



Jørgen Erik Christensen, Markku Karhu, Cecillia Christensen

International Communication Experienced from Students' Perspective

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Publisher Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Layout Alek Koivu

ISBN 978-952-328-027-4 (printed)

ISBN 978-952-328-028-1 (online publication)

ISSN 1799-6015 (printed)

ISSN 1799-6023 (online publication)

Print Metropolian Digipaino



INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCED FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Jørgen Erik Christensen, Associate Professor
Department of Civil Engineering, Technical University of Denmark

Markku Karhu, Head of Degree Programme in Software Engineering
Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Cecillia Christensen, Interior Designer, NLP Master Practitioner

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences



*I know that you think
that you understand what you think I said;
but I am not sure that you have realized
that what you heard is not what I meant.
(Anonymous)*

Corresponding author Associate Professor Jørgen Erik Christensen
Phone (+45) 45 25 18 53, jerik@byg.dtu.dk

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PREFACE

The importance of communication is recognized and acknowledged increasingly in engineering education. Successful performance of the engineering profession requires engineers to understand and explore customer needs, negotiate contracts, and collaborate in working teams. Communication in different styles is highly needed in all sectors of engineering fields. Of course, similar requirements concern professionals of other fields, as well.

This present book focuses on human communication in verbal and non-verbal mode and especially highlights interpersonal communication in an international context. Due to the increasingly globalized market, professionals who possess the ability to effectively communicate across cultures are in high demand. International communication studies are often overlooked in regular engineering curricula, although any form of communication plays an important role in an engineer's everyday work life. The core of communication is to understand what the information messages are and how they are sent and received. It is essential to learn to pay attention to the content (what) but also on the relational message (how).

The idea to offer an intensive course on International Communication at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences was born in a CDIO annual conference in 2009 when Professor Jørgen Christensen from Technical University of Denmark (DTU) arranged a workshop for the conference delegations. It was decided that such an international communication workshop type course should be offered also to Metropolia students. The CDIO™ INITIATIVE (Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate) is an innovative educational framework for producing the next generation of engineers. One of its objectives is to highlight personal and interpersonal skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential to prepare students for more advanced product, process, and system building experiences.

Another valuable condition to start this kind of cooperation was satisfied when Metropolia and DTU signed an agreement of Erasmus Teachers' Exchange. Thanks to the "Teaching Mobility funding through the Erasmus+ Programme; ERASMUS+; EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, European Commission", small funds to support the cooperation were awarded. Since 2010 this course on International Communications has been repeated 12 times, twice a year. Altogether 264 students have participated in and passed the course with great satisfaction. The course arrangement allowed us to invite a diversity of nationalities enabling the students to have an authentic and genuine opportunity for intercultural

communication. Over the years, they have presented some 50 nationalities.

The book records personal communication experiences from students' perspective showing obvious differences between nationalities. We are very grateful for the students for their openness and permission to publish their notes and statements in this book.

Furthermore, I wish to thank Jørgen and Cecillia from the bottom of heart for their enthusiastic, skilful and warm hearted teaching on the courses. What they share with the students is exceptional and has an everlasting impact on the participants' mind. It is an honour work together with you.

Espoo, Finland, March, 2017

Markku Karhu

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We wish to express our gratefulness to our students for letting us use their stories in this book, our assistant teachers who gave us valuable feed-back, and Davide Pavone for providing the photos, Mira Myllärinen for always helping with practical matters and supporting our course, Jonita Martelius for making the re-editing and Metropolia for letting us use all their facilities and making this course possible.

Should the reader like to get further information we can be contacted at the following connection points or Google:

Technical University of Denmark (DTU)

- ♦ www.dtu.dk, e-mail jerik@byg.dtu.dk

LinkedIn:

- ♦ www.linkedin.com, open group: ICC Metropolia

Or Google the following words (www.google.com):

- ♦ Jorgen Erik Christensen DTU CDIO Communication
- ♦ Jørgen Erik Christensen DTU CDIO Communication
- ♦ Cecillia Christensen CDIO Communication

Jørgen Erik Christensen and Cecillia Christensen

Lundtofte, Denmark, March, 2017

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1 INTRODUCTION

THE BOOK

Good communication is at the heart of small talk, networking, meetings, job interviews and also equally important with family and friends. It can ease one's way in private life and work, help to create strong relationships with colleagues, superiors and clients. Good communication can motivate and inspire. However, communication is something most people were never taught and this book is meant to be a tool for discovering the difference good communication can make in every aspect of life.

This book is not meant to be read from the start to the end in a few hours. Rather it is our hope that it will be just read in parts, really thinking about what the young students express in their writing and thus enrich the reader's mind. Also it is not our intention to write a book on a high scientific level but rather a book that will be of aid in efforts to get better at communicating.

Finland is one of the few countries in the world where it is possible for people from any country to study in English and for free. So from all the continents we have had students who were able to travel straight from their own country to Finland for this course – that is they may arrive without much knowledge of European conditions. Since Finland is so hospitable there are usually people from approximately 15 different countries from all over the world at our International Communication Course (ICC) at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland. We have been joined by students from:

- ◆ Algiers, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Zambia
- ◆ Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Canada
- ◆ Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam
- ◆ Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Rumania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, The Netherlands, Turkey, Ukraine

Written for students studying intercultural communication for the first time, this textbook gives an introduction to inter- and cross-cultural concepts providing an introduction to:

- ◆ communication
- ◆ non-verbal communication
- ◆ conflicting message
- ◆ living in the present
- ◆ concentration
- ◆ awareness
- ◆ first impression
- ◆ perception
- ◆ understanding the different types of contact forms and how they work

Each chapter addresses both theory and student-centered examples from around the world that represent a variety of differences showing how the relevant subject influences a young person's life.

In the following paragraph it is described how ICC is based on the CDIO approach. As part of using this approach the students have to read material provided before joining the course. Parts of the materials used have been put together to create this book. Knowing that the students are from countries from all over the world and that many have to work hard in order to be able to use the English language – we have decided to keep the English simple avoiding too many complicated words or phrases. Also in order to keep the book easy reading we chose not to use impersonal structures but rather “you” for the young students. As mentioned above, this course started at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland and in the beginning many of the students were engineering students, since Metropolia has a high number of students in the fields of engineering. As the time has passed, however, and the course has got a wider reputation we now have many students from other universities, too and thus the course is no longer directed to engineering students mainly and the contents of this book can be applied regardless of the field of study by anyone interested in improving their communication skills.

CDIO

This book is based on our experiences and benefits from the international CDIO co-operation in making our International Communication Course at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. CDIO is a trademarked initialism for "Conceive Design Implement Operate"

As an outcome of The 5th International CDIO Conference, Singapore Polytechnic, Singapore, 2009, it was decided to establish a co-operation between Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and Technical University of Denmark in order to develop better teaching giving the students more knowledge about communication. The co-operation was started through the invitation of Christensen to give an International Communication Course in February, 2010, at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. This invitation has been repeated twice a year ever since. The International Communication course is based on the development of teaching methods for learning interpersonal skills in an interactive environment – this making it possible for the students to live up their own experiences through active involvement in exercises in groups of two to six persons. The principle of this course is to use the intention of the CDIO approach, as interpersonal skills are becoming increasingly important, including communication, teamwork and leadership

Working with communication within engineering in specific is a relatively new concept and is being applied in the CDIO approach. According to Crawley, (Crawley et al., 2007) the CDIO Syllabus consists of four parts, (see Figure 1.1) 1) Technical Knowledge and Reasoning, 2) Personal and Professional Skills and Attributes, 3) Interpersonal Skills: Teamwork and Communication, 4) Conceiving, Designing, Implementing and Operating Systems in the Entrepreneurial and Social Context.

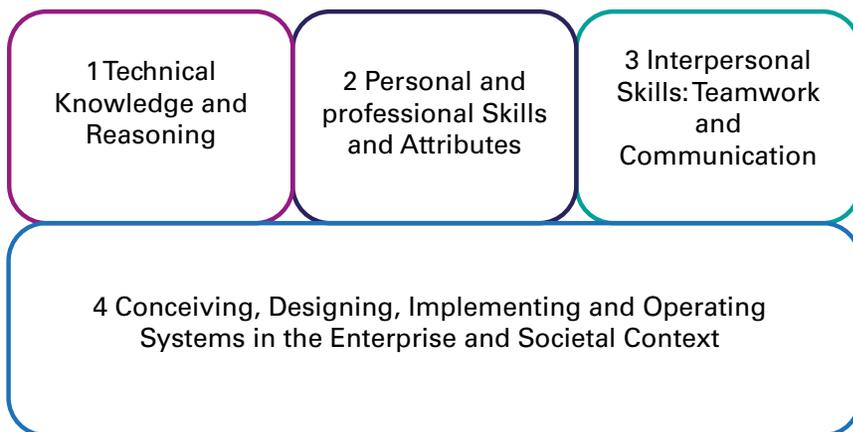


Figure 1.1. Adapted from (Crawley et al., 2007): The CDIO Syllabus.

The CDIO approach is a model made in order to develop and ensure a good quality of the engineering education. The letters indicate the stages or the lifecycle of a process, product or system. Modern engineers are involved

in all stages which are Conceive, Design, Implement and Operate. According to (Crawley et al., 2007) The Conceive stage is to define customer needs and to develop plans. The Design stage focuses on creating the design that describes what product, process, or system will be implemented. The Implement stage is to transform the design into the product and the Operate stage uses the product.

In the International Communication Course the stages have been changed a little in order to better correspond to the needs of the students. The Conceive stage is an understanding of the problem, getting ideas, uncovering problems, and finding the overall perspectives. The Design stage focuses on creating solutions to problems and describing the process that is to be implemented. In our course in International Communication we use the term Design your personal process since it is about the students' understanding/experience of communication. The Implement stage is about transforming the design into the process or the realization of the chosen tools/solutions. The Operate stage has focus on the actual use of the chosen tools/solutions.

The International Communication Course is structured in a way that helps preparing the students to take responsibility for their own learning while working actively. This is of great importance since development in society is accelerating, and students must cope with tasks that remain unknown while they are under education (Jank et al., 2006). Jank defines students as follows: "Students are people who let teachers assist with learning. No outsider can make learning happen. One can only learn for oneself. Teachers are people who will assist students to learn".

STUDENTS' TEXTS

As part of using the CDIO approach the students have to read some material before joining the course. Since August 2012 the students have had to write three assignments. One reason for this is to see if they are able to apply what they have learned; but also to avoid students not up to the efforts required for participating in the course since the students make an assignment even before they join the course. During the Conceive stage before the course the students read the material and write their assignment 1. During the course itself which is the Design and Implement stage the students write their assignment 2. The five weeks after the course is the Operate stage where the students use what they have actually learned but now in their own environment and they finish the course by writing their assignment 3. Since the International Communication Course is all based on doing practical exercises it is most important that the students read the given material beforehand. Writing assignments is a good way to estimate whether the desired standard has been

achieved but it has also increased the level of learning dramatically. The stories in this book are from these assignments written by our students, and we have tried to select stories from different counties showing how situations can be experienced differently. We chose to improve ever so slightly the grammar and spelling in order for the reader to experience the book as a general impression rather than a lot of fragments. We left, however, the different writing styles and voices of the individual writers untouched since they are valuable and also worth looking at.

We have chosen to bring quite a lot of stories from several of the subjects. This is for two reasons:

- 1.** We have experienced during our courses that it is so great for the students to learn that other young people regardless of their origin and upbringing share the same feelings and experiences as they do.
- 2.** Also we should like to share with the reader our experiences of some young people that really struggle to make it in a country that for some students is extremely different from their native country.

The many stories from our students show that something which is important in one country could be utterly useless in another and this creates a lot of situations that are great subjects for discussion in our class.

In some places in the book it would be correct to write “he and/or she”. However, in order to make the text easy to read we chose just to write “he”.

2 INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

“You travel because also in the school of life it is hard always to sit on the same seat.”

Sigismund von Radecki

International communication is becoming more important in the globalised world of today. Nevertheless, engineering education in specific, has traditionally focused on the technical skills rather than on personal development. However, the personal competences are becoming more and more important, including communications skills. One of the challenges in modern (engineering) education is the ability to focus on both the technical and personal development in order to educate a professional who can solve both technical and humanistic problems; thus creating good results from an all-round prospect.

When working as e.g. an engineer it is extremely important to be able to communicate in a satisfactory and positive way. It does not help to be a well-educated and skilled engineer if one is unable to communicate with colleagues, clients, etc. Beside this, it is of course also important to be able to communicate with your wife/husband, children, family and friends. Engineers, amongst others, are very much part of the ongoing globalization thus it is becoming more usual while studying to become an engineer to go to another university for a semester, preferably in another country and here one may encounter problems of cross-disciplinary nature. Team working skills, respecting other peoples' qualifications are required, so therefore too, interpersonal skills are essential, including communications skills and awareness.

Anders Bjarklev (President of the Danish Technical University (DTU), says in DTU AVISEN (DTU Newspaper) Nov. 1st 2012:”The global view has become a necessity not only for you as a student at university but also for many companies. All the time you have to keep your finger on the international pulse in order to stay ahead with the evolution and keep your position on the market. This development can be seen in the companies' demand for engineers who have international experience as well as some contacts outside the native country and even more importantly know what it is like to work with colleagues with a different background. As a student you could get these qualifications by taking a part of your education in foreign countries, you will be able to meet the companies' need for international and cultural competences that are so much in demand”.



Figures 2.1 and 2.2. International communication is becoming even more important in the globalised world of today.

Furthermore, Jørgen Jensen, (Director of studies at the Danish Technical University (DTU) says in DTU AVISEN (DTU Newspaper) Sept. 3rd 2012 “International experience is in increasing demand by the business sector and that is why it is something you have to give priority to. Besides getting a professional and technical advantage you also get a cultural knowledge and you put your profession in a cultural context so you will find out what it is like to work as an engineer in another cultural context. And of course it gives you an immense personal development to live in a foreign country for a longer period.”

3 GLOBAL STUDENT

“Journeys are the best means for self education.”

Karl Julius Weber

According to Hofstede (Hofstede, 1991) culture is more often a source of conflict than synergy. Cultural differences may be at best an annoyance but may also at worst be a disaster. However, if we really do want globalization we have to work with these differences. One way is to go to work or study in another country. At most intercultural meetings the participants speak different native tongues. Through history this problem has been solved by using a trade language, which nowadays more and more often is English in our part of the world. When communicating in another language it means another frame of reference has to be used – our mind is influenced by the surroundings where we grew up, the words and concepts that were there. So what we learn is determined by the environment we grew up in, meaning that we are good at whatever is important for an individual in the given environment.



Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. Our mind is influenced by the surroundings we grew up in. Children from Ecuador, Greenland, India, and Peru.

The many stories from our students show that something which is important in one country is utterly useless in another and this creates a lot of situations that are great subjects for discussion in our class.

Students from our class write about their experiences of being a global student:

Male, South Korea: “Korean is really difficult to learn for foreigners because it is such a difficult language. Likewise, English is really a difficult language to learn for a Korean. But it really is an important language. All people all over the world use English for communication though they also have their own mother language though. So I caught the importance of ‘learning English’, and knowing my lack of English I took this course. At the moment, I live with Spanish and German friends, and they are all good at English. So if I want to communicate with my flat mates, I have to speak and listen to English. It is really an important thing for me. This is Finland, not Korea. So I use English every day. I hope that the more I use English, the better it will get.”

Male, Nigeria: “As a student from Africa talking is part of our culture and it always makes you feel like you have offended the other person when they refuse to talk to you, you feel hated and not welcome. Back home in Nigeria I know all the basic information about my classmates, like where they live is like a routine to being friends. So it was difficult at the beginning coming from a background of interaction between classmates and fellow students to an environment where we seldom talk to each other. A society where everybody minds his or her own business, though it is not any easier now compared to about two year ago when I first came; but it has become adaptive and I begin to see it as normal. But one thing that worries me most is that how will you ever get to know the language if you cannot even make friends with those who are natives, especially those who share the same academic institution with you. So attending this course was very important because I was out of touch with student life, where you and your friends are in charge of the world.”

Male, Italy: “I believe that diversity is one of the biggest challenges in communication. One advantage and strength of this course was that there were participants from different countries from the entire world. We were people with totally different backgrounds so even if we have lived in Finland for several years we still show our cultural background in our behaviour. The diversity made the course and in general community richer. At the same time, when people from different cultures are part of the same group or team they should be aware of possible culture conflicts. They also should agree in common rules in order to respect other members.

Other possible factors that can determinate barriers in communication between team members are religion, environment, education or politic.

Because of the presences of many cultures this course has made me conscious about how difficult it can be to interact with people from a different background than mine and I saw this aspect of the course as strength.”

Male, South Korea: “The world has been globalized incredibly fast so now the whole world is like one country united to one another – globalization has become embedded in every country and economy so no one can survive without cooperating with the neighbour countries. It seems that there is no possibility to go back to the past. Thus, it is no longer a choice to learn more cultures and get accustomed to it.”

Female, Denmark: “I am generally interested in and curious about other cultures and how people live their lives and I try to ask as often as I can. I have however often been met with some hostility, like I offend people by asking about their culture. I never understood this, until today when I brought it up in plenum. It turns out that even if you know people quite well, questions like that can come across as critical and I would want them to defend the way they live. I never thought of this before, so in the future I am really going to make sure they know I’m just curious, and not trying to offend anyone.”

Female, Bosnia and Herzegovina: “It was very interesting to meet people from all over the world. I was so amazed how quickly we got to know one and other and how open people were and how willing to share so much of themselves.

I was most impressed by the four guys from Japan. One of them was fairly good at English, while the other three barely could construct a sentence that made sense. It was so amazing to see how hard they tried to get involved with the group and keep conversation. They could just as easily have excluded themselves by sitting together; but they actually never did. It takes a lot of courage to put you out like that. They really wanted to talk with you although they really could not; but if you were patient with them you were actually somehow able to.

In connection to this I would like to point out a particular situation that made a big impression on me. It was when we had to do case presentation. The quietest one from the group was chosen to present the analysis of the case. This was of course one of the guys from Japan. He was very uncomfortable, which was easy to read from his body language and he almost did not say anything during the presentation. He looked at his paper, hand in pocket, mumbled and nervously just stood there. Somebody then proposed that he do the presentation in Japanese. Just as an experiment to see if it was language barrier that was the reason why he

was so nervous. The second time around it was a totally different person doing the presentation. It was so eye-opening to witness how much the language influenced his confidence. After this experience I was so keen on including them in everything we did and I took contact with them and just tried to be as patient as possible.”

Male, India: “The main experience I can mention is I made some good friends through this course. I learnt about Germany, Japan, Ukraine just seated in a class, listening to the real life stories from the people there. Even during our break time, we were talking to each other and sharing more while having food.”

Male, Germany: “For me the whole course gave me a new view on the world (or at least on 16 countries). It was incredible to meet all the other participants, to hear their stories and to realize that we do have a lot in common. And what I definitely learnt during these days: you can communicate better when you know yourself. Besides of learning about other cultures, tips and tricks for communicating, I learned a lot about me and why I reacted in some situations in a certain kind of way. I think it will help me to change some of these behaviors and the course will definitely help me to understand international partners in my future job better and hopefully avoid faux pas.”

Female, Finland: “Exchange students and other foreigners have an advantage as they always can discuss their experiences in Finland or what their home country is like. I think it is important to study basic information about both countries before they start exchange year. It is quite surprising how often exchange students don't know what parties are leading their country or who their prime minister etc. is. Somehow it's understandable if they are not aware of these matters here in Finland, but they should be able to tell quite a lot about their own country.”

Male, Japan: “In the class, there was something that amazed me. It was the way of raising hands. When I want to say something in a class, I usually reach out my hand. However, some people didn't reach out their hand, they raised their index finger. Since I didn't know why they did so, I searched on the internet after coming back to my hostel. And then I understood. It is related to Nazis. This was really an impressive experience for me.”

Male, Kuwait: “When I first arrived in Finland, I noticed that all people while using the escalators to go down to the underground trains would stay on the right hand side of the escalators. Before I had time to react I was tapped on my shoulder by a stranger, a Finn, when I looked at him he had anger in his eyes and said “Excuse me!” I turned to the right and he kept on stepping down and tapped on the shoulders of another foreigner, my guess is he wasn't polite with him either. Then I realized that there is some sort of rule or tradition to stay on the right hand side of the esca-

lator, so that the people who are in a hurry can use the other “so called” lane to make their way down or up.”

Male, Finland: “It was very nice to meet so many people from around the world and get to know a little about them and their perspectives. I think meeting different people is always a valuable thing, because as people we tend to see the world only through the lens of our own perception and it can be easy to forget that this isn't the only interpretation.”

There are so many things, manners and customs that are different; going to another country indeed is difficult as is even just expressing what is on your mind in a foreign language. Here are some stories that may give you something to think about.

Jørgen: “It was at the end of the day during our course in International Communication. We had some Japanese students and they did not say very much, not even during the exercises. So I asked them to give a short summing up of the day which did not work out so well – they were incredible timid. Then I told them to do it in Japanese – and now they all had a lot to say, one louder than the other. The rest of the students (from 16 different countries) loved it because now they saw the Japanese students in a most different way.”

Jørgen - a Danish student from my university told me this story: “I was together with an American acquaintance in Copenhagen (capital of Denmark). We met three of my Danish friends and all five of us talked for some time before we parted. Afterwards my American acquaintance said that Danes are in fact a bit boring and not really able to express themselves. It never occurred to him that we were four Danes that spoke our best English for him and of course we would all be able to express ourselves much better if allowed to do so in Danish.”

Jørgen: “I have some classes that are about environmental conditions in Greenland so of course there are quite a lot of students from Greenland; but there are also a number of Danes. The class is in Danish and I think we Danes figured that the Greenlanders were rather timid and did not speak out loud. At a point I gave an exercise and the Greenlanders didn't understand it so I told them to discuss the exercise in Greenlandic which they did. Now they were not at all timid, they spoke very loud and had a most intense discussion and everybody wanted to say something. So at least I learned from this experience that if you are talking to a person that has to speak a foreign language then you must never believe that your perception of that person's personality is what he is like always.”

4 COMMUNICATION

“The greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it actually took place.”

George Bernard Shaw, (1856 – 1950)

Whatever we do - we are communicating. It can be done verbally with words or nonverbally with body language, facial expression and tone of voice. Communication is a very complex topic but since human beings are social beings it is very important to learn how to communicate as adequately as possible. In addition, improving communication skills will help to be more aware and understand the surroundings, as well as to better adapt and carry out more easily within different contexts.



Figure 4.1. Communication takes place anywhere, anytime. Two ladies in the subway in Barcelona.

Most people do not communicate well enough and one of the reasons for this is that we communicate consciously as well as unconsciously. Moreover, much of our communication is done unreflecting. We are not sufficiently aware of the quality of our way of transmitting messages to other people and this contributes to the message not being understood.

In the working life nowadays most of the time is spent communicating with others both in writing and verbally. It is therefore most important to develop skills in communicating effectively. It is not enough to know different

ways to communicate it is also important to improve the skills in applying them in a good way. According to (Karlsen et al., 1995), a top executive at a large company declared:” When I hire recently graduated engineers, it is rarely a problem finding one that meets our technical qualification requirements, but to find one that is good at communicating – that is worse.” According to a survey conducted by Karlsen et al. (Karlsen et. al., 1995), a typical engineer uses about 60% of his working time on communication tasks. At top management level it is up to 80-90% of the time. Therefore communicating is a very important part of the job. By employment for a job, personal characteristics are emphasized with a minimum of 50% – even up to 75% depending on who is hiring. That is, if two job candidates are equal in technical qualifications, the one with the best personal appearance and communication skills has the greatest chance to get the job. Jørgen: “I even have the knowledge of a case where a company chose an engineer who had just graduated, and an engineer with practical work experience in engineering was not hired. This despite the fact that he was actually better qualified, but his personal skills were not as well developed, which in this work was of great importance, since he should work with clients.”



Figure 4.2. It is extremely important to be able to communicate in a satisfactory and positive way. It does not help to be a well-educated and skilled engineer if you are unable to communicate with colleagues, partners, etc.

Jørgen: It is a large Danish company. Four persons are having a meeting. They are discussing a subject that is of great interest for all of them. Since they have different educations they see the problems concerning the issue in different ways; but they try to find a way to make the situation work. That is, it goes for the three of them (architect and craftsmen) because the fourth, who is an engineer, apparently looks at the circumstances in a most different way. All the time he interrupts the others, all the time he thinks that his remarks are more important than what the others are saying and all the time he speaks much louder than the others in order to make sure that everybody can hear his point of view. The engineer simply destroys the meeting and consequently the other participants in the meeting decide to make another meeting without the engineer and to find another company to work with (hopefully with an engineer who can behave in a better way).

Students from the International Communication Course write on difficulties of communication:

Female, Finland: “It was good when told how important it’s to get things out clearly. This is very important in working life. If other people don’t understand what I’m saying it does not matter what I say. It might give an impression I don’t know what I’m speaking about. Especially with the work that I’m doing now there are a lot of different terms and in many situations people use different words for things that are same. This makes the communication more difficult. I’ll definitely practise to communicate more clearly in future.”

Female, Ethiopia: “To conclude: In communication it is not only the words that are at work; but also our body position, hand shake, distance we make, eye contact and smile can affect our communication as much as our words. Also most importantly we have to pay attention to our surrounding and to ourselves. As we know what is out there the more comfortable we are.”

Female, Finland: “Before this course I was conscious of the challenges of communication; but honestly I was not aware of the fact that there are challenges around me and communication as well. Previously I did not think about cultural differences and communication so much but during my exchange period in Switzerland I realized that the cultural background matters a lot in communication. This course made me even more aware of communicational challenges around us.”

Female, Ethiopia: “Communication is also a key that improves the overall efficiency of a given work/plan. As people don’t have the same qualities and flaws; working well in a team saves time and energy. Working in a team also gives the members a chance to use their qualities and improve

their short comings. If I improve my communications skills I will be more efficient working in a group and so improve my efficiency in the working environment.”

4.1 NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

“The essence of lying is in deception, not in words.”
John Ruskin, (1819–1900)

Nonverbal communication is communication through sending and receiving without words (mostly visual). It includes body language, personal space (described later) and touch.

Body language

The meaning of any conversation is conveyed mostly by the use of body language and is interpreted instinctively by everybody except people with some mental deceases. The body language – a composition of body position, facial expressions, eye movements, conscious and unconscious gestures – expresses inner thoughts, what we think of our environment, and what we think of the people we are with. Gestures may be made with body, arms, hands, head, face and eyes. Facial expressions are very important since the human face is estimated to be capable of making more than ten thousand different expressions due to all the various muscles that control mouth, lips, eyes, nose, forehead and jaw. Eye contact (described further later) – when two people look at each other’s eyes at the same time – is a nonverbal way of indicating interest, attention, engagement and involvement. It builds emotional relationship between the listener and speaker. It is important to have an amount of eye contact that makes both feel comfortable and generally lookers gain more credibility than non-lookers (in Europe). Face and eyes are often thought of as the most expressive means of body communication.

Touch

Touch is a kind of communication that could be handshakes, high fives, a pat on the shoulder, holding hands, back slapping, brushing an arm, and kissing. Touch is a very important sense and vital in conveying nonverbal communication in interpersonal relationships.

The nonverbal communication should match and harmonize with the message that it conveys. When nonverbal and verbal communication complement each other it is easier to get an accurate interpretation of the message. While growing up we learn to identify facial expressions, body movements

and body positioning corresponding with specific feelings and intentions.

When we are happy, we express this feeling and we may shout with joy while our body moves in affirmation of what we say. When we are feeling unhappy our tone of voice may be lower and perhaps slower.

We generally tend to lean forward or ask questions in response to something that appeals to us and we lean back, farther away from the speaker, and may say nothing in response to something that we find uninteresting or unpleasant. It also shows our interest if we while our interlocutor is speaking look at him or not.

According to Stevens (Stevens, 1989) it is a fact not widely recognized that it is impossible not to communicate. Another way of stating this is to notice that every message has two aspects:

1. The **factual information** that is communicated and expressed.
2. The **statement** about the relationship between the two people who are communicating, the feelings that are there.

Consider the following example. This is the simple factual information: *“You are late.”*

A man may say this in a tone that says (the statement): “I am hungry and you just keep me waiting here, now look what you have done to me – it is your fault.” or he may say it in a tone that shows he is concerned: “Are you all right, was it very bad at the job?” A woman may say this in a tone of anger: “Why did you not call me, I was afraid something had happened to you.” or for example she may say it in a tone that says: “I just got home myself and I am so tired, could we just make something easy for dinner.”

In the chapter Awareness is explained more in detail how anthropologist Edward Hall (Hall, 1966) described the subjective dimensions that surround each person and used the name “Personal space”. It is highly variable and difficult to measure. Personal space very much depends on the cultural background of the country the person comes from. Also eye contact depends on the culture as well as hand gestures. One cannot expect non-verbal gestures to be alike in different cultures (e.g. nodding the head indicates agreement in some cultures and in others it indicates disagreement). This is something some of our students have experienced:

Male, Turkey: “One day my Italian friends invited me to their house to have dinner. They cooked everything well and I was almost eating my fingers to show my appreciation. I made a movement which we in Turkey use to show that the meal is perfect and delicious; because I thought that words were not enough to express my feelings. However the movement that I made to show my pleasure had a different meaning in Italian. The move-

ment we use in Turkey is a positive one while when used by Italian people in a discussion it is to show something negative”.



Figure 4.3. Non-verbal communication. The two women are having cakes. At some point the woman to the right looked very much at the other woman's cake and then into her eyes. Nothing was said, not even a nod, but evidently a yes was transmitted, and then there was a taste.

Female, Ukraine: “This happened several years ago. I traveled alone by train to another city in Finland. Opposite me sat young man. He looked really good, confident and smart. The pose of his body and smile said that he was interested in me and I was interested in making friends with him. At some point he blinked to me with one eye. In Ukraine it is the symbol of interest from the man. I smiled to him, he answered with a smile. In a minute he blinked again, then again. I was confused because he didn't say a word. After another gesture of interest I decided to start the conversation with the sentence ‘I see that you are interested in me why don't you talk to me’. And the man answered ‘I am married. It is the sun shining in my eye’. I was embarrassed. I just sat silently till the end of the journey.”

Female, Germany: “The worst experience with non verbal communication I had when I had an oral exam at my home university. The professor was sitting in front of me waiting for my answers on his questions. The worst thing on this situation was the way he was sitting there: with crossed arms over his chest, staring at me without blinking or any sign in his face. I was really confused when I was there, not sure if I am doing right or if he is even interested in what I have to say.”

Male, Romania: “One of the easiest examples of nonverbal communication happens between me and a few of my male friends. It is a situation that

neither needs words nor is it a good idea to have some low spoken opinion about it. When an attractive female passes my friend and me we often look at her and then we look at each other. Usually it is not needed to mention what we think of the girl since we communicate nonverbally about her.”

Male, Japan: “I usually use “hand gesture” when I talk with friends at home in Japan. If I use hand gesture it is more understandable. The most important thing is “To tell my mind” through the hand gesture. So I think that to tell my mind, my mood, is very important.”

Female, Ethiopia: “I remember an exercise where we chose a leader for our group without saying anything. We simply looked at one another for a short time; some of us used some facial expressions, nodding and moving our heads; but somehow we were able to communicate and arrive at a decision. We can see clearly one can also communicate without using words.”

Female, Finland: “This has happened many times with my closest girlfriends. I guess every woman and maybe men also know the feeling when you for example are in a shopping mall and you see a funny looking person or whatever. All I have to do is give that certain look to my friend and she knows that something amusing is around. It takes a few seconds for her to realise who I want her to look at. I try to communicate with body language and with my eyes and it always works. Especially with the people who you are close to, it is quite easy to communicate with no words.”

Male, France: “Communication is mainly thanks to body language, signs, eyes etc. Sometimes it is not necessary to speak to be understood. For this, the most striking example is young children who don’t know how to speak yet. I remember few years ago when my little brother didn’t know how to speak. It was possible to understand and be understood by him. We used to use several codes and body language communication to be understandable.”

Male, Nepal: “When I first came to Finland I was travelling by train. There was a Finnish guy sitting next to me. I was using my laptops and looking outside and sometimes looking at him. The guy felt weird that I was looking at him and I just said sorry. He didn’t say anything but still I understood with his gesture and prevented the worst situation that could have occurred.”

Male, Japan: “I belonged to basketball club when I was junior high school and high school student. We often used eye contact and hand signs at the basketball game when we passed the ball to somebody. The reason was that if we spoke aloud, the opponent perceived. I think the same may be said of other sports.”

4.1.1 Conflicting Message

Conflicting message is when there are conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages in the communication. When not using words to communicate and express oneself but disguising the true meaning, one should be aware of the fact that the tone of voice and body position many times make a statement. Our non-verbal expressions are generally much more honest than the words, and it may be that there is a large difference between the two. When the words contradict our non-verbal communication, people mistrust what we say because the facial expressions, postures, movements and gestures are so very important. While growing up we learn to lie with the words but not with our non-verbal expressions so when we are busy controlling ourself the different messages we send out may contradict each other.

A woman may say: *“Oh I am definitely not angry.”* with a tone of voice that says that something certainly is wrong and a fist that expresses anger.

A man may say: *“I really think this project looks most interesting.”* while he pushes away the drawings.

A woman may say: *“I am so glad that we should meet each other again after all this time”* while she takes a step backwards.

A man may say: *“It sure doesn’t matter that you are late.”* while his nose wrinkles and his foot taps out impatience.

A woman may say: *“I don’t want you to call me”* while she looks very much into your eyes and leans forward.

This is non-verbal cancelling. We say one thing with our body and something else with our words thus we are divided between spontaneous and controlled expressions.

When we perceive conflicting messages in a conversation our primary tool to understand the situation is the nonverbal communication and we pay attention to facial expressions, bodily movements and positioning.

Maybe you have been communicating with a person and afterwards you somehow feel very puzzled – what happened here? You may have been responding without awareness to some non-verbal messages, and if this is the case everything is now confused. The other person may now appear mystified or perhaps annoyed and irritated because your response to him is absolutely unconnected to his words. However; you will improve your communication skills if you are able to be aware of what is going on.

A student of the International Communication Course tells her experience:

Female, France: “I remember at work a colleague who retired came back for her retirement drinks party. When I saw how beautiful she was, I com-

plimented her. And she gave me a compliment in return saying how she liked the way I was dressed. Instead of appreciating the comment I felt confused. Because I could sense by the tone of her voice and the way she looked at me (a bit confused as if she felt she had to say something nice) that she was not being honest. I could sense from her non-verbal communication that she didn't like the way I looked."

Sometimes we may experience that our own true feelings are different from what social rules dictate. In this case it may happen that one ends up sending an incoherent message since our nonverbal messages betray our real feeling while our verbal message follows the social convention. It is often said: Actions speak louder than words – i.e. as people are trying to find out what one is really saying – they put more emphasis on our actions than our words.

Female, Finland: "I have an experience of wrong non-verbal communication. It was at my grandma's funeral in 2002. It was a sad event as funerals always are. But she was 93 when she died, so it was expected. We were parking our car when I met a relative I don't meet too often. I went to her smiling, as I normally do, when I meet somebody. Only when I was hugging her did I realize that I wasn't supposed to smile as it was a funeral. I still feel uneasy when I remember this."

Also when at a job interview we are to be most careful. It may be that we say all the right things; showing interest in the job and promising to work hard, having a positive attitude to the company and believing in what it is doing. But if our facial expressions, postures, movements, gestures and voice do very little to confirm the enthusiasm expressed by words the interviewer may intuitively decide that we do not really mean what we say. Our non-verbal expressions are generally much more honest than our words. We lean forward or ask questions in response to something that appeals to us and we lean back, farther away from the speaker, and may say nothing in response to something that we find uninteresting or unpleasant. It also shows our interest if we while he is speaking look at him or not. As mentioned above an interviewer tends to put more emphasis on the nonverbal than to the verbal signals.

Another version of the conflicting message could take place at a social situation. Imagine you have a cup of tea and accidentally you spill something on the table cloth. If your host is a friend the reaction could be "Oh you clumsy" meaning with the words to express a distress of the stain, but the smile and tone of voice assure that it is not the end of your relationship. In reality it is a very complex message saying: "I definitely don't like what you just did, but I still like you".

4.2 LIVING IN THE PRESENT

“The oddest thing about the future is that we shall call our present days: The good old days.”

Ernest Hemingway, (1898–1961)

The theory in this chapter is mainly based on Hostrup (2010), Pearls (1951) and Stevens (1989).

If we are unable to live in the present when communicating, we will not be able to communicate in a deep resourceful manner. The most important issue in the meeting with another person that we have never met before is to be right here with all our senses – to pay attention. Our presence is always somewhere, but it is not always where our body is or in what we are doing. You have experienced that you are in a situation perhaps at university; your professor is explaining something while you let your attention go f. ex. out of the window to something out there or to some music or a situation. Or you hear a sound that activates a thought that leads you to a new place in your inner world of thought. This gives you a sense and again you are back to the voice of your professor explaining something to you. This just occurs automatically and does that you are thrown around between thoughts, sensations and emotions. You are everywhere all the time and if you do not focus, you are thinking about something entirely different from this present situation and what is going on here. Also quite often you are remembering the past or anticipating the future and you are definitely not being present in the current situation. You lose contact with what is happening right here and now. It is not that it is “illegal” for you to daydream, but it is important to be aware of when you are doing so and especially when you should not do so.

You have had a lot of experiences in the past and will get a lot of experiences in the future. What has happened in the past was a fact at the time and it influenced you. In order to develop your ability to live in the present, it is important to develop the feeling of reality. When we speak about the present it is what is happening right here and now. What you are experiencing in the present may also be memories of the past, like flashbacks/memories that take place right here and now as well as the feelings and thoughts they are evoking. What you remember is something else than the experience you have had, but your thoughts, feelings and physical reactions are happening just now and have something to do with what you remember.



Figures 4.4 and 4.5. The most important issue in the meeting with another person is to be right here with all your senses, to be focused.

When we emphasize that you are aware of what is right here and now, it is not because we disallow the importance of the experiences you have had in the past. They are of very great significance. What we hope is that you will become aware of and use the present as a reference point, and will be able to look back and forward in accordance with what is happening. When you live completely in the present it is including that you notice what in the current situation evokes memories of something you learned at some point before and in this way you are able to respond to current events in an appropriate manner and adjust your behaviour in relation to this. If you are fully present and aware at the time when you are communicating, then even after your communication has ended you will have some memories left of that person or the conversation you had.

Analogous is it possible to have thoughts regarding the future. Here you create something in the present based on the expectation you have about a given episode that is in the future. You create an image of the future and this may result in the same way in the feeling, thought, and physical reaction here in the present moment. Just think of your next exam or an important presentation. Perhaps you get the feeling that you may have trouble making it, you feel fear and nervousness, and you have butterflies in your stomach. All of these things are happening right here and now even when they are based on an event in the future. It is important that you understand that this process is very good for you, it gives your brain the possibility to work with the upcoming task. The point is however that once you are in the situation – make sure that your brain stays right in that situation, and you do not think of something else. How do we distinguish, between the past, the present and the future? How do we know that something we experienced actually is in the past? And something that we plan to do is in the future? Scientists have found

that most people in the western world experience the time linear that is to say that events happen one after another on a line. One day follows another like pearls on a string. And this is what we use in order to be able to distinguish between the past, the present and the future.

If you are stuck in your past or future you will miss life, everything that happens right now, your life will be shallow. You will get a more sensuous life when you get better at being present. You will be able to be open-minded in your relations to other people meaning that if you are prejudiced you have a firmly established image of other people and you will not be able to see if they have actually changed. And one more thing: you will get better at handling stress, the less you are present in the moment the more you will react by reflex. For example you quite often get grumpy waiting to pay in the long line at the supermarket – you get stressed, even if there is nothing you really can do about the situation. It would be much better for you if you could take a deep breath.

4.2.1 Concentration

Perls pp 54, 55, 56 (Perls et al., 1951) distinguishes between concentration and healthy, organic concentration. He defines concentration as a deliberate, strenuous compulsive effort – something we make ourselves do. We “pay” attention where we feel we “ought to” and at the same time withhold attention from other needs or interests. So when we force ourselves to something that does not itself draw our interest we accumulate excitement not towards the “ought to” object but rather the struggle over the “distraction” and what we are deliberately concentrating on is more and more drained of interest. We get bored. Attention may switch from the boring situation to daydreaming.

Healthy, organic concentration is usually not called concentration at all but rather named fascination or absorption. What we are attentive to attracts to itself and includes the full range of our present interest. An example is children playing; they are so excited about their game and it is difficult to draw away their attention. The two factors – excitement of satisfying a need, interest or desire and the attention to the object or activity – are the substance of healthy concentration.

This chapter is about living in the present, since if we are unable to be in the present when communicating, we will not be able to communicate in a resourceful manner. Consider the following example.

Cecillia: “We are a group of women that have known each other for many years. One woman that I shall call “L” and I shared an interest in France since we have both lived and worked there. We also loved to go to museums to look at paintings. “L” took up painting at some time, I was very busy and we had not been together so much for some months. Then we

met at her flat and at some point “L” asked me to come with her to another room along with a neighbour of hers that I had never met. While walking towards the room they started to talk about a person that I didn’t know. Unfortunately I chose that moment to daydream because suddenly “L” asked me what I thought of her painting, which was hanging on the wall. To me it looked like some dots and two lines all in a nice green colour. I must have looked absolutely ridiculous and since I had not had the time to prepare myself I just said something about that it was simply some dots. “L” did look rather disappointed at me. If I had been present I could have figured out that she would ask me about my opinion.”

As stated in Chapter 4.1 about nonverbal communication every message has two aspects:

1. The factual information that is communicated and expressed.
2. The statement, i.e. the description of the relationship between the two people who are communicating – the feelings that are there.

Thinking of the incident described above, instead of going with the factual information and talk about what I could see on the painting I could have chosen the statement, the feelings that were there. We could have talked about how happy I was for her that she had found this great hobby, her joy of painting, what she felt about the green colour, did she feel inspired by some of the painters/paintings/museums we had visited together? – We could have ended up talking about things we had done together and the conversation had gone on without any negative emotions.

Students write about their experiences:

Female, Finland: “At school we were working with a project once again. Our job was to study literary sources and find information and details so that we were able to make a plan for a refinery for biofuels. Two other students and I were going to make some research about the issue. The two others were discussing about something and I had already started to focus myself to another subject and was looking for another kind of information. After they had discussed about the issue they were going to work with one of them asked my opinion about something they had discussed about. I did not know at all what they had spoken and I had to apologize that I had not listened. He did not look pleased at all.”

Male, Austria: “There have been many situations in my life where I did not behave so well because I did not live in the present. There is one situation which lasted for over two years. My grandfather had cancer but I did not live in the present. Of course I sometimes talked with him but not very of-

ten and I did not realize about the present back then. When he then died I had nothing to remember. I still feel bad and ashamed and I regret it when I think of this time. I neglected my grandfather and now I can't undo my mistake. He could have told me interesting stories and I could have shared stories about my life with him if I had lived in the present."

Female, Denmark: "I live in a large apartment building in Copenhagen, and have gotten a lot of new neighbours the last few years. I had 6 of them over for pancakes the other day. At some point we were having two separate conversations around the table. The girl I was talking to, "X", was telling me about how she was applying for jobs in Spain and how this was somewhat intimidating just moving away without a network, when someone in the other conversation started telling a story about me. Naturally, I got distracted from hearing my name spoken and involuntarily started following that conversation instead for a couple of seconds. This meant that when I got back to the conversation with "X" I had missed what she just said. Based on what we learned during the course I feel I should have apologised and said that I had just missed what she said. I did not however, and felt rather badly about this afterwards, even though I was able to grasp enough to continue the conversation."

Male, Finland: "I have a bad habit of 'zoning out', to the extent that my friends have come to expect it from me in various situations. If I find some situation uninteresting, I tend to drift off and start thinking about some project or idea I have been working on, or sometimes just staring at trees and other such things. In social situations this is of course not a desirable course of action, so I try to avoid it around people who don't know to expect it, but from time to time it seems unavoidable. "

Female, Germany: "I have a friend named P. We've known each other very long, but we meet only very rarely, because we don't live in the same state. We call once a month. In Germany I am always stressed. I study, I work, I do a lot of sports and then the time is gone. Whenever I call P, it is not easy to only concentrate on him. The TV is on, the PC is on, I'm online on Facebook and chat there, sometimes I answer an e-mail, I'm also working on a presentation that I have to keep in an hour, I'm answering on Whats App news in my family group on my Smartphone, while I'm talking on the phone with a very good friend. I am constantly distracted by things that are actually totally irrelevant; but appear to be important in this moment."

Male, Nepal: "Sometimes in our life we feel like: Please God can you give me that moment back so that I can improve that time when I did not behave well. Once there was such a situation. One of my best friends or I can call him a brother came to my house. We had not seen each other for almost 2 years. I was studying because I had just started an exam and

it was for a whole week. We used to have a lot to talk about and much fun before. But the whole week, I have to say that I did not talk to him. Only hello and what's up? No more words than that. I was going crazy with my exams and study. So later on, I knew from others that he is so angry with me. Obviously, it shows me that I have acted rude to him. So I feel like I behaved badly in that situation.”

Female, Denmark: “I like the exercise we did; where we had to sit with someone else and suggest things there we either had in common or not. It really forced you to focus on what the other person said, and try to see the bigger picture, in this case the whole person, otherwise you wouldn't be able to come up with the next “question”. It is particular useful for me, since I tend to think that I always know what a person is going to say next, so I don't have to pay that much attention to what they actually are saying. A lot of times I end up missing most of it, because I'm just not really there, which is not so good, since I don't think that leaves a very good impression.”

4.3 AWARENESS

“In the underground it is called crowded; but in a nightclub it is called nice and intimate.”

Frank Sinatra, (1915–1998)

The theory in this chapter is mainly based on Hostrup (2010) and Stevens (1989).

According to Hostrup (2010): Awareness is an “alertness” to inner and outer conditions that lets the organism coordinate multiple impressions and act accordingly.

It could also be said that awareness is to be attentive to what and how we experience and to the fact that we do experience. We get a better understanding of life if we are aware of what is going on around us.

Awareness can be translated as attention, understanding, knowledge and alertness, meaning that we are mentally awake and do hear, see and feel what is happening right now. When in a conversation with somebody else, this contact or this dialogue may help to get a better understanding of life. However, this is only if one is observant to what and how one experiences, and one is attentive to the fact that he does in fact experience. In the following is an example of (lack of) Awareness in practice.

Cecillia: This took place some years ago in Copenhagen, Denmark. I had been invited for dinner at home with one of my friends, married to a very

busy business man. We had dined, the teenage daughter had left the table, but we were still enjoying the dessert. I was looking forward to some nice time talking about what had happened since last time we met. Then her husband got his laptop and started to look at it very intensely.

Busy business man: *"I have to get back to work."*

Wife: *"Oh no, you are always working."*

Busy business man: *"You know what it's like, I'm in a top job now."*

Wife: *"It really would be so nice if we could go on a holiday together."*

Busy business man: *"Sure, that should be possible."*

Wife: *"Lovely, where would you like us to go?"*

Busy business man without looking away from his laptop: *"I have to go to Germany to check on some delivery – you could come along."*

Wife – said nothing – looked very sad – eyes completely empty for life.

They are now divorced!

Female, France: "There are many subjects that I'd feel like I have to improve but the one that I feel is the most important is awareness. I am always in my little bubble of my thoughts. And I am not always aware of what's going on around me. For example, when I go out, I am always listening to music. Therefore, I am not very aware of what happens to me. And I think it's not good for communication. Also in class I am always in my thoughts. I have trouble concentrating especially when I haven't prepared for the course and also sometimes when I am around people at work (especially men) and they are having a conversation about something that I am not interested in like cars, or video games."

Male, Singapore: "Many times I get too absorbed into my conversation and my awareness to the people who are listening to me drops significantly. Sometimes, I do not realise their reactions and emotions during my talk, and occasionally, I do upset people who are sensitive. However, I think every so often I focus too much on myself and I feel that it causes me to be less alert, and less able to connect to other people emotionally. I must try hard to remind myself that I must pay sufficient attention to each and every of my listeners and try to establish a connection with them. I must be attentive to their interest to the topic of discussion and if it sparks negative emotion, I should try to change the topic subtly to another of interest to the group. I must keep in the mind communication is not about individuals, but a group activity that requires the effort of others to make it more meaningful and engaging."

Usually one of the first things that happens in personal communication is the meeting between two or more people. In order to start a good communication it is important that the persons feel comfortable with the distance between them. If standing too close one will feel uncomfortable, and if standing too far away from each other it will be unnatural.



Figure 4.6. Working with personal space.

Anthropologist Edward Hall (Hall, 1966) described the subjective dimensions that surround each person and used the name “Personal space”, he explained that it is highly variable and difficult to measure. Personal space is very much depending on the cultural background of the country the person comes from and it is really one of the major differences in the nonverbal communication between cultures. In Latin America and the Middle East personal space is much smaller than what most Europeans and Americans feel comfortable with.

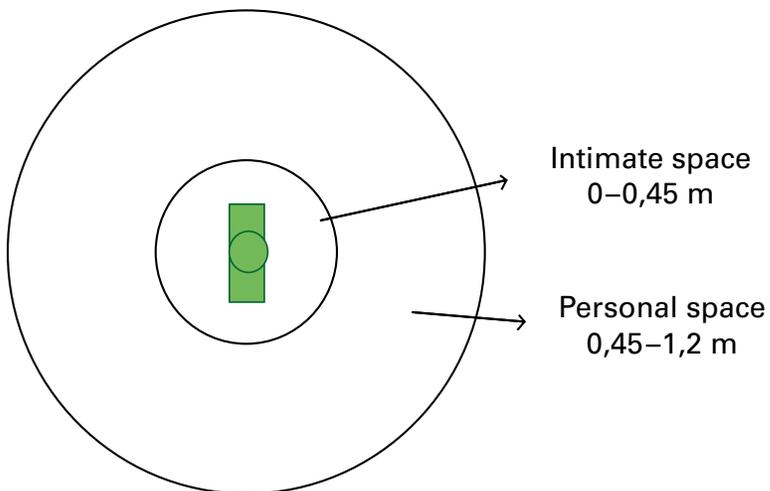


Figure 4.7. The concept personal space adapted from Edward Hall (Hall, 1966).

One should also be aware of the fact that the personal space is different in Europe. It is very common that Scandinavians are rather uncomfortable in southern Europe since for instance in Italy or France personal space is usually much smaller than for instance in Denmark or Finland.

Also in the rest of the world one has to be quite careful. For instance one of our students from Zambia talked about his childhood in a village out in the country, where he had been taught that when he was received in audience by the headman it would be impolite to come closer than four to five meters. This is in contradiction to the western world where it would be very strange to stay in a distance of five meters and talk to each other. In an international world it is very important that one is open and has awareness of the proper distance between two communicating people.

Here are some comments from students from our course:

Female, Finland: “When we did the exercise to find our personal space I thought that it was a very good exercise. I have never ever thought about how the person whose personal space I may break behaves. Now that I have noticed the nervousness in their eyes I learned a lot. I probably have never seen how a person acts when the personal space is broken because I am a Finn who has got a big personal space for herself, but it’s still good to know how to see if someone thinks that you got too close.”

Female, Denmark: “The personal space exercise shows really fast when you get too close to people. I normally don’t think much about this in my everyday life, and consider myself a bit free of this typical Nordic way, where we like to have people quite far away from us; but when it is tested in this way, it becomes really clear to me that I really prefer having people at an arm’s length. This goes even with people that I know really well, like my boyfriend. If we lie in bed and have a conversation, I immediately move a bit further away so I can see his whole upper body just because I feel like then it is easier to focus on the conversation when I see the body language at the same time.”

Male, Japan: “The most impressive experience in today’s class was when we observed the change of facial expression when we reduced the distance between two people. I found that almost all people laughed when they get too close. In addition, not only their expression changed but they also looked away from me or moved their finger!”

Female, France: “Learning about mine and my partner’s personal space, was a good experience. I could see that depending on where we are from it differs. It also differs on the gender of the person in front of us. I believe that men like to stay a bit farther from each other and they would want to be closer to the opposite gender.”

Female, Malaysia: “I was surprised to see during the exercise about personal

space, how far I keep people away, especially new acquaintances. I knew I have a hard time letting people into my personal space, I just didn't realize how big the distance was, and now I know that it is something that I should really work on."

Male, Japan: "The exercise personal space was also a good example of cultural differences. I realize that personal space is different depending on country and the closeness of our relationship, and it is important to be sure to pay attention to the distance between yourself and your partner when meeting a person for the first time."

4.4 FIRST IMPRESSION

"You'll never get a second chance to make a first impression."

Anonymous

Making a good impression

If you go to a party with a lot of people it doesn't matter

If you go to a job interview it means a lot

If you go to a first date it means everything

Camilla Holst – psychologist

According to scientists from New York University we make about 11 decisions about each other within the first seven seconds. It could be whether the other one is a friend or an enemy, is he reliable, pleasant, competent, trustworthy, but also something such as status and authority is determined. In just seven seconds we have made our first impression of another person and it is very hard to change. During this short time the senses of the people you meet collect enough information to decide whether you are a person they would like to get to know better or would rather prefer to avoid.

The position of the other person's body tells whether it is an energy loaded or a relaxed situation; but you may have a tendency to attribute that particular energy to the person. That is if the other person is nervous you do not think that it is because it is a first meeting rather your brain just establishes that he is a nervous person.

It is advisory to:

- Make sure to be very careful with your handshake. Scientists have found that it takes three hours of being together before you get the same intimacy that you get in a single handshake.
- When you have eye contact you show some interest and desire to be open. Always make sure to notice peoples' eye colour because at some point you then really have looked people into the eyes.

- As mentioned above it is hard to change a first impression and it takes quite some time, so make sure to be conscious of what your face expresses before you turn towards a person that you would like to make a good impression on.

- Think of your body language – lean forward – you show engagement and interest – but make sure to respect the personal space that you both feel is comfortable between the two of you.

- You cannot avoid that other people make a first impression of you; but you can have an effect on how they think of you. Think about how you behave during these first seven seconds.

According to Argyle (1988) there are five primary functions of nonverbal bodily behaviour in human communication:

- ◆ express interpersonal attitudes
- ◆ express emotions
- ◆ to accompany speech in managing the cues of interaction between speakers and listeners
- ◆ self- presentation of one's personality
- ◆ rituals (greetings)

When it comes to expressing interpersonal attitudes, humans communicate interpersonal closeness through smiling, touching, open body positions and eye contact.



Figures 4.8 and 4.9. Get eye contact – it creates energy between two people.

In some countries it is considered rude and most impolite to try to get eye contact. However, here the focus is on the behaviour in (North) Europe and in this part of the world eye contact is positive because it is connected to openness, honesty and obligingness. People that dare to use eye contact

appear stronger and are able to get positive results faster. If you do not dare to look other people into the eyes far more effort is needed to get in contact with your interlocutor. If you find it difficult to look into peoples' eyes a good solution is to look at a point right between the eyes just above the nose. It is more effortless and the other person will not feel the difference.

Male, France: "This is a simple exercise but it gave me very much. I have always struggled to keep eye contact with people. My eyes tend to flee and watch the ceiling rather than my partner. During the course I was given the opportunity to learn a trick that is very effective. Watch the top of the nose. It sounds simple but yet it is much easier to focus on a person's nose. The other person has the impression that you look at his eyes and our speech looks more clear and serious if we keep the eye contact or rather the nose contact. This is for sure something I will hold to from this week and use in my life especially during a job interview."

Male, Cameroon: "The exercise of eye contact and hand shake made me understand the importance of those two tools in a good communication. I never knew before that having eye contact with the person with whom you are communicating is so powerful; now it is almost part of my habit. I always try while shaking someone's hand to have eye contact; it helps to understand a great part of my communication partner's mood. It is possible from those few seconds of eye contact to know whether the person is open to the communication or not."

Female, Finland: "I have started to look more often into my children's eyes when they speak to me. Sometimes when I am busy with something it is quite difficult especially when my six years old son starts to speak about something that is important to him (for example a cartoon character or a new game) but a secondary issue to me. Hopefully he gets the idea that he is important to me even if I often have to tell him that I do not know what he is talking about because the characters are not familiar to me."

Female, Russia: "In my home country we have a kind of attitude that everyone is "bad" unless you know them closer. Probably, that is why people in Russia are not generally smiling to strangers – a "stranger" means potential threat.

Looking people in the eyes was surprisingly hard. It feels really awkward – looking someone you do not know very well into the eyes without saying a thing. In Russian culture this means aggression and is not used too often. But on the other hand it is a powerful tool, and if one is smiling at the same time, it leaves a good impression."

Male, Vietnam: "I would like to work on a very particular element of communication: eye contact. Personally, I find the human eye incredibly intense and unsettling to look at, which is why I find it so difficult to maintain eye contact for any amount of time. I know it is bad communication practice

not looking straight at the other person while talking, but I can barely help it. I am only too aware of this aversion to eye contact, and sometimes I would overcompensate by looking at people really hard in the eyes for too long, which is really awkward for both sides.”

Female, Ethiopia: “I come from a very shy culture where looking at the person we are talking to is almost rude. I did this eye exercise before as well but I still find it hard to look someone in the eye when I speak to them. Eye contact is quite useful to guarantee the person we are speaking to is listening to us.”

Male, Japan: “I would like to focus on “eye contact” skills because I’ve never been conscious of the importance of this. There are several reasons why. When I speak Japanese, I can communicate well without eye contact. In addition, I think almost all Japanese are weak at having eye contact while speaking because our national character is rather introverted and shy. But when I speak English, I’m not so good so it is difficult for the listener to understand. Through the international communication class, I’ve found the importance of eye contact. It means that communication goes smoothly compared with without eye contact. I think that I can tell what I want to tell more informative than without eye contact. In addition, by taking eye contact, it becomes easy to confirm whether the listener can understand what I say or not. If they don’t seem to understand, I just have to explain something in different words. After I came back to Japan, I have continued to try to take eye contact while talking to my teacher, friends and family. Recently, I found that eye contact is really effective not only when speaking English but also when speaking Japanese. For this reason, I’ll continue to try to take eye contact in my future life.”

Male, Kuwait: “I realized something very important that I will carry with me all my life. I realized that it is really very important to look into the eyes of other people and more important to maintain eye contact throughout the conversation. Without people’s attention no one can convey their message properly. In order to be understood correctly, it’s very essential to stay focused and keep everyone involved in the conversation.”

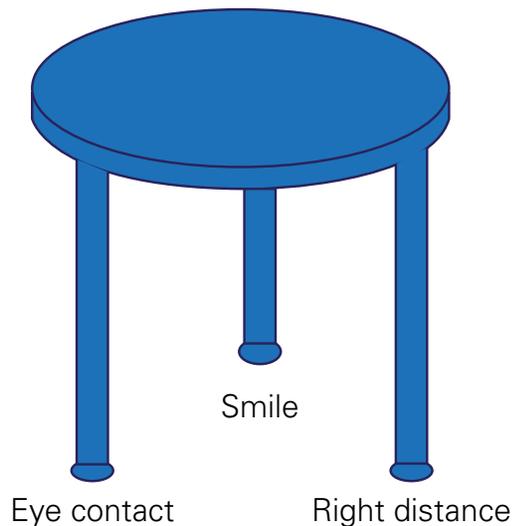
Female, Finland: “Eye contact makes people trust you more easily. I think eye contact is a very important factor to show that I am present in the situation and interested in what is told. While one is keeping eye contact it is also easier to notice if the interlocutor misses the point or maybe even misunderstands the whole thing.”

It is important to have awareness on communication. When meeting a person for the first time there are tools to use in order to make communication work well. It is important to be aware of the distance. It should be such that both of you should feel comfortable. Eye contact – it creates energy between two people – showing interest and desire to be open and make this new

acquaintance. Smile – welcoming the new relation, indicating friendliness and kindness. Please see the three legged stool of communication in Figure 4.10.

Figure 4.10. The three legged stool of communication.

Three legged stool - communication



As mentioned above, shaking hands is another important factor. Scientists have found that it takes three hours of being together before the same intimacy in a single handshake can be created otherwise. The handshake is the beginning and the end of a meeting and we subconsciously get a lot of information from it.

You have probably tried to get a handshake that was so different from what you expected – a very firm and hard almost painful one or a flaccid one. You may remember how confused you got and that you spent your attention on the handshake rather than on what the person said. There is no reason that you should make that mistake. It is a good idea to before shaking hands, you make sure to take a look at the other person. Is he a big man then you could squeeze a bit harder, but if it is a slight woman then it will be a good idea to be more gentle.

Male, Finland: “In Finland the formal course of action when meeting new people is a handshake, however since I live a very informal lifestyle a verbal greeting and a smile is usually sufficient. Being the reserved and introverted people we are, it often actually seems like we Finns would rather not shake hands even in very formal contexts and would prefer the smile-and-nod approach in most cases.”

Female, Denmark: “Generally in Denmark, we shake hands when we meet

new people. Many times, however, I meet people with a limp handshake and by that I will not get a good first impression. We talked about the limp handshake in class, and how it can make you consider him or her as lagging initiative, lagging self confidence and lagging of integrity and manners. Thus a firm, but not to firm handshake, is optimal to be able to perform when visiting Denmark.”

Male, Ethiopia: “In my country meeting a person starts by shaking hands and introducing names to each other. It is not in our culture to keep personal distance or avoid eye contacts. If one avoids eye contact, it would seem that he/she is shy, nothing more. Usually women to women or women with men kiss on the cheek (that depends on the relationship between the people). I come from a vast country which has a variety of ethnic groups. So, as a result there are many ways of starting communication in each region.”

Male, Italy: “I grew up in South Italy, in Sicily. In Sicily when we meet someone we know we are used to having a physical contact by shaking hands and kissing each other on the cheeks. This happens even when being first introduced to someone’s friend or relative and in most situations except in work environment. I discovered that greeting in this way is considered quite weird when I moved to North Italy. Here it is very unusual to see men kissing the cheek of other men and it can be considered hilarious. People that are not used to this have a projection and they associate this way of greeting to the Mafia (because they have seen it in some movie). Another culture shock for me was when I moved from Florence to Helsinki and found other ways and habits for welcoming people. After ten years I still get confused and I often make some “etiquette” mistakes. Especially when I'm going to Italy and I behave in the wrong way. It also happens if I stay for a longer period there so I still behave in the “Sicilian way” when I come back to Finland.”

Male, France: “In France, the way to say hello is to give two kisses, one on each cheek even if it is the first time that we meet the person. This is between a man and a woman but also between women. I was really surprised when I came to Finland and experienced quite a large personal space and greeting with a sign or shaking hands.

Male, Russia: “The way we greet for the first time in Russia, it's chiefly a formal handshake, esp. in the male-to-male contact. No kisses. Unlike here in Finland, where an oral greet should suffice, or in warmer countries with their hug-kiss-quarrel loops, we'd rather shake hands in silence or accompany it with a nice face and how-are-you-like questions or other more formal queries, as the situation requires. Personal distance is also there, and

like with the obviousness of greeting, the intimacy cuts the distance, while lack of it increases the 'air gap' between the interlocutors. The standard first-time encounter enjoys a distance of a metre or so in this case. Still as one gets closer to southern regions, more hugging is there as a part of greeting, even on formal occasions. Not too many kisses though.”

When meeting somebody for the first time it may be that greeting is done differently from just shaking hands.

Male, Japan: “In my country we usually use a “bow”. And it is very common in Japan. When we want to say: “Nice to meet you.”, “Thank you.”, “Excuse me.” We usually bow. And this is our habit in Japan. But I think this is a good habit. Because maybe everybody knows that the Japanese bow. And it is kind of a good culture. And when we first meet, bow is very important. I show fidelity through a bow. There are not so many foreigners in Japan. So I think it is quite difficult to get a nice first impression of foreigners in Japan. But almost all people in Japan like to talk about the weather. So I think if you come to Japan and you “bow” and “tell some story about the weather”, it may go well.”

Male, Nepal: “When we meet in a formal way we do Namaste i.e. joining two hands in front of our chest; but when meeting friends we shake hands – distance does not matter. No we do not kiss on the cheek when meeting people. Only few people greet in different ways in some regions because of religious differences. There is a region where the Muslim community is majority and they greet saying a salam walikum while taking the palm of the hand to the forehead.”

Female, Vietnam: “Actually in my country, we do not shake hands or hug when we first meet. But when I came to Finland, people kept doing that with me, so I thought that if I do not do it, I am out of country. So I keep reminding myself to shake hands and even hug when meeting people. First it was a little bit uncomfortable and uneasy but after doing it few times now I have got accustomed to it.”

Male, Japan: “In Japan, we just tell our name when we meet a person for the first time. In addition, distance is really important for us. I thought that our way of communicating is world common but in fact, it is not. When I introduced myself at the classroom, some students wanted to shake hands. This was surprising for me.”

Male, India: “In India, we have the custom of greeting with hands (palms) joining together. In some regions, younger people touch the legs of elders when they meet, as a sign of seeking blessings.”

4.5 FIGURE / BACKGROUND

“We all live under the same sky; but we do not all have the same horizon.”

Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967). German chancellor 1949–63

The theory in this chapter is mainly based on Hostrup (2010), Roediger (1996), Goldstein (1999) and Pearls (1951).

Our brain experiences an amount of separate data but it creates a pattern that makes sense and it is indeed very fond of patterns. Many melodies have a pattern that is repeated many times e.g. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

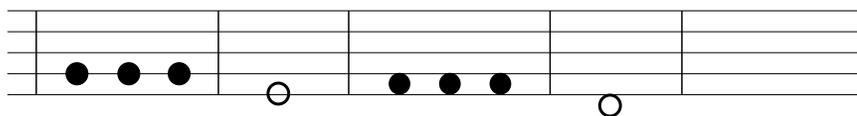


Figure 4.11. Repeated pattern, here it is notes in a piece of music.

This is an example of a melody that contains a specific pattern we can recognize again and again once we have learned to know it. Peter Vuust, Professor, brain scientist: “We like what is being repeated – because we know what it is. Then we don’t have to perceive it as a danger. We rather prefer things we know than things we do not know since they do not make any kind of threat. Melodies, sounds, systems, drawings that varies just a little bit.

We have a system in the brain that tries to decode these different systems that we are looking at or listening to in order to find out whether there is something we should turn our attention towards, which might represent some kind of danger or some food or something else interesting. The brain is saving energy and time because we don’t have to start all over every time we experience a new item. We sort of already know it.”

All day we are influenced by a wide range of sensory influences resulting in a kind of learned pattern, which gives us experiences. Since we have different experiences we become different and organize our sensory influences in different ways where something is the foreground and something else is the background. This is a congenital (present at birth) ability we have, which was gradually developed from the time we were born and it makes it possible for our brain to make a pattern in which something appears as a foreground/figure on a background of something that we do not pay any attention to.

One way of depicting the figure/background principle can be done in the following way: Imagine you are in a theatre looking at the stage. A projector is the only light on stage and it changes the light from person to person or from object to object. What is right now in the beam of the light corresponds to

figure and the rest which is in the dark is background. In this way the figure is changing from place to place. It is the same when your attention changes from place/time/thought/feeling, thus soon one is in focus and then the other, so forming a figure. So “figure” is the focus of interest – an object, pattern, drawing, situation etc. And “background” is the setting or context.



Figure 4.12. Very different feelings can be experienced by different people when watching a plane from Air India landing.

We are able to shape figure/background – formations by organizing the data given. Here is an example: Two people are in an airport watching a plane from Air India landing. They will, of course, both see the plane but they may perceive the situation differently. One may feel joy, because it evokes memories of a lovely sunny holiday in India. The other feels sad when thinking of all the distress, poverty and misery that exist in India. They both experience the same incident with an organization in figure/background, where the aircraft from Air India stands as a figure with everything else as background. However,

Their background experiences are different; so the two persons are experiencing the same situation in a totally different way.

This is one of the reasons why we may get in a situation where we perceive things so differently, although in principle what we experience is fully the same. You can see from this example that it is not enough to have a look at the current episode of a plane landing, but it is also necessary to look at the experience in its entirety, including the thoughts, feelings and physical responses that it evokes.

This is what makes communication so complex in many cases. You have the feelings you have and you have the right to have them. If you are using

your mind to convince yourself that they are not correct, because they are stupid or childish, you are suppressing the real you. It is so very important to focus on this. Of course it does require you having a trusting and good relationship with the one(s) you entrust your feelings. It can inevitably be abused and you have to give this full consideration. In contradiction to this it can develop and enrich your friendships/relationships in an incredible way. A good way to communicate provides the opportunity to develop good and close relations with your fellow human beings.

If we go back to the example of the aircraft from Air India, it is possible for a person to move focus (i.e. figure) from “aircraft from Air India landing” to some of the feelings behind. In this way, it is possible to get in touch with a wide range of information that was not available immediately. Hence it is possible to bring some other things forward as figure and in this way understand and adapt to the present situation so the experiences of joy or sorrow is a part of the experience with these feelings right here. The feelings are there and your experience with them can be adapted so you may get a more conscious experience next time. Then you shall better be able to understand why you may feel sadness, rather than some diffuse incomprehensible feeling.

The Air India plane was just an example but it can be applied in many circumstances in life. We cannot always change the situation but we can choose our personal focus.

Male, Austria: “On Tuesday there was an exercise with different pictures where you can see different objects/persons. Those pictures are designed to puzzle someone but they also showed that different cultures often interpret different.

Everyone’s Figure Background is different and I learned that it is very important to bear in mind that this can lead to misunderstandings. When you visit another country you should inform yourself about the cultural differences to be sure to not drop a brick.

You don’t do yourself a favour if you don’t try to get to the bottom of another person’s Figure-Background. Only when you consider the influence of past actions onto the opinion about a certain topic you will understand why a person behaves a special way or has other feelings than you about a situation.”

Male, Austria: “During the course when we did the exercise about figures on a piece of paper I understood that everyone has a different background on everything, when he or she thinks about anything. That is the reason, why people from different countries see different forms, things and animals in the same picture and it could be also the reason, why they react in different ways.”

We should be aware of the fact that the brain is lazy. As soon as it thinks that it knows what is going on it will relax. It prefers to put patterns or sounds or whatever in categories that are a result of former experiences. Since our experiences are different our brains will have different patterns or boxes, categories. We can experience the same incident but have a completely different perception of what happened.

4.6 PERCEPTION

*"The optimist thinks it is great that the thorn bush has roses.
The pessimist thinks it is awful that the rose bush has thorns."*
Anonymous.

The theory in this chapter is mainly based on Hostrup (2010), Roediger (1996), Goldstein (1999) and Pearls (1951).



Figure 4.13. Perception. Is this a circle?

Looking at our world, it is open to a variety of interpretations. There is no indisputable truth, but it depends on the individual understanding of the surroundings, and this is unique to the individual. As a person, you need to see a purpose in the world, and this perception of reality can easily come into conflict with other peoples' perceptions. Your ability to perceive the world depends on your ability to understand. The meaning you attribute to your sense impressions depends on your experiences and the culture you live in.

Your adaption of your observation, opinion and experience is perception.

We have to have a figure in order to see the background. We have to have a background in order to be able see the figure. And we are always very keen on interpreting.

It is important to be aware of the fact that what you experience is not necessarily what the person standing next to you is experiencing.



Figure 4.14. Perception. Is Cecilia 2½ meters tall or is this the lavatory for children at the central station in Kyoto, Japan? When you can compare the size of this lavatory to an object of known size such as a person, it is possible to see how small the lavatory is as opposed to looking at it in total isolation.

Through our senses we receive a lot of information. Aristotle identified the classic five senses (vision, audition, smell, taste and touch) but his list is incomplete and now according to Roediger (1996) we also talk about: kinesthesia (tells us the position of our limbs) and equilibration (the technical term for being able to keep our balance). So we get information, experiences, impressions – they influence our physical condition – and all this influences our behaviour. You can just recall what it is like when you are waiting in the corridor just before entering a room for an important oral exam. You probably have butterflies in your stomach, perhaps sweaty hands; you breathe faster than usual and you may even have some difficulty in speaking.

The brain controls everything we do. It allows you to understand what we see, hear and so on. It coordinates our muscle activity and at the same time it is the executor for all your internal functions –e.g. breathing. The brain has the capacity to store thousands and thousands of information. It is just that

it chooses not to and most days we throw out more than 90% of information because it is not worth remembering. The capacity to manage information is stunning – think of all the things you have to remember every day: faces, names, dates, pin codes, roads, spellings, how things work, bus/train routes, mathematics, contents of drawers/cupboards, the list is endless and yet you store and use all the right information without really thinking about it. It is amazing that you can retain what you want to retain and your brain is very efficient at filtering out the information that is just not important.

Dr. John Krakauer, Neurologist: “The ability to retain memories is not just helping us on a day to day basis – it creates our identity – it gives us the possibility to remember who we are. You are not physical the same thing when you are 50 as when you were five years old and yet memory provides you with continuity, it actually creates the link that makes the five year old, 10 years, 15 years, 50 years the same person on a time line. It is the memory that makes you a continuous person over time and space which is a truly remarkable thing about human memory.”



Figure 4.15. Perception. Our brain can see shapes that are not there. Round figures create a square.

According to (Nørretranders, 1999) “The eyes send 10 million bits to the brain every second, the skin one million, the ear 100.000, smell sensors of the nose 100.000 and taste buds perhaps 1000 bit every second. So the brain can perceive around 11.000.000 impressions per second.”

All the time we receive information or impressions through our senses. Our eyes can see 70.000.000 different colours; our nose can distinguish between 50.000 different smells. Our ears can hear 1500 different sound levels. Our hand uses 40 muscles just to hold a pencil; our foot uses 33 muscles when

taking a step. All the time our brain is busy. Most of all this is unconscious. You have tried to cut your finger – you look at it and then a short moment later comes the pain. You have tried to burn your finger – even before you really know you have burned it you have already taken it away from the fire or hot stove. A little child is very aware of holding a toy in his hand and with the greatest joy he will drop it on the floor. He is rehearsing his co-ordination of muscles. It is very difficult for a child to eat, you have probably seen how the spoon hits the cheek or the eye and the food is all over the child's face. You have also seen a little child just learning how to walk, how it is really difficult to keep the balance, and now you do not even think of it.

Only very few of all these impressions reach our conscious mind. We human beings just cannot contain all those millions of impressions and therefore they are filtered in our mind – we have an inner filter and **each of us has our own filter that will decide what information will get through.** It could also be said that the filter is our model of the world. This model of the world is formed during our childhood, through the incidents we have had and our experiences with all our senses. How we interpret the experiences unconsciously depends on what former experiences we have had for instance at a very early age even before we could talk or just yesterday. This means that there are not two people in the world that have the same inner experience – that will notice exactly the same things – or would interpret everything exactly the same way.

Brothers and sisters may have the same parents and more or less they go through the same events during childhood; but still their model of the world can be very different. An example: two sisters of almost the same age, one loved to be the centre of attention and the other feared such a situation. It turned out that they both had a recollection of an incident when they were 8 and 6 years old when they had to sing at a family event. Thinking back the elder sister remembered the day as joyful and happy; everybody smiled and enjoyed her singing. The younger sister remembered the day as a terrible, intimidating event with a lot of people staring at her.

Male, Egypt: “The exercise when we all had the same drawing; but some people could see things that other could not. It really showed me how much it is possible that people can be experiencing the exact same situation but they have totally different perspective about the matter and they might really have totally opposite feelings or thoughts especially if they are from different cultures. If I manage to keep that in my mind it will be really easier to accept when people have a different reaction to something that I am experiencing as well and it will help me to have a better connection with others.”

Female, Germany: “We looked at some drawings where at first you probably don't see what's displayed or what could be seen and what other people are seeing. You recognize that you're first impression is not necessarily right. Especially if you have some expectations of what you will see. All these exercises showed me: You experience what you expect and what you experience is not necessarily what really happens, it's only your perception. For example people had different colours associated to a bus, depending on where they come from and what colours buses normally have at their hometown.”

Female, Vietnam: “The same pictures were given to all students in the room, but it was amazing that people saw things differently in the same pictures. They would see and think from their point of view which is that they have seen something similar before. They cannot image and see thing which they have not seen before. It would somehow minimize their thought in a circle. It was interesting to experience this. I could never have thought about it if I had not experienced this exercise. It is hard to believe that the same things were recognized in different ways with different people but it should remind me in the future when I judge anything or anyone. I will make sure to stand in their foot to think and see things.”

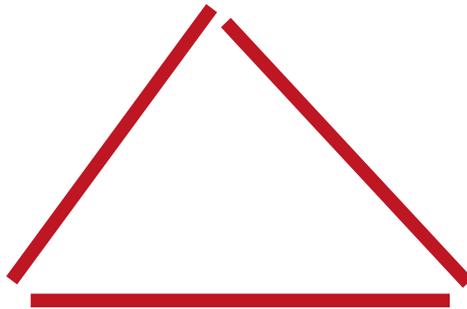


Figure 4.16. Perception. What is this? Three red lines?
A traffic signal? A triangle?

As mentioned before we should be aware of the fact that the brain is lazy. As soon as it thinks, it knows what is going on, it will relax. It prefers to put patterns or sounds or whatever in categories that are a result of former experiences. Since our experiences are different our brains will have different patterns or boxes or categories. We could experience the same incident but we may have a completely different perception of what happened –but it will also depend on what we expect.

Jørgen: I heard about this experiment in the radio. (It may be that it is not correctly described in all details):

It took place at a railway station with two tracks in the middle and a platform on each side. On the platform in one side were some people waiting for a train to come. On the platform on the other side of the tracks was an elderly man with glasses and his walking-stick. At some point a huge guy with a black leather jacket, bald-head and with several tattoos walked towards the elderly man. As they got very close to each other there was some disturbance, it looked like scuffle and there was screaming and yelling. The police arrived very fast and started to interrogate the witnesses on the opposite platform. All the witnesses told how the young leather jacket guy had attacked the poor old man. All their testimonies were alike.

The real situation was that the whole setup was with two actors and what had actually happened was that the old man had taken a comb from his pocket making the young guy “think” that he would be attacked. This is what the people on the other platform should have seen; but this scenario seemed so unlikely that the witnesses instead invented a plot where it was the young leather jacket guy that had attacked the old man in spite of the fact that it was absolutely wrong.

This is an example of how we watch something and then make observations based on our experiences and expectations, or on our memories, convictions and values. Our experiences and expectations tell us that it is most likely the young guy with tattoos and leather jacket that attacked the old man and an expectation of the opposite seems absolutely crazy.

It all depends on what we expect. Here is another story about a group of people in an experiment:

Each person was asked to identify cards from a deck of cards when each individual card was placed on the table for a short moment. All the persons gave the right answers as long as it was ordinary cards that they saw. Then the experiment changed a bit. Now also abnormal cards were placed on the table. For example this could be the ace of spades which had been coloured red. The test persons thought this was the ace of hearts since they had the expectation that there would only be ordinary cards in experiment. After some confusion the test persons realized that the deck of cards did indeed contain abnormal cards. Now the test persons had no problems recognizing the cards even when they were not the ordinary ones.

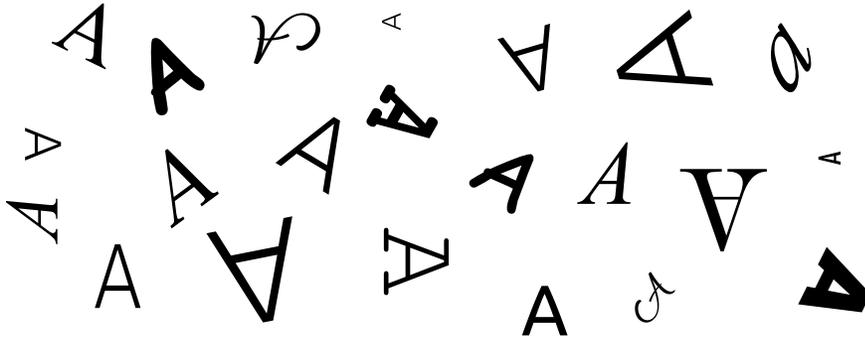


Figure 4.17. Perception. Your brains' capacity to manage information is stunning. Even though these letters vary in size, orientation and shape you easily recognize the letter A.

Jørgen: “A couple is on vacation on the Canary Islands. The lady wishes to buy an alcohol free beer with lemon that she remembers from last time the couple visited Gran Canaria. At the supermarket she doesn't remember exactly what the beer can looks like; but seeing a can with a three cm wide yellow ring round it she connects the can with a yellow lemon. She buys it, only it is not a lemon beer and it is not alcohol free.”

Female, Ethiopia: “For many years I have gotten used to the ideology that he/she who doesn't agree with me is wrong and whoever agrees with me is cool. Now I know that it is a wrong attitude; I even want to invite more people who don't think like I do into my life; as I believe it will give me a whole different point of view and knowledge. I would also like to get rid of my biased way of communication.”

Male, Ethiopia: “Sometimes when we thought we did some good thing, the person may perceive it in a wrong way. I think it is so important to explain your intention. The person who intended to do some good thing may be heartbroken when he sees that the other person understood it in a wrong way.”

The perception of colour differs from person to person, so it cannot just be considered physiological. It is something that happens inside our brains, and each of us will attach different associations with different colours. Milk is white and at the sight of white the association of milk may come and thus the taste and feel of milk that can be coupled with the colour. In an analogous manner red may cause discomfort if it is coupled with blood from an accident. In this way the experience of the colour red will be coupled with some negative emotions and associations. It could also be that you couple red with a red hearth and love and in this way it is positive emotions and associations. It is impossible to explain to a colour-blind how it is to experience the colour

red, because you will not be able to explain the quality of the experience.

The adaption of our observation, understanding, and experience is perception and it is actually a private experience. You have no idea how I feel. If I feel unhappy and depressed you have no way to understand completely what I really experience. With empathy and personal experiences you may have an idea of what you think I feel, but you'll never know what I really feel.

*"I know that you think
that you understand what you think I said;
but I am not sure that you have realized
that what you heard is not what I meant."*

(Anonymous)

Although our ability to perceive things with our senses is built up identically there will be differences in the experience of what we observe, because of differences in our human sensory system and because of differences in our expectations, past experiences and cultural backgrounds.

We experience something. Our senses receive information about this event. Our brain cannot process all this information, but would like to sort the material into categories. The incoming material is therefore sent through a filter made of memories, convictions and values. This filter is our model of the world.

Our memories are images, sounds, body sensations and perhaps smells. Some memories are clear to us, and some others are unconscious, which means that you do not know that you are now working with them.

Since the brain sorts out much material, we cannot experience the world as it is. Instead, we decide how the world is, and we do this by creating a series of convictions about who we are and how other people are. We can have positive convictions that support us in achieving our goals such as "I am good at communicating" or we can have negative convictions that inhibit us. This could be "I'm just not good at talking to strangers". Many of our convictions are based partly on our parents' models of the world and partly on the decisions we have made (usually unconsciously) in connection with the experiences we have had. A few pages ago the situation was mentioned: two sisters at about the same age, one likes to be the centre of attention, and the other fears such a situation. Try to reread the little story. One decided to get the conviction: "It is good to be the centre of attention." And the other sister decided to have the opposite conviction: "It is frightening to be the centre of attention."

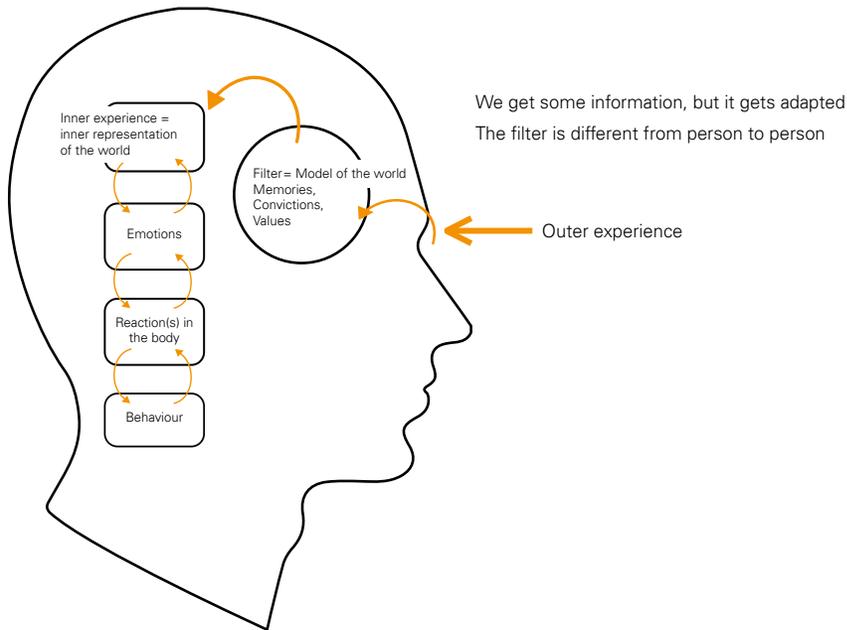


Figure 4.18. Perception. The brain adapts and sorts out impressions from an outer experience.

Another example. There are two brothers who are identical twins. One is very self-confident, he makes it pretty easy through school, gets good grades and as an adult he gets a good education. The other is the absolute opposite. It turns out that the summer holiday before starting school they stayed with some relatives and had the opportunity to get swim lessons every day for seven weeks. However, after only two weeks one brother gets an inflammation of the middle ear, has some complications and is not allowed to go swimming for four weeks. Then he is back with the other children to swim. That is, the others are now very good swimmers but he cannot swim at all. He is also not part of the group. After returning home the boys start school. One is very self-confident because he has just proven to himself that he can learn/do something. This other is having a severe inferiority complex because he has just experienced that he is not able to do what the others (including his twin brother) can do.

Again you have one child that decided to get the conviction: "Yes, I can do it if I want to." And the other decided to have the opposite conviction: "I'm not able to do this."

Your personal values are important to you, and they underlie everything you do. They decide for example:

- ◆ what kind of education you choose, (is it important to get a university degree or is your father a craftsman and thinks this is really good, because then you can always make your way).
- ◆ what you eat – e.g. meat (is it organic or not, or are you a vegetarian).
- ◆ what car you drive (is it important that it is exciting and perhaps a bit like a sports car, or is it important to you that it is safe, so if you get into an accident, you are protected the best way possible).
- ◆ what books and TV programs you choose, as well as washing powder etc.

Your values are personal, they are formed during childhood, and they are right for you at that time. Your values change during the years. While you are young, it is important to go to parties, as you get older, it is important to relax and have a nice time at home with the kids.

This was the filter – our model of the world.

The material that does get through the filter, we now have the opportunity to interpret, and this is what we call our inner representation of the world. The material may start some emotion, causing a physical reaction such as crying or heartbeat and this can affect our behaviour.

Example: I'm out for a walk, and a big dog runs towards me. It is barking. I cannot see the owner of the dog. When I was seven, I rode my bicycle home from school and was bitten by a barking dog, that came running towards me, and there was no owner to be seen. This is in my memory. Now I have a conviction that I am in danger, and my value is that it is important that I take care of myself. My interpretation is that I need to protect myself, because I risk being bitten again. My emotion is that I am afraid. My physical reaction is that I get a heartbeat and my pulse rate rises. My behaviour is that I decide not to continue down the road but turn around and make sure to get away from the big barking dog.

Example in reverse order: Behaviour, I am just going to a very important exam, my bodily reaction is that I have butterflies in my stomach; I have heartbeat, sweaty hands and my voice is shaking slightly. My feelings are nervousness and anxiety as to how this will go. My current inner representation of the world, concerning examination, is based on my past memories of being at an exam in this subject, my conviction is that I am not so good at this subject and my value is that I later will get an education that is about a something totally different from this.

The brain perceives millions of impressions each second; but our conscious mind leaves out very large amounts of information and the informa-

tion that does get in is the one that fits what is already there. The information that we do let through the filter is our inner experience of an incident; our inner representation of the world. It could be said that the inner representation of the world that we have inside is not the reality. Or in other words: The inner map of the world is not identical to the outer world. The map is not the territory. We do not experience the world; we experience a model of the world.

The inner representation consists of inner pictures, sounds, body feelings and perhaps smells and tastes. We choose to have an outer experience that contains millions of pieces of information simplified in an inner representation of the world which is decisive for how we experience the situation and which meaning it will get to us later. Our inner representation of the world is for most of us in inner pictures, many have an inner dialog and few people feel it in the body.

Visually thinking people think in pictures. You are aware of colours, what things look like, their shape. You learn the best way by looking at something.

Auditive thinking people think in sounds. You are aware of sounds and very easily you can get distracted by unwanted sounds. You learn the best way by listening to something – that is, if someone is telling you how to do it.

Kinetic people think in body feelings, like how the clothes feel against the body, what it is like to sit in the chair. Often you are very good at sensing moods and how you yourself and other people are feeling. You like physical recognition, like a light touch. You need to have a teacher that will go through things carefully with you; you need more details, perhaps being told a story with which you can identify yourself. You learn the best way by doing the things with your teacher thus understanding the subject.

Auditive-digital / A.D. people are very absorbed in logic and signification. You think in sequences and significations and remember by means of procedure, steps and sequences. You learn the best way by having the subject explained in a clear logical way, thus making sense. You will often need to go thoroughly into a question until you are absolutely sure you understand everything.

5 CONTACT FORMS

There are different ways to avoid or cancel contact, also known as “defence mechanisms”, “channels of resistance”, “boundary processes”, “contact functions” or as referred to in this book “contact forms”.

The definitions of the terms are based on the literature sources: (Perls et al., 1951) and (Polster et al., 1973). We have stated Perls’ and Polster’s definitions because we know that you Google/Wikipedia these; they may be a bit difficult to understand and you can just skip them if you want to. Keep in mind that the name “defence mechanisms” is many years old and based on people with some emotional problems since these mechanisms were originally developed as a therapy of neurosis.

“Defence mechanisms” are in this book referred to as “contact forms” as we base our lessons and book on (Hostrup, 2010). Being a psychologist from the University of Copenhagen (1978) she went to the United States and got her degree as a Gestalt Therapist. She continued to expand and reform Gestalt Therapy in both theory and practice. You will hopefully get the experience that these contact forms are not only negative; but they can also be positive once you know what you are doing and what is going on.

There are several kinds of defence mechanisms; but here are the ones that we mention in this book.

Contact forms:

- ◆ Confluence
- ◆ Introjection
- ◆ Projection
- ◆ Deflection
- ◆ Retroflection

The following pages show a survey of these contact forms followed by a more detailed description.

CONTACT FORMS

Confluence

Confluence is a mental process where I do not perceive the boundary between us. In most situations we try to achieve agreement. When I am confluent I will head for the same direction as the trend in the surroundings, and think/feel the same way as others in order to avoid disagreement and conflict. The result is that I do not use much energy in making my own choices.

Introjection

I take into my system whatever you give me without chewing thoroughly. When I learn norms, conventions and rules introjections are important. It is bad if I do not evaluate whether the introject is rational, wise or inappropriate or perhaps a prejudice. If I have been filled with introjects I have accepted a lot of messages about how things are and how they should be.

Projection

I cannot accept this feeling so I attribute it to you. But when I use projection in my contact with you I get in contact with parts of myself that I do not know are there, that I don't know about myself – but I do not get in contact with you. A large part of the interaction with other people is about projections. We are projecting previous individuals on the new ones we meet.

Deflection

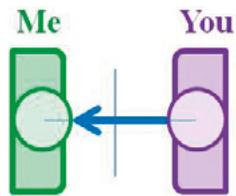
Deflection is a way to avoid direct contact with a person, I can do it for instance by starting to talk about other things, laugh at what is said and look somewhere else than in the eyes of the person who is speaking. Deflection is very useful in the sense that it works for all people as a useful avoidance manoeuvre in connection with unwanted contact.

Retroreflection

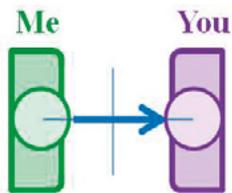
I do not say what I want to say – I keep it inside myself and this can help me avoid some problems and disappointments. In our society you are considered polite if you have a certain amount of self-restraint and a realistic sense of when it is acceptable to make some exclamations.

CONFLUENCE

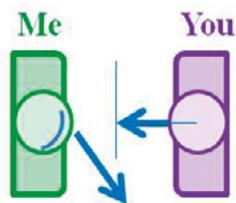
We flow together. I do not perceive the boundary between us.

INTROJECTION

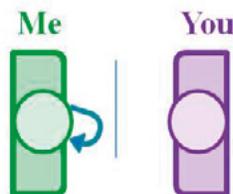
I take into my system whatever you give me without chewing thoroughly.

PROJECTION

I cannot accept this feeling so I attribute it to you.

DEFLECTION

I ignore it because I don't experience what you say.

RETROFLECTION

I do not say what I want to say – I keep it inside myself.

Figure 5.1. Contact Forms

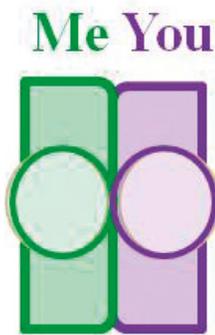
5.1 CONFLUENCE

“The remarkable is not to be one or the other; but to be you. And every single human being is capable of this if he really wants to!”

Søren Kierkegaard, (1813–1855)

According to (Perls et al., 1951) confluence is defined as: “flow together”. To be two in one, I-you is not there but has become we. When I and you do not exist anymore we have become completely confluent.

According to (Hostrup, 2010) confluence serves the survival of the child. It is very necessary in the relationship between baby and mother; a child will usually be in confluence with his family and an adult with his community.



We flow together. I do not perceive the boundary between us.

Figure 5.2. Illustration of the concept confluence.

A very confluent person has most of his life been adapting to others by how they believe it to be or done. The person is giving in and just goes with the tide allowing it to carry the confluent person to where it ends – he will head for the same direction as the trend in the surroundings, and think/feel the same way as others in order to avoid disagreement and conflict. This is not necessarily where the person wants to go, but either he is not aware of this or maybe he thinks that it is fine. This way of living does not request much energy from the person, and as a consequence there is no reason to be dissatisfied also you do not use much energy in making your own choices. It is important for the person to be alike and to be liked.

Many people live in confluence in a hell and they are not aware of this. They forget their own needs and only see the "we- need". One of the problems with confluence in a marriage or relationship is that just as two people cannot be in the same body, they may not have exactly the same ideas about what they want all the time. Quite often it is one part that is confluent with the other, and constantly adapts to and has the same opinions. Confluence often occurs in families, groups, jobs, associations, etc. In particular, it is much used within the army, where the individual is made invisible and everyone is alike

with the same uniform, marching in line, etc. When two persons sit opposite each other it happens quite often that after some time they sit the same way, if so there is confluence between the two.



Figure 5.3. Confluence in practice.

When sitting in a group or perhaps you are only two persons, make sure to notice this: one person is telling something and the others are listening. They get more and more affected by the story and put themselves more and more into what is being said. In order to get all of the experience the listeners begin to act like the story-teller and that usually means that they sit (or stand) like the story-teller. In Figure 5.3 on can see a good example. The young man to the right is telling something and the others are listening most careful. The young woman to the left sits like the story-teller and the young woman in a white blouse sits almost like him. When you notice that your listeners are behaving like you, you can be sure that they are interested in what you say. They are really listening.

Students experience confluence:

Female, Finland: “My friend is a very confluent person. It is very hard to get an opinion from her, especially one that differs from others opinion. She is always fine with anything and everything. Sometimes I detect a no from her face but her lips say yes, so I know what she really thinks. I’ve learned to see those things during these twenty years we’ve known each other and I know when she doesn’t want to do something even if she says yes. She has told to me that people who don’t know her have said that she

is a very hard person to get close to and that she is kind of like a closed book. I know what they mean because when you agree with everything, it doesn't give any idea of what you are really thinking. I haven't thought about it being a defense mechanism before but after the course I realize that it actually makes sense."

Female, Croatia: "I think that in some cultures confluence is much deeper and stronger. In Croatia, where I come from, it is not looked good at if you do all the same as others do. People are expected to be individualist, thinking by themselves. In Finland I noticed that confluence plays a bigger role in Finnish culture. If a person sees other people being quiet in the metro, then they get quiet too, look at the floor, out the window or at their cell phones in order not to make eye contact with strangers, because "this is the way other people act". Here it is not considered good to behave differently and people that do so are marginalized or looked bad upon. A lot of things here have to be done "by the book" and if I do it any other way it is automatically wrong."

Female, Venezuela: "I realized that when I meet people for the first time I tend to be confluent and remain silent when I disagree about something. I do this in order to avoid disruption or conflict. Confluence has helped me to cope and adapt through several situations that have involved change in my life. However, the more time passes by, and the more I get to know people, I feel more free and confident to say what I really think and to give truthful opinions. Therefore, confluence can be positive in adaptation processes, but at the same time it is necessary to have a balance and be able to have your own opinions. Otherwise, people may perceive this constant confluence as being a push over or lacking personality."

Female, Russia: "I always try to be confluent in new situations, no matter if it is work or free time activities. I am afraid of doing something wrong by not knowing and be laughed at, like when we come to a new place together with a person, and he or she immediately starts to ask questions like "what is going to happen", "let us do something" etc. I prefer to wait and watch what others are doing and join the majority afterwards. I think, in this case confluence is good because I try to learn the rules before starting to break them."

Male, Algeria: "When I first moved to Finland, I saw how people here tend to be less talkative, less interactive; it was strange to me that almost nobody knows anybody around here. Since I grew up in a society with people more interactive and talkative, this situation wasn't so appreciable to me, and if I was to try to engage in a conversation with someone, it might take long time to get anybody interested or...maybe they are but it is still hard FOR THEM to take off, and probably find an excuse to leave...so after

thinking about it, silence isn't really a bad thing, and if I wanted to fit into this environment I had to get along, be less talkative, and the problem was solved."

Confluence within a family context

Male, Turkey: "My cousin has always been a confluence person. Everything that he did was not his decisions rather it would be his father that decided which team he should support, which school he should study at, which job he should take. I remember that he never had any idea what he would do. He just listened to his father. I think he just choose the easy way, he never pushed himself to think or act. Living in confluence is easy for him."

Female, Ethiopia: "Confluence is something I experience in my life much of the time. Since I was a little girl I always tried to make less trouble at home and I always wanted my parents to be happy with me – so I always would do what they told me to."



Figure 5.4. Illustration of the concept confluence – stuck in the mud in Thailand.

Confluence within the context of a group

A situation may be that you are part of a group of people and everybody claims something and you just cannot understand why they do so. You will probably wonder why everybody is saying -----, either you will just say that you agree or it could be a question of how hard you would stick to your opinion. Would you keep on going about what you see or would you sort of give up and say well I do see what you see, in spite of the fact that you would say something that is not in agreement with what you had actually observed

yourself. This is a problem you meet sometimes in your life and the question is how you react. Do you dare to fight for what you believe is the right answer or do you try to achieve agreement or confluence? The energy in a group can do a lot to people. In groups we often tend to become more confluent and we tend to accept to do things we would never do if we were alone.

An African student in our class told about the time before he left his country: There were some riots in his home town. If you as a young man did not take part in these riots you would get killed or your house burned down, because everybody in the neighbourhood took part. So in the middle of the night they drove to the houses of people that did not take part in the riots and they burned down their houses and in some cases killed the people living there. Consequently, he was part of the group going round; but he kept himself in the background and did not participate directly in burning down houses.

Female, Croatia: “Since moving to Finland I found myself to be confluent with the people around me in numerous occasions. If I go to visit friends here, I always take my shoes off unless told specifically that I don’t have to do this. In my culture, taking shoes off is considered to be a really strange thing. When visiting friends we usually tend to dress better and shoes are a part of our dressing stile. If I dress up, I don’t really want to walk around in my socks because I’m used to think that this would give a bad impression of me. Living in Finland I had to adapt to this “strange” custom.”

Female, Morocco: “I was invited to a student party at one of my Finnish friend’s home. I arrived with a group of people and we were all dressed up in a formal way. Boys were wearing shirts and ladies wore dresses and high heels. Upon arrival, I saw that everybody took off their shoes. In my home country, we do not remove our shoes indoors especially not a formal event. Strangely I felt the need to also remove my shoes even though it wasn’t in my culture; I just sensed it would be wrong not to do so.”

Male, Bangladesh: “One of my closest friends at the university is here from Finland. One day he said:”I never tasted your food, could you organize a sort of food party?” I organized a dinner party at my apartment. I invited my community’s friends as well. I cooked my traditional food. We were sitting around the table and I put all the food on the table. Everybody started eating using their right hand except my Finnish friend – he started eating by fork. When he saw everybody else used their hand he stopped using the fork. He asked me politely do you eat by hand instead of fork. I replied him indeed yes. We are more comfortable with our hands. He told me can you teach me how to eat by hand and I taught him and then he put the fork on the table, started eating by hand. He did not complain about that. Although it was really difficult for him but he followed and respected my culture.”

Male, Nepal: “I have this experience of confluence. This is a bad thing to tell, but when I was in Nepal, I had my own circle of friends. Most of the guys in my circle don’t smoke and drink alcohol and I was same. But after coming to Finland, I met a lot of new friends in my college and the apartment where I stay. Some of them were Finnish and others were from different countries including Nepal. In this group, most of the guys do smoke and drink alcohol. I was like totally separated from the group, though they did not say it, I felt so. I couldn’t enjoy holidays, parties and gatherings with them. Then slowly, I started to smoke and drink also, and then I feel like, now I am related to the group. Now, I can enjoy with my friends, go to parties and gathering. Even though I know it’s not good for my health, I can’t avoid it as I can’t avoid being with my friends.”

Female, Germany: “Wednesday was the day with the topic confluence. We did some exercises based on this topic. In one discussion there was a boy who said that he had begun to smoke because then he is confluent with other smokers and it is easier to get in contact with new people. I think in some points he is right. My mother smokes and I often have observed that she gets to know new people because they stand together outside and smoke. But in my opinion this isn’t a good solution and there are several other possibilities to get in contact with new people. But I was impressed how convinced this boy was.”

Female, Finland: “I understood actually during this course why I probably was bullied in middle school. I dressed pretty much the same way that the others and tried to fit in the group. The difference was that I swam every day. On the weekends I had competition or a morning practise. I didn’t attend the parties.”

Male, Iran: “Some months ago, I was going from Espoo to Helsinki by train, and I was about to get off the train at the last station. I went to wait at the train’s door. Helsinki trains have two doors on each side but in each station they only open in one side. I rarely go to Helsinki so I was waiting for the wrong door to open. Since I was the first person waiting, the others (who were Finnish and assumingly travel more often by train) just lined up behind me. When we reached the station, the other door opened and everybody noticed they were mistakenly waiting at the wrong door.”

Male, Nepal: “One night, we suddenly heard a bullet firing near our home. It was normal those times. But the firing grew more and we could even smell the huge gunpowder. Suddenly, we heard a loud announcement that they are attacking the police station and we all the villagers had to support them. Our throat was dry, heartbeat was unusual and fear in the eyes. It was obvious that, if we followed the rebel group and marched towards cross firing, we might get killed with a single bullet. So, few families started

to run secretly for a safer place in the dark. We joined them and walked towards the field nearby. We all stayed silently for hours in the dark, until the firing stops. We didn't discuss why/where and when to stay like that. That fear for life made us confluent to walk that way, stay silently behind the bushes and wait for seizes fire."

Confluence within the context of work

If you as part of your job go to another country to work you will not be confluent with the people living there. This fact you will have to accept and cope with. It is most important that you find your inner strength in what you bring with you, and turn this into a gain. Do not forget that in some areas it may be an advantage to be different. With your other culture you can contribute with other things than those already in the company because you have another way of thinking. It is important to look at things positively and to remain in contact with your self-confidence and self-esteem.

Male, Nepal: "Last year in December, there was Christmas party in our company. The party was held in a hotel. I was there with my Finnish colleagues. Before the dinner, we went to the bar. All of my colleagues ordered beer. I also ordered one to make myself similar to them even though I don't take any alcoholic drinks normally. At that time, I was not familiar with the word Confluence. But now I think that that phenomenon was confluence."

Female, Vietnam: "You can't work well together with your colleagues if you do not communicate or know each other. When you know each other, you will know who is good at what and then divide work in good way. Moreover, it would be easy to work with people with the same goals and destination. So you can all try to reach that goal without conflicting."

Female, Finland: "Confluence is important for example when going into a new job or moving to a different country. I have noticed when going to work in a new company it's important to know the dress code, company's values and many other things. It doesn't mean I have to change my personality but it would be good to dress in a way that can be associated with the company values for example a suit or maybe a company's t-shirt. It's important to get along with the colleagues. I think especially when working in a team confluence is important."

Male, Cambodia: "Our department consisted of a five person team. In our team we had a person who was always in bad mood. Nobody wanted to be hard on her and so the rest of us used deflection and retroreflection round her. But the other side of the coin was that we got very confluent by managing her bad mood that damaged our good working atmosphere. When working with her I always felt depressed because she always had a

bad day and always unloaded her bad feeling not only to me but to rest of the members. When she was not able to go to work we felt fine. I think this kind of confluence is so unhealthy and I should have done something about it at that time.”



Figure 5.5. Confluence. It may be that there is no path, but if everybody decides that they will walk across the lawn, then there will be a path – Side entrance to Metropolia.

Confluence within the context of religion

Male, Nepal: “Confluence not only applies while having conversation but also having a good communication with a community or society. For example, in my country there are more than hundred religions residing in harmony and peace. If you enter a locality you can see many people from different castes living in harmony even when they have different traditions, customs and behaviours. I find these people are in confluence with each other because one person from a caste/religion invites another to their festival, they share eating habits and sometimes their customs too. If anyone would try to break this harmony our country could easily get into a religious war.”

Male, Ethiopia: “When I was a kid back in Ethiopia I used to go to church with my mother. Since our church is an ancient orthodox Christian church, an old liturgical language called Geez, is applied for all the prayers and the ceremonies that one should attend – like kneeling down during some of the prayer etc. While not understanding the point I used to just follow the

patterns of people. When they would kneel down so would I – when they spread their hands I did so and I just followed all the movement patterns for the songs.”

Confluence within the context of sports

Female, Germany: “I have played volleyball since I was 8 years old. It is a team sport and so you have to be confluent with the group to get good results. Certainly there are situations in which you have another opinion than the rest of your team. I had one of these situations when we discussed about our new tricots. All girls from the team wanted to have pink coloured tricots except me. I hate pink and in my opinion you look like a pig in these tricots. I told them my opinion but everyone else wanted this colour. So I decided to avoid stress and to be confluent with them by accepting their choice.”

Male, Germany: “In my handball team we have to be confluent. We have to adjust the pace of our play so everybody can follow and we have to play in order to the same tactic ideas to be successful. If everybody would play without confluence we would have a total chaos and have no chance to win or even make a goal.”

5.2 INTROJECTION

“I see myself as a 120 percent person. That means if I don’t do things 120 percent then I feel that I am not good enough.”

Michelle Obama, Former first lady of USA.

According to Perls et al. (Perls et al., 1951) the concept introjection is defined as follows: *“An introject consists of material – a way of acting, feeling, evaluating – which you have taken into your system or behaviour, but which you have not assimilated in such fashion as to make it a genuine part of your organism.”*

According to Hostrup (Hostrup, 2010): *“Healthy introjection is based on the innate ability to swallow something that comes from someone else without tasting it and without sorting it into beneficial and harmful. It is a survival instinct that guides all healthy mammal offspring.”*

And *“The outside impressions that reach the organism are not examined (tasted), sorted and assessed. Psychologically speaking, the organism takes some of the input from the world – from another person – and “swallows it raw.”*

According to Jørstad (Jørstad, 1.year Norsk Gestalt Institut) introjection is: *“To swallow completely, such as ideas, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, norms, laws, rules. Swallowing what is not right for me, swallow a message others*

have given me, without tasting, chewing it, ask questions, feel if I really want it. What I take in this way is introject.”

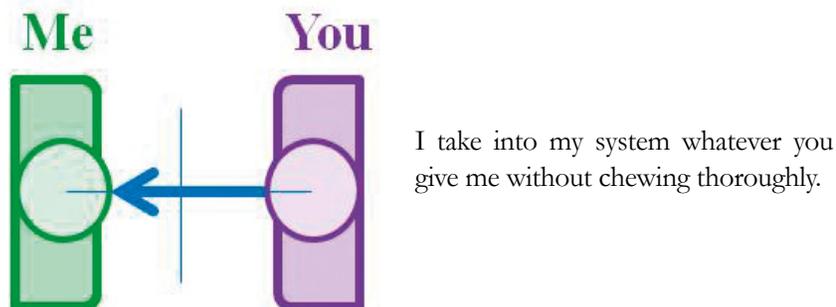


Figure 5.6. Illustration of the concept introjection

While you grow up you have one or several persons that will be your authority. Quite often it is father/mother/teacher. They will tell you what to do, say, eat, think, believe and so on. During your childhood you experience forced feeding, forced education, forced morality – you are expected to identify with your parents – all this result in a lot of unassimilated messages – many of these you do not experience at all until you move to another environment/country and experience what people do there.

You could also say that an introject is something you accept without asking questions. Somebody else says it is fine, this is how it is. It becomes introjection when you don't really know what you accept.

Introjection is important when teaching norms, conventions and rules. You can't learn unless you introject what is being told to you, and this competence you will need throughout your life. An example is that you must stay on the pavement while the traffic light is red. This is a good introject. Another good one is learning a language; but exactly this kind of introjection has a tendency to disappear later. Army, as a system is strongly based on blindly following the orders without questioning them. This can be seen as introjection as well and it is thereby easier for some people to take in than it is for others. At school the child “swallows” what the teacher says and the introjection process does that the child will learn what is needed in a kind of mental eating-digestion-process without spending so much energy.



Figure 5.7. Introject, when the light is red you must wait. Central Helsinki.

Introjection is bad when you take it in uncritically and you do not evaluate whether it is rational, wise or inappropriate or perhaps a prejudice.

People, who have been filled with introjects, have accepted a lot of messages about how things are and how they should be. They are filled with “must”, “should”, “is not allowed”, etc. They are missing in whole or in part the ability to consider things themselves.

Cecillia: Many years ago I had a friend who had a dog. She had to go to a course and I was taking care of her dog i.e. taking it for a walk. So I was walking down the street and a woman and her 6-7 year old son were coming towards me. As we got closer the boy smiled and he eventually kneeled down to play and talk to “my” dog while he was asking me questions about the dog. After some time his mother said:”Now you must stop asking all these questions, you disturb the lady”. I could see the life and the light leave his eyes and I am very sorry to admit that I did not say or do anything about it; but during the more than 30 years since this passed I have never forgotten his eyes. I could have said that it was all right and I had lots of time; but since she was the one who had a time problem it would have been nice if she had behaved accordingly, taken responsibility for her feelings (of impatience) and perhaps said:”Will you finish your conversation with the lady because we have a time problem and I would like for us to continue our walk.” As it now turned out the boy stopped talking and appeared rather embarrassed. He had been criticized and now he felt he was doing all wrong; but he also got introjects about asking questions and getting involved with people.

Please remember this little story as we shall also mention it when we get to retroflection.

When talking about introjects it could be something about doing something; but many times it is something that is said and here we are usually dealing with two kinds of words:

WORDS OF NECESSITY: *MUST, HAVE TO, NEED TO, OUGHT TO*

Example: “I **must** do more about this.”

Question: “Do you feel like wanting to do more?”

Example: “I **have to** exercise every day.”

Question: “What would happen if you skipped one day every now and then?”

Example: “I really **need to** do some gardening.”

Question: “So you will get some weeds in the flowerbed; but will that be the end of the world?”

“When you go to Paris you **ought to** see the Louvre.”

Really? I am not keen on museums, I’d rather enjoy the cafes and walking down the streets.

“I **need to** eat healthily.”

“I **ought to** wear nice clothes, when visiting my grandmother.”

“I **must** be kind.”

When reading these lines you get a feeling of something unsaid in the world of the speaker. When asking questions you have the possibility to get conscious of what is actually going on and to find out what **you** really would like to do about it. A student from one of our classes suddenly realized what it was all about – his mother had told him several times: “You really ought to call your brother”. In this class he suddenly understood that it was his mother’s need, not his.

In addition to afore mentioned words of necessity, there are also words of possibility.

WORDS OF POSSIBILITY: CANNOT, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, TO BE ABLE TO

These are words that tell that the person feels he has no influence on things. But many times it is the person's experience that sets the limit, not his abilities.

Example: "I just **cannot** ask her"

Question: "What is stopping you from doing so? What would happen if you actually did ask her?"

Example: "I **am** just not **able to** do that"

Question: "What do you expect would happen if you did do it?"

BY ASKING, YOU CAN GET CONSCIOUS OF WHETHER THERE IS A LIMITATION AND WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

The opposite of taking in introjects is to chew, break down and sort out. Only accept what **I** want and reject what **I** do not want. Make it clear to myself what **I** want, **I** wish, **I** will, **I** will not.

This little conversation took place in our class.

Student: "Now I understand what an introject is but how do I ask the questions?"

Cecillia: "What is your introject?"

The student said that his mother had always told him: "You must drink a glass of milk every day". He doesn't like milk.

Cecillia: "This is a good introject if you are a little child here in Finland; but when you are 22 you don't need to drink milk. – So when you get home from this class your mother waits for you with a glass of milk?"

Student: "Oh no, she lives in a town 200 km north of Helsinki."

Cecillia: "Well, then she will not know if you don't have your glass of milk. – What will happen if you don't drink that glass of milk?"

The student looked a bit confused and then said: "Probably nothing."

Introjection is important for the learning of norms, rules and any other kind of learning. For instance you must wait on the pavement when the traffic signal is red. This is an example of a useful introjection. Introjection is negative if you use it uncritically and you do not yourself evaluate whether it is sensible or inappropriate or for instance prejudiced.

Introjects can be words of different kinds; but in many cases they can also be acts, and many times you don't even know it is an introject until you move to another place. When you go to another country to work you bring along some cultural luggage that can be valuable in your own country but perhaps not always so useful in your new country.

Here are some stories told by students of our class:

Female, Morocco: “In my culture in Morocco it is common to have plenty of food at each meal. It is custom that as a guest in someone’s home, the hostess will make sure that your plate is always filled with food and the guest cannot eat all of it. The first time I was invited for a meal at a Finnish family, I didn’t finish my plate, the second time I did the same and the third time I wasn’t even invited. When I asked the son of the Finnish lady why I wasn’t invited anymore he replied: “Well you never finish your food and therefore my mother thinks you are rude!” I was not intending to be rude it was just in my habit.”

Male, Kuwait: “It was my first day in Finland and my friend picked me up at the airport. We came back to his place and he told me that his apartment number is 10 and on the 3rd floor. Soon after he left for work and I decided to go for a walk to look around. When I came back from my little adventure, I took the stairs to the 3rd floor and failed to find apartment 10. I knew it was the corner apartment but this wasn’t number 10 in this case. I went back downstairs and started counting the floors once again to make sure I was in the right floor and yes I was in the right floor but there was no apartment 10. Confused and worried, thinking if it is the right building I walked downstairs again. This time I took the elevator, pressed on 3 and bingo! There was apartment number 10. I was confused – how is it possible. I checked a couple of times it was the 3rd floor; but why couldn’t I find the correct apartment. A little embarrassed I did not ask anyone. In a week I learned that in Finland the floor at the ground level is always floor 1 but back in my country the ground floor is always numbered 0. So, the 3rd floor in Finland was actually 2nd floor according to the introject I carried with me from home.”

Male, Nigeria: “When I first arrived in Tallinn, Estonia being my first time in Europe, my flight arrived quite late around 11:45pm. At first when I stepped out of the plane, I felt as though something was wrong or maybe it was already the second day during the course of the flight. I was quick to check my watch and saw that the time was around 9:45pm by my watch because it was still set with the Nigeria time – I was quite nervous because all my life I have never experience brightness later than 7pm so it was strange.”

Male, Italy: “Few months ago I started to work on a project in a Finnish company where there are only Finns. I work in an open space office with about 10 other persons. I was very enthusiastic and on the first day I started at 9am. After half an hour I noticed that two persons who sit close to me started to talk about lunch time and were checking the menu of

the day in different places where they usually go. Usually I have a lunch after 1pm or 2pm, but the nice new colleagues invited me for the lunch at 10.30am. Of course I was very happy to go with them but it was very difficult swallow rice and chicken at that time when usually I can have only the taste of the coffee in my mouth. Now I got used to go every Thursday with them for a lunch and I am eating Finnish salmon soup at 11 am!”

Female, Malaysia: “I am from Malaysia; I have my own culture and faith. Somehow when I came to Finland I had to learn the culture and also try to adapt with the people. For example, in one of the activities of this course we were asked to shake hands to greet each other. So I had already learned that in most of the European countries, hand shaking is one of the ways to greet people thus it is the first thing you do when you meet new people. This is different from my religious upbringing, as a Muslim I can’t do hand shaking with non-related blood. So what I do is that I put on my gloves, and then I can do hand shaking to greet others. I have my own way to adapt to the culture and in the same time to respect others and to respect myself.”

Male, Nepal: “I had a very bad experience about introjection. When I first came to Finland a friend of mine invited me to his home as we were to do some home work for the university. After some time it was time to eat and among other things he put a plate with sausages on the table. I couldn’t tell whether it was a sausage made from beef so I asked him what kind of sausage is it and he said it is beef. I really was in trouble because in my country we worship the cow as God. I was feeling bad and sadly I had to say I can’t eat because of this and that. Well that was very embarrassing even though I am not a vegetarian I can’t eat beef which was strange for my friend.”

Male, Iran: “My parents taught me to be a respectful person to elderly people. I am going to tell a true story regarding introjection that my parents taught me. One of them was that if I was in a bus and all seats were taken I should provide my seat for the elderly if he or she is standing at that moment. I have always followed this introjection at my home country and also in Turkey and the elderly always have thanked me very much. After I moved to Finland, one day I came across the exact same situation during my short bus trip. I realized that all seats had been taken and there was an old Finnish lady standing behind me. As usual I offered my seat to the lady, but something unusual happened. She got angry and with her angry voiced she refused my offer and told me that she is not that old and she can stand like others. Afterward I found out that in Finland it is impolite to offer such a thing. I was wrong, because I thought that she would be happy like the other Turkish and Iranian elderly people.”

Male, Nigeria: “This happened here in Leppävaara. I had to take a bus to the city center for the first time and I went to the bus stop – and the bus which I had been told to take to the city kept passing by me several times. I wondered why it never stopped as I was the only one at the bus stop at the time. Several minutes later, another person came there to take another bus and he waved when the bus was getting closer and the bus stopped. I then decided to flag the next bus which I was to take and lo and behold; it stopped and I entered. When I got back home, I asked my brother who has been in Finland for years and he told me that buses in Finland don’t stop unless there is someone who waves. It is not the same as when I was in Sweden because the buses stop at the bus stops as far as there is someone at the stop.”

Male, Ethiopia: “I heard this story from X, a relative who is originally from my country but he has been living in Finland for more than 20 years. Once he went to Ethiopia for a holiday and his friend invited him for lunch in cultural restaurant. X went to the restaurant first and he saw that almost all tables were seated by one or more persons. He concluded that the restaurant was fully booked so he went back to his friend and said “We don't have a place to sit so let’s move on”. But the case is that in Ethiopia in most cultural restaurants people can share a table. X who lives in Finland has in his mind that if a table in restaurant has one person seated it means it is occupied totally so he thought the place is full. His friend told him that in Ethiopia they can share a table and they had their lunch.”

Female, Finland: “The auditor comes from India in January to check the procedures in our warehouse. He noticed that on the area of incoming material (there is a door out from that area) the lamp above the door, which catches flies is turned off. In his opinion, this is a critical observation. I spent almost an hour, trying to explain to him that during winter time here in Finland, we don’t have problems with any kind of flying insects, and we don’t need the lamp to catch anything when it is minus 20°C outside.”

Male, Finland: “When I started working in my current workplace, I pretty much introjected everything. I did everything the way my colleges told me to. But I think that was a good thing, because I really didn’t have enough experience and skills to question their advices. But now I can make some decisions of my own, because of the knowledge which I got from experience. If I would have had decisions of my own right away, I could have easily made terrible mistakes.”

Female, Finland: “I have several times noticed that students or newly graduated go by the book. They just remember what they learned at university, and think that this is how work should be done. Often they are right,

but sometimes those who have longer experience might know something more, you can't always go by the book, but listen to more experienced employees. Newly graduated should be proud of what they know but also humble."

Introjection in the family

Female, Finland: "In the course class we talked about introjection and a girl from Morocco told how her hostess in Finland found it extremely impolite that she took food on her plate and didn't eat all of it. In Morocco and many other cultures it is polite to leave some food on the plate, but in Finland it is considered to be rude, because it sends a message that the food was not good. I think that in Finland most people have been taught to eat the food they have taken to their plates by themselves. It is so strong an introjection that I always feel that I have to eat up whatever I have taken into my plate, even in places where it is actually more polite to leave something uneaten. Because I realize that it might lead to some misunderstanding, like that I am still hungry, I have taken this cultural difference as one of the discussion topics in dinner table. That way it makes it easier to understand behavior that might cause discomfort if left unexplained. Talking openly of the different customs can create a feeling of mutual understanding and sense of confluence even when both sides keep their own habits."

Female, Ethiopia: "I think all people in this world are influenced by introjection. I have also a story that I would like to share here. In our culture in Ethiopia it is always a tradition for people who invite guests to prepare food and ask them to eat together. Often when I had eaten what was on my plate and wanted to get some more, my mom would tell me that it is inappropriate to do so. Still though I didn't ask why this was so, I just stopped asking for more food. Even now when I dine with friends here in Finland it is so hard for me to put more food on my plate when I want to even though I see others do it."

Female, Finland: "Introjection about my father being an alcoholic and not working has made me avoid not becoming like him. I sometimes work too hard cause my mom was always afraid that I would become like him, so I have tried to avoid that with all I can and sometimes I work too much and I've been close to burn out because of that. It's a good and also a bit bad introjection. I haven't actually thought about it before the class. I have wondered why I work so much and why can't I give myself a break at times. I always have to be basically the best at what I do and one of my biggest fears is becoming like my father even though I realise that it is about how I live my life and how I've been brought up, not just my genes. This introjection

is also a good one because it gives me ambition to pursue the things in life that I want to achieve.”

Male, Turkey: “Since my parents are both working persons I grew up with my grandma when I was young. Older people believe in more psychic or unreasoning stories. She always warned me about nonsense situations but when I was a child they were so much significant for me. For example I couldn't go near fig trees since she told me that in every seed in the fig there is a soul of a dead person. Till I became 14 years old I couldn't eat or go near to a fig tree. When I grew up and was able to use my logic I realized that these are really pointless things.”

Male, Nepal: “Throughout my childhood in Nepal I was always told that during the eclipse (solar or lunar) I shouldn't eat nor drink anything. All the members in my family strictly follow this. Even if we have anything leftover in the fridge or water in a bucket we are not supposed to use it. Still today I do the same; I don't eat nor drink anything during the eclipse.”

Male, Iran: “When I was a kid in Iran my mom always said that I must always wash my hands before eating. I must also wash my hands if I came from outside or if I touched coins. Now I don't live with my mother anymore but I always wash my hands before eating even if I just came from shower. It has become a habit. If I don't wash my hands I would feel uncomfortable. I may feel I am eating dirt or letting bacteria go to my body. It is maybe not a bad thing to wash hands but I think I am doing it way a lot more than normal. I find it very hard to change introjections. It is like it is built in to you and if you skip or ignore it you feel like something is missing. You may think you didn't do it right or you may feel uncomfortable.”

Male, Finland: “Introjection is something which I will pay attention to. My parents were quite strict with me and I noticed that there are lots of little things I do the way they taught me to do them. For example, I find it rude if I'm having lunch with someone and they don't have “proper” manners. Now I am noticing that it is actually a strong introjection from home, which is useful in formal situations but is not something I have to stress about in everyday life. After noticing this fact, it is probably easier to be at ease in casual situations.”

Male, Vietnam: “In my childhood anything my father said is true. I just took whatever he said into my system without a second thought. I remember once a very special occasion in kindergarten. It required us to wear the uniform (nothing too fancy, it's just a t-shirt with the school's logo) but my mother made some mistake and I did not have the uniform to wear to school. I was crying so much and I did not want to go to school at all – because my teacher made a clear point that it was really important to wear the uniform and I am the kind of guy who follows the rule. Then my

father came, he was really angry and he started to beat me. Finally he said: “Don’t you think that you will always get what you want!” I still remember what he told me, now I don’t think that I’m ever 100% into something I want. I mean, if I want something and then I don’t have it, I will think it is okay and stop fighting for it. That attitude really pisses me off because it gives me the feeling I have never really fought for anything with all my soul. Or maybe it’s just me and I’m blaming others for my problem to feel good about myself.”

Female, Croatia: “I have a really strong and loud way of laughing. When I was younger, my mother used to say angrily to me to stop laughing so loud. I remember that it took me years until I was able to laugh naturally again. Nowadays a lot of my friends tell me that I have a really contagious way of laugh and that it makes them happy and cheers them up when they hear it.”

Male, Nepal: “When I travelled to Finland my parents went with me to the airport to see me off and they gave me a ring with a red stone in the middle. They said this ring is a represent of a goddess and also they told me not to take off. I didn’t ask them that what will happen if I didn’t wear it. I just took it and said ok. Till now I haven’t taken it off my ring ever. I told this story to one of my friends – I showed her my ring but she asked me why I have put it on my index finger. I simply replied that it’s bad to wear it in my middle finger because my mom told me not to wear it on the middle one, and ring finger is for the engaged one so - -.”

Female, Germany: “Some time ago I visited a friend of mine in her hometown and we met some of her friends at an open air pool. At a time one of the girls said that she wanted to go to the kiosk to buy something to drink. Her boyfriend lying next to her asked if she could get something to drink for him too. When she asked what he wants to have, he answered that it doesn’t matter except for cola. I was curious, because there aren’t many people, who don’t like cola. So I asked him why he wants no cola and whether he doesn’t like it. And his answer was surprising. He told that he had never tried a cola, because when he was a child his mother had always told him that he would die if he drinks a glass of it. He said that today of course he knows that this is a lie, but he is so affected by this that he doesn’t want to drink cola.”

Male, Italy: “When I was a child I was forced by my parents to eat fruit after lunch. The problem was that usually I had already eaten enough and I couldn't eat anything else. But often I had to eat some fruit anyway before I was allowed to leave the table. In this way I associated fruit as a punishment and I really disliked any kind of fruit. There was an exception for bananas. But because my parents used to buy bananas only for me and

after lunch I usually already had eaten a lot so I promised to eat the banana the next day until it was totally brown. So I started to get used to the taste of the ripe and brown bananas and I couldn't eat if they were a bit yellow. I had this kind of repulsion for fruit for about 25 years and I started to discover the fruits only few years ago. For example I have started to eat and love pears only two months ago.”

Male, Nepal: “I was small back then; my family was having dinner together. My mother had cooked chicken and rice that night. We were eating our food, and then I mixed some milk into my rice and chicken. My mother saw it and said that you cannot eat chicken mixed with milk as it is not good to do so. Subsequently I was prohibited strictly to eat chicken mixed with milk. I stopped eating that mixture although I really do not know what harm it may cause. I simply stopped because my mother said it is not good to eat like that. I still do not eat chicken mixed with milk as I was forbidden to eat that way by my mother.”



Figure 5.8. Eating fruit can be an introject.

Female, Denmark: “While growing up my mom has always told us to turn our clothes inside out (except for socks!) when we wanted it washed. I

never questioned this, I've just done so my entire life. I just recently moved in with my boyfriend, and now I've noticed that I tell him the exact same things, even though he has managed to do his laundry just fine before. So without knowing my mom has used introjection to teach us laundry rules, and now I'm doing the same."

Female, Croatia: "When I was a small child in Croatia my mother used to say to me: "You must wear an undershirt or you will get cold." I was allowed to stop putting on my undershirt after the first of May because according to her from that time on it was warm enough. To this day I always wear an undershirt so that I don't get cold. This winter I noticed that my partner doesn't wear an undershirt when he goes out. I asked him in shock how he can go out like that, because he will for sure get sick without the undershirt. Then I said to him: "Didn't your mother teach you to wear an undershirt?" He replied that she did and because of that he chooses not to do it nowadays."

Female, Ethiopia: "Growing up I remember me and my father sitting on the couch watching television. Then my mom used to come and she would always comment on the way my father sits on the couch and how it is embarrassing for her to see him sitting like that especially when there are guests around. She says that "you should sit like a man". Despite the fact that he is sitting the way he does because he has some kind of back pain, and always tries to explain this to her, my mom never fails to comment on the way he sits. So now after all these years I live by myself all these kilometres away from home but still I find myself sitting up straight uncomfortably while there are people around even when my girlfriend is around. But on the contrary I have noticed that I sit more relaxed, in fact more like my father used to, when I am alone."

Female, Czech Republic: "As I grew up my mother always tried to teach us to eat fish. She was always saying that fish is really good and healthy for us. In those days I was always obedient so I tried to eat the fish. However it was often carp which I really have always hated. I remember the day, when my mom once again cooked carp and she wanted me to eat it. I would like to eat it, but I really could not do it, so I started to cry. She asked me why and I told her, I wanted to be good girl and obey her rules; but I just could not eat it because it was so disgusting. That was the last time that my mom tried to make me eat any fish. But I still remember fish is good for my health and I have started to eat it once I grew up. Now I eat fish regularly; but I am still not telling her."

Female, Germany: "When I lived at home with my parents in Germany we usually had dinner the whole family together on Sunday evening. Often we went to a restaurant on this day or we stayed at home; but except for

a few occasions we always talked about time for dinner in the morning so that everybody could make their own plans for the day knowing at which time they had to be back home.

When I moved to another city, 400 km away from my home, to start my studies, I moved into a living community with two guys. The first Sunday there I asked them when they would be home in the evening and whether we want to cook something or go to a restaurant. I was surprised when both said that they didn't know about their homecoming in the evening. One of the guys said that he maybe would eat something before he would be home and the other guy told me that he had some leftovers from yesterday so he would eat this in the evening. Now I notice that I had this introjection from home, that everybody eat together on Sunday evening, but it seems that this was only something like a tradition in my family and not all people do this."

Female, Ethiopia: "A very big introjection to me and to most women across the globe especially for women in developing countries would be accepting the fact that our whole purpose in life is to find someone to marry and to be a wife and a mother. And we have to do that before turning 26. Even if you have done great things for your family, even if you have put yourself through a difficult study and even if you have studied and worked at a great institution; you are a failure if you are not married by 25 or 26. Even though I say this ideology does not affect me and I am a purposeful women that I don't have to fall for this kind degrading philosophy. However, I feel pressured and I think I need to find someone before I turn 25. This a norm the family and society has put on me and I have tried and work on convincing myself otherwise that I can contribute to society and make good use of myself than just wait for someone to come and marry me. Even though, I don't completely accept this idea I somehow find myself being desperate to find someone to marry. I feel more anxious as each birthday passes by. I feel not good enough before my family and society that I don't have someone inline to marry me. I think I somehow have accepted this idea as a fact and so I feel inadequate that I don't have wedding plans."

Female, Ethiopia: "In our country, especially in rural areas, it is believed that if a married man passes away, his wife has to marry his younger brother. This applies even if his younger brother already has family and children. It is accepted in the community without any questioning and it is thought that the possessions, wife and children of the man who passed away will be better protected if the family is under his brother."

Male, Nepal: "My father is police officer and as in office he tries to maintain discipline and obedience at his family too. My father believes that if a man

has long hair he is part of some illegal activities, so there was a strict rule at home that I was not allowed to grow long hair. This was not limited to me; even my friends that had long hair never wanted to come to my home or meet my father because they were scared of him. This chain of order didn't stop even when I left home for higher studies in other cities. My father always cares about my hair. This time I didn't cut my hair for 6 months so while talking on Skype my father told me repeatedly to cut my hair. Consequently I never let my hair grow longer even if I want to."

Female, Estonia: "When I was younger, with my grandma I went to buy a bus ticket from a ticket booth. I just said one ticket, took it and turned away. My grandmother, standing beside me, was looking at me so shocked. She said, how can you be so rude and not say please and thank you. I was very surprised, because there was line behind us and I thought if I am quick it will be good. And also the ticket sales woman didn't look really friendly. Well the bottom line was I didn't think I needed to say thank you – I gave her money and she gave me a ticket. But I still remember how shocked my grandma was and I felt like I disappointed her. So still after all these years when I go buy anything I say thank you to the cashiers or ticket sales people. And when I see people not saying anything I think of them as so rude."

Introjection and religion

Female, Ethiopia: "In Ethiopia the majority of the population is Orthodox Christian. As a kid I saw my mother kissing the cross on a priest's hand. After that day I did the same without asking questions because we were raised hearing that everything that happens in a church has something to do with God."

Male, Cameroon: "An example of my own life is the high level of introjection that I faced in religions in my home country Cameroun. Before the western Europeans came with Christianity and the Arabs with Islam we had our own believes and very strong traditions (ancestral and animistic). However the inversions imposed on us, telling us that our own believes and traditions should be rejected, that they are evil – that made people think. So people started to accept the new religions without further questioning and most of us abandoned our own religion. Our elders did not understand the principles of those new religions. They were obliged to accept them in order to collaborate with western countries and Arabs. That affected me a lot. I have grown up in such dilemma where couples are fighting because of religions; there are villages fighting each other because of imposed religion."

Male, Nepal: “In Nepal Hindu is the predominant religion. There is an animal whom we respect thus it has a peculiar status. It is the dog. I have my personal feeling about dogs. Here in Finland I have seen people sleeping in the streets; but I have never seen dogs doing so. Dogs have a high status here. Contrary to in Nepal where you’ll find dogs lying in the streets, beaten, killed, chased. But when the time comes for this particular festival called kukur tihar or dog tihar, we search for dogs to worship. We go to other peoples’ house to put garlands, worship and to offer sweets. And then again from next day we forget the festival and the importance of the dog is not realised again until the next festival. On Facebook I have seen a video of some policemen beating some dogs and the crowd were just watching them. But people forget their negative attitude about the dog when we celebrate this festival. Why do we worship the dogs if they are treated badly? It is a peculiar culture. This is an introject about that we respect different animals in different countries.”

Male, Ethiopia: “When I was a child my mother told me my religion has to be an orthodox and also I have to obey what the orthodox religion has said and asks me to do. However the fact is that I didn't know much about my religion, but since I was told by my mother that I have to be an Orthodox then I am right now. If someone asks me why I am an Orthodox I really don't have a good reason for that, and it always surprises me why I am doing this; but I know that I will continue having this religion until I die. Since I have accepted everything I was told as child without any questions, it will always stay in mind that I have to be like this and do what my mother has told me to do.”

Male, Nepal: “This is a very good story from Nepal that will be an excellent example of introjection. Long time ago a farmer lived with his son and a cat. In Nepal there is once every year a ritual to perform on the anniversary of the death of your parents. One day when the farmer was doing that ritual, the farmer first tied his cat to a pole fearing it may disturb while performing the ritual. His son had seen it. After the farmer died the son went to borrow a cat from his neighbour and tied it to the pole of his house thinking that it was necessary for the ritual. In fact the son had an introject that it was necessary to have a cat tied before performing the ritual.”

Introjection and school

Male, Vietnam: “My sister is left-handed, but she always writes using her right hand. Long ago, when she was learning how to write, her teacher(s) would actively discourage her from using her preferred hand and make her write with her right hand instead. Apparently, the only explanation given was that she should use her right hand to write because it was the “nor-

mal” thing to do. Thus, despite her left hand being dominant, she can’t use it to write as well as she could with her right hand.”

Male, Russia: “I was studying in Finland in grade school. I sensed my teachers were angry with me for some reason; but I couldn’t figure out exactly why. Then after a parental meeting that my mom had had, she told me the problem was that we (my sister and I) weren’t maintaining direct eye contact while speaking with our teachers. From their point of view, that was a sign of our disrespectfulness towards them, however for me, it was pretty normal. Actually in Russia, direct eye contact can be considered as a sign of aggression. Later on, I learned to keep eye contact and now have a common Finnish deadly-stare attitude. This describes achieving confluence through introjection.”

Male, Nepal: “Here in Finland I have found a strange thing during my studies. The teachers do not like the students to call them Sir/Madam but rather they would prefer to be called by their respective names. Back in Nepal it was totally forbidden to call a teacher by their name and if done so you would be penalized. Since I had learned from my childhood not to call a teacher by the name still today I have the same habit and I rarely call the teacher; instead I try to ask my friends if I have a problem with my assignment.”

5.3 PROJECTION

“Public opinion is nothing else but what people think other people think.”

Alfred Austin

According to Perls (Perls et al., 1951):

“A projection is a trait, attitude, feeling, or bit of behaviour which actually belongs to your own personality but is not experienced as such; instead, it is attributed to objects or persons in the environment and then experienced as directed towards you by them instead of the other way around.”

According to Hostrup (Hostrup, 2010):

“Feelings, thoughts, assessments, etc. which for some reason cannot be accepted as one’s own are automatically attributed to someone else. This leaves the person free to respond to them and thus maintain contact with the form and content of the projected feature. When we use projection in the contact with another person, we achieve contact with parts of ourselves that are not recognized as “me”, but we fail to achieve contact to the other person.”

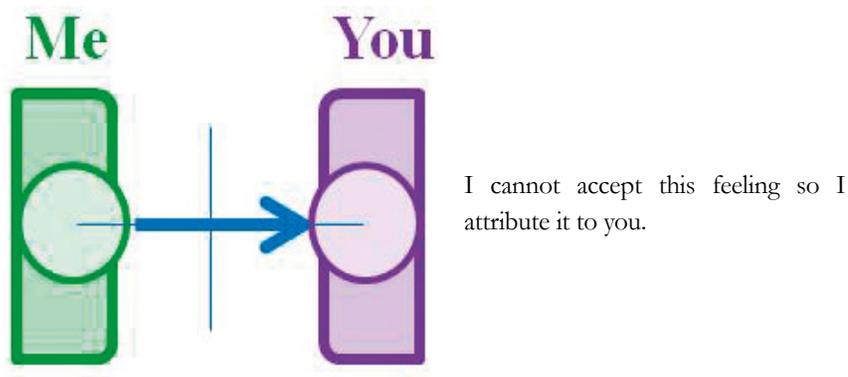


Figure 5.9. Illustration of the concept projection.

So you have some feelings you cannot accept as your own and then you attribute them to someone else. But when you use projection in your contact with another person you actually get in contact with parts of yourself that you do not know are there, that you do not know about yourself – but you do not get in contact with that other person.

Persons that project are usually not aware of this and one of the common ways not to take responsibility for oneself is to project one's feelings onto other people.

Before we continue with Projection, we should like to explain “The Time Line” and “Imagination”.

5.3.1 Time Line

Let us see if we can look at the subject Projection in another way. Above we looked at how we distinguish between the past, the present and the future. How do we know that something we experienced actually was in the past? And something that we plan to do is in the future? Scientists have found that most people in the western world experience the time in a linear way, that is to say that events happen one after another on a line. One day follows another like pearls on a string. And this is what we use in order to be able to distinguish between the past, the present and the future. Some people experience that their time line is some meters in front of them, the past is to the left and the future is to the right (or vice versa). It seems that many people sense a time line in a way as if the past is a line behind you and the future is a line in front of you; but even if you don't please try this.

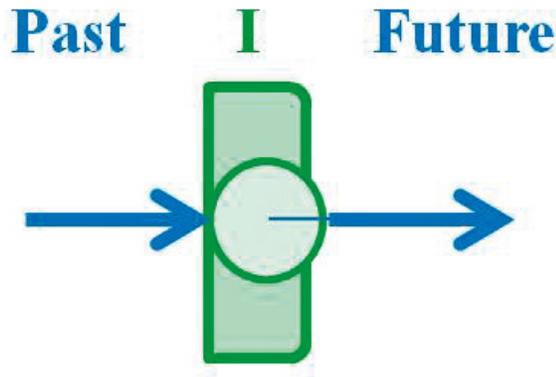


Figure 5.10. Illustration of the concept time line.

Place yourself standing on the floor in the middle of a room; imagine that your future is on a line on the floor in front of you. When you can imagine that, turn the upper part of your body around (don't move your feet) and imagine that your past is behind you. You were born in the corner and every cm that you get closer is a day, week or a month (depending on how old you are and how big the floor you have). Think of an experience or situation, take a look at your line and try to find where you sense it belongs. Try to remember what actually happened. You remember something if there is an emotion connected to the situation. If you are careful you will experience that emotion connected to the situation. All those many days of your life when nothing happened and you remember nothing is because there was not an emotion associated. When you have tried this exercise a couple of times you will have a sense of what it is about.

5.3.2 Imagination

Imagine that you are at your job busy working on your computer. Your boss enters your office introducing your new colleague. You take one look at him and decide that you do not like him at all. Then at home you look at your time line in the past. Way down the line you find a person who was nasty to you and who looked rather much like your new colleague. So it is not your new colleague that you don't like, it is the nasty person whom you see in your new colleague that you experience again. You project the nasty person from the past to your new colleague; you could also say that you put an imagination of the nasty person between you and your colleague. So you do not communicate with your new colleague but with an imagination of the nasty person.

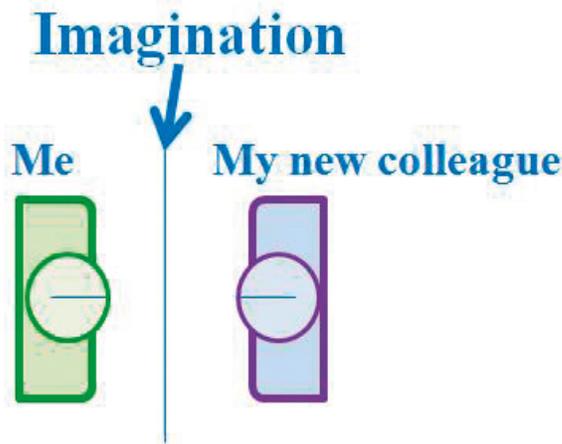


Figure 5.11. Illustration of the concept imagination.

A large part of the interaction with other people is about projections. We project previous individuals on the new we meet. For example, if a person has had a very strict father, this person could easily project his father on older men that are similar to his father. Other projections could be about priests, policemen, doctors, teachers, politicians, government officials etc. or it may be that somebody just looks different from you.

Some students have experiences of this:

Male, Algeria: “After living in Finland for some time I started to get to know some people and make friends. Sometimes it would be that after telling where I come from and because of the beard I have in my face, people call me “terrorist”! Now whether it was to be seen as a joke or seriously it was neither funny nor offending; but I could not keep engaging all the time to the same conversation, trying to explain what it is like to be a terrorist, a man with a beard, an Arab or an Islam adherent. But I always kept wondering why would some people think that way?!! Well now it’s all clear of course, since we have all been reading news about terrorism and international organized crimes, 9/11, suicide bombing... most of the time these news are connected to Arabs or Muslims, and pictures of convicted men are most of the time with a beard, so the connection is easy to make. People just project these images and ideas on the person with the least resemblance and things in common.

However, I myself was doing that too, at least at one point, the fact that I was worried about the way people are going to think of me is kind of a projection too, I heard some people do consider every Arab or Muslim as a terrorist so I assumed and expected to see that from everyone I met here, but of course that was seldom the case.”

Male, Ethiopia: “I had lived in Finland for 5 years and I experienced my fair share of racism in my stay. I had been approached by racist people from all ages but more from young to middle aged men who are bald and heavily tattooed. So I always approach such people with care and try to make as little contact or interaction as possible since I projected racist people to this physical appearance. But one time I was in a club when a bald, very muscular and heavily tattooed and pierced man was giving me a look while continuously getting close to my vicinity. I tried to avoid looking at him or talking to him at all because I did not want trouble at the time. But at the end he approached me and talked to me. It turned out that he wanted to meet and was interested in getting to know people from different cultures and backgrounds and he turned out to be a very nice guy. We ended up exchanging phone numbers and getting along well. The guy was not a racist and I couldn’t have been more wrong about my projection.”



Figure 5.12: Some people have projections on policemen. (Nepal, Finland.)

Male, Kenya: “I grew up in Nairobi the capital city of Kenya, in a part called Dandora. It is in the Eastland’s area with lot of crime related activities. Due to this, the police have been deployed all over the area. Most of these policemen are corrupt and money hungry and would do anything to set you up if you have an empty pocket. Growing up in this place gave me bad

attitude towards police and anytime I hear siren I always relate it to a crime scene being speculated. I had only been in Finland for 4 days when I heard a wailing noise. I was gripped by fear and I thought something bad had happened not knowing I am only projecting on my past experience. I also used to be scared when meeting or passing next to the policemen at night for fear of being interrogated for no good reason. And now that I know, the truth has overcome these emotions; the only problem is that they will be part of my life as it is never easy to forget where you were brought up.”

Male, Ethiopia: “The first time I came to Finland I had a strange reaction from the security controllers. It was my first time to arrive in Finland’s Vantaa International airport and on that day, I was the only black person on that flight. After arriving at the airport everybody collected his/her luggage and passed through the security control to the exit or transit gates – but it didn’t happen the same way for me. The security controllers asked me to enter one of the check rooms where the strange suspicious event occurred. After entering the room one of the two security officers asked me to show my travel documents and I handed to him my passport and my European country residence permit. The two officers stared at my passport photo, my face and then photo on the residence permit card, again and again. They were also searching for details related to my documents in their systems. Soon after, one of the officers picked up a telephone and called another officer who arrived within a minute. The new officer did exactly the same as the previous two – stared at me and then at the photos on the documents and then searching in their system. Then they made a call to another office, somebody came and did the same thing. When they called a third one I started feeling bad about what they were doing. I thought this all have happened to me because I was the only black person passing through the security check at that time. Anyway, after being scrutinized by two plus three officers from other rooms for about 50 minutes and after screening my luggage by the x-ray machine at least two times and checking the items in the luggage one by one, they told me that they are sorry for the inconvenience happened and I can now go, because everything was alright.

I left the airport still thinking that they did this to me only because I am a black person and assuming the Finnish people are racist. Later I shared my story with some friends and they told me that the awkward situation had happened to me because the Finnish security officers were cheated by Somalis in many occasions in which case more than one person used a single travel document (passport) to enter Finland. It was only at that moment I started thinking the happening of the situation from other perspective.”

Female, Finland: “I remember an incident from the time when I was a little girl, perhaps 3-4 years old. My mother and I went to the library and

she had to sort out some library fines she had gotten from not returning the books on time. I projected fines as a police matter and started crying because I thought my mother was going to jail. Really she only needed to pay them a couple of coins to get rid of the fines. For a long time I was scared of library personnel because I projected them as people who might put you in jail.”

Make sure to think of the fact that in the company of others and especially people you have just met, you may have some thoughts or feelings, and here it is good to be aware of the fact that it may be a projection, as much of our being together with other people is about projections.

Male, Ethiopia: “My example dates back to my freshman year when I was studying Textile Engineering at Bahir Dar University. We were attending Engineering Drawing Course. Fortunately, the teacher was a female and she looked like my mother both in appearance and in behavior. Her resemblance with my mother helped me to acquaint myself well with the course and I was feeling free to ask whatever question as far as the course was concerned. ”

Male, Nepal: “Well back in Nepal I have a girlfriend, her name is “N”, we are still in a relationship and I hope it goes well in future. Now I am in Finland and there is a girl in our class, her name is “J” and when I saw her the first time I was shocked because the way she talks and the way she behaves. Her attitude towards things was almost the same as my girlfriend – which is why I am so positive towards her and eager to talk with her. I think this is because of projection. Before I didn’t know how this can affect a person’s life but now after this class I feel projection plays a very important role in our communication.”

Male, Finland: “I actually met a really good friend thanks to this course. There was a man in the same Thai boxing training camp that I go to, we never spoke to one another, but I still had very negative feelings about the man. It had something to do with the way he looked, but I couldn’t really point out what it was. One day when we were to partner up to do certain exercises, I went up to him to partner up with him instead of walking the other direction and choosing someone else. I noticed he felt very awkward during this situation, but after 10 minutes of sparring and having a few laughs after that, we became really good friends. It became clear a bit later that he felt that I looked at him angrily, even though that was never my intention. I cannot point out what I was projecting in him, but clearly it wasn’t anything positive. I have undoubtedly learned not to judge a book by its cover, and to try and remove any negative sensations through communicating. I always considered myself a very social person,

but it has since come to my attention that I was mostly only social with people I knew or wanted to get to know. For some reason I blocked out other people, and have left out many good people from my life.”

Male, Nepal: “I had a friend with long hair and beard he was really mean and really selfish so whenever I see a person with long hair and beard it reminds me of him and I used to imagine that that person is mean and selfish like my old friend so I didn’t use to talk with the people of this appearance.”

Male, Nepal: “Some people may look bad in their appearance; but they may be good from inside. So, we should not judge them by looking at them. We can know a person only when we communicate with him/her. So, it is very important to talk to people if we want to know more about them. There may be many similarities between us although we look different. It happens many times in our life. Like last summer I met a girl in a bar who looked like gothic and she had a strange haircut. She had a lot of tattoo on her body. She looked like a freak out girl but when I talked to her I knew she was a very emotional girl. She was just opposite of her looks. It proves that what we see is not true always.”

Male, Finland: “I feel a bit awkward about other people’s projection towards engineers and IT experts in Finland and abroad, which tend to focus on the negative stereotypes. I’ve never felt myself of being a part of any sub-culture. I just like many things, but being labelled as a nerd, an engineer (usually along the line: “engineers don’t have any feelings/emotions”) or even sometimes as a Goth (because I like post-punk music), causes me to alienate from people who’re keen to projecting and labelling. But indeed, it is very hard not to project in some cases, as mind can only handle so many individuals, after which it is almost necessary to start projecting some traits to other people based on their actions. I think it is better to be careful, as stereotypes and hyperboles are usually just around the corner, especially if in a bar during the Sunday night football match.”

Male, Finland: “First time you step into the class you might see some familiar faces, but most likely a lot of new ones. People you haven’t met that might be anyone and look like anything. In these situations back at school as well as in life you have to be careful not to judge zebra by its stripes. People are often much more than they seem and you have to keep that firmly in mind. While you might have some projections of these people keep your head cool, calm and collective. This way you can avoid most of the harm done by projections and get to know who those people really are. ”

Projection is feelings etc. which for some reason cannot be accepted as your own and then attributed to someone else. Then you can react on these emotions and in this way stay in contact with the issue. But when you use pro-

jection in your contact with another person you actually get in contact with parts of yourself that you do not know are there, that you do not know about yourself – but you do not get in contact with that other person.

According to Perls (Perls et al., 1951) p 218:

“In the moving picture theatre it is obvious to everyone except small children that the pictures do not emanate from the screen but are reflections of light-patterns cast upon it by the projector. What can appear on the screen, which is simply a blank surface, is strictly contingent on what is on the film in the machine. On the other hand, when a person projects part of his personality, it ordinarily is not upon a blank surface but upon a screen – another person, object, situation – which already possesses in its own right some degree of what is projected upon it. We project onto persons who are “appropriate screens” – that is, who manifest enough of a particular trait or attitude to make it easy for us to justify loading them with our share of it as well.”

Projection often starts with introjection (see Chapter 5.2). Consider the following example:

When you were a child you maybe got angry, you were not allowed to stay up but put to bed, or you wanted some candy just before dinner, or you wanted some toy that belonged to one of the other children. Back then as a child you could not put words on your feelings – anger, disappointment or whatever. You would lie down on the floor and scream while kicking your legs. Your parents would tell you to stop, perhaps shout at you. You would learn that it is not all right to be angry. **“I cannot be angry** – I do not have the permission to be angry”. You hide that feeling far away, perhaps so far away that you don’t even know anymore that anger exists.

Now you are an adult. You have problems at work. Then you get home to your spouse. He or she is busy and may say hello a little bit too fast. Then you can say – *“Oh you are angry”* – your spouse will say – *“No I am just busy”* – then you will say – *“Oh yes I can see that you are angry”* – this will go on for a while and then you can be sure that your wife/husband does get angry – but then it is not you who is angry.

Now that you have read this you know that it is a concealed I-message. Instead you could say: *“I have a notion that you are angry, is it true?”* Here you are checking out your own interpretation and can get some enlightenment from the other person whether it is true or not.

This can happen to any kind of emotion or thought.

As mentioned before projection often starts with introjection. Layla is very keen that we bring in her story:

When I grew up we were three girls in the family, I was respectively four and six years older than my sisters. Our parents had a grocery store and although we lived upstairs from the store my parents were not at home that

much. As a consequence I grew up with introjects like: Layla you **must** do the dishwashing right after dinner, Layla you **ought to** look after your sisters, Layla you **cannot** go over to your friend because we **need** you **to** help with - -, etc..

Now I am an adult woman and I work in a big company. I like to wear high heels on my shoes so I can hear myself; it makes me feel more effective and competent. I really like to take responsibility and make other people work. One day I was wearing a new pair of shoes with very high heels and after some hours it got too much so I took off my shoes while I was sitting at my desk. When I wanted to go to the kitchenette I had forgotten about the shoes and walked on my bare feet so nobody could hear my effective walking. As I approached the kitchenette I could hear some colleagues of mine talking. One said: "Oh she is so bossy, she won't really let me get into anything". The other answered: "Ha Domina always prefers to do everything herself", and some other things. I was shocked but knowing they had not heard me I silently slipped back to my desk. I got something to think about. Was I really that awful? I decided to change my behaviour so the next time someone had a birthday I did not start a collection to buy a gift, nor did I choose what to give or go out to buy it, as opposed to what I usually would do. At the next meeting in our department I waited for a very long time before I said anything at all even though I really wanted to say very much. When something was broken in our department's kitchen I did not call someone to fix it, as opposed to what I usually would do. I began to feel I was really changing my attitude. Then our company celebrated something and we had a reception. I had been talking to somebody and finishing the conversation I turned round and saw my two colleagues from the kitchenette. They smiled and looking at me one said: "Yes Domina has definitely surpassed herself". I was shocked. Not only was she looking at me while she said it; but she also knew I could hear it. Then I got angry and I asked a bit too loud: "So who is Domina?" They both smiled even more and said at the same time that it was the "mother in law" of both the women. Some months ago they had found out that they were dating two brothers and sometime later they both had met the mother and she was rather horrible. I had to leave the reception for a little while to think; I was relieved, but then again I couldn't help laughing at myself.

As you can see, Layla got introjections of doing everything herself and then she turns it to a projection that the others see her like that.

Projections can be about what you think you know or what you think you want.

Male, Nepal: “In my past life, I never lived in abundance. In other words, we always had some kinds of financial limitations. So, I used to live in fear, and limitation regarding financial issue. And my social life was not very smart (what people say smart). When I met people that had an expensive home, nice car and pricey clothes, I used to think that they were very smart and they thought of us as very weak and poor people and I used to feel nervous to talk to them. But, now when I own my car, have enough money for doing and buying the things that I want, I realize that my fear and nervousness was just my projection.”

Male, Ethiopia: “When I was in Ethiopia, weather was typical equatorial; we had sun all the year round. Looking at movies, I always wished that we rather had snowy season – Christmas times on movies had snowy scenes, and I always wondered what it would be like to have a snowy season. In movies, I only saw people having fun with the snow and all the sport activities associated to it. After I came to Finland however, snow started to have another definition to me. Lengthy winters in Finland gave me another perspective when it comes to liking the snow. I started to develop a completely different outlook for snow and I started to dislike it. Because snow usually was associated with Christmas time, I projected wrongfully how wonderful could it be. At least for me, my projection was wrong.”

Male, Nepal: “When I was back home in Nepal my thoughts of some western countries (North American and Europe) were like life is just easy out there. People earn their money easily and there isn’t any big trouble like in some poor countries in Asia and Africa, so I thought that I would go there and have a happy and wonderful life. But reality was total different maybe these countries do not have difficult issues like poverty and hunger; but still life over here is more hectic and sometime you can get a mental issue because of it like tensions and stress. Life is by no means easy and hard work is needed in every step for the success and survival over here. So my projection about western life style totally changed when I arrived here and got to be a part of it.”

Food can be a physical item you can project onto. For example if you have been on a holiday and got something to eat that gave you a food poisoning. This incident has given you a bad experience. Later when you at home

are offered this type of food you may get some bad feelings that make it so that you have no desire to eat the product on offer – although hygiene at home is good and there is no danger in enjoying this food.

Female, Croatia: “When I was a child, I was once travelling by car with my parents. During the car trip I was eating a chocolate with strawberry filling. I felt really sick, I suffer from motion sickness, but I thought that it was because of the chocolate I ate. Now whenever I see a chocolate with fruit filling, I can’t help feeling sick to my stomach and thinking that it must taste really awful.”

Male, Nepal: “My cousin lived in some upper hilly part of my country Nepal and was fond of meat and especially chicken. But one day when he was round 7-8 years old, he on his way back from school saw some chicken in the street eating shit and rotten stuff available from a container. From that day onwards he even won’t want to hear the name of chicken meat and as far as my knowledge he has still not eaten chicken.”

Male, Finland: “Soon after I turned 18 a friend of mine introduced me to an alcoholic drink called whiskey. I liked the strong taste. For many years after that I used to have glass of whiskey quite regularly. So it became kind of a habit to me. It all changed however few years ago when I was celebrating pre-Christmas party with some of my co-workers. I was having a small whiskey drinking contest with my co-worker. I’m quite light weight I lost it pretty badly. As a result the next day I had a massive hangover; but it also happened to be a really cold night so I managed to get cold as well. So not only did I have a hangover but I also had quite high fever the following days. Needless to say I didn’t feel like drinking for few a weeks after that. But next time when I did happen to open a bottle of whiskey I discovered something strange. Suddenly after the party the whiskey had started to smell and as soon as I smelt it I started feeling really nauseous. At first I thought there had to be something wrong with that bottle, but sure enough the same thing happened with every other whiskey bottle as well. So ever since that party I have been stuck with this projection of feeling nauseous whenever I smell whiskey. It’s funny actually that I still remember how good whiskey tastes, but I just can’t taste it because the smell triggers that projection.”

Male, Ethiopia: “My friend, Biniam, told me about his business trip to another country. There was a lot of work but on the last day Biniam and the rest of the group were finished with their meetings and they were going to have some fun. Biniam was the only one from Ethiopia, so whatever was decided by the group Biniam would also follow. For lunch the group decided to go to this big restaurant. When it was time to order, one of the local tour guides who were showing them around suggested they all have

this special dish. Just as the tour guide was explaining about the dish, Biniam got a call from his boss and asking to be excused from the table he told the guy sitting next to him to order whatever he was having for him also. Then he went outside to take the call. Biniam got back and had his lunch. He ate well and really had a good time. Then later Biniam asked the person next to him what the dish was called. The person told him the name and said that he never expected horsemeat would taste like this. Then Biniam realised that he had had horsemeat for lunch and suddenly he was sick. He started vomiting all over the place. Finally he had to be taken to hospital. The thing is Biniam grew up in a very strict religious family and all his life he was told which animals can be eaten and which cannot. People who disobey these rules are considered evil spirited. So the fact that he ate the so called wrong type of food had made him realize, concisely, that he was going to be treated as a person with evil spirit. So his body reacted to that and made him sick, even though the food was perfectly healthy and no other from the group who ate the horse meat got sick.”

One can also project onto **sound or words**. It may be that there is a person who talks to you in a certain tone or with words that make you afraid. For example a woman as a child had experienced that when her father wanted to talk about something unpleasant he would said: “*Mary I have something I want to talk to you about*”. When Mary later in life meets people who say “*Mary I have something I want to talk to you about*”, Mary gets a sense of discomfort because she expects something disagreeable will be taken up. Here we are talking about an inappropriate way to respond because Mary automatically is projecting her father on all people who say this sentence, regardless of whether it might be something nice that person wants to say to Mary.

Female, Finland: “Some years ago I had my favourite song as an alarm tone of my mobile. Later on, every time I hear that song I feel tired and stressed and I can easily get the cold and dark feeling I had when the alarm rang at 6 in the morning.”

Male, Nepal: “My friends and I were on a vacation in a village, which has a dense forest going uphill. There is another village on the top of the hill and we were heading towards the village on the path that leads through that dense forest. We were drunk; festival was already flowing inside us. On our way, we had crossed almost half of the forest when suddenly we heard some peculiar sound somewhat roaring type. Then one of my friends who had been living there for a long time shouted in an unconscious mind, “Tiger” and we all were in a marathon again to the downhill village as a quick response for the call. When everyone was in peace and rest, we tried to recall what the sound was like. It was certainly not a Tiger and it was extinct in that forest. Then the other guy said it was the sound

of a “Huchil” a big bird that resembles owl. He told us that he had been in that situation before and had also confused that sound for a tiger. And we all ended laughing aloud at the end.”

Sometimes we all have emotions that we just cannot quite figure out. We can't always understand the way we react in certain situations. It is important to bear in mind that:

You have the feelings you have, and it is important that you listen to them no matter how childish, foolish, etc, you think they are. There is a reason for you to have them. This does not mean that you should not be more aware of the feeling and try to understand it better in order to change your future behaviour if necessary.

If you get annoyed or upset or something else by a colleague or a fellow student it is a good idea to find out why you have this feeling.

Cecillia: “I had just finished my studies and had only had my first real job for about three weeks. I was working at a company as an architect designing open plan offices, but everybody around me were sales people so I was working with them; but then again I was not since I was working with another boss. At my work a guy had got a new flat and invited all of us that worked in that open plan office with him to a house warming party on Friday – the specific hour of when to arrive would be announced later. But I heard nothing. He had taken some days off to work in his flat and I did not feel like asking the others about the time because what if they said it was a secret and I was not supposed to be invited to the party. I had only worked in the job for a short time and I was still rather insecure of everything. So I felt still worse. I almost could not look into peoples’ eyes. On the very day I felt I could not go on any more. He was back on the job and I went straight up to him and confronted him a little bit angry about the party. I felt I would rather have him say straight to my face that he did not want me to come because I was new and he didn't know me yet. Then he explained that the cooker he had received from a shop was the wrong one and he had returned it immediately. Thus he could not cook. He had told someone who was supposed to tell me that the party had been postponed since he himself was working at home. The party took place later and I had a nice evening.”

I was insecure and it was my projection that I thought that he did not want me to come since I was new and we did not know each other so well.

Female, Finland: “I was at work and all my colleagues got iPads but I didn't. The situation felt like maybe they didn't appreciate me enough as a worker. I didn't care about the iPad but I was thinking could they have given the iPads when I was not around if I was the only one not getting it. I did keep

this inside me but I it might have been better to ask right away what was the reason for this.”

Female, Germany: “I think I am a person who often gives many thoughts to situations that are happening. So I have the same problem as Cecillia had in her example at her first job with the guy, who gave a party. In a situation like that I would have reacted like her because I would have been insecure and would have worried whether he would want me at his party. In these situations I often think I know what the other person thinks about me, so I project my thoughts to this person without knowing what he/she really thinks.”

Always remember that it is most important to talk to people, what happened, how did you feel in the situation, how did the other person feel? Did you misunderstand each other? Talking is the easiest way to avoid misinterpretations, after all.

5.3.3 I see, I assume

“Objectivity is what we wish, that other people will show to other people.”

Gabriel Laub

I see, I assume – is not a contact form. We have already worked with the fact that when we meet new people or get a new colleague we unconsciously attribute something to that person. When we meet someone we have seven seconds to make an impression.

When YOU meet someone YOU make sure to give them more than seven seconds.

Meeting someone for the first time it is very likely that you will make some interpretations about that person’s behaviour or personality. In this book you have looked at different kinds of contact forms which are responsible for the way you perceive someone you have just met. It could be that you dislike someone before you have even started a conversation because of some kind of interpretation that you have made, or it could be a person that does something, which is completely usual for his environment but very abnormal for yours. This may make you draw a conclusion about the person so you should take into consideration that there are differences in your backgrounds that may lead you to an interpretation far from the truth. This chapter is about why you should not interpret or draw any conclusions before you have given yourself the chance to talk to him/her and tried to look at the situation from the other person’s perspective.

In our class we have an exercise about the subject “I see, I assume” and the following took place:

Person “A”: *“I see that you don’t have a piercing in your ear – I assume your mother will not allow you to get that.”* (“A” has a piercing in his ear but it turned out that his mother insisted that he should take away the little earring that he wore).

Person “B”: *“My mother would indeed not mind if I choose to get a piercing; but actually it is because I am very scared of needles and injections.”*

Another example:

Person “A”: *“I see that you wear a cap all the time – I assume that it is because you are bald.”*

Person “B”: *“I am not bald (took off his cap to prove it) but I have some problem with my eyes and too much light.”*



Figure 5.13. I see, I assume is a great tool for finding out how different your first interpretation is from what you actually ascertain later. (Photo by Pavone.)

I see, I assume – is not a contact form; but you can use it as a tool, experience or awareness exercise to find out how different your first interpretation is from what you actually discover later. When you have done this exercise many times you really understand the sentence: Any interpretation is wrong

even if it is right. You will get much more out of your communication if you are able to remain neutral and awaiting.

Cecilia: In Denmark we have adult education colleges which sometimes are old schools and sometimes big buildings located in beautiful surroundings. These places have some courses for just one or two weeks during the summer. Being interested in the subject of that week I joined a class at one of these buildings way out in the country by a lake and a forest. I would obviously meet some people for the first time; but I would also get the chance to get to know them better and find out how they really were – so I decided to use the “I see, I assume” method during that week and be very conscious about what I interpreted. There were many people present that week and many stories, but here I have chosen the ones that hopefully will make you think about your own “I see, I assume” situations.

It was Saturday noon on my way to the school. At the small station a couple of km from the school we got off the local train and on the way to the minibuss that would take us to the school I saw this gorgeous looking woman, well dressed, make-up and haircut perfect. I assumed it meant a lot to her that all men would look at her with admiration. Arriving at the school just outside the office I met a woman rather chubby and then it was very easy to think that she was the type that loved food. As I entered the corridor to my room I met a good looking young man in old clothes that were not so neat, there were several spots of paint both on his jeans and his T-shirt. I just assumed that he probably did not have so much money and perhaps he was an artist probably a painter.

About my interpretation of the gorgeous looking woman. On Wednesday a teacher was late and the class was cancelled until late afternoon. Almost everybody went for a walk round the lake. Not feeling quite well, staying at home I got into the library. There she was, still looking like a million. I said that it was not easy to go for a walk in those high heels and offering her my shoes we started to talk. Then I got her story; but here I shall just write a short version. She felt she was not dressed unless she knew everything was absolutely perfect. It was indeed not because she wanted men to notice her; but her upbringing had made her so extremely insecure inside and she had to have a perfect facade outside to make it through life. She really was a very nice and sweet person.

About my interpretation of the good looking young man. One of the days we had group work and I was in the same group as he. At some point I said something which I don't remember, but it was something about old clothes. However he caught my hint and when we had a coffee break he told me about himself. All during week he had to be impeccable well dressed since he worked in the finance business. The only way he felt that he could relax was if he was wearing his old favourite clothes and during this week he just wanted and needed to be so far away

from his job as possible. Incidentally it turned out that the spots of paint on his clothes were from painting his flat.

About my interpretation of the rather chubby woman. Having noticed her immediately at my arrival and having assumed that she was probably the type that took extras at the dessert I had noticed during the whole week if she was eating more than the rest of us. (Yes, I know I am very bad-mannered!) However she never really ate that much and didn't touch the desserts at all. It was Friday evening before I had the chance to sit next to her and knowing this was my last chance, I was eager to hear her story. Only you just don't ask people why they are overweight. Since the course ended the next day a bowl of sweets was passed around. I took some and so did she. Later the bowl got back again and I took some and so did she. Knowing I had to plunge into the subject I said something about that eating the sweets wouldn't make us fat until tomorrow. She said she did not like sweets at all but only took it because everybody else did. (Confluence). Then she said she had to be very careful about what she would eat and I replied that we all do. Yes, well she was on a treatment at the University Hospital in Copenhagen because she and her husband wanted a child so much. Since she had started the treatment she had gained more than 25 kilo in just eight months. Do I need to tell that I felt so ashamed of my interpretation – never since that evening, have I drawn any conclusions as to why people are overweight.

Here are some reflections from our students on the subject I see, I assume:

Male, Finland: “When I was starting high-school I had a hard time making friends at first. I spoke with a lot of people and I thought I had had positive and pleasant interactions, but the people did not react to me any differently afterwards. At some point I realised that I was always wearing a very dull and uninterested expression and exhibited a much closed body language. After that I started to consciously smile more and use more open poses, as well as walk more upright. After these adjustments I had no problems with socialising and made lots of new friends.”

Male, Ethiopia: “The exercise “I see, I assume” was a great experience. We always tend to make decisions from what we see. The conclusions we make are more likely to be wrong. I have noticed myself making many decisions about people. The bad thing is sometimes I never tried to get to know more about the person. The conclusions I have made at the earlier stage prevent a further communication between the person and me. When we did the exercise “I see, I assume”, I learned more about my group mate. I found out the real reason why he was having something or acting in a specific way. Afterwards it was easy to have a talk with my group mate.

We managed to talk about other things and talk about our opinions. After having a close talk with a person, I am sure it would become nearly impossible to forget that person. Therefore it was an exercise that gave me something special.”

Female, Croatia: “We did the exercise “I see, I assume”, which was really powerful and I have learned a lot from it. I realized how quick I am to judge other people by their appearance and the small gestures that they do. As it was the other person’s turn to do the exercise, I understood how they can judge me by the way I look. For some reason, I have never really thought so much about that. I remember that my partner looked at my watch and said that he thought I like big expensive jewellery. That really stroke something with me, as it couldn’t be more further from the truth.”

Male, Ethiopia: “I have experienced that sometimes I assume some things and put it into my mind and then project it on somebody – it could be good or bad about that person. The thing is that I always do this kind of things but I haven't done anything about it because I didn't even know I have this problem. The other thing that was special for me was that it was so easy to start talking to someone with the words “I see, I assume”. When we first started this small talk thing I didn't think it would turn to a big talk; but after we had talked small talk about the “I see, I assume” part we went to another subject and we talked the whole time about other things and this hit me that by starting small talk we can start talking much more which is very good for me since I am not that much of a talker myself.”

Male, Nepal: “This happened to me some years ago. I was going to my village. I had to walk about 5 hours to reach to my village as there was no transportation. It was a hot summer. After I had walked around 2 hours I got tired and thought of resting under a huge tree. I went there and saw an old man also sitting there. We started talking. In the middle of our talk he asked my age, I said I am 16 years and I asked him his age, he replied he was 10 years old. I got angry and also surprised to see an old man joking or telling a lie. I stopped talking to him as I thought he was a mad arrogant man. After few minutes of silence he started talking again sensing that I didn’t like his answer. He said, “I think you didn’t like my answer. My age is 60 years but I said my age is 10 years because I didn’t do anything and was just living for 50 years. I just started understanding life these past 10 years so I consider myself being 10 years. I was amazed to hear his answer and was ashamed of myself for projecting him as a mad man. I just had a negative projection of him. When we were doing the “I see I assume exercise” I just remembered this incident of my life.”

5.4 DEFLECTION

“Good upbringing is not to avoid spilling sauce on the tablecloth; but to behave as if nothing has happened, when somebody else does so.”

Anton Tjechov, (1860 – 1904).

According to Polster (Polster et al., 1973): *“Deflection is a way to avoid direct contact with a person. It is a way to get the “hot” focus away from the conversation.”*

According to Hostrup (Hostrup, 2010): *“Deflection is a process where some of the input from the other person is ignored.”*

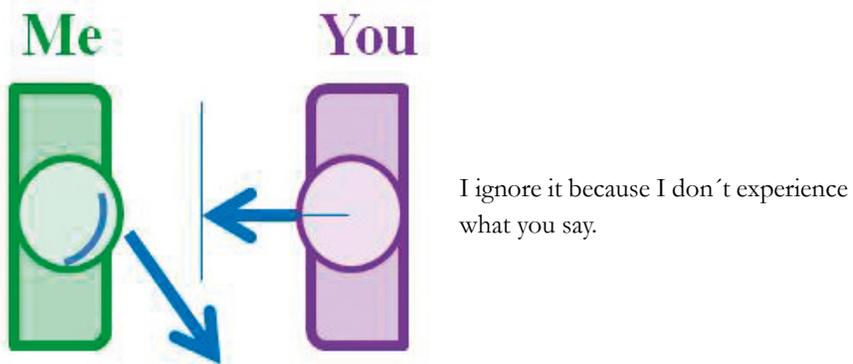


Figure 5.14. Illustration of the concept deflection.

You are together with somebody that says or does something that you do not want to experience – you ignore it or you turn focus to another topic. Deflection can be done in a variety of ways: By starting to talk about other things, laugh at what is said, look elsewhere than in the eyes of the person who is speaking, by making bad examples, by talking abstract rather than specific, to look at your watch or your mobile phone etc.

Cecilia: “I was at a dinner party – we talked about South America since one of the guests – “D” – had just come back from Peru. He had had a most fantastic journey and talking about other things also mentioned Machu Picchu, how beautiful the view was there. Another guest – “L” did not say a word during all this while the others had made a lot of comments. Suddenly she said very loud – since you are talking about views – I can’t help telling you how beautiful Florence looks, when standing on the hill on the other side of the river. Then she started talking about the Uffizi museum

and suddenly we all were talking about Italian art. Since I knew that “L” had actually been to Machu Picchu I later asked her why she would not talk about that. It turned out that she had been mugged near Machu Picchu and felt very badly thinking about this.”

She had a negative feeling about the subject Machu Picchu and she made a deflection. This German lady explains extremely well how deflection works and how it feels:

Female, Germany: “It happened at a party. I was there with some of my friends; but they were all smokers and at some time they all went outside to smoke a cigarette. I was alone in the kitchen and suddenly my ex-boyfriend, who was also invited to the party, stood next to me. He began to talk to me, asked me about how life is going, about university and so on. I was friendly and answered his questions. But actually I didn’t want to talk to him so after a short time getting my mobile phone I started to write a text message while my ex-boyfriend was talking to me. I think he noticed this and understood because it only took one or two minutes till he said that someone was waiting for him in the other room and he went away. I know it was not the nicest way to show him that I don’t want to talk to him.

- For me the exercise about deflection was important, because it showed me how it feels when someone deflects you while you are speaking to him. It gave me a really bad feeling I had to concentrate on what I wanted to tell. When the other person began to read in the booklet, to look away and to look at her clock, I had the feeling that she wasn’t interested in what I wanted to tell her and I actually wanted to stop or ask her to listen to me.

This showed me how important it is to listen and show the other person that you are present and aware. I certainly knew this before I joined the course but in real life it often happens that someone is talking to you and you listen but you do another thing at the same time. For example you look at your mobile phone or write a text message at the same time. Even if you think this is okay because you still listen, I now know what feeling it gives to the other person and because of that I will try to avoid such situations.”

Jørgen: A friend of mine told me this story:

“After finishing a project, a partner contacted me wanting a two-hour work-related meeting in order to discuss some issues. Perceiving that most subjects were fine, I thought this meeting would not be necessary and as I had a very busy schedule, I stated that we had to make it a very brief meeting. Shortly after the start of the meeting his phone rang and he talked for a long while. Later his phone rang again and once more he had a lengthy conversation. When we had talked for about 45 minutes he sud-

denly turned to his computer. He turned his back to me when he started working on it. I got very annoyed because I was rather stressed. I asked him if our meeting was over and he said “Yes”, still working at his computer with his back turned towards me. This is how the meeting ended”.

Projection and deflection have the same aim since they protect the Self from certain feelings or thoughts.

Deflection is the kind of contact form that makes it possible for the little child to stay free of unwanted contact. You may have seen how children are able to remain in their own world and you can call and call – they don’t hear you. Babies turn away their head when they don’t want any contact. Deflection is very useful in the sense that it works for all people as a useful avoidance manoeuvre in connection with unwanted contact.

This unwanted contact is something we experience growing up and some may still – even as adults practice some kind of deflection when communicating with the closest family.

Female, Czech Republic: “When I’m talking with my mother I often deflect, because I know she wants to speak with me, and also because I know that if I am fully present and really start reacting to her, we will argue again. We have really different opinions at almost everything and I don’t want to argue with her, because she is my mother and it is not polite. When I was a teenager, we argued all the time, but now when I’m going to see my parents only once in a while it is better to spend time with them in peace.”

Female, Finland: “When talking to my mother I find her deflecting a lot. For example I am in the middle of telling her a story that is important to me, and she will just start talking about something else that has popped into her mind. I have also sometimes noticed that if somebody is telling me a really boring story I easily get distracted and start to think about something else. Maybe then something important comes to my mind and I just have to say it. I know it is really rude and annoying, but I still do it unconsciously.”

Male, Cameroon: “I have noticed that there is a particular topic on which while communicating with my mother, I always deflect. In fact, for almost 2 years now, my mother has always been telling me about marriage. She likes to tell me about friends who are getting married; cousins, younger brothers, etc. In fact in our culture, parents think that they are better aware of the type of partner their son will marry. No matter the level of education of the parents. So each time when my mother brings up that topic, I always deflect, by talking about something else so that she will understand that I don’t want to hold that discussion with her. I remember the last time she wanted to start that discussion. She started by telling me that they found the wife of one of my younger cousins; and reminding me that he is two years younger than me. Surprisingly, I introduced another more

interesting topic, about the business we used to do when I was still in my home country. I started to bring new ideas, and finally, we found ourselves debating about the business.”

Female, Ethiopia: “I have used deflection when my parents ask me questions that I really don’t want to answer. I simply start talking about something else or I continue as if I did not hear the conversation. It can be useful at times but it is always better to face and solve things as soon as possible.”

Male, Finland: “I noticed I can be a little deflective towards my parents when we are on the phone and I just agree to everything they tell me about their day. I guess this isn’t a terribly rare custom for young people but I can see now that it may seem a little rude not to be living in that moment and be responsive towards my parents.”

Male, Kenya: “One of the lessons I learnt from the exercise is that deflection helps in shifting or avoiding a focus and this kind of reminded me of my childhood days. Whenever asking my father to take me to a local museum, he would shift the topic and start talking of how he was going to buy me an airplane and that we would fly it together. I always had a soft spot for planes and by my father mentioning it, I would forget about wanting to go to the museum.”

Female, Ethiopia: “Deflection is something that I have done growing up with my parents. Also it is something I would do to avoid a long argument and if I did something wrong. When someone starts nagging me about something, I would just stay quiet and when they give me space I would try to create a new situation by finding a subject of conversation that is to the interest of that person thus deflecting the situation.”

Female, Czech Republic: “I have an older brother and when we were children we often fought or argued. Still it was something which was usual and we did not care much. However when my brother would really upset me, he started ignoring me. He looked like he did not listen, he never responded me and just started doing some other activity like organizing his work desk or reading something. It always drove me crazy. And still if someone tries to deflect me, I have real trouble handling it with dignity.”

Female, Finland: “I often use deflection when I notice somebody is feeling uncomfortable in a conversation. I change the subject just to get somebody from an awkward situation. I have a relative who always starts a real interrogation when we have family get-togethers; she tries to find out everything, I try to change the subject when I notice the “victim” is feeling uneasy.”

Male, Italy: “I thought that deflection was a negative contact form. But actually I discovered that it is a nice technique that I can use when I need to defend myself from annoying or disturbing conversations or questions.

Unconsciously I noticed that I have used it often when talking with my parents or my son. My mom quite often is asking me when I'm going visit them. Because I am not able to answer yet I tend to change the subject and instead of saying that I don't know or I can't come yet I talk about something else that is relevant for her. Another example when I use deflection is when my son says that he doesn't want to do something for example go to the kindergarten. I can't say you have to go, it would bring more problems. So instead of saying that I start to ignore his complains and I start suggesting to him something to do together in the afternoon that I know for sure he would like such as playing with Lego or going outside with his bike.”



Figure 5.15. Deflection can be done in a variety of ways, e.g. looking away from the eyes of the person speaking. Photo from the International Communication Workshop in the DOSSEE IP, Universidad Alcalá de Henares, Spain.

If you after talking to someone feel confused or misunderstood you should try to go through what happened and quite many times you will realize that the other person was deflecting.

You do not get in contact with a person that deflects.

Male, Austria: “There was an exercise when we had to deflect our partner. I really was confused when she started to deflect me. I couldn't think clear and wasn't able to finish a sentence correctly. I understood how important it is to catch the moment when other people start to deflect. A friend of mine always talks about uninteresting issues to the girls when having

a conversation and he isn't very successful. Myself, I don't really realize what people say, because I always think about similar stories in the past, or I am thinking about what to say next. It is important to live in the present while communicating. Listen to what the other person is saying, communicate more directly and react when someone is deflecting me. These are the things I have to practice more. Even for improving the girls-rate, the knowledge about deflection could be quite an important tool."

Male, Nepal: "The most important lesson I learnt during DAY3 was about active listening (related to deflection). In the deflection exercise we did in pairs, when my partner was listening actively I was also talking actively without feeling any hesitation. However, when my partner started to deflect, I was feeling that it was very difficult to talk to him anymore. From this exercise I learnt the importance of active listening to make the communication more smooth and effective."

Male, Finland: "I visited the manager of one of our customers to fix her cell phone. I knew she was a really nice person and we talked for a while before I started working. She was definitely not looking very busy that day. Configuring her phone took a while, so I sat in the corner of her office working. While I was there, one of her employees came to the office to talk about a project. During the first couple of minutes the manager was focused on the employee and asked some questions. After a while the manager opened her e-mail inbox and started to write some mails. Apparently the employee didn't notice that the manager was indirectly telling her to leave. This went on for another couple of minutes until the manager said aloud that she was really busy. Only after that did the employee catch the hint and leave the office."

Male, Finland: "I believe that everybody has experienced deflection in their lives, especially as a child. I myself was somewhat a special case in elementary school, because I "skipped" the first grade and after half a year I transferred straight to the second grade. Because of that I was the outsider of the class since nobody knew me and I was one year younger than everybody else. That is why at first I had no friends, because nobody wanted to talk to me or hang out with me for they didn't know me or wanted to get to know me. When I tried to approach the others at break, they deflected me by moving away and not taking me. This kind of physical deflection happens to most of us sometimes during our lives. The other kind of deflection I can imagine which is very common happens in bars. When a guy is trying to hit on a girl, the guy is talking about himself or about something else, and the girl is not interested, she looks around for her friends or other, more promising guys to go to, just to get rid of the guy who is talking at the moment."

Male, Austria: “There are different kinds of deflections. Like, when I came back to Austria after my Europe-trip, I met a friend in Vienna and we had some beer together. After a while I started to tell him about my idea of a web-platform. First he thought I was making jokes, but after some time he realised, I in fact thought about this issue in a serious way. I felt he wasn’t really interested in my words and his focus wasn’t on it anymore. He started to deflect. I tried to bring on some new reason why such a platform could in fact work, but I was able to see that I had already lost his attention. So I attempted to turn the topic into something else which would seem more interesting to him. Before the course, I wasn’t able to realize, whether someone shared my opinion and I would force a person to listen to my expression of opinion in full-length, but now I know, sometimes it is better to leave an issue for a while if the other person is really starting to deflect.”

Male, Nepal: “While I was in Nepal I was invited to a wedding reception. It was a big party with everyone wearing traditional clothes; but since I didn’t have any such clothes I got there wearing my casual jeans. It was my friend’s house, and we have always been quite close. I brought along a gift and making my way through the room my friend who was also wearing the traditional clothes came to greet me. It had been a long time since we last met. We started to chat but after some time I could see that he was feeling uncomfortable – he started checking his phone. At that moment I knew so I excused myself and got out of there.”

Female, Finland: “I probably talk too much and my subjects are boring because I see people deflecting in my company all the time. Usually it happens when there is a big group and we have a common subject to talk about. When I open my mouth, it quite often feels like no one is listening and even when I quit talking no one notices anything. That is quite rude and annoying and I have tried to rearrange my social network to get rid of that. I have somewhat managed to do so but still this happens if I’m surrounded by people that aren’t my close friends.”

Female, Czech Republic: “I started a new course, where we were supposed to form teams and work together in developing a mobile application. The first task was brainstorming, where we had to come up with fresh ideas. I had already something in mind and I suggested it. The response from two of the team members was quite satisfying as they showed that they would consider my proposal. The third guy however did not say anything about my idea and instead he just suggested another one. I got confused from his reply and decided to test if I understood the situation (Deflection) correctly. I presented my idea again and asked him what he thought about

it. Once more he answered by suggesting another idea and he even turned away his eyesight from me. This was enough for me to understand that he was deflecting me. I was suspecting that the reason for his rejection was that he thought my idea impossible to carry out, so I asked him friendly if he would prefer to avoid this type of ideas for a mobile application. Finally I got his attention and he answered me with a simple “Yes”. This was a nice improvement as we were able to continue our brainstorming exercise and communicate more freely. What I learned during The Course in International Communication helped me in this particular case and I am sure it is going to be useful in many other situations.”

Female, Bulgaria: “One day I met one of my friends. We went to drink beer in a bar and soon after we went for a walk. While we were walking, he started slowing down towards a bus stop. I was having a good time so I thought we would continue to talk for some time. While I was talking, he started to look at his watch and then looked around. I stopped and asked if he was in a hurry, but he said he was fine and we could continue our conversation. After a while he started to look around again and check the time on his watch. I had to ask again, because it was quite obvious to me that there was something. This time he said that he would prefer to leave soon, because he had made another appointment. I, of course, said that it was ok and he could leave. I did not know back then what the term was deflection, but I can say that I noticed it in that situation.”

Deflection and projection both protect the ego/the self against certain emotions, thoughts and conceptions, opinions, views, understandings or ideas.

- ◆ When projecting they are placed on another person.
- ◆ When deflecting you don't experience them at all (they do not exist).

Deflection is as you can see a very effective way of getting rid of unwanted experiences.

Deflection is both positive and negative.

If you don't master deflection to some degree you allow everything from outside to get into you and affect you. You cannot protect yourself emotionally and you will be very vulnerable. When you deflect you are present in the actual situation but your mind is elsewhere. A person who is good at deflection can endure a tremendous amount of “emotional noise” without suffering. However, since you are responsible for your actions you have to make sure that you do not deflect at the times when you are supposed to be present.

Male, Finland: “I tend to deflect quite many labels that people try to stick on me. I have all sorts of hobbies and points of interest, but I have never quite fit the bill to feel part of a group when being labelled. Be it; taste of

music, reading habits, drinking/eating habits etc. Many times I've heard people saying to me that "You're one of the smart guys", but I tend to deflect even some of the compliments – usually for a good reason. Most of my life I have been called gay and right-wing by unknown people. In those cases I find it a lot easier to deflect, as I know I'm neither. Deflecting in those cases is also good for your integrity, if you're just being honest with yourself and your environment."

Male, Nepal: "I have an uncle who is a policeman by profession. He earns well but for some reasons he is always borrowing money from friends. Whenever he meets somebody he always talks about how their job is and how their income is. He asks for money for a certain period of time but when he has to pay back, he is always late. Most of the time, quite late. Consequently, each friend of his tries to avoid him when they meet him, and now he finds that he is in a situation that no one will lend him money.

It is a good thing to be able to remain calm, stay cool, if the situation is turning out of control. If you have made contact with a person and it turns out it is rather dangerous in some ways it is good be able to remain unaffected by the unfortunate situation and just quietly slip away.

Within politics deflection is wanted and used most often. On Danish television the journalists frequently interview politicians. The journalist asks a question and then the politician starts to say a lot, but he does not answer the question. Sometimes the politician says: *"I'm so glad that you ask that question because this gives me the opportunity to say blah blah blah."* According to scientists politicians deflect in three different ways: By ignoring the argument, by distorting the argument, and by rejecting completely without any reason.

Deflection is desirable in many work related situations or in social relations. To be able to tell a little joke or make a logical explanation or actually ignore what has been said or done, or by changing the subject are all different ways to avert an unpleasant incident when you are together with people and something happens. On the other hand if you deflect all the time you become very isolated. You should know that deflecting will "cost" you something, you pay a price.

Male, Ethiopia: "I have this friend who is very addicted to cell phone games. He is so addicted that he doesn't pay much attention even when all of our friends gather up. He is so hooked to the game that he did not pay any attention even to his girl friend so because of his behaviour he lost her. He seems so attentive when someone begins a conversation with him, but it only takes him maybe ten or twenty minutes to go bored out of even a serious conversation, he pops out his cell phone and starts playing his game. Even when someone calls him up, he doesn't reply well in order to make the conversation short and so that he can go back to his cell phone game."

Since deflection appears so innocently you have difficulties criticizing it. However do notice that in a way **deflection is a passive kind of aggression in the sense that you cannot get through with your communication.** This is important so here it is again: If you after talking to someone feel confused or misunderstood you should try to go through what happened and quite many times you will realize that the other person was deflecting. You do not get in contact with a person that deflects:

Male, Finland: “I would like to share an experience of deflection about somebody I know. A person I used to work for was always very sure of himself when it came to his profession. He was a good business man I have to admit. In contrast, his people skills in my opinion left a lot to be desired. Whenever I would bring up a valid point about something, he would either laugh at what was said or bring up a bad example relative to the point I made and thus deflect the attention away from my original topic. He was very clear in mentioning he really didn't care about my point and asking me in return “what has that got to do with anything?” You could say this person was an expert at deflection and used a lot of different ways at different times always avoiding a real dialogue between people if he could.”

Male, Bangladesh: “Deflection is a common thing in Finland especially for a foreigner who is coming from outside of Finland. I have an example: I went to the bank to get a bank statement. I took the queue number; I waited for my turn, one lady was before me. She went to the counter to sort out her problem. The employee was a young woman that talked with her nicely while handling her case and then they had a long nice conversation. When my turn came up I said hello. She said hello to me with a bad expression. I explained my problem into details to her. However it seemed like she did not care about my problem and she was working on other stuff instead of listening to me. I told her again I would like have a bank statement. Instantly she started to give some lame excuse which was quite awkward. I left the bank, thinking what can I do now; I needed to have this statement tomorrow. Basically I was really desperate to get this statement. I went to another branch of the same bank and simply got this statement without any problem. Finally I realized she ignored me so badly which was upsetting and so unexpected.”

Male, Finland: “I still have the skill of deflecting anything if I sense that I have something in my mind which is more interesting or important to think about. It's quite easy for my mind to wander to some school or personal project I'm working on. This of course does happen during normal conversation especially when I'm stressed about something. Funny thing is that most of the time the other person doesn't even realise that I'm

deflecting because my eyes are still looking at the other person and I even have the habit of nodding or otherwise express that I'm in the conversation. But the truth is that my mind is actually doing something completely else and I haven't really heard anything at all. Luckily this usually only happens when I'm stressed about something."

Male, Nepal: "Before I came to Finland I worked at a school. During the starting of the new session a man from a publication came to my working place for the promotion of his publication and wanted to meet me as I was the coordinator. I knew that he wanted me to include his books in my school booklist but that was already fixed and orders were made. I rejected the appointment with that man several times but he continued to come or make calls so at last I agreed to meet him. I called him into my office and asked him to describe his features. I was sure not to use his book as course material, as he was describing I did not pay any attention towards him but just acted being busy. He was trying to convince and draw my attention but I kept on asking silly questions and just looking here and there and using my gadgets. After half an hour the person was tired and felt discomfort. Then he thought that I was not interested and he just stepped out by saying "nice to meet you". From that day he never called me."

Female, Germany: "What I learned about deflection was important because I have changed my behaviour related to this topic. The exercises about deflection showed me how it feels when someone deflects you while you are speaking to him. It gave me a really bad feeling. I had to concentrate on what I wanted to tell. When the other person began to read in a booklet, to look away or to look at her clock, I had the feeling that she wasn't interested in what I wanted to tell her. I actually felt like stopping or asking her to listen to me. This experience showed me how important it is to listen and show the other person that you are present and aware. I know now what feeling it gives to the other person, and because of that I avoid such situations now. And in addition I hate it now, when other people use their mobile phone while they are talking to me or while I am talking to them and I draw their attention to it. For example when I was out with a friend of mine and she started to write a text message while we were in a café just the two of us. I asked her, if she was listening, she said yes and she also told some short stories herself while texting. So I believed her when she said that she listened to me, but in fact I got a bad feeling. It felt weird to me and so I started to do the same, texting on my mobile phone. Now both of us only talked a little and suddenly my friend seemed to notice that this was not the idea of having coffee together. She put away her mobile phone, looked at me and said: "Okay, you are right this is weird

and to be honest I listened but I think I didn't get everything you told me. I'm sorry." From this point on she admittedly used her phone and texted messages, but not all the time and in addition she said: "One moment I just have to answer this message" and after this we continued talking."

Male, Finland: "The exercise in which we had to talk about something interesting to someone who at first was interested and then started to deflect was really an eye-opener to me. I was in the group who did not know what was going on when we started to talk. When the deflection started it was really noticeable. I started to feel that I was wasting my partner's time. In a normal situation that would have been the time to stop talking, and of course it was harder to keep my thoughts together. I felt really bad after it so when it became my time to listen and deflect, I felt horrible. Deflecting is so powerful and made me feel so horrible that I am definitely going to think twice before deflecting someone after this exercise."

5.5 RETROFLECTION

"You should never be afraid to object or to tell people to go away. I was brought up to be a nice girl, listen and keep quiet. That is a big mistake. You should not always remain silent. Even today I work on getting better at saying "fuck off" to people. That is not easy."

Helen Mirren, (1945)

"The perfect husband understands every word his wife doesn't say."

Alfred Hitchcock, (1899-1980)

According to Perls (Perls et al., 1951):

"To retroreflect means literally to turn sharply back against."

According to Hostrup (Hostrup, 2010):

"When we do not speak what is on our mind or act out our impulses but instead restrain our reactions, we are engaging in the process of retroreflection."

According to Jørstad (Jørstad, 1-year NGI):

"The contrast: exchange, experiences, thoughts etc. and to tell what is going on with me. Getting out into the open what is hiding inside me as a person." "When we do not say what we mean or think and do not do what we feel like doing but hold back our reaction, then we retroreflect."

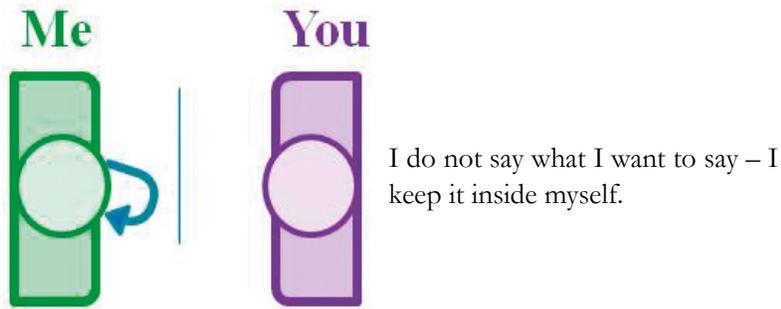


Figure 5.16. Illustration of the concept retroreflection.

Retroreflection is an essential contact form that can help us avoid some problems and disappointments. In our society you are considered polite if you have a certain amount of self-restraint and a realistic sense of when it is acceptable to make some exclamations.

It appears that there is a lot of retroreflection in Finland. Here are a number of comments on the subject from some of our Finnish students:

Female: “I found retroreflection most close to my own behavior. I’m direct with my thoughts when I am pushed to the limit of my patience but most of the time I’m extremely polite and keep many thoughts to myself. I guess everyone knows the feeling you get when you think afterwards what you wanted to say in a certain situation but didn’t have the courage to say it or just decided to act according to “the norm”.

Male: “I think that with Finnish people, one of the challenges we face in everyday life is that we are too polite, so we end up being far too retroreflecting for our own good. While we see some things that might make us want to say something or act, we often end up keeping these feelings inside of us since we want to avoid conflict. What I have noticed in Finnish society is that if you do not follow the line everyone else is in, you are branded odd or an outcast.”

Female: “I am a very retroflective person in some aspects. I guess that's a Finnish symptom. For example, if I am arguing about something that clearly has a black and white answer and I am 100% sure I am right about it, but the other person just does not believe me, I let him/her win and tell them they are probably right, but we both should check the facts again to be sure. I comfort myself thinking that he/she will learn the right answer sooner or later. Inside I might feel like shouting in his/her face. Also I rarely show anyone if I am angry. Then when I finally show it, I am really angry.”

Male: “The thing that really caught my attention was the part about retroflection. For me personally it is one of those mechanisms that come very naturally since I tend to be a bit too nice a person and awfully good at avoiding conflicts or differences in opinion. It is one of my inner safety precautions and that is why it is so strong. I don’t usually mind keeping things on the inside, but I think at times the other party could benefit from me saying something instead of just agreeing.”

Female: “I have been together with my boyfriend for seven years now and there is only one person in his family who I can’t stand; but I have never had the gut to say anything. My boyfriend is Estonian. His half sister has made her point of view very clear from the beginning: she hates Finnish people. I don’t know why but it’s the truth. Every time I am near, she makes degrading comments about Finnish people and she talks negative things about me to my boyfriend even if I am not anywhere near to defend myself. Still after all these years of mean comments, I haven’t said anything to her even though I’ve imagined a thousand times what I would say. I don’t say anything because I don’t want to make a scene in front of my boyfriend’s parents and I guess I don’t want to descend to her level. I want to be a person who can act polite even in a difficult situation. Or maybe I don’t say anything because I’m Finnish (heh).”

Male: “Not too long ago I also realized another thing I want to work upon especially in a working environment. Retroflection has been a slight problem for me as I tend to be way too nice to everyone taking a lot of weight that could be carried by someone else. I often fear to be rejected because of saying something less nice and that somewhat worrying. I have to learn to stand up and open my mouth when needed and not fear of what might come out of it. For a leader it’s important to inspire, but to inspire you have to voice your opinions and make people see the value in them. That way you become someone to look up to.”

Male: “I think the most general example of retroflection would be how males are expected to be tough and to not show any sensitive feelings. We all have seen and experienced this around us. Males are less sensitive by nature than females; but I believe a lot of pressure is also being put on males to not be too sensitive. We are taught from small boys to be tough by observing our fathers and other adult males in our lives, and also movies, comic books and literature. This may not create many issues later in life for most males but people are different and some people are more sensitive than others and they want to show their feelings. However, in many cultures they won’t be allowed to show their feelings without risking being marked less manly than what the preconception is.”

Retroflection in Finland experienced by foreign students:

Male, Italy: “Retroflection in general is something very common that I found in Finnish society. After living here in Finland I have seen it at several occasions (in family, with friends, at work, at school with Finns) that retroflection is a contact form used by most people. With retroflection people avoid to say unnecessary things that may cause conflict with other people and they give a general good impression of themselves. In Italy I grew up in a culture where people often have strong opinions and to have a conflict is not considered so bad. At the same time getting over a conflict is not as difficult as it is in general in Finland. This happens because the Finnish culture is familiar to retroflection and to avoid conflict while in Italian culture it is the opposite. People cannot stay with their mouths closed and they often end up in conflict.”

Female, Croatia: “I think that Finnish people are quite retroflective. They want to be really polite most of the time so they don’t complain openly and tend to keep their opinion to themselves. I had a lot of problems with this at my work. I would ask people their opinion about something and then I would just get a short answer back. It proved to be really challenging to change. As I was teaching a conversation class, I started to “provoke” people by making really strong statements that I was hoping my students would start to argue about or at least talk about the “issue”. After a while they told me that they were told as children to always be polite in school and to agree with the teacher, and that even now, when they are adults, they want to behave the same way.”

Male, Italy: “I think that the Finnish culture in daily life situation use a lot of retroflection. I have been living here for 10 years and comparing to Italy I had the impression that overall Finns tend to be more polite. Instead of saying what they really think very often they keep moderate opinion in order to avoid problems. Of course this is a very generically opinion and reality it is more complex. Retroflection is commonly integrated in Finnish society while on the other hand in South Europe like in Italy the culture in general is lacking of retroflection. People, often communicate and easily say what they really think. In general, this way of communication can create more conflict and delay in realization of common goals.”

Retroflection experienced with family and friends

Female, Ukraine: “Sometimes when I am talking to my parents by Skype they show me pictures of our dog. I miss him very much and I can’t play with him through Skype. So I feel very sad and I feel like crying, but I don’t do it, because I know that it can make my parents sad. In this situation I retroflect my feeling.”

Female, Finland: “When I was a teenager and got into a conflict with my parents, I learned that the best way to get away from the situation was to be retroflective and not say anything. If I would have said my own opinion about the conflict, it would have made it even worse. This affects me even today when I argue with my boyfriend. He is not retroflective in any aspect and I am, so usually I leave most things unsaid during the quarrel and might tell them in a softer manner later on when there’s peace on earth again. It’s not always good as he has to dig information from me quite often.”

Female, Estonia: “When my mom told me what to do and what she thought about things, being a small girl I always followed her and listened to her opinion making it my own. I was always confluent with her. I knew it was not always what I thought myself, but it felt better and right to be confluent with mom who is older and is certainly cleverer than me. Nowadays I am retroflective with her. I listen to what she has to say, what is her opinion or what she wants me to do. Then I do not argue usually, only sometimes if it is really very important or a big issue, and stick to my decisions. This way I avoid conflicts with her, I also save energy on discussing stuff with her, I just do what seems good to me. Of course, sometimes I follow her advice and sometimes no. I know I cannot change her opinion and I respect her opinion. This is why I act clever by listening to her, I also analyse the thing she tells me, but quite often I still retroflect her by sticking to my own opinion and keeping it to myself.”

Male; Nepal: “One day my sister was getting ready to go to a party. She was all dressed in red including her red shoes; but she wore a blue lipstick. She suddenly asked me how she looked. I was puzzled for a moment; but she looked really happy with her dress and makeover so I couldn’t tell her that she looked funny, instead I told her that she looked beautiful. If I had told her that she was not looking good then it might have hurt her and I might have ruined her evening.”

Female, Europe: “My boyfriend and I have decided that we will buy an apartment way back in my home country. We started to plan living together, how we would reconstruct the apartment, how our bathroom and other rooms should look like. We have planned this for 9 months now. But I started to think about traveling abroad, try to study abroad and one of my plans finally succeeded. I left for Summer School in Helsinki. Now I am receiving messages from him, how he is excited about the apartment, which ones he was to visit and so on. But now I don't want to buy an apartment, because I am not even sure I want to go back. But I just cannot tell him that. So I decided that I will return home to him and we shall buy an apartment even if I don't want to. However I am afraid that should some opportunity for me going abroad show up, I will definitely leave the apartment and care of it on him.”

Retroflection in class or at work

Female, Finland: "I like to avoid a conflict. I don't like fighting or arguing. For example if there's a situation where I know that I'm right and the other person is very confident that he/she is right - I let it be. This has happened to me many times and I only say afterwards to that person who was not listening to me that I was right. I think this might be bad according to the working life. I should put enough effort to explain if there is a situation where I know that I'm right. In future I will try to be more confident about this."

Female, Ukraine: "I think that retroflection can be very useful sometimes. When we are having a group meeting concerning our project and I feel angry because of one of the members in the group, I can't stand up, go away closing a door very loudly. I have to keep this feeling under control. Another example is that if I feel upset I can't cry in university, so I have to control myself."

Male, Japan: "I have many experiences which are called "Retroflection". There are two reasons why I have such experiences. One is because I am just too busy translating from English to Japanese in my brain. So when I want to say something, the topic has moved on. Thus, I have many experiences which are called "Retroflection". Another reason is I am afraid to make mistakes. As you know Japanese are not good at speaking English. So even if I try to say something in English, sometimes it doesn't get through because my pronunciation and grammar are strange. Thus, sometimes I keep my opinion inside myself. This experience happens only when I speak English. I can claim my opinion in Japanese because I can speak Japanese fluently. So if I can speak English fluently the same level as Japanese, such experiences gradually decrease. I want to improve my communication skill through this course."

Male, Iran: "There were so many times in high school back in Iran when I was kind of sure about the answer of the question which the teachers were asking, but I had no courage to say it, in fact I was afraid that it could be wrong. And when somebody else was saying the exact answer I was thinking about, that just felt really bad. And also my teachers might think I am just an average student although I almost knew about most of the questions. Therefore, later I tried to stand up for myself in the classroom."

Male, Germany: "I use retroflection at university when I want to avoid arguing with my professor. I remember one special situation at an oral exam. I used to share my thoughts in the course, I know that I know pretty much of the topic and I was really motivated during my first semester. But when it comes to the oral exam my professor graded me down because „he expected more from me“ in this oral exam because of my former activity

in his course. After this experience I stopped being active and sharing my thoughts in the courses, I keep everything to myself.”

Male, Turkey: “During second year in my department we had to make a project as a group and groups were arranged by the teacher. In our group there was a guy and he thought that he was the leader of the group and he knew everything. In every step he wanted us to do what he said. In one module of our project there was a vital mistake and I realized that but I didn't say anything. I just let him continue. End of our project we were to make a presentation to the teachers about how the program worked and he decided that he mainly would present the project. When he presented the part of the program that I was sure had a problem, the teachers did recognize the mistake and asked him about it and why we had done this. He just accusingly looked at us and with his eyes he was asking us "why you didn't tell me". It was retroflection which cost me a 2 character grade (If I had told them we probably would have got A but with the mistake we got C+).”

Male, Vietnam: “When talking to other people, I tend to keep back my own thoughts and try to keep up with others’ emotions. Sometimes, I could be working on a project with my fellows that I have known for some time. They may be doing the job not as well as I wanted, but I could not tell them because that may hurt (like, dude that page you just designed is a total disaster). Well of course for the good of the project I still have to manage somehow to discuss with them in a way that would not hurt their feeling.”

Male, Iran: “When I came to Finland from Iran I was 17 years old and I absolutely didn't know any Finnish words. I couldn't go to a Finnish school because of my age and immigration office said that I had to go to adult's school to learn Finnish and so I did. After 15 months of very hard and long study, I was granted the language certificate to start at a Finnish school. Even though I had the certificate I knew that I couldn't speak the language very well; but anyway I decided to start studying without wasting time. I registered myself at my town's high school and started my studies in Finnish along with two years younger Finnish students. I like mathematics very much and usually I would answer the teacher's questions during lesson. One day as usual I raised my hand and answered the question but after answering teacher asked me something in Finnish in a very fast way so I didn't understand what he asked. I wasn't able to answer and everybody started to laugh at me. I was ashamed of myself and decided not to answer any more questions in the future. After that day I always kept the answers to myself because I didn't want to get laugh at again. It was very difficult for me to start a conversation. I was afraid that I would

say something wrong and they would start to laugh so I kept what I wanted to say inside. This continued till my first history exam. I succeeded very well at my history exam and the teacher was pretty amazed with my Finnish language. He decided to share this during the lesson. He said to Finnish student that they should know that it is not easy to write Finnish that good in two years. After that day they never laughed at me and I didn't retroreflect my thoughts again."

Male, Japan: "The Japanese basic style of class is different from the European and the U.S. style. In Japan, students concentrate on listening to the teachers and writing notes. Students hardly ever ask questions. I think that is because of two factors. First factor is that students ignore class and they are not interested in talking. The teachers are aware of that, but do nothing basically. Second factor is that students are afraid to make mistakes and stop the flow. Students choose to be quiet rather than to ask a question. I don't understand why this is so, because we had been freely asking questions when we were at elementary school."

Female, Croatia: "In my culture, retroreflection is thought to be a negative thing. We are taught as small children to always speak up and say directly what we think, or otherwise people would think that we have weak characters and could take advantage of us. Now, when living in Finland I learned that sometimes at work I have to be retroflective. When I just moved here and landed my first job, I openly said to my boss that I don't agree with a lot of the things that she does and the way she does it. It resulted in her not continuing my work contract so I had to find another job. After that I started to keep my own thoughts for myself at work and thinking through how and what to say if I don't agree with other people."

Retroflection and confluence can link together.

Sometimes, for various reasons, you would rather just want to be like the others in the group around you and keep your opinion to yourself.

Male, Finland: "My friends and I were off to a movie and they had a different idea of a good movie than I; so I decided to say nothing and be confluent in order not to make them feel bad about me. Not really caring for the movie we went to I retroflected; but luckily enough the movie was actually a good one and we had a great time. It could have been different though and therefore I should have spoken out loud, instead of keeping everything inside."

Female, Russia: "My flat mate does many things because of confluence: one of her main motivations is to be on good terms with everyone which is not bad all in all; but that is why I daily hear stories about how she was listening to someone for two hours without any wish to do so, joined people

who were drinking just because she was the only one who was sober and so on. The connections between confluence and retroreflection can be seen: she retroreflects a lot not to make other people sad or so that they will not think she is “too negative.”

Female, Germany: “Before the course I often held back my reactions or what I wanted to say. But now I try to do it less and I have had some success with this because it has helped me to avoid some disappointments at university during the first days, when I expected things from the new people I got to know. In addition I think that it is now easier for me to not retroreflect because it is linked with confluence and like I said I try more often to make my own choices which get me to the point that I have to say things I would have kept to myself before.”

Male, Vietnam: “On Friday I usually would go to visit a Vietnamese family that had been living here for about 30 years. They were at my parents’ age and they cooked a lot of Vietnamese food for me and my friends for dinner. However I found out that the man kept talking about his work, which was interesting at first, but then it got somewhat boring since the stories were repeated over and over again. Despite of that, most of the times I smiled and nodded my head, sometimes I asked him something to keep the conversation flowing. Now I notice that I was being confluent because I did not want to be rude because they were really nice and I thought they might be quite lonely here because they did not see so many Vietnamese. So I was using retroreflection and confluence most of the times.”

Male, Germany: “I use retroreflection very often in combination of being confluent with somebody, especially when it comes to topics where my own opinion doesn’t matter that much. An example is when I am going to cinema with my friends and we try to find a movie everybody wants to see. I think it really depends on your personality if you use retroreflection that much or not. I think if you are an introvert person you will use retroreflection more often than an extrovert person.”

Male, Finland: “I use retroreflection usually to avoid conflicts and hurting people. For example, if my friend and I have strong opinions about something which we have already discussed, I just find it easier not to say anything about the subject to him again to avoid conflicts. That is useful when we know we have strong different opinions and we can’t change them. So we can be confluent by both being retroflective about the same thing.”

Also retroreflection and deflection can link together, as can be seen in the stories below:

Male, Singapore: “Many times, it is very hard to discuss a topic where everyone is interested. In the midst of discussion, you can see people are using deflection; checking their mobile phones, looking away, going out to

have a smoke and those are signs of clear deflections, which tells me that those people are not so interested in the topic. And almost certainly, the conversation dies down very fast when little or nobody is contributing to it. And I realised something as well, almost always, when a person in deflecting the topic, they have some form of retroreflection as well. I have asked some of my friends after a while why they are not participating in the conversation. They said that they are not interested and do not want to interrupt or breakdown conversation. So, in a way, they deflected from the conversation in a polite way such that it does not affect the rest of the group, which in my view, is also a form of retroreflection, as the person did not want to affect others, so he held back his reactions and not saying what he was thinking as he is not contributing to the topic.”

Male: “Maybe the most common ones have been the times when you think: “I should have said something”, after the opportunity or the situation has gone by or is about to. I had one of those moments just yesterday, when I was thinking about asking for a phone number from a nice person, but then started thinking and suddenly the moment had gone by.”

5.5.1 Healthy Retroreflection

Retroreflection is positive when you use it to keep quiet with your thoughts if you are together with a person that most likely will take advantage of the situation; just as well as it is good to be able to control yourself in some situations in order not to harm yourself or other people. Also sometimes it can just be very good to be able to keep a spontaneous comment to oneself.

Male, Italy: “I noticed that using retroreflection in daily situations at school, work or with my son has improved my communication skills. I think I have become aware of the power of this contact form and the importance of using it as a tool. Of course, using retroreflection is not always that easy. Sometimes it can happen that I don’t have time to think and I react in the most natural way which for me is far from using retroreflection. For this reason I believe that practice and also ability to analyze situations are required in order to keep improving.”

Male, Finland: “In my line of work I communicate with a lot of customers and if anything I’ve learned that sometimes it’s better to just stay silent than open your mouth and say something. That is one of the benefits of retroreflection and the ability to keep calm and collective and retroreflect whenever the situation calls for it.”

Male, Nepal: “It is somehow necessary to retroreflect during work since we have to talk with different people and our cultures are different so we cannot say whatever we like or think to them.”

Male, Iran: “I learned that sometimes keeping my thoughts to me is better than fighting about an unimportant matter. It is all about saying the right thing at the right moment and keeping my feelings to myself when they are not really needed.”

Male, Vietnam: “On occasions somebody would want to buy me a gift. I know that it’s the gesture that counts, but the fact remains that nine out of ten times, I wouldn’t have given the gift a second look. So what do I do? Openly and truthfully stating my indifference to the gift and risking alienating that person, or politely accept the gift and make them aware of my dislike of birthdays and presents on a more appropriate occasion? I have always picked the latter option, and likely saved myself a lot of trouble doing so.”

Male, Singapore: “I was staying at a hostel and I was in the common area doing my work. However, a bunch of people came in and they were very loud and rowdy and were affecting me. To stop myself from having any conflict, and also being polite, I chose to do my work in my room instead, even though it was not comfortable. When you retroreflect, most of the time you prevent contact and you would take the burden yourself, without voicing out your views.”

When you in a specific situation suppress a response, which would be to your disadvantage, your retroreflection is under control and you are aware of the fact that you are retroreflecting and what it is that you are retroreflecting – your behaviour is healthy.

5.5.2 Unhealthy Retroreflection

When a child is growing up and is told all the time not to respond, even when it is appropriate, the child will learn that he must hide all responses. In time this becomes automatic (without awareness) and this person, now an adult shows restraint whether it is appropriate or not. Retroreflection is habitual and it is not done temporarily in a special situation but is now part of personality.

Female, Finland: “I have an example of a friend who uses a retroreflection all the time. While she pays attention to other people’s demeanour, she represses her own. She comes out as the happiest, most joyful, polite, friendly person there is; but she holds a lot of her thoughts inside in many situations. She thinks that she can’t change her code of conduct because people expect her to act in a certain way. She just doesn’t want to hurt anyone or cause any trouble. She has told me that sometimes it is very hard and consuming to stay in that happy, polite place all the time. People actually think that she is never sad or never angry, which is not true of course, I know.”

Female, Ethiopia: “When I argue and fight with my friend she always say how she feels and tell about things that bother her and shout as much she pleases. Me I am always the quiet one even if I have tons of things to say at that moment and want to curse and shout I keep it inside thinking I might regret it later also I want to end the fight as quick as possible.”

Male, Vietnam: “In Vietnam there is a saying like ‘peace is fine’, that is, people keep trying to smile, small talk and hide their real feelings away just to keep the manner and their ‘face’. If you do not feel good about something, then it is your problem. So, if I could just stand up and tell people what I really think, that would be nice! (sometimes, I would use sarcasm on my friends’ facebook status, then I read and erase what I just wrote, thinking I’m being mean.)”

Male, Ethiopia: “Most Ethiopians are retroflective, we don't tell what we want to say and the bad part is that after it all passes we will be angry for not saying anything. For example when I was at school back home I had this friend who made very bad and offensive jokes, but since we were friends I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I just kept it to myself that I didn't like his jokes and as times went by I started to get bored of the jokes. I also started to get mad and lastly I didn't even want to be with him and we drifted apart; now we are not even friends anymore. Now it hits me that it would have been better to tell him the truth at that time and hurt him because now it turns out that I lost his friendship.”

Female, Ethiopia: “Retroflection is my day to day contact form. It happens every hour so I don't have any specific example but let me explain why it is so. Well we Ethiopians have a strong culture. We are raised in a very retroflective way. We don't say what we think of someone's saying or doing. We keep it to ourselves because we think that telling someone what we really think of the situation is rude. So even if someone does something we don't like, we tend to be retroflective and keep it to ourselves. But I have come to the realization that this kind of behaviour is not good because whatever we keep to ourselves we tend to think about it again and again. That will get us stressed and might even cause physical manifestation. One good example was given by a group member. His roommate smokes inside the house but the guy said nothing. He is afraid that he might hurt the other person's feeling. So he smokes passively with his roommate.”

Please reread the little story in Chapter 5.2 “Introjection”:

Cecillia: *Many years ago I had a friend who had a dog. She had to go to a course and I was taking care of her dog -- and so on. Think about how this little boy in the future maybe keeps inside himself some of his desires for asking questions and getting in contact with people.*

AFTERWORD



Thank you for having this journey with us. We hope the book has inspired in you the desire to constantly observe your environment and especially the people you meet. Life is an amazing voyage if you choose to keep your eyes open and your mind welcoming to new influences. You can make each encounter meaningful and precious if you only choose to do so.

Once again we should like very much to thank all the students that we have had the great pleasure to meet during the years, who with a gifted hearth shared their stories both during the courses in plenum and in the assignments, and who have kindly let us use their valuable experiences in this book. We will carry you in our hearts forever.

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Biographical Information

Jørgen Erik Christensen received his M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees from the Technical University of Denmark in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1981 and 1987, respectively. From 1992, he worked as Professor of Integrated Building Technology at Narvik University College, Norway. From 1997 to 2001 he studied gestalt therapy specialising in communication at the Norwegian Institute for Gestalt. In 2007 he returned to Denmark and has since then worked as an Associate Professor with the Department of Civil Engineering, Technical University of Denmark.

Cecillia Christensen received a degree in architecture in 1975. She has completed various courses in personal development and in 2002 was awarded a degree as NLP Master Practitioner.

