

**The Art & Science of Conversation:**  
**Creating Presence and Impact in 5 Minutes or Less**

***Abstract***

Participants and facilitators will collectively explore the role of conversation in leadership development in undergraduate and graduate classroom settings. This session is an inquiry into how each of us can make a difference with our presence. Conversation, even in its most pedestrian forms, offers rich opportunities for those interested in gaining a better understanding of the impact of their presence and experimenting with leadership behaviors. Additionally, this session will explore how we as faculty use conversation in both formal and informal ways throughout the design and delivery of our courses, including how we can be more aware of our own conversation behaviors, as well as how we can use conversation as an effective learning and developmental tool with our students. In this session, we will explore conversation as means of data gathering about one's impact and presence through a variety of Gestalt exercises and practicums, reflection, and discussions.

***Keywords***

Conversation, Gestalt, leadership, awareness

***Format***

This activity is best suited for a traditional classroom and may be used with both undergraduate and graduate students.

***Time Requested***

Sixty minutes

***Planning Details***

The session should be held in a room with moveable chairs and tables. Participants will spend time standing in quartets and small groups. Special equipment is not required.

***Teaching Implications***

Communication is the process by which information and meaning get transferred from a sender to a receiver. The typical management textbook presents interpersonal communication as being the sender's ability to get the message across and the receiver's performance as an active listener. Textbooks typically focus on the words conveyed in communication, yet only 7% of a person's understanding of others is attributed to words, where 38% is attributed to verbal tone and 55% to facial expressions (Mehrabian, 1972). The implications are noteworthy: we are never *NOT* communicating.

This workshop contributes to management andragogy by focusing on the plethora of detail provided by fact-to face communication, including meaning conveyed through word, body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice (Curhan & Pentland, 2007; Gottman & Bakeman, 1979). Are we, as management educators, aware of our impact in short interactions? Are we harnessing the power of simple learning devices, like conversation, to help raise student awareness and support their personal and professional development?

According to a rich body of social psychology and organizational behaviors literatures, spanning decades and contexts, the phenomena of accurate outcome prediction based on observation of “thin slices” of human communication behavior is well documented (i.e., Curhan & Pentland, 2007; Gottman & Bakeman, 1979). Studies, including diverse contexts such as the success of marriages, teacher ratings of high school teachers and university professors, contract negotiations, and hiring decision-making--with some observations as brief as *six seconds* in length—make the case that even five minutes of conversation is fertile ground for raising self-awareness, improving one’s presence, and engaging in leadership behaviors.

In this session, facilitators will guide participants through practicum exercises drawn from the Gestalt body of theory and practice to raise self-awareness and experiment with new behaviors. The facilitators will share theories related to conversations, drawing from social psychology, organizational behavior, and Gestalt theory. Reflection and group discussion will offer a means of integrating and translating the theory and tools shared in the session into tangible classroom tools.

### ***Session Proposal Description and Plan***

1. Group Introductions & Topic Intro 15:00  
Participant introductions, brief introduction to the session, launch experiment #1.
2. Experiment 1: Quartet Conversations & Debrief 15:00  
Two pairs make a quartet. Each pair has a turn as observers and a turn to engage in a conversation exercise. Debrief in quartets, using prompts from facilitators, about awareness of self in the exercise, receiving feedback.
3. Mini Lecture: Thin Slices of Conversation 7:00  
Research from organizational behavior, social psychology, and psychology has studied conversations to predict outcomes. This research suggests specific actions which promote success. What is the impact for the classroom and educator?
4. Experiment 2: Integrating Findings & Insights 15:00  
New pairings to create quartets, experiment with information from the lecture and feedback from experiment #1. Debrief in quartets using prompts provided by the facilitators.

5. Closing

8:00

Each participant shares one sentence about what has shifted for them a result of this session.

***Application to Conference Theme***

Communication is a cornerstone of service. One cannot meet or serve others without effective communication, and conversation lies at the heart of communication. Our focus, as educators, is typically on the words we speak. However, research tells us that more is conveyed by our non-verbal actions than by those given with voice. This session supports the theme by providing tools to help us effectively converse and communicate with one another.

***Unique Contribution to OBTC***

This proposal is being submitted to both OBTC and IOBTC. Our hope is to introduce the workshop at the OBTC meeting and to revise it for IOBTC based on reviewer and participant feedback, and our learning from our OBTC experience.

## References

- Curhan, J. R., & Pentland, A. (2007). Thin slices of negotiation: predicting outcomes from conversational dynamics within the first 5 minutes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(3), 802-811.
- Gottman, J. M., & Bakeman, R. (1979). The sequential analysis of observational data. *Social interaction analysis: Methodological issues*, 185-206.
- Mehrabian, A. (1972). *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*. United States: Wadsworth Publishing Company.