

# “ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION”

Activity developed by: Élan Interculturel



## OVERVIEW

The sequence presented herein explores different aspects of communication. We first focus on the means of communication, exploring our own preferences and sensitivities. We explore how we interpret communication behaviour of other people. Finally, we look at a key element of relating to each other through the concept of “facework”.

## TIME



120 -180 minutes, depending on the rhythm adapted to your group. With more advanced groups, it is possible to lead the full 3 sequences in 2 hours, with less advanced groups you may need 3 hours.

## PARTICIPANTS



Adaptable for 10 – 20 participants

## MATERIALS



- Flipchart, markers, blue tack
- Images about communication practices in different cultures
- Post-it

## OBJECTIVES



- Explore different facets of “communication”, in particular non-verbal communication: proxemics (the use of distance), eye contact, physical contact, posture, gesture etc.
- Give an opportunity to participants to identify their comfort zone and their preferences.
- Invite participants to explore communication forms that are different from theirs.
- Understand “facework” as the key momentum in the management of relations: how to offer the needed recognition and attention without offering too much.

## STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS



### SEQUENCE 1: EXPLORING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION. WHERE ARE MY SENSITIVE ZONES?

1. Before starting, tell participants that you will propose a sequence of non-verbal activities. Usually, these activities do not imply particular difficulty, but if for any reason they feel very uncomfortable, they can stop and sit. Ask them if anyone has physical problems that you or the others should be aware of (a knee issue, etc.). Ask them not to analyse the different instructions or their own behaviour, merely register any emotion or interpretation that can emerge, without dealing with it further. You can go through the series of instructions bellow.
2. “Start walking in the space of the room, exploring all corners and areas of the room, trying to put their attention on the present moment, on breathing and on their weight.”
3. “Look out for empty spaces in the room, go there. Watch your feet and the empty spaces.”

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4. “Now go where there is no free space and keep moving” (Here, usually participants will gather closely in the middle of the room. Try to keep them moving as opposed to standing still and jammed.)
5. “When one person stops, we should all stop. When one person gets going, we all move.”
6. “Keep walking, when you get into eye contact with someone, stand still for three seconds, then keep moving.”
7. “When you have eye contact, greet each other in any non-verbal way you like. Try different approaches for every new encounter.”
8. “Find a partner. Find the right place for your pair so you have enough space. Stand facing each other. Count from 1 to 3 in alternating rhythm, taking turns.” When you see participants have caught the rhythm: “now change number 1 to a specific sound and gesture. From now on you are going to repeat this chosen sound and gesture instead of saying 1.” When participants have practiced enough, ask them to change number 2 and then number 3 as well. In the end, invite some pairs to present their “rhythm machine” to the others. This exercise called “Rhythm machines” has been created by “Augusto Boal” as a means to “demechanise” ourselves from our daily routines.
9. “Please start walking again and find a new partner, someone who you do not know very well. One of you is going to be a mirror and the other the subject. The mirror has to reflect everything the subject does. The aim is not to create a competition but rather do something that the mirror cannot follow. Explore different types of movements.”
10. During this activity we will create different versions of the mirror exercise: in the next round, with a different partner, we invite participants to do the same basic task, but trying out different distances: “get as close to each other as possible, to the limit of what you feel comfortable with for both of you. Go as far from each other as possible, without losing the feeling that you are a pair.” A third exercise consists in inviting the “mirrors” to do something different or complementary to the subject. The mirror exercise is also proposed by Augusto Boal.
11. Divide the group into “two societies.” They should be equal in number. You tell them half of the society has a specific cultural code: they really like to engage in eye contact and in particular, they seek to establish eye contact with people who try to avoid it. The other society has just the opposite code: they tend to avoid eye contact. Invite the two societies to interact. After two minutes invite them to change roles.
12. In the next exercise you ask half of the group to stay in the middle of the room and to close their eyes. The other half have the following instruction: approach the participants who have their eyes closed and accompany them for a couple of meters, then leave them. Go find other participants that you can accompany. After two or three minutes ask the groups to change roles.
13. Invite participants to stand in a circle so close that their shoulders will end up touching each other. Ask them to turn to the right, keeping the circle really close. Invite them to sit down.
14. Explain that your sequence of activities is now over, and that it is now time to put words to the experiences we had. First make a collective recap of the different activities proposed and ask participants about which aspect of non-verbal communication they have touched. Correct if necessary and note each item on a flipchart paper. Tell participants it is quite normal that some of these forms are easier for us and some are more difficult. Discovering this is one of the aims of the sequence. Invite them for a visual check and comparison of these facilities and difficulties. Name one side of the room as “YES” and the other side as “NO”. Invite participants to answer the questions you are going to ask by positioning themselves either closer to the “YES” or to the “NO” side. Tell them this is an exploration, it is their interest to be honest and curious. It is perfectly normal that some aspects are easier, and some others more challenging. For each answer you can invite participants to have a look at where they are and where are the others. Here are some of the questions you can ask. Invite participants to ask similar questions:
  - It was easy to walk around in the space
  - It was easy to play with different rhythms
  - It was easy to stay close to a stranger
  - It was easy to look for eye contact
  - It was easy to avoid eye contact
  - It was easier to look for eye contact than to refuse it
  - It was easy to keep connected over a farther distance

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## DISCUSSIONS



### SEQUENCE 1

Identification of different means of communication:

You can incorporate this discussion towards the end of the sequence. Here are the key messages: we distinguish verbal communication (where there are words) para-verbal (where we express ourselves through voice but without words) and non-verbal (no voice involved, only the body). Our current modern European society puts lots of emphasis on verbal communication (spoken or written) but the non-verbal aspects are just as important in our capacity to convey meanings and develop relations. The three aspects are connected, but there can also be discrepancies. In this case, we quickly become aware that something is “wrong” (think of someone smiling gently while telling you that they are very angry).

From now on we focus on non-verbal communication. Complete the elements that participants may have identified to have the full list: proxemics – the use of distance/eye contact/physical contact or touch/rhythms/gestures/mimicry/postures.

Exploring intercultural perspectives

- To explore the intercultural dimension of communication, each time participants express their opinions using their own form of communication, ask them whether they expect that there would be any cultural diversity on that level (i.e. different cultures having different practices) and what kind of cultural differences they are aware of. You can talk about national, religious differences but also about gender, social class, etc.
- With foreigners/migrants, you can discuss what aspects of the local style of communication are more difficult for them to get used to.

## STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS



### SEQUENCE 2: UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

1. Before doing the activity, find a couple of photos that would represent situations of communication in different cultural settings, difficulties of communication or forms of communication that may seem “strange” for the participants. It is important to create a selection of pictures that can trigger emotional engagement.
2. We start the activity by putting the printed pictures on the floor or on the wall, we then ask the participants to take a tour around all the pictures.
3. Next, participants must find the picture that attracted them the most and make groups according to the choice of the picture.
4. Give each participant post-its.
5. Asks the participants to share with others in the small group if there is any connection to a personal situation, then, ask them to individually write down on the post-its the emotions linked to the picture, and paste it on the character with which they identify in the picture.



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6. After that, the trainer gives another post-it (of different colour) and asks them to try to explore hypothetically the mindset of the other person and try to imagine how they lived the situation. What is their rationality? Then invite them to stick this post-it connected to the other character(s) of the image.
7. Finally, we ask each group to present to all the participants their chosen picture and why they chose it. Then, we ask them to share their hypothesis of mindset/worldview of the “others” picture, and let the discussion unfold with the contribution of all the participants.

## DISCUSSIONS



### SEQUENCE 2

Here are some questions you may want to explore:

- How was the activity for you? Was any part difficult or uncomfortable? Did anything surprise you?
- How easy was it to put hypothesis on the behaviour/intentions of the other person?
- Why do you think such an “investigation” or “perspective taking” is not automatic? What do you think are the obstacles?

## STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS



### SEQUENCE 3: ENGAGING WITH THE OTHERS

Tell participants you’re going to do theatre to explore further some aspects of communication. Put two chairs side by side. This is going to be your stage. Ask a volunteer. Tell them you are now going to role play many sketches about the same situation. You can invent any specific context. We propose the following: you get on the tram and recognise another participant from a workshop you attended two weeks ago. Ask the other participants to take the free chair and show what could be considered as a “mistake” in communication.

As an alternative scenario, we propose a “birthday” event, such as: it’s the birthday of an intern who has worked with you for two months. The colleagues decided together to go down and have a drink. The occupied chair belongs to the intern who has the birthday and the empty chair is the colleague who is joining the celebration. Again, ask for all possible mistakes.

## DISCUSSIONS



### SEQUENCE 3

The first round of debriefing can take place exploring intercultural aspects of different forms of communication (physical contact, eye contact, etc..).

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However, the real aim of the 3rd sequence was to introduce the concept of facework and more particularly “face threatening acts.” We recommend that you put this concept at the centre of the debriefing discussion. The core idea is that in order to “respect” the other we have to follow the rules of “facework.” We can make two types of mistakes:

1. Not giving enough attention/importance to the person with respect to the relationship, and threaten his/her need for recognition. In the first scenario, this would be for instance sitting down next to the other not saying hello to her.
2. Giving too much attention/importance with respect to the relationship and hence threaten his/her need of autonomy and freedom.

The second scenario (or any “gift” scenario as a matter of fact) highlights very well these two sides. Offering a pencil to a colleague’s birthday may be too little but offering a rolex may be just as wrong.

Some guiding questions could be:

- Did the protagonist (person taking the empty chair) seem respectful to you?
- How did they try to show their respect to the other person?
- Where did they make a mistake?
- Why is giving too much (attention, closeness, gift etc..) a problem?
- What happens when you receive a very important gift from someone that you don’t know that much?

## HINTS



### SEQUENCE 1:

Timing and a good sense of rhythm may be important for a pleasant flow. There is no ‘absolute’ length for these activities, but they are quite short. Please observe participants to see to what extent they are still engaged in the activities or if they are ready for further instruction.

### SEQUENCE 3:

These simulations do not take a long time either. Make sure different forms of “mistakes” are explored. Please read the literature to feel safe and confident in leading this debriefing.

## THEORY



References:

- All activities, unless otherwise specified, were developed by Élan Interculturel.
- Augusto Boal 1992 Games for Actors and Non-Actors, 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge
- To open up “facework” we rely on Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (Brown P. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage / P. Brown, S. Levinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 345 p) You can find an easy introduction in: <http://scodis.com/for-students/glossary/politeness-theory/>

Further background readings:

Read our critical incidents about interaction and communication (<https://intimacycrosscultures.eu/collection/#relationship-to-each-other>)

Read about relationships skills in the SELFEE handbook (from page 40): [http://selfeeproject.eu/documenten\\_en/SOCIAL\\_EMOTIONAL\\_LEARNING\\_FOR\\_JOB\\_SEARCHERS.pdf](http://selfeeproject.eu/documenten_en/SOCIAL_EMOTIONAL_LEARNING_FOR_JOB_SEARCHERS.pdf)



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