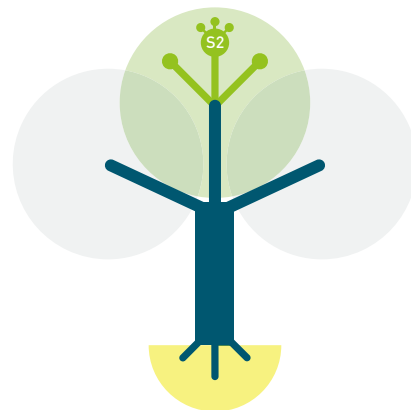## S2 Communication

The use of relevant communication strategies, domain-specific codes and tools, depending on the context and content

A 'linguistic model' of interpersonal communication identifies six fundamental elements that are necessary for a communication to occur[96]: **the sender** who transmits a message; **the message**: or object of the communication; **the receiver**: who receives and decode the message; **the context**: the situation in which the message is sent, the frame of reference that allows understanding the message, which is also set by receiver's level of knowledge; **the code**: the system of rules that allows a message to be formulated, for example, the language that the sender chooses to use to communicate. The code of communication must be understandable both by the sender and by the receiver of the message to be interpreted correctly; **the channel**: it connects the sender and the receiver physically and psychologically allowing the communication to take place. Examples include written communication channels, such as email or text messaging. When engaged in interpersonal interaction, each behaviour has a meaning. *It is **not possible** for individuals **not to communicate***[97] (even the decision not to speak is conveying a message). Therefore, what will differentiate one communicative act from another is its effectiveness or its clarity.

The spread of digital technologies has created novel ways of communicating. **Computer mediated communication** (CMC) enables communication and collaboration over distance allowing people to exchange messages and **large amounts of data** instantaneously and at a low cost, **facilitating connection** that would not have occurred face to face. Social media platforms are massively used for entertainment[98] but also to connect with others, maintain relationships and to obtain information about the world and one's own social network[99]. However, the CMC's lack of socio-emotional and nonverbal cues that are present in face-to-face communication may impair the effectiveness of CMC, leading to unintended interpretations. The lack of immediate contact with others may favour **polarisation** and uninhibited aggressive verbal behaviours[100]. In the context of education, important phenomena like cyberbullying, the misuse of technology to harass, intimidate or terrorise another person[101], or sexting, sending, receiving and forwarding of sexually explicit messages, pictures or videos, have serious consequences for students' wellbeing[102].

Students and lifelong learners, need to learn how to **make safe, responsible and ethical use of social media**, protect their personal information and develop strategies that allow them to cope and minimise their harmful effects, and to ensure and maximise the affordances and benefits of communication using digital technologies. This is why digital competence is so important. The **Digital Competence Framework for Citizens** stresses the relevance of the ability "to create, and manage one or multiple digital identities, to be able to protect one's own reputation, to deal with the data that one produces through several digital tools, environments and services, and of interacting through a variety of digital technologies and to understand appropriate digital communication means for a given context". Moreover, it highlights the importance of "being aware of behavioural norms and know-how while using digital technologies and interacting in digital environments, as well as to adapt communication strategies to the specific audience and to be aware of cultural and generational diversity in digital environments"[103].
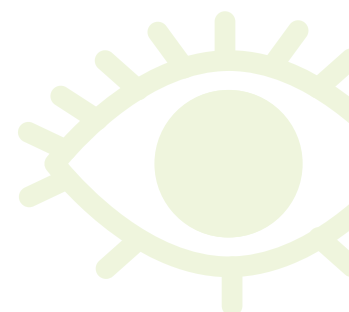
S2.1

Awareness of the need for a variety of communication strategies, language registers, and tools that are adapted to context and content

Individuals need to learn modulate their messages, taking into account the audience, the kind of relationship with the speaker, the context in which the communication takes place, its purpose, and the tools that will convey the message

To communicate effectively, individuals need to decide which **communication strategies** they will use in each situation: verbal strategies (written, including digital forms, and oral language), non-verbal strategies (body language, facial expressions, tone of voice), visuals strategies (signs, icons, illustrations) or mixed strategies. They need to **modulate their messages** taking into account the audience (e.g., the average level of knowledge on the topic being communicated about), the kind of relationship with the speaker (e.g., a friend, a manager, a teacher), the *context* in which the communication takes place, its *purpose* (to instruct, inform, persuade, order, entertain, inquire, socialise…), and the *tools* that will convey the message (text, email, smartphones, web conferencing, group messaging, social networks…). Both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies can be articulated using *different registers*, from formal to informal, which are needed to communicate effectively.
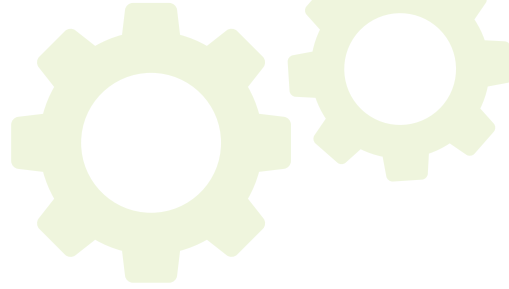
S2.2

Understanding and managing interactions and conversations in different socio-cultural contexts and domain-specific situations

For individuals to engage in communication in multi-cultural settings, they need to develop an attitude of openness and respect for cultural otherness

This descriptor highlights the importance of being able to **adapt** the communication style **to** different **socio-cultural contexts**[47]. Individuals need to adjust their communication style to: *the physical context*, the time of day, the noise level, or the lighting of the settings in which the communication is taking place (e.g., people need to communicate differently in a library, a party, or the workplace); *the cultural context*, the values, lifestyles, behaviours and beliefs of both the speaker and the audience, shape how people produce and interprets a message.

Individuals engaged in **communication** in **multi-cultural settings** need to develop an attitude of openness and **respect** for cultural **otherness**[47]. This entails self-awareness of their own cultural heritage and its influence on the way they perceive the world, including the tendency to interpret it from an ethnocentric point of view (i.e. the belief that own culture is better than others), the ability to shift temporarily into another perspective and to listen to others authentically[104]. The *social context*, the relationship between the speaker and audience, also sets rules on the intimacy level among speakers and the overall formality of the exchange.

S2.3

Listening to others and engaging in conversations with confidence, assertiveness, clarity and reciprocity, both in personal and social contexts

Effective listening underpins positive human relationships. It entails listening to the whole message, respecting turn taking, especially when the topic causes strong opinions

This descriptor stresses the relevance of the ability to **listen effectively** to others: being aware of and able to monitor verbal and non-verbal communication, showing empathy, patience and interest, clarifying, summarising and giving feedback to the other's message, and developing trust[105; 106]. Effective listening is a skill that underpins positive human relationships. It entails listening to the whole message, **respecting turn taking**, especially when the topic causes strong opinions.

Individuals need to be aware of **confirmation bias**[107], the human tendency to seek for, listen to, and remember the information that confirms their previous beliefs while dismissing the information that challenges it. Being aware of this potential risk, and actively trying to contrast it, is especially relevant in online environments. Currently, the algorithms of the main search engines or social platforms personalise the outcomes of the queries, offering tailored results, based on the algorithm's guesses on what each user would like to see[108]. The so-called **"filter bubbles"**[109] may limit the exposure to ideas that challenge users' beliefs, thus reinforcing confirmation bias. It is also to be underlined the importance of developing the ability to assert one's positions by expressing thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs in direct and appropriate ways, while respecting those of others. We include effectively *advocating, promoting, arguing, debating, persuading* and *negotiating*, both in personal and public settings.

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The European Framework for
Personal, **Social** and **Learning
to Learn** Key Competence

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