

## ICPAK Training of Trainers Workshop 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018

### Professional Public Speaking (Session notes)

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When I was invited to speak, my brief was pretty simple. I was requested to discuss the topic: **“Public Speaking. The do and don’ts when session chairing, introducing facilitators/ chief guest and what to observe while making presentations”** of which I was told I have a 30-minute slot just after lunch hour to do it. I thought great...this is a simple and straightforward area. I should be through in even half the time. After all, how else do you pass the message that the trick of a good introducer is one who has mastered brevity than by being brief yourself?

However, when I peeked at the day’s program, I noticed a more generalized topic though: **Public Speaking: How to handle introductions; Time management during sessions; General consideration while making your presentations.** All of a sudden, I felt a bit thrown at the deep end...because all of a sudden, I was being requested to condense material for a 4-year degree into a 30-minute session.

However, my sigh of relief is that the target audience are in themselves masters of their craft. That what they seek is less of an education but more of a reminder. More like a peer intersection into how better we can improve ourselves as professional communicators.

My humble submission then is to transform this from a lecture into a discussion...a plenary of ideas if you like. In the end, I may end asking more questions than seeking to provide answers. Which is what a good presenter, whether a session chair or facilitator should do anyway. The role of a communication is not to fill a brain vessel but to ignite an exciting fire with a lively exchange of heart sparks between the discussants hereby forming. Don’t make communication a rational endeavor but an emotional heartfelt attempt to fill the void of silence with verbal inspiration.

On top of mind then, in no specific order of merit, here are what I consider a couple of good pointers to remember when speaking before a professional or any other audience for that matter:



### On introducing speakers:

- 1) Get the **speaker's name** right
- 2) The **speaker is the center of attention**. Create interest in him or her not you. But don't over hype speaker. You create too high expectations for him to deliver.
- 3) **Be organized**. In order to ensure seamless transitions, make sure that speaker presentations are ready on the laptop being used, and check that your speakers know how to find and open theirs.... And have tech support nearby in case technology Murphy's law happens on you.

### On chairing sessions/conferences

- 1) **Be inclusive** Do not give one speaker more prominence than the others, whoever they might be; highlight each person's key publications and achievements equally. Be prepared for a stony silence when you open up the floor – prepare your own question for each speaker. But if there is a flurry of hands, don't hog the time. Prevent questioners from dominating, bullying, or patronizing speakers by courteously reminding them to come to the point.
- 2) **Be fair** Scan the audience to ensure that early career researchers and more reticent colleagues have an opportunity to address the panel. Try to make sure that all speakers get at least one comment or question.
- 3) **Be selfless** Keep anecdotes about your own research to coffee time and let the speakers take the spotlight. If you find links with your own work, or think of references that might help to inform speakers' research, talk to them or email them later. Encourage early career researchers and new speakers, and boost their confidence by thanking them for their presentation and showing an interest in their work.
- 4) **Be attentive** You are the chair, in full view of the room, so listen attentively and take notes on relevant points that could be used for questions later. Don't fidget, or yawn.
- 5) **Be Invisible** When it's time for questions, stand to the side of the podium and scan the audience, leaving center stage for your speakers. If multiple audience members raise their hands, make eye contact with each and nod discreetly so they know you have seen them.



- 6) **Be firm Always** begin promptly and make sure you time each speaker's individual slot, so that each has his or her fair share of the session. However awkward it is, you must keep people to time. Be prepared to tackle a speaker even if they are higher up the academic ranks, self-important, or simply stubborn enough to ignore you. Agree in advance with your speakers about what sign you will use to alert them that they need to begin drawing their talk to a close, such as a polite finger gesture. If necessary, know when to stop believing the speaker's promises that they are about to conclude and inform them firmly that you will have to stop them there in order to introduce the next presenter.
- 7) **Be positive** When you get to question time, it is your responsibility to lead the discussion by encouraging a dialogue between the audience and speakers. This can be the most rewarding part of the session; otherwise the experts may as well have stayed at home and read their paper to the cat.
- 8) Ensure that everyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so, and try to read faces and feel the silences. This way you know when the questions have dried up and it's time to thank the speakers and the audience, and say how great the session has been. When the time for the panel to end arrives, tie things up (even if there are more questions), allowing everyone to happily head for tea and biscuits or to the pub – where they won't talk about you, because you did your job so well.  
Be fair. Notice the shy hand raisers (inclusivity). Be a good time keeper for everyone.

### **On making presentations:**

- 1) Be informed about your topic. Very well enough to be simple about it.
- 2) Don't overly rely on PowerPoint. This is the rule. If someone can understand your whole talk simply by reading your PowerPoint slides, then you were not that relevant as a speaker. PowerPoint is a guide, not a manuscript. Have a simple guide. And prepare side notes for the participants to read after. No one reads PowerPoint slides after the presentation anyway.
- 3) Tell stories. Leave the speeches to the politicians.
- 4) Be standing. Be brief. Be seated. Time is currency. Everyone will be happy that you care enough about theirs to keep attention to it.

THE END

