MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CONSULTING AS WELL AS IN THE EVERY-DAY EXCHANGE

Content & Relevance

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Module 2 aims at developing the communication competences of all the target groups that comprise the university community (lecturers-teachers-professors, researchers, administrative employees, student assistants, and student representatives) through concise experiential art-based exercises focusing on non-verbal communication, making use of the three basic elements of everyday reality perception and formation (body language, movement, sound).

It responds to the universities' need to ensure equal opportunities and fight discrimination, in their effort to further increase the cultural diversity and facilitate internalisation processes.

This need has been imprinted on the needs analysis findings under the *Main challenges and needs* category and more specifically as:

* Language and communication difficulties (lack of students' language skills).
* Fear of being misunderstood / uncertainty of being sensitive enough / fear of judging.
* Interest in training on attitude in communication with students.

The MUSIC project, responding to the idea that came from the needs analysis for planning and organising more extracurricular activities to increase social inclusion and multicultural understanding, is providing this module with art based participatory methods, focusing on the development of the communicative competence and not on the artistic expression competence. Although we believe that art can benefit in a multidimensional way in every learning environment and multicultural cooperation, users of the above-noted methods will learn less about music, dance, and acting and more about how we listen, how we are being heard, present ourselves and invent ways of dealing with difficult communication situations in our daily lives.

Educational goals

The exercises of module 2 aim to:

* Further development of self-expression and creative skills through reflection, transformative learning and mindful learning.
* Critical reflection on analysing power structures underlying our communication practices.
* Understanding and conscious use of non-verbal or paralinguistics communication tools (e.g. movement, voice tone, sound, eye contact, body posture, etc.).
* Further understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity.
* Respect for diversity of cultural expression.

Theoretical background

All people working in the field of communication in formal and non-formal education would probably have come across the *Mehrabian 7-38-55 rule.* This rule allegedly states that only 7% of a message goes through words, while 38% are conveyed through paraverbal communication elements (the way the words are said) and the remaining 55% through face and body language expression.

The truth is that the application of this rule in all kinds of communication and all kinds of meanings is a rushed and over-simplifying generalisation of the experiment data of Albert Mehrabian (1981), who proposed this rule only for the conveying of feelings and attitudes through communication. Certainly, his overall research work in implicit communication (Mehrabian, 1981) refers to the fundamental significance of *non-verbal communication,* body posture, movement, face expressions, eye contact, voice quality, and intonation during speech, volume, and speed of speech, interpersonal distance, etc. in the conveying of a message from the transmitter to the receiver.

All the above comprise communication tools that play an important role to our everyday interpersonal communication, as they shape our perception and our beliefs about both our co-speaker and the communication fact itself, and they have been extensively studied in psychology and psychotherapy disciplines (Giles & Robinson, 1990; Gordon, Druckman, Rozelle & Baxter, 2006).

The importance of *art-based methods* for communication education, and more specifically for managerial education has also been highlighted. While in the past, research on the benefits of art-based education has focused on the educational outputs of reflection, critical reflection, transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997), in contemporary research much attention is paid to the meta-cognitive dimension of art-based education, and in particular its effect on *perceptual refinement* (Springborg, 2012). The learning environment shaped by art-based methods is an ideal space for the participants to bring their experiences as a starting point for transformation, but it also has the capacity to develop meta-cognitive skills and impact on multiple levels of communication in everyday life.

Since art-based methods for communication development (focusing primarily on non-verbal communication) aim to increase the chances of safe communication and decoding in a multicultural university environment, the important role played by *cultural differences* in non-verbal behaviour cannot be ignored.

> Early studies by Watson (1970) and by Watson and Graves (1966) have shown differences in gazing behaviour, space behaviour, body orientation, and touching behaviour among members of different cultures. More recent studies by Ekman and his colleagues distinguished the universal from the culturally specific sources for expressions of emotion (e.g. Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1988). While the underlying physiology for the primary emotions may be universal, the actual expression elicited is subject to cultural (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002, 2003) and situation-determined display rules […]. Display rules serve to control an expression or to modify certain expressions that would be socially inappropriate or would reveal deception (Gordon et al., 2006, p. 93-94).

The following exercises reproduce a vast part of behaviours-movements that are similarly perceived in many cultures. At the same time, behaviours, movements, gestures, and sounds that are not similarly perceived and interpretable by everybody, can act as material for further familiarisation and training and bring different cultures closer (increasing also self-awareness and smooth familiarisation with cultural diversity).

Exercise 1 – Acting in Silence[3]

Introduction & Methodology

This exercise fully familiarises participants with the conscious use of body language (eye contact, pantomime, body posture, face expressions, interpersonal distance, etc.) as it completely removes spoken language from communication and introduces participants to the rich world of non-verbal communication. Through a shared expressive challenge in the form of a theatre game, participants discover and connect with their already acquired knowledge and experiences in the non-verbal expression of even complex concepts and instructions.

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Target group(s)	Duration	Requirements / needed material
• All 3 target groups • 10 – 25 people	• 60 – 90 min	• Open space (ideally with a wooden floor) • Comfortable clothes

Learning outcomes

This particular exercise aims at
- Helping the participants start to notice themselves and others around them as well.
- Growing the participants' expressive means without using any words and communicating with each other non-verbally.
- Facing communication barriers and using creative competences to overcome them.

Instructions (explaining the exercise)

1. The facilitator guides the participants by giving the following instructions:
- I walk in the space.
- On the clap of hands I stop moving.
- I concentrate on my own breath.
- I observe the people around me.
- I have to follow one person of the group and start moving behind them.
- The group creates a circle.
2. In absolute silence I try to say 'good morning' to everybody without words, using only eye contact.
   » After that I create eye contact with one person. Without losing eye contact with my partner I must now switch places, but I should meet my partner at the centre of the circle. If a couple (a) has created eye contact and another couple (b) has already started to move the couple (a) has to wait without losing eye contact.
3. In this part the couples keep on switching places but now the members of the couples have to copy the movement of their partner as if they were looking into a mirror. The participants must use different qualities of movement (changing speed, levels, etc.). There is always a meeting point at the centre of the circle and the participants have to try not to lose eye contact.
4. The participants must now switch places with another member of the group but now when they step into the circle, they have to carry an emotional act (love, hate, I need help, etc.). At this moment the couples do not have to copy what they see but to

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3 An impression of the exercise from the accompanying online tutorial: https://tinyurl.com/3vkbfy8u

react to what their partner is doing. Eye contact is important once again.

5. The group splits into three groups. Each group has to create and present a theatrical act with no words under the following titles:

» Help!

» I would like to…

» Disagreement

The titles must be hidden from the rest of the groups. The groups have to improvise in absolute silence for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes have passed, they can speak for 3 minutes in order to talk about the details of their theatrical acts. They improvise again in silence for 3 minutes. Each group makes the presentation in front of the other groups. The audience attempts to describe what they understood from the act.

6. The group stands in a circle. For one last time random couples meet in the centre of the circle and say 'goodbye' in any way they want (with or without words, in a well-known or in a strange language etc).

Tips for reflection / deepening the content

This exercise addresses all target groups of the project and does not require previous experience in theatre, pantomime, or performing arts in general.

Some instructions of the exercise may put the participants in a difficult position (for example, when familiarising with eye contact everyone feels awkward at first). Our tendency is to hide such moments of awkwardness and embarrassment from others, and this is perfectly acceptable. On the other hand, however, the exercise will achieve the greatest learning effects if we manage to highlight these difficult moments, become aware of them and observe ourselves how we overcome them.

To do this, a round of reflection with the participants is required at the end.

Beforehand, the facilitator should prepare a semi-structured list of questions in order to facilitate the emergence and presentation by the participants of the knowledge and skills used during the exercise, as well as the attitudes acquired. Questions like those below could support this procedure:

• How did you feel during the eye contact? Why?

• Did you find it difficult to perform your feelings (love, hate, I need help, etc.) in the circle? Why? How do you feel right now?

• What did you find most difficult during the working groups and the preparation of the performance? If you failed to communicate your ideas nonverbally with the rest of your team, how many words do you think you would need to achieve it?

• What did you think of the performances? Did they represent the title/topic?

• How do you evaluate the whole experience?

• What have you discovered today that you would like to use in your daily life?

Exercise 2 – Conveying information through a soundscape

Introduction & Methodology

A soundscape describes a sound or a combination of sounds which create or emerge from an immersive environment. Sound – whether produced by man or by nature itself – can transmit one or more pieces of information to the audience. We can make use of sound to convey specific information describing a situation, a fact, or a story.

In our everyday life we usually ignore the great influence of our sound environment and the ways in which it affects our perception of the world. We only pay attention to sound when it disturbs us (aeroplane flying low, public works out of our window) or makes us feel good (music, birds singing). But in other cases we find it difficult to understand that sound is the main channel of message delivery (in a movie at the cinema, it is the sound that makes us anxious about what will happen next, not the image of a closed door). Sound can convey messages and meanings in ways waiting to be discovered and integrated into our communication practices. The general methodology of the exercise is based on experiential learning and team work, following the method of soundscape creation.

Target group(s)
- All 3 target groups
- 10 – 25 people
- Participants need to be some-what familiar (ice-breaking exercise)
- Not accessible with hearing impairments

Duration
- 50 min

Requirements / needed material
- Open space (ideally with a wooden floor)
- A4 white papers
- Markers for painting

Learning outcomes

- Self-development through creativity.
- Creating a quicker way to realise and share the important information.
- Awareness of communication channels.

Instructions (explaining the exercise)

1. Based on the participants' number, split the group into subgroups of 4 people at least. On three different pieces of paper, invite the groups to simply draw a story that has a beginning on the first page, a middle part on the second page and an end on the third page. Each group keeps the story secret from the others. Then in 15 minutes each group will have to find a way to describe this story and then to perform this description without using words but only sounds to the other groups.

2. Each group performs their story with sounds, while the audience keeps their eyes closed or their backs turned to the stage, so they cannot see any action, only listen. The audience is then asked to translate the story into words based on the sounds they heard. The groups still do not reveal their stories, they just keep the feedback.

3. After the presentations each group with the comments of the audience goes to a second round (or if necessary, a third one too) of creation and presentation, correcting or removing each time the wrong or misleading information that makes the story different from the original. In the end, the groups reveal their stories.

Tips for reflection / deepening the content

- We do not have to inform the groups that they have to present the story in an audience with closed eyes beforehand. At the end we realise that we have to keep only the key words (sounds) and not all the elements that we drew (saw) on the paper. With this approach the important information arrives faster to the ears of the listener, without the noise of the meaningless information.
- This is a pleasant and entertaining exercise. We can also make use of it by repeating it with the aim to create a new vocabulary of sounds or information that can be used in the future.
- A round of reflection with the participants at the end is recommended. Coordinate an open discussion where the participants have the space to express their experience.

Exercise 3 – **The Sphere**

Introduction & Methodology

This exercise guides the participants through a journey of the awareness of their environment, of the space through which the human body moves and of the relations developed with other people. The exercise follows the experiential learning and team work methodology, making use of active participation and collaboration for the creation of a common experience. It is also based on the cooperation between body and mind and the human inner impulse to express and communicate through the body.

Target group(s)	Duration	Requirements / needed material
• All 3 target groups • 10 – 25 people	• 50 min	• An open space (ideally with a wooden floor) • Comfortable clothing • Music playlist with relaxing songs & nature sounds (low volume) • Sound system, speaker(s)

Learning outcomes

This exercise aims at raising the participants' awareness of their body, its positioning inside the environment and space and inside the relations we develop as well as its potential as a communication and expression tool.

Through this exercise we can achieve:

- Better connection with our body.
- Opportunity to observe oneself and the others.
- Opportunity to know oneself better and connect with a group.
- Awareness that our body consists of individual parts able to move independently or combined.
- Development of spontaneous and conscious movement.
- Development of imagination.
- Awareness of our body's ability to communicate and convey feelings and information.
- Development of non-verbal communication.

Instructions (explaining the exercise)

1. Introduce oneself through body and movement:

The facilitator asks the group to form a circle and start observing their body asking questions and giving examples:

» Is there any body part that feels sore or in pain?

» Do you notice anything different today? (e.g. 'My feet are sore because of standing for a long time.')

» Is there something about my body that I would like to share with the others? (e.g. 'I slept well and I feel fresh.')

After some minutes of observation, the facilitator asks the participants to introduce themselves to the group, first with their name and the observation of their body, and then with a movement that represents this situation. The facilitator starts giving an example and the participants follow, e.g.:

» 'I am Costas and today my shoulders are in pain, because I carried a heavy load.' Then Costas says his name again, while at the same time he bends his knees, lowers his head and puts his hands on his shoulders.

The facilitator invites the participants to repeat each person's movement. Thus, they put themselves into other people's position, get to know each other and also do a short warm up.

2. My body, the environment, and the others:

The facilitator puts on some mild, low volume music and asks the group to break the circle and freely move into space. S/he lets the group move freely while at the same time the participants observe their body, their breath, expression, and way of moving as well as the others'. As the group keeps on walking, the facilitator gives the following instructions:

» Breathe with more awareness.

» Create small, interesting paths between other people. Avoid making circles.

» Observe the space in which you move in and the environment.

» Observe the others, too. How do they move? Recall the movement with which they introduced themselves before.

» Observe yourself in this crowd and in this space.

Then, the facilitator claps his/her hands and the participants stop moving. At the second clapping, the participants start moving again. By repeating, the facilitator creates a code under which the participants understand that with each clapping they should pause until the next clapping, when they move again. Repeat several times, change the speed and the duration of pauses.

3. Discovering my sphere:

At some point, the facilitator asks the participants to stand for a while at the point they randomly paused. Then s/he asks them to keep following the instructions given without interrupting the procedure. S/he invites them to trust him/her and actively participate; if somebody feels uncomfortable it is ok to stop, but encourage them to also try something that might be difficult for them.

» Consider that the place where you stand now will be your personal space for a while. You can imagine that a big bubble, a sphere is surrounding you and providing you with safety.

» Extend your arms and discover how big this space is.

» Move into this safe space, trying to discover its dimensions and limits.

» Try to move continuously, making use of the instructions on your way. There is no right or wrong movement.

» If you feel safe, you can close your eyes and feel the limits and dimensions of the space.

» Try to involve all your body in this process and not only your arms, but also, head, shoulders, fingers, torso, pelvis, knees, feet, even eyes, face muscles, sternum.

» Try to move low or high, fast or slow, try to jump or turn in the sphere.

» You can follow the music.

» Do not forget to breathe and do not be afraid of making the movement bigger.

» Slowly return to a neutral position and open your eyes if closed. Try to keep this feeling of your personal space while we are going back to the groups' space and continue to move.

While the group is moving, the facilitator points out that we are transferring our body into the space that surrounds us and in between people also moving around us, as if we transfer the sphere we discovered before. We can choose whether we remain in our safe personal space or allow somebody else to enter our space.

4. The sphere breaks:

Then, the facilitator asks the group to create encounters; to communicate by observing how they manage their personal space, when they keep it away from others, when they allow somebody to approach entering their sphere and how they feel about their body in each condition. The facilitator proposes:

» Give a handshake.
» Say 'Good morning' in any way you like.
» Find a reason to give a hug.
» Find a reason to congratulate somebody.
» Offer a present or offer help to somebody.
» Give directions to somebody.

5. Let's introduce ourselves again through the body and movement closing the circle:

The facilitator asks the group to come back to the circle, gives some time for everybody to observe their bodies again and asks them to repeat the process of step 1. Maybe there are some changes, maybe not.

When all participants have talked, the exercise is completed. The facilitator thanks everybody for sharing and participating.

Tips for reflection / deepening the content

It is advisable that 10 more minutes are given to the participants to discuss their feelings during the process

• What was hard for you?
• Have you discovered something that you wish to keep?

Glossary

• **Pantomime:** is "the art or act of expressing thoughts and emotions with movement rather than speech" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). An ancient form of pantomime can be found in Roman times, where a solo performer or dancer was representing movements related to the narration of a chorus. Nowadays, pantomime can refer to any form of performance where the story is told non-verbally, based on the body movements and facial expressions of the performer.

• **Non-verbal communication:** Non-verbal communication types include eye gaze, gestures, facial expressions, paralinguistics such as loudness or pauses and rhythm or tone of voice, body language and posture, interpersonal space, touch, appearance, and artefacts.

• **Sound:** whether produced by man or by nature itself - can transmit one or more pieces of information to the receiver. We can make use of sound to convey specific information describing a situation, a fact, or a story. Sound is transmitted through gases, solids, and liquids in the form of waves.

• **Soundscape:** is the sound or combination of sounds produced by natural or artificial sound sources and perceived or/and interpreted by humans. Human perception and the production of meaning that influences human behaviour are the key features that differentiate it from the broader acoustic environment, which simply refers to the sounds or combination of sounds that coexist in an indoor or outdoor space.

The soundscape can be created from sounds of the natural environment, such as animal voices, birds fluttering, insect buzzing (biophony), sounds of weather phenomena, the movement of rivers and the sea (geophony), as well as sounds created by human activity, such as a musical composition, the sound of office equipment, industrial sounds and even human language (anthropophony). What is crucial here, is the way in which the environment is understood by those who live in it.

• **Personal space:** refers to the space that surrounds a person; the space which is considered personal or allows for privacy. When another person goes into this private area a level of discomfort is often felt by the person whose private space is violated. Personal space is linked also to the concept of *interpersonal distance,* the distance at which persons usually position themselves from other interacting persons. Interpretations of behaviour related to the category of proxemics are encountered in many sociology and psychology studies. Hall (Gordon et al., 2006) proposed four categories of interpersonal distance that describe different types of communications in face-to-face interactions (valid mostly in Western cultures):

1. intimate distances in which interactants stand 6–18 inches from each other, types of interactions expressing intimacy being *love-making and wrestling, comforting, and protecting*
2. personal distances of 1.5–4 feet, which usually reflect close, personal relationships
3. social or consultative distances of 4–7 feet, which are typical of business and professional client interactions
4. public distances of 12–20 feet involving public speaking in which recognition of others spoken to is not required.
   Personal space is linked to the first and second category and is challenged or reconciled in interactions of the 3rd and 4th type.
- **Safe space:** The term safe space (or *safer space* in a more realistic point view) generally means "a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other emotional or physical harm" (Lexico, n.d.). This definition may seem too broad; in fact, we can tell two different perceptions of the term: one is the ideological one, while the second one refers to physical spaces/environments catering to the need of safety of the people involved. It is also often referred to places created for marginalised individuals to come together to communicate regarding their experiences with *marginalisation,* most commonly located on university campuses in the Western world, but also at workplaces. The term safe(r) space (also positive space) may also indicate that a *teacher,* educational institution or student body/group does not tolerate *violence, harassment,* or *hate speech,* thus creating (or aspired to gradually create) a *safe* place for marginalised people.

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