

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND LINGUISTIC UPGRADE IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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# PREFACE

This coursebook has been developed in the scope of the Erasmus+ KA2 project INCLUDE (Intercultural Communication and Linguistic Upgrade in a Digital Environment). The project was set in the context of the global onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that has brought immense changes to the manner people communicate and engage in professional activities. Language and intercultural communication (LIC) teachers at higher education institutions teach courses that heavily depend on communication and they have had to invest more time and effort into transforming their teaching methods and materials into ones that are applicable in online teaching. At the same time, LIC teachers are the ones who have to prepare their students for real-life communication in a virtual setting as well as to enable them to acquire the Global Competence.

The main objective of the INCLUDE project was to boost students' employability on a global scale by ensuring an inclusive, progressive, high-quality language and communication course in a range of languages (English, Croatian, Portuguese, Greek) at higher education institutions across Europe and wider.

The project was operated by an international project team from three partner institutions and it included 30 students from all partner universities, as well as a solid base of industrial partners as associated partners. The project has especially aimed at involving students with fewer opportunities and on boosting students' ability to participate in high-quality virtual exchange.

The project has resulted in a research paper based on which this handbook has been developed and made available in four languages as an open educational resource accompanied by animated videos produced by the students who participated in the course piloting sessions and a detailed course curriculum that may easily be implemented, fully or partially, at any higher education institution. The coursebook may be used and adapted within an existing course or a completely new



course, as well as for self-study purposes. It is primarily intended for bachelor level students of various fields, such as engineering, nursing, business administration, agriculture, etc., but it might be considered useful by anyone wishing to update their knowledge on the fundamentals of teamwork in a digital, multidisciplinary and intercultural environment.

The authors wish to extend their sincere gratitude to the Croatian National Agency (Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes) for all the support during the project implementation phase, as well as to the reviewers and industrial partners whose comments and suggestions have enriched the final version of this coursebook. We would also like to thank all of our students who participated in the course piloting process. Their feedback was absolutely priceless.

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# Chapter 1: Intercultural communication and the role of language

## General aim

This chapter presents an introduction to intercultural communication and an overview of reflection and discussion topics connected to global competence.

## Expected outcomes

On completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

### Outcome 1

define and exemplify the key concepts related to intercultural communication

### Outcome 2

differentiate between various stages of becoming interculturally competent

### Outcome 3

identify some language-related challenges that may arise while communicating with people from different cultures and how to handle them

### Outcome 4

critically assess your strengths and areas that might be further developed for the purpose of efficient engagement in intercultural communication

## 1.1. Introduction to intercultural communication

Globalisation, internationalisation, interculturality, multiculturalism, as well as the growing influence of the Internet, social networks and new technologies, are some of the hallmarks of the 21st century. The main link between all these concepts is communication.

Reardon (1998) lists six basic features of **human communication**:

### 1. People communicate for a multitude of different reasons.

We communicate to establish, maintain or end a relationship, we communicate for fun or business reasons. Sometimes we start communicating just to reduce the discomfort caused by silence. For example, while waiting in line for an officer to return from a break, we will begin a conversation with people who are in the same place for a similar reason. Whatever the reason and our intention, communication always conveys messages about us, our intellectual, emotional, social and other characteristics.

### 2. Communication results in intentional, but also unintended effects.

Communication between the participants of the business meeting is intended to achieve results related to the purpose of the meeting (for example, to agree on a project delivery deadline). However, during a meeting, we may intentionally or unintentionally provoke reactions that were not planned. For example, checking the cell phone during the meeting will give the impression of insufficient focus on the participants or the goals of the meeting.

### 3. Communication usually goes in two directions.

Although sometimes it seems that one person "leads the word" and that some of those present do not participate in communication, any feedback is part of communication. In a meeting where the

boss gives instructions for creating a project, the participant who uses the mobile phone actually communicates insufficient interest in the topic and / or participants.

#### **4. Communication involves at least two people influencing each other unequally.**

Ideally, the sender and recipient of the message receive and interpret the information through a communication channel. However, in reality, the meaning of information is assigned by people who have different experience, knowledge, education, emotional and social status, and therefore often come to different interpretations of the same information. How many times have you read the same information, but others have interpreted it differently? For example, the boss mentions that the last project received a solid amount of funding. Some people will interpret this as insufficient, some as adequate, while others may perceive the project to be funded with a high amount of money.

#### **5. Communication happened even when it was not successful.**

Most people have experienced a situation where communication seems to have failed because it did not even happen: when we silently listen to the boss's objections or when our interlocutor does not answer our questions. Silence is a message too, sometimes stronger than spoken words. An old proverb says "silence is golden". In this case, silence is also a message, and silence is sometimes stronger than spoken words.

#### **6. Communication involves the use of symbols.**

Words and our gestures are symbols for concepts, feelings. The problem arises in the different interpretation of the meaning of symbols, which is described in item 4.



Source: pexels.com

**Intercultural communication** is the process of sending and receiving messages between people who, due to their cultural traditions, can interpret verbal and nonverbal signals differently (Bovee, 2012). Referring to communication as being intercultural, the influence of culture on the interaction between members of different cultures is emphasised.

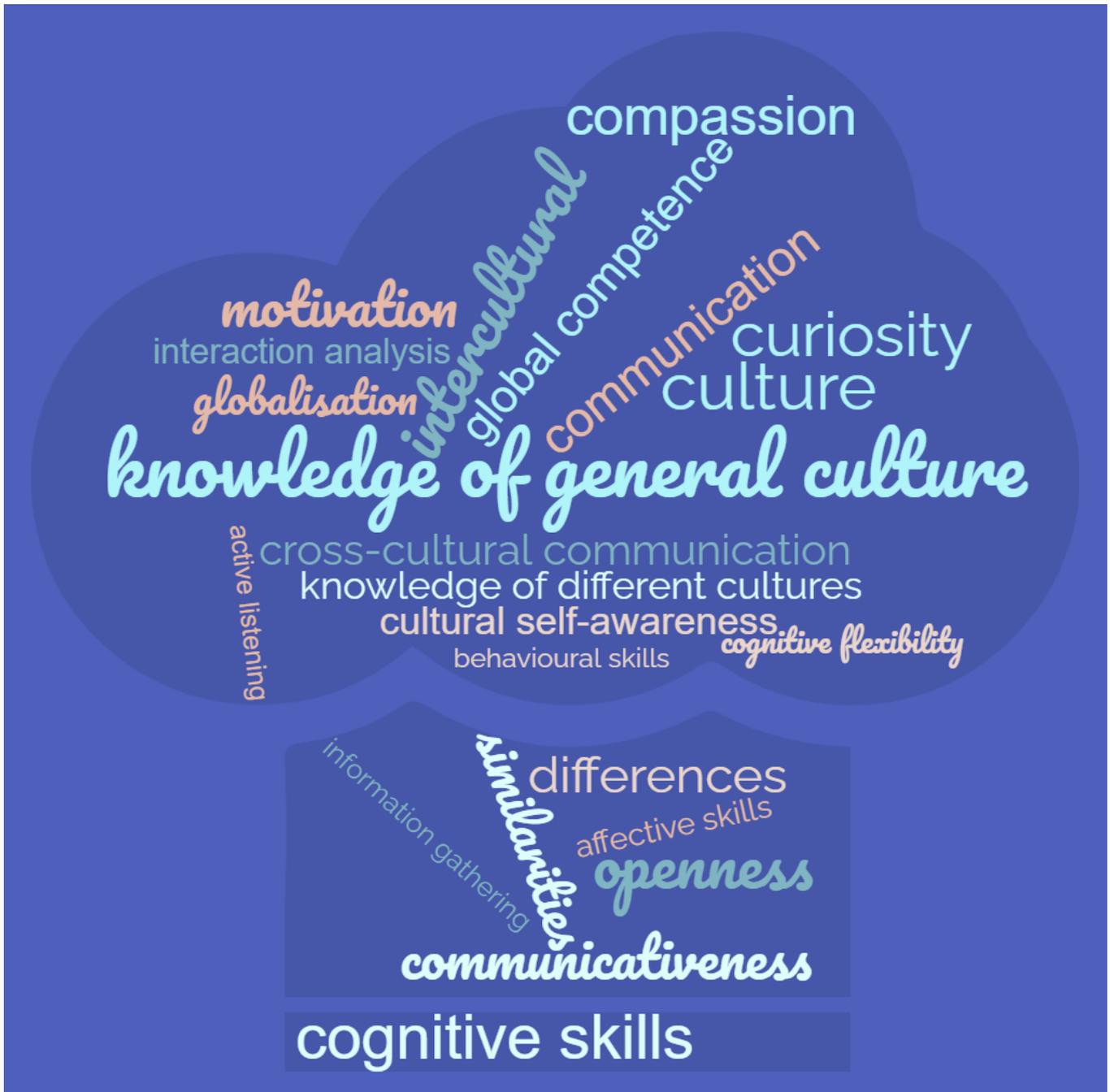
Intercultural communication involves the interaction of people whose cultural perceptions and symbolic systems are different enough to change the communicative act (Samovar, 2013). Perception, verbal and nonverbal communication are fundamental aspects of intercultural communication.

Contemporary global and social changes require each individual to develop new knowledge, attitudes and skills, or to develop new intercultural competencies as an essential prerequisite for successful communication in intercultural situations. Competence can refer to ability, skill, expertise, talent, experience, knowledge, and intercultural communication competence is actually a type of behaviour that is appropriate and effective in a particular place, and contains a combination of different abilities that allow an individual to perform well in other cultures other than their own culture. Intercultural communication competence is the overall inner ability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication, such as cultural differences and unknowns, attitudes that exist between certain groups, and the stress-related experience that accompanies such situations (Samovar, 2013). Additionally, with the developments in technology, which have allowed for the implementation of video conferencing tools, the world has virtually become a “global village” where one frequently meets new people from other cultures in a digital setting. While being extremely efficient and environmentally friendly, communication in a digital environment tends to be somewhat different from face-to-face communication, as it is, depending on its mode, at least partially deprived of some nonverbal cues. Further information and useful tips on communication in a digital environment are provided in Chapter 3.



Source: pexels.com

According to Bennett (2008), intercultural communication competence is a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that make up effective and appropriate communication in various cultural contexts.



Cognitive skills and characteristics include:

- cultural self-awareness,
- knowledge of general culture,
- knowledge of different cultures,
- interaction analysis.

Affective skills and characteristics include:

- curiosity,
- cognitive flexibility,
- motivation – openness.

Behavioural skills and characteristics include:

- communicativeness,
- ability to listen and solve problems,
- compassion,
- ability to gather information.

## 1.2. The notion of culture

As Bennett (1998) points out, when discussing the concept of culture, we may distinguish between **Culture** (or objective culture) and **culture** (or subjective culture). While the former is connected to arts, literature, drama, or social, economic, political, and linguistic systems (and it usually involves things we learn from the history of a certain culture), it remains questionable whether this kind of knowledge alone allows for sufficient background information about a certain culture to enable us to participate in successful intercultural communication with its members. On the other hand, understanding **subjective culture**, which refers to the everyday thinking and behaviour of a certain group, is more likely to lead to intercultural competence.

### 1.2.1. Monocultural communication and intercultural communication

Monocultural communication is **similarity-based**, i.e. difference represents the potential for misunderstanding. The similarities generally allow people to predict the responses of others to certain kinds of messages and to take for granted some basic shared assumptions about the nature of reality. On the other hand, intercultural communication does not allow people to predict the responses and easily make assumptions about the shared view of the reality. Thus, the intercultural communication approach is **difference-based** (Bennett, 1998).

### 1.2.2. High-context cultures and low-context cultures

The anthropologist E. T. Hall used the terms high-context culture and low-context culture to describe the way in which human communication styles differ. According to Hall (1976), in **low-context cultures**, meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages, while in **high-context cultures** meaning is expressed more implicitly, by using gestures, social customs, silence, nuance, or tone of voice. In other words, the context is of primary importance in low-context cultures, whereas in high-context cultures, how the message is delivered often matters more (Nam, 2015). For instance, northern European cultures are usually considered lower context than Latin American cultures. Similarly, US American culture is considered lower context than Japanese culture. However, even in low-context cultures a significant portion of meaning depends on nonverbal communication, such as gestures, spacing, eye contact, voice pitch etc. Thus, understanding the nonverbal aspects of communication is vital to an overall comprehension of intercultural events (Bennett, 1998).

Table 1 shows some basic differences between the low-context and high-context communication.

Table 1. Low-context communication / high-context communication (Nam, 2015)

Low-context communication	High-context communication
Most of the information is in the verbal message and less in the context	Context is very important and so is the nonverbal communication (gestures, eye contact, tone of voice...)
The message is direct	It is important to read between the lines and consider age, rank, class and gender while communicating
<i>What</i> is more important than <i>how</i>	<i>How</i> is more important than <i>what</i>
<i>Yes</i> means <i>yes</i> ; <i>no</i> means <i>no</i>	<i>Yes</i> can mean <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> or <i>maybe</i> , depending on the situation and context
It is acceptable to say “no”	Saying “no” is avoided; silence or other subtler expressions are used instead (e. g. It could be difficult)
Task oriented	Oriented towards building relationships
Linear writing style	Circular writing style

Even though we can generally discuss these distinctions, it is important to highlight that globalisation and internationalisation significantly contribute to the reduction of clear-cut differences. Furthermore, it is important not to oversimplify and to consider individual characteristics and contextual situations. We cannot assume that every member of a low-context culture will actually communicate only in the low-context manner.

### 1.2.3. Cultural stereotypes and generalisations

**Stereotypes** may be defined as rigid generalizations that characterize others based on the ethnocentric perspective of an outsider (Bennett, 2015). They are constructed when we act as if all members of a certain group share the same characteristics. Stereotypes may be attached to any characteristic that can serve the purpose of defining a certain group. Thus, we have stereotypes related to cultures, nations, religions, gender, sexual orientation, etc. There are positive and negative stereotypes. **Positive stereotypes** are connected to those characteristics that the observer respects, while **negative stereotypes** are connected to those traits that are disrespected. Regardless of the type, there are many issues surrounding the concept of stereotypes. They can provide the observer with a false sense of understanding, as they are usually only partially correct, and they can create biased assumptions that may ultimately result in creating **prejudice**. Furthermore, they might become “self-fulfilling prophecies”, meaning that one observes the group from a selective perspective, identifying the characteristics that correspond to the stereotype and neglecting the ones that do not confirm it (Bennett, 1998).



Source: pixabay.com

Many people instinctively react to any generalisations in an opposing manner, considering them to be stereotypes. When hearing a generalisation about a certain nation, they might say something like this: “I have a friend from this country, and she is nothing like this.” However, while stereotypes are generally problematic as they tend to be misleading, it may be of value to explore some **flexible generalisations**. Diversity trainers, Thomas Kochman and Jean Mavrelis, the authors of the book *Corporate Tribalism* (2009), call such generalisations **cultural archetypes**. They refer to generalisations that insiders of a certain culture would agree on and perceive them as authentic and true. In other words, an outsider creates stereotypes, while insiders confirm generalisations.

### 1.3. The role of language in intercultural communication processes

There are many definitions of language, as well as many roles that language has in human communities. In simple terms, we may refer to language as a structured system that humans use for the purpose of communicating. In fact, as Bennett (1998) points out, many people perceive language almost exclusively as a communication tool. Throughout the history of linguistics, there have been many theories regarding language as a concept, as well as a specific language system and the concrete usage of speech in a particular language. Thus, apart from its role as a communication tool, language is used for various other purposes, such as performing an action, self-expression, organising one’s thoughts and perceptions of reality and categorising concepts and objects. From the intercultural perspective, we may say that language is **a system of representation**, which allows us to organise the reality, as it provides us with categories and prototypes that guide our formation of concepts (Bennett, 1998).

#### 1.3.1. Does our mother tongue influence the way in which perceive reality?

An interesting question that has sparked interest among linguist for many years is related to the connection between language and culture. As Štrljak Despot (2021) puts it: “Do speakers of different

languages think alike because of the universality of the experience of being human or do we all think differently because of differences in our languages?” There were (and still are) theories that support the standpoint that the language we speak shapes our thoughts and, consequently, our perception of reality. This theory is called **linguistic determinism** and it was first introduced by Benjamin Lee Whorf, an American linguist and fire prevention engineer, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The theory itself finds its roots in the work of Franz Uri Boas, an American anthropologist who is well-known for his cultural relativity theory. The shared foundation of their work is the fact that both Boas and Whorf did field research of Native American languages, so their hypotheses rely on the differences they had observed between these and European languages. Whorf’s linguistic relativity theory (especially its more radical form, the linguistic determinism) has been greatly criticised. However, the rise of the cognitive theories sparked new interest in it (Štrkalj Despot, 2021). What can be said for sure is that it had opened an interesting debate and resulted in valuable empirical research.



Source: freepik.com

### 1.3.2. English as *lingua franca*



Source: freepik.com

Currently, there are around 7,000 languages in the world (Štrkalj Despot, 2021). Each language has its specific characteristics and, obviously, it would be impossible to learn all of them. In the past, intercultural communication was mostly reserved for diplomats and some tradesmen who, due to the nature of their work, had the opportunity to communicate with people from other cultures. However, in the modern, globalised world, intercultural communication has become much more embedded even in the everyday life of common people, and in the academic and business circles it has almost become a norm. Obviously, if we want to communicate with people from other countries, we need a common means of communication. In the last couple of decades, English has established its role as a global *lingua franca*. Speakers from two different countries may have another common language at their disposal (other than English), but today ELF (English as a *Lingua Franca*) is the most common

medium of intercultural communication (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Consequently, the majority of speakers who use English in the modern world are non-native speakers of English. This fact alone clarifies the extent to which the English language has been changing as a result of its *lingua franca* role. Initial ELF research results have shown that that ELF communication is largely marked by **variation** and **innovation**, which are identifiable across all levels, from phonology to speech acts (Bennet, 2015). Although it does not necessarily sound intuitive, many non-native speakers of English claim that they understand other non-native speakers of English better than native speakers of English. As Bennet (2015) points out: “Although this is a new area of research, preliminary findings suggest that ELF communicators mainly focus on the direct negotiation of meaning without reliance on Anglo-cultural norms and with a developed awareness of the need to catch and repair inevitable instances of miscommunication.”



Source: freepik.com

## 1.4. Global competence

**Global Competence** is a multi-dimensional construct that requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to global issues or intercultural situations (PISA, 2018).

### 1.4.1. What does it mean to become interculturally competent?

Here are some useful tips and tricks on how to engage in effective cross-cultural interactions:

1. Become aware of cultural diversity

It is obviously impossible to learn everything about every single culture we may encounter during our lives. Therefore, patience, courtesy and a bit of curiosity go a long way. And, if you are unsure of any differences that may exist, simply ask (MindTools, 2021).

2. Show respect for others

Use your curiosity and open-mindedness to learn about the culture of people you are going to work or communicate with. A small gesture such as greeting a person in their mother tongue may open many doors to expressing mutual respect and understanding.

3. Keep it simple

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, English will most likely be the language you will use while communicating with people from different cultures, and it is quite probable that none of you will be native speakers of English. When you communicate cross-culturally, make additional efforts to keep your communication clear, simple and unambiguous.

4. Be careful about the use of humour

Before making a joke, make sure you double-check its appropriateness. Humour tends to be extremely culture-specific, i.e. something that sounds very funny in one culture might just sound offensive or awkward in another culture.

## 5. Insist on mutual acceptance

Do your homework in advance and learn as much as possible about the customs of the other culture. Furthermore, educate your team members from another culture about some specifics of your own culture, such as the time zone, the level of dedication to deadlines etc. It should be insisted on in both directions. And remember – courtesy, goodwill and respect usually go a long way.



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## Tasks

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1. Work in small groups. Each group should consist of participants from at least two different cultures.

STEP 1 - What are the typical associations you have about your country? Please list as many as you can in two minutes. It is crucial that you do not share information with anyone. Do not comment, just write.

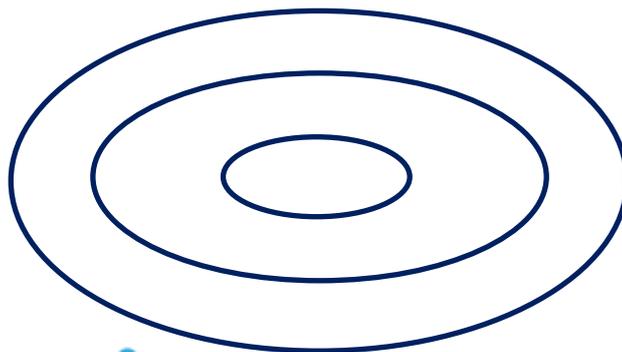
STEP 2 – What are your first positive thoughts when you think of the country / culture(s) of other participants in your group? Do you have any positive stereotypes?

STEP 3 - How did you feel when you hear other's thoughts about your country? Were all the impressions / stereotypes correct?

2. One of the well-known theories in cognitive theory and linguistics is called the **prototype theory**. According to this theory, any given concept in any given language has a real world example that best represents it.

STEP 1 – Work individually. You may use an online dictionary to help you if necessary. Think of the following concept: **bird**. Fill in the diagram below in the following manner:

- Enter the most typical bird (the one that comes to your mind first) in the middle;
- Enter other typical birds (the ones that come to your mind as well while thinking of birds) in the second layer;
- Enter some birds that are not very typical in your country / geographical area in the third layer.



STEP 2 – Work in a small group. Each group should consist of participants from at least two different cultures. Compare your diagrams. Discuss the similarities and differences.

STEP 3 – What can you conclude about intercultural communication in general from this simple exercise?

3. People often compare belonging to a certain culture with wearing a specific type of glasses. Find a pair of glasses with red lenses and a pair of glasses with blue lenses. Imagine your own culture is “blue” and the culture of people you have been working with for several months on a large project is “red”. Even though you have been working together for so long, and you think you perfectly understand their culture, is this really so? Try this out – put your blue glasses on. Now you can see things from the perspective of your culture, right? Now, while still having the blue glasses on, put the red ones on too. Which colour can you see? What can you conclude about intercultural communication from this simple experiment? Discuss it with your group and write a short reflection about your conclusions.



Source: freepik.com

4. Read subsection 2.2.2. How do you understand the concepts of low-context culture and high-context culture? Is your culture low-context or high-context? Discuss it with your team.
5. English is frequently used as *lingua franca*, meaning that we frequently use it to communicate with people from different cultures, not necessarily with native speakers of English. Think about the following questions, discuss them with your team, make notes and prepare a short presentation to be delivered to the rest of the group:
  - Have you ever experienced any challenges while communicating in English with non-native speakers of English?
  - Is it easier for you to communicate in English with native or non-native speakers of English?
  - Have you identified any changes in your personal communication style while communicating in English as opposed to communicating in your mother tongue?
  - Which tips and tricks could you offer to people who need to communicate in English with other non-native speakers? Are there any differences between face-to-face communication in English and video conferencing in English?
  - Imagine you need to deliver a presentation in English to a group of people from various countries who are non-native speakers of English. Which steps in the presentation preparation phase would you emphasise?
6. Watch the video “Intercultural Communication” available among the INCLUDE resources. Would you add any additional tips and tricks? Work with your team. Read the whole chapter on Intercultural Communication and prepare your own 1-minute video on the most important aspects of intercultural communication. Focus on the tips and tricks that you collected during this course. The video can be animated or acted out.

7. Think about the experience you have had during this course. Have you identified any personal strengths related to being able to communicate effectively in a digital, intercultural environment? Is there any area you could work on? Write down a short reflective essay.

## Key concepts of Chapter 1

Term	Explanation
Globalisation	(French: <i>globalisation</i> ), economic, social, political and cultural processes that lead to the transformation of living conditions and the growing connection and interdependence of individual parts of the modern world ( <i>Hrvatska enciklopedija</i> , online, accessed on 1 June 2021)
Internationalisation in higher education	a process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research, service), and delivery of higher education (Knight, 2004). Internationalisation can take place both at home and abroad: at home, it is a campus-based activity and does not involve the movement of persons or programmes across borders, whereas abroad implies cross-border activities or cross-border education involving the movement of people (students and teachers), programmes, and providers across national boundaries (Knight, 2006).
Interculturality	the ability to respect people of different cultures and achieve dialogue through the active exchange of experiences (Encyclopaedia of Anthropology, 2006)
Multiculturalism	coexistence of different cultures, where culture includes racial, religious or cultural groups and is manifested through customs, cultural assumptions, values, ways of thinking and communicating (IFLA, 2010)

Stereotype	rigid generalizations that characterize others based on the ethnocentric perspective of an outsider (Bennett, J., 2015)
Low-context culture	the context is of primary importance in low-context cultures (Nam, 2015)
High-context culture	in high-context cultures, how the message is delivered often matters more than the context itself (Nam, 2015)

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## Chapter 2: Communication in a digital environment

### General aim

This chapter presents an introduction to communication in a digital environment as well as some rules for using different tools in digital communication, especially video conferencing.

### Expected outcomes

On completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

#### Outcome 1

distinguish different types of communication in a digital environment

#### Outcome 2

apply communication standards of various digital tools

#### Outcome 3

participate in the work of an international team in a digital environment

#### Outcome 4

apply the rules of appropriate behaviour and participation in video conferencing



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## 2.1. The notion of communication

Communication (Lat. *communicare* - to make common) is the transmission of messages from the sender to the receiver through a communication channel that can refer to spoken or written language, body movement, facial expressions, etc. (Readron, 1998).

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts and feelings through speech, signals, writing or behaviour. Communication can be defined as the exchange of information between two or more persons with the aim of transmitting or receiving meaning through a common sign system (and symbols). In the communication process, the sender (encoder) encodes the message, then sends it via media / channel to the receiver (decoder) who decodes the message and, upon data processing, sends the appropriate feedback / response using the medium / channel.

## 2.2. Types of communication

There are many different classifications of communication. Wangare, Kibui, Gathuti (2012) concluded that people communicated with each other in a number of ways depending on the message they were exchanging and the context in which it was being sent. The selection of communication channel and communication style also affects communication.

According to these authors, communication can be divided in the following manner:

- by **channel** of communication,
- according to the **distance** between the communication participants,
- by **style**,
- according to the **number of participants**.

### 2.2.1. Communication by channel

Depending on the **channel**, communication may be verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication refers to the form of communication in which a message is conveyed through speech and writing. The acronym KISS should always be used in business interactions where we use oral or written communication: keep it short and simple.

Spoken words are used in spoken communication. Jones (2019) mentions examples of this type of communication: face-to-face conversation, telephone conversation, video, radio, television, video conferencing. Examples of voice communication used in the workplace include conversations, interviews, counselling / assistance to colleagues, meetings, conferences, etc. (Wenbin, 2008). In oral communication, comprehension of the message is influenced by volume, articulation, speed and clarity of speech.

Written signs or symbols are used in **written communication**, and the message is conveyed through letters, reports, instructions, task descriptions, work orders, e-mails... (Wenbin, 2008). Business correspondence is a major part of a company's external and internal communication. Communication with external clients (such as current customers, potential clients, distributors, public services) traditionally appears in the form of business letters. Whether old or new, all forms of communication aim at reaching people who have an opinion on what they consider polite, tactful, modest and empathetic.

Recently, digital communication has been mentioned as one of the communication channels. Digital channels include face-to-face communication and video conferencing; from written notes to e-mail and from personal conversation to phone use. Digital channels retain many of the characteristics of the main channels, but affect different aspects of each channel in new ways. The choice between analogue and digital can affect the environment, context and interference factors.

Since digital communication is the communication channel within which the INCLUDE project was implemented, you can read more in the subsection “Digital Communication Challenges”.

Regardless of the chosen communication channel in business relations, it is important to use the appropriate style in speech and writing, which includes following the norms of literary expression, such as:

- grammatical norm - oriented towards correct expression in speech and writing,
- lexical norm - preserves the nature of language,
- orthoepic norm - determines the correct pronunciation of words, correct emphasis and expression in speech,
- stylistic norm - includes the choice of rhetorical means.

When we think of communication, we usually focus on how we exchange information using words. Although verbal communication is important, people had relied on nonverbal communication for thousands of years before we developed the ability to communicate with words. **Nonverbal communication** is the process of generating meaning using behaviour rather than words (Jones, 2019). Nonverbal communication is the way people communicate without words, either intentionally or unintentionally. It can be a supplement or a substitute for words (Readron, 1998).

Knapp and Hall (2010) conclude that nonverbal communication follows verbal communication and it is difficult to achieve communication goals without understanding the interaction of verbal and nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal communication encompasses a wide range of behaviours. Hess (2016) also cites the influence of clothing, embellishments, or more generally, appearance.

Although Marabian's (2017) urban legend attributes the thesis that 93 % of communication takes place in a nonverbal way, he has encouraged considerations of the impact of nonverbal messages on communication, as well as discussions on the impact of paralinguistic or vocal phenomena such as frequency range, voice intensity range, speech errors, pauses, speed and duration of speech.

Scientists have noticed that nonverbal communication has different structures and properties, just like verbal communication. However, nonverbal communication contains less intent. Certain nonverbal cues, such as sweating, redness, or shaky hands, are difficult to control, unlike words that can be chosen and controlled.

There are different categorisations of elements of nonverbal communication, but the most typical are: facial expression, look, body posture and movements, spatial distance, touch, external appearance, paralinguistic signs.

Figure 1 shows some elements of nonverbal communication as related to the part of the body that transmits them.

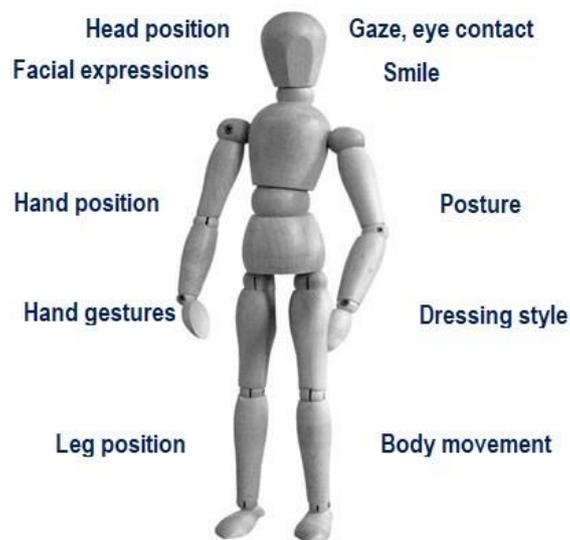


Figure 1. Some elements of nonverbal communication (*Badrov, 2020, pp 58*)

According to Hargie (2019), nonverbal communication has a number of functions that are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Some functions of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication function	Example
Substitution of words in situations where it is impossible or inappropriate to speak	You look at your colleague for the purpose of making him stop talking at a meeting.
Complementing the spoken content	A colleague says he would stop talking and at the same time covers his mouth with his hand.
Contradicting the spoken content	A colleague tells you that he was not affected by your request to stop speaking at a meeting, but you can see from the expression on his face, his gestures and the intonation of his voice that he was affected.
Conversation regulation	At a meeting, it is determined who will speak by the movement of the boss's hand.
Expressing feelings and interpersonal attitudes	With a smile we show satisfaction, with raised eyebrows we show concern...
Transmission of personal or social identity	Clothing, tattoos, jewellery...
Contextualizing interaction	Sitting arrangements at a meeting that reflect a hierarchical position

## 2.2.2. Communication according to the distance between the participants in the communication

According to the distance between the participants, communication can be:

- direct - oral communication in the form of face-to-face conversation (meetings, seminars, discussions),
- indirect - using technical means (telephone, video call, various media).

## 2.2.3. Communication by style

According to the style, which is conditioned by interpersonal relations and situation, communication can be:

- formal

When communicating formally, certain rules, conventions and principles are respected during communication. Formal communication takes place in a prepared and organised environment using formal expression that includes appropriate speech style and correct pronunciation of words.

- informal

Informal communication uses a more relaxed style of speech (including jargon, dialect). Informal communication has the effect of connecting people faster and building relationships.

Formal communication refers to communicating via formal communication channels in a specific manner that every employee in the organisation should follow. As Fox (2006) points out, it is "a planned, systematic, official transmission of information in spoken and written form, tailored to the needs of the organisation." Informal communication is communication that does not follow certain rules, and which takes place between employees of the organisation who belong to different groups. The most important advantage of informal communication is its frequency and intensity.

## 2.2.4. Communication according to the number of participants

According to the number of participants, communication can be:

- **intrapersonal communication** - communication that the subject performs with themselves: they review and evaluate their actions and decisions, think about solving problems, exercise the messages they wish to convey to others, etc.,
- **interpersonal communication** - the interaction between two or more persons face-to-face, with the possibility of obtaining information instantly (Readron, 1998),
- **group communication** - it takes place between three or more people who are part of a team or group. People come together and work in a group to achieve common goals, overcome difficulties, develop ideas, share information and experiences. An example of group communication is teamwork while working on a project,
- **public communication** - communication between a speaker and the audience whose purpose is the transmission of information, influence, persuasion. An example of public communication is a public lecture, forum, gathering, etc.,
- **mass communication** is aimed at a large audience and takes place via mass media (TV, radio, Internet).

## 2.3. Digital communication challenges

Although some authors single out digital communication as a special type of communication, in this text the term **digital communication** refers to “the physical transfer of information converted into digital form through the process of digitisation. The terms digital or data transmission are used interchangeably, using a computer to process and store data.”



Table 3. Some advantages and disadvantages of classic letters, e-mails and instant messages

	<b>Letter</b>	<b>E-mail</b>	<b>Instant message (IM)</b>
<b>Speed</b>	Reaches the recipient in a slow manner	Fast delivery to a large number of recipients	Fast exchange of information
<b>Efficiency</b>	Requires time for preparation and delivery Availability for people not connected to the Internet	Inability to access those working offline	Inability to access those working offline
<b>Costs</b>	Cost of printing and postage	Low cost	Low cost
<b>Formality</b>	They are formal, but allow for a personal touch	They allow for a formal and informal approach	Informal
<b>Appropriateness</b>	More suitable for external communication	Suitable for internal and external communication	More suitable for internal communication
<b>Security</b>	High level of security by courier delivery	Depends on the e-mail server firewall	Depends on the IM system firewall
<b>Storage</b>	It can be archived and used for legal purposes	Possibility of deletion and loss due to technical difficulties	Possibility of deletion and loss due to technical difficulties

Although we are often convinced that we know how to write e-mails, below we provide a reminder related to the basic parts of an official e-mail.

## Email header

- **Recipient (To).** Enter the address of the person for whom the message is intended - they are expected to respond to the content of the message, complete the task, reply, so it is good not to put more than one person in this field, unless the task is intended for more people. Before entering recipient addresses in this field, make sure they agree to share their addresses. Otherwise, use the *Bcc* field. If you publish e-mail addresses publicly through *To* field, you increase the possibility that all these addresses end up in the wrong hands and later be exposed to increased spam activity.
- **Copy (Cc - carbon copy).** The addresses of those who need to know about the communication between you and the recipient are entered in this field. As a rule, they are not expected to do anything. Think carefully about whether other people should be informed about the content of the correspondence. If you include bosses in the correspondence who are not directly involved in the task or the correspondence is operative, your colleagues may consider this procedure non-collegial.
- **Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc).** All persons listed in the *To* and *Cc* fields are visible to anyone who receives the message. The people listed in the *Bcc* field are not visible to anyone who receives the message. This field lists people who need to know about the communication, but no one needs or should know about them. An e-mail address is personal information and only its owner has the right to choose whether, and where, it is displayed publicly. Recipient names added to the *Bcc* will not be shown to other recipients. People listed in *Bcc* will not receive Reply to all messages from everyone who has been added to *To* and *Cc* fields. When sending greeting cards for Christmas, Easter, and other holidays, enter all recipients in the *Bcc* because they have the right to protect their privacy.
- **Subject.** The text should attract attention. Write the main topic of the e-mail in a specific, clear and concise manner, so that it is clear to the recipients what is expected of them. E-mails with

an unclear or misleading subject may remain unopened. A clear and short text of the subject of the message is important and, therefore, certain words can trigger spam filters.

### **The body of the message**

Pay attention to addressing the recipient. If you know the person, start with “Dear Sir / Madam” or “Dear Mr. / Ms.” combined with the person's last name if you are in a formal relationship, or the person's first name if you are in an informal relationship. If a person has an academic title, make sure to include it: “Dear Prof.” combined with the person's last name. In official, electronic correspondence, the principles of writing classic business letters apply as well. Be specific, write down all the necessary information that prompted you to write the e-mail. However, don't be epic. Your message is one of, potentially, fifty that the recipient received on the same day. If you have additional information, add links in the text of the message or add them as attachments. Let the recipient decide for themselves how much time they will spend reading your e-mail.

**Signature.** E-mail signature contains name, job title and / or sender's department and contact details. An e-mail signature can be automatically included in any outgoing e-mail. It contains your name, job title and / or department and contact information. You can automatically include this e-mail signature in every outgoing message.

In short, a good business e-mail contains five key elements:

- who is the recipient you are addressing,
- who is the sender and what is your role,
- what is the subject of the message, what is it about,
- what is the purpose of the message, which request are you responding to
- what are the deadlines within which the recipient should respond.

**Instant messaging (IM)** additionally increases the speed and flexibility of communication. According to Jennings et al. (2006), instant messaging and Internet chat communication have experienced enormous growth over the last several years. IM is the private network communication between two users, whereas a chat session refers to the network communication between two or more users. Chat sessions can either be private, where each user is invited to join the session, or public, where anyone can join the session.



Source: <https://www.canva.com/photos/MAEJBCbdf0-instant-messaging-word-cloud-with-abstract-background/>

No matter which IM you use (WhatsApp, Viber, Hangouts, Skype, Facebook Messenger...) follow these rules:

- **Send IM to people you know**

Instant messaging is convenient for communicating with people you already know because it is somewhat more informal in nature. If you only know someone from social media, you might want to consider another way to communicate with them.

- **Start with a short greeting**

When starting a conversation via instant messaging, you should always greet the other person briefly and politely. At the same time, it is important to make sure they are free to talk.

- **Tailor communication to the other person**

Match your communication style to the situation and the person you want to communicate with. It is not the same whether you are sending an instant message to a colleague, boss or client. Formal and grammatically correct communication is needed for one category of the audience, while some conversations can flow in a slightly more relaxed tone. Assess who is in which group.

- **The conversation should be short**

Before you send an instant message, ask yourself if it will take someone a long time to think about responding to your message. If the answer is yes, you may still need to call or e-mail them. Instant messaging is suitable for situations where an urgent response is needed, which means a response within half an hour.

- **Use abbreviations, symbols and emoticons carefully**

In fast virtual conversations, the use of abbreviations and symbols is quite common and therefore you should make sure that they are used appropriately.

It is important to make sure that the person you are talking to knows what the message is about. If you use such tools, let them be known to everyone. When you are unsure of such a scenario, it is safer to choose a word or a whole phrase instead of an abbreviation or symbol.

- **Never send bad news**

Instant messaging is a fairly casual medium, so save serious conversations, especially negative ones, for another type of communication. For example, you should not convey the news of a cancellation

or poor project results in this way. In this environment, stick to neutral and positive information, such as a meeting arrangement or a short answer to a question.

- **Respect time, especially working hours**

Due to the nature of the relationship, send IM to private contacts in accordance with common time rules. Some people prefer evening IM conversations. If you do send IM to business associates, respect your business hours. In either case, allow the person not to respond immediately, as they may have more important commitments.

### 2.3.2. Video conferencing

Video conferencing refers to communication by means of which sound and images in motion alternate between two or more locations in real time, thus allowing participants to hold a business meeting or training "live".



Source: <https://www.canva.com/photos/MAEYXzNRijl-webinar-video-conferencing-on-computer/>

Okabe-Miyamoto, Durnell, Howell and Zizi (2021) have concluded in their research that because of COVID-19 social distancing measures, companies were forced to shut down in-person work and move exclusively to working from home, transitioning from a dominantly offline workplace to a dominantly online workplace, most often conducting business meetings over video conferences.

Karl, Peluchette and Aghkhani (2021) have found that Zoom, for instance, had 10 million daily meeting participants in December 2019, but by April 2020, that number rose to over 300 million. Other video conferencing platforms, such as Google Meet™ and Microsoft Teams™, have also experienced significant increases in daily participants. Furthermore, it is likely that the use of video conferencing will continue long after the end of the pandemic and that only 25 % of business meetings will take place in-person by 2024.

Despite the advantages of video conferencing, these platforms still pose some challenges.

- **Lack of personal interaction**

Video conference meetings can be impersonal. Even with video enabled, employees are simply communicating with screens. A lack of personal connection and face-to-face contact may cause employees to struggle to get to know their co-workers, managers or clients and develop personal connections with them. There is a particular problem of recognising nonverbal messages that can be an important part of a complete message.

- **Network connectivity issues**

Office settings typically have reliable network connectivity, as well as backup options in case the Wi-Fi network goes down. Home networks rarely have backup options. These networks were not built to support the same activities - including video conferencing - as office networks, so they may fail due

to bandwidth if, for example, multiple people are on video conferences simultaneously. Home networks may also cause lagging and dropped calls.

- **Securing meetings**

In 2020, hackers took advantage of the boost in video conferencing usage and increased their attempts to infiltrate and disrupt meetings to create chaos. Zoom, in particular, faced scrutiny for several publicised meeting disruptions from internet trolls and caused many IT executives to worry about internal meetings' security.

“Zoombombing” (Okabe-Miyamoto, Durnell, Howell, Zizi, 2021) incidents began to occur for the first time during the pandemic. “Zoombombing” is a relatively new phenomenon where those not invited to online meetings hack in and make work challenging and uncomfortable by posting inappropriate content or spamming chats.

After these incidents, security came into focus. Many video conferencing apps have safeguards in place that ensure only authorised attendees can join private business meetings, such as the use of passwords to access meetings and waiting rooms, so guests are not automatically allowed in a meeting without the organisers' approval. These features have helped address some major security concerns.

- **Recording meetings: Complying with laws and regulations**

From a compliance perspective, organisations worry that due to the different state laws, recording some meetings may be illegal without all attendees' approval. To address that, Microsoft Teams and Zoom offer audible announcements to confirm the meeting is being recorded. This functionality is configurable.

Organisations must also contend with the issue of storing and archiving recorded content. Healthcare organisations, for example, must store patient data anywhere from 7 to 12 years, depending on the case. Healthcare organisations must also store that data in a way that complies with HIPAA

regulations.

- **Organizing newly created data**

Newly generated content from recorded meetings introduces new challenges as organisations consolidate and classify information available to users. Some video recordings can be a part of training content, other recordings can be project reviews and others can be team huddles. Regardless of the content type, content managers must plan and define data governance to ensure the information is secure and easily accessible when employees need it.

- **Creating policies**

Content managers must plan around new content types and sources. Content managers should create new sets of policies, apply and implement those policies on the newly created video, audio and text files from the meetings.

**What are the dos and don'ts before and during a video conference?**

Planning and conducting a video conference is the responsibility of the organisers. However, the overall outcome of the conference depends on the satisfaction of all participants.

Therefore, below you may find an overview of some guidelines for video conferencing organisers and participants.

***Guidelines for video conferencing organisers***

- Time management
  - Check the possible time zone difference between the residences of the expected participants of the meeting.

Schedule an appointment respecting any time zone differences between the countries from which you expect participants.

- Send the meeting invitation on time. It is recommended to inform the participants about the meeting at least 8 days before the scheduled date.
  
- Instructions for accessing a video conference
  - Send a password link with the meeting request. If you organise a meeting with invited participants for the first time, send them short and simple instructions for accessing the online platform.
  
- Define the rules in advance
  - How will the participants be named during a video conference? Is it enough to sign up automatically (with a cell phone number) or do you want to see their first and last name? Instruct them on how to set or change the name.
  - Do you expect participants to have a camera and microphone on? When, for how long? Explain how to turn the camera and microphone on / off.
  
- Provide technical support for those participants who will have difficulty registering.  
More inexperienced participants will be calmer and more prepared for the topic of the meeting if they know whom to turn to in case of technical difficulties.
  
- Emphasise the rules for recording a video meeting. Seek prior consent from participants to record if recording is necessary. Explain what the recording is for and how it will be used and distributed.

### ***Guidelines for video conferencing participants***

- Sign up for a video conference at least 5 minutes before you start. Never be late.

If you are late, do not disturb the organiser and other participants even with a chat message.

If you need to wait for the organiser to let you into the video room, wait.

- Sign in with the microphone off.

No one wants to listen to sounds from your surroundings: nervous cats, singing neighbours, your family's cell phones.

- Take a suitable position.

Video conferencing is an official event. It is not appropriate to lie in bed, call from a coffee shop or a pool.

- Dress appropriately.

Surely you have nice pyjamas or a bathrobe in your closet, however, this is an official meeting.

- Do not eat during a meeting.

Drinking tea, coffee, water during the meeting is fine. However, have you ever participated in an official live meeting where pizza was served so the participants were munching, whispering?

- Don't overdo it with comments in chat. The organiser does not have time to read them if they present a topic at the same time.

- Do not interrupt the speaker.

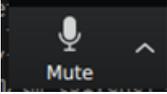
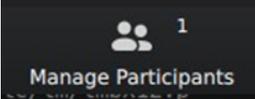
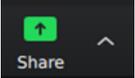
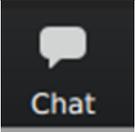
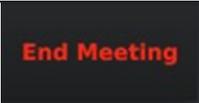
Ask for an opportunity to speak with a raised hand mark that will be displayed and visible in your image box.

- Stay focused on the topic and video conference participants.

Clearly, it is harder to maintain concentration in a video meeting than in a live meeting because a lot of things distract us (mobile phones, family members, interesting things on the Internet, favourite TV show...).

Imagine that the meeting is live. Act like it is live and you will not go wrong.

## The meaning of the main icons on the Zoom platform

 <p>Mute</p>	Mute or unmute your microphone
 <p>Start Video</p>	Turn off or turn on video camera transmission
 <p>Security</p>	With this button you control the options that participants will be able to use: you can open the waiting room, enable or disable participants to share their screens, chat etc.
 <p>Manage Participants</p>	The 'Manage participants' button allows you to view and manage all participants who have accessed your meeting. You can change their name, expel them from the meeting, etc.
 <p>Share</p>	'Share' button lets you share your screen image. It is very useful because you will be able to share your presentation, write on the board etc.
 <p>Chat</p>	Textual chat communication with participants who follow your meeting. This window should be monitored regularly for possible questions from participants.
 <p>Record</p>	You can record and save your meeting on your own hard drive or the cloud.
 <p>End Meeting</p>	At the end of the meeting, be sure to click on the "End meeting" button for all participants.

## Tasks

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According to the instructions from subsection 2.3.1., write a business e-mail to your colleague, but with information for other colleague. Be careful who you put in the *To* field, who in the *Cc* field, and who in the *Bcc* field.

To	
Cc	
Bcc	
Subject	

According to the instructions from subsection 2.3.2., schedule an online meeting via the Zoom platform by following the rules.

## Key concepts of Chapter 2

Term	Explanation
Communication	The process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts and feelings through speech, signals, writing or behaviour.
Types of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by <b>channel</b> of communication</li> <li>• according to the <b>distance</b> between the communication participants</li> <li>• by <b>style</b></li> <li>• according to the <b>number of participants</b>.</li> </ul>
Verbal (oral) communication	A form of communication in which a message is conveyed through speech and writing.
KISS	Keep it short and simple.
Nonverbal communication	The way people communicate without words, either intentionally or unintentionally. It can be a supplement or substitute for verbal communication.
Digital communication	A type of communication that was created owing to the Internet. It includes writing messages via various messenger tools, electronic correspondence via e-mails, writing and reading blog posts, but also using various video conferencing tools.
Video conferencing	A communication by means of which sound and images in motion alternate between two or more locations in real time, allowing participants to hold a business meeting or training.

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# Chapter 3: Interdisciplinary communication

## General aim

This chapter focuses on interdisciplinary communication and aims to enable learners to communicate with professionals from different fields of expertise.

## Expected outcomes

On completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

### Outcome 1

know what interdisciplinary communication is and what it requires

### Outcome 2

communicate and work with professionals from different fields while increasing mutual understanding among these professionals

### Outcome 3

identify communication barriers in interdisciplinary environments and resort to strategies to overcome these barriers

### Outcome 4

avoid the overuse of jargon and terminological ambiguity in interdisciplinary settings

### 3.1. What is meant by *intersectoral / interdisciplinary communication*?

Intersectoral / interdisciplinary communication refers to the process of expressing ideas between people from different areas of expertise. In today's global and digital world, professionals interact with people from different fields on a regular basis. Hence, it is relevant to know how to effectively communicate in a cross-disciplinary setting.



Source: freepik.com

### 3.2. Communication barriers: jargon and terminological ambiguity

One common issue in such an interdisciplinary environment is misunderstanding, often caused by the overuse of technical jargon, i.e., 'words or expressions that are used by a particular profession

or group of people, and are difficult for others to understand', as defined in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*.

Jargon can represent a major barrier to effective communication between professionals from different sectors, as technical terms are difficult to understand without specific knowledge of a particular subject. Many times, patients struggle to understand what doctors tell them, as they commonly use technical terms without making the meaning of these terms clear. This represents a typical scenario of ineffective communication in an interdisciplinary setting.

Another challenge in a cross-disciplinary environment is the need to deal with terminological ambiguity. Basically, many words or expressions have multiple meanings, i.e. they do not necessarily have the same meaning across disciplines, and it is not always clear which meaning is addressed by the speaker (Mennes et al., 2019). If you look up the meaning of the word *probe* in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, you will find out that it can refer to a space probe, i.e. 'a spacecraft without people on board that obtains information and sends it back to earth', to 'a long, thin metal tool used by doctors for examining inside the body' (healthcare), or even to 'a small device put inside something and used by scientists to test something or record information' (engineering). This is a clear illustration of the point previously made, as different field-related meanings are assigned to this word.

As mentioned by O'Rourke and Crowley (2013, p. 1941), '[...] the false appearance of agreement that can arise when the same word is unknowingly used with different meanings' is one of the main challenges for interdisciplinary communication. Thus, it is important to make students aware that they may face such problems, as cross-disciplinary team members normally are not trained to do so (Mennes et al., 2019).

### 3.3. How to overcome communication barriers?

Effective communication depends on audience awareness. When communicating, never assume your audience has all the background information necessary to understand your message. Think about the pieces of information that you need to include in your communication to help your audience understand your message, essentially when you are in an intersectoral setting.

Do not overuse technical terms when the person you are communicating with does not have expert knowledge of your field. This does not mean that technical terms are forbidden, but when using jargon with laypeople, make the meaning of each technical term clear, at least when it is the first time that you are using it.

The exchange of information is a key aspect of teamwork. Hence, team members must be willing to express and share their knowledge in a way that allows individuals from other disciplines to understand, as communication behaviours will determine the team success (Morgan et al., 2021).

## Discuss and Create Task



Source: freepik.com

Work in multidisciplinary groups. As all members of the group are from different fields of expertise, you are asked to describe to each other concepts of their field of study. The familiarity that will grow out of this exercise will be fundamental for the achievement of this task.

Together, start by picturing a scenario involving the interaction between professionals from your fields. Create a list of potential communication barriers in such an intersectoral setting and discuss strategies to overcome these barriers and avoid misunderstanding.

In this context, create a short dialogue between these professionals which serves as an example of effective communication in an intersectoral environment.

## Key concepts of Chapter 3

 Mentimeter



Source: Word cloud created with the interactive presentation software Mentimeter (available at [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)).

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## Chapter 4: Teamwork



Source:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/ba/Working\\_Together\\_Teamwork\\_Puzzle\\_Concept.jpg/256px-Working\\_Together\\_Teamwork\\_Puzzle\\_Concept.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/ba/Working_Together_Teamwork_Puzzle_Concept.jpg/256px-Working_Together_Teamwork_Puzzle_Concept.jpg)

### General aim

This chapter presents an introduction to teamwork and aims to familiarise learners with the underlying mindset as well as with specific techniques that may be employed when they handle problematic teamworking situations.

## Expected outcomes

On completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

understand what teamwork is and what it requires

discover the positive attributes of a team

know the basics of teamwork mindset and behavior

distinguish team dynamics stages

identify some teamwork challenges and know how to handle them

resort to strategies that promote teamworking



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## 4.1 What is teamwork?

A wealth of definitions on teamwork may be encountered in the literature, yet the working definition to be presently employed will be the one attributed to European Commission since all countries involved in this research project are member states of the European Union. Therefore, teamwork is defined as:

‘The ability to work with others towards shared goals and to willingly participate in team assignments and projects. It refers to seeking opportunities to foster team collaborations to maximise team outcomes and achieve collective objectives’<sup>1</sup>

European Commission 2020: 5

### 4.1.1. Why is teamwork important?

Teamwork is ‘one of the professional competencies identified by the EU for people performing in a professional context and is transferable between any roles’<sup>2</sup>; it is also classified as an ‘...integral part of on-the-job success in every context and occupation’<sup>3</sup>. For future professionals it has an additional value because it enhances the employability of young graduates. Labour market stakeholders (Deloitte, 2017) as well as HR managers (Succi & Canovi, 2019) rank it as one of the three primary skills required by the industry when recruiting young graduates.

In order to understand what teamwork involves, do the following task:

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission 2020: 5

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/taxation-1/eu-training/taxcompeu-eu-competency-framework-taxation\\_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20competencies%20are%20further%20split%20into%20three,typically%20transferable%20between%20roles%20within%20tax%20and%20beyond](https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation-1/eu-training/taxcompeu-eu-competency-framework-taxation_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20competencies%20are%20further%20split%20into%20three,typically%20transferable%20between%20roles%20within%20tax%20and%20beyond)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission 2020:31



## 4.2. The ideal team

A team is a group of two or more people, and each person brings in the team his/her talents, strengths, competencies, skills. Before embarking on any project, it is relevant to first discover your positive attributes and then those of other team members.

### Reflect and Write Task 4.2

---

Grow your understanding of your positive attributes by listing at least two for each category, for example musical talent, patience, flexibility, expressing one's ideas etc.

Talents - Strengths:

Competencies:

Skills:

---

## Group Activity

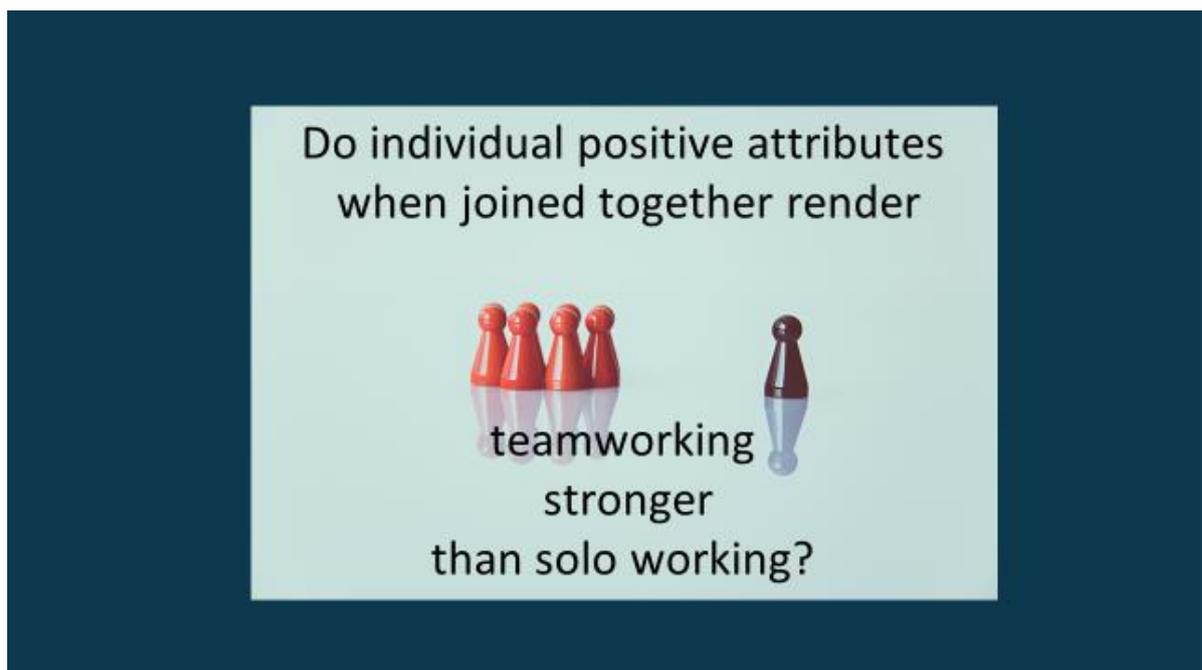
At this point it is important to discover the positive features of the member(s) of your team. This may be achieved by arranging a meeting of all team members -it may be virtual or physical- where everyone participates in the activity titled:

'Who is the Ideal Team Player<sup>4</sup>?'

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<sup>4</sup> Extracted and adapted from <https://www.teambuildingportal.com/games/tag-team-game>

1. Team members meet and assign the role of coordinator to a team member.
2. The coordinator asks team members to reflect for 5 minutes and list on a piece of paper 2 or 3 positive features (talents, strengths, competencies, skills).
3. Team members hand over their list of positive features to the coordinator.
4. The coordinator reads aloud all the features and suggests that the Ideal Team Player for their project is an imaginary person holding the positive features reported.
5. Team members may give a name to this imaginary person.
6. The coordinator ends this activity by posing the following question to the team:



### 4.3. Teamwork mindset

Along with the range of team's positive features and attributes it is important that each member develops a teamwork attitude. Developing a teamwork attitude and performance involves accepting the rationale that teamwork is more successful than solo working and the individual positive attributes of the team members are the basic elements which maximise team results. In this line a description of teamwork mindset and behaviour is useful in order to identify its aspects.

A team worker:

1. <sup>5</sup> is able to integrate within a team, participate actively, share responsibility and rewards, and contribute to team results;
2. participates in the development and execution of team goals and plans;
3. demonstrates the ability and willingness to share information, give and receive constructive feedback;
4. acknowledges others' skills, experience, knowledge, creativity and contributions, and is willing to learn from others;
5. seeks to understand and build on differing perspectives of others to enhance team efficiency and quality outcomes;
6. contributes to a positive, constructive working atmosphere and supports self and team members in combining individual strengths to enhance team performance;
7. proactively assists and involves others and encourages participation in team outcomes.'

European Commission 2020: 31

Apart from the teamwork mindset, a team member should also be aware that a team made up of individuals from other countries is likely to be affected by multiculturally related challenges such as 'language barriers, cultural differences, different communication styles, etc.' (European Commission, 2020). In particular a multicultural team may face:

- language barrier problems if participants do not speak a common language,
- cultural problems due to different behavioural patterns,
- different communication styles which may involve different styles due to occupation.

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission 2020: 31

Awareness of such problems enables team members to prepare in advance and include techniques or tools to overcome them either when designing any project or when forming the team.

## Reflect and Write Task 4.3

---

Grow your understanding of the teamworking mindset by answering the following questions:

1. Do you think the teamworking statements reported in section 4.3 are:

necessary? \_\_\_\_\_

useful? \_\_\_\_\_

irrelevant? \_\_\_\_\_

hard to be followed? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you adopted any of them when you were involved in teamworking? If yes, list the numbers which are next to the statements:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you disagree with any of the statements reported earlier? If yes, list the number and explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_

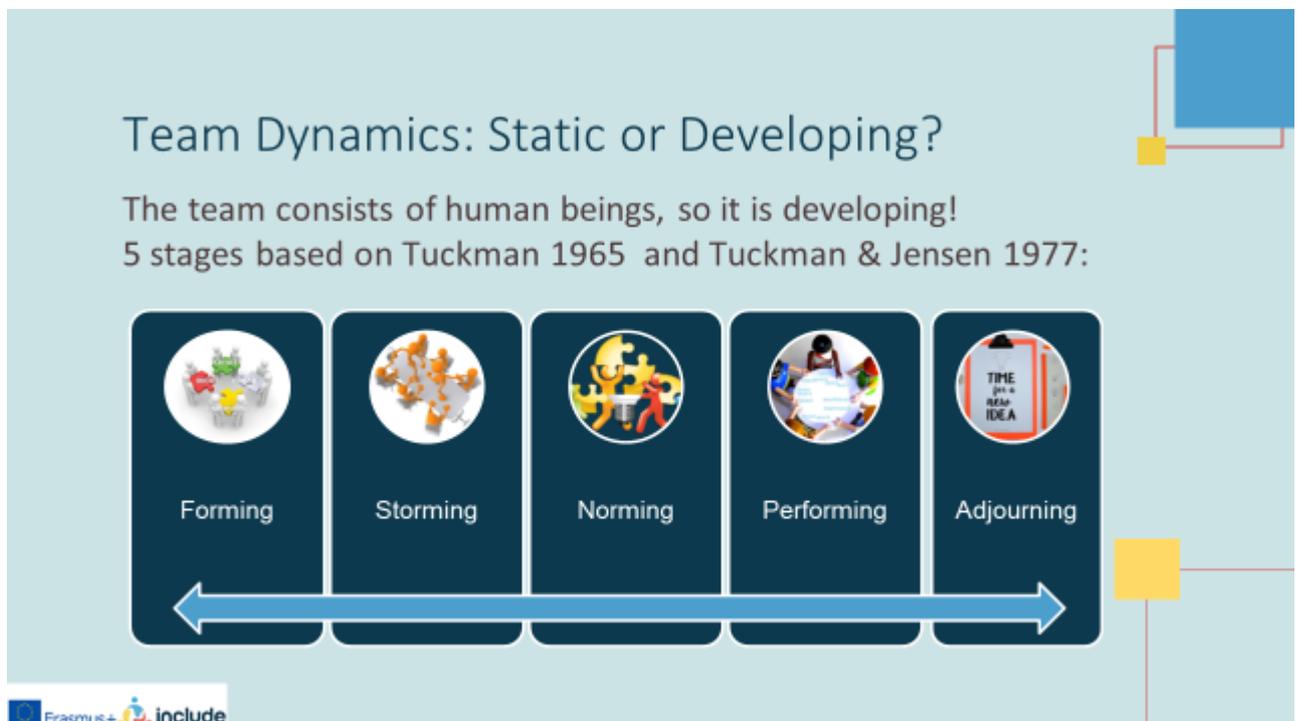
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\_\_\_\_\_

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## 4.4. Team dynamics

In order to apply teamworking, a team is required, which more often than not is formed of talented individuals who may not have met each other up to that point. Therefore, it is possible that team members may not collaborate in harmony from their first meeting. This may be discouraging, yet theory shows that it is expected. Teams go through some developmental stages which reflect team members' attitudes and behaviours. Being aware of these stages can render team members prepared for possible conflicts as well as ways to handle them. The stages of team development are described in Tuckman's model introduced in 1965 and supplemented by Tuckman & Jensen in 1977; it comprises 5 stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning.



A summarized explanation of the five stages is provided below, cited in Kasem, Sakeer, Ain, 2017:3-4.

### 'Forming

According to Bonebright (2010), this stage of the team development is referred to as the 'testing and dependence'. In this stage, the team members orient themselves with other teammates and the task. It involves the team members familiarising themselves, setting ground rules, planning the tasks, testing the interpersonal skills and establishing relationships. This era is characterised by positive expectations, anxiety, judgments and nervousness, due to everything being new (Farrell, Schmitt and Heinemann, 2001).

### Storming

This is the second stage which is characterised by disputes and opposition. The team members face issues regarding the work, show resistance to flexibility and are likely to become emotional. Competition may arise amongst the group members, as well as disagreements (Lacoursiere, 1974). Team members seem unsure about their allocated tasks, which usually results in an emotional response. This stage is highly dissatisfying, frustrating and depressing. (Rickards and Moger, 2000; Wilson et al., 2010).

### Norming

In this stage, there is more unity and the conflicts seem to be settled. Opinions and views are respected and expressed confidently. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities are assigned. According to Maples (1998), the genuine feeling of a team is formed in this stage. In other words, it is characterised by a more realistic approach, towards accomplishing the task, which results in productivity (Neuman and Wright; 1999; Tuckman and Jensen, 1997).

### Performing

The penultimate stage of the model brings the energy into play. The roles and responsibilities are carried out, and the team works to solve the problem (Farrell, Schmitt

and Heinemann, 2001). According to Tuckman (1965), at the performing stage, the entire 'group's energy is channelled into the task' (Bonebright, 2010, p. 114). The existing issues are resolved and the members become more flexible (Wilson et al., 2010).

### Adjourning

The final stage is particularly shadowed by sadness and gloominess as the teams disengage and the project has terminated (Tuckman and Jensen, 1997; Wilson et al., 2010). At times, when a team is working on an extensive project, some individuals tend to get attached with the team. This makes them used to their co-workers and their company. Hence, when the time of termination arrives, it leaves those individuals extremely sad, nervous, nostalgic and emotional (Graham et al., 2014).<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned earlier, awareness of the team developmental stages can enhance appropriate management of team dynamics, so some tips and techniques are reported below. These may be useful in handling each stage and transitioning to the next:

#### <sup>6</sup>1. Forming

This is a good time for the group leader or manager to open up discussions about the team's mission. It's also a good time to address the ground rules, clearly stating what the team norms should be while reviewing expectations for team dynamics.

#### 2. Storming

This critical stage is a necessary evil in the formation of a successful team. Managers and team leaders need to confront issues directly. Ignoring them could let minor conflicts fester

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in <https://www.upwork.com/resources/stages-of-team-development>

into major problems. In the end, however, team members will have to come to a consensus about how to move forward as a team.

You can help the team break through the storming stage by encouraging members to refocus on goals. Try breaking large goals down into smaller, more manageable tasks. Then, work with the team to redefine roles and help them flex or develop their task-related, group-management, and conflict-management skills.

### 3. Norming

Wait, watch, and intervene only where necessary. The group needs to work out this dynamic organically. You can gently encourage team members to engage in self-evaluation to determine whether there is room for process improvement, but your primary focus should be on encouraging stability.

### 4. Performing

This may be the perfect time to evaluate team functions to increase productivity even more. Even as you push for greater productivity, you should make a point of rewarding the team by showing confidence in their abilities, offering support for their methods and ideas, and celebrating their successes.

### 5. Adjourning

Management can help the team navigate through the adjourning phase by acknowledging the team's accomplishments and recognizing the difficulties that come with tackling all the loose ends.'

Source: <https://www.upwork.com/resources/stages-of-team-development>

## Reflect and Write Task 4.4

Remember a team project you had worked on in the past. Reflect how it developed and progressed. Do you think the team went through any of the stages described above? If yes, which ones?

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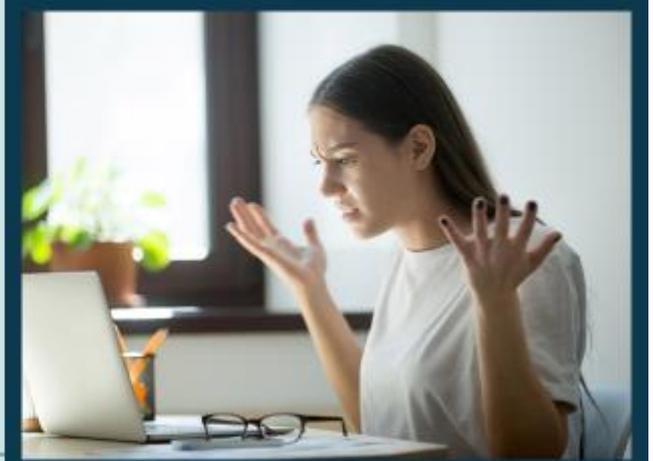
### 4.5. Challenges of teamwork and how to handle them

A team member disagrees on every decision taken



Teamworking -like any collaboration- is dynamic with positive and negative sides. Being aware of them, renders team members prepared to deal with them.

A team member  
does most of the  
work because other  
team members do  
not follow deadlines

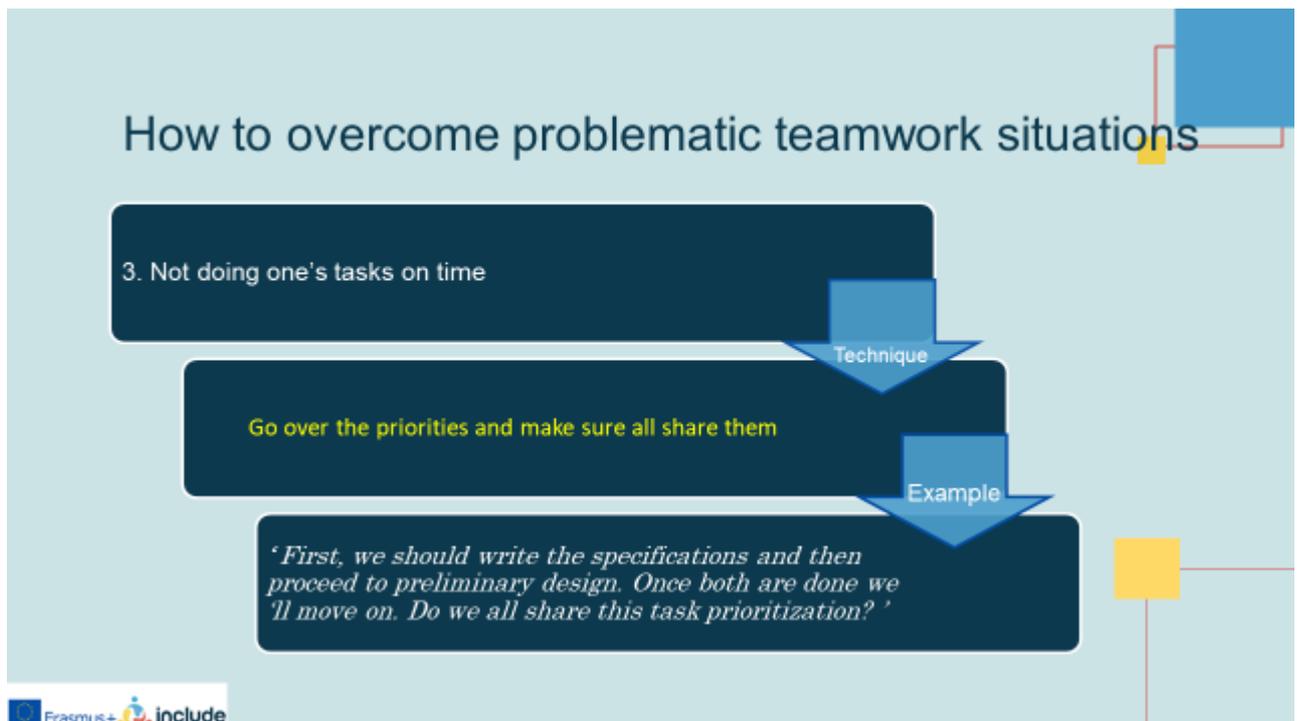


A list of some challenging situations is presented below:

1. The team has no clear goal
2. Not everyone shares the goal
3. Not doing one's tasks on time
4. Not having a voice in the team
5. Avoid communicating clearly and directly; messages are implied
6. Communicating impolitely
7. Having a member who acts as team leader all the time
8. Unbalanced workload
9. Self-interest is more important than the team goal

Nevertheless, challenges may be handled in ways that smooth out disturbing behaviours. To overcome such problematic situations, specific techniques along with examples are presented below. The following slides present:

- a) the problematic situation(s),
- b) the technique(s) to be used,
- c) verbalized examples of the technique(s).



## How to overcome problematic teamwork situations

1. The team has no clear goal
2. Not everyone shares the goal
9. Self interest is more important than team goal

Technique

**Remind the goal and its impact on the team**

Example

*Our goal is to design.....If this is achieved by the deadline we are going to have a bonus on our salary*

## How to overcome problematic teamwork situations

4. Not having a voice in the team
5. Avoid communicating clearly and directly; messages are implied

Technique

**Aim at communicating constantly with all team members**

Example

*I have partly drafted the specifications. John how far have you moved on? Claire, do you face any problems? Should we have a short meeting in 2 days to share our progress?*

To review some situations and techniques watch the video “How to overcome problematic teamwork situations” available among the INCLUDE resources.

### 4.5.1. Strategies for working as part of a team

Quite often, resorting to strategies that reflect a teamwork attitude can smooth out difficult situations and build rapport among team members. Such strategies complemented with examples are illustrated below:

**Strategies for working as part of a team**  
(from Allum & McGarr 2008: 48 letter font is different from the original)

I. Recognize when you are unable to help		I 'm really snowed under at the moment. Can anyone else help you?
II. Provide alternative solutions		-Mrs Cho is refusing to drink anything. I do not know what to do.
III. Be an active team member rather than working as an individual		-Have you tried applejuice? I know she 'll drink that. I have finished my work. Does anyone need a hand?



**Strategies for working as part of a team**  
(from Allum & McGarr 2008: 48 letter font is different from the original)

I. Ask for assistance politely		• Would you mind giving me a hand? I need someone to check this medication.
II. Share the workload		• Do you mind taking beds one and two, and I 'll take three and four?
III. Acknowledge the contribution of others		• Thanks for helping me, Hans. It was much easier to do this together.



## Reflect and Write Task 4.5

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Do you think the techniques and strategies outlined earlier are useful for teamworking?

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If yes, which ones would you employ?

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If no, which one(s) is/are not useful and why?

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## Key concepts of Chapter 4

- Definition of teamwork
- The Ideal Team: a synthesis of members' positive attributes
- Solo working versus teamwork
- Teamwork mindset
- Stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning
- Teamwork challenges
- Techniques to overcome problematic teamwork situations
- Strategies for working as part of a team

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## Chapter 5: Presentation skills

### General aim

This chapter presents a step-by-step guide to preparing a presentation and aims to enable learners to deliver effective and engaging presentations.

### Expected outcomes

On completing your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

make a structured plan of your talk

apply opening techniques to your presentation

get the audience's attention and involve them while recognising the importance of audience awareness and cultural attitudes

know how to present visuals

implement effective strategies to bring your presentation to an end

deliver an effective and engaging presentation



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## 5.1. A step-by-step guide to preparing a presentation

Preparation is the key to success. If you want to deliver an effective presentation, you need to spend time preparing every part of it. It is important to have a clear and logical structure that is easy to follow. Here are ten tips to achieve this:

1. Start by making a structured plan for your talk – normally this includes three parts: introduction, development and conclusion;
2. Think about your audience: who they are and what they need or want to know – this will determine your content and register;
3. Write an introduction with clear objectives – this first part of your talk is important to create a positive impression on your listeners and to build rapport;
4. Write detailed notes of what you want to say, highlighting key points;
5. Add a few helpful visuals to illustrate what you need to communicate – get your listeners' attention;
6. Use simple and clear language;
7. Do not include too much text – writing the whole presentation word by word is not a good strategy;
8. Conclude your presentation with a strong and memorable final remark;
9. Practice your presentation to make sure that your talk fits the time schedule and that you will not need to read from your notes – when doing so, ask someone to give you feedback;
10. Anticipate some questions and prepare answers.

## 5.2. Opening techniques

- Welcome the audience and thank them for attending the presentation;
- Introduce yourself and the topic that will be addressed;
- State the purpose of your talk;
- Outline the structure of your presentation;
- Mention the duration of your talk;
- Let the audience know whether they can ask questions during the presentation or if they should pose them at the end.

Note: Even though it is not very usual, you could open your presentation with questions as a strategy to involve your audience from the very beginning.

## 5.3. Delivering the presentation

- Make eye contact with the audience – even in a digital environment;
- Speak clearly – voice projection is important in this regard;
- Use plain language – keep it short and simple;
- Stress key points – intonation plays a key role when emphasizing specific words;
- Make pauses to make your sentences easier to understand;
- Repeat new information – this will help the audience to assimilate the ideas;
- Involve the audience – highlight common interest by using the pronouns *we* and *us*, instead of *I* and *me*.

## 5.4. Closing techniques

- Ensure that your audience knows that your presentation is coming to an end – so you have their full attention;
- Summarise the main points of your talk;
- Make a strong and memorable final statement;
- Thank the audience for listening;
- Deal with questions.

Note: If you do not know the answer to a question, be honest and admit it but offer to find out. Remember to anticipate questions and prepare some answers beforehand. This gets easier when you know exactly who your audience is and what to expect from them.

## 5.5. Effective strategies to bring the presentation to an end

- Ask a rhetorical question – make sure you have planted a question in your audience's minds, so they still think about your presentation after it is over;
- Quote a famous person – it could be a writer, a philosopher or simply an expert in the field;
- Make a reference to the beginning of your presentation – this will establish a connection between the different parts of your talk.

## 5.6. How to get the audience's attention?

If you want your audience to listen to you, you will need some strategies to get their attention. Here are some examples:

- Speak with emphasis – use your voice effectively;

- Ask questions from time to time – promote your listeners’ participation and engage them;
- Tell a personal story – this will create a bond with them;
- Mention an interesting fact or statistic – something that they probably do not know;
- Challenge them with a problem to solve – make them think;
- Refer to visuals.

## 5.7. How to present visuals?

Visuals refer to pictures, charts, graphs, etc. used to make a text or a talk easier to understand. Moreover, they make a presentation more appealing and interesting. It is important that visuals are clear and easy to follow, so do not make them too complex. When using visuals in a presentation, consider the following points:

- Tell the audience what each visual illustrates – visuals should be connected to what you are saying;
- Make sure your audience can read the visual – the font size and the colours are important in this regard;
- Keep it simple – design and content need to be clear;
- Use effective headlines;
- Reduce text to a minimum;
- Present information in a clear and logical way.

## 5.8. Cultural attitudes to presentations

The register of your presentation (formal or informal) will largely depend on who your audience is. Therefore, it is important to know the audience. Some cultures expect presentations to be structured and formal, whereas others believe that more informal and relaxed presentations can be more effective. This will influence your register, i.e., the appropriate level of formality.

The same rule applies to time, as some cultures place a lot of importance on starting and finishing on time, not being flexible about delays. Even humour is not appreciated by all audiences.

Cultural attitudes should not be overlooked, as they will significantly affect the way you prepare and deliver your presentation.

## Prepare and Deliver Task

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Work in small groups

Prepare a short presentation on one of the topics discussed in the previous chapters of this handbook. Write a plan of your talk, where you structure your presentation into different sections. Carefully prepare your presentation, according to your plan.

Now it is time to deliver your presentation. Do not forget to invite questions at the end. Ask your colleagues to write down the strengths and weaknesses of your presentation, while they are listening to you. At the end, ask them to share their feedback with you.

Now it is their turn to present. Write down the strengths and weaknesses of their presentations and give them feedback at the end.

After everyone's presentations, all learners take time to reflect on each other's feedback as this will contribute to valuable improvements in future presentations.

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Presentation Plan	Strengths & Weaknesses

## Key concepts of Chapter 5

Mentimeter



Source: Word cloud created with the interactive presentation software Mentimeter (available at [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com))

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## Further reading

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