

Module 8:

Oral Communication in a Team Context

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Module	8 - Oral Communication in a Team Context
Module Learning Outcomes	
By the end of this module students will be able to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Become aware of oral communication patterns in a team meeting. [CLO 1, 2, 5] 2. Understand the difference between interrupting or completing another's idea or comment. [CLO 3, 5] 3. Develop an awareness of non-verbal cues in team settings. [CLO 1, 5] 4. Develop a vocabulary for talking about team communication dynamics. [CLO 3, 4] 5. Identify at least two oral communication strengths and one area for improvement. [CLO 6] 	

Resources (Bank)	
Item	Description of how to be used
Design Activity	To be used by teams to guide their 15-minute activity
Observation sheet	Used by workshop participants to record observations during the activities

Face to Face Workshop Plan	
Description of Workshop	This workshop employs a "fishbowl" structure. One team of four works on a task while another team of four observes them. Although students may be hesitant at first with someone observing them, most of the time the hesitation disappears as students become more involved in the task itself.
Time for Completion	60-90 minutes
Materials	Large room with mobile furniture Observation sheets (one for each student) Team task (one copy per student) Markers Flip chart paper

	<p>Post-its Index cards</p>
<p>Workshop Preparation Instructions</p>	<p>This activity requires a large room with movable furniture. The groups need enough room to have a shared space with observer chairs around it close enough to hear and see individuals, but not so close as to be “part of the team.” Ideally, the facilitator sets up the room before the activity.</p> <p>There are two ways to use this workshop. The first is to work with extant teams from a course as either a course activity or an activity offered for the course, but outside of class time. The second way offers the workshop to students but not associate it with any particular team project or course. Since engineering students work in teams in many of their courses, co-op placements or internships, this activity can work at any level. When working with a group that is not already divided into teams, assemble teams randomly at the beginning of the activity. This can be done by distributing sets of numbers, colours or just “counting off.”</p>
<p>Procedure</p>	<p>Step 1: (~5 minutes) Begin by quickly putting students into four-person teams. This may be adjusted if there are uneven numbers of students; however, teams should not be more than five as this increases the complexity dynamics and observations.</p> <p>Step 2: (~10 minutes) Distribute the Observation Sheet. Go over the six categories. Define them and give examples of the behaviours (e.g. someone initiates an interaction by raising their hand, leaning forward into the group and says, “Ummm...”). The observing student need only make a tally mark next to IN for that action.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i> There may be confusion about the difference between interrupting and completing. It is a judgment call. Usually an interruption cuts someone off before their thought has been completed. The direction or intent of the comment is not picked up, rather, the interrupting speaker takes the incomplete idea in a different direction as opposed to developing or following the first</p>

speaker's perceived intent. It is also possible to observe the response of the person whose thought has been taken up or interrupted. When someone's idea is being completed or developed there is often non-verbal nodding in agreement, interjections of assent, etc. When someone has been interrupted the non-verbal registers more surprise or something more negative, leaning back from the table or group.

Step 3: (~20 minutes)

Pair up the teams, have them flip a coin to see who will observe first and have them take their appropriate seats. Distribute the [Design Activity](#) and start the activity. Allow 15 minutes for the activity.

Facilitator Notes:

Finishing the activity is not the goal. Becoming engaged in the activity is more important.

Step 4: (~20 minutes)

Stop the activity at 15 minutes and have the teams change places. Instruct the first observing team to hold onto their observation sheets until the end of the second round. Ensure the observing team has their clean copies of the observation sheets. Run the activity again for 15 minutes.

Step 5: (~20 minutes)

Debrief: The first step in the debrief is to have each team receive the observation sheets from their activity. Ask the teams to put the sheets out where everyone on the team can see them. What patterns, if any, do they see on a first glance.

Facilitator Notes:

Give students enough time to notice before using probing questions. Some groups of students may need more or less guidance in seeing patterns.

Does one category of interaction dominate? Does one person dominate in a category? If someone has been mostly silent (little or nothing in IN, IR, C, Q) what can their gaze and listening behaviours indicate?

	<p>The second step in the debrief is to interpret these observations. What are two possible interpretations of a pattern where one person dominates the IN (initiates) category? What other interpretation could there be? At this point, it is possible to start to more openly explore why someone is hesitant to speak, what wait time means and how silence feels to different team members. How different team members respond to interruptions—being interrupted or doing the interrupting.</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i> Generating alternative interpretations is important because it is not possible to always accurately interpret another’s motivation and intention from words and non-verbal behaviours alone. Interpretations need to be confirmed. Asking for this confirmation can allow students to understand just how differently the same actions can be interpreted.</p> <p>The third step in the debrief is to try and link the patterns with the progress the team made (or didn’t make) during the short activity period and/or the quality of the progress. What happens when one person dominates one or two categories? How that is different from a more evenly distributed set of interactions. How could learning to wait an additional five seconds change the opportunity for more team members to participate?</p> <p><i>Facilitator Notes:</i> The third step may be a step too far for some teams, especially if the facilitator is not working with extant teams. A rich discussion in the second step of the debrief that supports students becoming aware of how they interpret others’ actions and how their own actions may be interpreted can lead to implications for their own behaviours (e.g. I am hesitant to speak because I don’t think I have anything to offer, but if I know what the goal of a meeting is ahead of time, I can prepare and then feel more confident that I can make a contribution or I see that I feel as if I am waiting a very long time, but it is really on a couple of seconds. If I wait and tolerate “silence” five more seconds, others may feel that they have time to “pull their thoughts together.”)</p>
Supplemental Materials	No supplemental materials for this module are needed.

Assessment

Individually, students write down three things they learned about themselves in a team context from this activity. Students next write down one thing they believe they do well and should continue to develop in their team communication practices and one thing that they don't do very well and need to improve. This concluding reflection should give some indication of what insights students may have gained about their own and others' oral communication in a team context.

Resources

DESIGN ACTIVITY

The Marshmallow Tower challenge has been adapted from:

<https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/spaghetti-marshmallow-challenge>

Provide each team with the following supplies:

20 sticks of dry spaghetti (any style)
1 meter of string
1 meter of tape
1 marshmallow
Scissors

Instructions:

Build the tallest freestanding tower possible with these supplies in 10 minutes.

This can be altered with the constraint of build the tallest tower possible that will support the marshmallow or build the tallest freestanding tower possible that will support the marshmallow on the top of the tower.

Additional challenges which can be used in the same way may be found at:

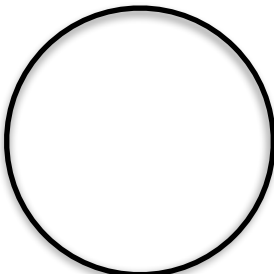
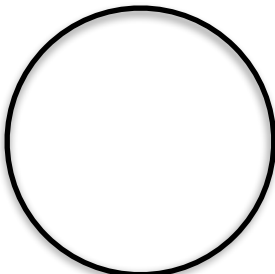
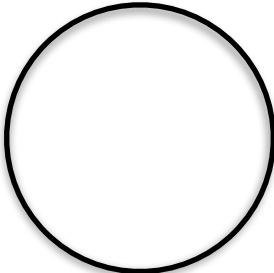
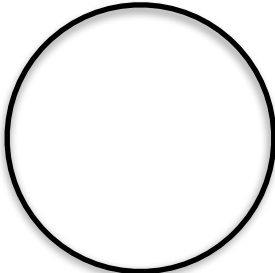
<https://frugalfun4boys.com/awesome-stem-challenges/>

Team Behaviour Observer Recording Sheet

When you observe a particular behaviour by a particular individual, add a mark in the corresponding box

IN		IR		C		Q		L	
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IN		IR		C		Q		L	
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IN	Initiates: individual initiates an interaction, verbally or non-verbally
IR	Interrupts: individual cuts off another's utterance without verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement or permission
C	Completes (expands or explains, builds): individual completes another's utterance with explicit verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement
Q	Questions: individual asks a question to confirm, clarify, seek information
L	Listens: individual follows interactions with gaze, non-verbal responses (facial expression, private language, note-taking)
G	Gaze: where does the individual's gaze predominantly rest: on an individual, on a device or notebook in front of them, on one other person, on the person who is currently speaking, in the distance Indicate the direction of gaze with arrows between the circles

IN		IR		C		Q		L	
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IN		IR		C		Q		L	
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