

Technical, professional and intercultural communication (15 EC) - 201400236

Study level	Bachelor final year
Study load	15 EC
Faculty	Faculty of Behavioural Management and Social Sciences (BMS)
Provisional starting date	BSc degree programme Communication Studies Quartile 1A / 2015-2016
Prerequisites	120 EC finished, relevant domain-specific prior knowledge
Instruction language	English
English language requirement	IELTS 6.0 or TOEFL iBT 80
Tuition fees	To be paid at home institution

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

This package primarily aims at providing students with the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact audience characteristics have on successful message reception. With the value of empathy at its core, the module will introduce students to three communication sub-disciplines: technical communication, professional communication, and intercultural communication.

Empathy, defined as being aware and sensitive to the needs of another, is central in technical communication with its emphasis on designing user support (online, video and written instructions, help desks, user fora) that would aid users to safely and effortlessly use a specific product or system. Moreover, the need to develop fundamental communication competencies (e.g. listening, explaining, questioning) and to cultivate sensitivity when interacting with an individual from another culture, the primary goals of professional and intercultural communication, respectively, is predicated on the importance of emphatic concern for the communicator's interaction partner.

COURSE INFORMATION

5A1: Technical Communication

This module component aims at providing a general introduction to the broad field of Technical Communication. This field comprises all communication about technology: communication between professionals working with technologies, between users working with technologies, and communication between professionals who support users who are working with technologies. The focus in this module component is on professionals who support users who are interacting with various forms of technology, from consumer products, such as an espresso machine, to complex software systems. These professionals, also called technical communicators, support the users by providing them, for example, with online, video, and written instructions or by means of a help desk. The central question for Technical Communicators is: How to design user support that is really helpful for users?

The book that will be used is written from the perspective of technical communicators. These professionals use the results of scientific research to design good user support. Hence, by taking this

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

perspective, the students will learn about the professional context of Technical Communication, but also about the most important scientific studies in the field. The series of lectures will start with an introductory lecture, followed by three lectures on the design of user support in a professional context and three lectures on specific topics related to the field such as rhetoric and a number of future developments. All lectures also include an interactive in-class discussion or assignment.

At the end of this module component, students are expected to be able to:

1. describe the professional context of technical communication and the relevant developments within the field;
2. systematically design user support documentation based on the principles of the user centred design process and the structure and style of instructive documents; and
3. evaluate user support documentation based on guidelines on the structure and style of instructive documents.

5A2: Intercultural Communication

Globalization and technological advancements have precipitated increased contacts among individuals with differing cultural values and norms. Modern societies have transitioned to cultural heterogeneity and most organizations have increasingly become more culturally diverse. These heterogeneity and diversification have both positive and negative ramifications for members of society, in general, and for organizations, in particular. Differences in cultural values and expectations are bound to constraint the initiation and maintenance of meaningful interactions among individuals from various cultural clusters. Nonetheless, such cross-cultural encounters are inevitable in a highly globalized world and, even, indispensable for survival in a complex environment.

This 3-EC module component aims at introducing students to the most relevant theories, concepts, and principles of intercultural communication. Factors inhibiting effective cross-cultural encounters and socially relevant issues attracting widespread debate such as immigration and acculturation will be discussed. The course will primarily have interactive plenary lectures and several non-lecture activities (e.g. cultural game, film viewing, panel interviews). Results of the final examination and the quality of the paper reporting results of an interview with a foreigner in the Netherlands will be the basis for assessment in this module component.

At the end of this module component, students are expected to be able to:

1. define culture and its' influence on perception;
2. describe the stages of culture shock and the different acculturation strategies in the acculturation process of people who move from the culture in which they have been born and raised to a new and unfamiliar culture;
3. discuss the impact of cultural differences on the communication patterns of individuals from various cultural groups;
4. understand the characteristics and features of their cultural identities and how these identities shape the way they view individuals from different cultural groups;
5. report the experiences of individuals in a foreign country and how they deal with and make sense of those experiences (both positive and negative);
6. explain how barriers in intercultural interactions can arise using six factors that impede intercultural communication;
7. participate in culturally-sensitive interactions and communication with individuals from various cultural groups demonstrating cultural empathy and cultural sensitivity;
8. identify different cultural barriers and intercultural issues that emerge from interactions between people of various countries; and
9. compare values and elements that distinguish different cultures from each other using the dimensions of Hall, Hofstede, Gudykunst, Trompenaars, and Schwartz.

5A3 Ethics and Epistemology in Communication

In the philosophy component of this module, students will encounter philosophical theories that support the central topic of the module. As the main module project involves knowledge-sharing across cultures, the philosophy component will focus on the themes of knowledge, language, and community. By investigating these themes in the philosophical tradition, students will have an opportunity to reflect on theoretical approaches to the methods they will learn and employ.

By studying epistemology and expert testimony, the students will learn theories about how knowledge is formed and transmitted. An emphasis on social epistemology will highlight the connection between community and knowledge, outlining the possibilities and difficulties in bridging cultural knowledge gaps. These theories will be framed against the background of professional responsibility and the communication of expert knowledge.

An emphasis on the ethics of communication will round out the philosophy component. The students will learn about ethical perspectives on relativism and pluralism, two theories that ground toleration and embrace of differences between individuals and cultures. Challenges unique to the global community in a rapidly-changing and technologically unequal world will be highlighted, along with the moral norms of respect, empathy, and cooperation that guide efforts to bridge cultural boundaries.

The philosophical study of language will centre on Pragmatism and the early linguistic philosophy of John Searle. An investigation of the Pragmatic conception of truth as well as Searle's Speech Act Theory will provide insights into the formal methods of Functional Pragmatics and Conversation Analysis. In addition, a brief study of rhetoric will offer ideas about how to position communicative acts with respect for the audience and the material presented.

At the end of this module component, students are expected to be able to:

1. apply ethical theories of pluralism and relativism to the challenges of intercultural communication;
2. describe the role of culture, society, and community in the construction of knowledge; and
3. connect the methodologies they learn with theoretical frameworks of linguistic meaning and communication.

5B: Professional Communication

Professional communication is an umbrella term for various forms of communication such as speaking, writing or listening which can be carried out either face-to-face or mediated. However, professional communication also necessitates sensitivity and empathy when interacting with others. The need to interact with others is fundamental and indispensable. However, the competence to properly interact with someone else depends on the quality of one's communication skills. As Hargie (2011) points out in his book 'Skilled interpersonal communication – Research, theory and practice', "interpersonal skills are at the very epicenter of our social existence". Hence, knowledge of various types of communication skills is crucial for proper functioning in different professional and intercultural settings. Therefore, the course 'Professional Communication' aims at developing and/or polishing seven critical skills that typical communication students should have, namely:

1. Working with others: Skills of participating in and leading small groups
2. Communication without words: Skilled nonverbal behaviour
3. Finding out about others: The skills of questioning
4. Paying attention to others: The skills of listening
5. Getting your message across: The skill of explaining
6. Standing up for yourself: The skill of assertiveness

7. Working things out together: The skill of negotiating

Several assessment methods will be used for this module component. At the beginning of every lecture, students will take a short knowledge test in order to check their knowledge and understanding of the contents of the different chapters of the book (6 out of 7 will be weighted and counts 25 % of the final mark). Furthermore, at the end of the course, students will write a reflection paper based on the exercises covered in the seminars. The reflection paper accounts for 25% of the final mark. In order to apply the developed skills in a professional setting, students will participate in a debating contest with recent and controversial issues as propositions for the debate. Performance in this debate will constitute the remaining 50% of the final mark.

At the end of this module component, students are expected to be able to:

1. demonstrate appropriate nonverbal behaviour and to be sensitive to others' nonverbal behaviour in interactions;
2. participate in effective interactions with others using explanation, questioning and listening skills;
3. participate in interactions with others in which both individual and group goals are attained through participation, assertiveness, and negotiation techniques;
4. apply the aforementioned communication skills when defending their views and stance on a certain controversial or disputable issue through a more structured debate; and
5. reflect on the significance and eventual application of, at least, three different professional skills in a professional context.

5D: Project: Designing a User Instruction

As the market for products has become highly globalized and demographically diverse, reaching product users with appropriate instruction for the correct and safe use of products has also become urgent. However, user instruction designers are bound to confront several issues when designing and developing user instructions for product users from various cultural clusters (Warren, 2002). It is, therefore, critical for user instruction designers to take into account the socio-cultural and demographic characteristics of the target users of a manual to effectively relay the needed information on the proper use of a product to them.

With the module's focus on technical and intercultural communication, students would be tasked to design a user instruction for a product that would still be launched in the market. Specifically, students will have to develop a user instruction for a specific target group (e.g. age, level of literacy, or gender) within a specific country. New products (or products in the development phase) that will be selected as bases for the development of user instructions will come from the technical departments within the university (e.g. human-media interaction, industrial design).

With this project, students are expected to be able to:

1. apply the principles of technical communication and intercultural communication in the design of a user instruction for a specific group of product users with various cultural characteristics; and
2. use the various professional communication skills they have developed in the different phases of developing a user instruction

LEARNING GOALS

Each module in this package has its own specific learning objective. Please read above.