

Chapter 57

More-Than-Human Future Ministries



Samuel Yu, Bem Le Hunte, Susanne Pratt, and Scott Matter

57.1 Introduction

Futures Ministries is a speculative world-building game, originally developed by Bem Le Hunte in 2015, in which participants collaborate to imagine a new government in a future scenario. Thinking through the lens of governance and policy, participants role-play as alternative government ministers to envision a new and better future for an interconnected society. The aim of the game is to suspend disbelief for change, re-writing narratives to envision new ways of thinking, governing, and living. This entry focuses on a regenerative extension of this game—More-Than-Human Future Ministries.

Introducing a more-than-human lens to Future Ministries encourages players to represent other ecological actors, not just focusing on humans. It encourages life-centered futures thinking and creativity, going beyond human-centered approaches to imagining new regenerative possibilities. It is an activity that encourages participants to be hopeful, radical, critical, empathetic, and collaborative while considering both human and wider ecological well-being.

S. Yu (✉) · B. Le Hunte · S. Pratt · S. Matter
Transdisciplinary School, University of Technology Sydney, Ultimo, NSW, Australia
e-mail: samuel.yu@uts.edu.au; bem.lehunte@uts.edu.au; susanne.pratt@uts.edu.au;
scott.matter@uts.edu.au

© The Author(s) 2025
J. Bentz, J. Ristić Trajković (eds.), *Imagining, Designing and Teaching
Regenerative Futures: Art-Science Approaches and Inspirations From Around
the World*, Science for Sustainable Societies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9029-9_57

57.2 Transformative Potential

More-Than-Human Future Ministries is an open-ended role-play activity for imagining new forms of government and society through a range of alternative lenses. In an Australian context—where this activity originated—ministries are government departments headed by a minister. They are responsible for portfolios that can lead to siloed thinking and action—for example, departments for Defense, Finance, or Social Services. This activity asks—what kinds of ministries might better address the interconnected nature of the global challenges that we currently face?

Framed as an ecologically focused task, participants are directed to think through different aspects of government and more-than-human society to step beyond the restrictive remits of our current government ministries. It generates a forum to create new narratives for human relationships with nature, as nature—rather than positioning humans as separate. This contributes to the growing body of other futures-oriented role-play, simulation, and story-telling activities that invite participants to adopt the perspective of other more-than-human actors and think through the consequences of human impact and governance. For example, (The Treaty of Finsbury Park 2025) and Council of All Beings (Seed et al. 1988) which both present forms of creative play in which participants act as another entity (and not as humans) to discuss concerns and possibilities in fantastical ways.

57.3 Application

The activity can be applied in a range of different contexts, from classrooms to industry workshops. As an activity, it only requires some light facilitation and everyday workshop materials. The beauty of the activity is its flexibility and open-endedness and its ability to incorporate transdisciplinary perspectives. The instructions below outline our general procedure, but facilitators and participants are invited to frame the activity as they choose, as well as its process and outcomes. More-Than-Human Future Ministries could be used as an open-ended exploration to develop futures thinking or be used in an applied context with a more refined scope toward generating actionable insights. Additional resources such as costumes and props can add to this suspension of disbelief and create a more theatrical, creative, and engaging environment.

57.3.1 *How to Play*

The approach below provides a generic structure to More-than-human Future Ministries. This is the approach we have used within the Transdisciplinary School at the University of Technology Sydney, with undergraduate students in the Bachelor

of Creative Intelligence and Innovation. We find that it typically works best with a group of 20–30 people and a timeframe of 90–120 minutes.

57.3.2 *Framing the Activity*

More-Than-Human Future Ministries begins with a short introduction that recognizes that new futures need to be imagined. Participants are prompted to dream big, think radically, and push boundaries. Their aim is to come up with a new society, through the lens of government and policy. The activity may be broadly framed as an open call to re-imagine any aspect of the world or be framed within specific contexts or topics. The activity works well in prompting participants to imagine their futures through the lens of regeneration. Engaging with ecological well-being from both human and more-than-human perspectives sets them up to imagine government, policy, and society that addresses well-being more holistically.

57.3.3 *Forming Ministries*

Forming groups of 4–6, participants select, or are assigned, a future government department from a descriptive list of different ministries prepared in advance. For example, the Ministry of Abundance, the Ministry of Tinkering, and the Ministry of Care. These future departments are not traditional government ministries as we currently know them but have been created to encourage new ways of thinking across silos. Each alternative ministry adopts a unique framing, perspective, and focus to prompt participants to imagine governance, actions, and policies in an interconnected way that extends to the more-than-human world. Participants are not required to stick to the established list and are free to propose their own ministry with a new agenda.

Participants should consider the membership of their ministries to adopt more-than-human roles. This promotes policy planning that considers constituents beyond human citizens and residents. More-than-human members may be relevant animals, plants, and other entities such as rivers, mountains, and forests, or even buildings and technologies. To support a life-centered, rather than only human-centered approach—more-than-human personas can be used to support participants' thinking (Lutz 2023).

57.3.4 Envisioning a New World and Future Policies

Participants begin by introducing themselves and discussing the ministry they have chosen. It is important to establish a collective understanding of the ministry's agenda within the framing of the activity. In establishing the future ministry's direction, scope, and responsibility, groups should collectively reflect on two key questions:

- What are your biggest wishes for the future of government?
- What are your biggest concerns for the way that government is currently conducted?

Discussing these questions and the group's responses is a mode of collective sense-making for everyone to critically reflect on what "government" means to them and how it could operate differently. This involves debating the current functions of government and the kinds of new inclusive and expansive policies that future departments would prefer to consider.

The objective is to imagine the workings of a new society and the role that the ministry plays in supporting it. To assist with creating future scenarios, facilitators can incorporate other futuring tools and methods.

Prompts for future ministries to consider:

- What is your department's vision for a more-than-human society? This could involve what kind of future the ministry wants to promote, as well as avoid.
- What are the key relationships between the human and more-than-human constituents? What role does each of them play in the ecosystem?
- What would your ministry look like in a networked, complex, open, and dynamic world?
- How might you engage with other ministries toward a shared vision?
- What are the public's greatest concerns/worries about the future to address?
- What is the narrative of this future? How did this new government form?

57.3.5 Presenting Future Visions and Policies

By the end of the activity, each ministry presents a summary of their vision and policy proposals to the other ministries. This may take many transdisciplinary and creative forms, such as a conventional presentation or a manifesto. To create parliamentary consensus, the ministries then work together to form a new constitution for their future society.

In our experience, students who have engaged with More-than-human Future Ministries have found this to be an engaging and insightful experience with a lasting impact on their understanding of complexity, more-than-human relations, and the importance of acting wisely to benefit all players in an interconnected world (Table 57.1).

Table 57.1 Method overview

Main purpose
More-than-human awareness-building and decision-making
Gained competences
More-than-human empathy and mindset, futures thinking, and collaborative decision-making
Educational setting
Formal (undergraduate and postgraduate classes)
Informal (workshops)
Space requirements/restrictions
Indoors, but can be done outdoors
Resources and necessary materials
List of alternative ministries (please contact authors if you would like more information)
Number of participants
Groups of 4–6; approximately 20–30 people but can be more
Facilitator competences and skills
Basic workshop facilitation, understanding of more-than-human concepts, and understanding of basic government structures
Participants skills/age/competences
Students, policymakers, and community, but open to all with flexible framing
Duration
Approximately 90–120 minutes

References

Lutz D (2023) The non-human persona guide: how to create and use personas for nature and invisible humans to respect their needs during design. Damien Lutz, Sydney

Seed J, Macy J, Fleming P, Naess A (1988) Thinking like a mountain: towards a council of all Beings. New Society Publishers, British Columbia

The Treaty of Finsbury Park. The interspecies assemblies or the story so far. <https://treaty.finsburypark.live/>. Accessed 13 June 2025

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Part VII

Innovative Pedagogies for Regeneration and Societal Transformation

To regenerate our societies, we must transform the ways we teach, learn, and communicate within educational spaces. This part brings together methods focused on pedagogical innovations that cultivate transformative competencies essential for navigating and reshaping a rapidly changing world. These include self-awareness, reflective and critical thinking, empathy, active listening, sustainability leadership, and a sense of collective responsibility. Through diverse approaches, these methods invite learners to question dominant assumptions, reframe inherited knowledge systems, and engage education as a site of possibility. Rather than treating education as a neutral process of knowledge transmission, these pedagogies embrace it as a deeply relational, ethical, and political practice that shapes not only what we know but also how we live and relate to others and the world. They create space for learners to participate actively in the co-creation of just, caring, and regenerative societies. These approaches foster the capabilities needed to think systemically, act collaboratively, and imagine alternative futures. They remind us that to teach for sustainability is also to teach for harmony, creativity, and ecological responsibility—and that education itself can be a powerful act of regeneration.

Chapter 58

Reflective Lifelines: Tracing the Path to Regenerative Horizons



Leonie Paul

58.1 Introduction

Before we can be different, we need to meet ourselves where we are. (unknown)

This quote beautifully encapsulates the essence of the Lifeline exercise and underscores the profound importance of understanding our past as a catalyst for “growth” and change (McAdams 2008).

Our lives are a tapestry woven with unique stories, each representing memories that have shaped our minds, actions, and the world we inhabit (Prebble et al. 2013). These threads weave a tale of the personal meaning and significance we assign to events, people, and ourselves (Eysenck and Keane 2015).

In the quest for regenerative futures, we can find that the most profound steps begin within ourselves. I believe that this introspective journey exemplified by the Lifeline exercise is the cornerstone of meaningful change in the external world (see Frank et al. 2019). It is where we unearth the seeds of transformation that can sprout into purposeful actions, from inside us to the outside world.

Whether you are just beginning to explore your regenerative understanding or have been involved in the field for a long time, lifelines can be created repeatedly at different points in your journey. You can conduct this exercise individually for personal reflection or in small group settings as conversation starters to explore regenerative futures and visions. Sharing your lifeline with others can reinforce the concepts of inspiration, (un-)learning, and collectively evolving.

I invite you, dear readers, to share the “turning point” moments of your journeys with one another and to nurture the hope for a regenerative future where all beings

L. Paul (✉)

LUT University Lappeenranta Finland & RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
e-mail: leonie.paul@lut.fi

© The Author(s) 2025

373

J. Bentz, J. Ristić Trajković (eds.), *Imagining, Designing and Teaching Regenerative Futures: Art-Science Approaches and Inspirations From Around the World*, Science for Sustainable Societies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9029-9_58

thrive. Your stories, your insights, and your care are the fuel that drives this collective endeavor.

58.2 Transformative Potential

This exercise is not a mere stroll down memory lane; it is a powerful tool for nurturing the regenerative futures we aspire to create. First, by dedicating time to unraveling our personal sustainability narratives, we gain profound insights into our ever-evolving relationship with the planet and our role within it. It serves as a reflective mirror, illuminating our individual journeys as well as the collective odyssey of humanity toward a more sustainable and regenerative world.

Second, understanding how our perceptions of sustainability have transformed over time empowers us to be deliberate, conscious, and effective change agents. It invites us to acknowledge and celebrate our progress while also discerning the areas in which potential shifts in our perception are needed. Through this exercise, we deepen our self-awareness and support a sense of agency and responsibility, propelling us toward a future where each of us actively participates as an integral part of nature.

Third, in sharing our personal sustainability stories, we contribute to a joint source of inspiration and wisdom that can illuminate the paths of others on their transformative journeys toward regenerative thinking and action (see Bentz et al. 2022). Thus, we collectively weave a narrative of hope and learning, guiding us toward the regenerative future we envision.

The exercise is refreshingly simple, demanding nothing more than your imagination. However, you are welcome to use pen and paper for visualization. So, let us begin...

58.3 Application

Through my own journey and interactions with others deeply engaged in sustainable development and regeneration, the Lifeline exercise has unveiled a mosaic of diverse experiences. Critical incidents that have forged a stronger connection or deeper understanding of oneself and regeneration often transcend traditional boundaries. The Lifeline exercise can be used as a prompt in interviews, classroom settings, intra- and inter-organizational workshops, interdisciplinary seminars, and many other contexts.

When done alone, a debriefing session with a small group or partner can be helpful to process the findings. The transcript describing the exercise can be found below and can be read out by a facilitator. Alternatively, you can follow along with the provided audio file. Feel free to draw your lifeline to bring reflections to life.

Creating a first lifeline draft will take about 15–20 minutes. Trust your instincts and initial thoughts; there are no right or wrong answers, and everyone’s journey is unique. If you have the chance to reflect on your lifelines in small groups, I recommend scheduling ample time to openly share thoughts and ideas from the exercise.

Audio <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BxB40vkd0osMk7Tw3ttuwtobK-c11lad/view?usp=sharing>

Transcript

Dear Listener/Dear Reader,

I would like to invite you to find a comfortable position. You might be seated or standing. Take a deep breath in and try to release any tension, physically and mentally. Before delving into the dreaming and designing of regenerative futures, I encourage you to have a look at your past and your own story.

Visualize your life’s journey, from the day you were born to this very moment as you read/hear these words. Your life’s path may take on various forms: a straight line, a spiral, a series of steps, or even a winding, curvy road. It is entirely your choice.

Now, traverse this lifeline, adding significant markers along the way. These markers could be your first day at school, a memorable family vacation, a life-altering accident, a true love story, your graduation, or the wedding of dear friends. Begin adding these marks to your imagined life course. These significant points in your life not only define your unique journey but also serve as crucial signposts guiding you through the rest of this exercise.

Next, let us come back to the present moment and begin walking backward along your lifeline. As you journey back in time, try to pinpoint the moment when “Sustainability” first made its entrance into your life’s narrative. I purposefully keep the concept vague because this is your story, and you are the storyteller. Only you truly grasp what the term means to you. When did sustainability appear in the picture for the first time?

If you identify an occasion that you believe marked your initial encounter with sustainability, continue walking further back into your past. Search for additional instances, understanding that during those early moments, you may not have explicitly labeled them as “sustainable.” Yet, armed with the knowledge you have gained over time, you can now see the connection. Can you identify specific incidents or multiple instances that signal your evolving perception of sustainability? What sparked these changes?

Take your time reflecting on these questions, and when you are ready, return to the *Reflective Lifelines* chapter and debrief the exercise.

Debrief

Having embarked on this introspective journey through your lifeline, you have unearthed the precious gems of your own sustainability narrative. Now, as we collectively aspire to craft regenerative futures, it is essential to harness the insights you have gained and channel them toward meaningful action.

For some, it is the transformative power of education, like a teacher’s words igniting a lifelong passion for social justice or animal welfare. For others, it is the fascination of travel, where immersion in new environments sparks eco-consciousness.

Family can play a significant role; the tales of eco-savvy parents or the influence of a grandparent's regenerative farming practices can resonate across lifelines. Furthermore, global events can trigger eye-opening moments, whether experienced firsthand or solely witnessing the devastation of natural disasters on a TV screen. For others, the impact of being confronted with harsh realities through documentaries vividly sharing images of, for example, the meat industry can trigger shifts in awareness and action. Each lifeline is unique; however, I invite you to look out for commonalities.

After completing the exercise, consider taking the following steps:

Document and Act Record your reflections to capture the essence of your lifeline. Keep a journal for your thoughts, milestones, and realizations to deepen your insights. Identify factors that shaped your views on sustainability and consider how to transform these into actions. For example, if learning about regenerative farming from your grandparents inspired you to explore urban gardening, you might offer neighborhood workshops to share this knowledge.

Engage in Dialogue Share your experiences and insights with others, whether their journeys are similar or different. Meaningful conversations about personal transformations can foster new perspectives and collaborative initiatives, leading to broader change. Think together about the common determinators to strengthen sustainability awareness and ultimately develop a regenerative mindset. How can we invite others on this journey? (Table 58.1).

Table 58.1 Method Overview

Main purpose
Reflection on inner transformations
Gained competences
Self-awareness, reflective thinking, integrative thinking, agency, empathy
Educational setting
Formal (undergraduate and graduate courses; leadership and management programs, and adult education)
Informal (workshops, seminars, retreats, and team building)
Space requirements/restrictions
Quiet reflection space
Resources and necessary materials
Pen and paper (optional)
Number of participants
Individual, pair, or group work (recommended)
Smaller groups of up to 6 people
Facilitator competences and skills
Active listening
Moderating diverse opinions
Participants skills/age/competences
Community, students, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners from age 16
General interest in learning about sustainability
Duration
30 minutes including some reflection time

References

- Bentz J, do Carmo L, Schafenacker N, Schirok J, Corso SD (2022) Creative, embodied practices, and the potentialities for sustainability transformations. *Sustain Sci* 17(2):687–699
- Eysenck MW, Keane MT (2015) *Cognitive psychology: a student's handbook*. Taylor & Francis Group, London
- Frank P, Sundermann A, Fischer D (2019) How mindfulness training cultivates introspection and competence development for sustainable consumption. *Int J Sustain High Educ* 20(6):1002–1021
- McAdams DP (2008) Personal narratives and the life story. In: John OP, Robins RW, Pervin LA (eds) *Handbook of personality: theory and research*. The Guilford Press, New York, pp 242–262
- Prebble SC, Addis DR, Tippet LJ (2013) Autobiographical memory and sense of self. *Psychol Bull* 139(4):815–840

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 59

Regenerative Practices, Teaching as Learning



Lígia Oliveira

59.1 Introduction

This approach aims at reconfiguring the relationship we have with Nature. This is seen as the key to regenerative practices to unfold, independent of scale, target groups, discipline, and place. As a designer trained in interdisciplinary approaches, I have been developing this as a means to approach challenges within the multiple fields of my expertise: design, arts, architecture; the urban realm; and any disciplines belonging to these, to the cultural and innovation frameworks.

The regenerative practice proposed here consists of regular visits to a specific place, other species, or element. However, this is not a method per se, as no exclusive approach can be considered regenerative. Instead, these practices emerge from a relational stance within a specific context, requiring our presence, self-inquiry, values, discipline, observation, and cooperation. Therefore, it is more fitting to refer to these as practices and approaches rather than a single method.

To reconfigure our relationship with Nature, we need a body–mind relational approach. Key aspects of this include mental knowledge, by having clear values and goals, and analytical thinking; listening and interpreting our bodies' sensory cues—including emotions, as these, aligned with our experiences, values, and current moods, provide constant information about our context and its unfolding. Finally, a relational approach acknowledges the quality of our engagement toward places, more than humans, elements: not as consumers, users, and visitors, but as friendly parts of a complex, interconnected system. This includes the awareness of these relational dynamics: how we impact other humans, other species, and ecosystems; the impact these have on us; and the interconnectedness among all. It also integrates

L. Oliveira (✉)

Independent Artist and Designer, Vila Real de Santo António, Portugal

e-mail: ligiaoliveirastudio@gmail.com

© The Author(s) 2025

379

J. Bentz, J. Ristić Trajković (eds.), *Imagining, Designing and Teaching Regenerative Futures: Art-Science Approaches and Inspirations From Around the World*, Science for Sustainable Societies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9029-9_59

an understanding of how our own biographies, character, and aspirations shape us, and by extension, define the quality of what we do in the world.

Observing the complexity of these, we can loop back to the mental knowledge and awareness of values and behaviors, apply those within this relational framework, and ask: What are the values and behaviors that make good relationships, and which ones can be applied to regenerative practices? The answer to this might be individual, circumstantial, and local, yet the questions themselves are a fundamental step in this practice.

59.2 Transformative Potential

We become full members of our society by being specialists on what is around us—people, places, and Nature—by being their students. This curiosity is a key feature in establishing positive relationships, done through engagement with them: by listening, observing, first. Our disposition to learn defines the quality and complexity of our analysis and of our relationships and largely indicates how good the results are. Getting to know the object of our analysis directly, the other, as often as possible; in different conditions; its patterns of behavior, of change; how it interacts with other elements; and its history. Where did it come from? How was it in the past? How does it relate to its system?

The power of the approach for regenerative futures presented here lies in its foundational framework toward deeply understanding the interconnectedness of all elements within ecosystems: how they relate to each other and with us. By recognizing that everything relates to its context and that we relate to everything, we develop a profound awareness of the interdependence of all elements. This perspective fosters a systemic understanding essential for addressing complex environmental challenges. It emphasizes the importance of both external observation and internal reflection. It encourages us to be “me-searchers,” understanding our motivations and histories and how these relate to our contexts. This dual focus helps identify individual and collective shortcomings, frustrations, misguided actions, and opportunities, leading to more effective and meaningful actions.

By reframing our practices in response to social and environmental crises, we can foster a new imagination that drives positive change. This promotes a shift from a human-centric to a relational-centric approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of listening to and respecting our environment. This framework is transformative because it acknowledges that we are also transformed by our methodologies and frameworks, not only the reality that we aim to regenerate. We transform, and all of these transform us too. Through integrating intellectual and emotional intelligence, transformation occurs within the author, relationship, and outcome. And by having a framework grounded in the relational through awareness, communication, and values such as respect and compassion, the intentions are toward the right course of action. By using this framework, we foster deeper relationships—with ourselves and with Nature.

59.3 Application

The work I do starts outside—getting to know my context and defining my commitment: I commit to respect and care. Not in an abstract way, but specifically: a tree, a river, a landscape, or a sea. The process of getting to know it—the ecosystem we are looking into—increases the commitment. Value it and make that the basis of your relational, loving practice: an action verb.

In this simple walking, sitting, and observing routine, no complicated materials or extensive preparation are needed. These are framed by repetition: regular, in-person visits. Being in nature, I engage emotionally and physically with the environment, and by asking questions like, “What would the trees or the river do?” I open myself to new perspectives and solutions from the natural world. In the process toward any outcome, object, or process, I keep contrasting it to the relational dimension: how would it affect this place: this tree or similar ones, this landscape or others I have never seen, or how does it affect the functioning of the ecosystem? Does it provide disruption, and to whom? Does it create entanglements, opportunities, benefits, and to whom? What would be necessary for regeneration to occur?

For this practice, you will need the following:

Time Commitment: Set aside regular time to visit your chosen natural place, element, or species. Even short, frequent visits can be powerful.

Materials: Minimal materials are needed—comfortable clothing, a notebook for observations, and perhaps a camera to document thoughts, metaphors, sensations, impressions, and moods.

Application: This method can be applied individually or in groups. Individual practice helps with personal growth and understanding, while group activities can foster community engagement and collective learning.

Preparation: No extensive preparatory work is required. Simply choose a place that resonates with you and begin your visits. Over time, your observations and interactions will deepen your understanding and connection.

Further Considerations: Emotional regulation is an important element when witnessing environmental changes, as these can be challenging. Practices of compassion, hope, and commitment, rather than avoidance, help manage discomfort and anxiety, as well as sharing concerns with a trusted friend and/or within your community. This practice encourages viewing problems from a broader perspective and understanding the interconnections within ecosystems. This comprehensive view is crucial for developing regenerative practices and aims to encourage a sense of belonging. And finally, combine physical presence in nature with self-reflection. Understanding your motivations and histories, and how these relate to the larger environmental context, contributes to weaving your individual narrative into the collective, planetary one. We are all in this together (Table 59.1).

Table 59.1 Method overview

Main purpose
Awareness building/decision-making/behavior change
Gained competences
Awareness: Of self, of the other/nature, of the relationship; systemic perspective
Educational setting
Informal and/or formal: Individual and collective decision-making processes and workshops
Space requirements/restrictions
Outside activities
Resources and necessary materials
Comfortable clothing, a notebook for observations (optional: Camera)
Number of participants
Individual and small groups (max. 25)
Facilitator competences and skills
Self-knowledge, compassion, and interpersonal skills
Participants skills/age/competences
Community, students, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners; university level and above
Duration
From 1 hour on, with benefits resulting from its repetitive use

References

- Celidwen Y, Keltner D (2023) Kin relationality and ecological belonging: a cultural psychology of indigenous transcendence. *Front Psychol* 14:994508. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.994508>
- Ekman P, Ekman E (2016) The Atlas of emotions. <https://atlasofemotions.org/>
- Pallasmaa J (2005) The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses. Wiley-Academy, Chichester
- Waldinger RJ, Schulz MS (2023) The good life: lessons from the world's longest study of happiness. Simon and Schuster, New York
- Watson J (2019) Lo-TEK: design by radical indigenism. Taschen
- Whitburn J, Linklater W, Abrahamse W (2020) Meta-analysis of human connection to nature and proenvironmental behavior. *Conserv Biol* 34(1):180–193. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13381>
- Yunkaporta T (2020) Sand talk: how indigenous thinking can save the world. Harper Collins

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 60

Active Listening Workshop: The Art of Listening to Words and Emotions



Maria Bakatsaki

60.1 Introduction

Active listening is one of the most powerful communication skills, and it can be cultivated through daily practice. The proposed 2-hour experiential workshop uses role-playing to effectively develop active listening skills. This technique can be used for experiential teaching, either in-person in a classroom or via an online platform. Participants often reported quickly connecting with others, despite the brevity of the exercise. They also recognized shared challenges, highlighting active listening's potential to foster a sense of belonging and shift thoughts and behaviors.

Active listening is the art of listening to words and emotions. The ability to connect empathetically by understanding others' emotions, avoiding interruptions and distractions, while using techniques such as interpreting both verbal and non-verbal cues, reflective paraphrasing, summarizing, asking open-ended or clarifying questions and staying curious about the speaker's intentions and motivations. This entails questioning perceptions, empathizing, using warm and supportive vocal tone and showing genuine concern and full attention facilitating others to express themselves more openly and authentically (Tennant et al. 2023).

Stephen Covey (1990), author of the bestseller 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People', suggested as a tip that '*We should seek first to understand, then to be understood*'. Emotional regulation is essential to prevent anger outbursts and set aside judgment, manipulation, egocentric attitudes, stereotypes, and personal assumptions that hinder communication. This approach reduces misunderstandings and conflicts, facilitates information exchange, builds trust and mutual respect, and

M. Bakatsaki (✉)

School of Production Engineering and Management, Technical, University of Crete,
Chania, Greece

e-mail: mbakatsaki@tuc.gr

© The Author(s) 2025

J. Bentz, J. Ristić Trajković (eds.), *Imagining, Designing and Teaching Regenerative Futures: Art-Science Approaches and Inspirations From Around the World*, Science for Sustainable Societies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9029-9_60

385

fosters fruitful dialogue and meaningful communication, ultimately creating a more positive and welcoming atmosphere in both personal, educational and professional settings.

60.2 Transformative Potential

The American psychotherapist Carl Rogers introduced active listening as a key communication tool in 1967, recognizing its significance in therapeutic contexts. He observed that allowing individuals to share what has happened to them and how they feel about it was a crucial step in facilitating changes in their thoughts and behaviors (Rogers and Farson 1987). While advice can help them, real change happens when they work through problems themselves. Having the space to speak openly with a compassionate listener is one of the most powerful ways to support the process (Tuhovsky 2018). Since then, active listening has proven valuable in fields such as counseling psychology, administration, education, and healthcare.

Human relationships are the sum of interactions. When people's concerns, efforts, and opinions are acknowledged, they feel seen and valued. This enhances communication, reduces misunderstandings, and facilitates conflict management by promoting a collaborative atmosphere where both parties feel respected. Open dialogue can challenge existing norms and paradigms, paving the way for innovative solutions and transformative actions. Under such conditions, fear and anxiety are reduced, while self-esteem increases, creating space for trust, mutual respect, and a sense of security. This fosters integrity and ethical behavior, empowering people to be authentic and innovative. Moreover, when open dialogue is paired with empathy, compassion, and openness, it strengthens social cohesion, resilience, and a sense of belonging, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being of society. This, in turn, encourages people to become engaged citizens who actively participate in civic life, fostering a more informed and democratic society .

In education, active listening empowers students to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns, promoting critical thinking and creating a positive, inclusive learning environment. It strengthens teacher–student relationships, and when students feel heard and valued, they are more likely to engage in their academic community. This sense of belonging encourages students to work harder to achieve their learning goals (Oyeronke et al. 2024), significantly contributing to their educational success and well-being (Conner et al. 2022).

In the professional realm, active listening is an essential skill for effective leadership and team collaboration (Hersey et al. 2001). Leaders who actively listen to their team members demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and employee well-being, which enhances workplace morale and fosters innovation as employees feel empowered to share their ideas. Moreover, by actively listening to stakeholders, businesses can develop practices that align with ecological principles, contributing to a more sustainable and regenerative economy.

Active listening also plays a key role in integrating cultural and Indigenous knowledge into ecological practices. In a broader context, the ability to understand, respect, and respond to diverse voices in environmental discussions is crucial for building a collective commitment to ecological sustainability. By fostering understanding, collaboration, and meaningful dialogue, active listening contributes to regenerative futures, promoting a holistic approach to problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation in sustainability and environmental stewardship (Taylor 2023).

It takes awareness, effort and can be cultivated through daily practice to become a more effective listener. The proposed Active Listening workshop, specifically using role-play, holds significant transformative potential for several reasons:

1. It is an effective conflict management practice, enabling two opposing sides (CONS and PROS) to reach a mutually acceptable solution quickly (within 5–7 minutes). During the group session, participants engage in self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques to enhance their self-awareness and active listening skills. Occasionally, I encourage members of the academic community, including administrative staff, professors, researcher and deans, to participate and interact with the students, as well as with each other. This amplifies the results of the workshop, strengthening the students' sense of belonging to the academic community, improving their relationships with their co-students and academic staff and boosts their motivation, persistence and academic performance (Silverman 2021; Wang et al. 2024). Such inclusive interactions in a non-hierarchical setting foster mutual trust, respect and authentic dialogue among academic stakeholders, humanize institutional roles, demystify authority figures, which in turn can reduce social distance and power imbalance. Additionally, academic staff gain insight into students' perspective, concerns and communication styles, which can inform more empathetic and effective teaching (Flavia & Enachi-Vasluianu 2016) and administrative practices. Ultimately, this cross-participation improves community bonds, interpersonal relationships and contributes significantly to greater academic performance, personal well-being and a more cohesive and inclusive organisational culture.
2. Participants are tasked with supporting an opinion contrary to their own beliefs by "putting themselves in the shoes" of the opposing side. Our minds often justify our actions, causing us to overlook important factors. By adopting the opposite perspective, we can identify overlooked issues and better prepare for future actions. For example, consider interracial baby adoption: in the context of a hostile school environment, how prepared would I be as a parent to support my child against stereotyping and bullying from children unfamiliar with racial diversity? Would I be strong enough to confront close-minded teachers who contribute to a toxic environment?
3. The observer in this exercise is required to actively listen to the two participants without intervening, which puts them in a unique position. They gain a more objective perspective, observing the entire process from a distance. This practice promotes cognitive clarity, reduces the negative effects of stress on the brain, and

encourages a relaxed state. Observers also become more attuned to the “DOs” and “DON’Ts” of active listening, increasing their awareness of effective communication strategies.

60.3 Application

This experiential Active Listening workshop is based on a group exercise from Bateman and Snell (2017), and can be applied to students either in person in a classroom or online:

- (a) **Online version:** An online platform (such as Zoom, Webex, or any platform that allows participants to be randomly and automatically divided into break-out rooms) is used. Each participant must have a camera and microphone. The presentation and instructions for the workshop can be sent via email before or at the beginning of the workshop using the chat function of the online platform. The advantages of the online version include: (1) the facilitator can quickly create break-out rooms and easily visit groups without interrupting them, (2) the groups can work without disturbances, (3) the workshop can accommodate many participants, and (4) it is easier to record the entire process (though consent from all participants is required). The disadvantages include: (1) recordings are only available in the break-out rooms visited by the facilitator, (2) despite cameras, many non-verbal cues are missed since only faces are visible, (3) there is always a risk of technical issues (e.g., internet or electricity failure), leading to participant drop-offs or disconnections, and (4) the cost of the online platform license must be considered.
- (b) **In-Person Version:** For in-person workshops, a video projector is required to present the theory of active listening and the instructions for role-playing. Participants are randomly divided into groups of three and receive hard copies of the workshop instructions. The in-person version allows participants to observe full-body non-verbal cues and eliminates technical disruptions. However, the disadvantages are: (1) dividing participants into groups takes more time, (2) it can be very noisy when all groups are working in the same room, and (3) as the number of participants increases, more space is needed, making it harder for the facilitator to monitor group progress.

The workshop requires at least 100 minutes, though 2-2.5 hours is recommended to allow participants to fully experience all roles and still have time for discussion during the subsequent plenary session. The Active Listening Role-Play workshop is organized into five stages:

Stage 1 (25 Minutes) The workshop begins with a joint session where all participants are introduced to the theory of active listening (find helpful links below in the section of References), its advantages, and practical techniques. My own presentation can also serve as a helpful guide, which can be downloaded from the link: https://users.isc.tuc.gr/~mbakatsaki/Workshop_ActiveListening-EN.pptx.

Stage 2 (5 Minutes) The process of the exercise is explained to participants, as detailed in the following stages and more extensively in the presentation link (https://users.isc.tuc.gr/~mbakatsaki/Workshop_ActiveListening-EN.pptx).

Stage 3 (at Least 50 Minutes) Participants are randomly divided into groups of three to begin the role-playing exercise. Groups should be as diverse as possible (in terms of gender, nationality, discipline, age, etc.). Each participant is assigned a number (1, 2, or 3). In the first round: 1 takes the PROS position, 2 takes the CONS position, and 3 acts as the OBSERVER. A suggested list of “difficult” topics is provided (e.g., the death penalty for convicts, legalization of marijuana, etc.), and participants can propose alternative controversial subjects.

The PROS (1) and CONS (2) members have 1 minute to prepare their points of view, followed by 5–7 minutes to reach a mutually acceptable solution. The OBSERVER tracks time and notes the behaviors and comments of the conflicted parties, based on a list of active and less-active listening behaviors provided in Table 60.1.

After reaching a mutual (acceptable or non-acceptable) conclusion, team members share feedback on which behaviors worked well and which need improvement. The OBSERVER presents their own observations and experiences regarding how the PROS and CONS members practiced active listening.

If possible, two further rounds are conducted, each with a different topic, allowing everyone to play all roles. The facilitator during the role-play visits the break-out rooms (online format) or the groups (onsite format) and observes/facilitates the whole process.

Stage 4 (at least 10 Minutes) In a plenary session, all groups exchange their experiences and reflect on the following questions:

1. How did you come to a mutually acceptable solution? What helped you get there?
2. Which factors hindered this process?
3. How comfortable did you feel supporting the PROS or CONS position? How did this affect your active listening ability?
4. If the given position (PROS vs. CONS) was opposed to your values, did you see the issue from a different perspective before the workshop?

Table 60.1 Information about listening

Indications of active listening
1. Asked questions for clarification
2. Paraphrased the opposite view
3. Reacted to non-verbal cues (body language, vocal tone)
4. Worked towards a mutually acceptable solution
Indication of less active listening
1. Interrupted his/her interlocutor instead of letting him/her finish
2. Became defensive about his/her position
3. Tried to dominate the conversation
4. Ignored non-verbal cues

What steps could you take to improve your ability to listen actively to your friends or collaborators, especially if you disagree with their opinions?

Stage 5 (10 Minutes) The workshop concludes with a discussion on how to further cultivate active listening. To deepen participants' learning and evaluate their experience, the link of an online short anonymous questionnaire (e.g. via Google Forms) can be shared (Table 60.2). The facilitator waits participants to complete the questionnaire and respond to any questions.

Table 60.2 Method overview

Main purpose
Experiential workshop using role-playing to practice of the fundamental communication skill of active listening. Active Listening is a powerful conflict management tool and can foster mutual trust, respect, empathy, and meaningful open dialogue, as well as a sense of belonging. This can subsequently lead to changes in behavior, encouraging more ethical and authentic behavior, engaged citizenship, and improvement in general social cohesion, resilience, and society's well-being. It can also contribute to building the foundations for a more informed and democratic society and promotes a more holistic approach to problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation in the context of sustainability and environmental stewardship.
Gained competences
Active listening and other verbal and non-verbal communication skills, educational & professional benefits (strengthen teacher-student relationships, sustainability leadership, decision-making, creativity, inclusivity and workplace effectiveness), Social and Relational skills (teamworking, building trust, conflict management) and Cognitive & Reflective skills (critical thinking, improved self-awareness, problem solving). It increases Behavioral & Transformational skills (compassion, empathy, self-esteem, ethical and responsible behavior, stress reduction and resilience).
Educational setting
This capacity-building workshop can be easily applied to all educational settings (primary, secondary and higher education) as well as informal vocational settings. I included this workshop as an experiential learning method in the "Human Resource Management" course). Occasionally, I encourage members of the academic community, including administrative staff, professors, researcher and deans, to participate and interact with the students, as well as with each other. This amplifies the results of the workshop, strengthening students' sense of belonging to the academic community, improving their relationships with their co-students and academic staff, and encouraging them to work harder to achieve their learning goals, which contributes significantly to their educational success and well-being.
Space requirements/restrictions
Indoor activities either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online format conducted via a video conferencing platforms, allowing participants to join from any location without physical space limitations. Web platforms have usually a limitation of 300 participants. The problem is that only the participant's upper body is visible and the non-verbal cues of the full body cannot be taken into account. – In person format in a physical space room size becomes a constraint. There is a limitation of 8 groups of 3 people = 24 people per 50 m²; otherwise, it will be too noisy. The advantage is that since all participants are present, full-body non-verbal cues are able to be observed, which can significantly enhance the active listening experience.

(continued)

Table 60.2 (continued)

Resources and necessary materials
Material: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 presentation of the theory about active listening (my own presentation can be also used as a helpful guide, which can be downloaded from this link: https://users.isc.tuc.gr/~mbakatsaki/Workshop_ActiveListening-EN.pptx), – 1 page with printed directions of the role-play, which is shared to all participants for in person version. In the case of online version a Word file is shared via the chat of webplatform. Technical equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online version: (1) mobile phone or computer with microphone and video camera and (2) web platform for video conferencing, which has the possibility of break out rooms – With a physical presence in a room/class: 1 video projector
Number of participants
Groups of three participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The online version of the free account of webplatform has a limit of 100 participants. The paid version can host from 300 to 1000 participants (depended on the webplatform payment plan). The more participants there are the lower the quality of the connection. – With physical presence in a class/room (8 groups of 3 people = 24 people per 50 m²)
Facilitator competences and skills
The workshop can easily applied even by primary/secondary/higher education teachers to pupils or students if they follow the directions of this chapter/tipsheet and are aware of verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The introductory presentation on the theory of active listening could be also a helpful guide, which is given at the following link: https://users.isc.tuc.gr/~mbakatsaki/Workshop_ActiveListening-EN.pptx .
Participants skills/age/competences
Anyone over the age of 10 can participate regardless of their scientific background. A diverse range of participants, including those from various countries, genders, ages, businesses, policymakers, citizens, and more, can make the workshop more effective and encourage meaningful dialogue.
Duration
At least 100 Minutes, preferably 2-2.5 hours (150 Minutes)

References

- Bateman T, Snell S (2017) Management leading & collaborating in a competitive world. McGraw-Hill, Boston
- Conner J, Posner M, Nsowaa B (2022) The relationship between student voice and student engagement in urban high schools. *Urban Rev* 54(5):755–774. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-022-00637-2>. Epub 2022 Jun 23. PMID: 35761953; PMCID: PMC9219399
- Covey SR (1990). The 7 habits of highly effective people. New York: Simon & Schuster
- Flavia M, Enachi-Vasluianu L (2016) The importance of elements of active listening in didactic communication: a student's perspective. *CBU Int Conf Proc* 4:332. <https://doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v4.776>
- Hersey P, Blanchard K, Johnson D (2001) Management of organizational behavior. Leading Human Resources. Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey
- Oyeronke P, Adeoye M, Arowosaye S, Yejide I (2024) The impact of active listening on student engagement and learning outcomes in educational settings. *Int J Univ Educ* 2:77–89. <https://doi.org/10.33084/ijue.v2i2.8898>
- Rogers CR, Farson RE (1987) In: Newman RG, Danzinger MA, Cohen M (eds) Active listening. Communicating in Business. D.C. Heath & Company, Boston