion	Control	Affection
Expressed	eI	eC	eA
Wanted	wI	wC	wA

By measuring an individual’s behaviors related to these six needs with an instrument (Schutz developed a questionnaire to measure these needs), it would then be possible for the individual to describe their propensities to engage in these six types of interpersonal behaviors. Schutz then describes the compatibility or incompatibility between individuals with high or low scores on these six needs. For example, an individual with a “high expressed inclusion” would be compatible with another who has a “high wanted inclusion”, but incompatible with someone with “low wanted inclusion”.

Group / individual issues in groups

Schutz explained the phenomenon of group development from the point of view of FIRO-B. This view describes three phases of group development. The three phases relate to inclusion, control, and affection. When groups come together or new members arrive in a group, the issue of inclusion is the first to arise. The issues dealt with at this stage involve questions of who is “included” in the group, how the person is informed that the person is part of the group, who does the “including”, whether the new member waits to be included or whether he / she simply jumps in full steam ahead without resolving the issue of inclusion to the satisfaction, mostly at an unconscious level, of the group members. The way these questions arise and resolved forms the inclusion phase of group development.

Control phase of group development revolves around issues of distribution of power and influence among group members. As the group moves towards its task, members try to influence group movement by taking on tasks, making suggestions about how tasks can be and should be done, assigning subtasks to group members. As they engage in these activities, different members are seen as influencing the group to differing extent. If this distribution of influence, and the influence attempts of various members do not fit the “expressed” and “wanted” control needs of members, conflict arises. The influence attempts themselves are “expressed control”. Those with high “expressed control” are the ones who quickly engage in “taking charge” of tasks and responsibilities, as well as

telling others what to do and what not to do. If those who are being told what to do and what not to do are people with “low wanted control”, they will not take such attempts kindly, and they will begin questioning such influence attempts.

The control phase often results in conflict. Conflict is compounded in cases where inclusion issues have not been resolved satisfactorily prior to the group entering the control phase. “Person X is completely new to the group, yet he / she is trying to take control of the group” is the sentiment of “old timers” in the group. “What does he / she know about the team / our tasks that he /she can presume to tell us what will work or not?” is the question asked by these old timers, and there is immediate subtle, or not so subtle, resistance to the newcomer’s ideas. Objections may be raised; statements such as “That simply cannot be done” may arise; and in essence, the newcomer’s ideas may be sabotaged – perhaps not consciously, but definitely to give the message that the newcomer will have to wait to acquire a status to influence the direction of the group.

As groups progress through resolving inclusion and control issues, they may face affection phase. During the affection phase, members begin forming close associations, friendships, pairs, and in-groups. These closer relationships between a few of the members of the group may extend outside of the group as well. Group members know, or at least have a sense, of which members are close to whom. Affection may arise as a result of compatibilities in tastes, interpersonal need satisfaction, or other preferences. Affection may be expressed to differing extent depending on the norms of the group and culture. If affectionate behaviors violate any of the norms, it may result in sanctions by the group. This can trigger off “control” phase. Affectionate behaviors between a subset of members may make others feel isolated or deprived, and may result in a feeling of being left out. This itself can send the group back to “inclusion” phase.

These three phases thus keep recurring in groups due to turnover of members, or simply because the group keeps switching between these phases as the group moves on its task and experiences success or failure. Success or failure of a group is not independent of these phases. In fact, these phases are interwoven with the task processes of the group, and may either interfere with or facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of the group in performing its tasks. These phases are therefore integral to a group’s life until the group completely disbands.

Group Dynamics According to Bion

W. R. Bion developed his notions of “Basic Assumptions” in work groups based upon his experiences in group therapy sessions at the Tavistock Institute (Bion, 1961). Although groups get together to perform work, Bion found that “Work-group activity is obstructed, diverted, and on occasion assisted by certain other mental activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives. These activities, at first sight chaotic, are given a certain cohesion if it is assumed that they spring from basic assumptions common to all the group.” (p.146). A Basic Assumption is a powerful emotional drive shared by all the members of the group at a particular time in the life of the group, and exhibits itself in the modality of behavior by most, if not all, members of the group. Bion identified three Basic Assumptions – Basic Assumption Dependence (baD), Basic Assumption Pairing (baP), and Basic Assumption Fight-flight (baF).

According to Bion, a group exhibits a Basic Assumption of Dependence when the group behaves as if it has met in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment, material or spiritual, and protection. When a group is in this kind of modality, members may refuse to take on, or abdicate, responsibilities that they should otherwise be accepting and carrying out as mature members of the group. A group operating in baD, may actually do quite well if the leader continues to structure the task and lead the group through instruction, providing direction, and bringing resources continually to the group. However, this group can flounder if the leader is somehow unable to provide all these.

A group exhibits a Basic Assumption of Pairing when the group behaves as if it expects some members to pair up, and hopes that leadership will evolve through such pairing. Bion, although a therapist in the psychoanalytic tradition, did not attribute a sexual connotation alone to the pairing. In fact, he clearly states that the gender of the pairing members may not be pertinent to the group with baP. He simply states that in a pairing group, leadership is nearly always absent, and thus the pairing of members is almost expectantly observed by the group in the hope of a birth of leadership activity.

The third Basic Assumption of Fight-flight exists when the group behaves as if they have met to fight someone or something, or to escape or fly away from someone or something. Such a group pays no attention to the leader unless the leader exhorts and encourages the group to fight or fly. Often then, such a group fights or flies away from the real task at hand. These are the kind of meetings we have all experienced where people are talking war of some kind or another on “them” or “others”, or where people seem to fight with each other for long periods of time without resolving anything, or where people talk about everything under the sun except the work of the group, or simply are waiting to get away from each other. Again, baF can actually facilitate the work of a group when the work consists of fighting, or when work consists of only having fun, such as in a party.

Integrating FIRO-B and Basic Assumptions

The common themes between these two theories may be noted quite easily. Schutz talks about Control, while Bion talks about Dependence. Schutz implies conflict as a result of Control, while Bion talks directly about Fight - flight. And while Schutz alludes to Affection, Bion talks about Pairing. Schutz describes groups as shifting from phase to phase, not necessarily in any particular order. Bion describes groups as shifting between the Basic Assumptions. Both describe these emotional phenomena as diverting the group from its task, as well as aiding and facilitating its task. These common themes, however, are not necessarily “equivalent”.

There are also differences. Schutz begins with interpersonal “needs” of individuals before examining the impact of these needs and associated behaviors on the development of phases where groups resolve these issues. On the other hand, Bion goes directly to the behavior of groups themselves, and it is worth noting that Bion is talking about a group level phenomenon, or the meaning of the behaviors of “all” group members taken together. Thus, they approach their theories from different “levels” of systems – Schutz from the individual to interpersonal level, while Bion approaches from the group level to the individual level.

This leads to the question of whether there is any way to integrate the two theories to create a bridge between the individual and the group. It seems that interpersonal behavior is that bridge. The dimensions implicit in the two theories may be considered as providing the support columns for this bridge, and the span may be described in terms of the implicit opposites on each dimension. The framework proposed in the next section perhaps will provide a more complete picture of this bridge.

The Twelve Choices Framework

We may accept the premise that emotive overtones in interpersonal behavior arise out of individual needs to belong to, to interact with, to affirm oneself, and to test reality through people. As such, an individual X may engage in task activities as well as purely emotive exchange with others. The emotive overtones, overlaid on task or other communication, may be understood in terms of four dimensions – Control, Affection, Aggression, and Flight. Control dimension has “Pre-emptive (or controlling)” behaviors at one extreme, “Interdependence” in the middle, and “Dependence (or submissive / compliant)” at the other extreme. Affection dimension has “Love” at one extreme, “Empathy” in the middle, and “Apathy” at the other extreme. Aggression dimension has “Aggression towards the other” at one extreme, “Confrontation” in the middle, and “Self-flagellation” at the other extreme. Flight dimension has “Escape” at one extreme, “Humor” in the middle, and “Withdrawal” at the other extreme. These dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

The explanation of dimensions and the illustrations are to be considered as a few of million different ways that people express themselves on each dimension. Words, actions, tone of voice, non-verbal messages through facial or body movements are all part of the emotional overtones. These can be combined in countless ways to change the meaning of one’s emotional overtone in highly subtle ways. It is also possible to mix emotional overtones in greater or smaller proportions. Another individual could perceive one particular emotional overtone of an individual in a completely different way. Misunderstanding of emotional overtones is as common in our daily lives as breathing. Yet, people are capable of reading the emotional overtones accurately and responding to them.

Control: Although much of human behavior is directed at influencing one’s environment, the Control dimension relates specifically with which of two individuals in an interaction (let us call them X and Y) determines the immediate course of events.

If X wants to determine the immediate course of events, X may “pre-empt” behavioral options for Y, options that may change the course of events. As an extreme example, if X binds Y with a strong rope, X is “pre-empting” Y from running away (which may have been an option for Y in that situation). If X tells Y that Y must do something specific (with an implied threat of a dire consequence if Y fails to do it), then it is a somewhat milder form of “pre-emption”. When someone asks you with a glare “Don’t you think we should be doing ...?”, they give you the message that you better agree with them (or else) – a common occurrence in management meetings and in marital relationships. The most extreme form of “pre-emption” is killing the other person. If X kills Y, there is no question of any behavioral options left for Y. However, X is also pre-empting any chances of continued interaction with Y. If X wants to allow Y to determine the course of events, X will show “submissive” behaviors (this is also the set of behaviors one would expect from members of a group that is in Basic Assumption of Dependence). These submissive behaviors may range from groveling in front of Y to simply waiting for instructions. People often show deference towards those with greater power or authority.

Interdependent behaviors suggest that both individuals are jointly responsible for the outcomes of that interaction. Typically, interdependence is shown through polite requests and polite compliance. For example, typical business transactions or dinner table transactions are conducted through mutually interdependent behaviors. A request such as “Please pass the salt” usually results in the other person politely passing the salt.

Affection: This dimension relates to the human capability of compassion, vicarious experiencing of others’ personal feelings joy, grief, and pain. At the same time, humans are equally capable of treating others as non-human objects.

At the “love” extreme end of affectionate behavior, person X may do something to give pleasure to, or to reduce the pain of another person Y. Loving behaviors from parents to their infants and children, loving behavior of one romantic partner towards the other, loving behavior of a saint towards any other human-being are all examples of love. There are probably more meanings of love than any other type of behavior. It is important to note that sex as a behavior is not necessarily synonymous to love – because sex may have overtones of Control or Aggression as in the case of rape.

Apathy, as the other extreme, is exhibited in behavior when X treats Y as an inanimate object, in ways that dehumanize the other person. Such behavior is seen from arrogant people in power when they completely ignore less powerful people, to the extent of not even acknowledging their presence with word, manner or gesture. Normal people may ignore beggars in the same fashion. It is as if one does not want to have any human contact with other person, lest the recognition of another person will somehow make one “do” something for the other.

Many authors of management have described empathy, as a requisite for managers. In this framework, empathy may interpreted as behavior which recognizes the other person and their feelings, without necessarily any attempt at “doing” something for that other person to remove their pain or to give them pleasure. For example, in the workplace, one may listen to another person’s family woes without necessarily doing something to alleviate whatever is bothering the other person.

Aggression: This dimension relates to the human capability of hurting oneself or another person through a hurting behavior. Confronting reality can sometimes be hurtful, but almost always necessary.

Aggression towards other has been a common phenomenon in human life. Human beings have killed others millions of times over in human history. This is an extreme of aggression. From there on, a spectrum of behaviors can exhibit themselves as physical or psychological torture, flashes of anger towards the other, and throwing reality in someone’s face by calling someone ugly, stupid, idiot etc.

Aggression towards oneself may be difficult to see as “aggressive behavior”. However, there are few who have at least not said “sorry” to another person. To be sorry is to feel pain. Something or someone must inflict that pain, and that someone is the person himself or herself. Saying “sorry” is the mildest of ways of showing aggression towards oneself. Apology, remorse, repentance, penitence are all forms of self-flagellation. And they are all quite effective as emotional overtones to repair and / or maintain relationships.

Confrontation as a center refers to those behaviors that bring us to face reality. The intent may not be to hurt either oneself or the other, yet often reality is painful to face, because it may require tasks and actions that are not

necessarily pleasant. Volumes can be written on confrontation. A psychologist may help a client to face reality by confronting the client with factual data about the client’s behavior and mental condition. A leader may confront his / her followers with reality so that followers “wake up” to the tasks at hand. Spouses may have to confront each other with real behaviors so that they may change their behavior and relationship from where it is towards a better relationship. Managers and co-workers often have to confront each other in meetings with facts about errors, misjudgments, and lack of action. These behaviors may be mildly painful for at least a short period of time, and to that extent can be considered as falling on the dimension of aggression.

Flight: This dimension relates to the human capability to escape from reality that may be undesirable or painful.

Escape as one extreme on the flight dimension is expressed by physical removal of oneself from a particular situation. In a sense, suicide is an extreme form of escape from the reality of this world. From this extreme behavior, there is a spectrum of behaviors that are exhibited by people. Running away from home, suddenly leaving an interaction by walking off, or any physical avoidance of an impending interaction (students often “duck” behind corners when they see a teacher whose class they may have cut earlier in the day) are all examples of escape. Drugs or alcohol are also ways of escaping from reality.

Withdrawal at the other extreme does not involve physical removal of oneself from an interaction. It is simply a behavior that turns a person inwards and tunes out external stimuli, so that the only reality is the inner reality of the person. The most extreme form of withdrawal is catatonia. A catatonic person essentially tunes out the entire world, and may take up a fetal position. From here, there is a spectrum of behavior expressed by people who may refuse to respond to stimuli from others. People often exhibit glazed eyes, frozen expressions, and non-response to aggression / love / commands, i.e., any emotional overtones from others.

Humor as a center behavior changes the meaning of reality without necessarily rejecting it. For example, if a person drops a glass of water in someone’s lap in a restaurant, the other person may simply crack a joke to reduce the tension created by that incident. Of course, some people get angry, some get up and leave, and rarely any may hug the person who dropped the glass of water. A joke simply changes the meaning of the event.

Figure 1: Dimensions of Emotive Overtones in Interpersonal Behavior

Dimension of Emotive Overtones	Extreme	Center	Extreme
Control	Pre-emption	Interdependence	Submission
	----- -----		
Affection	Love	Empathy	Apathy
	----- -----		
Aggression	Aggression towards others	Confrontation	Self-flagellation
	----- -----		
Flight	Escape	Humor	Withdrawal
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Applications of the Twelve Choices Framework

People express all these emotional overtones in their interaction with others. Infants must necessarily depend on adults to help them survive. As infants grow up to be children, they begin showing all the emotional overtones in interpersonal situations. As children grow up to be adults, they develop patterns of behavior during their life as they learn which emotional overtones produce desired effects in interpersonal situations. After all, every individual is attempting to influence his or her material or interpersonal reality.

It is generally accepted that our reality is uncertain. The most uncertain part of our reality is people. Thus, all interpersonal situations are sources of great uncertainty. Uncertainty produces anxiety. Anxiety produces learnt patterns of behavior – a great part of which is the behavior that shows an individual's pattern of placing emotional overtones. These basic premises underlie the dynamics of Sensitivity Training groups. It is no wonder that Bion identified his Basic Assumptions in the behavior of groups. The composition of group membership may be such that a Fight (Aggression in the Twelve Choices Framework) dimension or Flight dimension becomes prominent in the emotional overtones of all members.

Entry of a new member in a group, or the first coming together of group members are anxiety-provoking situations due to the uncertainty of the course of events. At such times, empathetic behavior from one or more members may trigger off the "Inclusion" phase in a constructive way. Apathetic behaviors from current members may make the new member highly anxious and trigger off the new member's learnt emotional overtones which could range anywhere on the Twelve Choices Framework. If the new member is confident in his or her ability to deal with any situation, he or she may begin engaging in pre-emptive behaviors by telling the group what to do or what not to do. If the new member is shy, he or she may stay withdrawn, or show submissive behaviors.

The pattern of emotional overtones from different people, and particularly oneself, may be charted on the Twelve Choices Framework to identify "typical patterns of behavior". Such identification (or audit) of current patterns can provide a great deal of learning to a person about his / her own self. This can allow the person to experiment with behaviors other than the learnt patterns. If self-development is the goal, it becomes possible with the help of this framework.

Managers may be able to observe their own and their team members' behaviors using the Twelve Choices Framework. It is then possible to categorize useful versus dysfunctional behaviors by one or more members of the team. Once dysfunctional behaviors are identified, a manager may be able to coach his or her associates with respect to changing those behaviors either through personal counseling or through group sessions where the entire team can engage in team-building through behavioral change.

Relationships can be viewed in light of patterns of these emotional overtones. If we define relationships as relatively stable patterns interpersonal interactions between two people, we find that the stability arises because of similarity or complementarity of the emotional overtones of those two individuals towards each other. Relationships may be categorized as below, with patterns of emotional overtones as shown below each category.

1. Complementary – Growthful Relationships
Centered behaviors, Loving - Loving
2. Complementary – Nongrowthful Relationships
Control - Dependence; Loving – Withdrawal / Self-flagellatory; Aggression - Self-flagellation; Escape – Escape.
3. Destructive Relationships
Control - Aggression / Escape; Aggression - Aggression
4. Non- Relationships
Apathy - Apathy; Withdrawal - Withdrawal

Conclusion

Theories of interpersonal and group dynamics by William Schutz and W. R. Bion form the basis of conceptualization of the Twelve Choices Framework. Dimensions of behavioral modality identified by these two authors were combined to form the Twelve Choices Framework to identify emotional overtones in interpersonal behavior.

The Twelve Choices Framework does not imply that a particular overtone is good or bad, or more effective or less effective. It simply gives a way to understand the emotional overtones. People make these choices based upon (a) what they feel at the moment, and / or (b) what they believe will influence others and events towards what is desired. Some people have a greater tendency to allow their feelings to be expressed in their behavior, which is sometimes seen as "naïve" behavior or "reaction" to the actors and other factors in the situation. Some people are more prone to "calculate" how they should behave with respect to gaining their own goals. Thus, it is extremely difficult to

make a direct connection between people's behavior and their feelings / thinking and calculation that go in their behavior.

There are many applications of the Twelve Choices Framework. The framework may be used to identify current patterns of behavior of individual in interpersonal situations. The framework may also be used to identify alternate possibilities in the same situations. The framework does not suggest any "ideal" behavior. However, individuals may visualize what they want to do in the future when they are confronted with interpersonal situations or certain emotional overtones in other people's behaviors. Does aggression need to be met with aggression, with love, with apathy, with escape, or with submission? Which response helps move the interpersonal process in which direction? These are the kind of questions that may be answerable with the help of this framework.

The Twelve Choices Framework is oriented towards observable behaviors. It does not address any underlying needs that drive these behaviors. In that sense, the framework needs to be supplemented with other theories that address some more fundamental factors in individual psyches – if we agree that there exist such more fundamental factors. However, that task must be left to the future.

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