



Exam November 2018, questions and answers

IT Professional Practice (Monash University)

FIT1049: Professional Practice

Sample exam questions: Sample answers for Weeks 2-6

Week 2

Sample question 1 (based on this week's ePub):

Assume that you are speaking to an audience of 10 or so colleagues from your own work area. List three kinds of nonverbal communication that could be used to gauge the engagement of the audience so far.

Hints and comments:

Here you are speaking to a group of people whom you know reasonably well (i.e. colleagues from your work area), and the number of the audience still allows you to observe their individual reactions as you speak (i.e. an audience of 10 or so). So as far as the non-verbal communications are concerned, what you will be looking for are signs of active listening. See the ePub on this topic for a list.

Answer:

Three kinds of nonverbal communications that I could use to gauge the engagement of my audience would be:

1. Eye contact: If the audience members are looking at either myself, my slides or taking notes it is a positive sign that they are engaged with my presentation.
2. Body language/posture: If the audience members are not busy doing other things such as looking at their phone, or facing away from me in some other manner, but instead facing forwards and looking up it is a positive sign of engagement.
3. Active listening: If the audience members are responsive to the content of my presentation it would be a sign of positive engagement. I could identify this through their reactions to questions, jokes or new information. They may also change their facial expressions as they react to the information they are presented with.

Sample question 2 (based on this week's ePub):

Assume that your manager asked you at a very short notice to deliver a set of data that is rather time consuming to generate. Due to other tasks you are undertaking at the same manager's instruction, you can only do the suggested task by tomorrow, but your manager wants it today. How would you seek a workable compromise in this instance?

Hints and comments:

Whatever and however you communicate to your manager, being clear about what you can realistically commit to is the priority. On this basis, you may, for example, propose this work to be done by tomorrow, or suggest you do this work instead of the other work you were asked to do by the same manager. Either way you are demanding your manager to make a compromise, and it is important for you to be assertive not only on the ground of your workload, but also on the ground of your and your manager's shared interest, such as the quality of work produced as a result, for example.

Answer:

In such a case I would approach my manager for help with prioritisation. I would negotiate politely, explaining that my priority is "X" however if they wish me to shift it to "Y" I will be happy to do so, with their acknowledgement of the implications and flow-on effects to other areas of my work. This would show my

manager that I am able to be realistic and also flexible in my approach to completing my work. I would also thank them for their time and advice, ensuring I maintain the strength of the relationship.

Sample question 3 (based on this week's lecture):

What is 'glocalisation'? And what kind of skills does it demand IT professionals to acquire?

Hints and comments:

Globalisation tends to result in what seems to be the uniformity in the global culture, as seen in the prevalence of, for example, McDonald's and Starbucks. Such seemingly global cultures however often manifest in such a localized form, and it is important for IT professionals (or any professionals working internationally) to be able to understand and manage such balance between what can be assumed as the quasi-universal norms and otherwise, through effective intercultural communications. See under 'intercultural communications' in the ePub for detailed descriptions of the skills involved in this process.

Answer:

The concept of 'glocalisation' creates the need for IT professionals to be aware of both what is seemingly 'global' protocols of professional communications as well as how they are implemented more 'locally' to suit their customs and practices. This would require IT professionals to acquire strong communication skills as well as cultural awareness in order to ensure the effectiveness of their business activities, and they should also be aware of how best to ensure their communications have the desired effect for these audiences.

Sample question 4 (based on this week's lecture):

Assume that Alex, your junior colleague, has been untypically late for work for three out of the last 10 days. He also missed a meeting without notice, and this resulted in Alex getting the requirements of his task wrong, wasting 2 days of coding time. Alex has been at the company for 3 years, and is considered a brilliant programmer by his colleagues. He is usually on time for everything, though he does not socialize much with his colleagues, e.g., eating lunch with the other people in the company. How would you approach this situation? List two of the actions you might consider taking to make the situation better for all involved in this scenario.

Hints and comments:

Take into consideration at least the following: 1) Who would you be approaching as a start? Would you speak to Alex as a colleague? Or would you discuss this with his/your manager? 2) If you are to speak to Alex, how would you approach him? Remember that you are a senior colleague; there is already a power relation there. Would it be appropriate to speak to him informally by inviting him to lunch (which he does not usually have with a colleague)? Or would you schedule a meeting by properly explaining its purpose? Or would that make him even more anxious? 3) What are you going to do when you meet with Alex to discuss the issue? Alex may not be even aware that his behaviours had changed, or may not like to tell you the full story of what's causing his recent behaviours, which you have to respect. How would you frame this conversation to make it a positive and constructive experience for Alex? 4) Note that the reasons for Alex's recent behavior may well be triggered by issues at workplace (such as bullying, harassment, office dynamics) and/or something beyond work (such as personal issues). You need to understand if Alex does not wish to discuss any of these with you, but you can still provide him with information on who else he could obtain more support from. 5) Some of the issues, such as bullying, harassment and family violence, will have to be dealt with immediately in a professional manner.

Answer:

The two actions I would take to in response to this situation would be as follows:

1. I would first arrange a meeting with Alex to ask if everything is okay with him. Alex does not generally seem to prefer to socialise with colleagues beyond work, and since his recent errors at

work prompted me to have this conversation, I would not hold this conversation somewhere public or informal. I will convey to Alex my concern and willingness to support.

2. Then, if there were any issues of a serious nature that he is experiencing, I would encourage him to speak to his supervisor to get support from the company such as time off, counselling, or whatever may be helpful given the circumstances. I would reassure Alex that I would keep the details of our conversation confidential and leave the next steps up to him.

Week 3

Sample question 1 (based on this week's lecture):

While Internet search results yield a wealth of information based on the keywords entered, such results tend to lack the original contexts of each of the information. What does this mean? And why is this potentially problematic?

Hints and comments:

Have a think about how the Internet search results are presented. Does it make it easier or harder for you to identify the attributes of the information (e.g. currency, authority)? Does it reveal the types of information (e.g. primary, secondary)? What kind of challenges would you have if you were to find specific information relevant to your own purpose?

Answer:

The Internet search results are ordered according to an undisclosed algorithm, and while the list of results may look to be on topic, there is no contextual information given for the reader to make sense of the order within the information provided. This makes it difficult to sort reliable information from others, and this is further complicated by the fact that reliable or quality information often does not necessarily surface on the search results.

Sample question 2 (based on this week's lecture):

"The medium is the message." What does this mean, and how does this relate to IT professional practice (or professional practice in general)?

Hints and comments:

The statement generally can be translated like this: The medium in which the message is embedded starts having its own quality as a message itself. So one of the issues with 'fake news' is that despite its often dubious contents, it presents in the guise of 'news' which already starts making the audience under the impression that this is a legitimate piece of information. What can we learn from this in the context of professional practice? Think in terms of the balance between contents (i.e. what we communicate) and means (i.e. how we communicate), as per discussion from Week 2.

Answer:

In the context of professional practice, "the medium is the message" acts as a reminder that we should be conscious of which medium we use to communicate with various audiences and the meaning that this chosen medium imbues our communication with. In professional practice, this demands the sender to consider the effectiveness of both the content of the communications as well as the means of communication, and for the receiver, one has to be critical in assessing given information that is delivered in a seemingly reliable medium as a means of communication.

Sample question 3 (based on this week's lecture):

The 'intelligence cycle' includes as its part 'dissemination'. What does this entail in the context of research in the professional practice?

Hints and comments:

One lesson we learn from the 'intelligence cycle' is that gathering and analysing information is only part of the 'research' we conduct in professional practice, and disseminating and actioning on the outcomes of the research hold equally significant values to produce positive outcomes. Well, this is more like an answer than a hint, but here you go, you have it.

Answer:

In the 'intelligence cycle', gathering and analysing information are only part of the broader process, and disseminating and actioning on the outcomes of the research are given equally significant values to produce positive outcomes. In professional practice, this principle applies the same, and while gathering quality information and conducting accurate analysis are important, it is also important for professionals to effectively disseminate and action on the research outcomes using right medium to the right audiences in order to achieve the positive outcomes.

Week 4

Sample question 1 (based on this week's ePub):

The following slide was used to illustrate that deliberate refusal of receiving questions can be used as a communication strategy to limit potentially uncontrollable spontaneity. If you are to reformat this into a hierarchical style of visual presentation (e.g. the Minto style), how would you do? Draw a sketch of the new slide, and explain why.

"It's traditional at the end of the meeting that directors chat with shareholders over a sandwich and a cup of tea. ... With the prospect that they may be asked a few curly questions, the minute the meeting was over, [CEO] and his fellow directors snuck out a back door." (ABC, 2018)

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Analyst

Annual general meetings reveal what some directors really think of shareholders, and it's not a good look

By business reporter Andrew Robertson
Posted 21 May 2018, 5:40pm

At the recent AMP annual general meeting, the company's interim chairman Mike Wilkins asked shareholders to judge directors on their actions.

His plea to the 300 or so people at the meeting came during a lengthy apology for the scandals around AMP which saw the chairman, chief executive and two other directors leave immediately, with a fifth director to go by the end of the year.

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(ABC, 2018)

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Hints and comments:

The most prominent feature of the Minto style is the idea of hierarchy (or a pyramid, they would call). One needs to formulate a brief sentence that captures the main message, and include some textual information and image to support the main message. In the actual exam, we will not necessarily specify the Minto style as such, but you still need to understand the idea of hierarchy within a slide. PowerPoint presentations usually exploit this idea of hierarchy within, and across the slides, and this needs to be translated into the cohesion and independence within each slide, as well as across the slides as a set.

Answer:

Refusal of questions as a communication strategy

Potential benefits:

- Limiting the chance of unwanted spontaneity
- Protecting the organisation's communication vulnerability

Potential problems:

- Perceived and actual lack of transparency in communications



(ABC, 2018)

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Explanation

In creating this slide I have adopted a hierarchical structure on three levels. First, I have given the slide a title to inform my audience as to the subject matter at hand. On the next level I have provided two subtitles to categories the three bullet points which summarise more granular information about the topic. The image I have selected has been chosen to visually support my verbal explanation on this slide, which is about an instance where this strategy was actually used.

Sample question 2 (based on this week's lecture):

Imagine that you are to deliver a presentation to a group of employees at the client's organisation. The presentation will be on a new system that would result in yet another restructuring in the client organisation, and you expect the audience to be hostile against you at the presentation. Your role to date was only to provide a report on the feasibility of implementing the new system, and another group of consultants have been working on change management. Your presentation will focus on your own topic, though it is likely that the audience will quiz you over the change management side of the situation. What would you do? List two actions you would take to prepare for the presentation.

Hints and comments:

Think about all the seven key aspects discussed in the lecture, though purpose and positioning are the most relevant. An example would be to make your role explicit by stating at the beginning that you are presenting this as a SME on a specific topic, so that the parameter of the presentation is clear to the audience. You could also provide the audience with an alternative channel of communications specifically for the purpose of obtaining further clarifications on the topic outside of your presentation. Now, how would you do that? Have a think about it.

Answer:

The two actions I would take to prepare for this presentation given the circumstances would be as follows:

1. I would design an introduction slide and clearly state my role and what I am there to present, so that there are no other expectations.
2. Before my presentation I would speak to the change management group, or the management of the client's organisation, and ask if they would be able to have their representative attend the presentation to receive any questions.

Week 5

Sample question 1 (based on this week's ePub and lecture):

What's wrong with the following minutes from a meeting?

Item 3.2: Amendment to the membership of Departmental Meetings

As a result of discussion, a motion to vote for the following resolution was proposed by proposed by Ms Alex Lim. Motion passed unanimously.

Resolution: Future departmental meetings will be attended by at least two representatives from the senior management of the Department.

Hints and comments:

What can I say? This is very much a procedural matter, so there is not much for me to say as a 'hint' as such. Read the ePub please...

Answer:

The problem with the minutes from this meeting is that they state that a motion was proposed by one person. A motion would require a second person from the team to support it (seconder) in order for it to be suggested.

Sample question 2 (based on this week's ePub and lecture):

A relatively unstructured meeting with low power concentration can lead to certain risks. Describe one of the risks, and give an example of a strategy to prevent this risk.

Hints and comments:

With a team with low power concentration, one of the risks is that people will start saying whatever without much structure, and the meeting may well not produce the outcomes you had hoped to achieve. So what would you do?

Answer:

One of the risks in having a relatively unstructured meeting with a low power concentration is that the focus of the discussion at the meeting can be obscured and not able to produce tangible outcomes, as people may bring up irrelevant or non-urgent topics for discussion, and/or there would be no one to facilitate discussions. One strategy to counter this risk would be to install some formal processes, such as the use of an agenda and nomination of a chair.

Week 6

Sample question 1 (based on this week's ePub and lecture):

You have a team of five (5) with low power concentration and weak leadership within. What would be an effective strategy to lead this team while avoiding 'groupthink'?

Hints and comments:

Have a think about the dynamism of the team in the conditions specified. What would be the likely symptoms of the team, and how would you address them?

Answer:

One strategy to counter the potential risk of groupthink in this scenario is to articulate clearly the responsibilities of each member, so that each of the members would be accountable for their respective responsibilities. This would make each member's functional role within the team clear, and would compensate the weak leadership.

Sample question 2 (based on this week's ePub and lecture):

You are joining as Project Manager a well-established team of eight (8) with two influential members within. List two strategies you can use to lead this team effectively.

Hints and comments:

Have a think about the discussion we had for the Question 3 (of the quizzes in the Week 6 lecture). You are very much in the same situation; how would you approach this in order to achieve positive outcomes?

Answer:

The two strategies I would take in this situation would be as follows:

1. I would designate clearly to each member their respective functional role within the team with respective responsibilities regardless of the level of influence they have. This would potentially be effective to address the risk of groupthink.
2. It is also likely that there are an existing set of informal rules within the team, some which will need to be challenged by my entry to the team's internal dynamics. I would try understanding these existing rules first, and then implement formal rules as appropriate to develop a set of agreed new 'norms' within the team.

