



We're now into the holiday season. According to my local Starbucks, it started just after Halloween. Now, even I'm in the mood for a little holiday music with my Grande Decaf 3 pump Skinny Mocha (no whip). The holiday season is very deeply about people—families gathering, concerns for those without families, gatherings in churches and synagogues and mosques, parades and community gatherings, holiday parties, holiday lights. In our communal ways, we collide with others. Some collisions are intentional, some accidental. But these collisions are at the heart of community and, as it turns out, at the heart of innovation.

Collaboration is really about how we structure meaningful collisions. This truth was brought to me last week in several different contexts. First, I participated on an interview team that was doing its final to the owner team via an on-line video conference. Our team was scattered around California and we were limited to two video feeds. The owner's team of seven was assembled in a room with one camera focused on the group. It was hard to get a sense of anyone's reaction so we were left to a presentation that was meant to be power point but ended up as printed .pdfs, distributed to the presentees.

The benefit of this process was that it saved money for the participants (our team), a valuable goal in this day and age of giant presentation teams spending a \$100,000 or more in pursuit of work. But the detriments were present as well. We couldn't establish a real connection with the interview team. Our collision was over fiber optics, at some distance, with unreliable connectivity. And the interaction we hoped for, the searching conversation that is at the heart of communication was missing. We were not able, in essence to collaborate. We were left to laborate (seems like that should be a word if it isn't) in silos—lone voices dominating the voice activated system with the attendant background noise and media detritus that accompanies such a venue. Yet, every day we hear advertisements for the great efficiency of these technological "innovations."

The next day, I was back in Dallas, listening to NPR (national public radio if you haven't tuned in lately). They had a report about an Israeli scientist who was researching what information we can read from people's faces. He assembled photographs of tennis players' faces and asked people whether the player was happy about a certain point or play or disappointed. Interviewees were unable to accurately describe the emotion the player was actually feeling—they needed to see the body and the face. They needed more context:

"When you and I talk to each other and we look at each other, we're really looking at each other's faces. That's where our attention is. And so the assumption has been that that's where all the information is, too," says Barrett. "But these studies show very clearly that that's not the case."





“These findings add to a growing body of evidence that when we're trying to figure out another person's emotional state, we rely on a lot more than just the face.”¹

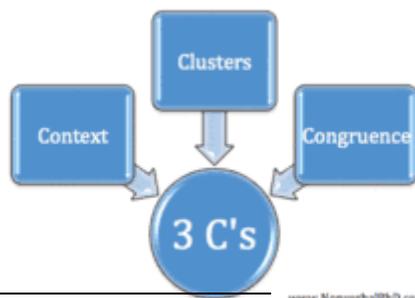
This information was combined with my work in a trailer last Friday. A team from two Dallas area hospitals assembled in the construction trailer of a new hospital to work on the transition from their current facilities to their new ones. Construction teams from both sites and staff from both existing operations worked together to consider how moves that won't happen for a year and a half should be planned. As they laid out stickies with information on each thing that needed to be accomplished for the move, the hospital project manager commented: “now this is starting to look like a big room.”

So what do all of these disparate activities have in common? Something very close to home for our community, as it turns out. One of the tasks of the research committee this year is to look into big room culture. What is it that is necessary to get the kind of collaboration we strive for when we talk about the opportunity on lean design and construction projects to “collaborate, really collaborate?” What these experiences tell me is that there is no reasonable substitute for in person, face-to-face (now body-to-body) interaction. We derive extraordinary benefits out of in person communication—the planned collision of folks striving for a common end.

An article last year in *Psychology Today* took on the challenge of whether “80% of communication is non-verbal.” In agreeing that the 80% number is generally true, Jeff Thompson (a PhD candidate researching non-verbal conduct in mediation at Griffith University Law School) suggested:

“One way of increasing your accuracy [in referencing the 80%] is applying the 3 C's of Nonverbal Communication: context, clusters, and congruence. Context includes what environment the situation is taking place in, the history between the people, and other factors such as each person's role (for example- an interaction between a boss and employee).

“Looking for nonverbal communication gestures in clusters prevents us from allowing a single gesture or movement to be definitive in determining a person's state of mind or emotion. Sure, crossing your arms at your chest can be a sign of being resistant and close-minded, however, if the person's shoulders are raised and their teeth are chattering, they might just be cold!



“Finally, congruence we already discussed above in regards to the formula. Are the words being

¹ <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/30/166184008/victory-or-defeat-emotions-arent-all-in-the-face>



spoken match the tone and the body language? After someone falls, and they verbally state they are fine, however their face is grimacing and their voice is shaky, you might want to probe a little deeper.”²

As we continue to parse through technological innovations, we need to continually challenge ourselves whether we’re getting the hoped for benefits from the tool (“is the juice worth the squeeze” as my friend Steve Warnick says)? We are immersed in a world of innovation—we’re connected to each other electronically, 24-7. Yet, there continues to be real value in face to face, person to person, body language to body language conversations.

² <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/beyond-words/201109/is-nonverbal-communication-numbers-game>