

# **Growing the person**

## **Communication, soft skills, and the broader curriculum**

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A person is standing on the edge of a high, white, rocky cliff. The person is wearing a red jacket and a hat. The cliff face is rugged and textured. In the background, the ocean is visible, and the sky is overcast. The overall scene is dramatic and scenic.

# **Context / Research Background**

- **Media Arts and Centre for Business, IT, and Enterprise, at Wintec**
- **2014 – employer expectations of communication skills of graduates**
- **2015 - educational perspectives of communication skills of graduates**



ACCI (2002)  
Bennett (2006)  
Careers NZ (2013)  
Davies, Gore, Shury,  
Graduate Careers  
Australia (2013)  
Vivian, Winterbotham,  
& Constable (2012)  
VUW (2006)

Word collage created on Wordle - <http://www.wordle.net/>

A black and white photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a dirt road or path leads into the distance. The middle ground features rolling fields and some trees. The background shows a horizon line under a sky filled with dramatic, layered clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and expansive.

# **Communication as part of the ‘employability’ landscape**

- Employers are looking for attributes along with, or as part of, communication skills.
- Notion of pre-competence and threshold competence (Jackson, 2009)



# Snapshot of employer survey

- Our findings were consistent with broader international research on employability skills and communication – much focus on interpersonal skills, teamwork, written communication, and also personal attributes.
- Communication learning outcomes included in our courses were generally consistent with employers' expectations.
- **BUT** employers still found communication skills of graduates wanting & identified issues with adapting to professional contexts.

# **Snapshot of tutor survey – so far**

- Mostly consistent with employers' thoughts
  - High ratings for all skills, but highest for interpersonal
  - Also rate personal attributes like motivation highly
  - Rate presentation skills higher than employers, spelling slightly lower
- Many mention the importance of adaptability to professional context



# **Issues for teaching**

language morphing

delivery style

authenticity

scaffolding

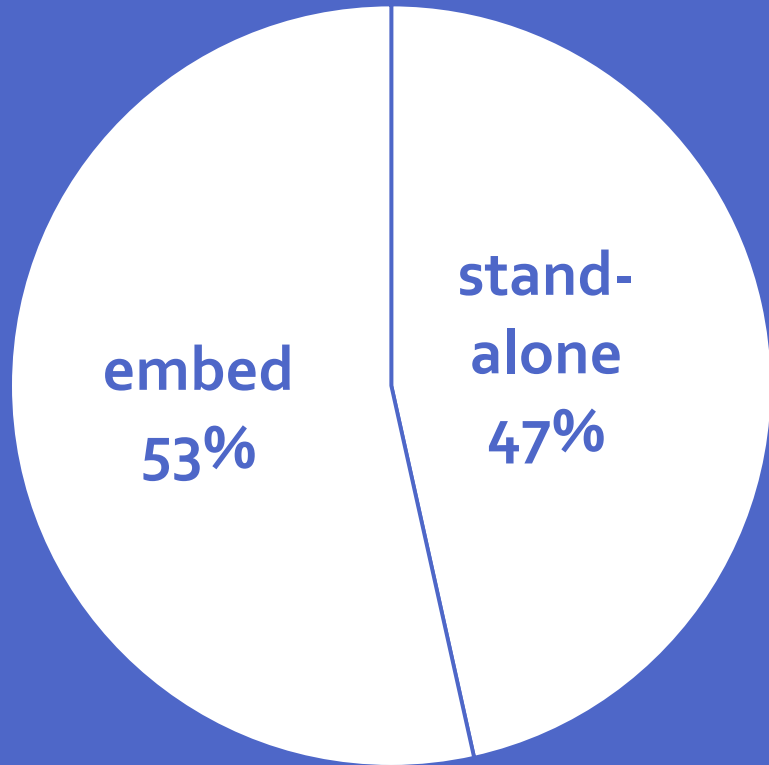
flexibility



**So...**

- How should communication competency be taught and does it include broader competencies and attributes beyond basic communication skills?
- Should communication skills be embedded or taught as stand-alone courses?
- How might it be woven into discipline-specific learning?

# Results so far...



**But, when reading comments...**

- **22% respondents favour stand-alone**
- **28% advocate BOTH**
- **BOTH categorised two ways:**
  - stand-alone + embedded
  - integrated
- **Embedded either in-class, or work-based**

# Models / Methods for teaching communication

Stand-alone

Contextualised  
communication  
skills

Embed

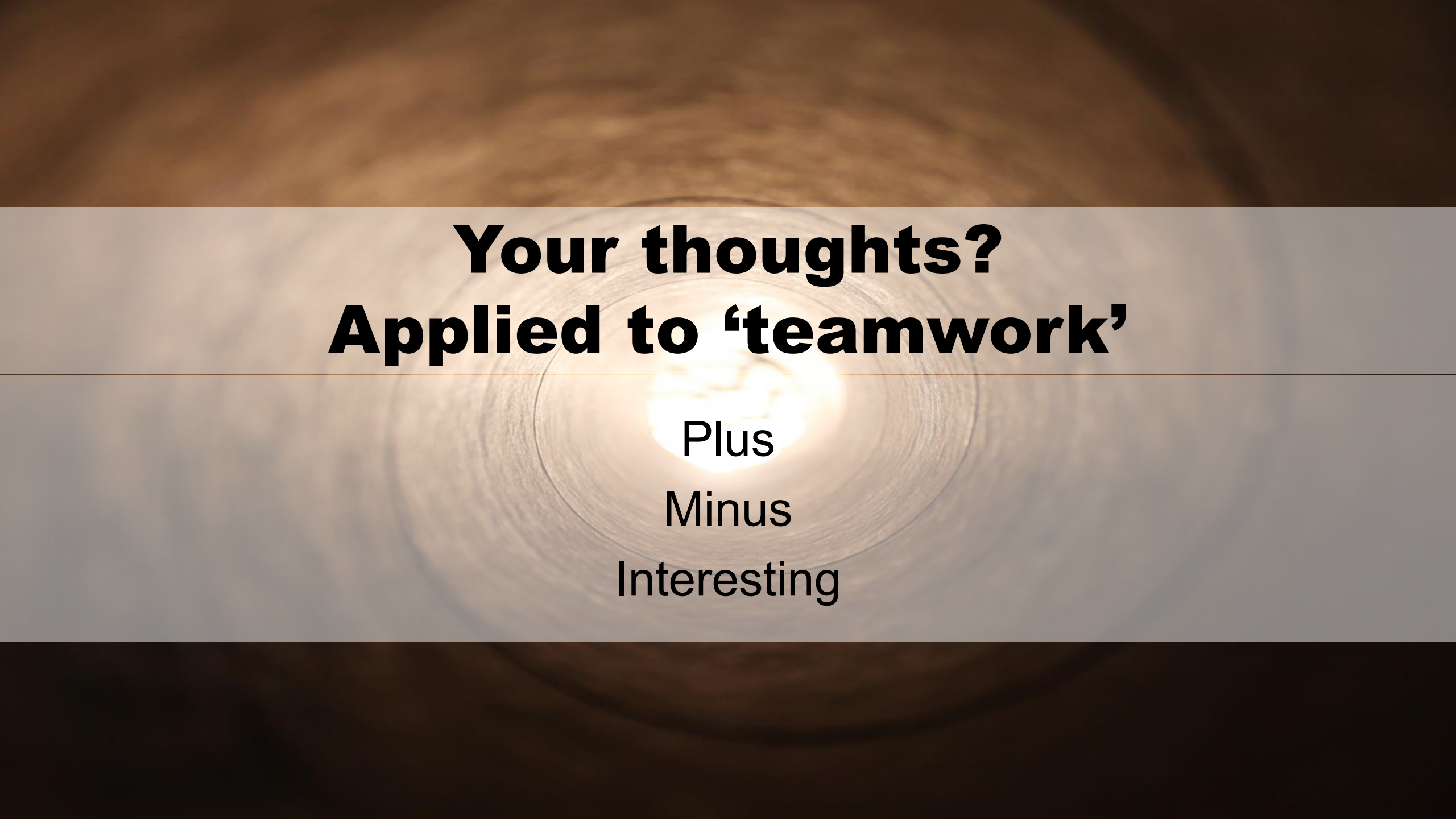
Expressed as  
part of, or  
applied to,  
subject-specific  
content

Integrate

Substantial  
integration  
of communication  
skills as  
subject content

Work-  
based

Communication  
skills as  
interpreted  
within a  
professional  
context



# **Your thoughts? Applied to ‘teamwork’**

Plus

Minus

Interesting

The background of the slide is a long-exposure photograph of a night sky, showing numerous concentric star trails in shades of blue and white. At the bottom of the image, the dark, silhouetted outlines of mountains or hills are visible. A semi-transparent light gray rectangular box is centered horizontally and covers the middle portion of the image, serving as a background for the text.

# **What else?**

Other models?  
Other examples?

A person is holding a lit sparkler, which is creating a bright, starburst-like pattern of sparks. The person's hand and part of their arm are visible, wearing a light-colored, textured sleeve. The background is a clear, light blue sky. The overall image has a soft, slightly blurred quality, emphasizing the light from the sparkler.

# **What needs to happen?**

Best practice for your discipline?

Questions to be answered for effective approaches?

Academic / Institutional / Professional

# A proposed framework

*University of Western Australia – Communication Skills Framework (2009)*

[http://www.uwa.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1895806/Communication-Skills-Working-Party-Report.pdf](http://www.uwa.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1895806/Communication-Skills-Working-Party-Report.pdf)

- Incorporated into a major **or** covered separately
  - “explicit focus” on communication
  - develop skills progressively across levels
  - content, pedagogy, and assessment
  - taught **by or in consultation with** specialists
- integrated into professional and subject-specific content

**A post-it for your  
thoughts...**

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