# TRANSFORMATIONS
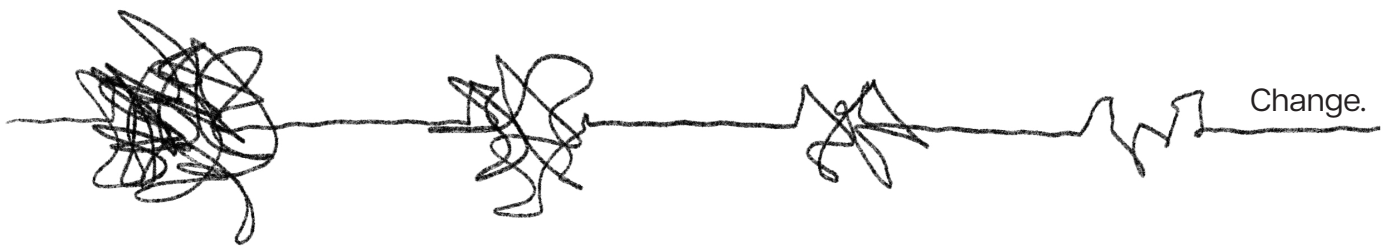


Honours Graduation Projects
Processes of Change
Cohort of 23-24

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# Contents

Change.

# Foreword

Most people, when thinking of a recent big change in their lives, will mention a new job, new home, or their first child. All these changes are tangible. Someone can point out the building they work in, or the house they bought. Rarely will people point out a change of mind due to an epiphany, a person they met, or a brilliant course. The Processes of Change honours programme is exactly this: a continuous change of mind lasting 1.5 years. With every course, every teacher, and every new skill, the seemingly everlasting change of mind would continue and be given a new twist and new direction while still holding to the end goal. Today, we have reached the end of this process of change. We have been equipped with everything that we need for a final change, to reach the final goal. This time, we will be the people who ignite a new change in this world. Even though our changes may not be as big as the Processes of Change programme, we can proudly say that we did bring about a change in this world. And, after doing something once, you can do it again. The 1.5 years of continuous change may end here. But we will continue changing the world around us.

Our teachers gave us the best preparation we could have asked for. We want to thank all of them, Dr Tsjalle van der Burg, Dr Marcella Hoogeboom-Hendriksen, Dr Desirée van Dun, Dr Rashimah Rajah, Dr Julia Wijnmaalen, and Dr Lara Carminati, for the amazing experience in the last 1.5 years and for all the effort and time they spent on those Monday and Wednesday evenings. Without you, nothing would have changed.

The booklet in front of you includes the reports of all of our change projects. They are the product of our 1.5-year process of change. We truly hope that whoever reads it will be inspired to ignite a change. Because, without change, tomorrow will be just the same as yesterday.

# Our Professors



"One and a half year ago, after your first Honours meeting, I proudly told my colleagues that we were now having a cohort with so much energy that it might be wise to also teach them some lessons about the disadvantages of being too enthusiastic. And indeed, your group has given so much energy to everyone that it is the first cohort of which all student who started have also obtained their Honours diploma in the end. You can be proud of that absolute Honours record. I have given my lessons with great pleasure, and I wish you all the best for the future."

**Dr Tsjalle
van der Burg**

"Dear Honours Students,

Writing this text means that you are in the process of finishing your honours trajectory. As a teacher, it is an honour to have the opportunity to work with you.

The learning curve that we observed from the start to the end of the honours course is illustrative of your professionalism, dedication, curiosity, and importantly, your ability to collaborate in a multidisciplinary context. In many courses, you were taught that change is the heartbeat of growth. I hope that for your future, you can take all the experiences from the honours program and use these to embrace every challenge and success on your journey, for it shapes the extraordinary things that you are achieving."



**Dr Marcella
Hoogeboom-Hendriksen**



"Eager to learn, positively critical, relaxed, and playful at the same time! That is how I remember your cohort after spending many Monday and Wednesday evenings together during the Fall/Winter of 2023, talking about effective leadership, practicing it through hands-on exercises, and reflecting on your own experiences. It was such a pleasure to learn together with you and be inspired by your healthy fruit breaks and jointly building a safe space for feedback and personal growth. Now that you have reached the end of the PoC journey, I trust constructive change is in good hands with you and I wish you all the best in your life. Let's keep in touch!"

**Dr Desirée
van Dun**

"When I was told that the Honours programme is something different at the UT, I was not sure what I was in for. But when the students voluntarily stayed until 8.30pm on a snowy winter night asking questions about the topic of leadership on my first day of teaching here, I knew that this group was special. Congratulations on graduating from the Honours programme. You overcome many challenges - both simulated and in real companies! - to get here. I trust you will use the theory and the practical skills you learnt in PoC modules to strive for excellence in whatever you do."

**Dr Rashimah Rajah**

"Here you are at the Honors-finish. If we have done our job successfully you should now be able to let yourself, other people and the groups and organisations you are part of, turn to new views, attitudes, behaviours and policies. And? Are you able to do this? Did you change? If you are still in doubt whether you are able and capable then take in the life lessons of Baz Luhrmann in Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen), turn into your torch song and you will always be ok in the future!"

**Dr Julia Wijnmaalen**

"Dear PoC 2024 cohort,

Now that this whole journey is coming to an end and you are graduating, I can only hope that you will carry with you for as long as possible all the knowledge and skills you have learned throughout this year and a half. As future drivers of change, keep on being eager to ask questions, to dare try to explore new opportunities, to allow yourself to make mistakes and to learn from them, because "we are not what we know but what we are willing to learn" (Mary Catherine Bateson). I hope you will keep nurturing your beautiful and curious minds, as well as your souls and wisdom. Good luck with your next steps and what is waiting ahead of you!"

**Dr Lara Carminati**

# Our Class

Processes of Change
Cohort of 23-24

Arda Akyazi

Maria Alexandra Sandu

Youssef Abdelaziz

Jasper Nijman

Nina Kwaks

Cătălina Antonia Petruș

Ruxandra Ursu

Janis Hölter

Iulia Costea

Lara Yilmaz

Mark Zhitchenko

Daniël Schoeren

"There is nothing permanent except change."
- Heraclitus

# Our Projects

# "Bridging individualistic and collectivistic Cultures: Fostering Understanding and Integration among students in the Netherlands"

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# 1. Introduction

In a world that is increasingly globalized, universities serve as merging grounds for people from all cultures and backgrounds (Xia, 2009). The University of Twente, with its high international student population, is not an exception.

The University of Twente currently offers 16 distinct bachelor's degrees taught in English, as well as a variety of master's and doctoral programs (Twente, 2021). Furthermore, at the beginning of 2020, the official working language changed to English, resulting in the University of Twente taking significant measures toward internationalization (Solanki, 2020). Moreover, according to Wittenborg University's worldwide research on the English proficiency index, the Netherlands became the world's most skilled English-speaking country outside of the Anglosphere (Wittenborg, 2016). These prospects have attracted a large number of international students at Dutch Universities, including the University of Twente. The high quality of education and international cultural environment attracts many students from all over the world. According to the Times Higher Education report (2024), around 38% of its students are international and have numerous reasons to visit and study in the Netherlands.

However, cultural diversity creates both benefits and challenges. The primary issue is the gap in culture between students from the so-called "individualistic cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010), which are common in many Western countries such as Germany, Netherlands, USA, whereas "collectivistic cultures",  are common in countries such as Turkey, South America and Asian countries. According to Lee and Rice (2017), cultural segregation occurs when overseas students are not fully incorporated and integrated into the community. More specifically, culture influences students' learning and communication styles, relationships with peers and teachers, motivation, and perceptions of what is important to learn. Students' comfort level in educational settings is influenced by their cultural background and the dominant culture of the institution (Gua, 2007). Thus, with the continuous increase in the number of international students, the need for integration and cohesion inside the university becomes a necessity, as well as the need to bridge cultural differences between more collectivistic and more individualistic cultures.

## Need to bridge individualistic and collective cultures

This section provides arguments and reasons why the individualistic and collectivist cultures needed to be bridged in the University of Twente for a well-integrated community.

1.      Improving Social Integration: Cultural differences might create challenges for international students to integrate into their host society. Students from collectivistic nations, who are accustomed to strong social bonds and community backing, may struggle to adjust to the Netherlands' more individualistic and independent lifestyle. This lack of integration into the host

society can cause feelings of isolation and loneliness, affecting their academic achievement and overall well-being (Xia, 2009).

2.      Fostering Mutual Understanding and Respect: Cultural myths can create biases and prejudices, limiting effective communication and collaboration between different nations and creating huge dilemmas (Trompenaars, 1996). By addressing the gap between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, we can foster mutual understanding and respect. This is critical for establishing a peaceful and welcoming campus atmosphere in which all students feel appreciated and respected.

3.      Empowering Students for a Globalized Workforce: In today's global market, cultural competency and awareness are widely valued. Students who can recognize and manage cultural differences are better suited to the global economy. Universities can improve their graduates' employability by developing intercultural communication skills and preparing them for rewarding careers in a variety of contexts (Johnson et al., 2006).

4.      Students' Psychological Well-Being: Cultural integration contributes significantly to international students' psychological well-being. The stress of adjusting to a new culture can create cultural shocks and worsen mental health problems (Xia, 2009). Bridging cultural gaps can serve as a network of support for international students, allowing them to better cope with cultural transitions while sustaining their psychological well-being.

## Theoretical Background

This part of the project explains the theoretical background used to conduct change intervention. Two main models have been employed during the project: Trompenaars' (1996) cross-cultural research and the Kübler-Ross' Change Curve (1969). These frameworks are critical for understanding the cultural dynamics that guide the individual change processes needed for successful integration. Firstly, Trompenaars' (1996) research on cross-cultural differences elucidates how people from various cultural origins may effectively communicate and collaborate to solve the dilemmas that have been created by cultural differences. This literature is used to create awareness and understanding among students who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Besides, Trompenaars's model of the Seven Dimensions of Culture was used in workshop activities, targeted at closing the cultural gap between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. This approach is consistent with the broader goal of creating a more inclusive and peaceful atmosphere within the university as well as beyond. On the other hand, for an effective individual change, the model of The Kübler-Ross Change Curve was also taken into account for human psychology.

# The seven dimensions of culture

Trompenaars' (1996) cross-cultural seven-dimension theory provides insight into how people from various cultural origins can effectively engage and address the issues that cultural differences create. This concept is critical for raising awareness and understanding among students from different cultures. The seven dimensions are:

1. **Universalism vs. Particularism:** The focus on rules vs relationships.
2. **Individualism vs. Communitarianism:** The emphasis on one's success over collective purposes.
3. **Specific vs. Diffuse:** the degree to which people interact with each other in certain areas of their lives rather than in general.
4. **Neutral vs Emotional:** The extent to which emotions are communicated.
5. **Achievement vs. Ascription:** How status is determined based on performance rather than imposed roles.
6. **Sequential vs. Synchronic:** The view of time as linear versus flexible.
7. **Internal vs. External Control:** Believing in controlling outcomes rather than adapting to external events.

For this project, the most relevant dimensions are universalism vs. particularism and individualism vs. communitarianism, which is similar to Hofstede's (2010) individualistic vs collectivistic cultures. These dimensions were applied to create workshop activities that seek to bridge the gap in culture between individualistic (e.g., Dutch/German students) and collectivistic (e.g., Turkish students) cultures. By emphasizing these cultural characteristics, the project aims to create a more inclusive and peaceful university atmosphere.

# The Kübler–Ross Change Curve

The Kübler-Ross Change Curve (1969) has been modified to clarify people's emotional responses to change. This Change Curve can assist the change process in predicting people's reactions to the change and providing adequate appropriate support for individuals as they go through a period of transition. This framework is useful for managing individual change processes, particularly in terms of cultural adaptation.

The Kübler-Ross Change Curve consists of the following stages:

1. **Denial:** Refusing to embrace change and sticking to the past.
2. **Anger:** Frustration and disappointment at the change.
3. **Bargaining:** Seeking to reach an agreement or discuss issues of the change.

4. **Depression:** realization of the degree of the change, which causes feelings of grief and helplessness.
5. **Acceptance:** the process of adjusting to change and integrating new behaviors and attitudes.

Trompenaars' cultural dimensions, together with the Kübler-Ross Change Curve, provide an integrated approach to cultural integration. Trompenaars' approach influences the content and structure of the workshops, ensuring that activities are both relevant and effective. On the other hand, the Kübler-Ross Change Curve drives the support strategies, which address the psychological and emotional components of cultural integration.

## The aim of the Change Project

The study aims to bridge the gap in cultures between universalism vs. particularism and/or individualism vs. communitarianism cultures (or "individualistic vs collectivistic" or "I and We cultures") among international students at the University of Twente. As an international student, I have noticed that cultural differences frequently impede good integration and communication among the student population, especially with Dutch students and as it is also mentioned previously, cultural differences cause many challenges and misunderstandings, often resulting in a lack of harmony and inclusivity within the academic community. I have mainly experienced these cultural conflicts during my group project where people are from different backgrounds. Individuals generally think that others also share the same values and ideas, but this might not always be the case which in the end leads to disagreements, misinterpretations and dilemmas. Therefore, this project aims to build mutual understanding and respect by focusing on Turkish/Asian students, who come from a collectivistic background and are thus representative of this type of culture, and Dutch/German students, who can represent people from individualistic cultures. The goal is to develop an awareness of cultural disparities and foster meaningful relationships among University of Twente students. The project's goal is to highlight distinct cultural values and practices through workshops and interactive activities thus enhancing the integration process for all students involved in the study. By raising awareness, we can reduce or better comprehend these misunderstandings and challenges that are created by cultural differences.

## Target Group: German, Dutch, Turkish, Japanese

The target group consists of both individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures. The selection of the participants was made to have the same number of participants from both cultures to be able to have a fair distribution of pairs for the scenario discussion part. In total 6 individuals have participated in the workshop and the change intervention in general. The participants from I culture contained 3 individuals; 2 Dutch and 1 German. The collectivistic culture group consists of 3 individuals; 2 Turkish and 1 Japanese.

# Change Goals

The change goals for this project are intended to prevent cultural discrepancies between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, with an emphasis on improving integration and understanding among international students at the University of Twente. These goals should be assessed to see whether the intended changes have been triggered. Since the project took about 2 months, its overarching goal was broken down into short-term goals. However, as the participants will continue studying at the University of Twente, they will also be asked to give feedback in the long term to evaluate the degree of change. Therefore, specific goals are:

## 1. Raise Awareness and Understanding of Cultural Differences

Why This Aspect: As the Johari Window Model, developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (1955), suggests, awareness is the initial step toward understanding and acceptance between groups of people for an effective relationship. Students can better recognize and respect each other's perspectives and viewpoints by emphasizing the differences in values and actions between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. This awareness can help to prevent conflicts and miscommunications caused by cultural differences.

Benefits: Increased awareness can result in a more peaceful and inclusive campus setting. Students who understand and appreciate each other's cultural origins are more likely to work effectively together and form meaningful relationships (Gua, 2007).

Literature Review: As it is explained in the theoretical framework, for this change goal Trompenaars' (1996) cross-cultural seven-dimension theory will be employed.

Measurable goals: Surveys will be conducted 'before' and 'after' the workshop to examine changes in participants' awareness and understanding of cultural differences. These surveys will include questions meant to assess students' initial awareness and impressions of cultural differences, as well as record any changes that occur after the workshops (See Appendix).

# 2. Promote Interaction and Reduce Misunderstanding, Conflicts and Dilemmas

<u>Why this aspect:</u> Individualistic and collectivistic cultures have different ways of communicating, values, and social standards, which can lead to misunderstandings and cultural conflicts. Addressing these concerns is critical to creating a supportive and collaborative academic atmosphere inside the University of Twente. By decreasing these misunderstandings and conflicts, students can have more transparent and effective interactions, strengthen their relationships, and thrive in a more welcoming environment (Marangell et al., 2018).

<u>Benefit:</u> This change goal was chosen because reducing cultural confrontations can result in a more respectful and engaged university / academic experience for all students, allowing them to concentrate on their social and academic growth without the additional pressure of cultural conflicts.

<u>Literature Review:</u> Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture (1996) emphasizes the significance of understanding cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism and methods of communication. His findings give a foundation for detecting and addressing cultural differences, which may later result in misunderstandings and conflicts. Using Trompenaars' scenarios addressed in the paper, we can develop realistic and relatable situations that illustrate cultural tensions while also providing a platform for conversation and mutual learning. On the other hand, the Kübler-Ross Change Curve will be used for the individual change intervention. By this theory, the process that individuals go through when the change is required will be an illustrative tool to follow.

<u>Measurable goal:</u> The purpose is to provide educational interventions through a workshop that addresses the identified root causes of misunderstandings. This workshop will apply scenarios from Trompenaars' 1996 article and individualistic (I culture) and collectivistic (We culture) backgrounds will be paired. During the workshop, participants will debate and reflect on how they respond to these scenarios and explain the logic behind their decisions to one another. Participants will be given feedback forms at the end of the workshop and asked to reflect on their experience to assess its success and effectiveness. The workshop's effectiveness will be monitored by reviewing feedback forms to have at least 80% of participants express an improved understanding of cultural differences and decrease perceived conflicts between cultures.

# Change Approach

For the change intervention, a workshop was organized to promote understanding and integration among students from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The session was designed to encourage engagement and participatory learning, focusing on Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture.

In total, six students attended the workshop representing both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Individualistic cultures were presented by two Dutch and one German student, whereas collectivistic cultures contained two Turkish and one Japanese student. The workshop lasted 40-45 minutes and offered several critical components to promote learning and interaction with cultural differences.

The session started with an introduction in which participants were introduced, and the purpose of the change intervention and its change goals were explained. Then, the session continued with an extensive explanation of Individualistic and Collectivistic cultures to raise awareness in individuals which *was the change goal 1*. This change intervention was supported by Trompenaars' 7-dimension theory to enhance the individual's understanding of cultural differences.

 After a detailed explanation of cultural differences, the workshop moved forward towards scenario-based learning and into discussion between participants. Participants were teamed up with one person from an individualistic culture and one from a collectivistic culture to have conversations and play out scenarios that were taken from Tompenaars' 1996 paper. To each pair, scenarios were provided, and they were asked to make decisions accordingly. After their decision was made, it was asked to explain the reasoning and logic behind why they have obtained certain behaviors or actions to 'Promote Interaction and Reduce Misunderstanding, Conflicts and Dilemmas', which is the *second change goal of this project*. This engaging activity was followed by a group discussion in which participants shared their experiences and ideas from scenario-based activities, promoting open dialogue and mutual learning. To assess the workshop's impact, participants submitted pre- and post-workshop surveys that measured improvements in their awareness and understanding of cultural differences. In addition, they were asked to write a reflection form to collect participants' feedback on the workshop's effectiveness and personal takeaways.

The 45-minute workshop provided enough time for presentations, engaging activities, and debates. During the workshop, the majority of participants indicated that, although they were to some extent knowledgeable about cultural differences, the workshop gave a deeper insight by providing an extensive explanation of individualistic and collectivistic cultures. They have found scenario-based learning the most fun and effective aspect of the workshop, as it allows them to engage fully with the content and apply theoretical principles to everyday situations (See

Appendix, Figure 4). The debates and explanations of the logic behind behaviors enabled participants to see cultural differences from a variety of perspectives, encouraging empathy and respect.

Students also talked about how to apply Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions in their daily lives, and how understanding these dimensions could help them manage cultural differences in academic environments, interpersonal relationships, and future professional circumstances. The workshop focused on common challenges and misconceptions caused by cultural differences, with participants sharing personal stories of cultural clashes and thinking about how awareness of these cultural components could have prevented conflicts and dilemmas.

In conclusion, the workshop achieved its objectives of developing awareness and promoting interaction to reduce conflicts among international students. The collaborative environment and emphasis on practical application proved the accomplishment of the change goals. Overall, the program gave great insights into the cultural dynamics and assisted participants in developing skills for enhanced intercultural communication. This approach together with Trompenaars' theory and scenario-based learning, proved to be an effective tool for bridging the cultural gap between individualistic and collectivistic students at Twente University. The workshop not only improved participants' cultural competence but also provided a foundation for future cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

# Results

The workshop's impact and its outcome were tested using pre- and post-workshop surveys, which indicated substantial increases in participants' understanding and awareness of cultural differences. Before the workshop, participants' knowledge and understanding of cultural differences differed, with assessments ranging from 3 to 5 on a 1-5 scale (See Appendix, Figure 1). According to the participants' responses, some had prior experience with cultural diversity discussions, while others indicated no experience. Besides, in the survey, it was asked to students, how understanding different cultures would help them in their social and professional life. Their initial expectation and answers about understanding cultural differences was that knowing cultural differences would help them communicate more effectively and minimize misunderstandings ( See Appendix, Figure 2).

After the workshop, participants' assessments of their understanding and awareness of cultural differences showed a noticeable improvement. Almost every participant assessed their post-workshop awareness with a rating of 5, which implies a high degree of understanding (See Appendix, Figure 3). Several effective elements of the workshop were emphasized by the participants, including the scenario-based exercises, the explanation given before the interactive activities, and the discussion where the reasoning and logic of certain actions or behaviours were explained (See Appendix, Figure 4).

## Quantitative Data

As mentioned before, pre and post-survey forms were filled by the participants to measure the effectiveness of the Workshop which was done for the change goal 1. The pre-workshop data showed an average of 3.67 which indicates an average level of awareness of cultural differences. On the other hand, post-workshop results showed an average of 4.83 reflecting a reasonable amount of awareness (See Appendix, figure 1 & 3). Besides, some participants indicated during the feedback session that they thought they were aware of the cultural differences while they realized in reality they lacked knowledge. This also reflects that the increased amount of awareness is actually higher and students think they have enough knowledge and experience which was not the case.

## Qualitative Data

Reflection form and open-ended questions were provided (See Appendix, Figure 2 &4) to the participants to be able to measure the effectiveness of the integration promotion and decrease in conflicts.

Participants gave extensive input on the most beneficial aspects of the workshop:

Discussion at the End: Participants reported in their reflection form and open-ended questions, that the group talks at the end of the workshop were quite successful in improving their awareness of cultural differences (Appendix, Figure 4). These conversations enabled participants to think about the circumstances and share their perspectives with fellow students from other cultural backgrounds.

 Scenario-Based Learning: Trompenaars' seven cultural dimensions, along with interactive instances, had a particularly strong influence. Participants valued the practical application of academic frameworks, which helped students grasp and learn how cultural differences happen in everyday circumstances. According to the reflection forms, this storytelling method and active engagement with peer students indicates success in the change goal 2, " Promote Interaction and Reduce Misunderstanding, Conflicts and Dilemmas."

Pre-discussion explanation: Before the interactive activities where participants needed to communicate and engage, an extensive explanation of cultural differences and Trompenaars 7 dimensions were explained. Apparently, according to the reflection form, this activity helped participants with the exact differences in cultures. These explanations created a good basis and context for the next tasks.

After the workshop, all participants stated that they felt more comfortable and skilled talking with people from various ethnic backgrounds. This suggests that the session not only increased awareness but also improved participants' intercultural competency. The quantitative and

qualitative data results support the conclusion that the workshop was successful in improving cultural awareness. For example, one participant stated, "*It was interesting to see in which areas we have culturally different mindsets. (Trompenaars' cultural dimensions). Especially, I realized that most of our communication problems with other UT students derived from indirect/direct approach*" (see Appendix, Figure 4). This response emphasizes the workshop's practical importance in recognizing and resolving particular differences in cultures that influence communication.

## Linking the findings with Literature

The increased knowledge and understanding among participants reported that Trompenaars' (1996) concept of recognition and appreciation of cultural components improves intercultural relations. The session successfully employed Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture to offer participants a formal framework for understanding cultural differences, resulting in improved interaction and collaboration. Besides the 7 dimensions framework, Trompenaars (1996 p. 57) suggested that storytelling is a good way to change basic assumptions. Thus, in the paper for each dimension, a scenario has been provided, which was also used for the interactive activities. Besides, the workshop was designed to consider the psychological aspects of cultural adaptation by using the Kübler-Ross Change Curve. Overall, the workshop fulfilled its aims by increasing knowledge and interaction among students from various cultural backgrounds. The findings contributed to the literature on intercultural communication and change management, emphasizing the importance of collaborative approaches to learning in bridging cultural gaps and facilitating effective intercultural interactions.

# Advice for the target group

Although awareness has been created, to keep and expand the multicultural understanding accomplished throughout the course, participants must continue to engage in cross-cultural interactions. Participants are invited to join intercultural groups or attend international events at the university and in their personal lives, which can give them extra opportunities to practice and get an enhanced awareness of cultural differences. Forming social (friend) group support is another successful technique for maintaining the synergy gained throughout the workshop. These groups may serve as hubs for ongoing learning and mutual support, allowing participants to share their experiences and methods for navigating cultural differences. Participants should also be motivated to use the skills and information they learned during the course in their daily lives. This entails being aware of cultural variations in interactions, showing respect for different opinions, and proactively recognizing any conflict or misunderstanding that may emerge due to culture. Besides, regularly collecting feedback and reflecting on cross-cultural interactions can help participants learn while reinforcing positive behaviors. Furthermore, it is also advised that participants take part in additional workshops and conferences on intercultural communication

and cultural competency. These gatherings can add to the foundation established by the first workshop by introducing new insights for successful cross-cultural integration.

# Learning Experience

Throughout this change project, I learned more about the complexity of intercultural communication and the practical applications of cultural competency. Organizing and conducting the workshop gave me an excellent chance to apply academic knowledge to real-life scenarios, which also improved my understanding of how cultural differences affect interactions and relationships. Besides, it was my first time hosting an event, which allowed me to gain experience in planning and managing an event. Moreover, as stated throughout the report, participants indicated that interactive and scenario-based learning exercises were successful in enhancing understanding and awareness of cultural differences. Leading those discussions and listening to participants' perspectives highlighted for me the significance of interaction in international engagement, emphasizing its role in overcoming misunderstandings and conflicts while building mutual respect.

If there were another chance to re-do the workshop, I would include a wider range of situations and scenarios to cover more cultural components and give participants a greater understanding of intercultural relations which was also the feedback from participants ( See Appendix, figure 6). Besides, conducting several workshops would allow for further in-depth discussions and exploration of the cultural topics. In addition, implementing follow-up sessions to reinforce learning and give additional assistance would make the workshop's influence last longer and provide permanency of the gained knowledge.

## Change Leader

Initially, I conducted this project with a leadership style that corresponded to my Discovery Insights profile as a 'Directing Reformer'. Directing Reformer leadership is associated with effective problem-solving abilities, overall efficiency, and setting intense goals for perfection. These abilities helped me to point out structure, define objectives, and a well-organized workshop through intense planning. However, as the project developed and I needed to perform during the workshop, I realized that I needed to modify my leadership style to be more welcoming and empathic. Facilitating discussions and connecting with people from different backgrounds necessitated a more collaborative and adaptable approach rather than relying heavily on task orientation. This experience has taught me the need to combine my intrinsic organizational and problem-solving skills with a greater focus on empathy and adaptability.

As a future leader, I plan to adapt empathy and flexibility into my leadership style especially where individual change is intense and needed. Individual Change contains human psychology, which is a complex topic, as the Kubler-Ross change curve proves. Therefore, only an Instrumental Leadership Style is not enough and I need to balance my leadership styles depending on the context (Yukl, 2012). Besides, this project taught me the importance of cultural competence and the necessity of establishing inclusive environments that promote mutual respect and understanding. I intend to employ these lessons as a leader in the future, being aware of the needs of a variety of individuals within the team and being capable of managing the complexity of multicultural relationships.

# Conclusion

Overall, the change project aimed to bridge the gap between individualistic and collectivistic cultures by raising awareness and promoting interaction between University of Twente students. This project-based its academic approach on Tompenaares' 7 dimensions of culture and Kublerr-Ross's change curve. The project had two goals on individual change; *"Raise the awareness and understanding of cultural differences"* and *"Promote Interaction and Reduce Misunderstanding, Conflicts and Dilemmas"*. To achieve these goals a workshop was conducted within the targeted group who were from a variety of backgrounds. Surveys and reflection papers that have been collected by the participants indicated that the goals were successfully achieved.

Besides, this project helped to gain many valuable skills in navigating individual change. As a change leader, I have realized that I can organize and monitor events and navigate individuals well, however, I do sometimes lack in my communication skills. Being very direct and task-oriented could limit me to being an effective change leader since change itself is very complex and contains intense human psychology. This need necessitates me to develop further on effective empathic communication styles. Lastly, the insights learned will continue to shape my leadership style and help me evolve as a culturally aware leader.

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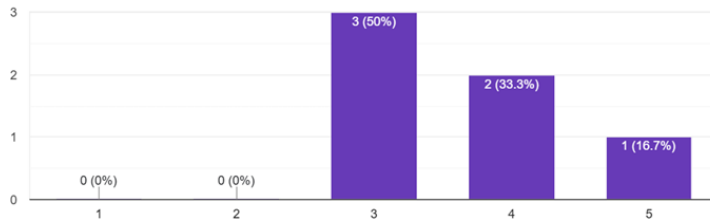
# Appendix

## Pre-Workshop Survey Results

How would you rate your current level of awareness and understanding of cultural differences?

6 responses

Copy

3 (50%) at value 3, 2 (33.3%) at value 4, 1 (16.7%) at value 5, 0 (0%) at values 1 and 2

Have you previously participated in discussions or received training on cultural differences?

6 responses
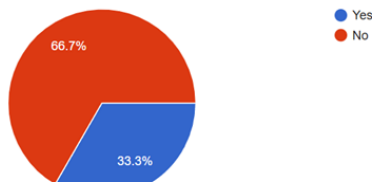
Copy

Yes 33.3%
No 66.7%

**Figure 1**

How do you think understanding cultural differences will help you communicate with people from various backgrounds at Utwente?

6 responses

At the UT there are people from all over the world, with many different cultures. By understanding cultural differences, I can adapt what and how I communicate. In some cultures, it is more appropriate to take responsibility for a task by yourself, and involve others when you are finished. In other cultures, it is appreciated to involve fellow students from the start on any work you do. By being able to understand this difference, and many others, I can communicate better to decrease the risk of conflict and improve quality of work, and the enjoyment in communication with others.

I guess understanding cultural differences might be somewhat helpful in communicating with people from various backgrounds at Utwente. It could maybe help me not offend anyone accidentally. But honestly, I'm not sure how much of a difference it would really make.

It will help me by knowing what they would see as polite or rude so we don't start off on bad terms and can make me more flexible towards for example culture specific holidays

Help me to be aware of do's and not to do's and understand why people are happy or upset about certain things. Understanding the reaction and behavior of people better.

Communicate better

**Figure 2**

# Post- Survey Results:

How would you evaluate your understanding and awareness of cultural differences after attending the workshop?
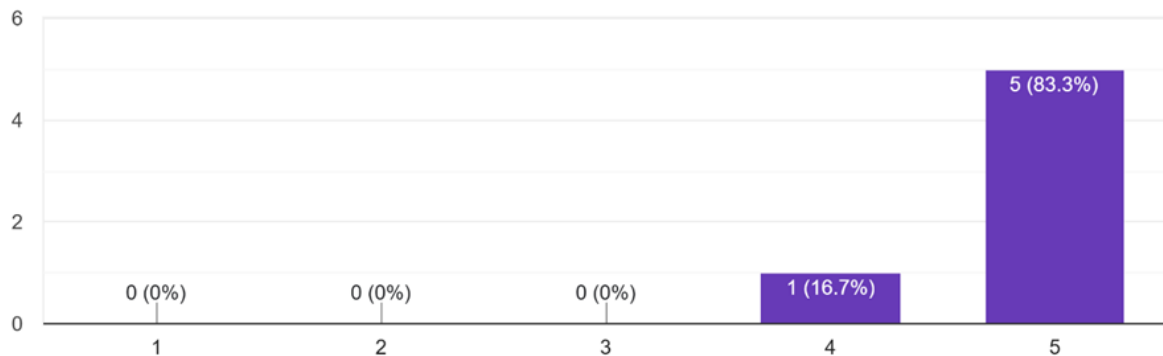
6 responses



*Figure 3*

Which parts of the workshop were most effective in raising your awareness of cultural differences?

6 responses

7 points of different cultures together with the scenario the combination made it

It was interesting to see in which areas we have culturally different mindsets. (Trompenaars' cultural dimensions). Especially, I realized that most of our communication problems with other UT students derived from indirect/direct approach.

Interactive discussion about an ethical dilemma.

seeing the similarity between the concepts and the situation presented.

Discussion at the end

The explanation before the discussions gave me the most awareness

*Figure 4*

Do you feel more comfortable / confident interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds after attending the workshop?

6 responses
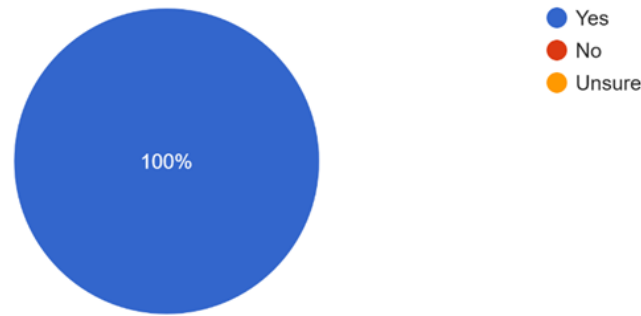


**Legend:**
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

100%

*Figure 5*

What additional activities or topics would you suggest for future workshops on cultural awareness?

5 responses

Maybe address an issue where somebody doesn't feel comfortable in a setting in the Netherlands and address why it could be and see how both cultures react

More questions/scenarios can be asked to measure difference of awareness level before and after workshops. What kind of activities/ workshops can be done by university can be researchable.

making cultural awareness matters on understanding the importance of the situation faced.

There were similar ideas from similar backgrounds, i would be interested in hearing about reasonings why its this way or some facts about this outcome, or maybe another discussion about how to consider this when working together

More questions and maybe more controversial topics for discussion

*Figure 6*

# Igniting Innovation: Enhancing Creative Thinking in Higher Education

Mark Zhitchenko

# 1. Introduction

*"Creativity is understood to support the acquisition, transfer, and application of knowledge in schools and, hence, to contribute to an innovative and flourishing national economy."* (Lewis, 2008)

The quote above describes how crucial creativity is for education, nevertheless, it is being neglected by disciplines unrelated to art or design (Roth et al., 2021).

While some studies encourage creativity in science, stating that acquiring factual knowledge alone is insufficient for nurturing practical know-how (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014), it is still unimplemented in academia globally or to a full extent due to educational policies that drive standardisation of education and lack of training resources for teaching staff(Roth et al., 2021).

The "uncreative" trend continues to grow, according to the study conducted by Adobe in 2012 and 2016 across the USA, UK, Germany, Japan, and France. Less than half of the respondents (39% in 2012 and 41% in 2016) considered themselves creative, and only about a quarter felt they were fulfilling their creative potential (Skillicorn, 2022). In addition to that, the feeling that the education system is stifling creativity has risen to 70% in the US as of 2012.

Regarding more recent research, it was found by Adobe that 56% of people at their peak of creativity (13-23 years old) consider themselves creative, and this number falls to 44% in people aged 24 or above (Shi et al., 2020).

While numbers grow with time, it is slow. In addition, the science of creativity is still a grey area, and it is difficult to measure creative potential with performance indicators.

Creativity enhances problem-solving skills, drives innovation, and adapts to the ever-changing demands of the modern world (Sawyer & Henriksen, 2023). By fostering creativity in education, students would be empowered to think critically and unconventionally and learn how to utilise creativity in innovation for future success.

Nevertheless, considering all the benefits that link creativity with innovation (Sawyer & Henriksen, 2023), it is important to study it and encourage the educational system to promote creativity courses among all disciplines.

## 1.1 Research question

With the problem described above in mind, a research question follows:

*"How does inclusion of creativity intervention in education affect students' creativity in higher education?"*

# 2. Change goals

In the light of the above-mentioned problem, two change goals follow. The first change goal states:

- After the intervention, students should improve their creative abilities, and understand creativity better.

As Theodore Levitt once said *"Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things."* While being creative is beneficial on a personal level as it improves problem-solving (Aldous, 2005), it also helps innovation (Lewis, 2008) which is crucial for global progress.

Nevertheless, it is only feasible to stay within the scope of the University of Twente (UT). Therefore, the second goal states:

- Raise awareness among students and course coordinators about the importance of creativity in bachelor education regardless of the programme.

While technical sciences (like TCS, BIT, AM) at UT offer students tasks that require creativity to complete, there are no programmes that teach students creativity itself. Such a trend can prevent students from improving their problem-solving and unconventional thinking. According to Cialdini, R. (2016, Chapter 3) something that has gotten a lot of attention will be seen as important, therefore it is critical to draw attention to the nature of creativity instead of just practising it in the background.

By contributing towards helping students' understanding of this complex phenomenon, and showing them how to improve their creative abilities the overall quality of education at the University of Twente will increase, as graduates will have improved innovative abilities (Lewis, 2008).

# 3. Change approach

To measure whether change goals were achieved, an experiment involving an intervention as well as pre-, post- and longitudinal tests were used.

## 3.1 Testing

While creativity is a complex quality to measure, it can be broken down into attributes that make it up (Olson et al., 2021), the main one being divergent thinking. Such thinking is employed when an open-ended task is given. It is considered to be a problem-solving part of creative thinking (Runco, 2014).

Opposed to convergent thinking (the ability to come up with a single optimal solution in a linear way (Olson et al., 2021)), divergent thinking is characterised as a web-like and connections-based way to generate multiple, unique solutions (Runco, 2014).

While there are multiple ways of manual creativity evaluation, e.g. Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, they are very laborious and time-consuming. For this study, a Divergent Association Task by Olson et al. (2021) was used. It is a robust, and scientifically proven way to measure divergent thinking using computational, automatised methods. While the creativity Likert scale was also an option, it was decided to avoid it due to the bias of self-report data.

Divergent Association Task was used to measure the divergent thinking of participants in pre- post- and delayed tests. The measured variable was the percentile they scored. While pre- and post-tests took place at the beginning and end of the workshop respectively, the delayed test was handed to participants remotely one week later (Figure 1).
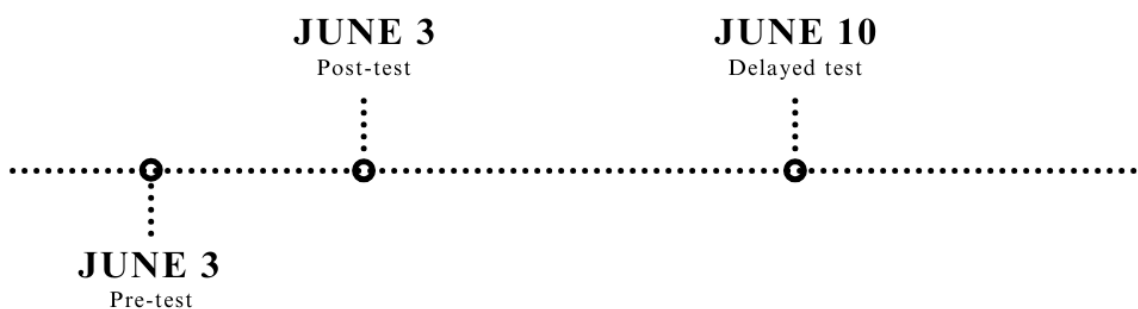
**JUNE 3**
Post-test

**JUNE 10**
Delayed test

**JUNE 3**
Pre-test

*Figure 1 "Testing timeline"*

## 3.2 Intervention design

To achieve the goal of improving students' creative abilities and their understanding of the concept, a workshop was designed. The structure of the workshop involved two parts, a presentation about creativity, and 3 creativity training exercises developed by Gu et al. (2023).

During a creativity presentation, students were required to express their opinions on what is creativity as well as go through scientific definitions described by Sawyer & Henriksen (2023), Roth et al., (2021) and others, to discuss the topic of the importance of creativity in education. By introducing the audience to a concept related to the subject yet to be addressed, one can nudge behavioural change (Cialdini, R.,(2016, Chapter 9). In this case, behavioural change would be a conscious acknowledgement of creative thinking.

To make the workshop entertaining and appealing to the target group of students, a short discussion format was chosen to keep attention locked on the workshop topic. Short, fun, yet scientifically accurate facts were presented to participants to be both informative and entertaining. Such short discussions included the quick test to determine which side of the brain

is more dominant by clasping hands together. According to Mohr et al. (2003) and Ida, Y. (1988), by observing whether a left or right thumb is on the top of the clasped hand gesture, we could tell which side of the brain is more dominant, determining whether we tend to be analytical or creative. Additionally, a trick described by Cialdini, R. (2016, Chapter 4) of addressing the audience as "you" was used to create a more personal and engaging atmosphere.

Additionally, based on a study conducted by Förster et al. (2005), found that deviancy implying images increase creativity. Therefore the following 1 minute long video was presented to the participants to draw their interest to the unique nature of creativity.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXrJRuEIwBQ
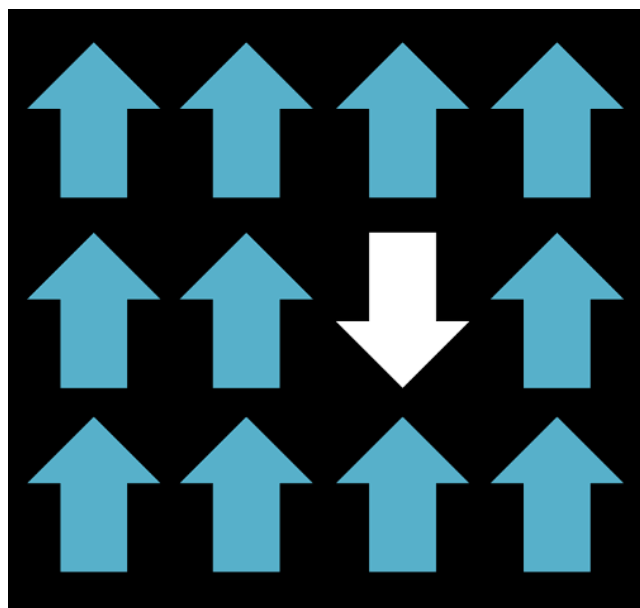


*In59seconds, 2014*

Creativity exercises were presented in the form of tasks students need to complete, they are: "Inspirational Inventions", "Words Association" and "Constrained Problems" (Gu et al., 2023). These exercises improve students' creative thinking skills, generative abilities and divergent thinking (Gu et al., 2023).

## 3.2.1 Inspirational inventions

In this exercise, students were exposed to 3 inventions: Flitz Bike, Rolling bench and metal detector slippers. All of these inventions played a role of inspiration for participants to come up with their own inventions and share them with others.

According to (Gu et al., 2023) this exercise aims to improve creative inspiration, which can lead to a motivational state of creative thinking (Gu et al., 2023; Oleynick et al., 2014; Thrash et al., 2010). The motivational nature of the exercise was taken into consideration when placing this task first in line, to set the right tone for the following experiments.

### 3.2.2 Constrained problem

In this task, participants were asked to find a solution to the following problem: "How to stop bees from getting inside through an open window?". They had to overcome constraints such as trivial solutions of closing the window or placing a net to generate new ideas (Gu et al., 2023).

This task is aimed at training participants' abilities to generate and recognise creative ideas (Gu et al., 2023; Cropley, 2006; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999).

### 3.2.3 Words association

The exercise consists of participants building a word chain to connect two words (Gu et al., 2023; Benedek et al.,2012).

For example: "kid–(parents)–(holiday)–(beach)–(sand)–(sea)–fish" (Gu et al., 2023). This exercise was chosen to be the staple of the creative thinking development in the scope of this research as it improves associative thinking, a main cognitive process of creativity (Benedek et al., 2012) as well as representing an indicator of divergent thinking based on performance during the exercise (Benedek et al., 2012).

# 4. Results

## 4.1 Participants sample

The workshop took place on June 3rd 2024 and involved 15 (out of 21 registered) participants from several programmes within the University of Twente. The intended 21 participants come from different studies in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 2 describes the ratio of master to bachelor students participants.
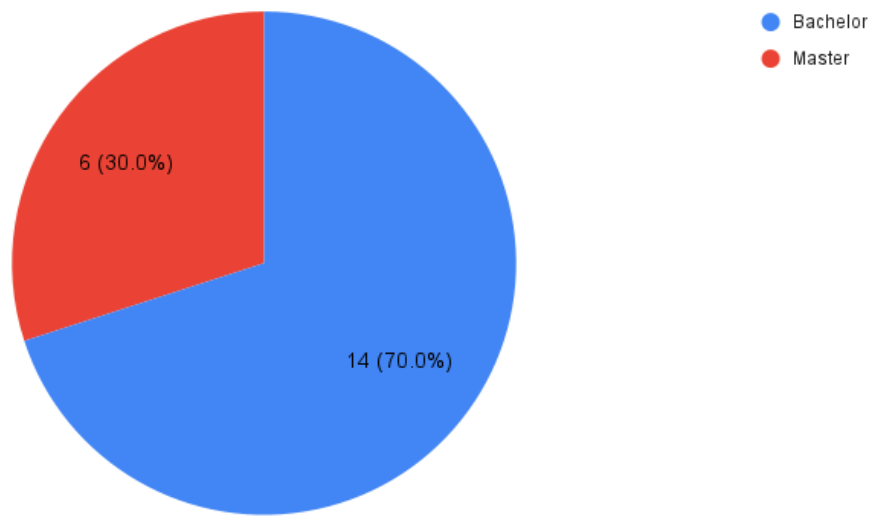
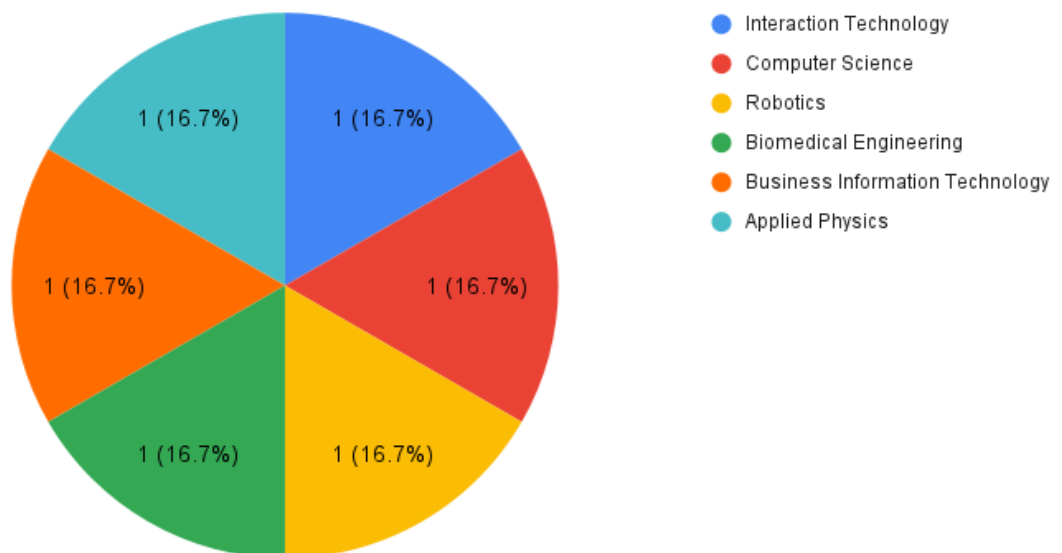*Figure 2 "Ratio of Master to Bachelor student participants"*



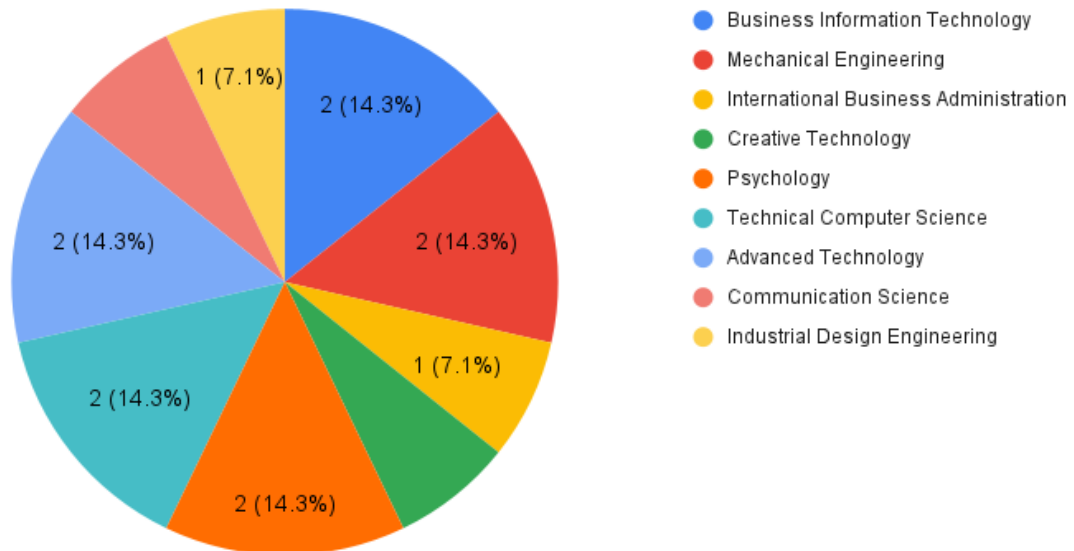*Figure 3 "Ratio of Master students participant's studies"*

*Figure 4 "Ratio of Bachelor students participant's studies"*

## 4.2 Test results

Results of the pre-test using divergent association tasks indicate that the average participants' creativity percentile is 64.62%. The post-test indicates that the average score percentile of participants is 70.36%.

While this does not ultimately lead to the conclusion that the workshop had improved participants' divergent thinking, it still indicates that average growth in percentile (including those that got lower results on a second try) is 5.7%, and 20% on excluding 4 out of 15 people who got lower results on the second try.

Five participants took the longitudinal test a week after the intervention, and the results show an average growth of 3% in the percentile score. Nevertheless, 2 out of 5 students had worse results than after the post-test during the intervention. Nevertheless, comparing the results of the longitudinal test to the pre-test results, an average growth of 10% in percentile score is noted, with 1 out of 5 students scoring less on the third test.

## 4.3 Participants' definitions of creativity

Before participating in exercises, or any discussion on the topic of creativity, participants have been asked to define what creativity is. Only 2 out of 12 participants have defined creativity as something related to innovation or creating a new "product". The rest of the participants linked definitions to art, imagination, doing something that is deemed impossible, etc (see Appendix A).

## 4.4 Participant's opinions

At the end of the workshop participants were asked their opinions on the workshop, as well as suggestions, see the list below:

| What do you think about the workshop? What did you learn from it? |
| --- |
| Creative |
| Lekker |
| Very fun |
| Free food |
| Fun! Different types of thinking |
| Creative |
| Informative |
| Spasiba |
| Random and cool |
| Creative and indeed free food |
| Divergent and convergent thinking |
| creativity can be learned and developed further |

| |
|---|
| Loved it. So far the best lunchtime spent |
| Had to activate my brain (very difficult) |
| I like the suggestions for training creativity |
| Pretty cool- convergent vs. divergent thinking? |
| Very interesting, I learned from it |
| Diversity |
| Divergent |
| The right and left-hand thing was funny gonna try that with friends |
| Creativity can be developed |
| Thanks for the food |
| I learned I'm not creative |
| for future iterations: would give suggestions of how to implement the examples you gave daily |

*Figure 4 "Participants' feedback"*

# 5. Discussion

## 5.1 Interpretation of findings

The intervention has brought significant interest from participants and peers in research. Results suggest that targeted creativity interventions can have a positive impact on students' divergent thinking abilities. The increase in average creativity percentiles indicates that even brief, focused interventions can foster creative growth. This, in turn, suggests that the first change goal was achieved.

The fact that participants' increase in percentile score of divergent association tasks reduced comparing pre-test and third test, may imply that a single intervention format does lose its effect over time, and a more regular intervention practice should take place.

The feedback from participants emphasised the enjoyment and perceived value of the workshop, suggesting that such interventions are not only effective but also well-received. It indicates that the design of the workshop has managed to capture the target audience's interest. One of the participants directly referred to one of the short format activities: "The right and left-hand thing was funny gonna try that with friends", referring to the test of clasped hands from before. This positive reception is crucial for adopting and integrating creativity training in educational curricula, as its development relies on students' initiative. The fact that the majority of feedback was about new topics learned and a better understanding of creativity, implies that the second change goal was achieved to the extent of student awareness.

While initially, a meeting with Alma Schaafstal with the networking help of Desiree Van Dun was supposed to have taken place, it was moved to an approximate date of winter 2024, due to time constraints. This implies that the second change goal was not achieved to the extent of the University of Twente course coordinators' awareness, due to unforeseen circumstances.

The variation in participants' initial definitions of creativity highlights a common misconception that creativity is primarily associated with art and imagination, rather than a broader capacity for innovation and problem-solving. Such a trend highlights the importance of creativity intervention in education, to help students improve their innovative skill sets, which are critical for personal and professional success (World Economic Forum, 2023; Lewis, 2008).

The intervention's success at UT provides a model that can be replicated and adapted in other educational settings. Raising awareness among educators and students about the importance of creativity is a vital step towards embedding it within the core curriculum.

## 5.2 Limitation of findings

While this study has set a direction for future research, there are multiple ways future research can take place. This intervention covers mostly divergent thinking, which does not encompass the whole creative abilities spectrum. Future research should aim to include a broader range of creative skills to provide a more comprehensive understanding of creativity.

Additionally, to determine the long-term effects of such interventions, longitudinal studies are needed. The data gathered is not enough to support the implication that the effects of such intervention are diminishing over time.

Focusing on specific student groups, such as those in the Electrical Engineering, Mathematics, and Computer Science (EEMCS) faculty, can reveal whether the intervention's effectiveness varies across disciplines. Comparative studies across different academic fields can help in determining if the intervention can be generalised or if discipline-specific approaches are required.

To ensure the robustness of findings, future research should involve larger sample sizes and rigorous quantitative evaluation methods to check for statistical significance. Advanced statistical techniques and detailed data analysis can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of the intervention and highlight the most impactful components.

# 6. Advice

Several factors of this intervention could be improved with extended effort. This chapter will consist of three sections. The first one aims to give students an overview of how to develop creativity. The second one describes possible ways that the University of Twente can help its students become more creative using organisational efforts. Finally, the last section will discuss how this research can be improved in the future.

## 6.1 Advice for Students

Creativity is not a static trait but a dynamic skill that can be developed with practice. Engaging in regular creativity exercises can help maintain and enhance creative thinking abilities. Activities such as brainstorming sessions, divergent thinking tasks, and creative problem-solving exercises can stimulate your mind and keep your creative mind sharp.

It is important to develop your creativity to be successful nowadays, as it is comprised of skills crucial for innovation (Sawyer & Henriksen, 2023), which is the second most demanded skill within the current job market situation (World Economic Forum, 2023).

It was discovered that the majority of students simply do not understand the concept of creativity, and therefore it is important to broaden students' understanding of it. Expanding your view of creativity can open up more opportunities for applying creative thinking in various fields. Creativity can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. Adopting a growth mindset enables one to view challenges as opportunities for growth and creativity as a skill that can be improved. This perspective encourages continuous learning and experimentation, essential for creative development.

## 6.2 Advice for the University of Twente

The workshop's success highlights the need for integrating regular creativity training into the academic curriculum. This could be achieved through dedicated courses, workshops, or integrating creativity modules into existing courses like it is done with academic skills courses.

It is important to offer regular workshops to students, as findings imply that there may be a diminishing effect of the short intervention. Such workshops could be scheduled periodically throughout the academic year to maintain and enhance students' understanding of creativity as well as skills that encompass it. The vagueness in students' definitions of creativity underscores the need for educational initiatives that emphasize the broad applications of creativity beyond art and imagination. Seminars or courses that focus on creativity in innovation and problem-solving across various fields could help in this regard.

Establish a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and experimentation. Provide resources such as creative spaces, tools, and materials that facilitate creative thinking and prototyping. Recognize and reward creative efforts through competitions, showcases, and awards.

Finally, encouraging further research into the impact of creativity interventions can help in developing more effective programs. Collaborations between different departments can lead to innovative approaches to creativity training.

# 7. Learning experience

I believe my change approach helped me understand creativity better myself, as I had to develop a framework of related studies to have a basis for my change intervention. Regarding my change approach, I've learned that it is important to consider the interests of your target group, as even the most valuable change project can be left unnoticed without proper execution. I think that the entertaining, hands-on aspect plays an important role in my change intervention, as it helps to digest wicked concepts such as creativity and increase learning speed.

Nevertheless, there are aspects that I could improve on, such as extending the longevity of the intervention effects by providing instructions on how to learn creativity on your own.

My personal coaching sessions helped me greatly during my personal development within this project. It was a great opportunity for me to learn more about my creativity, as that subject was the staple of both coaching and change intervention. I've learned how to be more consistent with my creativity and "tame" it by learning to focus on one thing at a time. This was particularly important for me due to my profile of "Motivator" according to Insights Discovery, as it states that I can benefit from control and direction, understanding of procedures and slowing the pace down.

During feedback sessions, I've received valuable suggestions from my peers regarding the improvement of my change intervention during its development, such as using Wooclap.com. Nevertheless, when it comes to the design of my change intervention, the greatest support was received from my supervisor Desiree van Dun. She helped me greatly by advising me on the format of my intervention as well as refining the practices that I implemented along the way.

Concerning my development as a change leader, I would like to refer to the "Effective Leadership in Organizations" module of PoC. Considering, that before I was closely resembling a transformational leader, due to my tendency of generating ideas and being an initiator of the research, now, I feel like I have been shifting towards instrumental leadership by being more systematic and analytical, thanks to the coaching sessions. It resonates with my idea described in individual reports during ELiO, that I believe there is no ideal leadership style, rather than ideal leader, as I don't want to encompass a single type, rather than to learn to leave my comfort zone of transformational leadership and approach the problem from multiple perspectives.

Reflecting on this change project, I believe that I have secured an image of a transformative leader, as well as learned how to employ other leadership styles in my work. This project has shown me that I am capable of changing people's perspectives on complex topics and helping me utilise my own creativity to my full potential.

To conclude, I would like to say that the Processes of Change honours track was truly a journey for me, it taught me how to become a better leader, academic writer, innovator and team player. It closely resonated with my study of Business & Information Technology in multiple aspects and served as a great support for my upbringing as a change leader.

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# Appendix A

**Participant's opinions on what is creativity (pre-test).**

What is creativity?

| |
|---|
| Something I don't have |
| Thinking outside the box |
| Imagination |
| Out of the box |
| Something I don't have |
| Art |
| Coming up with ideas |
| Expanding your brain connections |
| Blow the mind |
| innovation |
| Combining seemingly unrelated idea into a new "product" |
| putting in practice things people dont think is possible |
| Finding solutions |
| Thinking in not the mainstream expected way |
| Problem-solving |

# Appendix B

Invitation to the workshop message:

Free lunch alert!

Hi there!

I invite you to a workshop on creativity and innovation! Learn how to develop creative thinking and how creativity helps with innovative ideas.

When: June 3, 2024, from 12:45 to 13:30

Where: Carre 3D

What's in store:

Discussion on creativity and innovation

Practical exercises to develop creativity

Creativity test

Why you should come:

Learn what creativity is all about

Help a study's purpose of raising awareness on the importance of creativity in education!

Collaborate with like-minded individuals

Free, inclusive lunch will be provided including beverages and cookies!

For more information refer to the registration form:

https://forms.gle/rsgpTuiwygE4DsSF8

Spaces are limited!

Hope to see you there!

# Encouraging Assertive Communication in University Students

*Ruxandra Ursu*

*Supervisor: Dr. Rashimah Rajah*

*Processes of Change Honours Programme,*

*University of Twente*

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is assertive communication?

Assertive communication is a communication style that implies expressing one's thoughts, feelings and needs, in a clear and respectful manner, while also considering the rights and needs of others. It is a communication style that seeks to achieve personal and instrumental goals (Pfalman 2017). However, St. Lawrence (1987) recognized more than 20 different definitions of assertion, used frequently in research. Therefore, definitions of assertiveness might differ across academic works.

In their literature review study, Postolati (2017) gathered the following benefits of assertiveness, and assertive behaviour:

Assertiveness promotes equality in interpersonal relationships, and predicts success in relationships. Assertive individuals were shown to be willing to express their thoughts and feelings, while not being interested in offending other people. Assertiveness prevents personal helplessness, and assertive people are less likely to experience the herd instinct (especially in the case of life events), and to believe misinformation.

Individuals that present higher levels of assertiveness were shown to be happier, healthier, more honest and rarely manipulated, which implies better mental health. Moreover, assertiveness was discovered to be an important sign of success in all areas of business, especially in leading positions and in management. By Postolati (2017), this vocational success can also be linked to the fact that assertive people showed better performance in executing higher complexity tasks.

Another benefit of assertiveness and assertiveness training is increased confidence levels (Insani, Sanyata, and Sutanti 2023). Assertive training was shown to positively influence self image and personal reflection in high school students. Moreover, it was also shown to lower social anxiety, as students who underwent assertiveness training were more confident in stating their opinions.
There is, however, a curvilinear relationship between assertiveness and effectiveness in leadership (Ames and Flynn 2007). It was shown that leaders who are less or more assertive than the middle levels of assertiveness, were evaluated worse than other leaders, who presented medium levels of assertiveness. The study also recognized assertiveness as a frequent theme in leadership, and especially in topics of leadership weakness.

From this, it can be concluded that in leadership situations, assertiveness should be used wisely. Ames and Flynn (2007) state, however, that in the case of management positions, there is a linear relation between assertiveness and perceived effectiveness, hence higher assertiveness levels are evaluated more positively in management, than they are in leadership.

## 1.2 Current Situation

Parray, Waqar, and Kumar (2016) have concluded that there is a lack of assertiveness in students, and suggested that training in assertive communication would be beneficial for students. In addition, Asrowi and Muya (2013) concluded in their study about assertiveness in high school students, that students respond to assertiveness training, and that their skills improved during the training.

In their research paper about assertiveness, Pfalman (2017) states that more research is needed on the topic of assertiveness, since there are many discrepancies in findings across different studies. This of course leads to it being difficult to draw consequential conclusions regarding assertiveness.

However, being aware of the importance and impact of assertive communication is not enough for people to use it. The Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Ajzen (1991) points that an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour is the primary predictor of whether they will actually do so. This intention is influenced by three factors: attitude towards the behaviour, social norms and perceived behavioural control. Therefore, by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991), students need intent and practice in order to gain new communication skills.

There are several skills that are linked to higher levels of assertiveness. Developing assertive communication skills involves learning techniques such as active listening, using 'I' statements, expressing feelings and needs clearly, giving constructive feedback and setting boundaries.

The importance of these skills in learning assertive communication is supported by the assertiveness workbook of Paterson PhD (2022), and also by the case study by Chakraborty

(2009). In this case study, the new CEO of Finnie Inc. underwent assertiveness training, and after six months, found that he improved his self-confidence, decision making skills, and was able to create and nurture honest relations with the company's stakeholders. Additionally, poor listening skills, and the difficulty to give constructive feedback were recognised as communication challenges in professional contexts (Stokes Rice 2022).

## 1.3 Target Group

The target group for this project consisted of international university students, aged 18-25. There was no requirement regarding the course the students were enrolled in, or previous academic or cultural background, however a medium or lower level of knowledge of communication theory was required.

This target group was chosen because these students are part of international environments, and therefore are exposed to various communication styles. Moreover, students are undergoing their development period, in which learning new skills is easier, because the habit of learning is used actively. Being already part of a learning environment, in this case the university, means that they are already accommodated with gathering new information and learning new skills.

## 1.4 Sense of Urgency

Being part of international environments for the duration of their academic journey, students are often exposed to various cultures and cultural aspects that can manifest in different communication styles, stress management techniques and work ethics.

This can pose conflicts in teams, especially because academic projects are often accompanied not only by different visions of success, but also by different approaches to handling challenges (such as lack of time, resources and knowledge). A lack of proper communication of goals and methods can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety and stress, and sometimes to verbal aggression. Therefore, raising awareness and providing advice about the practice of assertiveness will facilitate the communication of students in teams, and will lead to more experienced communicators, especially in students' future professional lives.

Moreover, the academic education of students represents the perfect 'playground' for mastering communication skills that will benefit them not only in their academic and professional life, but also in their personal relationships. This entails a period of trial and error in which students can experiment and learn quality skills, with the lack of serious repercussions.

# 2. Change Goals

The main change goal of the project is:

1. *To raise awareness about the importance of assertive communication, and how to recognise and differentiate between the three main styles of communication: passive, aggressive and assertive.*

Subgoals:

(a)  Students can effectively recognize and differentiate between the different styles of communication.

(b)  Students recognize the importance of their communication style in day to day life.
(c)  Students recognize the examples provided for the communication styles as being reflective of situations they have been in their academic life.

Additionally, the project includes secondary change goal, namely:

2. *To provide advice that will result in facilitating the practice of assertive communication for university students, targeted towards group activities and communication with fellow group members.*

Subgoals:

(a)  Provide advice that students can use to further develop their communication style.

(b)  Students consider that the advice given is easy to understand and to apply in their day to day life.

Considering the main goal of the project, this intervention can be classified as a change of awareness. As for the second change goal, the aim of the project is not to instil behavioural change, but only to provide a list of tools that students can utilise, should they want to develop their communication skills.

# 3. Change Approach

For this change project, the chosen method of change is podcasts. There are several reasons for which podcasts are an effective change tool. They are accessible and convenient, since they do not require any special preparation or conditions, except for the device of choice of the participant. They offer a personalised learning experience, since each participant can listen again or skip passages as they see fit, to match their learning style. They offer the opportunity for feedback and interaction, as participants can contact the organiser for clarifications and feedback. Furthermore, podcasts are also advantageous for the organiser, as they can curate the content of the episodes as they see fit.

Podcasts are also an effective tool for learning. In their study, Nozari and Siamian (2015) found that teaching with podcasts increased the level of Arabic for high school male students. Moreover, it was found that podcasts stimulate students' imagination and vocabulary, and it can lead to them gaining new interests (Widodo and Gunawan 2019).

To begin, a group of 10 students interested in finding out about assertive communication were contacted, and a survey was created for the students, to determine factors such as their motivation, prior knowledge of the three main communication styles, and their predominant style of communication.

The main phase of the change intervention consisted of 3 podcast episodes, of 15-25 minutes each. The structure of the episodes was the following:

- Episode 1: The definition of the three main styles of communication: passive, aggressive and assertive. Verbal and visual cues for recognising them. Examples, adapted to the experience of university students, especially in the context of group work.

- Episode 2: An interview with Martian Slagter, personality coach and lecturer at the University of Twente. Topics discussed are: When and how should students be assertive? What are the signs of low and high assertion levels? What role do lecturers play in the process of students asserting themselves? What are some steps students can take to become more assertive?
- Episode 3: Advice for practising assertive communication, which include: saying 'No', using 'I' statements, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, supporting one's peers. Examples used to illustrate how each of those tips would look like in real life.

This phase lasted approximately 1 week. After finishing the podcast, the students were asked to participate in a final survey, to determine the results of the intervention.

## 3.1 Structure of the Surveys

The pre-intervention survey was formed by combining insights from two tests on assertiveness communication style created by University of Oxford (2015) and Utah Education Network (n.d.) respectively.

The test of University of Oxford (2015) consists of scenario-based questions which refer to real-life situations, such as being in queue at a store. Each question presents three answer options, and based on the most common type of answer, the level of assertiveness of an individual can be found. In the case of the test of Utah Education Network (n.d.), it evaluates personal beliefs, communication behaviour, decision-making tendencies, and personal characteristics, using questions such as 'Do you exhibit this behaviour?' and 'Which statement do you most agree with?'. For the pre-intervention survey, 6 questions were extracted from each of those two tests, and one more question was added, in which participants are asked to describe in one sentence, for each communication style, what they think that communication style looks or sounds like.

As for the post-intervention survey, likert scale was employed for several key statements, in order to measure students' perception and understanding of the communication styles. Each statement was accompanied by a five-point scale, where participants rated their level of agreement as follows: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Somewhat disagree; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Somewhat agree; 5 - Strongly agree. For other questions, unipolar rating scales were used, where students had the possibility to agree with a statement on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'Not really' and 5 being 'Yes'. The last question of this survey asked students to provide any further feedback on the intervention, should they wish to do so.

# 4. Results

## 4.1 Preliminary Survey Results

Out of 10 students who participated in the preliminary survey, 4 were not familiar with any of the communication styles, another 4 stated they had knowledge of all communication styles, and the remaining 2 had knowledge about a couple of the communication styles. Out of the 4 students that stated they have knowledge in all communication styles, only 2 were able to provide concrete and correct examples of how those communication styles could look like.

From the examples of the participants, it is understood that individuals tend to see assertiveness as a communication style that is closely related to aggressiveness, meaning that it involves somewhat aggressive language, and a demanding tone. This finding supports the need for this intervention, as the goal of the intervention is to raise awareness about the communication styles, and therefore clear up such misunderstandings.

Regarding the communication styles of the participants, 1 out of 10 participants presented an aggressive communication style, about 5 participants had a passive communication style, some of them leaning softly into assertive communication, and the rest of 4 participants presented a more assertive communication style.

As for the situations in which students tend to adopt certain styles of communication, it seems that giving negative feedback is particularly difficult for the students that participated in the survey. For instance, the question that received the most 'passive' responses was asking students what they would do if they received the wrong order at the restaurant, indicating that they would rather be unsatisfied with their order than cause negative feelings for the waiter, by pointing out their order is wrong.

## 4.2 Final Survey Results

According to the final survey, 9 out of 10 students considered that they have a better understanding of, and can successfully recognize assertive communication in their peers. The tips from the last episode were considered easy to understand by all students, and 9 out of 10 students considered them useful. As for the examples offered throughout the podcast, 9 students considered they are relatable for their university life. Out of the 10 students, 9 expressed that they want to further develop their communication skills, and that they will practise the tips offered in the last episode of the podcast, to improve their assertive communication skills.

The last question of the survey, asking students if they would like to add anything else in regards to the podcast and the intervention, revealed a powerful insight. One of the students expressed that they don't consider assertive communication important, seeing it as just a superficial way of delivering negative feedback to peers that 'cannot handle feedback'. This highlights a limitation of this change intervention, that being the manner in which assertiveness is perceived by certain people.

## 4.3 Discussion

Considering the results discovered in the final survey of the intervention, the following change goals were achieved:

1. *To raise awareness about the importance of assertive communication, and how to recognise and differentiate between the three main styles of communication: passive, aggressive and assertive.*

   Subgoals:

   (a)  Students can effectively recognize and differentiate between the different styles of communication.

   (b)  Students recognize the importance of their communication style in day to day life.

   (c)  Students recognize the examples provided for the communication styles as being reflective of situations they have been in their aca- demic life.

2. *To provide advice that will result in facilitating the practice of assertive communication for university students, targeted towards group activi- ties and communication with fellow group members.*

   Subgoals:

   (a) Provide advice that students can use to further develop their com- munication style.

   (b) Students consider that the advice given is easy to understand and to apply in their day to day life.

The success of goals 1(a)-(c) and 2(b) can be drawn from the answers of the students in the final survey, while the success of goal 2(a) is drawn from the content of the third episode of the podcast.

These results reveal that students respond to informative material about assertiveness, and the communication styles in general. Moreover, the desire of students to further develop their assertive communication skills highlights the positive impact of the podcast. The negative feedback of one of the students suggests a point of improvement for the intervention, that it may need to address misconceptions about assertiveness and emphasise its broader benefits, beyond delivering feedback.

In conclusion, while the podcast was largely effective in improving students' understanding of the communication styles, future interventions should consider a wider range of examples and addressing varying perceptions, to ensure all students recognize the value of assertive communication and the importance of being aware of one's communication style.

# 5. Advice for the Target Group

The results support the ability of international university students to be aware about the communication styles and the differences between them. Additionally, 9 out of 10 student participants expressed interest in developing their assertive communication skills. Therefore, the advice for the target group will be centred around ways to develop and enhance their communication skills in general, in order to suit all participants, not only those willing to develop assertiveness.

    1. Engaging in Active Participation

    Active participation is not only useful in building significant contribu- tion in a project or setting, but also in developing assertive communi- cation skills, as mentioned as well in the first episode of the podcast. Through participating actively, students have more opportunities to express and support their opinion, which can contribute to building assertive communication skills.

    2. Enhancing Nonverbal Communication

    Nonverbal communication accounts for a high percent of our total communication, alongside verbal communication. Moreover, as described in the first episode of the podcast, one of the ways to recognize someone's communication style is by observing their body language. Therefore, it is important to develop this aspect of communication as well. Students are advised to begin with recognizing nonverbal cues in their peers, and also self-analyse.

    3. Joining a Course/Group Focused on Developing (Assertive) Communi- cation Skills

    Courses offer the opportunity of sharing one's experience with other people that have the same interests and issues, thus providing the chance to give and receive feedback, and to gather insights from other people's experience in learning a skill, in this situation, communication skills. Furthermore, designing courses is a method commonly used in studies regarding communication, as also described in several research papers: Asrowi and Muya (2013); Insani, Sanyata, and Sutanti (2023); Widodo and Gunawan (2019).

# 6. Learning Experience

## 6.1 Creating the Podcast

Aside from its already discussed benefits, the podcast was chosen as the change tool since it offered me the most flexibility, considering my agglomerated schedule during my internship minor. My expectations were that the podcast would offer a straightforward and fast outcome, and allow me to spend more time on the report, and on my internship. The real situation proved to be rather different.

For recording the podcast, I used the DIY Podcast Studio provided by the Video Team UT. After recording the first episode, completely unprepared, I found that simply preparing topics for

discussion would not result in my desired outcome. That is why I began designing my scripts more closely, and also spent time recording myself on my mobile phone, to listen to how a sentence, or my intonation would sound like, so I could fit in the booked time slot of the podcast studio.

I edited the podcast using an online podcast editing software, which was an interesting and complex process. Although I would not have expected, the most difficult aspect about editing a podcast was removing breathing sounds, and filling words, such as 'um', which was a rather long process. By the time of recording the last episode, I had a good understanding of the best ways to record, use my tone of voice, where to start re-recording if I made mistakes while recording, and how to take notes I could use when editing the podcast.

If I would repeat the process again, I would research more about how to create a podcast beforehand, and I would allow myself more room to make mistakes and try different variants for an episode.

## 6.2 My Development as a Leader

My journey as a leader started during the Effective Leadership in Organizations Honours module, when I discovered that my leadership style is instrumental, with elements of transformational leadership. During this project, learning about assertive communication and its benefits, I decided this is a skill I must adopt for myself as well.

Assertiveness and decision making are essential in leadership, and can bring me closer to transformational leadership, which is the leadership style I would like to achieve. This project and the coaching sessions provided in this module gave me a proper idea of how to achieve those skills and implement them in my development as a leader. However, as Ames and Flynn (2007) revealed, assertiveness should be used wisely in leadership, and therefore, my learning of these skills has only begun. In the future, I plan to practise the same advice that I prepared for the students that participated in the project.
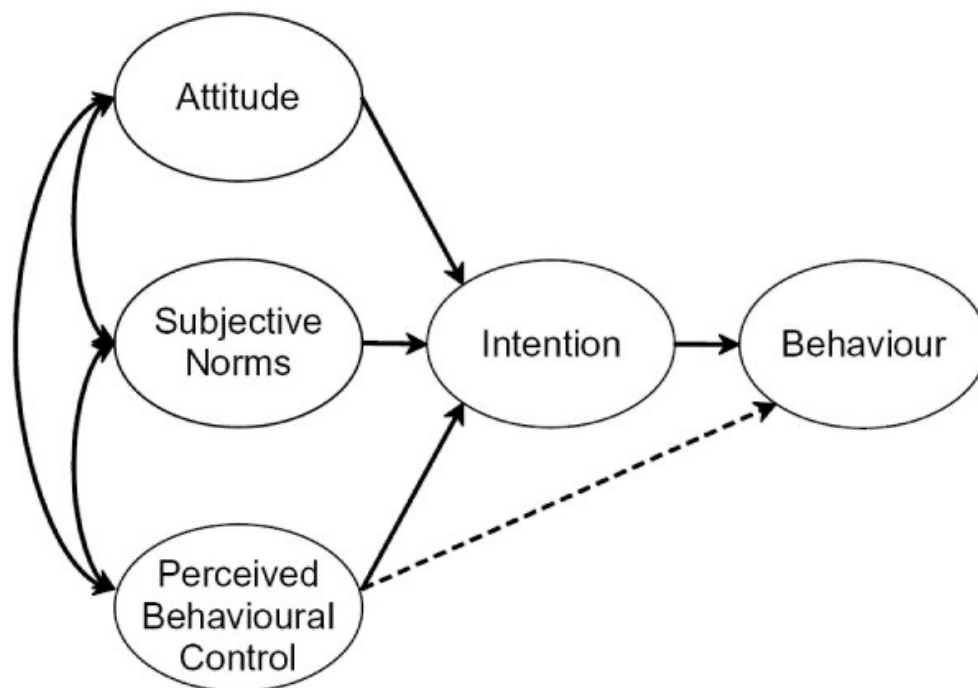
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# 7. Appendix

## 7.1  Appendix A: The Theory of Planned Behaviour - Picture
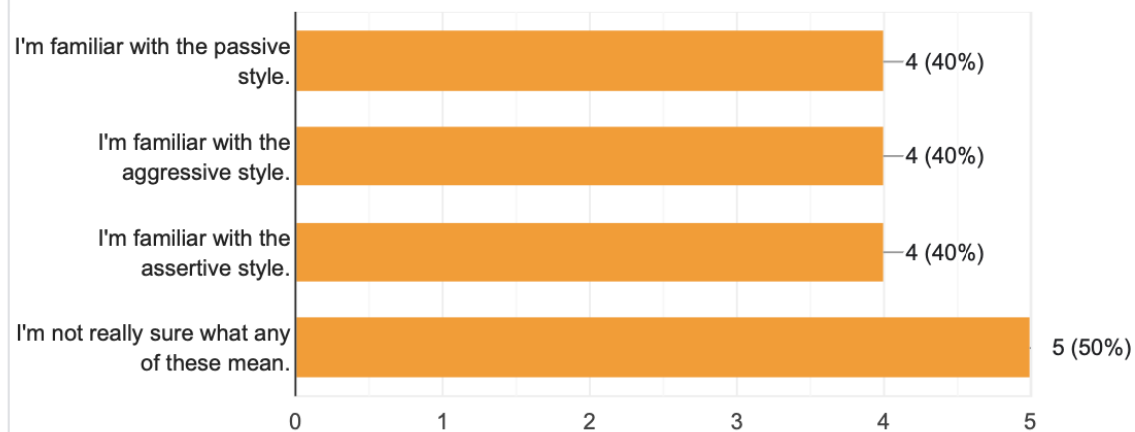


## 7.2  Appendix B: Podcast Link

Link to the Spotify podcast

# 7.3 Appendix C: Preliminary Survey Results

Are you familiar with the three main styles of communication: passive, aggressive and assertive?

☐ Copy

10 responses



| Label | Value |
|---|---|
| I'm familiar with the passive style. | 4 (40%) |
| I'm familiar with the aggressive style. | 4 (40%) |
| I'm familiar with the assertive style. | 4 (40%) |
| I'm not really sure what any of these mean. | 5 (50%) |

Please write a short, one sentence description, for what you think each of the communication styles means (it can also be an example) : passive, aggressive and assertive.

8 responses

Examples:
Passive: you are over tolerating to other people's points of view even if you don't agree with them.
Aggressive: you aggressively pushing your own points without compromising with the other person.
Assertive: you explain your own points and you let the other person also explain his points and aim to find a way to achieve satisfaction for both of you.

Passive: non-confrontational, prefer not to stir any emotion in the counterparty
Aggressive: confrontational mixed with emotions, often rude
Assertive: tactfully pushing through with your things, preferring not to invoke emotions whilst still getting the point across

Passive - you choose not to react to a situation that makes you annoyed/makes you angry
Aggressive- you react in a extreme way, violently
Assertive- avoid reacting so that you don't make things worse:')

1. For me, a passive style means that someone uses a lot of 'soft' words, such as: "[...] or at least that's what I am thinking" or "I kind of think that [...]"

2. For me, an aggresive style means that someone is trying to use a 'strong' language, such as "Get done the task by Monday at 8am" or "Why haven't you looked over what I've sent?"

3. For me, an assertive style is a mid point between the two aforementioned. If a leaeder uses an assertive style, then he firmly imposes his way of view. One example that comes to my head is a leader asking an employee who just doubted his decision: "Well, mister <employee name>, if I let the impression that I was asking for someone's advice then I misguided you and I am sorry for that.

passive: You ignore someone, or don't put effort into communication. Aggressive, you use aggression (duh) like shouting or demanding. Assertive, I imagine taking the role of the "bigger person" and making the other(s) look up to you ?

*Passive: Prioritizing need of people/ Soft spoken *Agressive: Speaking loudly/ Get frustrated easily *Assertive: Clearly states need and wants/ Confident/Good eye contact/ Compromise

Passive could mean not contributing much, reacting to what is being said around you. Aggressive just means aggressive, maybe being mean, disrespectful, or with a harsh tone. Assertive means balanced: not passive, as you contribute actively to the communication, but not too aggressive, as you don't try to take over the conversation.

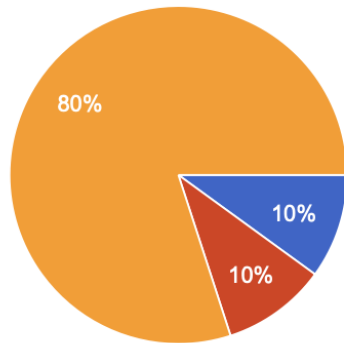Passive is trying to finish conversation
Aggressive is trying to express emotion
Assertive is trying to convince someone

You are a customer waiting in line to be served. Suddenly, someone steps in line ahead of you. You would:

Copy

10 responses



- Let the person be ahead of you since he/she is already in line.
- Pull the person out of line and make him/her go to the back of the line.
- Indicate to the person that you are in line and point out where the line begins.

80%

10%

10%

You are at your favorite restaurant and order a chicken sandwich with mayonnaise, but they give you one with salsa. You would:
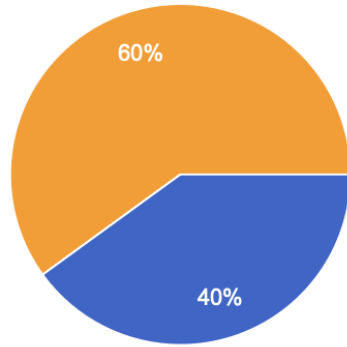
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10 responses
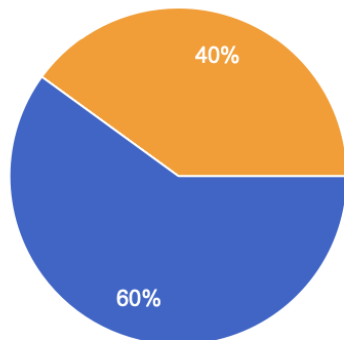


- Accept it since you (sort of) like salsa anyway.
- Refuse the sandwich and insist on seeing the manager to complain about the poor service.
- Call the waiter and indicate you ordered your sandwich with mayonnaise.

40%

60%

A friend drops in to say hello, but stays too long, preventing you from finishing an important task. You would:                                    Copy

10 responses

60%

40%

● Let the person stay, then try and squeeze your work in later.
● Tell the person to stop bothering you and to get out.
● Explain your need to finish your work and request he/she visit another time.

You take your game console to a shop for repairs and receive a written estimate. When you pick it up, you are billed for additional work and for an amount higher than the estimate. You would:                                    Copy

10 responses

60%

10%    30%
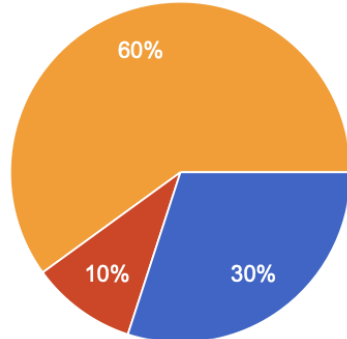
● Pay the bill since it must have needed the extra repairs anyway.
● Refuse to pay, and then complain to the head office or the Better Business Bureau.
● Indicate to the manager that you agreed only to the estimated amount, and then pay only that amount.

You are in a group discussion about a project at university that includes your mentor/supervisor. A colleague asks you a question about your work, but you don't know the answer. You would:
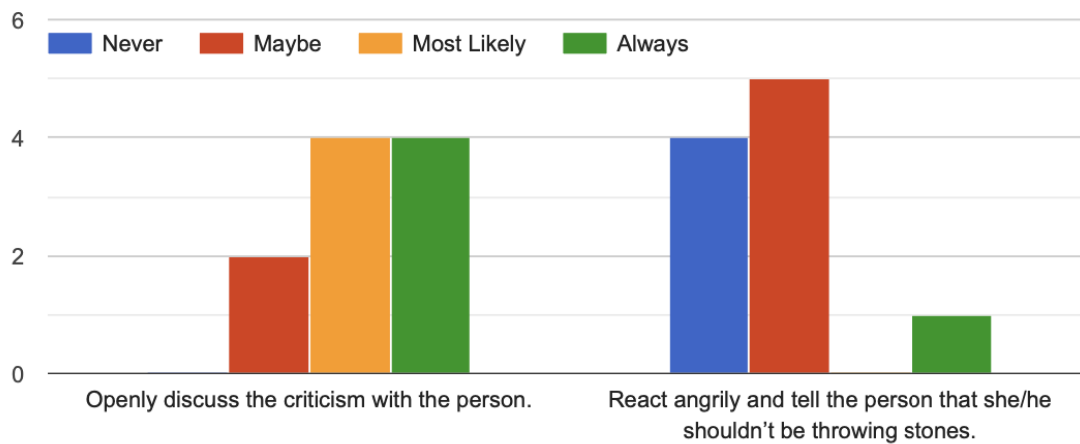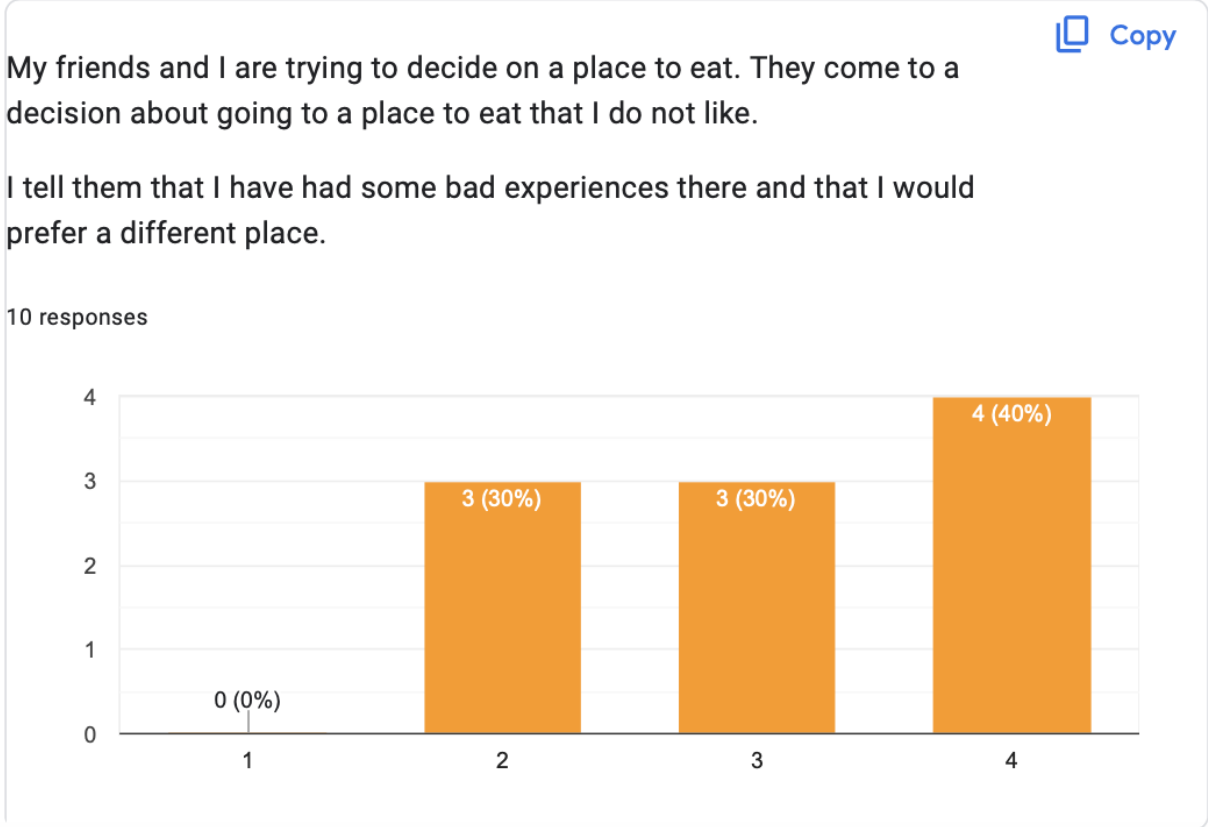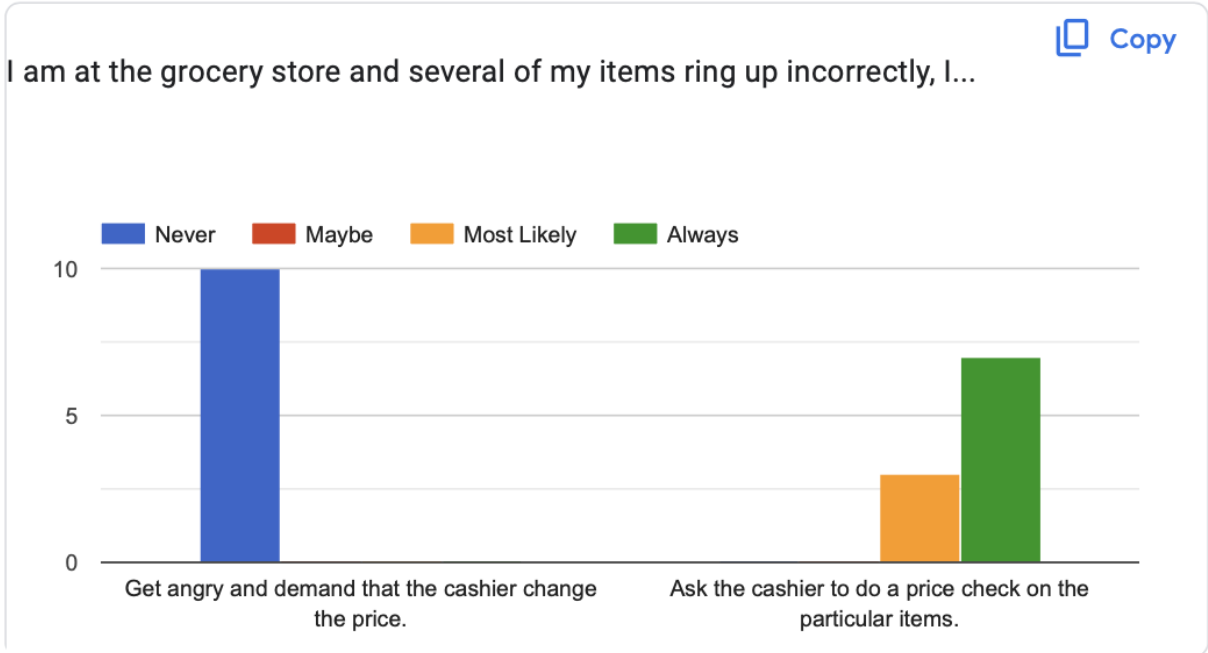
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10 responses
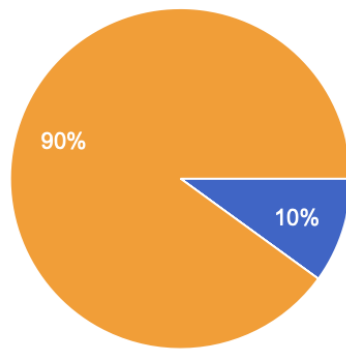


- ● Give your colleague a false answer so your mentor will think you are on top of things.
- ● Do not answer but attack your colleague by asking a question you know he/she could not answer.
- ● Indicate to your colleague you are unsure just now but offer to give him/her the information later.

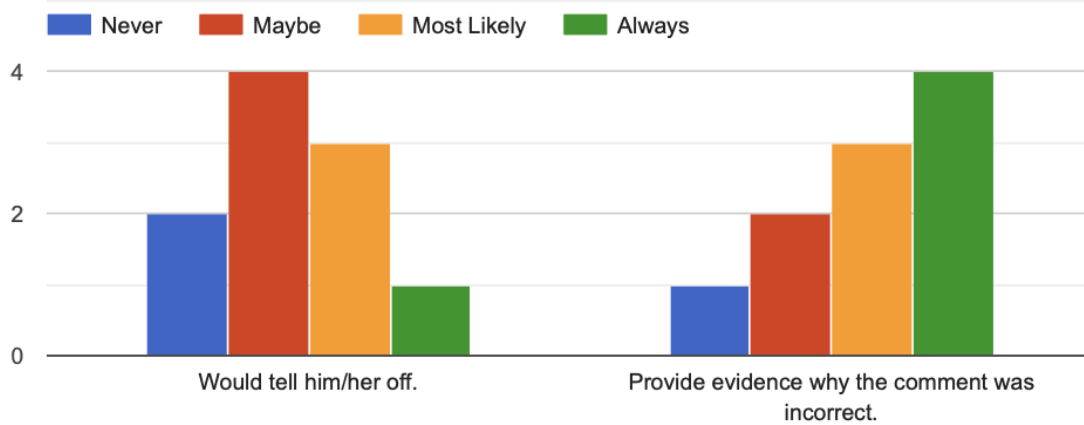90%

10%

Copy

When someone close to me unjustly criticizes my behavior, I ...



■ Never  ■ Maybe  ■ Most Likely  ■ Always

Openly discuss the criticism with the person.

React angrily and tell the person that she/he shouldn't be throwing stones.

Copy

## I am at the grocery store and several of my items ring up incorrectly, I...

Legend: Never, Maybe, Most Likely, Always



- Get angry and demand that the cashier change the price. — Never: 10
- Ask the cashier to do a price check on the particular items. — Most Likely: 3, Always: 7

Copy

## My friends and I are trying to decide on a place to eat. They come to a decision about going to a place to eat that I do not like.

I tell them that I have had some bad experiences there and that I would prefer a different place.

10 responses



- 1: 0 (0%)
- 2: 3 (30%)
- 3: 3 (30%)
- 4: 4 (40%)

Copy

## If someone I know well says something that hurts my feelings, I...



■ Never  ■ Maybe  ■ Most Likely  ■ Always

Copy

## If I am at a performance and someone keeps talking loudly, I...



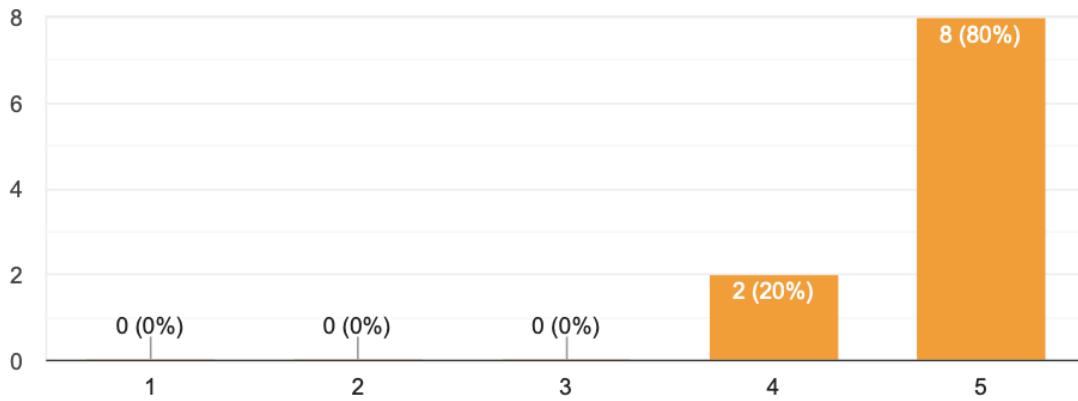■ Never  ■ Maybe  ■ Most Likely  ■ Always
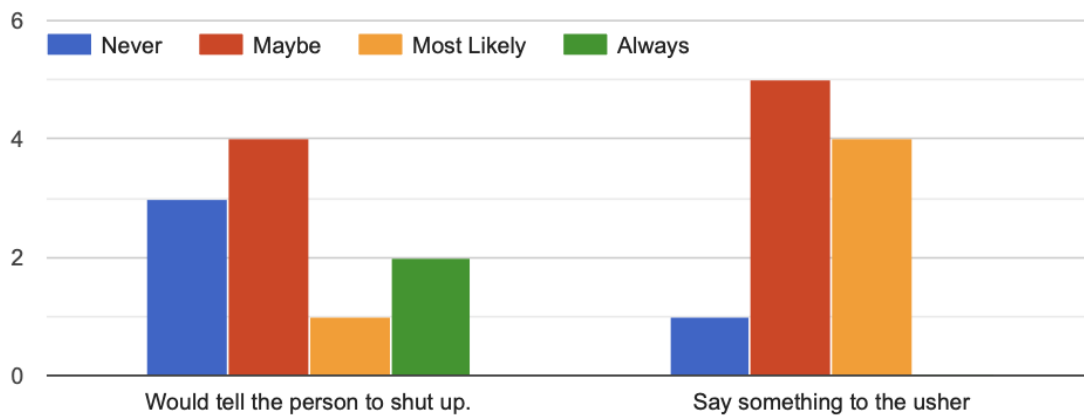
## 7.4 Appendix D: Final Survey Results

After listening to the podcast, I have a better understanding about communication styles, and how to recognize them.
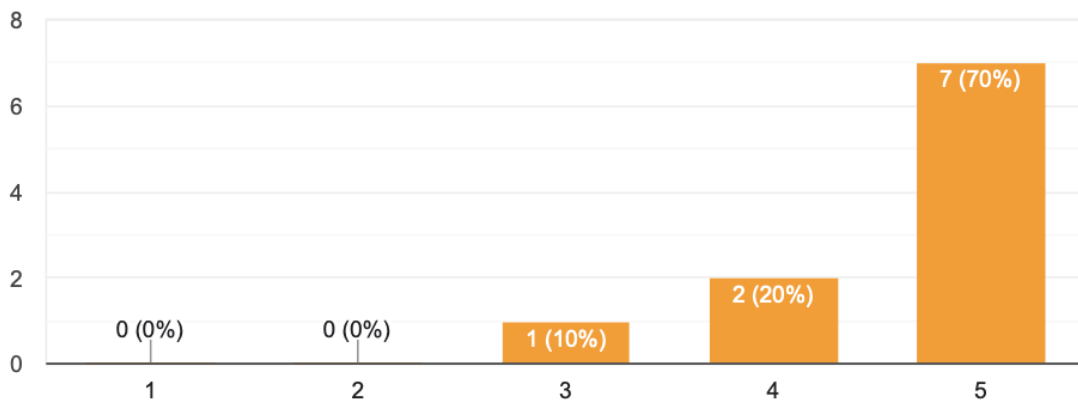
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10 responses



After listening to the podcast, I understand what assertiveness is, and how to recognize it.
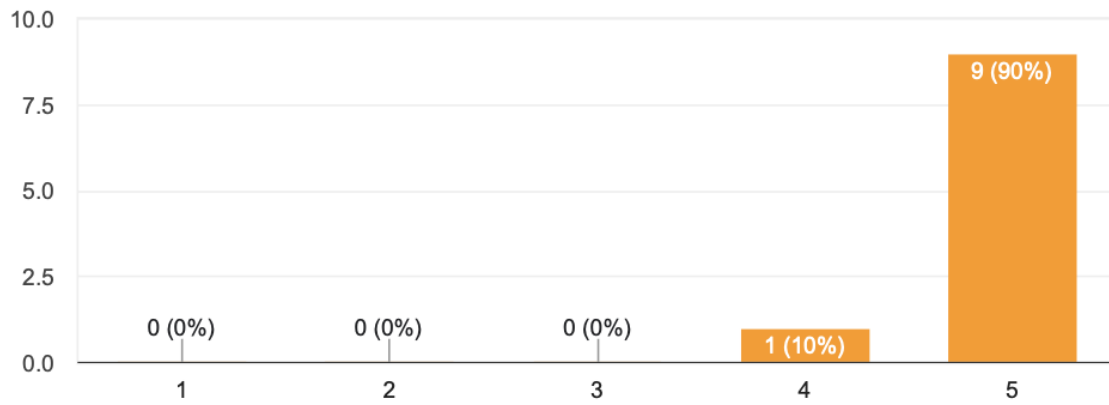
Copy

10 responses

## I found the tips from the last episode easy to understand.

Copy

10 responses



## I found the tips from the last episode to be useful.

Copy

10 responses
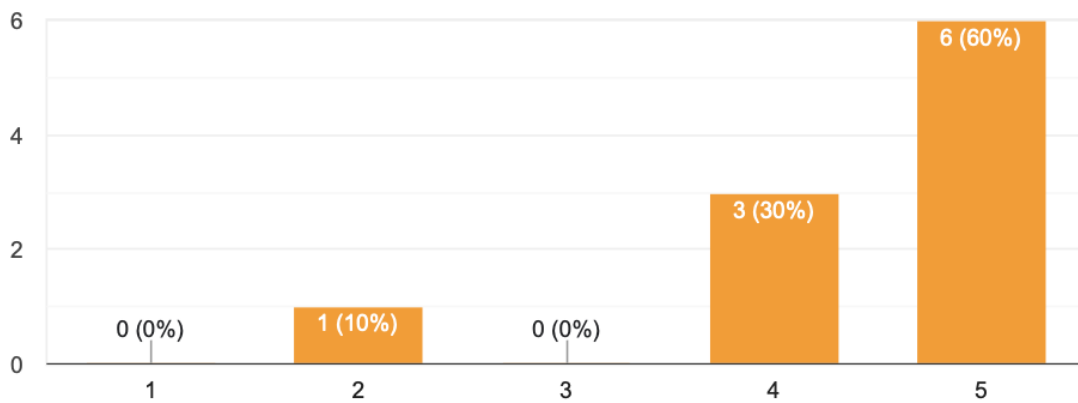
I found that the examples given in the podcast reflect situations I have been in.

Copy

10 responses



- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
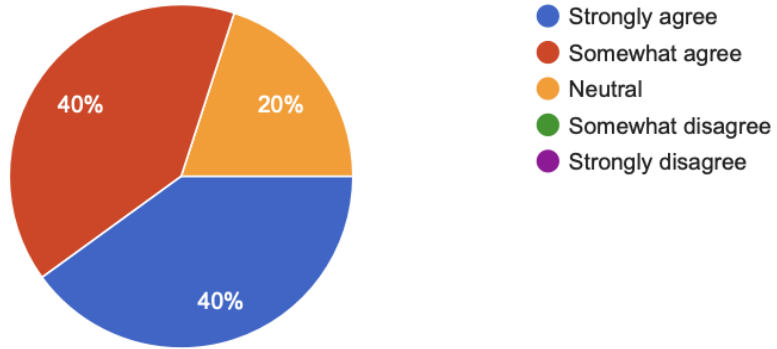
After listening to the podcast, I would like to improve the way I communicate, if I get the chance.

Copy

10 responses



- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I will apply some of the tips from the last episode in my day-to-day life / university life.      [Copy icon] Copy

10 responses



- ● Yes, for sure!
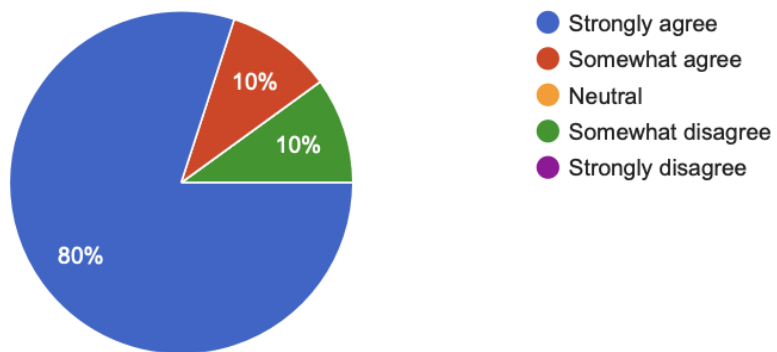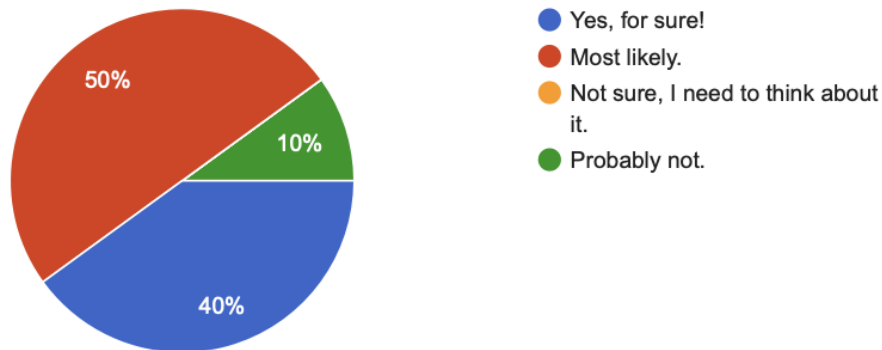- ● Most likely.
- ● Not sure, I need to think about it.
- ● Probably not.

50%

10%

40%

Would you like to add anything else?

2 responses

Nope, besides complimenting the speaker who has a calming way of speaking, which was really relaxing while driving! 😊

As mentioned in the podcast, this is really a matter of also cultural and experience background but I don't see the benefits of assertive communication. To me this is just a fancy way of telling introverted people / cowards something in a nicer way which is not branded as "aggresive". The effect is the same in my opinnion.

Additional Feedback

The podcast is well done. For a first podcast, it's very good, it shows that you have been inspired (in a good way) by others. Sound, effects, transitions. Good third episode, very nice that you came with examples, what/how to say and how not to.

# Intentional smartphone use: A change intervention to help students use their smartphones in a more intentional way

Iulia Costea

Coordinator: Dr. Pauline Weritz

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Target group and current situation

Our smartphones are incredibly powerful tools. We can get connected to friends and family regardless of our location, interact with different cultures, stay connected, learn, and grow. It's all within a simple touch. However, if used carelessly, they can consume significant amount of out time. Why have these fascinatingly technological tools with the potential to unlock so many possibilities turned into weapons to our time management? And can we learn how to use them in a more intentional way, so that they can serve us and improve our lives, rather than taking away our time, TikTok by TikTok, or Tweet by Tweet?

Papers from all over the world bring in concerning results related to high smartphone usage. Amez and Baert (2020) present issues related to academic performance, time management, sleep quality, physical health, and distraction, all linked to smartphone use. Olson et al. (2022) also extend similar issues, with a few additional ones regarding cognition, mental health, and mood. Overall, it is quite clear that high use of smartphones causes a range of negative effects, especially amongst young adults, university students.

## 1.2 Sense of urgency

Data on how much time young adults spend on their phones varies greatly, and it can be very difficult to find an all encompassing value. Certain reports estimate around 3 hours or less, while others go up to shocking values of 6 or 7 hours spend daily. Reports from pre-intervention survey show that a majority 43.8% of students use their phones between 4-5 hours every day, with some other students reporting even more than 9 hours (12.5%).

Furthermore, in the same pre-intervention survey, all students that participated have reported that reducing their screen time is something they wish to do, to a variant degree.

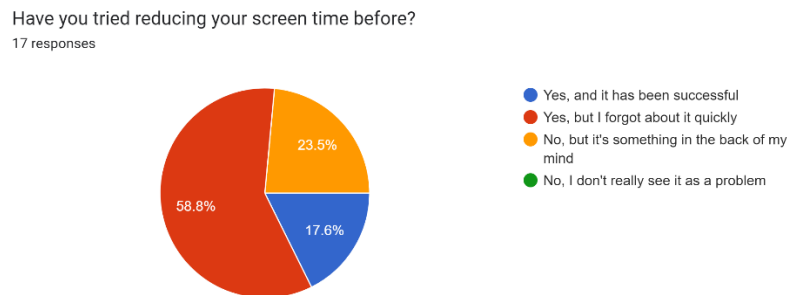Have you tried reducing your screen time before?
17 responses



Figure 1: Percentage of attempts to reduce screen time

Many of these students already have decided on activities they would like to replace screen time with, which include sports, studying, time with friends, mindfulness and relaxation.

Counting the hours spend scrolling away, the result is concerning. Many young adults are on track to spend years of their lives disconnected from reality, and not engaged in activities they would wish to do.

# 2. Change goals

## 2.1 Exact change goal

The primary goal of this change intervention is to help the participants use their phones in a more intentional way, reducing the time they consider to be wasted. Another goal is to coach students into setting their own intentional smartphone use goals, regardless of what they are: spending less time on time-consuming apps such as TikTok, using more productivity apps to use the amazing potential phones have as a tool, or improving mental wellbeing by turning down voices on agitating apps such as Twitter.

Ideally, participants would experience both an awareness and a behavioural change during the weeks of the intervention. An awareness change is desirable as it can eventually lead to changes in behaviour. Starting to check the weekly screen time more often can help subjects keep track of their progress, or show them that methods implemented might not give them the expected results. Consequently, they might try different approaches in order to reach their goals.

On the behavioural side, one general expected result would be a lower overall screen time. Furthermore, time spent on specific time consuming apps, which are particular to each participant, should also decrease.

A few other more subjective indicators will be taken into account, such as the activities participants have used to replace screen time, as well as which personal life aspects have improved for them.

## 2.2 Measurable goals

The **behavioural change** goals of this intervention are:

1. Lower overall screen time, measured in the phone setting of each participant.

2. Lower time spent on specifically problematic application, depending on each participant, measured in the phone setting.

For the **awareness change** goals, the following are desired:

1. An increase in the weekly amount of screen time checks, self reported by each participant.

For the other, more difficult to measure and more **subjective change** goals, it is expected to see:

• An improvement in the following: productivity, stress, mental health, personal relationships; based on self reports.

• A replacement of screen time with any of the following activities: practicing sports, sleep, studying, time spent with others, other hobbies or activities.

• A wish to continue improving after the end of the intervention.

# 3.Change approach

## 3.1 Methodology/Approach

The change intervention's main part consisted of a workshop to help participants from the target group learn about and implement steps they need to take to reduce their screen time.

The workshop started with a short introduction of why the high use of smartphones is a problem, including powerful visuals that contrast how much time users in the same social group as the participants waste away. Also part of the introduction was a short motivational component, meant to motivate participants to make a change and encourage them to apply the steps in the following sections.

After the introduction and motivational part, students were shortly introduced to the methodology behind the intervention, to gain an understanding of its steps, as well as the scientific background that backs up the steps they would later apply.

The workshop continued with a brief introduction of the steps they would later on apply. In this part, the reasons behind why certain steps work were briefly explained. It was also presented shortly how to personalize these steps depending on the behaviours of each participant. The steps taken from Olson et al.(2022) are:

1. Step 1: Disable notifications

2. Step 2: Disable TouchID/FaceID

3. Step 3: Hide Social media apps

4. Step 4: Set up focus times

5. Step 5: Set time limits

6. Step 6: Out of sight, out of mind

7. Step 7: Keep tasks on your computer

8. Step 8: Overall, use your phone as little as you can

The steps which proved to have the lowest applicability among participants, specifically step 5 and 9 from Olson et al. (2022) have been purposely been left out of this intervention, for simplicity and efficiency of the workshop. Step 4 of Olson has been included in step 6 of this intervention. Furthermore, steps 4 and 5 have been introduced, to test a few new solutions.

The second part of the workshop consisted of the practical application of accumulated knowledge. A smartphone was connected live to the screen, showing how to apply all of the 8 steps. Participants followed along while implementing changes based on their personal experience and goals.

## Intervention Plan

**Scientifically proven methods**

Methods used by Olson et al. (2022) will be presented to participants so they can get started on changing their behaviour.

→

**Individual coaching to maximize results**

Individual 1-on-1 sessions will be available for participants, including the methodology presented to us by Siegfried Grief.

Figure 2: Steps of the intervention, as presented to participants

## 3.2 Theoretical Alignment

Three main theories from different modules of the "Processes of Change" course have been applied in this intervention. Firstly some of the principles presented by Robert Cialdini in his book "*Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade*" have been applied during all steps of the workshop. Secondly, the live workshop section, where students applied the methods learned, has been based on Siegfried Greif's Intention Action Gap coaching methods. Finally, some of the later applied personalized coaching methods have been drawn from the fifth module of "Coaching and Consulting" from the "Processes of Change" Honours Course.

Cialdini (2016) presents methods and principles of influence, specifically on how to set the stage for effective persuasion before delivering a message. Some of the principles of Cialdini include Authority, Social Proof, and Reciprocity. The **Authority** principle, which implies people are likely to be influenced by those they perceive as experts, was imposed during the workshop by presenting the 8 steps that participants were meant to apply as being drawn from a study made by professionals with measurable results. The **Social Proof** principle, through which people consider that actions taken by people around them must be the right behaviour, is also drawn from the study presented. As the behaviour implemented has worked for many people in the study, a similar behaviour must work for them as well. Furthermore, a principle that might have negatively impacted the results has been the **Reciprocity** one: people feel obligated to return a favour. Complimentary lunch was provided during the workshop, which might have made participants feel obligated to deliver good results at the end of the intervention.

The second part of the workshop, which included the practical part, has been based on Greif (2022). In his work, preparation for the implementation of change is highlighted as a crucial step. By applying the steps before leaving the workshop, participants do pre-actional planning, implementing intentions before being faced with the habit they want to break. This makes implementing change easier for participants.

Besides the behavioural change methods used, a strong backing for this intervention is the work of Olson et al. (2022). This is the source of the 8 steps used in the workshop. The steps have been slightly modified or enhanced in order to align more closely to the change goals of this intervention.

# 4. Results and Literature Enrichment

## 4.1 Reported Changes

The workshop had a total number of 17 participants. The average age of the participants was 19.94, being fit for the target group of the audience. Their self-reported average screen time was 5.375 hours/week. Motivation-wise, on a scale of 1 to 10, "1" being "Not a priority for me", and "10" being "Urgent, I need to improve this immediately", the average of the group has been 6.70. A vast majority, 76.4% of participants, have reportedly tried to reduce their screen time before the intervention, with only 17.6% being successful. Another 23.5% see it as a problem, but did not try to change their behaviour.

Out of the 17 participants of the workshop, 10 sent in their results 2 weeks after the intervention. Out of the 10, only 5 have provided valid data which can be analysed. A further discussion of why certain data could not be used is included in section 5.1.

Out of the 5 participants whose data complied with needed requirements, 2 have also received additional personal coaching and reported their screen time for one more week. At the end of the second week, the average for the measurable screen time of the 5 participants went down by 7.32%. For the two students who received personalized coaching, their screen time went down 51.5% in the final week compared to the week pre-intervention.

While measuring behavioural change has proven to be problematic, measuring the change on awareness has been more straightforward. The self-reported weekly screen time checks have increased from an average of 1.7 times a week to 3.9 times a week. This indicated participants' awareness of how much they use their phones has increased.

| Participant | Pre-intervention screen time | Week 1 after intervention | Week 2 after intervention | Week 3 with Individual Coaching | Motivation factor | Decreased screen time after 2 weeks | Decreased screen time after 3rd week |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 4.33 | 4.5 | 3.83 | - | 6 | 11.50% | |
| P2 | 4 | 3.75 | 3.5 | 2 | 7 | 12.50% | 50% |
| P3 | 4.12 | 3.16 | 3.33 | 2 | 8 | 19.17% | 53% |
| P4 | 4.1 | 4.25 | 4.33 | - | 7 | -5.60% | |
| P5 | 5.2 | 4.45 | 5.25 | - | 10 | -0.96% | |

Figure 3: Screen time (in hours) results and evolution for participants

The problematic apps mentioned by participants have been mostly Instagram (50% of participants) and TikTok(20%). No relevant change can be noticed while analysing the results sent in by participants. A few of them have noticed a significant decrease, down 60% from the original time spent, some other participants having doubled their time on these apps, despite setting a time limit on them.

## 4.2 Link to Relevant Literature

Available literature, studies and experiments do not agree on which measures help or do not in reducing screen time, improving habits, and changing behaviours around smartphones. The results obtained in this intervention can be related to a few relevant works.

Firstly, it is important to observe the changes adapted and followed by participants of this intervention, compared to the rates of participants in the study of Olson et al. (2022). A big difference can be noticed between the usage of "Step 2: Disable TouchID/FaceID", participants of this intervention having enforced it much less. Steps 6, 7 and 8 also has less of an adoption compared to participants of the other study. This decrease could be linked to the lower screen time reduction obtained by our participants.
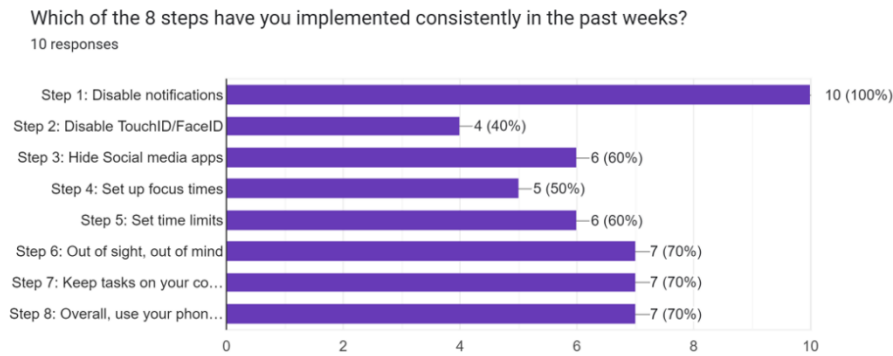
Which of the 8 steps have you implemented consistently in the past weeks?
10 responses

| Step | Value |
|------|-------|
| Step 1: Disable notifications | 10 (100%) |
| Step 2: Disable TouchID/FaceID | 4 (40%) |
| Step 3: Hide Social media apps | 6 (60%) |
| Step 4: Set up focus times | 5 (50%) |
| Step 5: Set time limits | 6 (60%) |
| Step 6: Out of sight, out of mind | 7 (70%) |
| Step 7: Keep tasks on your co... | 7 (70%) |
| Step 8: Overall, use your phon... | 7 (70%) |

Figure 4: Percentage of participants applying each step

| Guideline | Already followed | Planned to follow | Followed at 2 weeks | Followed at 6 weeks | Feasibility | Long term |
|-----------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Disable non-essential notifications (sounds, banners, and vibration). | 46% | 91% | 97% | 82% | 5.71 (1.71) | 5.18 (1.77) |
| 2. Keep your phone on silent (vibrate off), face down, out of sight, and out of reach when not in use throughout the day. | 33% | 94% | 82% | 88% | 5.49 (1.73) | 5.69 (1.46) |
| 3. Disable Touch ID/**Face ID** (i.e., the fingerprint/**face** scanner to unlock your phone); use a password instead. | 11% | 83% | 76% | 48% | 5.24 (2.36) | 3.85 (2.16) |
| 4. Keep your phone on silent (vibrate off) and out of reach when going to bed (e.g. on the opposite side of the room). | 40% | 96% | 73% | 58% | 5.42 (2.05) | 5.61 (1.95) |
| 5. **Turn down your phone's brightness**, set it to greyscale (black and white), and change the colour warmth to filter out blue light (i.e. turn on the "night shift" feature). | 35% | 86% | 71% | 58% | 5.09 (2.23) | 4.73 (2.47) |
| 6. Hide social media and email apps (e.g. Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, Gmail, Outlook) in a folder off of the home screen (or even delete them). | 14% | 60% | 56% | 70% | 4.98 (2.06) | 4.45 (2.10) |
| 7. If you can do the task on a computer, try to keep it on the computer (e.g. social media, web search, or email). | 17% | 100% | 84% | 67% | 5.09 (1.48) | 5.26 (1.54) |
| 8. Let your family, friends, or colleagues know that you will be replying less often unless they call you directly. | 0% | 86% | 65% | 21% | 4.70 (2.20) | 3.44 (2.00) |
| 9. **Leave your phone at home when you do not need it (e.g. when getting groceries or going to the gym).** | 11% | 86% | 34% | 21% | 2.88 (2.06) | 2.79 (2.07) |
| 10. Overall, use your phone as little as possible. | 0% | 100% | 90% | 42% | 4.79 (1.55) | 5.41 (1.26) |

Figure 5: Percentage of participants applying each step presented by Olson et al. (2022)

Steps 5 of this intervention, which focused on setting up time limits for problematic applications, has been introduced in order to test whether such a change could help participants reduce problematic use of certain applications. As discussed in section 4.1, no consistent change could be identified for the participants, regarding the use of applications such as Instagram or TikTok, which they reported a high use of. This result can be confirmed by many other publications which support that time limits do not affect the problematic use of technology but can induce anxiety and other negative emotions (Zimmermann 2021).

## 4.3 Discussion and Advice for Next Steps

Some of the best results at the end of the intervention belong to those participants who wished to get more personalized advice regarding their screen time. In the personal coaching sessions, we have reflected on the methods which worked for participants, as well 4 as the ones they did not find useful. New tweaks were added. One student complained that muting all notifications has proven to be disadvantageous, often missing important notices. To fix this, we

curated notification and only left on important ones, muting groups with plenty of messages which represented a big distraction. This participant also implemented a time restriction for problematic apps: only using Instagram during 7PM and 8PM. For the other participant, which had issues with picking up their phone a lot during studying and work, we installed an application that makes them wait 30 seconds before opening TikTok, YouTube, and other distractions. This often made the participant give up the intention of scrolling, as the waiting time was too high.

The success of these participants also came from the will to make a reflection on what helps and what does not, as well as intentionally try to adapt solution to their specific problems. I believe all participants could achieve similar results with this level of effort and implication. While these 2 students had someone to help them with tips and new methods, it would also be possible to find similar tips and information online.

To prepare for offering the workshop and individual training, I have read a few papers on techniques that help reduce screen time use, use of problematic apps, and on how to build a better behaviour generally regarding your smartphone. To offer a solution to those that cannot access such coaching, I have built a [GPT](#), a virtual assistant tool to help implement the 8 steps included in the coaching, as well as offer coaching in a similar way to the personalized one I did. This is open for all users, and can be a helpful tool to both participants, to further implement solutions, as well as those who just want to improve their habits.

# 5. Learning Experience

## 5.1 Insights from Change Approach

A great number of lessons can be drawn from this change intervention. Regarding the results and the carry-out of the intervention, I believe a few things could have been improved. It would be important to enhance that all kinds of results the participants have are important. While I have mentioned it in the requesting results phase at the end of the intervention, I believe enforcing it more throughout the intervention would have led to more of those who did not notice much of a change still sending in their feedback and results.

The study done by Olson et al.(2022) included only users of iPhones. I did not wish to limit the possible participants to only those students, so having this kind of phone was not a requirement. During research, I have checked whether Android users have a screen time monitoring feature, which they do. However, while receiving results from participants, I learned that each smartphone producer implementing the Android software can configure this section themselves. Most of the students using the Android operating system only had daily screen time, not a weekly average of it. This had a big impact on how I had to interpret the results, as many of them could not be included in the statistics.

Another valuable lesson I have learned is the waterfall effect of how many participants can be lost in the process of a study. At first, 22 students signed up for the workshop, 17 were present there, 10 sent in the feedback and results form, and only 5 had data that could be fully analysed. At every stage, reminders about the following action that needs to be taken have been sent, along

with encouragement that all kinds of participation and results are valuable. Participant retention has proven to be a challenging aspect, especially when difficulty levels increase.

## 5.2 Impact of Coaching and Feedback

The personal coaching I have received has been an insightful look into my professional skills and personal experience, from which I have gained constructive feedback. In the conversations I've had with my coach, Anusha Moses, we have touched on a lot of different matters, topics ranging from working more efficiently in a team, finding your position between leader and follower, as well as accomplishing more personal goals and receiving desired results.

The most helpful lesson I have taken from these conversations has been focusing on the process. The issue we started from has been the pressure of always achieving great goals and high personal expectations. My coach highlighted how important it is to focus on the steps needed to reach such goals, instead of overly stressing about the final result. Channelling energy into doing the most at each stage of the project ultimately contributes far more to accomplishing said goals. I have been applying this mindset in daily life, and as a result, I can now apply less pressure on myself, while instead concentrating on attaining a good result at each phase. This has been reflected in the change intervention itself, as well as other university-related work. I have yet not implemented this on personal issues, however, I believe the mindset can be modelled to fit all kinds of goals and objectives.

## 5.3 Change Leadership

Over the course of this program, we all have learned a lot about leadership, both from a theoretical perspective, as well as from a practical one, by implementing it in projects, teams, and as much as possible just in daily life. We have learned that leaders are not always named, but they can emerge when they are needed. We have learned about different kinds of leadership: transactional, transformational, and instrumental. Working on this project has reinforced to me what my personal style is. During the intervention, I have tried to continuously offer my participants tools to work on their goals, through my knowledge gained of the subject and coaching skills that I acquired in past modules. This proves my high preference for instrumental leadership. However, all kinds of leadership can be reflected in the workshop. Motivating participants has been done in a transformational manner, while offering lunch to participants can be considered a transactional exchange.

To reflect back to my Discovery Insights, where my results was a strong Green, with the supporter role, I can clearly link it to how I have carried out the intervention. From walking students through all of the steps during the workshop, to the coaching I have done with them, my role has been to assist students with their goals.

At the end of the intervention, I reflect back on my personal and professional development and I am content with my learning experience. It has been a rewarding journey, at the end of which I am happy to have learned so much from my work, with the help of my coordinator, Dr. Pauline Weritz, as well as my coach, Anusha Moses. This past module and the project reflect well my whole experience with the Processes of Change Honours Program.

Through this one and a half years, I have developed my ability to recognize change, and built skills to handle it, all through the valuable insights of exceptional teachers, their support and feedback, memorable guest lectures, and of course, sharing knowledge and experiences with my peers. I am grateful for the opportunity and excited to take onto opportunities to show what I have gained from this transformative program.

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3) Olson, J. A., Sandra, D. A., Chmoulevitch, D., Raz, A., & Veissiere, S. P. L. (2022). A Nudge-Based intervention to reduce problematic smartphone use: randomised controlled trial. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 21(6), 3842–3864. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-022-00826-w

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5) Zimmermann, L. (2021). "Your Screen-Time app is keeping track": Consumers are happy to monitor but unlikely to reduce smartphone usage. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, *6*(3), 377–382. https://doi.org/10.1086/714365

6) *ChatGPT - Intentional Screen Time Coach*. (n.d.-b). ChatGPT. https://chatgpt.com/g/gG8h7IpKKb-intentional-screen-time-coach - Mentioned here as a reference to the GPT created to help students reduce their screen time post intervention.

# Appendix

What is your current weekly average of screen time use? You can find this in your phone's settings, under Screen time.
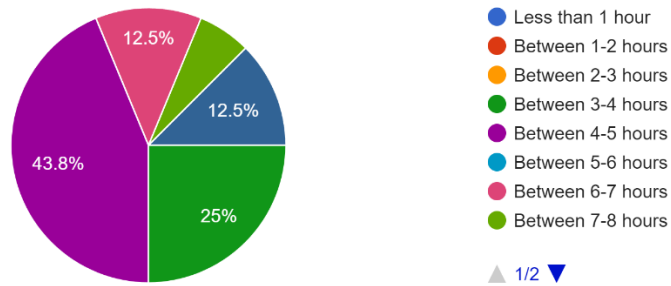
16 responses



Legend:
- Less than 1 hour
- Between 1-2 hours
- Between 2-3 hours
- Between 3-4 hours
- Between 4-5 hours
- Between 5-6 hours
- Between 6-7 hours
- Between 7-8 hours

▲ 1/2 ▼

Figure 6: Average screen time for students pre-intervention

What would be some activities you would like to replace the time spent in front of the screen with?
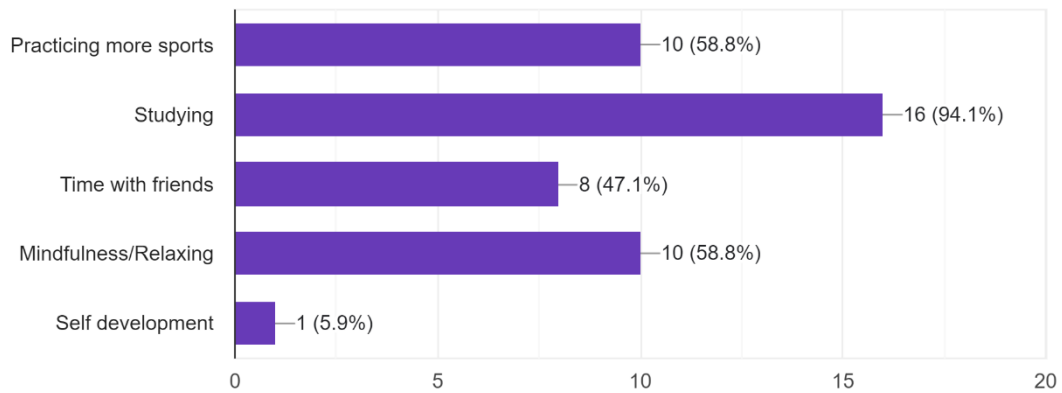
17 responses



Figure 7: Activities students would like to replace screen time with

Figure 8: Screen time of participant 1



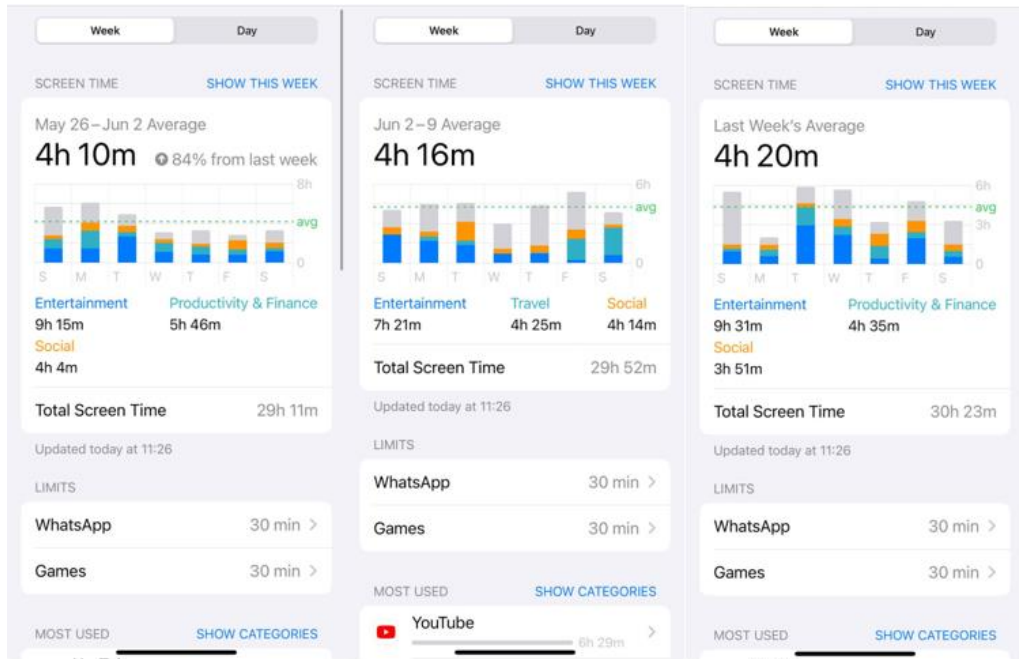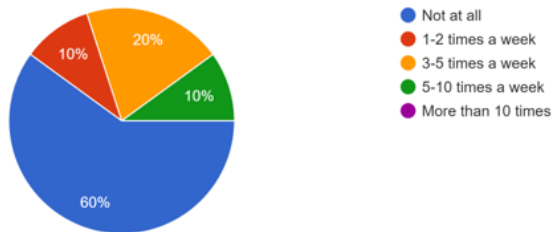Figure 9: Screen time of participant 2
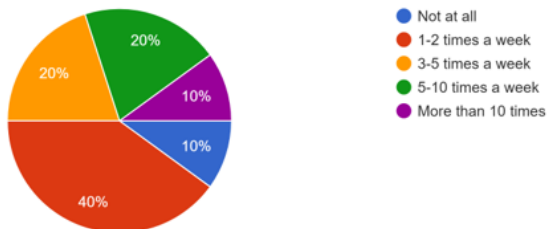
Figure 10: Screen time of participant 3



Figure 11: Awareness change: how often participants check their screen time before and after the intervention

**Have you actively tried to replace screen time with any of the following activities?**
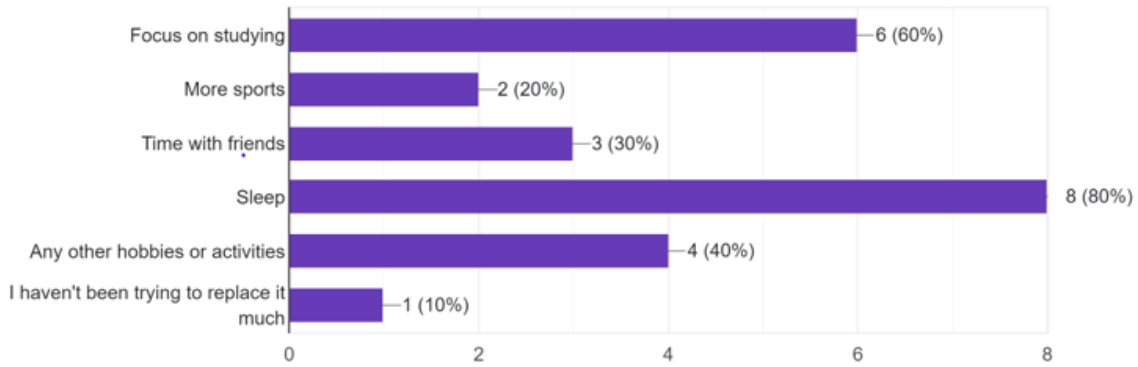10 responses

Figure 12: Other changes - Activities used to replace screen time with

# Stereotypes and Fake News: Raising Awareness for in University Students

Janis Hölter, Youssef Abdelaziz
Supervisor: Dr. Arnold Enklaar

# 1. Introduction

As part of the final module for the honours track, we were tasked with combining our knowledge from previous modules and provide a well rounded change intervention. This report provides a holistic view of the intervention. The change intervention was aimed at contributing to awareness of a complex societal problem, hence it was split in two parts, and the whole project was done in pairs. The problem is the lack of awareness about the differences in people, and the intricate composition of today's society. An example would be the refugee crisis hitting europe. This report covers the nature of the change process, explaining the necessity of the change and the target audience. This is followed by the goals of the intervention, and the approach embraced to conduct this change. Finally, a summary of the results is provided with recommendations provided for further development of the change intervention.

Discrimination and racism are current issues, minorities in Europe have to face very commonly. In the Netherlands, 1.6 million people or 11% of the total population, are annually exposed with any form of discrimination (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). Of those who experienced discrimination, 36% reported to these incidents happened because of their ethnicity or skin tone, and further 26% reported their nationality as underlying motivation. Next to ethnicity and nationality, religion seemed to be a motivation for discrimination as well. 29% of the Islamic population in the Netherlands reported discriminative experiences in 2021.

This phenomenon is not bound to the borders of the Netherlands, in the contrary, in Germany, 52% of participants in a study of the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2019), indicated that they perceive the Islam as threatening, and 13% were in favour of banning immigration for Muslims. So far, these stats only concern discrimination in general, however, its consequences can result in criminal acts as shown in Figure 1. In 2021/22 110,000 racial hate crimes were recorded by the police in England and Wales. This number is result of a steep in increase in hate crimes as it more than tripled from 2011/12 to 2021/22 (UK Home Office, 2023).

Figure 1

*Number of police recorded racial hate crimes in England and Wales from 2011/12 to 2022/23.*
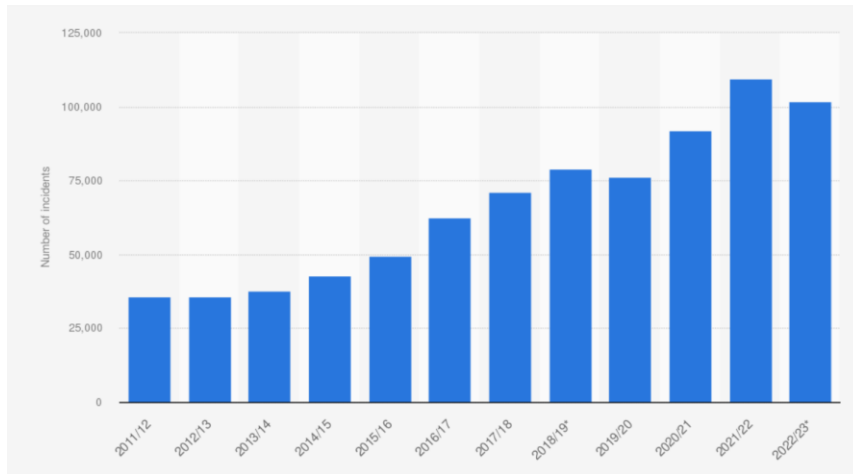


*Note.* UK Home Office. Copyright 2024 by Statista.

While reflecting upon the reasons for the situation at hand, the authors of this change project identified two factors that might be influential. The first factor is anchored in the psychological processes that lead to discriminative behaviour. To do so, it is important to understand how people form their social identity. These processes are described in the *Social Identity Theory* (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual builds their identity to a certain degree from the membership in social groups which provides a source for pride and self-esteem. This development takes place throughout three stages: the *social categorization*, the *social identification* and the *social comparison*.

People categorise their physical environment in order to understand their surroundings. This also happens in regard to people surrounding them. Those *social categorizations* are based on similarities such as nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Categorization can be based upon minimal similarities such as wearing the same t-shirt colour and may, therefore, exist purely cognitive (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Towards the categorizations of people, certain characteristics are assigned. Characterising different social groups simplifies the life of people. On the other hand, it may lead to stereotypes.

The second stage of the SIT is *social identification*. Social categorization is not only applied to others but also towards oneself. This means individuals categorise themselves as part of a certain social group and adopt the characteristics of the group. To this identification with a group, an emotional bond will emerge which will have an influence on the self-esteem and self-image of the individual.

As the identification with a social group affects self-esteem and self-image, individuals are motivated to protect and positively influence their perception of their social group. This results in favoring one's own group (In-group favoritism) while being neutral or negative towards other groups (out-groups). If this *social comparison* would not take place, it would endanger the self-esteem and self-image of the individual.

## 1.1 Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

In this social comparison, it occurs that people perceive the members of their own social group as more diverse and out-group members as homogeneous. This is called the *outgroup homogeneity effect* (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992). This is because people have more knowledge about their own social group and, hence, are able to form more detailed characterisations of those. This effect may result in the perception that all members of an out-group are the same.

Consequently, from social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison, stereotypes about out-groups may arise, which might be generalised to all members of the outgroup due to the outgroup homogeneity effect. On those evaluations, affective responses in the form of prejudice may follow (Mackie et al., 2009). Exemplary for this emotional response to stereotypes are the results of the survey mentioned above, which stated that 52% of Germans perceive Islam as threatening (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019).

Discrimination is a behavioural response to cognitive stereotypes and the affective prejudice. It can explicitly act out and lead to racist motivated hate crimes, or take place implicitly which, in the context of immigration, will lead to a mismatch in the jobs of immigrants in relation to their skills. For example, in Finland, the share of migrant workers with secondary-school education is 98%, while their share in semi- or high-skilled jobs is only 53%. This might indicate an implicit discrimination of migrant workers on the job market (International Labour Organization, 2024).

## 1.2 Effect of Media, and Potential for Fake News

The development of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination can be influenced by many factors, one of them is the media. Medial information about social groups is used by the individual to nurture self-image and self-esteem by positively affecting one's social identity (Trepte et al., 2018). Another interesting effect is the hostile media effect (HME) (Hartmann & Tanis, 2013). The HME describes that people tend to interpret news articles to be slightly directed against their social group.

These mechanisms of media information and the components of the SIT can easily be misused by fake news articles. As individuals use positive knowledge about their social group to strengthen their social identity, they may tend to read sources that improve their self-image and deny sources that may be a threat to it. This might result in denying evidence stating negative aspects of one's social group and only directed towards sources in favour of one's social identity.

Additionally, as people tend to interpret news with a hostile bias towards them, they might perceive their social group as constantly attacked. This could result in rejecting those sources and reacting to bias. Again, fake news could use this bias and only enforce it by stating that a certain social group is the target of hostility.

## 1.3 The target group

In the light of these statistics and the above literature review, the urgency of this issue becomes evident from which the necessity to act upon it arises. To do so, this change project targeted university students. One might argue that university students are already a highly educated demographic and do not have to learn more about the mechanisms underlying the issue. However, especially this idea might cause ignorance towards the situation and lead to the denial of the problem. Secondly, the target group is expected to influence the futural

societal development by pursuing impactful careers. In influencing this development, it seems important to face the issue at hand.

# 2. Change Goals

## 2.1 Change goals of the Workshop on Stereotypes

The overall change project concerned both stereotypes and fake news, whereas this report concerns specifically stereotypes. Hence, the following part is focused on addressing stereotypes.

Behavioural change does not occur from one moment to another. In order to occur, the individual that is ought to change must go through different stages of change. The first stage of change is the *precontemplation* stage (Krebs et al., 2018). In this stage, the individual is unaware of the problem and resulting from this unawareness there is no intention to change. Applied to this change project, increasing awareness of the internal processes that lead to discrimination might result in active self-reflection of one's own stereotypes.

Next to reflecting upon one's own stereotypes, raising awareness of the mechanisms of stereotypes might help to take the perspective of others, too. People expect others to hold stereotypes about them, which might not be the case in reality (Lattu & Innanen, 2023). Awareness of the processes of building stereotypes might change the perspective that stereotypes are something to avoid, even though having stereotypes is a natural cognitive categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In order to reduce inequality that might be caused by explicit and implicit discrimination, it is important to raise awareness of stereotypes (Huynh et al., 2024).

Based upon this necessity, the aim of this part of the change project was raising awareness of stereotypes and their mechanisms.

## 2.2 Change Goals of the Workshop on Fake News

The focus of this intervention is to change the awareness of the target group on the abundance and severity of fake news. Awareness is always the first step of any change (Raihan and Cogburn 2024), often people do not realise the presence of a certain situation or problem to initiate the change. Raihan and Cogburn 2024, described the transtheoretical model (TTM) as the standard-bearer for change, with multiple stages that easily put an explanation in the human behaviour of change. Stage 1, known as precontemplation, is the targeted stage of this workshop. Precontemplation is the stage where people are not aware of the existence of a problem or a situation, hence they are unmotivated to change. Additionally, Lalchandani and Lalchandani (2024) mention that awareness is key in skill building, those two reasons are the reason for setting the awareness at the core of the workshop. Moreover, the workshop included preliminary skills to be able to critically assess fake news. This was done right after making the target audience aware of the problem, in efforts to pave the way for later stages of the intervention.

The workshop was set up in a way to allow for self-reflection and evaluation of the participants. The awareness was measured comparatively before and after the exposure to the tests and information within the workshop.

# 3. Change Approach

## 3.1 Change Approach of the Workshop on Stereotypes

In this change project, the change goal was approached with the creation of a workshop. This workshop concerned the two issues of stereotypes and fake news. Therefore, it was split into two parts. Before the start of the workshop participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding their understanding of stereotypes and their awareness of their own stereotypes. The ten items of this pre-workshop survey were rated on a Likert scale of seven, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 7 indicating strongly agree. The purpose of this questionnaire was to measure their awareness of stereotypes before participating in the workshop.

## 3.1.1 Implicit Association Test

The first part of the workshop was the part concerning stereotypes and it was split into an interactive and an educational component. To raise awareness of the effect of one's own stereotypes, the participants interactively took part in the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT focused on the implicit association of participants between skin tone and positive or negative qualities. The choice of starting the workshop with this tool was motivated by two reasons. Based upon Chialdini's principle of consistency (Cialdini, 2016), the test should challenge the internal consistency of the participant to stay engaged in the following educational component of the workshop. It was hoped that the test results may challenge the internal belief of the participant to not apply stereotypes. In order to stay consistent to this belief, it was expected that the educational part concerning stereotypes was attentively received. Secondly, the IAT is distributed by the Harvard University which is an institution with a very good reputation. As a result of this reputation, according to the principle of authority, the test should have been a trusted and respected measure for the participants.

## 3.1.2 Short Lecture about Stereotypes

The second educational part was a short lecture about the development of stereotypes and its consequences, which may result in discrimination. Underlying this lecture was the SIT by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Again, to build the lecture upon an established psychological theory might have provided an authoritative source. This was hoped to activate the principle of Authority (Cialdini, 2016). Consequently, participants were expected to trust the lecture's content better. Having an educational lecture was deemed to be appropriate for increasing awareness as it was in concordance with the components of attitude and perceived behaviour control from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Regarding the attitude towards dealing with one's own stereotypes and, hence, becoming aware of those. The educational lecture was aimed at implementing the attitude that having stereotypes is something natural, nothing to be ashamed of, and that it is important to deal with them. Secondly, by providing the knowledge, it was hoped to increase the perceived control about reflecting on stereotypes and consequently provoke an awareness.

# 3.2 Change approach of the Workshop on Fake News

The intervention was set up in 3 stages, namely, a pre-workshop survey, the workshop itself, and finally a post-workshop survey. The pre-workshop survey was to measure the perception of the target audience's own skills in identifying fake news.

The pre-workshop survey contained questions asking the participants about their perception of both stereotypes and fake news, in this paper we focus on the 11 questions related to fake news. The survey used a 1-7 (1 being strongly disagree, 7 being strongly agree) likert scale and asked questions about the participants' ability of detecting fake news.

The workshop itself was split in two parts, the first revolved around the topic of stereotypes. The second part, which this paper describes, revolved around the theme of fake news. The second part started with a test that provides news prompts some of which are real and the other are fake. The participants had to answer whether they think the headline is fake or real. This test, known as 'Misinformation Susceptibility Test (MIST)', was developed by psychologists at the University of Cambridge (Cambridge 2023). It is important to mention one limitation that might arise from the use of this specific test, which was that the news prompts in the test were US-centric. This is slightly not relatable to the current demographic in the workshop. Moreover, during the workshop, particularly after each test, the participants had the opportunity to share their results. The results also appeared anonymously on the board for all audience to see.

Followed by the MIST the audience were presented theory that related the topic of fake news to the topic of stereotypes. As mentioned before, news outlets are often used as a populist tool to marginalise certain minorities of a society. Stereotypes often are a result of cognitive categorization, and this along with self-identity theory can offer an explanation. In self-identity theory (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 2004) often we tend to think of in and out groups. In-group are the people who are similar to us, while out-group are people who are different to us. Delaney et al. (2023) and Bastick (2021) showed that self-identity theory alter our recollection of certain events based on their positive or negative connotation. These theories explain the severity of fake news, and how they can be used to shift the opinion of society against a certain group. During the workshop an extreme case of this was also presented to the audience. The case known as pizzagate where a person believed certain fake news, later turned out to be a conspiracy theory, and acted upon it. His actions were acquiring firearms, entering a pizzeria and shooting at civilians in there. It should of course be understood that this is an extreme case, and there must have been other reasons explaining this person's behaviour. However, it can be seen that one of the stimulants for their behaviour was the consumption of fake news.

After presenting the audience with the necessity for being aware about fake news, they were shown a framework of how to check for fake news. Although it was not one of the change goals of the intervention, it was crucial to provide skills for tackling a problem after identifying it. The audience were also provided with sources of news checkers, and with that a preliminary tool-set was provided for the audience to be able to critically assess news.

The following part of the workshop was set up in a way to include a gamification element to it. It was an interactive competition, where the audience were presented with a certain topic, and they are tasked to generate their own misleading news headline about it. All the headlines were displayed on the screens, and the participants had to rank them from most to least believable. Also, the audience where offered access to more literature if they wish to do more reading about the topic. Finally, they were asked to fill two questions on a likert scale about their experience in the workshop. The post-workshop survey took place one week later to measure the change, if any. The workshop included theory and examples to show the severity of the topic, while also providing an easy guideline for how to check for fake news. Additionally, the aim of the gamified activity of writing your own fake prompt was aimed at

indicating for the audience how easy it is to create this problem. This was made in efforts to help the change the awareness level of the participants.

Finally, at the end of the workshop two questions were asked to the audience, asking them about their experience in the workshop. The first asked whether their fake news detection skills were as good as they thought, and the other asked whether they found this workshop helpful.

Three days after the workshop, the same survey questions were asked again for comparison. The difference in results, and the participants' self-perception of the topic, serves as a measure for the change in awareness goal of the intervention.

# 4. Results

## 4.1 Results of the Workshop on Stereotypes

To examine a potential change in awareness towards stereotypes resulting from the workshop, the pre- and the post-workshop survey were assessed. The means of each item and the general mean of each survey were compared. The pre-workshop survey was executed by all 9 participants of the workshop. On the contrary, the post-workshop survey was only executed by 6 participants.

## 4.1.1 Pre-workshop survey

The means in the pre-workshop survey reached from 2.13 for "I believe that I am completely free from holding any stereotypes" to 5.88 for "I am open to the possibility that I might hold unconscious biases". The average mean per item was 4.7 (SD = 0.75) indicating a relatively high awareness of stereotypes. The reversed scores for items 3, 4, and 7 were integrated in this mean. The complete scores of the pre-workshop survey are visible in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*Scores of the pre-workshop survey.*



| Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 ~ strongly disagree, 2... | Durchschnitt | Minimum | Maximum | Anzahl |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am confident that I can identify common stereotypes in society. | 5,00 | 4,00 | 6,00 | 9 |
| I believe stereotypes can be a helpful way to understand people. | 4,00 | 2,00 | 6,00 | 8 |
| I believe that I am completely free from holding any stereotypes. | 2,13 | 1,00 | 3,00 | 8 |
| When making decisions about people, I am certain I don't rely on stereotype... | 3,25 | 2,00 | 5,00 | 8 |
| I am comfortable discussing stereotypes and their impact with others. | 5,75 | 3,00 | 7,00 | 8 |
| I actively challenge stereotypical assumptions in myself and others. | 4,38 | 3,00 | 6,00 | 8 |
| I find it difficult to imagine how stereotypes could affect my judgment. | 3,13 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 8 |
| I am familiar with research on implicit bias and its influence on behavior. | 4,38 | 2,00 | 6,00 | 8 |
| I am open to the possibility that I might hold unconscious biases. | 5,88 | 3,00 | 7,00 | 8 |
| I make a conscious effort to be inclusive and avoid stereotypes in my inter... | 5,11 | 3,00 | 7,00 | 9 |

*Note.* Translation of the column names from German to English: "Durchschnitt" ~ Mean, "Anzahl" ~ Number.

# 4.1.2 Post-workshop survey

First of all, the means of the items ranged from 2.17 for "I find it difficult to imagine how stereotypes could affect my judgment", and 2.5 for "I believe that I am completely free from holding any stereotypes" on the lowest end to 5.33 for "I am confident that I can identify common stereotypes in society" and 5.67 for "I am open to the possibility that I might hold unconscious biases". The average mean per item was 4.73 (SD = 0.64) indicating a relatively high awareness of stereotypes. The reversed scores for items 3, 4, and 7 were integrated in this mean. The complete scores of the post-workshop survey are visible in Figure 3.

Figure 3
*Scores of the post-workshop.*

Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 ~ strongly disagree, 2 ~ disagree, 3 ~ somewhat disagree, 4 ~ neutral, 5 ~ somewhat agree, 6 ~ agree, 7 ~ strongly agree) 6 ⓘ

| Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 ~ strongly disagree, 2... | Durchschnitt | Minimum | Maximum | Anzahl |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am confident that I can identify common stereotypes in society. | 5.33 | 4.00 | 6.00 | 6 |
| I believe stereotypes can be a helpful way to understand people. | 3.83 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 6 |
| I believe that I am completely free from holding any stereotypes. | 2.50 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 6 |
| When making decisions about people, I am certain I don't rely on stereotype... | 3.33 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 6 |
| I am comfortable discussing stereotypes and their impact with others. | 5.17 | 3.00 | 7.00 | 6 |
| I actively challenge stereotypical assumptions in myself and others. | 4.50 | 3.00 | 5.00 | 6 |
| I find it difficult to imagine how stereotypes could affect my judgment. | 2.17 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 6 |
| I am familiar with research on implicit bias and its influence on behavior. | 4.67 | 3.00 | 6.00 | 6 |
| I am open to the possibility that I might hold unconscious biases. | 5.67 | 3.00 | 7.00 | 6 |
| I make a conscious effort to be inclusive and avoid stereotypes in my inter... | 5.17 | 3.00 | 7.00 | 6 |

*Note.* Translation of the column names from German to English: "Durchschnitt" ~ Mean, "Anzahl" ~ Number.

# 4.1.3 Comparison of Means

The overall mean between the two surveys increased very slightly with 0.03. Especially, the item "I find it difficult to imagine how stereotypes could affect my judgment" displayed an interesting decrease of 1. This item is directly concerned with the awareness of one's own stereotypes, and therefore, the score indicates a change in awareness of the participants.

# 4.1.4 Explanation of Findings

That these findings are indicative of a slight increase in the awareness of participants is in line with the expectations. The methodology was reasonably chosen based on the literature of Cialdini (2016) and Ajzen (1991). Nevertheless, there was only a slight decrease, which might be due to chance. Therefore, it is not possible to prove the efficacy of the workshop. Additionally, only superficial data analysis was performed. In the intention to create a scientifically proven effective workshop, the workshop must be replicated, and more in-depth data analysis must be performed.

# 4.2 Results of the Workshop on Fake News

There were nine participants for the workshop, eight of which had filled the survey just before the workshop. However, only 6 participants filled the post-workshop survey sent three days later. Moreover, there was two questions at the end of the workshop, the first got seven responses and the last got six responses.

For the survey before the workshop, the lowest scoring question was 'I am familiar with reliable fact-checking websites and resources' with a average score of (3.00). Followed by that were 'I often share online articles without carefully considering their accuracy' and 'When encountering a newsworthy claim online. I instinctively check for evidence' both with an average score of (3.38). On the other hand, the highest scoring question was 'I am skeptical of information that seems too good (or bad) to be true.' with average score of (5.63). Followed by it was 'I find it difficult to judge the credibility of information shared on social media' with an average score of (5.50). Moreover, the participants were on average somewhat agreeing to statements about their critical abilities in detection of fake news. Further, they were somewhat disagreeing to statements asking about their instinctive abilities to assess fake news.

The results of this survey, show us the need of developing the skills of fake news detection. However, it also shows that the audience were somewhat aware of the underlying existence of fake news. One might argue that this shows that there was no necessity for the intervention. However, it is important to make a distinction between the awareness of the existence of the problem and the severity of the problem. With this intervention the aim was to raise awareness about both topics. It is however realised that since there exists a common understanding of the problem, and perhaps less of the skills required to tackle it, then it would be better to dive deeper into an change plan about developing said skills.

For the survey three days after the workshop, the lowest scoring question was 'I often share online articles without carefully considering their accuracy' with an average score of (3.17). Followed by that was 'When encountering a newsworthy claim online, I instinctively check for evidence' and 'I rely on my gut feeling when deciding whether online information is trustworthy' both scoring an average of (4.17). The questions scoring the highest were 'I am aware of common tactics used to spread fake news' and 'I am skeptical of information that seems to good (or bad) to be true.' both scoring an average of (5.50). The greatest change results was in the question asking about the audience's knowledge of fact-checkers, with a change from (3.00) to (5.33). This can be directly attributed to the introduction of fact checkers in the workshop. Further, the question 'I am confident in my ability to distinguish between fact and opinion online' witnessed the second highest change in score from (4.00) to (5.17). Statement 'I can easily spot misleading headlines designed to grab attention' saw a change from (4.38) to (5.00), and statement 'I find it difficult to judge the credibility of information shared on social media' saw a change from (5.50) to (4.50).

Those witnessed changes can help us draw the conclusion that the participants find themselves more confident to their skills after the workshop. This can be explained by two things. Firstly, as mentioned in the approach a set of preliminary checks and tools were introduced to the participants to help them more in the detection of fake news. Secondly, the results of the MIST also contribute to this. 50% of the participants were able to detect correctly whether the news prompt was real or fake for 12-14 of the 16 prompts, while 38% detected between 9-11 correct. Having scored well on the MIST gives the audience a confidence boost in their own skill, which was apparent in the change of results between pre and post workshop survey. Further at the end of the workshop the participants were asked whether their ability to detect fake news was different than what they thought. Five of the seven who answered disagreed, which again can be explained by the high scores on the MIST, one agrees and one student strongly agrees. It is noteworthy to mention a certain limitation to

this question, is whether they agree with the aforementioned statement because their ability turned out to be better or worse.

As a final question during the workshop, the participants were asked whether they found their workshop to have helped with their awareness about fake news and media literacy. All six respondents agreed, three of which strongly agreed. This can reflect the success of the workshop in raising the awareness about the topic. Moreover, from the aforementioned results it can be concluded that the skills development for fake news detection also improved. However, we do believe that the workshop was not comprehensive enough to cover such an intricate topic. Hence we would suggest to further build on this current intervention with another that tackles this problem rather than an intervention aimed at changing the awareness of the problem.

# 5. Advice

## 5.1 Advice based on the Workshop on Stereotypes

Based upon the results of the workshop and the underlying literature, the participants are advised to explore the topic of stereotypes on their own as the workshop covered the matter due to time constraints superficially. This exploration might evoke a further self-reflection of one's own stereotypes and a stronger understanding of the perspectives of out-group members. According to the stages of change (Krebs et al., 2018), becoming aware is only the first step, it is important to continue the reflection process. Therefore, participants were advised to stay critical of extreme statements about certain social group and to keep on questioning their own stereotypes. In regard to the societal situation towards forms of discrimination, the participants are asked to actively address discrimination if they notice it towards themselves or others. Only by cooperating in reducing discrimination, changes can be made.

## 5.2 Advice based on the Workshop on Fake News

The initial ideation of this change intervention started with tackling major societal problems, such as the current refugee crisis in Europe. Elements of differences in culture were also included. It is realised however, that such deeply rooted problems cannot be fixed right away with a workshop. However, more needs to be done, especially given the uncertain times that are present in the current political domain. It is the aim of this intervention to contribute slightly to raise the awareness of the future leaders of tomorrow. Fake, or biased, news is always going to be present, however it is our duty to confront this ever growing phenomenon. The skills we have provided are not difficult to implement, rather they are novel for university students. It is important however, to stay aware, be very skeptical, and always verify your news consumption. The awareness stage of any problem needs to be followed with action, and what we recommend is to stay persistent in seeking the truth.

# 6. Learning Experiences

## 6.1 Learning Experience of Janis

From the applying the change approach in this change project, I learned how important it is to address people on an emotional, personal, and interactive level. It is not sufficient to only demand change from them, and a lot of effort must be paid into implementing your approach. Sadly, often it is not possible to care for each person of the targeted group individually, nevertheless there are opportunities to design change intervention on a personal level. This is possible by trying to understand the others and by trying to meet their needs. This might demand a lot of attentiveness to the characteristics of the others, but it may pay off, if you are able to reach them. This insight came to me while holding the educational lecture about stereotypes. To me, it seemed like the participants were actually interested in what I was telling. This felt great and was probably only possible because I was enthusiastic about the topic myself. Therefore, I tried to design the workshop personally tailored to my audience.

However, if I had the chance to redo it, I would approach the project differently. I still need to learn to become more structured in organising my work. Even though, I enjoyed working on this project, often I simply did not have the time necessary to integrate all my ideas. This was a bit frustrating. I expect this to change because I am learning to become more structured and manage all my demands. If I review the development of this process, I can see a static improvement that will continue.

This is a good transition towards the coaching sessions and the personal development plan. As I mentioned, I want to become more structured for a certain time now, I also discussed this with my coach. While doing so, we developed certain strategies to improve time and task management. This was very helpful to me, and I observed short-term improvements as I was able to manage my work in such a way that I did not get lost in the chaos of tasks. On the other hand, such development takes time, and I did get into time stress because I misinterpreted my abilities to handle several tasks at the same time. This resulted in a few issues throughout the process of this project.

I understand myself as a transformational leader because I am focused on the people around me. This is the most important thing for me because I believe only if a team is cooperating well, it can work effectively. After implementing this change project, I may come to the conclusion that adopting traits of an instrumental leader might be a good idea. The perspective of strategically managing resources such as time is something I am missing in myself from time to time. In the future, I should probably focus on strategic planning and on learning to refuse request if I momentarily do not have the resources for it. If I am actually able to adapt this insight, this would have been a very fruitful experience.

My focus on the people around me was also displayed in my Insights Discovery Profile as, according to the analysis, I mostly displayed green character traits. It assigned the role of a supporter to me. The conflicts described in the Insights report, on the other hand, seemed a bit strange to me. As a green character, I do understand myself as someone who is good at getting along with red characters without making too many compromises. Nevertheless, it helped me to realize the colours in the people around me and to react to them. Additionally, I also learned how others might perceive me as a group member which was also a very helpful insight.

# 6.2 Learning Experience of Youssef

Executing this workshop has been very helpful not only to the participants, but also to myself as an organizer. I was aware of the problem beforehand, hence the choice of conducting the intervention. However, I was not fully aware of the severity of the problem, which was made clearer after the literature search. Moreover, reflecting on the results, it showed that the audience were aware of the situation, however, also not of the severity.

Apart from learning more about the topic, I learned about practicalities of hosting a workshop. Although the workshop went smoothly, there should have been adjustments to the interactive par of the workshop. This is the part were the participants had to come up with their own news prompt. The idea we adopted was using a current policy change in the Netherlands, which was the introduction of extra fees for delayed students. Choosing this topic was a good idea, however the execution should have been better. As an example provide more context, since only one of the nine participants was Dutch.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reflect on my personal development plan (PDP) in the coaching session. It is noteworthy to mention, that the development plan was not related to the project rather to my own personal development. The first meeting could be described as a rough start, I was not fully settled on my PDP and during the meeting I was not structured with my approach. However, my coach was very tentative and provided me with the space to express what I thought at the moment. They suggested we change the theme of the PDP to dealing with anxiousness. I was skeptical at first as I always had the self-perception of keeping everything under control. This changed, and it was decided to meet again in two weeks to discuss updates and progress, specifically what approach to embrace when dealing with anxiety. The second meeting was a significant improvement as compared to the first, and during the meeting we devised a plan together to tackle the problem of being anxious. Finally, two weeks later we met for third time, and I was consistent with the plan while also showing improvement. Hence, we decided this would be our last meeting. Reflecting back I was rather skeptical at first, however, the coaching sessions have proven to be very helpful. I do believe that now I have embraced a calmer, less anxious, way of thinking about the future.

The insights discovery was one of the most helpful workshops we have done in the honours track. It was an eye opener to our own personalities. I was classified as an analyser with blue and red colours being dominant. This is indeed very reflective of my personality as I am always seeking to gather all the information first before conducting any work. Although this analysis seems very primitive, however this is a very striking trait of my personality. Further during project groups and work when I led the project I always felt that I am the tenacious implementer when it comes to a leadership style. This can be attributed to my attention to collecting all the data before any task and being an analyst.

Although this project was not directed at improving my leadership skills. The honours track as a whole helped provide knowledge about different change management theories, and effective leadership. It is noteworthy to mention, that we did not conduct this workshop under supervision which was beneficial on its own. We had one meeting at the beginning to help with ideation, however later we did the intervention on our own to help build our independent work ethic.

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# The Role of Non-Violent Communication in Conflict Transformation

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# Preface

Personally, I first encountered the concept of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in 2021, when my mentor in my home country introduced it to me. In fact, Marshall Rosenberg's book was my birthday gift from him that year, and I have carried it with me when moving to the Netherlands as I found it as a very good guide. This book lies now at the core of this paper. Three years later, I enrolled in an Erasmus+ training course on conflict transformation, where nonviolence was a key topic of discussion and these two concepts connected. Discovering the power of NVC in that setting significantly boosted my motivation for this project, especially since this style of communication aligns with my personal preferences and approach.

Personal Motivation. I think we should all imagine what a perfect world looks like, and we should talk about it on any occasion we get. We should all think about how we can lead our lives, manage our relationships, and build our businesses to take us one step closer to that ideal state. In this sense, a world that speaks non-violently is close to my ideal. And I believe that change starts small, and if I can change the people in one room to adopt a non-violent way in their communication and they go home and learn to have empathy and change the narrative they had, then the ripple effect of this one room of people can have is very powerful. This is why the possibility of peace exists in that room alone. Thus, because "Words may inspire, but only action creates change"(S. Sinek, 2022), I found this final change project the suitable opportunity to share this vision with my room of people and I set as my personal goal for the project to talk about this ideal world that I imagined when reading Rosenberg's book and bring it closer to people through my intervention, by equipping them with the tools and understanding needed to practise Nonviolent Communication.

Finally, this report explains the process undergone to conclude this final project as part of the "Processes of Change" journey and details the outcomes and effectiveness of the change intervention across these three pillars. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of the literature review this project is based on, clarifies the design choices for the intervention, the objectives set for the activities, and the results they had in the end, demonstrating the impact on participants' ability to engage in Nonviolent Communication and transform conflicts into opportunities for growth and understanding.

# 1. Introduction

When two or more people interact, conflict happens. As social beings, conflict and misunderstandings are inevitable and normal. Often, these conflicts leave people feeling disconnected and misunderstood and the pressure caused by them needs to be to hold and carry on. From family dynamics to professional environments, from the classroom to the war zone, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is changing lives every day (PuddleDancer Press & Center for Nonviolent Communication, 2009). NVC is now being taught in corporations, classrooms, prisons, and mediation centres around the globe (PuddleDancer Press & Center for Nonviolent Communication, 2009) and it is affecting cultural shifts as institutions, corporations and governments integrate NVC consciousness into their organizational structures and their approach to leadership. It provides an easy-to-grasp, effective method to get to the root of violence, pain, and conflict peacefully. Firstly, it is examining the unmet needs behind what we do or say. Thus, NVC helps reduce hostility, and bad attitudes when facing a conflict such as anger, frustration, or misunderstanding. Then, by suggesting a direct and clear, but very respectful way to express these needs, it heals pain and strengthens professional and personal relationships.

**Glossary**

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Non-Violent Communication (NVC) | "Nonviolent Communication is a way of being in the world that has the purpose is to serve life and to create connection in such a way that everyone's needs can be met through natural care." (Rosenberg, 2003) |
| (Interpersonal) Peace | A state of being with others that works harmoniously and without harm. (Connors, 2011) |
| Violence | Any human attitude, behaviour, context, action that brings harm to any living environment |
| Conflict | Contradiction of goals and ideas, perceived or actual, that comes as an inner or as an interaction of actors. |
| Conflict Transformation | It is a strategy to approach conflicts whose aim is to alter the consequences of a conflict into more constructive ones by focusing on root causes, creativity, openness and mutual understanding. <br> By dictionary, it is the process of moving from conflict-habituated systems to peace systems. (*Dictionary of Conflict Resolution* (1999: 121) |
| Emotional Literacy | The ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately express emotions and needs. It involves self awareness and recognition of feelings, the ability to manage them, empathy and sensitivity. |

*Table 1.* Glossary of terms

## 1.1. Non-Violent Communication Framework

The framework of Rosenberg is based on four crucial steps/components:

1. *Observation:* Usage of non-disputable facts instead of assumptions. The first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation. Using words that are guided by opinions or hyperboles can provoke unwanted feelings and reactions from others.

Example one. "Janice works too much." In nonviolent constraints, "too much" is an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: "Janice spent more than sixty hours at the office this week."

Example two. "Never," "Always," "Often," "For no reason" are forbidden words when wanting to make an observation. Instead, using facts that people can see, hear, smell, taste gives no room for dispute.

2. *Feelings*: For this step, creating a strong vocabulary of emotions and emotional literacy are particularly important.

Example. "I feel misunderstood/ignored." Here the words *misunderstood* or *ignored* indicate someone's assessment of the other person's level of understanding or an interpretation of the actions of others rather than an actual feeling. In this situation, one may be feeling anxious, annoyed, or hurt, loneliness.

3. *Needs*: Acknowledging needs is the third step and involves taking responsibility for our feelings. Feelings are most of the time rooted in needs that are either met or not and every individual has the goal of meeting his/her needs. This part is important because, as Rosenberg says, "If we express our needs, we have a better chance of getting them met."

Example one. "I feel angry when you say that, because I am wanting respect and I hear your words as an insult." - the speaker is acknowledging responsibility for his or her feelings.

Example two. "I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn't." To express the needs and thoughts underlying his or her feelings, the speaker might have said, "When you said you'd do it and then didn't, I felt disappointed because I want to be able to rely upon your words."

4. *Request*: Making requests in clear, positive, concrete action language reveals what individuals really want. Vague language contributes to internal confusion. When individuals simply express their feelings, it may not be clear to the listener what action is desired. They might also not know what they are requesting.

Example. "I want you to understand me." is very violent as the word "understand" does not clearly express a request for a specific action. A request for a specific action might be: "I want you to tell me what you heard me say."

Following these steps when approaching a conflict means achieving an effective language for saying what is on your mind and in your heart which sometimes resolves conflict on its own.

## 1.2. Why conflict transformation and not resolution?

Conflict transformation (Galtung, Lederach) means transforming mental frameworks, knowledge, and skills for handling conflict so that it can build relationships. It can be done by trained facilitators for a particular conflict situation or as part of overall violence prevention.

Conflict transformation begins with a central goal: to build constructive change out of the energy created by conflict. It refers to the part when the two parties express their needs, their positions, and their thoughts about the conflictual situation. Non-violent communication comes as a tool in this primary step to allow the parties to move to the conflict resolution part afterwards peacefully, where they can choose compromising, collaboration, accommodating or other strategies. Galtung's (2011) definition of peace-making is working to prevent violence and to practise conflict transformation. This report focuses on the initial step: establishing a quality of connection where each person clearly understands the other's needs, and both parties recognize each other's perspectives. Rosenberg, in another book called "The Heart of Social Change" (2004) says that when the person trusts that the other party is equally interested in their needs, 90% of the problem is solved. This project will not address this secondary part of resolving a dispute but will focus on NVC as an effective strategy for the first step of approaching it.

## 1.3.  Sense of urgency

*"In our present age of uncivil discourse and mean-spirited demagoguery, the principles and practices of Nonviolent Communication are as timely as they are necessary to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, personal or public, domestic or international." (Midwest Book Review, 2009).*

Conflicts as a contradiction of goals and ideas (see Glossary) manifest in all kinds of settings such as families, friend groups, workplaces, and communities or global relationships, leaving behind a hostile and tense atmosphere. For instance, disagreements over household responsibilities can strain familial relationships, while clashes over resources or ideologies can disrupt community harmony. Meanwhile, in professional environments, conflicts can lead to decreased productivity, low morale, and high employee turnover (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). For the latter, there is an urgent need to cultivate a culture of open, clear, non-judgmental communication to create a better teamwork experience, job satisfaction, and overall efficiency.

Rather than managing anger by suppressing the feelings or blasting someone with judgments, with NVC people can express themselves in a way that does not harm the connections.

**Relevance of Emotional Literacy.** People live in a world that prioritises practicality over emotion, where efficiency and facts are valued more highly than feelings. There is no formal education that teaches individuals to recognize their emotions or develop a strong vocabulary of feelings, leading them to improvise when expressing themselves. As a result, they often resort to name-calling and expressing assumptions or opinions instead of articulating the feelings that trouble them. Here are two explicit simple examples where emotional literacy could have helped people:

***Example one.*** A college student reported that he was being kept awake by a roommate playing loud music late at night. When asked to express his feelings, he initially gave opinions: "I feel that it isn't right to play music so loud at night," and "I feel, when people do something like that, it's a personality disturbance." (he followed the word feel with the word *that* or *when*, so he was expressing an opinion but not revealing his feelings). Upon further prompting, he admitted, "I have no feelings about it whatsoever," highlighting a difficulty in identifying and expressing his true emotions about the situation. (Rosenberg, 1999)

*Example two.* One woman described her husband as "a wall" because he was emotionally unresponsive. During the discussion, her husband remained silent and immobile, validating her complaint. This led to frustration and feelings of loneliness. It was explained that statements like "I feel like I'm living with a wall" come across as criticism rather than invitations to connect. => She sounds like she is feeling lonely and wanting more emotional contact with her husband, and expressing these exact words to him would catch his attention more.

## 1.4.  Target Audience & Target Group

In this section the target audience is defined and a sample from it was chosen for the change intervention, called in this report, target group. This part refers to the target audience as all the individuals that share the same characteristics such as demographics, psychographics, behaviours, and interests. Meanwhile, the target group consists of the group of people that an intervention is intended to reach. The people in the target group actively participate in the intervention, and the project's conclusions are based on their behaviours and actions. Meanwhile, the target audience represents the larger group for whom the change project is intended and relevant.

Non-violent communication is meant to improve both professional and personal relationships and examples were provided of both types to fit the general audience.



*Figure 1. Target Audience for the Intervention and Choice of Target Group*

However, since the target audience encompasses a broad spectrum of individuals and, society could significantly benefit from Rosenberg's framework, the scope of this project was scaled down to fit a 2-month time and the available resources. The change intervention was implemented with 8 participant national teams of an Erasmus+ Youth Exchange in May 2024, in Larnaca, Cyprus (2023-3-CY02-KA152-YOU-000182326). During the seven-day event focused on "Shaping a Participatory Future," one day was dedicated to the change intervention discussed in this paper. The thirty-seven participants constitute a diverse sample

group, spanning ages 16 to 30 and various professions. Most of the participants in the two workshops are university students or young professionals. Their nationalities are diverse, representing over ten countries from Europe (Lithuania, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Hungary, Sweden, etc.) and Asia (Kazakhstan, Iran, India). This international and diverse composition prompted the facilitator to create a primary workshop, "Building Common Ground," to ensure everyone understands cultural differences in communication and interaction. The results collected and analysed focusing on the behaviour and attitude change of this group and their development in nonviolent skills.

Later, in week 9 of the process, the intervention was extended to target the students at University of Twente on Nonviolent Communication with holding a Student Ted Talk with an integrated workshop as part of Well-Being week at the university. In this case, students and academics were targeted, and the workshop "Exploring Nonviolent Communication" was conducted. This time seventeen people attended and benefited from the activities.

# 2.    Change Goals

Effective behavioural change requires that we identify what we are changing, why we are changing it, and how we are changing it and then create a plan of action to ensure that we implement this change. Three main goals were settled when designing the change process:

### Change in Awareness

"Awareness is the first step toward change as individuals and as societies." (Logan, Berman, Berman, & Prescott, 2021, p. 6) The same paper argues that, once a person has awareness, it allows him/her to see both the challenges and the possibilities and to make meaningful choices. After the intervention, participants will know about the existence of Rosenberg's communication style and will have the tools and knowledge to apply it. Moreover, develop a deeper understanding of how their communication style and behaviour impact others and influence the dynamics of conflict situations. With regards to the first workshop "Building Common Ground," the activities connected to understanding cultural differences and cultural biases have the sole purpose of raising awareness in participants on the existence of these differences and internal biases.

### Change in Attitude

This second pillar focuses on a switch in parties' attitude in this first step of conflict. Using discussions, case studies, and participation in mindset-shifting practical exercises, participants learned to approach conflicts with a more open, non-judgmental, and structural perspective. This attitude change is crucial for understanding the deeper, underlying causes of conflicts and addressing them effectively. The intervention encouraged participants to see conflicts not as threats, but as opportunities for growth and positive change.

### Skill Development

Next step is to develop the skills to display the required behaviour. Combining skill development with underlying, intrinsic motivation and reason, is essential for sustainable change (Di Vito, 2019). This last pillar is achieved through skill-building workshops, debating, and reflecting on personal scenarios, and by real-world application exercises. At the

end of the intervention, participants should have developed essential non-violent communication techniques, together with empathic listening and dialogue. In addition, they should have acquired the skill of identifying and expressing their needs and feelings. Each activity aims to contribute to at least one of these targeted objectives, according to *Table 2*.

| ACTIVITY | DESCRIPTION | | OBJECTIVE |
|----------|-------------|---|-----------|
| The Onion Tool | The Onion illustrates some of many layers and elements of conflict that get built up over the course of a dispute. | → | Learn to analyze conflicts and recognize needs. Develop the skill of move beyond surface-level to address the root causes, and enhance self-understanding and personal growth. |
| 4 steps towards Non-Violence | Participants step in turns, give an example of conflict and how they try to address it by stepping on the sheets of paper with the name of the component. | → | Practice the skill of using NVC's 4 steps for any given conflictual situation. |
| The Cultural Rope | Participants place themselves along a rope on the floor to indicate their position on a cultural dimension. | → | Increase in self-awareness and understanding of cultural diversity. End goal is improving communication and collaboration in diverse teams. |
| Biases Drawing | Participants draw or write their biases on each country's paper.(in national groups) | → | Increase awareness acknowledgement of cultural biases/stereotypes. Create a safe space for open dialogue to understanding of diverse cultures. |

*Table 2 - Learning Objectives of Intervention Activities*

## 2.1. Learning Goals & Expected Outcomes

Next step is analysing the learning goals of the change intervention. At the end of the intervention, participants should be able to…:

a.      use the four steps of Nonviolent Communication of Marshall Rosenberg and apply them to daily situations.

b.      implement strategies to de-escalate conflicts and prevent misunderstandings.

c.      differentiate between positions, interests, and needs within conflicts and pinpoint the needs behind their feelings and emotions.

d.      self-reflect and gain insights to apply the learnings to their professional or personal roles.

e.      identify their personal biases with regards with other cultures

f.      be aware and acknowledge that diverse cultures approach situations differently and shape their communication and attitude accordingly.

g.      develop active listening skills to enhance empathy and understanding in interactions.

h.      be aware of their communication style and the power of words.

i.      explore alternative conflict resolution approaches or strategies.

Outcome: To encourage participants to translate insights derived from the workshops into actionable steps or initiatives within their communities or organisations, driving real-world impact and positive change.

# 3.    Change Approach

## 3.1. Methodology

A workshop could deliver such that all three objectives are met: a presentation was made by the facilitator to deliver the information and to create a basic knowledge of the topic discussed, interactive activities were held so that the theoretical notions could be practised, and reflection time was used so that the group could connect the concepts with their personal experience and then debrief this connection with the other participants.

### 3.1.1.   Non-Formal Education

According to the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU, 2011), non-formal education at its best is creating knowledge, skills, and attitude- rather than swallowing ready-made facts and opinions without evaluation. This methodology was chosen as the three pillars of awareness, attitude change, and skill development match perfectly the objectives of this change intervention.

Adopting non-formal ways means that the role in organising the workshop switched from teacher/lecturer to facilitator and creating workshops based on these ways included designing participatory engaging activities where the participants will actively contribute to the learning experience.

This intervention consisted of two separate workshops: **Building Common Ground & Understanding Cultural Differences** and **Exploring Nonviolent Communication**. As the target group was very international and diverse in terms of age, culture and professions, a primary session was conducted to build common ground and to explore cultural differences between participants, after which the focus switched to Rosenberg's theory.

## 3.2.   Workshops

**Understanding cultural differences.** Culture is shaping most of the personal communication styles, and according to Erin Meyer (2014, p. 20) "You may find that part of your personal style comes from the culture where you spent the first years of your life". It defines not only what words we choose in our interactions with others, but also how we approach these interactions. Cultural differences then are truly relevant in this regard. Being aware of the diversity and the differences that surround the context is highly beneficial for individuals.

For the change intervention, having such an international diverse group (>10 nationalities) was the reason of having these activities related to cultural diversity in communication before going into Nonviolent communication activities. The aim of this primary workshop was to overcome cultural barriers, or more explicitly, the challenges in communication that arise because of differences in the cultural backgrounds of the involved parties. Examples can include differences in language, directness in communication, communication styles, stereotypes, and even prejudice. The exercises chosen were "The Culture Rope" inspired by Meyer's 8 dimensions scales and her methodology of positioning

cultures along these scales. During the interventions, participants were asked to indicate their culture position on the scale using their personal judgement and experiences. Each person did so by placing themselves along a 4-meter rope. This exercise was powerful because everyone can visually assess the position of their peers in comparison with theirs, and the physical distance along the rope was a metaphor for the cultural distance between countries. The debriefing part was interesting, in which every participant could explain with real life personal examples how their culture approaches Leading, Direct negative feedback, Communication or other dimensions of the Culture Map.

The second exercise consisted in drawing biases on each country's flipcharts. Participants worked in stations, drawing different images, or writing some things that first come to their minds when thinking or imagining the country on the flipchart.

Below, the workshop guides used during the intervention explain in detail the activities and the dynamic of the workshops:

WORKSHOP GUIDE (1):

| Title | **Building Common Ground & Understanding Cultural Differences** |
|---|---|
| **Facilitator** | Cătălina Petruș |
| **Number of participants** | 37 |
| **Total length** | ~ 1h 30 min |
| **Materials** | ● Support PowerPoint material<br>● Flip charts prepared beforehand placed on 8 working tables<br>● Long rope |
| **Session objectives** | 1. Bring definitions for the terms used in the workshops to an agreed form by everyone.<br>2. Recognize and acknowledge personal cultural biases and stereotypes.<br>3. Raise awareness on cultural differences in communication and behaviour. |
| **ACTIVITIES** | |
| **Activity 1**. Building definitions ~ time: 25 min | Bring the flipcharts with the definitions of Peace, Violence, Emotional Literacy in the front of the group, one at a time.<br>Discuss in plenary the definitions and create a mutual understanding of each notion. |
| **Activity 2**. The 8 Dimensions of Culture ~ time: 15 min | Presentation on Erin Meyer's "Culture Map" framework focusing on the importance of understanding cultural differences.<br><br>For each dimension give the book examples with countries placed on the scale.<br><br>*This activity intertwines with Activity 3. |

| Activity 3. The cultural Rope<br><br>~ time: 30min | 1. Explain the purpose of the rope and that it is a metaphor for the dimension scale and define the ends as the 2 extremes (example: One end will be "low-context communication" and the other "high-context")<br><br>2. After presenting one dimension, give 2 clear examples from the two sides of the scale of the dimension.<br><br>3. Give 30 seconds for participants to place themselves along the rope according to their personal style or where they estimate their country would be placed.<br><br>4. Ask 3 participants or more to explain their reasoning. Usually choose the extremes to display the contrast and a person in the middle. Try to give space for debriefing and discussion between participants by asking them to give personal examples and concrete situations. |
|---|---|
| Activity 3. Cultural Biases Drawing<br><br>~ time: 30 min | 1. Split the teams into national teams (~5 participants/team).<br><br>2. Ask them to draw whatever they can think of when seeing the country's name on the flipchart or when they imagine this country.<br><br>3. Give 5 minutes/country to draw and then rotate until the national team reaches their flipchart. Facilitator goes around and monitors the movement.<br><br>4. The teams come in front taking turns to address what is on the paper. Helping questions:<br>• What were your feelings when you saw the drawings?<br>• Are the biases true/false? Explain them briefly. |
| Evaluation time - feedback time<br>~ 3min | Ask them to close their eyes and show a number with their fingers from 1 to 10 to evaluate how satisfied you feel after the session.<br><br>*Optional to open 5 minutes of open sharing. |

WORKSHOP GUIDE (2):

| Title | **Exploring Nonviolent Communication** |
|---|---|
| **Facilitator** | Cătălina Petruş |
| **Number of participants** | 37 |
| **Total length** | 1h 30min |
| **Materials** | ● The Onion diagram<br>● Support PowerPoint material<br>● Flip charts<br>● Sheets of A4 paper<br>● Colour markers |
| **Session objectives** | 1. Recognizing your own and other people's emotions.<br>2. Identifying your own and other people's needs<br>3. Practise nonviolent communication using the emotions and needs discovered |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 4. Practise active listening and observation to identify personal and other people's needs and emotions |
| **ACTIVITIES** | |
| **Activity 1**. Emotions connected to needs. (the onion tool, the wheel of emotions and the universal needs list)<br><br>~ time: | *Participants explore the connection between emotions and needs and the purpose of emotions and its power.*<br><br>1. Show the wheel of emotions, first ask them if they have any questions on any of the terms. If they do not, the facilitator picks up the most uncommon ones and explains or asks for input from participants. Hand in the wheel on paper or digitally.<br><br>Once all the emotions are clear, ask participants to pick up at least one emotion from each level *from inner to outer level. Ask them to challenge themselves by picking up emotions they do not usually name and be precise in self-reflection.<br><br>2. Share the list of needs (paper or digital) and ask them to think about the needs that they already know about and those that they have not identified as a need before.<br><br>3. Show them **the onion as a tool** to recognize their emotions and the link between them and their needs. Ask them to think about a conflict and create their own onion by adding the 3 different layers. Hand in papers and give them time to create their own. This will be an individual exercise where everyone draws their own onion.<br><br>4. Now, participants work in pairs and discuss with their partners what strategies and positions they are adopting in the conflict and any additional needs or changes that they came up with when reviewing the onion the second time individually.<br><br>As a possibility, ask them to share all together any insights that they had during the experience *pairs and individually. |
| **Activity 2. NVC in Presentation**<br><br>~ time: | 1. Explain the NVC framework through a presentation.<br><br>2. Use the NVC Card Toolkit and flip charts created beforehand. Stick the flipcharts in front of the group after the explanations. |
| **Activity 2. NVC in Practice**<br>~ time: | 1. Take 4 sheets of paper that convey all the steps and put them on the ground.<br><br>2. The facilitator gives three prepared examples of situations and the non-violent way of handling them by dynamically moving along the paper steps.<br><br>3. Now let participants follow the example by taking rounds in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | stepping on the papers and assist them.<br><br>4. Use the card toolkit created if in trouble. Facilitate discussion and correct the "violent" words that might appear. |
| **Evaluation time - feedback time ~ 3min** | Ask them to close their eyes and show a number with their fingers from 1 to 10 to evaluate how satisfied you feel after the session.<br><br>*Optional to open 5 minutes of open sharing. |

Facilitator 's note: If participants are interested in going deeper on the subject, you may recommend they apply The Onion to analyse a conflict within their own personal life and recommend NVC app.

*"THE ONION" - A self-analysis tool*

When there are conflicts between us or between our organisations, the "Onion" (also known as a "donut"), can be used by many groups to sort out some of the dynamics at play in the conflict. (We Rise, n.d.). The basis lays under the idea that the layers of a conflict are much like that of an onion. There are many dynamics to be considered, but only those on the surface are visible, until we start to peel off the layers to see what lies at the core. It allows a better understanding of the conflicting parties' positions and their real interests and needs. It helps us to distinguish between what the different parties say they want, and what they really want and need. (Imam, Modibbo & Sunday, 2020, p. 29).
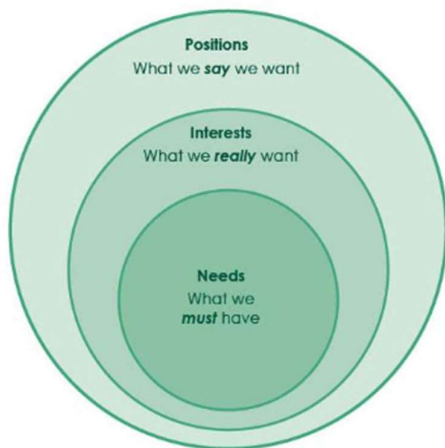


**Explanation.** The outer layer of the onion represents the positions we allow everyone to see and hear what we say we want). Underlying these are our interests (what we want), which represent what we wish to achieve in a conflict situation. At the core of the onion are our needs (what we must have), which must be fulfilled for the conflicting parties to be truly satisfied with the outcome. While interests can often be negotiated, needs are non-negotiable.

*Figure 2 – "Onion" as a Tool of Analysis*

Peeling personal onions discovers the key to conflicts – people's deeply felt needs. The Onion illustrates some of the many layers and elements of conflict that be built up over the course of a dispute. The aim is to understand and identify these dynamics and layers so that the real needs at the heart of the dispute can get addressed and the conflict resolved in a constructive way.
One example given by a participant drawing his onion:
**Position**: "I need a raise."
**Feelings**: "I feel undervalued and stressed."
**Needs**: "I need recognition and financial security."

**Strategy**: "Being concerned about my long-term career growth and financial stability, I rush to the boss' office and approach him with my request."

# 4. Results

This section presents the findings from the project intervention, measured through pre- and post-workshop surveys and direct feedback from participants immediately following each workshop. The analysis aims to address the following questions: what has changed, together with what data supports this change and linking the findings to relevant literature.

## 4.1. Pre-Session Survey

The aim of the pre-session questionnaire is to evaluate participants' existing knowledge and identify specific areas where they lack understanding. This initial assessment allowed for tailoring the workshop content to address these knowledge gaps effectively by providing relevant information and skills.

**Questions and participants' answers:**

| *Question* | *Answers* |
|---|---|
| Have you heard of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) before? | *Over 70%* answered *No.* |
| If yes, how would you rate your understanding of NVC? | *Half (50%)* rated their knowledge as a *1 (*on a scale from *1-very bad* to *5-very good).* Only three people of all respondents knew to name the steps of the NVC framework. |
| How often do you identify and articulate your needs during a disagreement? | *50% (fifty percent)* only *'Sometimes'* do*,* while *11%* responded *'Never'.* |
| How confident do you feel in understanding others' feelings and needs? | All answers were above *3 (*on a scale from *1-not confident* to *5-very confident).* |
| How often do you make specific, actionable requests in conflicts? | Approximately *66% 'Occasionally'* or *'Sometimes'.* |

*Table 3 – Some questions and answers from the pre-survey*

Among the expectations of the participants, they mentioned that they would like to lear*n "How to resolve conflicts better with all types of people"* or how "*To fix problems easier*." In addition, some people expressed their willingness to improve their skills on expressing

feelings and thoughts: *"I hope to learn some clues about expressing my feelings and thoughts better."* or *"How to be considerate in conflicts whilst maintaining assertiveness*."

**Interpretation.** The pre-session questionnaire revealed significant knowledge gaps among participants regarding Nonviolent Communication (NVC). Most participants had never heard of NVC, and those familiar with it had a poor understanding. Few could name the steps of the NVC framework. While participants felt somewhat confident in understanding others' feelings, many struggled with articulating their needs and making actionable requests during conflicts. Participants expressed a strong desire to learn effective conflict resolution strategies and improve their communication skills. This feedback informed the redesign of the workshop, focusing on foundational NVC principles and practical techniques.

## 4.2. Post-Session Survey

The aim of the post-session survey is to evaluate the impact of the workshop on participants' knowledge and skills related to nonviolent communication. This assessment helps measure the effectiveness of the workshop and the non-formal ways used to enhance participants' understanding and readiness to apply NVC principles. By gathering feedback on their newly acquired insights and their confidence in using NVC strategies, the survey provides valuable data on the immediate benefits and potential long-term application of the training.

**Questions and some Answers:**

| *Question* | *Answers* |
|---|---|
| How would you rate your understanding of NVC now? | 100% of the answers were rated at 4 - strong and 5 - very strong. Also, 90% of the respondents were able to write down the 4 steps of the NVC framework when being asked. |
| What new insights or skills have you gained from this session? | *"Learned how to transform conflicts and practiced NVC."* *"Communication and strategies to connect to avoid misunderstanding."* *"Learning the four components well."* *"I learnt new ways to make requests."* |
| How do you plan to apply what you learned in your daily life? | *"Applying the framework to transform my daily conflicts."* *"By learning more about it"* *"Of course, to have better communication."* *"Difficult to consciously apply this in every situation, but it might help me occasionally IF I remember."* *"I will try to explain my feelings more openly."* |
| What aspects of the session did you find most | *"Explanation of examples and the onion model"* *"I think understanding the importance of the way we* |

| | |
|---|---|
| valuable? | *talk was the most valuable part."* <br> *"The 4 stages of NVC" (x2)* <br> *"The Onion"* <br> *"Examples"* |
| Do you feel confident about using the 4 steps now after the workshop? | *76%* responded '*Yes*' while the rest said '*Maybe*' |

**Interpretation**. Ideally, the initial assessment questions (*How often do you identify and articulate your needs during a disagreement?, How confident do you feel in understanding others' feelings and needs?, How often do you make specific, actionable requests in conflicts?*) would be administered again after a period of 1 month. However, due to limitations of this change intervention project, the aim of this post-survey question switched so that awareness and fresh knowledge were measured. Some questions also assessed the willingness to use and put into practice. However, these results suggest that the workshop successfully addressed initial knowledge gaps and equipped participants with valuable communication tools, aligning with the goals of the intervention.

The post-session survey reveals significant improvements in participants' understanding and application of nonviolent communication. Participants reported a strong grasp of NVC principles and could accurately identify the four steps of the NVC framework. They gained valuable insights into conflict transformation, effective communication strategies, and practical skills for making requests and avoiding misunderstandings.

**Suggestions for Improvement.** Participants provided constructive feedback on how the session could be enhanced. While some found it perfect, others suggested making it more interactive and energising. Involving the audience with more questions and ensuring a dynamic, two-way communication process were recommended to increase engagement. This feedback gotten after the sessions in Cyprus were then implemented in the workshop one month later during the Student Ted Talk, so that more exercises on NVC were added, and more physical materials used such as papers with exercises for participants to complete. This way, a participant that would not feel comfortable with stepping in the circle and following the 4-steps (**Activity 2. NVC in Practice)** would still be able to actively participate by completing the handed exercises.

*Direct Feedback*

To assess the impact of the workshops while it was in their fresh memory, participants were asked to close their eyes and rate their satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5 using their fingers. Additionally, a 5-minute open sharing session was provided optionally. All participants rated their satisfaction as 4 or 5, accompanied by positive feedback. Direct feedback was also received intensively after the workshops and a lot of people congratulated the efforts and thanked for the new knowledge. More importantly, at the conclusion of the Erasmus+ youth exchange, after a week of workshops and activities, many participants highlighted the workshop on nonviolent communication as a key takeaway they would apply in their daily lives. This feedback indicates a notable change in both behaviour and awareness among the participants and the acknowledgment of the workshop as a memorable and impactful experience suggests an enhanced awareness of the importance of empathetic and nonjudgmental communication.

*Link with literature*

The results from the project intervention have enhanced the literature on nonviolent communication practices by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of targeted workshops in improving participants' understanding and application of NVC principles. These findings align with existing literature on the importance and power of Nonviolent Communication. Marshall Rosenberg's work emphasises that NVC enhances empathetic interactions and reduces conflict through better understanding and communication of needs and feelings (Rosenberg, 2003) showed also in the significant improvement in participants' understanding and their intent to apply NVC principles in daily lives. The non-formal approach to teaching NVC, as implemented in this project, appears to be particularly effective. This method that uses interactive and practical exercises, allows participants to engage deeply with the material, resulting in fast knowledge retention and practical application skills. This aligns with educational theories that emphasise experiential learning as a powerful tool for behaviour change (Kolb, 1984). This project intervention stands as proof that these techniques can be used in classrooms, learning and even business environments such as for team building activities, and might be more effective than the sit-and-listen lectures or theoretical presentations.

# 5. Advice

Following the completion of the workshop on Nonviolent Communication and conflict resolution, participants are encouraged to continue their growth and development by considering the following recommendations:

1. It is highly recommended to practise the things learnt during the workshops in conjunction with reading Dr Marshall Rosenberg's book ("Nonviolent Communication a Language of Life"). The book is valuable for its real-life examples, the simple accessible language and the powerful message and can be even listened to in multiple languages.
2. Keeping a journal to reflect on conflicts, feelings, needs, and other interactions helps in revising and self-reflection. In case of conflict, one could take a moment and write their thoughts and then translate them into non-violent. It can also be helpful to retrospect and document the situation, the feelings and the needs involved, and the outcomes.
3. Finding a mentor or joining a group is another recommendation post-intervention. Practising in a group and discussing together with others makes the journey more fun and easier. A group or a personal mentor can help to share experiences, gain insights, and stay motivated.
4. Recently, some mobile applications can be found on the market that relate to Nonviolent communication and Rosenberg's theory. Most of them provide examples, lists of feelings. The Centre for Nonviolent Communication offers the [NVC Help App](#) with the following functionalities: List of feelings and needs, thought extractor and phrases builder. Another good application for people unfamiliar with NVC is [NVConnect](#). It will also appeal to those who are serious about deepening and integrating their NVC skills. In this case it is highly recommended to use it in conjunction with Dr Marshall Rosenberg's book ("Nonviolent Communication a Language of Life").

5.  Continuing being attentive, observant, and mindful to cultural behaviours, differences and intercultural interactions gives internationalised interactions more sense. Participants can use the learnings to identify biased thoughts and stop them from altering their relationships.
6.  One recommendation for people that work in international and cross-cultural teams in their academic or professional work is to use the Culture Map book and its scales. They can use the Culture Mapping Tool to map their teams and groups of friends and use the mapping in tailoring their communication and approach to group work dynamic since the start of a project.

# 6.  Personal Learning Journey

This final module allowed me to implement an intervention that was both challenging and rewarding. This project was my first experience designing and conducting workshops, gathering data, and analysing the impact of my intervention and I consider myself lucky to be able to be working with a diverse group of participants from various cultural backgrounds in the Erasmus+ Youth Exchange and later at the University of Twente. In this sense, the learnings from module four helped me with it as I learnt that adjusting the leading style on the situation is needed and there must be a match between the environment, the followers (participants in this case) traits and my personal style of leadership. For example, the two workshops held in Cyprus had to be adjusted later to suit the characteristics of the audience that came for the Ted Talk on campus.

In addition, the project's core—teaching and practicing NVC—was instrumental in reinforcing my personal understanding of nonviolent communication principles and their application in real-world scenarios. Looking back, it was indeed a "Learning by Doing" experience, as I gained a lot more information and experience on the topic while I was showing it to others. The process of conducting this change intervention has significantly contributed to my personal and professional development. I gained valuable experience in project management, from conceptualization to execution and evaluation and I also gained confidence in my presenting and organisational skills, and my assertiveness. This hands-on experience in applying theoretical knowledge to practice has been satisfying and educational. A lesson that I learnt from the overall experience and reflecting on feedback was to focus on interaction and public participation. Incorporating more feedback loops within the intervention could enhance its effectiveness. Gathering feedback from participants during the workshops would allow for real-time adjustments and improvements, ensuring that the content remains relevant and engaging for all participants.

Lastly, the coaching sessions, just partly related to the project, helped me in setting and achieving personal goals. I found it as a great opportunity as developing others with my change intervention went together with developing myself. The sessions helped me reflect on my personal growth, my working style, my plans, and targets and how all intertwines with my professional aspirations.

The Processes of Change track, in particular, equipped me with a set of skills and insights that my main major would not touch and that proved to be very valuable. One of the key highlights of the Honours Programme has been the emphasis on real-world applications of theoretical knowledge that we experienced mostly in the last two modules and how personal and tailored all the modules felt. I am grateful for this experience and look forward to applying the learnings in diverse contexts, driving positive change in my community and beyond.

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# 8. APPENDICES

Appendix A -

Appendix B – Understanding Cultural Differences



Figure – Biases drew on Hungary's flipchart
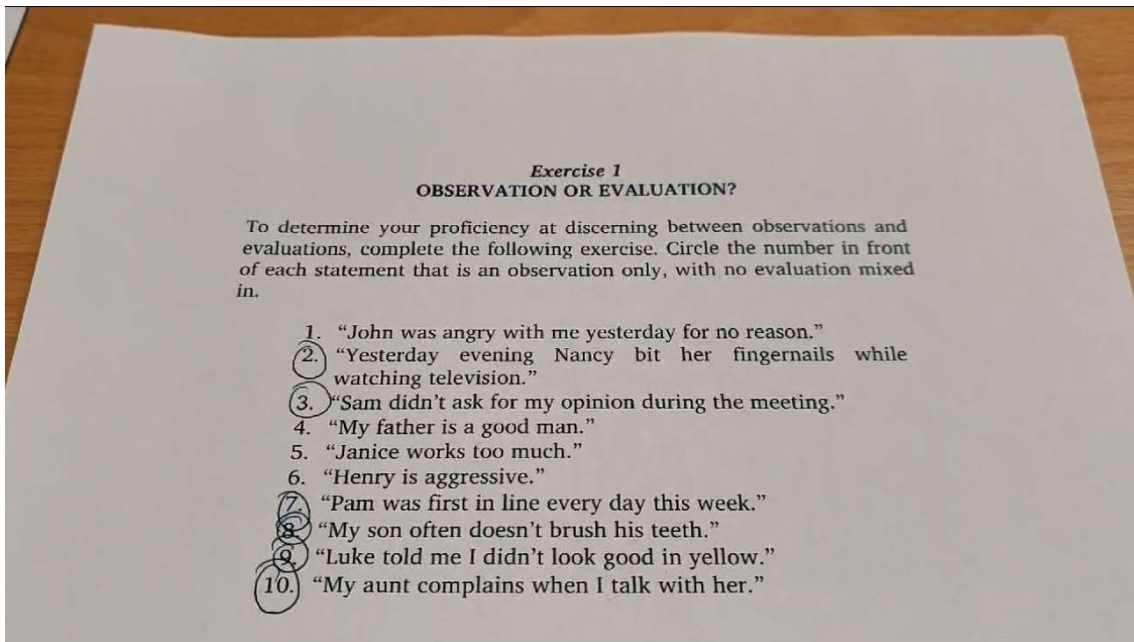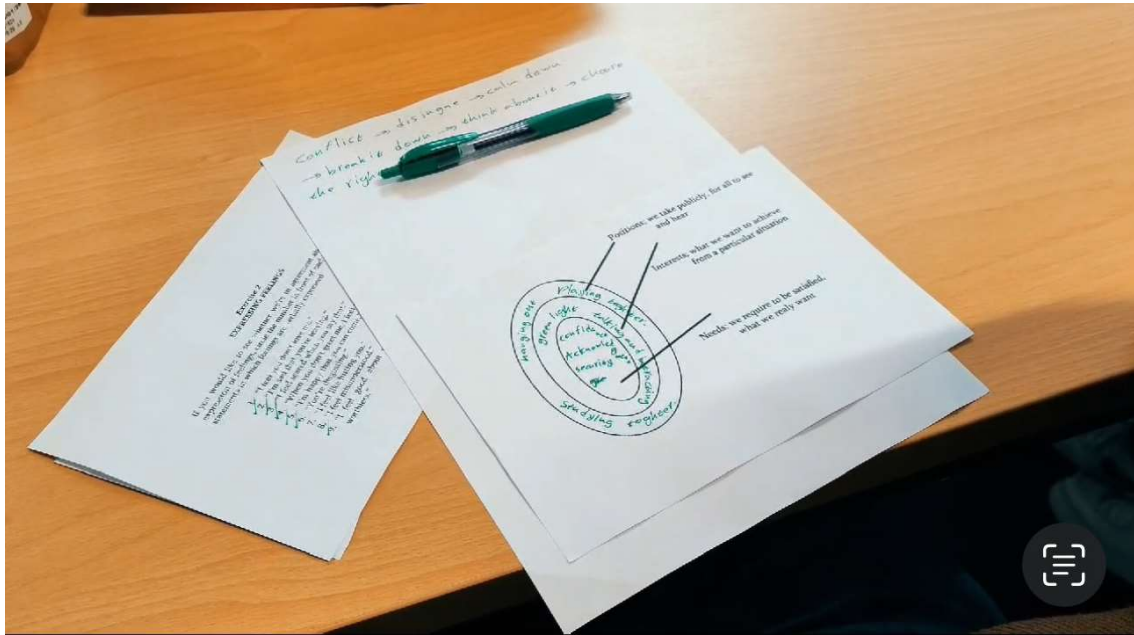
Appendix C – Images from during the interventions - workshops

Figure – Participants drawing their personal "Onions"





Figure – Activity NVC in Practice the 4 Steps

Appendix D – Student Ted Talk

# Overcoming Social Anxiety

Author: Maria Alexandra Sandu
Supervisor: Dr. R.B. Rajah

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety is characterized by an intense fear of social situations. Individuals with social anxiety believe that future encounters will expose their flaws and that they will be judged for them (Butler, 2016). This fear can be so overwhelming that it leads them to avoid social interactions altogether (Warner et al., 2018). Persuading individuals with social anxiety to confront their fears can be challenging, as it requires them to step outside of their comfort zone.

## 1.2 Target Group

The target group for this initiative is students, as social anxiety can impact them on multiple planes (Antony & Swinson, 2017):

- **Mentally**: When going from high school to university, the step can be quite large, especially if you move away from your family to a new city or country. People crave support from others in stressful situations, but to have that support in a new environment, you need to put yourself out there and engage socially.
- **Academically**: Social anxiety can negatively influence academic life by holding students back from fully participating in their education, impacting their grades and overall learning experience, as it can present with reluctance to interact in classes, to ask questions, or with having a hard time presenting or collaborating in teams.
- **Professionally**: Being a student can mean you are having your first peek into the job market and that can be intimidating on its own, but going to interviews and networking at career fairs can be even more overwhelming for socially anxious individuals, impacting their career growth by hindering their chances to secure positions in internships or jobs.

## 1.3 Situation

When going through the already available literature surrounding social anxiety, I was not able to find a study that encompasses a way for students, or people in general, to go through all of the phases explained in this paper. The majority were focusing on either only the beginning step of awareness, or on steps that come further along in the process, but that implied participants needed to already know how they were affected by social anxiety. This is not an easy task, and many struggle to understand where to start, or what causes their social anxiety.

## 1.4   Urgency

The intended number of years for a bachelor's degree in the Netherlands, depending on the type of institution, is 3 to 4 years, but this is a limited time in which students have to balance not only academics, but also social relations, and career options. It is a crucial time for growth on all levels, where making mistakes and learning from them is part of the process. Because social anxiety can have such a powerful and overwhelming effect on someone, it is extremely important to start being aware of the limitations it possesses, as well as trying to limit the impact before it causes missed opportunities to arise. Thus, by addressing social anxiety early, students can find mechanisms that work for them in overcoming this fear timely.

# 2.   Change Goals

## 2.1   Benefits of Overcoming

Social anxiety can be a hurdle in personal growth, professional development, and social interactions (Antony & Swinson, 2017). Overcoming it allows individuals to develop stronger relationships, express themselves confidently, and pursue opportunities they might otherwise avoid due to fear. It can lead to a significant improvement in overall well-being. This can manifest as a stronger sense of self-trust, replacing the constant doubt that often fuels social anxiety. Additionally, the intense distress and worry associated with social situations can decrease, allowing for a calmer and more positive emotional experience.

## 2.2   Change Goals

In the creation of the change goals, I have used the goal clarification method proposed by Siegfried Greif in the lecture "How to Bridge the Intention-Action-Gap" from the module 'Change at the Individual Level', so I can view exactly what goals I want to tackle in this paper. I started by explaining the motives for the goal, and the difference it can make, then I checked how concrete it is, detailed the positive consequences, and decided on the importance of the goal. This left me with the following change goals:

- Help individuals be more aware of how social anxiety affects them mentally and physically.
- Help individuals be more aware of where social anxiety can come from.
- Help individuals with methods on how to manage social anxiety easier.
- Help individuals with concrete tips on the type of social anxiety they experience.
- Ultimately, help individuals overcome their social anxiety.

## 2.3   Focus Rationale

The best first step for understanding yourself and how you are feeling is to make a self-assessment or go through a guided assessment. This will allow you to determine how much social anxiety impacts you and where it stems from, help you choose the most effective exercise to overcome it, and then implement those strategies (Antony & Swinson, 2017). The change goals also follow this timeline, from awareness to management.

## 2.4 Key Benefits

This method is most likely to be beneficial for the situation because after an individual understands where their emotions are coming from, they are more prone to start taking action about it. After being taught exercises that help in social anxiety-inducing situations, individuals can also apply them, as they are formed of actionable and practical tips. This means that on a long-term plan, they will start being more and more comfortable in those situations, effectively overcoming their social anxiety, or at least minimizing the impact it has on their lives.

## 2.5 Decision Drivers

One of the principles presented in the book *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade* by Cialdini (2016) is the Principle of Unity. Because there was a time when I struggled with social anxiety, I found I could relate to the individuals taking part in the study by creating a space of shared interest. Although not the scope of the study, and not intentional, it turned out that all students who participated in the workshop were international students, all from Romania. This furthered the sense of unity, as we not only had the same struggle but also came from the same country, sharing similar backgrounds. I used this principle to create a safe space where everyone can talk freely about social anxiety and how they are affected by it, such that I could increase awareness among the participants.

# 3. Change Approach

## 3.1 Initial Approach

The initial approach consisted of three different methods that could be used based on the responses from the first survey. This can be seen in Appendix A. The methods have changed a little, as the proposed initial approach did not entirely fit the change goals, only tackling the 2nd "Help individuals be more aware of where social anxiety can come from." and the 4th "Help individuals with concrete tips on the type of social anxiety they experience.".

## 3.2 Final Approach

Firstly, at the beginning of the workshop, a moment for a safe space will be created to make participants comfortable in sharing their experiences concerning social anxiety. This will be done using the Principle of Unity presented in the book *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade* by Cialdini (2016), by sharing that everyone in the room has struggled or is struggling with a shared problem, and that we are there to understand how to make it impact us less. After this, participants will be invited to have a small open discussion, either purely on how anxiety affects them, or by following the topics:

- Describe a situation where you feel socially anxious.
- What emotions and physical sensations do you experience in that situation?
- How does social anxiety affect your academic life, e.g. in teamwork or presentations?
- Do you think your social anxiety stems from a fear that others will judge you negatively?
- When you feel anxious in a social setting, how do you typically respond or behave?

After the discussion has ended, I will delve into how self-focused negative thoughts can have a big impact on social anxiety (Mahone et al., 1993). This stems from the idea that socially anxious people can fear being judged by others based on their behavior, which means they also tend to focus on the mistakes they make and how they will be perceived (Spurr & Stopa, 2002). To better explain the idea of self-focused attention, the following extract will be used in the workshop "Self-focused attention can have negative effects because it detracts attention from the environment and, if the content of self-focused thoughts is negative, then self-focused attention generates negative affect and impairs the individual's ability to problem-solve effectively." (Spurr & Stopa, 2002). After this, participants will be asked if they think this applies to them and in what way. Five techniques will follow on how to regulate social anxiety either in advance or during an uncomfortable situation:

- Grounding Exercise (Smith, S., 2018)
    The article explores the usefulness of the 5-4-3-2-1 Technique after breathing, which is meant to help ground you when feeling anxious and steer you away from the negative thoughts.

- Breathing Technique (Jerath, R. et al., 2015)
    The article emphasizes that controlled breathing can positively impact the autonomic nervous system (ANS) by reducing stress and anxiety and increasing relaxation and calm.

- External Focus (Fergus, T. A. et al., 2014)
    The article explores the difference in results between attention-training techniques (ATT) and mindfulness-based tasks. The result of the study is that they both reduce anxiety with the same effectiveness. But, the exercise proposed for external focus is based on the mindfulness-based task. More information in Appendix E.

- Preparation and Visualization (Neocleous, M., 2012)
    Although the main focus of the article is a little bit more specific, it also describes the idea of "Preparedness, prevention, planning and preemption" as a security mechanism that helps in coping with anticipated challenges in anxiety.

- Positive Self-Talk and Reframing (Eagleson, C., 2016)
    The article has observed both "replacing the usual form of worry with images of possible positive outcomes, or with the same positive outcomes represented verbally", and both methods were deemed effective in reducing anxiety. For this exercise, I will explore the possibility of positive verbal representation as some people might struggle with imagining photos.

The steps for each exercise can be found in Appendix B.

Given that from the first survey, available in Appendix C, the two situations people have experienced social anxiety in are meeting/talking to new people and speaking in front of people, the next step will focus on giving a 'cheat sheet' on how to approach a stranger and start a

conversation, as well as tips on public speaking. This is based on the idea of 'Preparation and Visualization', as it prepares participants for the scenarios they have already been socially anxious in, reducing the impact it will have on them in the future.

Thus, for the scenario of speaking to strangers, multiple subjects from the book *How To Start A Conversation And Make Friends* by Gabor (2011) broken into the following categories will be elaborated:

- Body Language
    It was also emphasized as important in effective communication in the workshop given by Frans Stel, "Insights Discovery workshop", in the module 'Change at the Individual Level', as it makes up 55% of non-verbal communication.
- Rejection
- Starting a conversation
- Ritual questions
- Difference between closed-ended and open-ended ritual questions
- Continuing the conversation
- Closing unwanted conversations

The categories' explanation can be seen in Appendix D.

For speaking in front of people, the article *Anxiety Level in Students of Public Speaking: Causes and Remedies* by Raja (2017) was used to extract methods that can help in alleviating anxiety in public speaking, while also attaching them to the five techniques on how to regulate, listed above. The methods are as follows:

- Openly admit about your anxiety
- Create a mantra (linked to 'Positive Self-Talk and Reframing')
- Correcting your own mistakes and using familiar words in speaking
- Use breathing or grounding techniques
- Prepare extensively (linked to 'Preparation and Visualization')
- Focus on the material, not on the audience

The explanation can be seen in Appendix D.

## 3.3   Measuring

The subjects will be given a survey before and after the workshop. The first survey will contain open-ended and/or multiple choice questions with regards to the people partaking, and how their experience with social anxiety is through the point of three categories, thinking, behavior, and physical feelings (e.g. the level of social anxiety that they experience, the situations in which this is most prevalent if they used any methods to overcome this, why they want to overcome it, how does it affect their mental health, how does it affect their body, etc.) (Antony & Swinson, 2017; Warner et. al., 2018). The second survey will also contain open-ended and/or multiple-choice questions but on the new behaviors that they will be able to implement from the moment of the workshop onwards (e.g. what safety behavior are you most comfortable implementing, are you more aware of your triggers now, do you feel more confident going into social anxiety-inducing

scenarios, etc.). They will also be observed by me in their interactions during the workshop, so I can assess if I see a change. The usual telltale signs I will look for are behavioral (e.g. not initiating conversations, speaking quietly, too slow/fast speaking, short answers, avoiding eye contact, only interacting with people they already know, always agreeing with another person, as well as physical (e.g. trembling, blushing, sweating, hiding hands behind their back, putting their hands around their mouth, fiddling with hair or ears) (Butler, 2016; Warner et. al., 2018). To further assess if there has been an improvement in the participants' social anxiety, a final survey will be sent after two weeks from the date of the workshop.

# 4.   Results & Enrichment

For the content and responses of the first, second, and final surveys refer to Appendix C.

It is important to mention that from the five participants who signed up, only three showed up at the workshop, despite being reminded via email the morning of. The participants that did not show up were between the highest in regards to their social anxiety from the people that responded (both a five on the scale from zero to ten), which might also be the reason they decided to not come, as it would put them in an, although beneficial, uncomfortable circumstance.

All of the participants who came to the workshop indicated in the first survey that they did not use any methods to overcome their social anxiety, which meant none of the techniques I presented were already familiar to them, or if they were, they did not try them in practice yet.

In the second survey which was given right after the workshop, part of the results from the assessment can also be concluded, concerning the change goals, from:

- "Are you more aware of your triggers now?" concerning the first "Help individuals be more aware of how social anxiety affects them mentally and physically." and the second change goal "Help individuals be more aware of where social anxiety can come from." has received three out of three 'yes' responses.

- "Which part(s) of the workshop helped you the most?" concerning the third change goal "Help individuals with concrete tips on the type of social anxiety they experience." all participants indicated that the part about speaking with new people was the most helpful (they were also given the option of 'None').

- "What safety behavior(s) are you most comfortable implementing?" concerning the fourth change goal "Help individuals with methods on how to manage social anxiety easier." every participant viewed another method as the most useful, which means the techniques were diverse enough for everyone to find something suitable for them. Such, the responses were split between the breathing technique, preparation and visualization, and positive self-talk and reframing

- "How likely are you to use the techniques learned in the workshop in your daily life?" concerning the fifth change goal "Ultimately, help individuals overcome their social anxiety." two participants responded with a four, and one participant responded with a five (on a scale from one to five).

Additionally, the responses from the open question in the second survey "Overall, did this workshop help you? If so, how?" showed that the change goals were almost met, as the participants are now more aware and have an understanding of the techniques which can help them lessen the impact of social anxiety, but this will be further assessed from the responses of participants from the final survey.

Through observing the participants, I discovered some additional insights. Although no one displayed obvious signs of anxiety, there was a noticeable behavior change. Initially, one participant, who was self-declared as a six out of ten on the social anxiety scale from the first survey, was somewhat reluctant to speak. During the small talk I was making before starting the presentation, their responses were quite short, and there were only a few instances where they asked questions back to me or the other participants. However, this changed by the end, as after I took a final round of feedback, they independently asked several questions regarding the scope of the project for PoC and what other classmates had done in their papers. This was a sign that they either became a bit more comfortable or had taken in some of the methods and were trying to put them into practice with someone who was not entirely a stranger.

During the final survey that the participants received after 2 weeks from the workshop, it was revealed that the change goals were met, as follows:

- "How has your awareness of the mental and physical effects of social anxiety change since the workshop?" concerning the first "Help individuals be more aware of how social anxiety affects them mentally and physically." and the second change goal "Help individuals be more aware of where social anxiety can come from." has received positive responses, as participants mentioned that their awareness has "changed a lot", having a "better understanding of what it is", and that they are now "more aware of the ways to cope with anxiety". Also, being able to "notice when either me or some other person feels anxious" suggests the participants have gained insights into the triggers of social anxiety and can even identify when someone else is anxious.

- The rest of the questions from the workshop concerned the third "Help individuals with methods on how to manage social anxiety easier.", the fourth "Help individuals with concrete tips on the type of social anxiety they experience." and the fifth change goal "Ultimately, help individuals overcome their social anxiety.". Participants have described different methods that they put in practice, even detailing a situation where they used the 'Preparation and Visualization' method in an "an event which also had a networking part" and the effect was positive, "helped me a lot and I actually had some good conversations". Participants mentioned that even if they found a method to be difficult, they "slightly modified the steps so that it fits" them better, which means that the methods presented were customizable enough to fit the participants' needs. Also, two out of three participants indicated that their social anxiety has either significantly or slightly

decreased since the workshop, which could be due to the better understanding of their social anxiety and new-found methods that they started to put into practice.

# 5.    Advice for next steps

For the next steps, participants will be given the slides of the presentation. They are advised to take another look at the parts exemplifying the five techniques and the situational scenarios in their own time and remember a scenario from the past or imagine a new scenario in which one of the methods would have been/would be useful. After they are certain they understand them, the only thing they need to do is practice! Reminding themselves how this is helpful in the long term can help them be more motivated to continue, because results will not be seen immediately, it can take some time until they find exactly what works for them.

# 6.    Learning Experience

## 6.1    Reflections and Revisions

From the change approach, I have learned a couple of things that now I would do differently:

- I found out how important it is to be organized with your thoughts, as I found it quite hard to put all of my ideas in the right place. Between all of the articles I have read, I should have kept a list with quotes from each article to quickly go through, instead of having to come back to them multiple times.

- I found out that it is really hard to persuade people to get out of their comfort zone and try to overcome something challenging, especially only through a text. For this, I believe I need to be more charismatic, motivational, and inspirational, traits that a transformational leader exhibits, and I believe it would have been more helpful to go to people in person to attract them to join the study. I may have found it particularly hard because being a persuader is described as my opposite type in the Insights' Discovery.

## 6.2    Coaching Impact

The coaching sessions were not all related to my personal development in this project. One of the situations I tried to tackle in the coaching sessions that did help in the project as well was procrastination. As seen in the Insights' Discovery, "Maria gives the impression she believes in economy of effort. She must be careful that this is not seen as, nor leads to, laziness.". Such, it is hard for me to find the motivation to start working on any kind of project if the deadline is not approaching, as I then believe I will have enough time to work and I generally just stay on my phone instead. With the help of my coach, I was able to find a method that works for me, that helps me reduce my screen time, and gives me the ability to make an intentional decision before opening an app. When making decisions, I am presented in the Insights' Discovery as I tend " to make sound future decisions only after deeper reflection.".  So, having an application that makes me wait for around 30 seconds before opening another application and then asks me if I still

want to open it, makes me more aware of something that became quite automatic to me and gives me the space to think if I should or could be doing something more practical and useful instead.

## 6.3   Benefits of Feedback Sessions

The feedback sessions helped me stay on track with the project, making sure I was not falling behind, but they also provided me with information that was useful in completing this paper, for example changing my view on the target group for which I was initially set on TCS Students. Some of the questions posed during the session made me realize that I was not focusing on what I should have, I was just limiting the study because of the stereotypes I knew about TCS Students and how they struggle with social anxiety, but at the end of the day, any student can struggle with it and can benefit from participating. This also relates to my Insight's profile about the possible blindspots I have, as it mentions that I "may reflect longer than is necessary before undertaking or beginning a project. Gathering relevant and factual data to help ensure that her ideas are workable, she needs to simplify her often theoretical and complicated ideas for the benefit of others.". Such, the complex approach was only helping TCS Students in the study, but making it simpler helped benefit others as well.

## 6.4   Leadership Style Evolution

I believe my leadership style did change but not during the project, more so at the beginning. My main leadership styles are instrumental and transactional but their scope didn't necessarily fit the project. Thus, I tried being more of an authentic leader by thinking of how I was experiencing social anxiety and what I would have also found helpful at the time when looking up articles and when thinking of how the presentation should be structured to allow participants the time and space to think and express themselves as much as possible. I also tried being more of a transformational leader by stimulating conversation during the workshop to challenge the participants, showing my enthusiasm for the subject, and reminding participants of the purpose of the workshop.

## 6.5   Leadership Growth and Career Impact

I believe this project gave me an insight into how important it is to understand yourself first before trying to help someone else in their change journey. It has also enabled me to be more comfortable in giving presentations, as some of the tips I found on public speaking resonated with me as well, and because of that, I feel like I was also able to empathize and be more excited about the subject, which was reflected as a transformational leadership characteristic. I am certain that feeling more comfortable in presentations will also help me in my future career.

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# 8.  Appendices

## 8.1  Appendix A

The initial change approach:

People with social anxiety may lack confidence in specific social skills such as making conversation or handling awkward unexpected scenarios. Based on the response from the first survey, the method(s) will be chosen between:

1. **Exposure-based and cognitive strategies**: Short improvisation of real-life social anxiety-inducing scenarios and understanding the gravity of the scenarios that could go wrong to diminish the effects of that situation on the individual's well-being. The article by Antony, M. M., & Swinson, R. P. (2017) introduces a list categorized into interpersonal and performance situations which can be used as improvisation scenarios, such as initiating a conversation, meeting new people, returning an item, introducing yourself to a group of people, etc. The choice of scenarios will also depend on the survey filled out by the participants.

2. **Communication skills and cognitive strategies** (Antony, M. M. & Swinson, R. P., 2017):  Giving out a 'cheat sheet' of conversational starters and topics, and a discussion session for strategies on how to shift from negative self-focus in social situations.

3. **Mindfulness and acceptance-based techniques** (Antony, M. M. & Swinson, R. P., 2017): Perception of Speech Performance will be performed for small speeches given by the participants, where they are told beforehand to form a certain plan in case they feel nervous during the speech, for example, "If I feel concerned, then I will focus on the back wall of the room" (Webb, T. L. et al., 2010).

## 8.2   Appendix B

1.       Grounding Exercise (Smith, S., 2018)

The participants were given the following steps:

Step 1: Find a quiet place and take a few deep breaths.
Step 2: Focus on your physical sensations (e.g., feel your feet on the ground, the chair supporting you)
Step 3: Look around and name five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.
Step 4: Repeat a positive affirmation, such as "I am calm and present."


2.       Breathing Technique (Jerath, R. et al., 2015)

The participants were given the following steps:

Step 1: Practice deep breathing to reduce anxiety before and during social interactions.
Step 2: Inhale slowly for a count of four, hold for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, and pause for a count of four.
Step 3: Repeat this breathing cycle for a few minutes, focusing entirely on your breath.


3.       External Focus (Fergus, T. A. et al., 2014)

The participants were given the following steps:

Step 1: Choose an object in the environment (e.g., a painting, a plant).
Step 2: Describe the object in detail to yourself, noting its color, shape, texture, and any other characteristics.
Step 3: Whenever you notice your thoughts turning inward, gently redirect your focus back to describing the object.


4.       Preparation and Visualization (Neocleous, M., 2012)

The participants were given the following steps:

Step 1: Before a social event, visualize yourself having a successful interaction. Imagine the setting, the people, and the positive outcomes.
Step 2: Plan a few conversation starters or topics you can bring up.
Step 3: Mentally rehearse these scenarios, focusing on your outward attention and positive interactions.

5.      Positive Self-Talk and Reframing (Eagleson, C., 2016)

The participants were given the following steps:

Step 1: Identify negative thoughts or self-criticisms as they arise.
Step 2: Challenge these thoughts by asking yourself for evidence against them.
Step 3: Replace negative thoughts with positive or neutral statements (e.g., instead of "They will think I'm awkward." reframe to "I'm doing my best to engage and that's enough.")
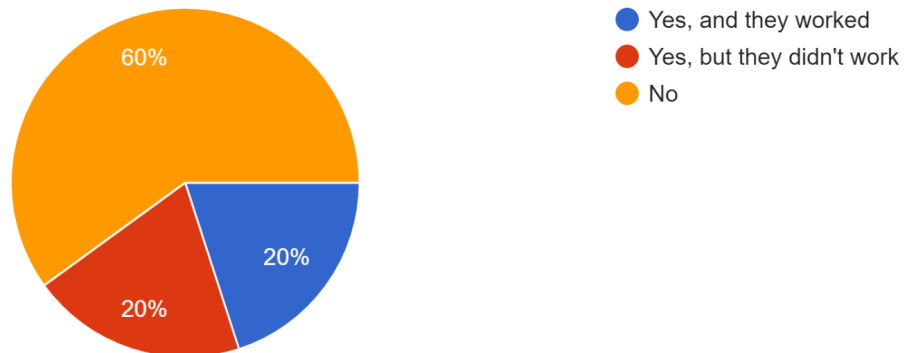
# 8.3   Appendix C

The responses of participants to the first Google Forms survey, extracted in Excel:

| C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Are you available to join the workshop? | What is the level of social anxiety that you experience in an uncomfortable situation? | In what situations is social anxiety most prevalent for you? | Have you used any methods to overcome this? | What were the methods you tried? | Why do you believe they worked/didn't work? | How does social anxiety affect your wellbeing? | Why do you want to overcome social anxiety? | Do you have any other remarks you would like to add? |
| Yes | 5 | Big groups, especially when drinking | Yes, and they worked | grounding exercises, taking a break | taking a step back gives me time to calm down and/or hype myself up to get back out there | makes me feel worthless and sad | i like socializing, but not being sad | |
| Yes | 5 | speaking in front of people | Yes, but they didn't work | Imagining people in their underwear | My mind just blanks out anyway | It's not too prevalent but I find it difficult to make friends because I'm always worried about what people are thinking | To be able to make friends and meet people more easily | |
| Yes | 6 | Approaching new people | No | | | If I'd know I'd probably make a change | Overcoming anything is an improvement so why not | |
| Yes | 3 | Sometimes when I am around groups of people I don't know | No | | | I am not always as social as I would want to be. | I think it would help me be more open with people and get to have a bigger network. | |
| Yes | 5 | When I am put in an unfamiliar situation, and I feel that I cannot control the flow of the interaction(for example when i try to interact with a new group of people) When I have to ask for help from someone | No | | | I get uneasy, and sometimes I procrastinate instead of getting an interaction done with | To be more relaxed overall and avoid unnecessary stress | |

A better visualization of how many participants have tried in the past different methods to overcome social anxiety:

## Have you used any methods to overcome this?
5 responses



- Yes, and they worked
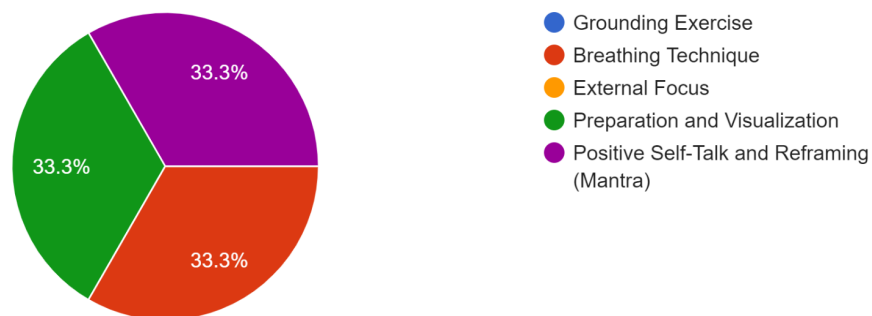- Yes, but they didn't work
- No

60%
20%
20%

The responses of participants to the second Google Forms survey, extracted in Excel:

| What safety behavior(s) are you most comfortable implementing? (Select all that apply) | Which part(s) of the workshop helped you the most? (Select all that apply) | Are you more aware of your triggers now? | Do you feel more confident going into social anxiety-inducing situations? | How likely are you to use the techniques learned in the workshop in your daily life? | Overall, did this workshop help you? If so, how? | What aspect of the workshop did you find the least helpful or most challenging and why? | Do you have any additional comments or feedback? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Breathing Technique | Speaking with new people | Yes | Yes | 4 | I'm aware of a more practical approach to having conversations with new people, and how to steer the conversation in the way I want | I couldn't visualise well enough how I would behave when put on the spot to talk in front of people | |
| Preparation and Visualization | Speaking with new people | Yes | Yes | 5 | I think the preparation and visualization part is very important for me. I haven't tried this before, but it is usually the situations where I don't expect to have to talk to people that I feel the most uncomfortable in. So mentally preparing for the worst could be very helpful for me. | Maybe some of the techniques I already knew of, but it is still good to be reminded about them. | I think the workshop was presented well and had a lot of useful information. I liked that it was engaging and not just a one sided presentation, more like a conversation. |
| Positive Self-Talk and Reframing (Mantra) | Speaking with new people | Yes | Yes | 4 | I believe I am more aware of the causes of social anxiety and ways to prepare for social interactions | The workshop tackled one of the issues I encounter the most in social interactions which is approaching strangers. The advice seems useful, however I believe applying it in my daily life will take some practice | |

A better visualization of what methods the participants are most comfortable with trying:

What safety behavior(s) are you most comfortable implementing? (Select all that apply)
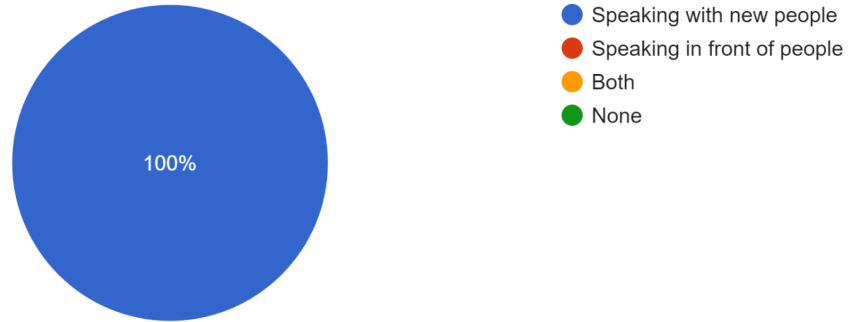3 responses



- Grounding Exercise
- Breathing Technique
- External Focus
- Preparation and Visualization
- Positive Self-Talk and Reframing (Mantra)

A better visualization of what part participants found most helpful:

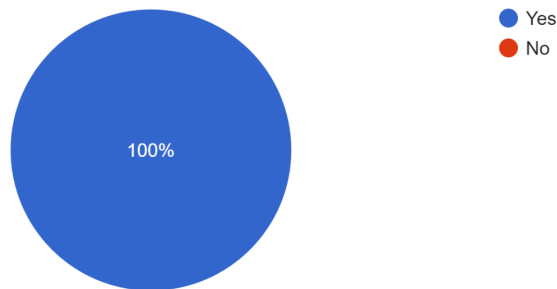### Which part(s) of the workshop helped you the most? (Select all that apply)
3 responses



- Speaking with new people
- Speaking in front of people
- Both
- None

100%

A better visualization of how many participants are more aware of where their social anxiety comes from:

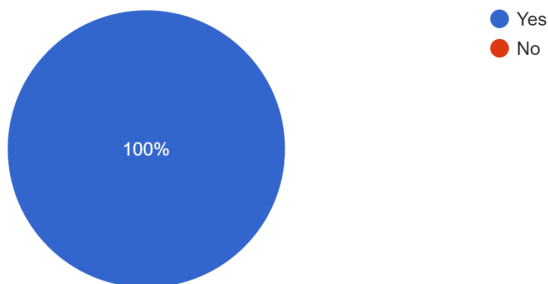### Are you more aware of your triggers now?
3 responses



- Yes
- No

100%

A better visualization of how many participants are confident going further in uncomfortable situations:

### Do you feel more confident going into social anxiety-inducing situations?
3 responses



- Yes
- No

100%

A better visualization of how much participants believe the techniques presented will be helpful:

How likely are you to use the techniques learned in the workshop in your daily life?    Copy
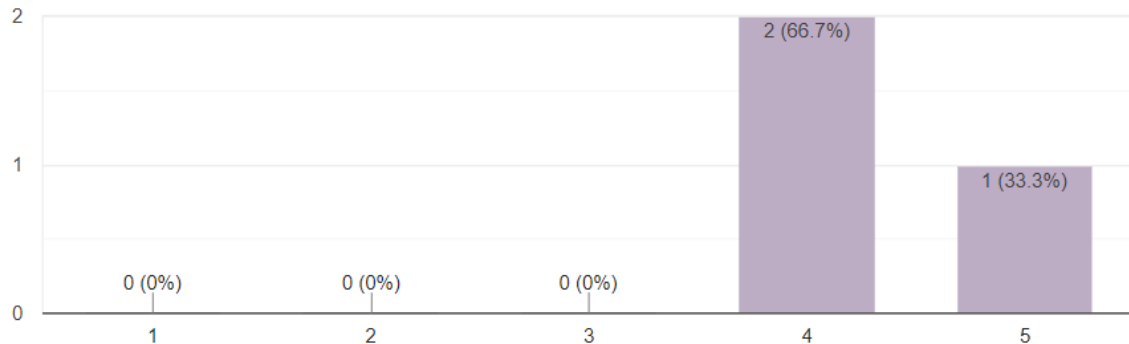
3 responses



The responses of participants to the final Google Forms survey, extracted in Excel:

| B | C | D | E | F | G | H |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How has your awareness of the mental and physical effects of social anxiety change since the workshop? | Have you been able to put any of the methods you learned in the workshop into practice? If yes, please specify which methods. | How has your ability to manage social anxiety change as a result of the workshop? | Which methods have you found to be the most effective in managing your social anxiety? If none, say 'none'. | Are there any methods that you found difficult to implement? If so, which ones? | How would you rate your level of social anxiety now compared to before the workshop? | Do you have any additional comments? |
| I think my awareness changed a lot, I am more aware of the ways to cope with anxiety, and beyond that, my behavior has changed as well. | I did manage to put into practice some of the methods mentioned to help us handle talking to people in unfamiliar situations. I recently went to an event which also had a networking part, and before going to the event I prepared myself for the networking part, visualizing what is going to happen and the talks I would like to have. This helped me a lot and I actually had some good conversations. | I feel more prepared for situations that initially made me feel anxious previously, namely the social gatherings with a lot of people i do not know. | I feel like Preparation and visualization has been very effective for me. I've also been trying to do more positive self talk before going into situations that can make me feel a bit anxious, to get the courage that I can do it. | Breathing techniques, as easy as they seem to be, are still hard for me to implement, mostly because I often forget to do them. | Slightly increased | I found techniques from the intervention easy to implement. I really like that the workshop came with a lot of practical exercises to implement, I find these to be the most helpful. |
| I've felt more in control of how I can steer a conversation in the direction I want it to go | Yes, I was able to accept people not being interested in a coversation I'd like to intiate easier, without feeling like it is my fault, and I was able to distinguish between using closed ended ritual questions versus open-ended ritual questions. | It has changed slightly in the positive direction, as I feel like I am more in control in conversations. | Preparation and visualisation Ritual Questions | I wouldn't say any methods were particularly difficult | Slightly decreased | It was a pleasant experience that taught me how to be able to create more meaningful interactions with the people around me, and how to be less anxious while doing so |
| I believe it is easier for me to notice when either me or some other person feels anxious. I have a better understanding of what it is and therefore I am more perceptive in regards to its effects. | I have mainly used the method "Preparation and Visualization". I also tried using the "Positive self-talk" and "External focus". | I haven't experienced any stressful events lately, but this could simply be because the workshop was so good. In general I believe I am more open and social which is a sign of improvement. | The method "Preparation and Visualization". I believe it is very important to have at least a slight idea of where to lead the conversations before starting them. Being prepared can also reduce the chances of awkward silences which are usually annoying to deal with. | The "Positive self-talk" method. It is sometimes hard to disagree with a first though but after some practice it became something that I usually don't even have to think about. The "External focus" method is something I often do but in a different way than presented. After some time I slightly modified the steps so that it fits me better. | Significantly decreased | |

141

## 8.4   Appendix D

Body Language:
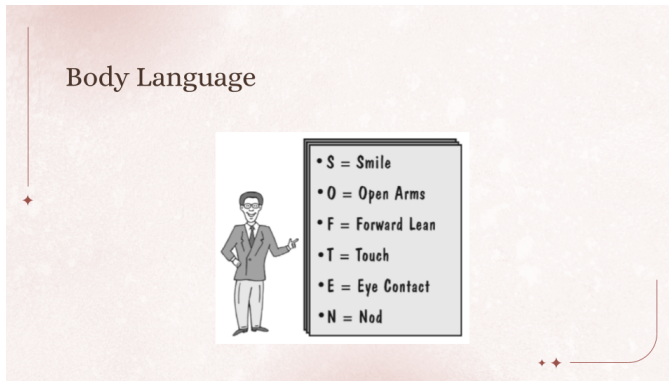


'Keep an open body language when trying to initiate a conversation and look for people who are also sending receptive signals through their body language, and when you feel the time is right, approach them in a friendly and direct way.'

Rejection:
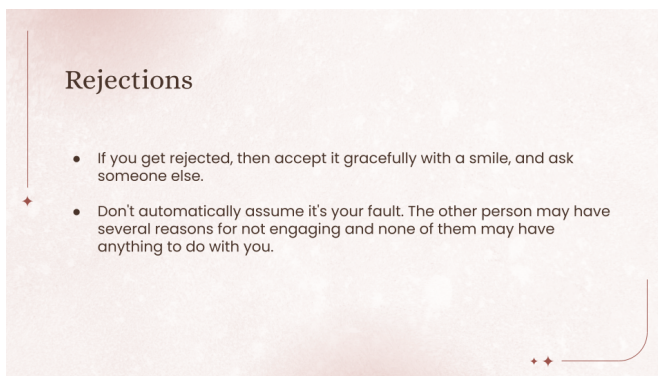


'Remember, it is all about choosing receptive people which comes with practice.'

Starting a conversation:



'1. Risk versus rejection: Be the first to say hello, it allows you to guide the direction of the conversation.
2. Ritual questions: Ask easy-to-answer questions about the situation or the other person.
3. Active listening: Know what to say next by listening carefully for free information.
4. Seek information: Ask follow-up questions to seek information based on free information you've just heard.
5. Self-disclosure: Reveal plenty of your free information while asking questions that may interest you personally.'

Ritual questions:



'This allows you to prepare to introduce yourself to the other person. When there is a pause in the conversation, this is a good time to say, "By the way, my name is .. . What's yours?" '

Difference between closed-ended and open-ended ritual questions:



Continuing the conversation:



'Hot buttons can be work, a new job, a hobby, a career goal, an upcoming trip, a sporting activity, a personal dedication to a social cause'

Closing unwanted conversations:



'There are times when the nature of a conversation, or the person you're speaking with, makes you prefer to end the conversation and withdraw sooner than later, but without offending the other person.

But what if you don't know anyone else there and the person will see me just standing there? Then you can try depending on the event, refill your glass, get something to eat, or visit the bathroom, and then take a few moments to think about the next steps. You can even look for a new person to start a conversation with.'

Alleviating anxiety in public speaking:



'Openly admit about your anxiety: Having transferred the burden of anxiety to the audience, you are enabled to go on a bit more calmly with the presentation.

Creating a mantra: Instead of "They will think I'm awkward." reframe to "I'm doing my best to engage and that's enough."

Prepare extensively: By preparing extensively you will be more confident in the speech you are going to give, thus worrying less. So treating public speaking as a skill that you can improve upon. To prepare can also mean trying to give the same speech to a smaller audience, maybe formed of friends, even recording it. Also, creating some questions that the audience might ask to have predefined answers can help

Focus on the material, not on the audience: This is easier said than done of course, but if the material you are speaking of is something of great interest to you too, it should come easier to talk about it, try to see it more like talking about one of your passions, if you are excited about your work, people will primarily pay attention to the information being presented instead of any mishap you might have.'

## 8.5   Appendix E

The concept of mindfulness-based tasks and exactly what they mean in the scope of the study is the following:

"mindfulness-based tasks teach individuals to observe internal experiences using an accepting and nonreactive stance, stating that 'close observation of internal experience may be maladaptive in the general population but adaptive when it is done mindfully' " (Fergus et al., 2014)

# Improving an International Program: a Case Study of the Public Governance Across Borders Program

Jasper Nijman

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The PGAB program

Cooperation between the Universities of Twente and Münster goes back as far as 2002 (University of Münster, n.d.). After the rehaul of the bachelor Public Administration in 2012, Public Governance Across Borders (PGAB) was born. The program gives students from the University of Münster the ability to get a double degree and study at two universities in two different countries. The students spend the first year of their bachelor degree at the University of Münster where they are taught in German. They spend their second year at the university of Twente where they are taught in English and join the Management, Society & Technology (MS&T) program (this year is the main focus of this study). In the third and final year the students may return to Münster for minors, study abroad, do an internship, or take minors at Twente.

### 1.2 Importance

The importance of this study lies at the core of the PGAB program. It is as much the reason to improve this program as it is the reason for students to join this program. Studying abroad has shown a lot of benefits for international students both in literature reviews and empirical studies. Maddux et al. (2021) showed that international students with multicultural experiences show increased levels of leadership effectiveness, trust, communication competences, and moral flexibility. They also showed that international students show increased levels of psychological adjustment, general performance, and creativity. However, the program needs to facilitate openness, adaptation, learning, and cognitive complexity for these effects to occur. Furthermore, Wilczewski et al. (2022) showed that interaction with domestic students increases general adjustment, interactional adjustment, and satisfaction. So, Maddux et al. (2021) do not only show that multicultural experiences can have positive effects on the students. They also show that the program needs to set up correctly for this to happen. This last point is one of the reasons that this study is important. However, the second reason may be even more important. Besides the findings above, Maddux et al. (2021) show

that multicultural experiences can have adverse effects on students. For example, if the multicultural experience is perceived as negative, the experience can increase intergroup bias.

To conclude, the importance of this study is twofold. Firstly, this study is important to make sure that the program facilitates the positive effects of multicultural experiences. And secondly, to prevent adverse effects of multicultural experiences.

## 1.3 Situation

As explained above, the second year of the PGAB program takes place in Enschede at the university of Twente. It is this part of the PGAB program, the switch from Münster to UTwente and the year taught in Enschede following this switch, that this change project targets and aims to change. Currently, there are a multitude of problems that can and should be solved without any major restructuring of the program or financial costly decisions. Some of these problems might include: poor integration of German (PGAB) and Dutch (MS&T) students, a big overlap between what was taught in the first year of PGAB and the second year of MS&T, and unexpected differences between educational models.

# 2. Change goal

The change goal for this study is as follows: "Improve the PGAB program by solving its current problems". To measure this goal 'current problems' needs to be defined further. This is exactly what the first part of this study, as will be explained in the change approach, will aim to do. Consequently, the change goal can not be fully defined at this stage of the study. However, when the interviews are finished, the change goals of this study will become clear and addressed by the suggestions.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Interviews

As this study tries to uncover the full range of the challenges that the PGAB program faces, this project is set up as an exploratory study. This type of study requires qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2023) gathered through qualitative interviews. These interviews are semi-structured and one-on-one if possible. The choice for a semi-structured interview was made to leave room for follow up questions while still having a relatively comparable set of answers (since the primary questions are the same for all interviews). The abovementioned preference for one-on-one interviews is for similar reasons as Barriball and While (1994).

The main motives are the comparability that one-on-one interviews provide by ensuring that all participants answer all questions, and the certainty that the participants' answers are their own answers (i.e. participants' opinions are not overshadowed/influenced by other participants). The downsides to this interview method is the significantly increased amount of time it takes to conduct all the interviews and it misses out on the advantages of focus groups. Focus groups enable the interviewees to engage in group discussions. These discussions allow for multiple opinions to emerge to which other participants can react. Next to discussing different viewpoints, focus groups also allow for evaluation of viewpoints by the group (Saunders et al., 2023). For both the practical and qualitative reasons, this study has also conducted a focus group interview. Thus, ending up with mixed methods.

## 3.2 Sample

For the sample of this study, this study relied on available subjects. This kind of sampling is called convenience sampling (Babbie, 2015). During the interview process, the sampling took place in the following way. After a lecture ended or during the break of the lecture, one or more of the present PGAB students would be asked if they would like to conduct an interview on the PGAB program for an Honours project. This type of sampling has some inherent problems. Convenience sampling should only be justified when there are no other sampling methods possible that are 'less-risky' (Babbie, 2015). When using convenience sampling the researcher has no control over the representativeness of the sample. Consequently, results from this type of sampling method are difficult to generalize (Babbie, 2015). However, since generalizing results is not within the scope of this study, this sampling strategy fits this study perfectly.

In the case of this study, the sample may be biased because it only includes students that attend the lectures. However, one can argue if this bias is problematic because the students that do not attend lectures may not have much to say about the program. On the other hand, their absence may originate from a problem they experience. Nevertheless, it is good to be aware of the bias of this sample.

## 4. Change approach

This change approach consists of three steps as displayed in figure 1 below. The first step was to interview PGAB students currently in the second year of the program. These students were chosen specifically because they are the students that have most recently taken the second year of the program. Five interviews with a total of ten students were conducted in this step of the change approach. The interviews consisted of four main questions and, depending on the answers from the participant(s), sub-questions. The four main questions were aimed at gathering information on the identity of the program, the strong points of the

program, the weak points of the program, and possible solutions to these weak points, respectively. The interviews took, depending on the (amount of) participants, between 15 to 30 minutes. The results and the questions of these interviews are available in the 'interview results' section.

The second step in the change approach was drafting suggestions, which were presented during the roundtable meeting (step 3). During the drafting process the data gathered from the interviews, both on solutions and problems, was kept in mind and actively used. Ultimately, three suggestions were drafted for the three biggest problems that emerged during the interview process. For the suggestions to be viable, they were designed to be low cost and easy to implement. The amount and type of suggestions were dependent on the results from the interview.

Step 3 was a roundtable meeting with the program director of PGAB at the University of Twente. During this meeting the results from the interview were presented, to offer direct feedback of the PGAB program, as well as the suggestions drafted in step 2, to offer possible solutions to the problems established in the interviews. For the results of this meeting see the 'Roundtable meeting results' section.

**Figure 1, three step change approach**
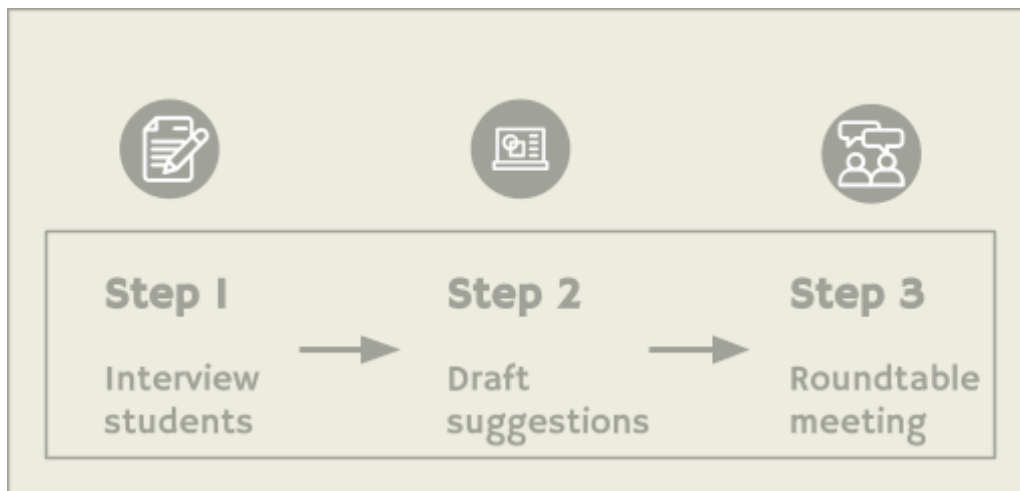


# 5. Interview results

The first three tables below are a summary of the most common answers of the first three questions. The final table includes a full list of all answers of the fourth question. For an overview that also includes left out answers, refer to the appendix.

The four tables below represent the answers to the questions from the interviews. To find the most common answers in the five interviews, all the answers for a question were color coded based on their category. The categories that showed up the most are represented

in the tables. In order to draw conclusion, the two or three most common answers for each question were put together in one answer and were used for both the drafting process of the suggestions and the round table meeting.

Question 1 was *"How would you describe the PGAB program?"*. This question was in the interview as to not change the core identity of the program through the suggestions. Furthermore, it served as a neutral starting point for the interview and provided a baseline for the interviewer since it would sort out outliers that have a different view of the program. This is important since these outliers are likely to have different problems with the program or perceive other parts of the program as positive. Looking at the results of the interview. Such outliers were not present in the sample. Almost all the interviewees mentioned that the program is defined by its two different foci at the two different universities. Most of them also mentioned that the program is considered international. There were some people that mentioned an EU focus. This is explained by the fact that some of the interviewees have been taking an EU focused track in the last semester.

**Table 1, most common answers for question 1**

| | | *Different foci of universities* | *Double degree program* | *International program* | *EU focus* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Interview (n=1)* | *1* | x | x | | |
| *Interview (n=1)* | *2* | x | | | |
| *Interview (n=1)* | *3* | | | x | x |
| *Interview (n=5)* | *4* | x | | x | x |
| *Interview (n=2)* | *5* | x | | x | |

The second question was *"What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"*. This question was included in the interview process for similar reasons as the first question; strong points of the program will not be changed by referring back to this question during the drafting process. Additionally, it provides positive feedback for the roundtable meeting. The most notable strong points of the program include the subjects and the structure of the program and the practical approach that the university offers compared to the university of Münster. With the structure of the program the interviewees meant the module structure (compared to a two semester structure in Münster). Another noteworthy strong point is the

administration of the universities. The students mentioned that, for example, the grades were swiftly and without problems transferred between universities.

**Table 2, most common answers for question 2**

| | *Specializatio n* | *Structure & subjects* | *Practical* | *Diversity of students* | *Administrati on of university* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Interview 1 (n=1)* | x | x | | | |
| *Interview 2 (n=1)* | | x | x | x | x |
| *Interview 3 (n=1)* | x | x | x | | |
| *Interview 4 (n=5)* | | x | | | x |
| *Interview 5 (n=2)* | | | x | x | * |

*\* Answer to follow-up question*

Question 3 was *"What should be improved about the PGAB program?"*. This question was the most important question for this study but also for the interviewees. They gave the most answers for this question and it took up the bulk of the time for the interviews. Interestingly, even though this question provoked the most responses, the answers were not diverse at all. All interviewees mentioned the same two points at least once. Except for one interview, the first answer to this question was consistently communication between the universities. The students had a problem particularly because they assumed that this was the cause of the overlap they experienced between the curricula from their first year at Münster and from their second year at Twente. The other two main categories were practical information and the kick-in. The kick-in was not a good experience for the people that went; some interviewees even reported that they left halfway through the program. When asked, some of them did say that it would be better if the kick-in was together with the students that they have lectures with. Instead they did the kick-in with first year students. The practical information category was brought up by some interviewees as a main struggle during the transition period from Münster to Twente. They reported that the 'official' side of the information was well covered. However, a lot of practical information was missing. This includes things like health insurance, housing, and places to visit in Enschede.

**Table 3, most common answers for Question 3**

|  |  | *Communication between universities and overlap* | *Practical information* | *Kick-in* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Interview (n=1)* | *1* | x | x | x |
| *Interview (n=1)* | *2* | x | * | x |
| *Interview (n=1)* | *3* | x | x | x |
| *Interview (n=5)* | *4* | x |  | * |
| *Interview (n=2)* | *5* | x | * | x |

*\* Answer to follow-up question*

The fourth and final question of the interview was *"What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"*. Since there is no need for comparison for this question, the answers are provided in a comprehensive list of all answers from all interviews. The answers to this question, even though not many, have had a heavy influence in the drafting stage. In fact, all three initial suggestions were based on the answers from the interviewees.

**Table 4, list of suggestions from question 4**

| *Interview (n=1)* | *1* | Unified program |
|---|---|---|
| *Interview (n=1)* | *2* | Document for students by students with practical information |
| *Interview (n=1)* | *3* | Meet-up, change program description on website, not choosing own project groups, communicate topics to Münster beforehand |
| *Interview (n=5)* | *4* | Get rid of the overlap |
| *Interview (n=2)* | *5* | An activity with Twente students |

# 6. Suggestions

The suggestions below were presented during the roundtable meeting with the program coordinator. Note that these suggestions have been changed after the meeting. For the sake of a transparent process they are still included in this paper. All changes will be mentioned in the 'roundtable meeting results' section.

In the 'interview results' section above, three main problems were established. This study suggests a solution for each problem. These suggestions were presented during the roundtable meeting. The first suggestion focuses on the problem of a lack of practical information. One of the interviewees suggested distributing a document with practical information for students made by students. This document should ideally be distributed early in the first semester of the year in Germany instead of later in the year when the visits also take place. During the interviews, some students mentioned that they already had questions of this nature earlier in the year. So, to prevent students from having unanswered questions for too long and potentially dropping out, this document should be distributed as early as possible. The document should at least include the following:

    a) Practical information like:
        i) Tips for housing
        ii) Health insurance
        iii) Rooster.utwente
        iv) Explaining Osiris
        v) Explaining the Kick-in
    b) 'Official' information
        i) Dutch education system v German education system
        ii) Tuition fee
        iii) Overview of the year (subjects at each module)
        iv) Study advisor explanation + contact information
        v) Dates of visits and what they will address

Secondly, the problem of the kick-in and poor integration will be addressed. This type of suggestion was also put forward by interviewees multiple times. The suggestion is to organize a meet-up with the students from Twente and Münster. This meet-up should be very informal in nature and should either take place just before the summer break or in the first week of the second year before the lectures start. Ideally, this meet-up would increase the integration of MS&T and PGAB groups. Additionally, it would provide the PGAB students the possibility to ask questions directly to the students from Twente. What, exactly, this meet-up would look like depends on the time it would take place, if the UT or the students would organize this event, and more. All of this will be discussed during the roundtable meeting.

As for the kick-in part of the problem, it is already partially addressed in the document by students for students. The document could explain what the kick-in looks like so the students can decide for themselves to come. Furthermore, the meet-up would facilitate what the students have been missing during the kick-in; instead of meeting first year students the PGAB students now get to meet the second year students that they have classes with.

The final and, arguably, the biggest problem is also the most difficult to solve. For this reason, this study does not provide a straightforward solution like the two above. Instead, the general points of better communication and comparing the curricula at both universities will be stressed during the roundtable meeting. The meeting will also be used to gather more information on what the communication process currently looks like and if there are any obvious flaws.

# 7. Roundtable meeting results

During the roundtable meeting with the program coordinator both the feedback from the interviews and the suggestions above were discussed. Some of the weak points of the program were points that they recognized. The problem of overlap, for example, was already a known issue. However, the added value of this study, according to the program director, is two fold. It shows that the overlap is the biggest problem among students and, therefore, provides a basis for the director and the teachers to rethink certain courses. Hearing the strong points of the program was a good thing; the administrational strength of the program was the biggest surprise. Since some of the weak points of the program were already known, the suggestions provided were certainly appreciated.

When discussing the suggestion of a document for students by students filled with practical information, the director mentioned that the UT already sends out a document to the first year students at the end of their year with some information about the structure of the upcoming year, how to access osiris, canvas, mytimetable and more. However, the director was not satisfied with the current version of the document and was happy to hear any suggestions on what to change, remove, add, and, most importantly, how to make the document attractive for students. Consequently, a feedback session was planned and all the students that participated in the interviews were invited (for the results see 'feedback session results'). This extra change intervention also added a step to the change approach (see figure 2 below).

The suggestion of a meet-up was also received well. After discussing the timing of this meet-up, it was concluded that the first week of the second year was the best time to do a meet-up. Although less concrete plans were made compared to the one above, the director did say that they were going to discuss the idea with the module coordinator of module 5 and some ideas were exchanged on what this meet-up would look like.

Possible solutions for the overlap problem were discussed as well. However, before discussing solutions, the causes of this problem were discussed first. The interviewees

assumed that the cause of the overlap problem was poor communication between the two universities. However, the program director mentioned that this is not the main cause. Instead, practice shows that students forget a lot of the information they receive; especially after a full year. Which is why part of the overlap is intended to be a recap. Other contributors are the changes the program has undergone in the last years and the influx of minor students in the fourth semester. These minor students need to understand the basics to be able to participate.

**Figure 2, four step change approach**
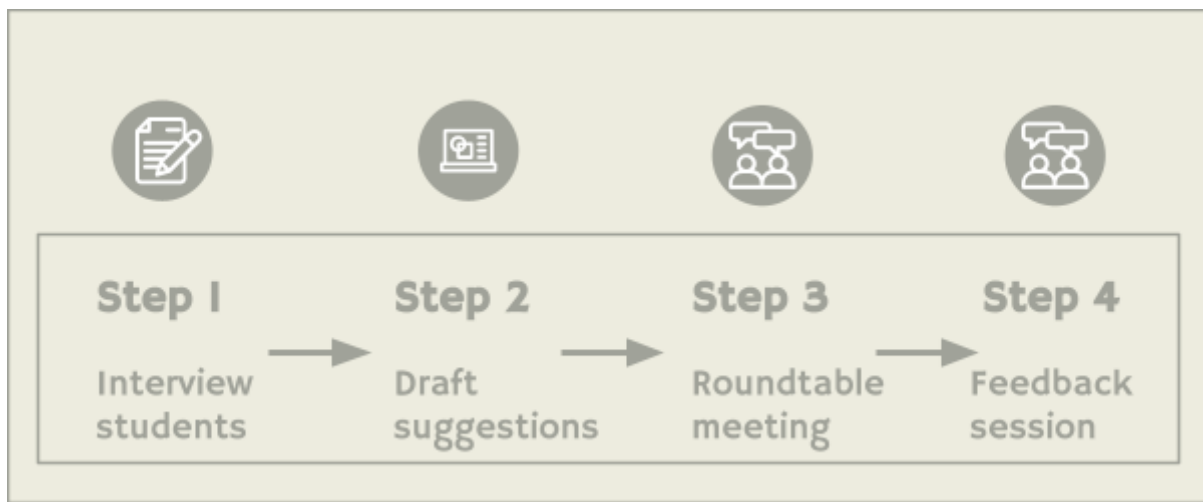


# 8. Feedback session results

Because the feedback session was planned on such a short notice, only three out of the ten invited people were able to participate. The room that was picked for this session was picked specifically for the screen that it provided. On this screen the document that was provided by the program coordinator was projected so the group could suggest improvements. The session consisted of two main parts. Firstly, the group discussed the questions put forward by the coordinator; they wanted to know if the students preferred screenshots or videos, links or not, what they thought of the format of communication and the contents of the document. All the students were on the same line on these questions. They preferred no links and screenshots over videos (i.e. they preferred all the information to be in the document), thought the format was fine and had some comments on the contents. The main improvement point on some parts content wise was to either give a some more explanation or not have it in it all. In the second part of the session the students made suggestions not connected to the questions from the coordinator. Among other things, they suggested to include an introduction with the experience of a former PGAB student, give 'near life descriptions', and to include informal matters like registration in the city,

description of the kick-in, star program and EuroSim (a simulation that MS&T and PGAB students can partake in).

The results of this session also proved to be useful after a short meeting with the program coordinator. Some of the suggestions were feasible and could be implemented before the document would be sent out again. Specifically the preference of no links and screenshots above videos were helpful.

# 9. My learning experience

In general this change project has been a good and informative experience but for different reasons than I expected when I started this project. First of all, this was the first time I conducted interviews, processed results, used the results, and presented them to a third party. I think having this experience of doing a full project by myself is the biggest contribution to my personal development. Among other things, it forced me to think about and justify my methodology and my change approach. Overall I think that having this experience is really helpful as a second year bachelor student, especially with an eye on my bachelor thesis.

I also learned a lot in ways and about things that were unexpected. Even though I already spent quite some time with some PGAB students before this project, I still learned new things during the interviews and the feedback session about, for example, the culture at the University of Münster and Germany in general. Talking to the program director was also very insightful. I learned a lot about how the program is run and how the teachers make certain decisions.

There is not much that I would do differently if I had to redo this project. The only point would be to pay closer attention to the deadlines. It would have saved me a lot of trouble if I knew about the deadline for the draft version of this report. Apart from this point, I didn't run into any hiccups and I'm happy with how this project turned out.

The coaching sessions were not directly connected to this project. Instead we focused on personal goals. I won't go into detail about these sessions here because it wouldn't add anything to this report and the topics were quite personal. The sessions were surprisingly helpful though and I can proudly say that they helped me to improve as a person.

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# Appendix

*Answers in <mark style="background-color:red">red</mark> are not included in the results section.*

## Interview 1 (n=1)

**Q1 "How would you describe the PGAB program?"**

Political science in Münster, more focus on governance & administration in Enschede. Double degree program.

*side note (while talking about the description)*
<mark style="background-color:red">Info from the German side is different from actuality.</mark>

**Q2 "What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"**

Focus on PA. The two different tracks in module 7&8 make sense PA & EU.
The overall structure is good and the subjects as well.

**Q3 "What should be improved about the PGAB program?"**

The biggest problem: for both the Germans and Dutch people. Zero coordination. Which leads to repetition/overlap (Stefans course during module 7). Coordination between the modules in Twente as well.

<mark style="background-color:red">Why people drop out in the first year (munster): there is no exposure to Twente. Only exposure is negative (people that dropped out).</mark>
Questions in the first year: living, housing, uni structure, topics. Have the ability to ask questions.
<mark style="background-color:red">Januari excursion and one visit in may/june (only partially provided this). Maybe its better to have them at different dates (earlier in the year).</mark>

Kick-in, don't know what the kick-in is. Some people have overlap with retakes.

<mark style="background-color:red">M5 is easy. Having uni everyday is way better.</mark>

**Q4 "What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"**

Unified program subjects (there should be clear coordination between the two universities about which subjects they address).

Interview 2 (n=1)

**Q1 "How would you describe the PGAB program?"**
PA focused at Twente vs public science at Münster. Practical vs Theoretical (respectively).

**Q2 "What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"**
The diversity of subjects. Theoretical vs practical (see above). Diversity in students.

**Q2.1 What about the year here?**
The projects are nice.

**Q3 "What should be improved about the PGAB program?"**
Limited communication between universities is a problem. Kick-in with first years.

**Q3.1 What if it the kick-in was with second years?**
Better, but still not great.

Schedules are different (German v Dutch) so overlap.

*side note (more answers for Q2)*
Communication of grades is very good (administration in general).

**Q3.2 Were the visits helpful?**
Yes, but osiris was a problem (they did a presentation that was not perceived as helpful). No problems with the dates. Lack of practical information (e.g. health insurance).

**Q4 "What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"**

A document from previous students (people are willing to) which includes: health insurance, osiris, kick-in, housing, etc.

*side note (general comment)*

SDG was funny to see so present at Twente. Was not even mentioned once at Munster.

## Interview 3 (n=1)

**Q1 "How would you describe the PGAB program?"**
Politics with a more international approach. Two countries specialized in EU.

**Q2 "What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"**

More practical approach at Twente. More writing, proposals. Second semester specialization. The general Dutch structure. Modules. The different topics between modules.

**Q3 "What should be improved about the PGAB program?"**

Coordination between Münster and Enschede (overlap). Makes it boring, "Why am I here?". Two biggest overlap points are: EU (basics) and international relations.

Kick-in with the first years is not a good thing. Integration of the groups could be way better.

Lack of information on every level.

**Q3.1 Were the visits helpful?**

The visit at Twente, Sirius.
At munster guest lecture (felt weird to have a guest lecture, expected information).

**Q4 "What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"**

Not being able to choose your own groups (to force getting to know each other).

Communicate the topics to Münster beforehand.

Practical information, also in the description of the program on the website (it's outdated and very general).

Have a meet up, organized by uni/associations, with the first years, does not have to be fancy. Some students already tried to do this.

## Interview 4 (n=5)

**Q1 "How would you describe the PGAB program?"**

PGAB is not descriptive.
Euro focus.
Interdisciplinary.
Multiperspective.
International.

**Q2 "What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"**

Adminstrational grades, papers, diplomas.

They went to us, modules are good, subjects, specific.

**Q3 "What should be improved about the PGAB program?"**

Transfer of grades (a 1.0 (German perfect) is a 9.3 (Dutch))

Overlap between subjects is the biggest problem.

Credit points are skewed.

Project ending before exams is nice — the project made sense but was short, to many people in a group for such a small project.

**Q4 "What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"**

Getting rid of the overlap would solve a lot of problems

**Q5 What did you think about the visits?**

We didn't meet the students (would have been nice).

*side note (more answers for Q3)*
Kick in was a mess (some people left very early).

*side note (general comment)*
Have previous projects as an example available on Canvas.

**Q6 Was the practical information available?**
*side note: only 1 or 2 people answered*
The information is actually there if you look for it (did not have a big problem).
**Q7 Do you think a document early in the year would be helpful**
Yes, very helpful. Especially early in the year.

## Interview 5 (n=2)

**Q1 "How would you describe the PGAB program?"**

Program in two different countries. Both universities have a different focus.

Political science with EU and PA. International.

**Q2 "What are the strong points of the PGAB program?"**

International focus on the topics. The international students at Twente. The group projects are nice.
More practical at Twente.

**Q3 "What should be improved about the PGAB program?"**

Communication between the universities. Specifically about overlap (EU subject).
Kick-in with the first years instead of the second years.

**Q3.1 What about the information you received?**

Official information is good. Practical information could be better.

**Q4 "What could be possible solutions to these problem(s)?"**

Have some sort of activity with Twente students.

*side note (general comments)*
Choose from other programs. More PA.

# Promoting Sustainability within Grolsch

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July 4, 2024

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**Abstract**

This report addresses the challenge of enhancing sustainability among employees at Grolsch, a major Dutch brewery, by developing initiatives focused on intrinsic motivation and behavioural change. Due to communication issues and time constraints, direct testing of the proposed initiatives was not possible. Instead, expectations are based on theories of planned behaviour, nudging, uncomfortable interactions, and data physicalization. The project includes visual cues, such as posters and stickers, interactive elements, such as a suggestion form and wall, and direct conversation with employees. The authors suggest fully implementing these initiatives and continuously monitoring their progress if the project is continued.

**Keywords:** sustainability, intrinsic motivation, behavioural change, nudging, persuasion, organizational culture, Grolsch, employee engagement.

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# 1 Introduction

The extreme droughts in August 2022 (Waterstaat, 2022) put the Twente region under significant water scarcity pressure. In response, several businesses and institutions have joined forces under the initiative 'De Twentse Golf' to enhance the region's resilience. With climate change and the global temperature increase over the past decades, action is urgently required not only from governments but also from companies, which must take responsibility for addressing such problems (*Summary for Policymakers — Global Warming of 1.5 ºC*, n.d.). For the long-term sustainability of businesses, it is crucial to embrace sustainable practices (Galpin, Whitttington, & Bell, 2015). While there is managerial recognition of this need, the greater challenge lies in transforming a company's culture to become more sustainable and green.

In the final module of the Processes of Change (PoC) Honours programme, the assignment involved developing a change project that would be implemented and evaluated. This project integrated learnings from the programme on individual change, organizational behaviour, leadership, consulting, and creativity. The challenge chosen by us was a continuation of a previous project

1

(proposed during the course "Being a Consultant and Being Coached") at Grolsch, one of the oldest and largest beer breweries in The Netherlands. Susan Ladrak, the sustainability manager, came to us asking for help to promote sustainability in the hearts and minds of her workers. She emphasizes intrinsic motivation as the key to achieving sustainability goals. The company has committed to a green strategy focused on reducing water usage, cutting CO2 emissions, maximizing circular packaging, and utilizing green energy (*Sustainability | royalgrolsch.com*, n.d.). Despite these efforts, Susan identifies a disconnect between the company's sustainability ethos and the consistent adoption of sustainable practices among employees. Her objective is to bridge this gap, urging employees to align their actions with Grolsch's sustainability commitments, thereby demonstrating a genuine commitment to sustainability.

Initially, during "Being a Consultant and Being Coached", the project aimed to generate ideas to help Grolsch employees become more intrinsically sustainable. Now, the goal of this final module was to implement these ideas and evaluate the changes.

The target audience initially proposed by the client included all of the company's employees. However, it was brought to us during later meetings with Susan that a particular focus should be placed on shop floor workers, as they offered the greatest potential for water reduction. However, it was still important to her to inspire everyone in the company to prioritize sustainability.

# 2    Change Goals

Susan revealed that Grolsch's sustainability agenda cannot be realized without employee commitment. Despite some exceptions, employees were generally not taking proactive actions towards sustainability. With objectives such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 and reducing overall water consumption (*Sustainability | royalgrolsch.com*, n.d.), Grolsch aims for employees to actively promote sustainability in their actions. As Susan emphasized, "We as Grolsch's employees must walk the talk."

We focused on increasing the intrinsic motivation of the workers towards sustainable behaviour, acknowledging the diversity of employee profiles. Through discussions with Susan, workers were categorized into two profiles: office and shop floor employees. Office employees, primarily responsible for managing operations, are classified as white-collar workers, while shop floor employees, responsible for production facilities, are mainly blue-collar workers.

To address this challenge, the following goal has been outlined: *Develop and implement interactive initiatives aimed at enhancing shop floor and office workers' awareness and encouraging a change in behaviour of sustainability principles. The primary aim is to help workers better understand sustainability concepts and promote tangible steps towards sustainable behaviours.*

For that, we propose implementing visual cues throughout the workplace to reinforce awareness generated by the interactive initiatives. These cues would take the form of posters, signs, and digital displays strategically placed to remind employees of critical sustainability practices.

A timeline was created for this project and can be found in Figure 1. This timeline was agreed upon with the client. However, milestone 2 (the implementation of the proposed interventions) could not be achieved due to delay in communication from the client's side and time constraints, which will be discussed in Section 4.
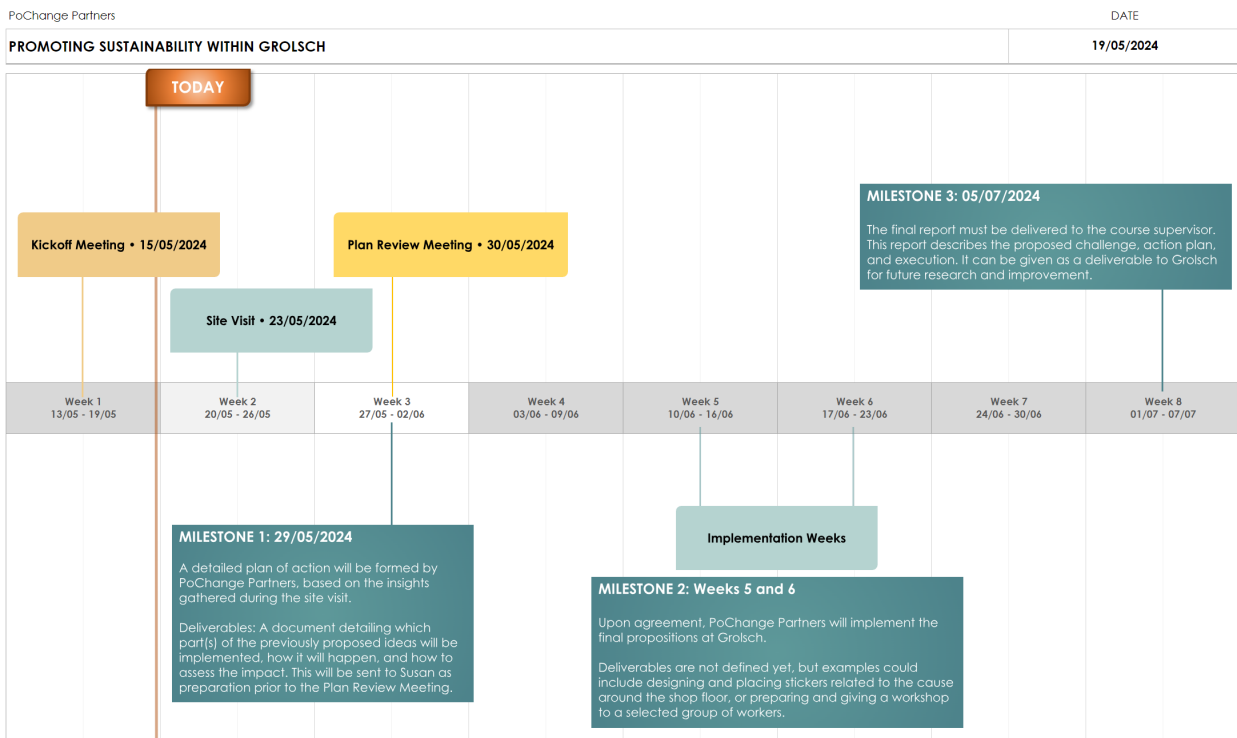
**PROJECT TIMELINE**

Figure 1: The timeline created for the project and shared with the client.

# 3   Methodology

Our strategy to tackle behaviour change from multiple angles is divided into three interventions:

- The development and implementation of visual cues related to sustainability around the factory.

- Allowing workers to contribute to the future of the company's decision-making by opening up for suggestions related to sustainability.

- Physicalising water waste data, which could create a big impact on the workers and help them visualise their impact on the company.

For that, the project is based on the theories of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), nudging (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009), and uncomfortable interactions (Benford et al., 2012), as well as Professor Greif's insights on behaviour change (Greif, 2022) and Cialdini's principles (Cialdini, 2016). By working with consistent exposure, it is possible to persuade the workers at Grolsch to build more sustainable habits.

For companies wanting to be more sustainable, it is important to find a fit between the organisational culture and the sustainability activities (Baumgartner, 2009). To identify a common goal among the different profiles within the factory, a topic that resonates with every worker was

needed. After discussions with Susan about the office and shop floor environments and three factory visits, two personas were created and studied (Appendix A1 and A2). The client has told us that water and beer production are shared elements across all roles. Consequently, we decided that messages should be communicated through the relationship between water waste and the amount of beer that could have been produced with it. This intervention helps workers connect sustainability issues with familiar aspects of their daily work, allowing for a deeper understanding and engagement with the company's sustainability initiatives.

## 3.1   Visual Cues

This first intervention is designed to nudge workers towards sustainable behaviour by using visual cues. The following theoretical foundations and practical actions were considered:

- **Nudging Principle:** Nudging influences decision-making subtly without being forceful (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). To apply this, visual cues around the brewery can encourage sustainable practices without mandating them.

- **Environmental Modifications:** Environmental changes support behavioural change and habit adoption (Greif, 2022). Therefore, placing visual cues in strategic locations within the brewery can reinforce sustainability messages.

- **Theory of Planned Behaviour:** Behaviour is influenced by intention, which is shaped by attitude (one's position towards an action), subjective norms (one's perception of others' values and norms), and perceived behavioural control (one's perception of their capability to act in a given way) (Ajzen, 1991). In that scenario, these three points can be touched upon by sharing with the workers some information about the negative impacts of an unsustainable work environment, highlighting the brewery's collective commitment to avoiding water waste, and providing actionable suggestions for employees to adopt more sustainable practices.

To promote sustainability at Grolsch, the visual cues below were developed and could be strategically placed to maximize visibility and relevance to both shop floor and office workers. They aimed to make sustainability a visible and continuous consideration for all employees. Furthermore, the design philosophy behind the visuals focuses on a direct association between water waste and a commonly understood quantity among the workers (beer), making the impact of actions tangible.

- **Sticker 1:** If placed near production lines where shop floor workers operate, this sticker could highlight water wasted from small leaks, relating it to lost beer production (Appendix B1).

- **Sticker 2:** If placed near taps, this sticker could encourage closing the water flow when not in use (Appendix B2).

- **Posters 1 and 2:** These visuals directly call out workers on water waste inside the company, again translating it to beer amounts to maintain the campaign's consistency. The goal of

these posters is to make people uncomfortable (Benford et al., 2012) and prompt reflection. The posters are designed to first grab attention with striking visuals or large text, and then convey the campaign message clearly upon closer inspection. These posters can be placed in common areas for both shop floor and office workers, namely break rooms, hallways, and entrances (Appendix B3 and B4).

- **Poster 3:** Includes a QR code leading to a digital suggestions form (further explained in Section 3.2), encouraging workers to contribute ideas on how Grolsch can become more sustainable (Appendix B5).

- **Screen Savers:** These are adapted versions of the posters, ensuring the message reaches employees also through their office computers (Appendix B6, B7, and B8).

All data used for the development of the visuals is based on information from *The quick fix way to cut water waste at home | Water UK* (2014) and *Brewing Water* (2022). Furthermore, the blank spaces left on the visuals should be replaced with amounts based on the report on water usage still to be sent by the client.

## 3.2   Suggestions Form and Wall

The second intervention is a digital suggestion box for employees to submit ideas or plans for sustainability at Grolsch. The ideas and their progress are showcased via a sustainability wall in a communal area and the visual cues. The theoretical foundations are:

- **Involvement employees by letting them formulate initiatives:** For sustainability to integrate at all levels of an organization, employees should be involved in making sustainability initiatives for their day-to-day jobs (Galpin et al., 2015). Ideally, employees start to regard sustainable work and contributing to the transition as part of their job. As a result, considering energy and water waste becomes a normal part of the employees' job and work culture.

- **Sense of ownership:** Engaging employees in the change process helps building a sense of ownership (Galbraith, 2018). By involving employees, it communicates they are drivers of change, making it more likely to adopt and support the change.

- **Promote conversations around sustainability:** For sustainability to become a part of the day-to-day work culture, it is important that the topic becomes natural to talk about (Galpin et al., 2015). The intervention therefore aims to, besides involving employees in the change, promote conversations around sustainability.

Based on these theories, the idea is to have an intervention that involves the employees in the change to sustainability. The employees should feel that they are part and drivers of the transition by giving them the opportunity to suggest changes for their own work at Grolsch around sustainability. The desired effects are an increased feeling of involvement and sense of ownership around putting sustainability in their work. The idea is that sustainability becomes something that is driven by employee initiatives rather than something imposed from higher up.

Furthermore, by promoting conversations around sustainability, the desired effect is that it becomes a part of the work and organizational culture. The goal is to make it more natural to talk

about sustainability during or outside work. Therefore, the digital suggestion box is complemented with a wall promoting submitted initiatives and their progress. This wall is placed in a communal area such as the canteen where employees come together and have (informal) conversations. The desired effect is that the wall functions as a spark for conversations around sustainability. In addition, this visibility promotes the use of the suggestion box and inspires employees through ideas of their peers. As a result, employees embracing the change are recognized (Galbraith, 2018).

The digital suggestion box is realized and promoted in the form of a QR code displayed on visual cues. The choice for a digital form instead of a physical box came from the idea not to create materialistic waste with a physical box. Additionally, it was preferred by the client as it can make the process of assessing suggestions more convenient. Whereas other visual cues are used to attract attention and make the link between water usage and beer production, the idea behind the design for the visual cue for the QR code is to have it friendly and inviting to submit suggestions. Employees can scan the code to access a form for submitting their suggestions. The form asks the following questions:

1. What is your full name?

2. What is your email address?

3. What is the name of your idea?

4. What is your idea?

5. What is the expected effect of your idea?

6. How do you think we can implement this idea? (Describe it as: "I think we should stop doing... and start doing ... instead.")

The submissions to the form are received and reviewed by Susan, who updates the suggestion wall with the status of each idea: in progress, on hold, or implemented. This system keeps employees informed and engaged with sustainability initiatives. The questions help Susan to contact the person who submitted the idea. In case few or irrelevant suggestions are submitted, there could be multiple reasons why. Among problems could be a lack of interest in sustainability, difficulty of coming up with suggestions, an impractical process for giving suggestion or the design of the box being uninviting. In this scenario, by having interviews, it should be evaluated by us why the digital box failed to bring forward new suggestions. Despite this possible risk, the intervention is a tool to communicate to employees that they are part and drivers of the change. It allows employees to engage in making Grolsch are more sustainable place, increasing their sense of ownership. Furthermore, the addition of the wall and the promotion of implemented suggestions can spark conversations around sustainability and help to make it more a part of the day-to-day work culture.

## 3.3 Big Impact!

Uncomfortable interactions can cause suffering for individuals. However, this discomfort can be used as a 'means to an end' to strengthen the connection between the conveyed idea and the individual's experiences. Benford et al. (2012) propose that engaging with this discomfort can help establish a profound and personal connection with the experience.

Furthermore, data physicalisations allow data and its manipulation to be embodied in physical forms and interactions (De Kreij, Ranasinghe, & Degbelo, 2024). By transforming data into tangible objects, this tool enables direct manipulation, enhancing data exploration. This intervention leverages physical engagement to create more interactive and immersive data experiences, which can significantly improve both cognitive understanding and user experience (De Kreij et al., 2024). Utilising these methods, it is possible to further display and create a connection between the experiences of workers and concepts like sustainability.

Incorporating principles of self-reflection and internalisation of values from educational theory can significantly enhance the effectiveness of our water conservation initiative. The visual display of beer crates, representing the amount of beer that could have been produced without water wastage, serves as a powerful tool for self-reflection. This aligns with the affective domain of Bloom's Taxonomy, which emphasises the importance of assigning value and integrating learning into personal beliefs. Additionally, by consistently reminding employees of the importance of sustainability through stickers, posters, and screensavers, we facilitate the internalisation of these values, embedding them into the company culture (Zajonc, 2001). This process is supported by Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), which posits that values become internalised when they resonate with personal goals (Uğur, Constantinescu, & Stevens, 2015).

We propose creating an impactful experience for employees as they enter the factory. They will be greeted by crates of beer representing the amount of beer that could have been produced if no water had been wasted in the previous week. We will inform them about the extent of water wastage in the company and highlight the newly posted stickers, posters, and screensavers promoting sustainability. Later, we will ask if these initiatives have encouraged them to think and act more sustainably by using questionnaires. These visual and tangible reminders will emphasise the importance of water conservation in the production process.

# 4    Expected Results

Due to communication challenges with the client and time constraints, it was not possible to test any of the suggestions or theories in practice. Therefore, this section outlines the expected outcomes based on relevant literature.

The proposed interventions are expected to enhance the sustainability culture among Grolsch employees. The use of visual cues such as posters, stickers, and screensavers should nudge employees towards more sustainable behaviours by making them aware of the consequences of their actions in a relatable context (e.g., water waste equating to lost beer production). These visual reminders are designed to trigger reflection and promote habitual changes through consistent exposure, as supported by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The introduction of a suggestion form and wall aims to create a sense of ownership and involvement in sustainability initiatives. According to participatory management theories, involving employees in decision-making processes can enhance their commitment to organizational goals. By allowing employees to contribute ideas for sustainability, increased engagement and a stronger alignment of individual actions with Grolsch's sustainability objectives are anticipated. This participatory intervention is expected to make sustainability a more integral part of the organizational culture.

The impactful experience created by visualizing the potential beer production lost due to water wastage is anticipated to provoke a deeper personal connection to sustainability issues. This method uses the concept of data physicalization to enhance cognitive understanding and emotional engagement (De Kreij et al., 2024). By making the abstract concept of water conservation tangible, employees are expected to internalize the values of sustainability more effectively.

Overall, based on theories of behavioural change, participatory management, and data physicalization, the proposed initiatives are expected to result in increased awareness, motivation, and action towards sustainability among Grolsch employees. These changes, in turn, are anticipated to contribute to Grolsch's long-term sustainability goals.

# 5   Discussion

For the development of this project, several steps must be undertaken. Future efforts should focus on implementing the proposed approaches, as well as evaluating their effectiveness in fostering a sustainable culture among Grolsch employees.

Once the initiatives are in place, continuous monitoring is important to assess their impact. Regular surveys and feedback forms should be distributed to gather insights from employees on the effectiveness of the visual cues, suggestion form, and big impact. This feedback will provide valuable information on what is working and what needs adjustment. Based on the feedback collected, the strategies should be evaluated and adjusted accordingly. If certain visual cues or messages are not resonating with employees, they should be redesigned to improve their impact.

Furthermore, while the initial focus of the given approaches is on water conservation and reducing waste, future initiatives could explore other areas of sustainability. This includes energy conservation, waste management, and reducing carbon emissions.

# 6   Conclusion

The initiatives developed in this project aim to foster a culture of sustainability among Grolsch employees through visual cues, interactive suggestions, and impactful experiences. Although evaluation was not feasible due to communication issues and time constraints, expectations based on established theories suggest these measures will enhance awareness, motivation, and sustainable behaviours. Future efforts should focus on the full implementation, continuous monitoring, and refinement of these initiatives, as well as employee engagement and training. By integrating sustainability into the organizational culture and expanding the scope of efforts, Grolsch can achieve its sustainability goals and serve as a leading example for other companies.

# 7 Individual Reflection

## 7.1 Arda

### 7.1.1 Personal Contribution to the project

In the project, we have all decided on what can be implemented together, but after the decision, we have taken upon different approaches mentioned in the *Methodology* section. I took upon the 'Big Impact' as the approach itself really intrigued me. In our discussions with Susan, she wanted us to create this awareness through uncomfortable situations. When we were looking for theories behind the uncomfortable situations and their connection with creating awareness, I really liked the theories from (Benford et al., 2012) and (Uğur et al., 2015), and decided to take on the section. Moreover, I believe I was Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to implement our Big Impact ideas.

### 7.1.2 Reflection

Working on our project has highlighted the challenges of collaborating with clients and companies, such as communication problems, higher expectation than university et cetera. As our project evolved into a job-like endeavour, the expectations for deliverables shifted significantly. We found ourselves heavily reliant on the client for implementation, limiting our ability to test our ideas and plans.

This project has taught me that organizational change in practice requires substantial time. Additionally, trying to apply the theories we learned in our classes within a real organizational context made the project complicated from the start. To avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings, we needed constant communication both within ourselves and with the client. Unfortunately, we have not had the opportunity of implementing our ideas due to communication issues with the client.

Overall, these experiences have provided a valuable glimpse into what working in the corporate world is like.If unforeseen problems had not occurred, I believe we could have completed the project and studied the impacts of our ideas on a large scale among Grolsch employees.

### 7.1.3 Personal Development Plan

During our last module, we had the opportunity to work with a personal coach who guided us in achieving our personal goals. This experience was instrumental in helping me understand my weaknesses, particularly in becoming more assertive in project work, task distribution, and communication. Typically, I hold myself to higher quality standards in group projects. When I see parts of the project that do not meet my expectations, I tend to improve them myself instead of discussing the necessary improvements with the person responsible.

My coaching sessions were quite efficient. Each meeting focused on specific areas I wanted to improve. We would discuss and set goals for the next meeting, and in subsequent sessions, we assessed my progress and set new objectives for the upcoming weeks.

In this project, there was not much correlation between my Personal Development Plan (PDP) and the change project. However, one notable overlap was in task distribution. We had to commu-

nicate our ideas and tasks to ensure everyone understood their responsibilities, which was crucial given the project's complexity. This clear communication was essential for our success and aligned with my goal of becoming more assertive in managing group work.

### 7.1.4 Leadership

In this project, there were few opportunities for me to use my leadership skills or style extensively. I am a supportive leader, preferring to stand in the background and assist those who seek help. According to my Insights Discovery (*Insights Discovery® | Official flagship product | Insights*, n.d.) report, my dominant traits are Blue, Green, and Red, with Blue being the highest. This combination means I strive to understand and help others grasp the problems they face. I aim to uncover the underlying principles to make objective decisions. These qualities help me facilitate decision-making in a team setting by providing solid reasoning during discussions.

However, my dominant Red trait is both a strength and a weakness in leadership. I am confident when presenting ideas, aiming to spark discussion before deciding. This approach can lead to productive debates and consensus if team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas. Conversely, if they are reluctant, we miss out on multiple perspectives.

Throughout the project, I have been working on moderating my assertiveness and encouraging others to contribute more to discussions. While my leadership style remains supportive, I am focusing on balancing my confidence with a more inclusive approach to ensure effective teamwork.

## 7.2 Nina

### 7.2.1 Lessons Learned

Working with a client offers hands-on experience, allowing for expanding professional networks and exploring unfamiliar areas. I chose to continue with this project for the last quartile of the Honours Programme as I was very satisfied and proud of the results from the previous quartile. My teammates and I had worked very hard to create an initial proposal for the client during the course "Being a Consultant and Being Coached", a challenge that proved to be very hard at some points. Nonetheless, knowing that Grolsch had appreciated our efforts and wanted to continue collaborating during "Learning-by-Doing" motivated me to choose this as my final project. I wanted to learn more about what it means to work with a real client, and somewhat search for this satisfaction I had felt previously. What can I do for them? Will my change proposal really be implemented? How valuable can I be for a real person? These questions drove me through the process.

In this project, however, communication with the client was challenging. Frequent delays, typical in large organizations, hindered our ability to achieve all our goals, particularly regarding the implementation and evaluation of our proposals. At the beginning of the project, I had created a timeline for all important meetings and deliverables. This was shared with the client in the hopes of ensuring the project would be finished on time even when accounting for potential delays. The milestones were revised and agreed upon during a physical meeting, and we believed they could be met. However, at some point, we could not reach the client anymore, which meant we did not have the time or opportunity to reach our goal.

We spent significant time developing solutions, but we could not test them. This was disappointing as it would have been beneficial to see the impact of our efforts. Unfortunately, I did

not reach the satisfaction I was pursuing. Nonetheless, I hope the client was satisfied with what we could deliver within the time and resource constraints. If I were to redo this project, I would establish more robust communication channels, such as requesting a second contact point in case Susan was unavailable, and set more flexible timelines to account for potential delays, ensuring that all fundamental deliverables could still be achieved.

### 7.2.2 Coaching Sessions

Alongside this project, I was also working with a coach on my Personal Development Plan (PDP) as part of the "Learning-by-Doing" course. Even though these sessions were not directly related to Grolsch, they were important in helping me find a balance between my work and personal well-being. Since young, I have struggled with taking breaks, often resulting in great and somewhat unnecessary stress. I would burn out and achieve even worse results than if I had simply done enough rather than trying to do more than time allows. Through this coaching, I learned that taking planned and efficient breaks can enhance productivity rather than hinder it. This has allowed me to approach work with a healthier mindset and improved balance. The feedback sessions from my personal coach enabled me to refine my approach to work, ensuring that I remained focused and efficient throughout the project.

Again, the goal of these sessions was not to help me with the project from Groslch itself, but I can now see how it has positively impacted my overall relationship with academic and professional work. My coach suggested many activities and we had multiple talks about how I am as a person and what I want to achieve in the future. We worked on changing the way I perceive responsibilities and the way I treat myself. She taught me about the importance of phrasing and prioritizing for my own well-being, and even gave me tips on how I can keep improving in the future after the end of the course. This was a rather personal process, which is why I will not further expand on it. However, I am grateful for the opportunity.

### 7.2.3 Leadership and Skills

I consider myself a transformational leader (Antonakis & House, 2014). As a Motivator, according to the Insights Discovery profile (*Insights Discovery® | Official flagship product | Insights*, n.d.), I always try to inspire others to reach their potential and encourage a collaborative team environment. This is evident in every project I participate in. For this particular project, I tried to make sure every member was happy with their tasks during distribution and wanted them to be able to work on what they felt most comfortable with given their skills. These could be either practical skills (research, writing, brainstorming) or interpersonal skills (speaking to the client, presenting to the class, taking the lead during Q&A moments). I did this by initially dividing the tasks taking into consideration what I knew about their profiles, but also by asking them if they agreed to what we had set. I believe this helps with achieving the best results possible as people are more intrinsically motivated to do their part. We adopted a more collective approach, with no single leader. Each team member contributed equally, bringing their unique strengths and perspectives to the table. This dynamic allowed us to use our diverse skills effectively, showing that leadership can be distributed and still result in a successful outcome.

Furthermore, during the project, I was responsible for the visual cues, including the design of stickers, posters, and screen savers. I researched relevant theories and gathered the necessary

data to design these visuals. My choice to work on this aspect of the project was based on my background in Creative Technology, a course that has taught me I have a passion for design. I have many design skills and enjoy the challenge of persuading people through visual means and subtle hints. This project allowed me to apply my creative skills to develop impactful visual cues that aimed to encourage a culture of sustainability within the company.

Finally, I believe my interpersonal skills were of good use for this project. As I have been told before, I have a great affinity with storytelling. This allows me to speak to clients and crowds in a way that makes them more interested and feel more connected to the presentation. We used this during the project especially when trying to convince or get familiar with the client. More practical questions were usually left to my coworkers, while I was the one to make the client more interested in what we could do.

### 7.2.4 The Future

Reflecting on my future aspirations, my ultimate goal is to achieve a balanced relationship with work. I do not want work to be a harmful thing for me, and I am determined to avoid burnout. I love work and it is such an important part of who I am. I want to use this passion to my advantage, knowing when to stop, step back, and take breaks. Learning to manage and balance my own expectations is crucial, and I am committed to continuing the progress I made with my coach.

Processes of Change introduced me to various leadership and change theories, which I now see as applicable not only in a professional context but also on a personal level. These theories have helped me understand the mechanisms behind change, both for myself and when relating to clients. Questions like "How do I make myself change?", "What do I need?", and "Why do I need it?" have become easier to answer with this programme. While I have always been a self-reflective person, I now feel more equipped to achieve my goals. The programme has given me a sense of control over my personal and professional growth, making me more effective. I am definitely not the same person I was before I started this programme, nor do I want to be.

## 7.3 Daniel

This project was conducted in a group of three students. This last section of the report consists of my individual reflection on the change project, the learnings and my personal development.

### 7.3.1 Reason of choice project and Personal Lessons learnt

First of all, the reason of choice for the project at Grolsch was both to work on my personal development as well as my interest in the subject. The experience of working with an actual company, having meetings and implementing a change there would be new for me. For my personal development, I saw this project as an opportunity to work on dealing with uncertain situations. When writing my personal development plan, I formulated the goal for the coaching sessions to work on my leadership in new or less structured situations. Usually, I like to prepare well for meetings or presentations and use knowledge to rely on. In group work, I tend to think about arguments beforehand when I want to give my opinion or view. I wanted to work on feeling more comfortable and being more assertive in group work when things were more open for own interpretation and less clear structured from the beginning. Because first of all, this project was conducted in a group in

combination with a client and a supervisor, there were multiple stakeholders to take into account. Secondly, the assignment for the project was open for own ideas and there was not really a clear goal or finish line. These two factors made the project suitable for me to work on both leadership and assertiveness in new situations.

From working on this project and the coaching sessions, I learnt that it is important to ask a lot of questions. In situations where things about the project are uncertain, it is best to make this clear and ask questions. Furthermore, asking questions shows curiosity and interest and that you are concerned about the project even if you do not have something new or valuable to say immediately in a meeting. During this project, I started to ask more questions in the meetings with the client and that helped to also make it more comfortable for myself.

Another reason I wanted to continue the project at Grolsch was because I enjoyed the project during the fifth PoC module and wanted to actual implement the ideas. During the second module, Change at the Individual Level, we implemented our change project. It was interesting to see how things turn out differently than planned and it also gave energy to see how something you made and thought of actually being there in practice. I saw doing such a project at an actual company as a challenge. From this experience, I take away that it is quite difficult to get things done in a larger organisation. A lot of different people and departments have to give permission and agree. Although we could not implement our ideas in this module, we are sending the report with our ideas to the client. We proposed a meeting to discuss the report and how the interventions could be implemented. The hope is that the ideas get implemented and we get to see the extent to which they help with the desired change.

### 7.3.2 Learnings from Change Approach

Secondly, my learnings from the chosen change approach and project. The overall approach was made by the group where I have had individual contributions. The first thing I learnt came from reading literature about provoking a change in an organizational culture, more specifically how to make the culture more sustainable-oriented. I learnt from this that involvement of the employees, the target group, is important. Additionally, the subject sustainability should be promoted with the goal of it becoming a natural part of the everyday work culture. The chosen approach to involve employees is the introduction of a suggestion box and wall. The primary goal of the box was not specifically to use the box to get helpful ideas about sustainability at Grolsch, but to involve the employees and communicate they are part of the change. 4

The second thing I learnt from the project is how important it is to talk to the target audience and get feedback from them. For coming up with intervention ideas and designing them, having a clear understanding of how the target group sees the change is very helpful. For this project, we asked to interview or talk to shop floor employees. However, because of the peak season due to summer and the European Championship football, all capacity was needed and we could not ask questions. It was understandable, but also made it more difficult to work out interventions. Next time, I would try to explain the importance of such input from the target group more to the client, explain that it does not have to take a lot of time and try to find a way to do in way that we can get at least some input. Building upon this point, next time, I would organize the implementation of the intervention differently. In hindsight, we waited too long until all our intervention ideas were finished and we could completely implement all of them. We did this because we thought it would have more impact. It would have been better to sooner implement a small part of our initiatives,

so that we would already have implemented something and from there work on the larger/more time consuming parts. That way, we would already had something and some impact to measure. Additionally, we could have learnt from this smaller implementation and use that feedback to improve the other initiatives. Now we wanted to implement all at once, because we hoped to get more impact, but process-wise that was not the right approach.

Unfortunately, we were not able to implement the interventions during the timeframe. We received a message that due to personal circumstances and time constraints it was not possible to implement the ideas. We have all understanding for this. It however was a bit upsetting not to see how the ideas would turn out in practice and to which extent they would work. On the other hand, I also learnt from the experience and there are things I would do differently next time. The first thing I would do differently is making the plan for the timeframe even more concrete. During the module, we made a planning in the beginning with things that were going to happen each week. We, however, did not plan everything more specifically in advance. The advantage of having an agreed plan on in the beginning would have made working on the project more independent for us. That way we could have easier continued with for example putting the visual cues on the screensavers without having to get approval and feedback of the client for each step. The second thing I would have done, is as early on in the project as possible implementing at least some part of an intervention. As a result, we could measure some impact and could use feedback on this implementation to improve the interventions. To finish the collaboration, we are sending the final report to the client and we proposed a meeting to discuss it. During the meeting, we also want to discuss the implementation of the interventions and take some time to evaluate how the cooperation has been. We have let the client know that we are sending the report and we proposed a meeting.

### 7.3.3 Change Leadership Development

Lastly, my leadership development. During PoC I learnt more about myself. I found out that my predominant colours are blue and green and that I would consider myself mostly an instrumental leader. My strength is to analyse a situation or problem and try to find connections with literature or approaches used in other scenarios. I enjoy working with theories and frameworks. However, in some modules there were none. There we had to come up with ideas ourselves and interpret things more broadly. These exercises were interesting as it showed me that another way to find solutions for problems is to observe something and think about. A more concrete example from the project at Grolsch was that we observed employees (mostly) being motivated for the company, but not necessarily for sustainability. Consequently, an intervention methodology could be to show them how sustainability is valuable and important to the company and therefore for them too. This reasoning did not require literature or frameworks, but came from thinking about the problem. Approaching a problem in such a manner, so by observing and reasoning, was something I learnt during PoC.

Furthermore, PoC exposed me to the topic of behavioural change. When leading changes in the future, it may be more technical for me. For example, a new software solution for a company or a new innovation. However, because of PoC, I will also keep the behavioural aspect of a change in my mind, because I have seen how important (and difficult) it can be. This awareness makes me a more complete change leader.

A last thing I find important to mention is that I also had a lot of fun during the project work at PoC. Despite working on serious assignments and everyone being from different backgrounds,

there was also enough fun times during the group work. I take away that this is an important part of being a leader too. It can help to make things less forced and therefore also helps with having a say in the decisions made in a group. Additionally, it also makes working on the project more fun.

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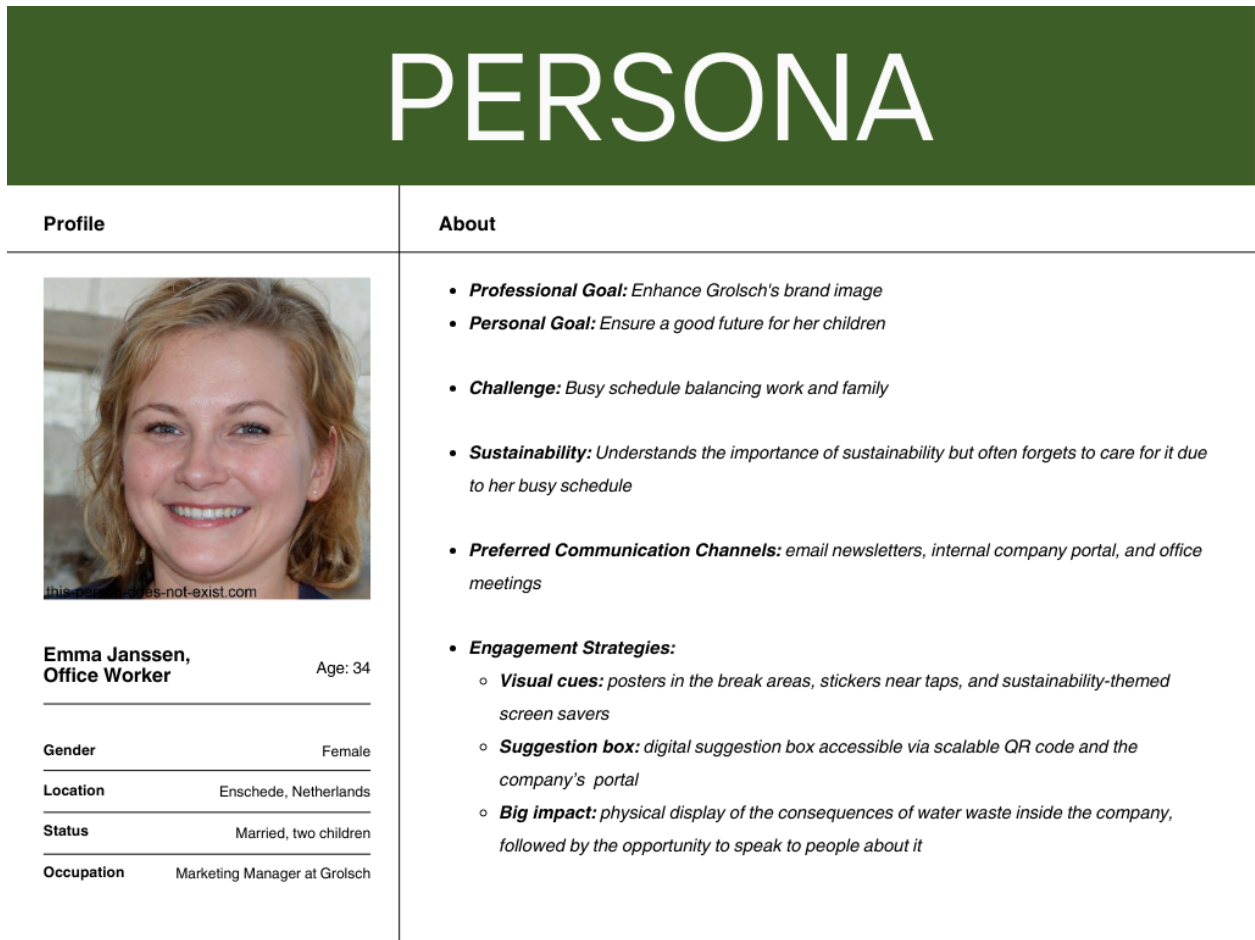
Appendix A - Personas



Figure A1: A customer persona representing an office worker at Grolsch.

## PERSONA

### Profile

this-person-does-not-exist.com

**Henk de Vries,**
**Shop Floor Worker**                    Age: 58

| | |
|---|---|
| Gender | Male |
| Location | Enschede, Netherlands |
| Status | Married, grown-up children |
| Occupation | Senior Brewery Technician at Grolsch |

### About

- **Professional Goal:** Maintain standards in the brewing process and ensure efficient operations
- **Personal Goal:** Passionate about the local environment, enjoys fishing and gardening

- **Challenge:** Limited access to digital communication during work hours

- **Sustainability:** Knows sustainability topics have become more common, but needs clarity on how individual actions on the shop floor contribute to overall sustainability

- **Preferred Communication Channels:** notifications in common areas, printed material, and direct conversation

- **Engagement Strategies:**
  - **Visual cues:** posters in the break areas and common hallways and staircases, stickers near work areas
  - **Suggestion box:** a physical representation of the suggestions given and implemented
  - **Big impact:** on-site demonstration and discussion, emphasizing how reducing water waste directly benefits the environment and the brewery's efficiency

Figure A2: A customer persona representing a shop floor worker at Grolsch.

Appendix B - Visual Cues



Figure B1: First design created for the stickers to be placed around Grolsch.

Figure B2: Second design created for the stickers to be placed around Grolsch.

Figure B3: First design created for the posters to be placed around Grolsch.

Figure B4: Second design created for the posters to be placed around Grolsch.

Figure B5: Third design created for the posters to be placed around Grolsch, related to the suggestions form.

Figure B6: First design created for the screen savers to be placed on computers around Grolsch.



Figure B7: Second design created for the screen savers to be placed on computers around Grolsch.

Figure B8: Third design created for the screen savers to be placed on computers around Grolsch, related to the suggestions form.

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Change is a process.