



Commonwealth Scholars  
Professional Development Training

# Writing and Communicating in Diverse Environments

Nicola Vermooten, PhD  
AccessEd

@\_AccessEd  
#AccessEdTraining





# Welcome to today's workshop

## Microsoft Teams Housekeeping:

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- Please ensure you are **muted** if you are not speaking to the group
  - We will pause for questions as we go
  - If you are having connectivity issues, please try turning off your camera during the presentation; these can be turned on during discussion sections
  - If you have any technical issues, please privately message Hannah in the chat for her help
  - If you have a Question as we go, please use the chat function
  - For breakout groups, we encourage use of your camera if possible please!
-

# AccessEd: Who are we?



- AccessEd is a non-profit organisation committed to supporting postgraduate researchers in their professional development and university access programmes to increase social impact globally.
- AccessEd has expertise working with international students and social enterprises, as well as delivering courses in transferable skills for the 21st century. AccessEd bridges the gap from education to the professional and public sectors.



# Introduction to your trainer

**Nicola Vermooten**



Registered as an Industrial Psychologist in South Africa, with experience in training and development.



Holds a PhD in Industrial Psychology.



Has worked in the education sector, both nationally and internationally.

# Why writing and communicating in diverse environments training



**This training is good for researchers who:**



Want to understand the expectations of communicating in a workplace



Want to understand what type of communication they might have to manage in the workplace



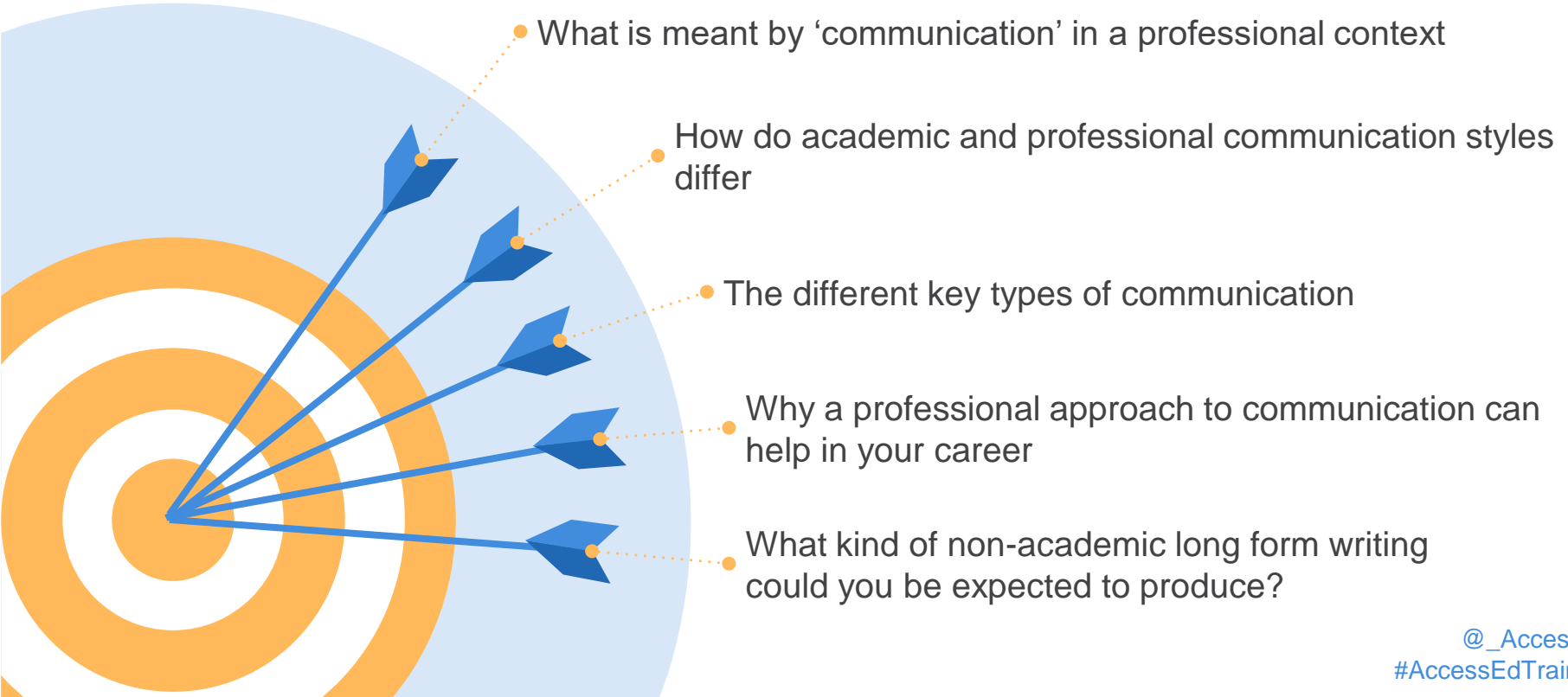
Want to know how to adapt communication styles for working in different environments



Want to improve their effectiveness in communicating during their degree or working with their peers on projects

# Session learning outcomes

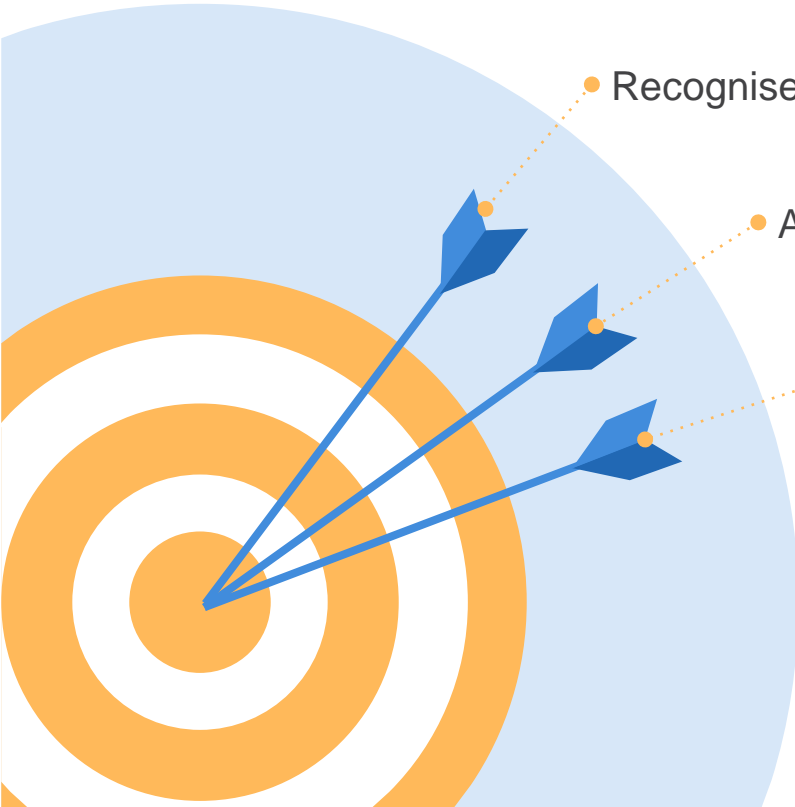
## You'll leave knowing:





# Session learning outcomes

**You'll leave being able to:**



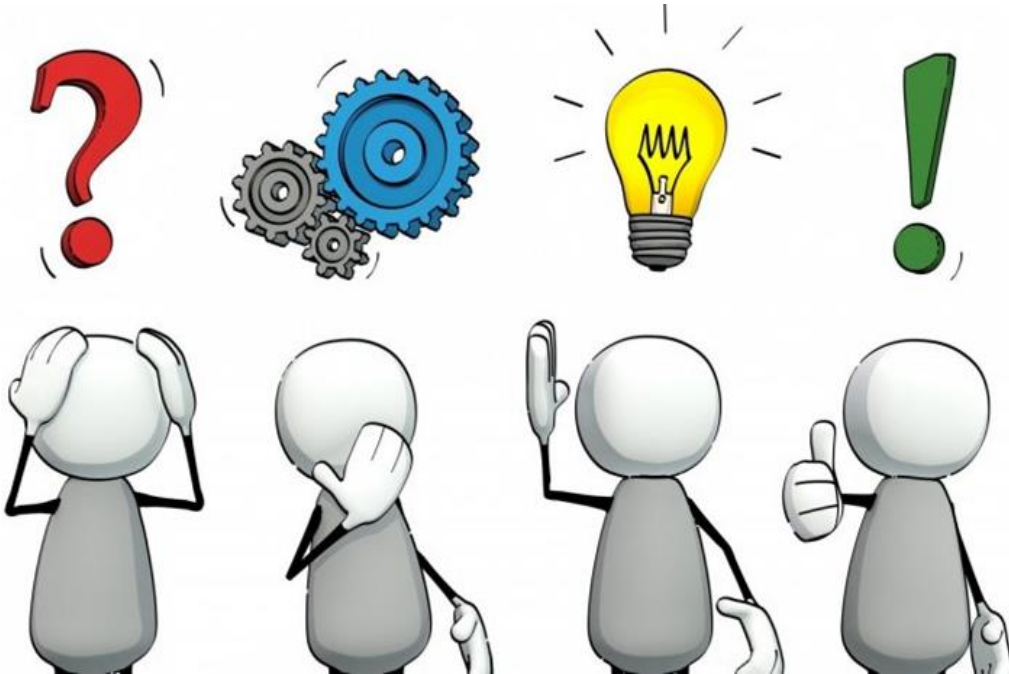
- Recognise your communication style
- Adjusting your communication style to get the right result
- Pinpoint breakdowns in team communication

# Ice breaker



?

**Introduce yourself, your degree, and one line on why you have attended training today**







# What do we mean by 'communication' and why is it important



# What do we mean by 'communication'...



In the professional world, it is ***skill*** of understanding how to relay information masterfully by managing your style, chosen method (a meeting, email, pamphlet, infographic) and language when working with people to get the desired result (e.g. building a strong relationship; making a sale).



# What we mean by 'communication'...

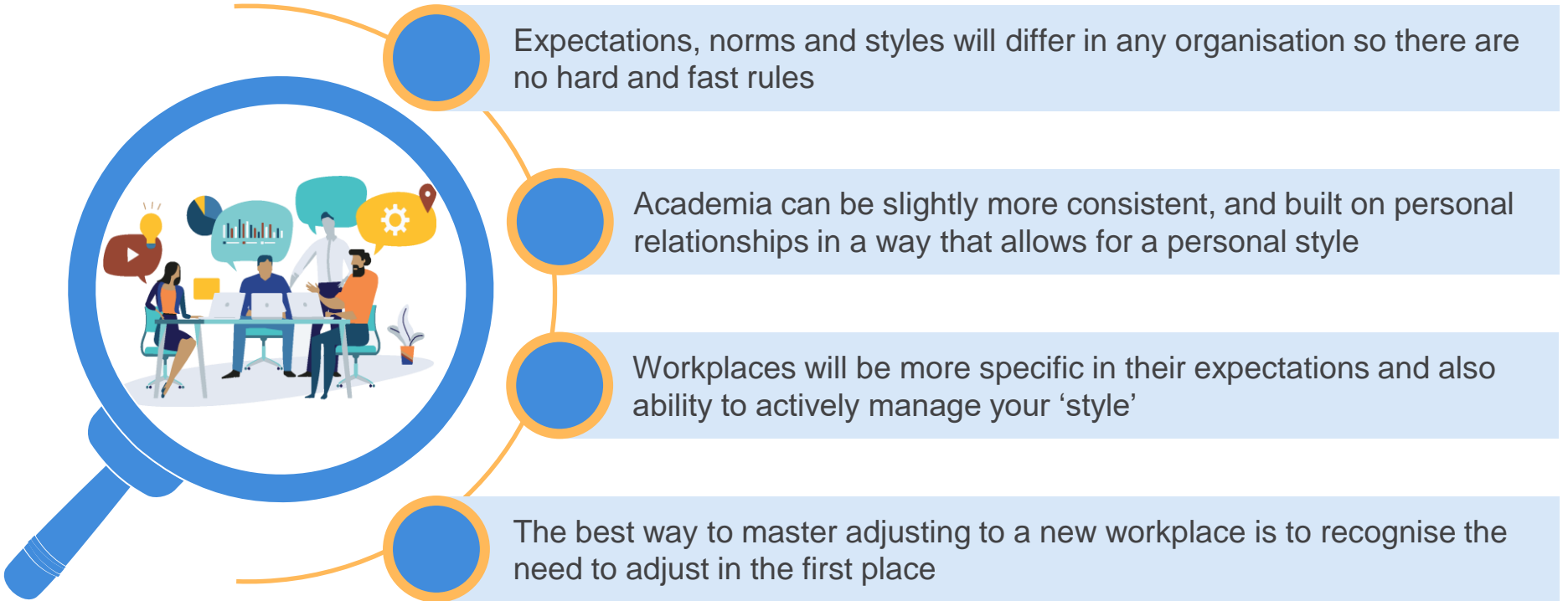
## Good communicators:



# Written, non-verbal and verbal communication



# Communicating in workplace environments



# Why a professional approach can help in your career



- Everything you communicate – written or orally – reflects on you and your abilities
- Facilitates your interaction with others – makes you more professional and productive
- Key to maintaining strong working relationships
- Builds trust with colleagues and clients
- Makes you more efficient because you're able to streamline how you deliver information (a style)
- One of the most important skills for career advancement and getting into leadership roles
- Enhances your professional image



# Academic vs. non-academic communication style:

## Writing for external audiences

	Academic	Professional
Goals	– summarise and showcase your research	– influence and convince people
Writing style	– longer sentences and paragraphs, passive voice	– shorter sentences, more to the point, active voice
Audience	– often for experts in the field, will usually take their time to read	– can be targeted at anyone, may only skim
Format	– academic papers often have a similar structure	– can vary depending on what kind of document you're writing



uncertainty (using 'maybe', 'potentially' etc.) is allowed in academic writing but can weaken your point in professional writing

# Group discussion: Developing your skills (5 mins)



Let's take a moment to reflect on your goals for improving communication skills.

- How could refining your communication skills help you in your next role or job?
- Where have you seen an *unprofessional* approach result in a negative outcome?
- Have you noticed any differences in expectations since studying in the UK?







# Workplace 'Communication' in practice



# 'Communications' in the workplace

## Internal

Exchange of information and ideas within an organisation (e.g. between employer and employee or between employees)

- Forms – emails, staff meetings, Google Drive...
- can be formal or informal
- Function – ensure that everyone is up to date on projects, motivate employees, organise teams, deal with problems

## External

Dissemination of information from an organisation to the external environment (e.g. partners, customers, society)

- Forms – Phone calls, emails, business letters and meetings, social media...
- mostly formal and produced by a designated team member
- Function – establish and uphold a company image, forge new partnerships, attract new clients

# Communications you might be expected to produce



- Has anyone in the group had to produce any of the above pieces of communication in past roles?
- How did you go about finding out the best approach and style?

# Writing styles in a professional environment

	1. Factual / informational	2. Influencing / persuasive
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide a record of specific area of organisation</li> <li>– Provide reference to work</li> <li>– Update others about information</li> <li>– Enable company to predict future performance, record previous performance, meet legal or regulatory requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Providing reader with unique ‘value proposition’</li> <li>– Encouraging a response</li> <li>– Might be to make a sale, further a relationship, bring someone around to your idea</li> <li>– Facilitating behavioural change by influencing emotion to motivate action</li> </ul>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quarterly financial reports, meeting minutes, employee handbooks, annual departmental overviews, FAQ pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Marketing and promotional content e.g. brochures, ads, press releases, emails, newsletters, direct mail campaigns, proposals, cover letters</li> </ul>
Focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Getting across key points succinctly</li> <li>– Doing this directly / in thorough way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The audience – what they want and what they’re trying to solve</li> </ul>

# Writing styles in a professional environment



	3. Liaising/organising	4. Friendly
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Provide step-by-step details of how to complete a task or action</li><li>– Often coordinating multiple people around an event or outcome</li><li>– Requiring recipient/ responder to take action as a result</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Relationship building with recipient</li><li>– Building bridges over a cause</li><li>– Communicating success, enthusiasm over work or gratitude</li></ul>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Emails about upcoming event; user manuals/instruction guides, gantt charts or timelines</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Emails, letter, informal internal communications (e.g. over internal messaging service)</li></ul>
Focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Being clear with details</li><li>– Acknowledging plans, constraints and limitations of others</li><li>– Using collaborative language to show desire to reach end goal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Using the right level of informality</li><li>– Empathising with audience/recipient</li></ul>

# Mastering email communications

- Emails will be your most common mode of communication in a team or externally
- Need to be actively managed and are today a key part of any workplace
- How your institution prefers you to approach written communication can be called a 'house style'
- Getting used to the 'emailing culture' of a team, company and industry or country is key -- read between the lines, understand how different type of issues are approach over email
- In the UK, it's important to know that language is often indirect, polite and never confrontational



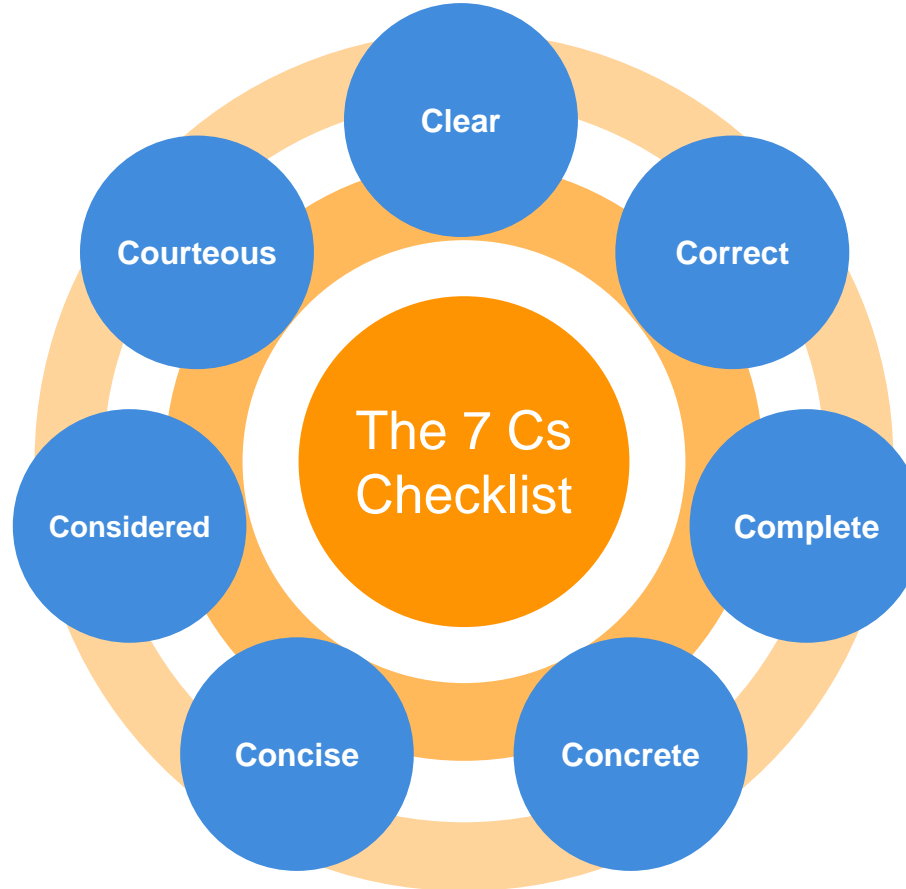
# Mastering email communications



- ✓ Respond quickly (use automatic reminders to keep track of emails you have sent a holding reply to)
- ✓ Keep emails short
- ✓ Structure your emails to make them easier to skim
- ✓ Check your spelling
- ✓ Define action items
- ✓ Put your biggest ask or key point at the top
- ✓ Check who you're CC'ing and BCCing – replying all? Using bcc strategically?
- ✓ If using the likes of Gmail, you can schedule email send (to arrive at strategic time, so not outside work hours etc)



# The 7 C's of communication





# Group discussion: Written communication (5 mins)



Take a moment and pretend you are working in a policy role related to your area of expertise. You're asked to write a news post for the public explaining the recent advances in this field.

- What questions would you ask before drafting?
- What part of your research do you think you'd focus on as most relevant and appealing to your audience?
- What title might you use to catch their attention?





# Application: Developing and adjusting your communication style



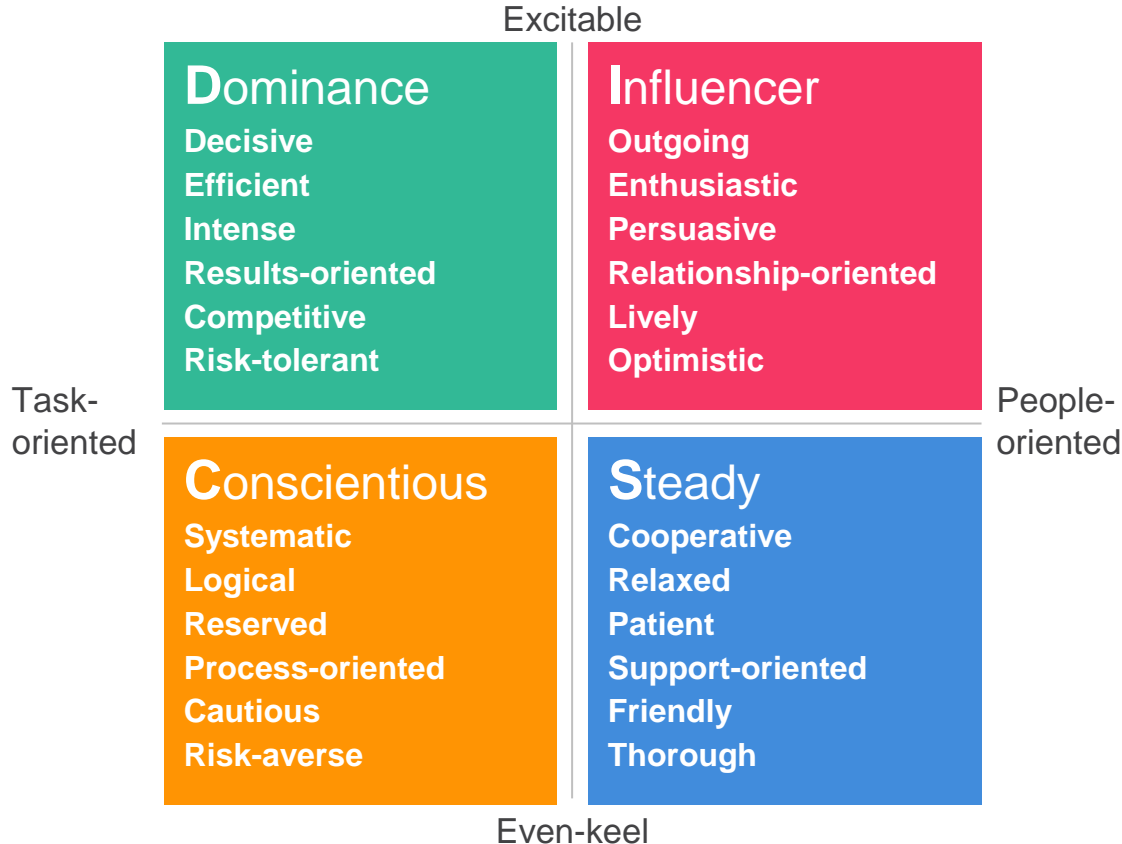
# Understanding communication styles



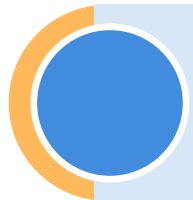
## 4 'classic' communication styles:

- Assertive: clear, direct; use eye contact but are not overly pushy
- Aggressive: overly intense, demanding, can be deflective
- Passive-aggressive: Say one thing but often feel or do another; struggle to voice needs
- Passive: yield to others; avoid confrontation

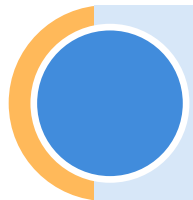
# Personal communication styles: the DISC model



# DISC: 'Dominant' communicator



People who have a “dominant” personal style (known in similar frameworks as a “director” or “driver”) love action and are focused on results.



Prefer to think about the big picture, and leave implementation details to others



# DISC: ‘Dominant’ communicator

## A few things to keep in mind when communicating with “dominants”:



### Try to...

- Get right down to business, and stay on topic.
- Be prepared to field follow-up questions on the spot so you can answer with confidence.
- Expect them to be decisive and fairly blunt.

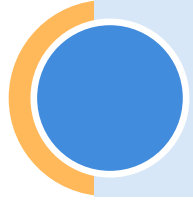
### Avoid...

- Taking their bluntness, follow-up questions, and/or impatience personally.
- Making promises you can’t deliver on.
- Expecting them to open up about their weekend plans.

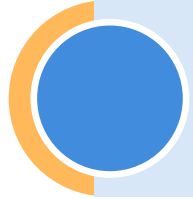


Dominants are often accomplished, excitable, and love a good challenge.

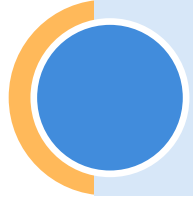
# DISC: 'Influencer' communicator



Known in similar frameworks as an “initiator” or “socializer” are your classic “people” people.



Thrive on interpersonal relationships, which makes them great collaborators.



Often best engaged for shorter collaborative bursts.



# DISC: 'Influencer' communicator

## A few things to keep in mind when communicating with “influencers”:



### Try to...

- Approach them in a more informal manner
- Put details and facts in writing for them to refer back to after a verbal conversation.
- Expect them to be optimistic about ideas, as well as their own abilities and the abilities of those around them.

### Avoid...

- Talking down to them or being curt.
- Trying to confine conversation or stifle freedom to express ideas and emotions.
- Expecting them to dive deep into the details with you.



If you're trying to re-shape the culture on your team, an influencer might be the perfect partner in crime.



# DISC: 'Steady' communicator



Also known in similar frameworks as a “relator” or “harmonizer”



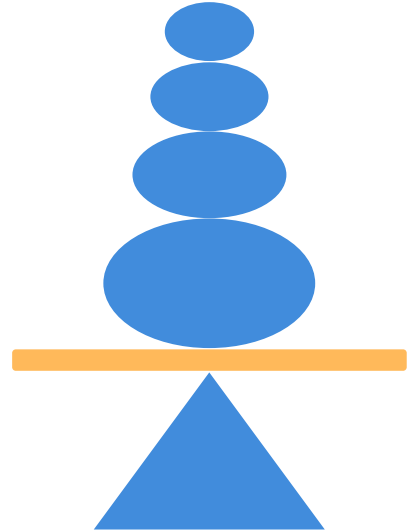
Emphasise cooperation and are loathe to upset the apple cart.



Value consistency, stability, and loyalty.



Might find them in service-oriented roles like customer support



# DISC: 'Steady' communicator

A few things to keep in mind when communicating with “steadies”:



## Try to...

- Practice active listening, and confirm that you've heard them by summarising what they've just said to you.
- Break the ice by acknowledging a recent contribution they've made.
- Expect them to ask for details.

## Avoid...

- Rushing them into a decision.
- Assuming they support an idea 100% just because they don't voice opposition



Steady communicators are even-keel people who love to be in a cooperative environment where everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. If your team is in turmoil, a steady might not lead the effort to restore normalcy, but they'll be a strong ally.

# DISC: 'Conscientious' communicator



- Known in similar frameworks as an “analyser” or “thinker”
- Prioritise precision and place a high value on competency.
- Often jump at the chance to demonstrate their expertise and build new skills
- Likely to find these people in an engineering, data science, or analyst role.



# DISC: 'Conscientious' communicator



A few things to keep in mind when communicating with “conscientious” types:



## Try to...

- Provide as many details as possible up front, organised as systematically as possible
- Give them clear expectations and space to work independently
- Expect them to double- and triple-check all the relevant info before making a decision

## Avoid...

- Responding to them emotionally – use words like “know” or “think” instead of “feel.”
- Expecting them to ease into a conversation with chit-chat.



Conscientious types might appear as cautious, but are highly systematic. They're the person you want to partner with when assessing risks or checking things through for a project or work you might be about to launch.

# Breakout room: Understanding yourself – DISC (10 mins)



Go into your breakout rooms and reflect on your own score for the DISC questionnaire completed before the training. Discuss:

- Were you surprised by your result?
- Where have you seen these traits come out in yourself in the past?
- What things might you need to be aware of during research or in the workplace having this communication style?





# Tea break

# Adapting communication style for results

**What does it mean to be able to adapt to different communication styles?**



1

I recognize the impact of communication on different people.

2

I consider how different perspectives, situations and contexts affect meaning and messaging.

3

I can anticipate, plan for and deal with ambiguous and confusing situations.

4

I demonstrate respect for diversity in communication with all people.

5

I select the appropriate communication method for the person/people I'm communicating with.

# Effective Communication in the Workplace

**Even when adapting communication styles for your team, there are common barriers to effective team work and communicating.**

Not tackling these can lead to:

Misunderstanding what's expected of you on a project

Colleagues ending up very frustrated due to communication breakdown

Creating an uncomfortable social situation at work

Wasted time, money or resource

Reflect negatively on your management abilities or capabilities



It's important these are recognised and solved either together with your team -- strong communicators will help resolve communication issues even if they are not theirs!



# Common communication issues in a diverse team



1

Cultural/personal differences in expectations – how formal do you have to be? how to deal with differences of opinions?

2

Linguistic barriers and miscommunication - using idioms, lack of confidence in being able to express your point may stop you from trying

3

Different communication styles – low context, high context communication – how direct can you be? can you voice disagreement?

4

Diversity can present a barrier to casual office communication that builds trust



# Adapting approach & resolving misunderstandings



Situation	Adaptive response
You observe that a member of your team has misunderstood the intent and meaning of a colleague's comment.	You use active listening and paraphrasing to further explore the comment with both parties, acknowledging that cultural differences might be a factor
Recognise that you manage or are part of a diverse team with diverse perspectives and different understanding of / cultural perspectives on a difficult topic	You understand that you need to play a stronger facilitative role during meetings, encouraging team members to have patience for others' perspectives.
You know that the participants in an upcoming meeting will have diverse perspectives based on their backgrounds, including some from external organisations of parties that you don't know very well	You plan a meeting agenda that allows more time for exploration and mutual understanding of views.
You recognise that your direct communication style is offensive and sometimes misunderstood by your colleagues.	You seek out the colleague and attempt to clarify what you mean and your intentions (having a conversation), when the situation allows

# Examples of communication problems in the workplace

Problem	Context	Why is this a problem? What repercussions could this have?	Solution?
<b>Failure to Communicate Fully</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– You are managing an external stakeholder event</li> <li>– You create an agenda and share with your team but only list the times and subject to cover</li> <li>– Your colleagues come unprepared because they didn't know who else is attending</li> </ul>		
<b>Assuming someone else has taken responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Your team hosts a brainstorming session on strategies for next year</li> <li>– When your boss asks the outcome, it turns out only one person took notes, and they did not capture much detail</li> </ul>		



# Examples of communication problems in the workplace

Problem	Context	Why is this a problem? What repercussions could this have?	Solution?
<b>Failure to consider actions or words</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Failure to consider what you are about to write or say can lead to a breakdown in communication, either because you are not fully articulating your thoughts or because you react without thinking</li><li>– This can lead to hurt feelings and misunderstandings.</li></ul>		
<b>Being unprepared</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– If you're late for a meeting or approaching a deadline and you are unprepared, you may be tempted to try and get away without preparation. When you are unprepared, mistakes, misunderstandings, and even the misdirection of a project or task can occur.</li></ul>		

# Examples of communication problems in the workplace

Problem	Context	Why is this a problem? What repercussions could this have?	Solution?
<b>Using the wrong communication tool</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– There are times when an email is appropriate and other times when a phone call or in-person meeting is more suitable.</li> <li>– Misjudging the situation and picking the wrong tool can lead to a breakdown in communication and create confusion or misunderstanding</li> </ul>		
<b>Oversharing/ being too informal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sometimes we overshare when we speak before we think.</li> <li>– Some people gossip and exchange inappropriate information.</li> <li>– Sloppiness can result in oversharing or releasing personal or sensitive information</li> <li>– E.g. hit “reply to all” or “forward” in an email conversation accidentally</li> </ul>		

# Breakout room: Communication faux pas (15 mins)



In your breakout rooms, discuss the examples of communication problems in the workplace. Pretend you are the boss:

- Why are these a problem in a professional environment?
- How would you manage this with a colleague if they were causing this issue?

Bonus: Give an example where you've seen one of these happen and how it was resolved.



# Active listening

## 10 tips for active listening



1. Face the speaker and maintain eye contact (if in person)



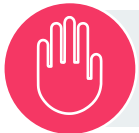
2. Be attentive and focused on conversation



3. Keep an open mind



4. Listen to words and picture what being said (instead of planning what you're going to say next)



5. Don't interrupt and impose your solution/ideas



6. Wait for the speaker to pause before asking clarifying questions



7. Ask questions to ensure understanding, without veering topic off track



8. Try to feel what the speaker is feeling



9. Give the speaker regular feedback through empathy



10. Pay attention to what isn't said – non-verbal cues

# Mastering communications



Expect to adjust your style, language and 'modes' in different environments

When in doubt, observe and mimic what these; note what works and doesn't

Not everyone will be as quick to adjust; your ability to listen, adapt and respond will be a tool for working with diverse colleagues



Save examples of great comms; email templates, brochures, blogs - ask yourself 'Why is this strong? How can I take inspiration from it to strengthen my work?'



# Next steps...



## Do:

Start a 'Good Comms' file; add examples of great email responses, proposals, articles, anything that could be useful inspiration in future!



1

### Reading:

*How to Win Friends and Influence People – Dale Carnegie*  
*The Science of Effective Communication – Ian Tuhovs*

2

### Podcasts:

*'How can I say this'*  
*'Mindful communication podcast'*

3

### Blog:

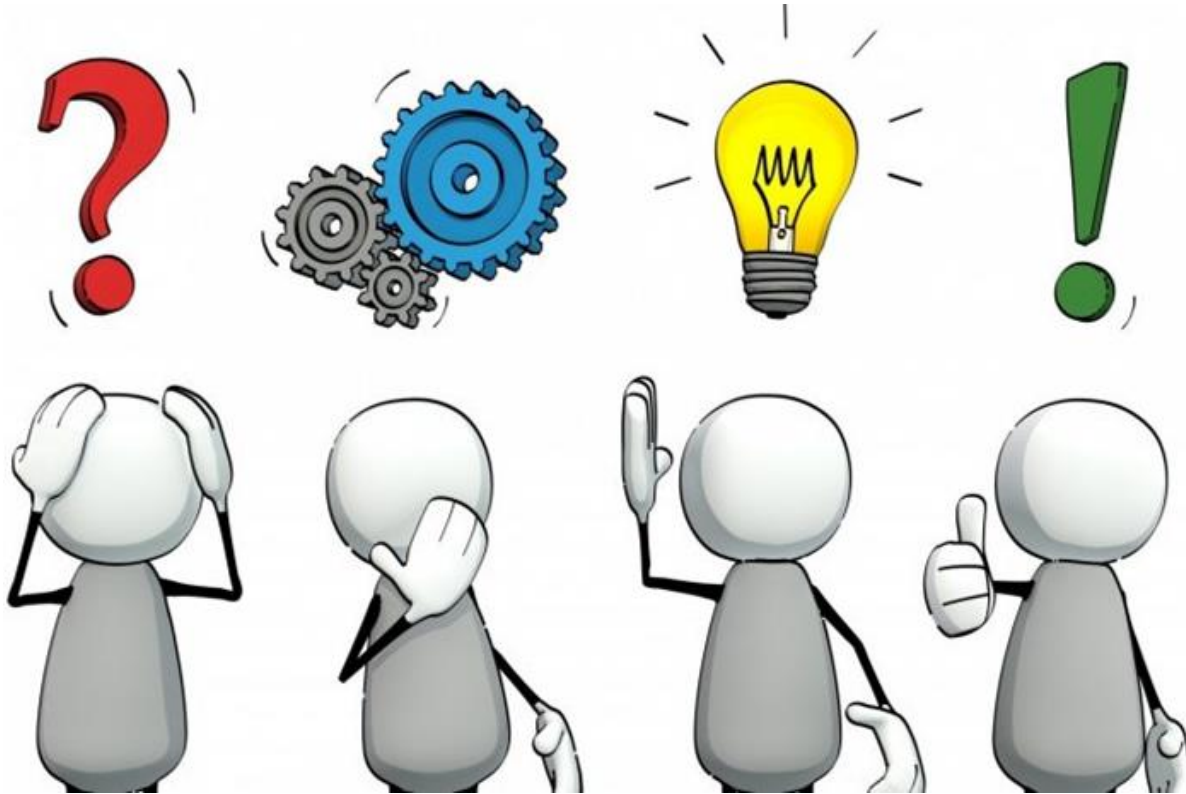
*'Rethinking business communications blog' – Lucille Ossai*

4

### Future training:

*Transitioning to a career: mapping opportunities*  
*Translating your Skills for the professional world*

Reflections - what have you learned in relation to your learning portfolio? Questions? Comments?





# Thank you & Evaluation

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