

Winning the Remote Collaboration Game

Insights Report--How a Native American artifact, smiley faces, and a common video game concept can transform collaboration in the workplace

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IDEO Insights for Innovation

Seeing with new eyes provides opportunities for insights that can drive innovation. For 6 weeks I participated in the IDEO Insights for Innovation course. I learned techniques for “seeing with new eyes” in order to explore more purposeful collaboration in the workplace.

Lesson	Mindset
Observe: Listen with your eyes	BE CURIOUS
Learn from extremes: Explore edges	STRETCH
Interview: Prep and ask the right kinds of questions	DEEPEN
Empathy: Look beyond assumptions	SENSE
Sharing insights: Mini revelations	MOTIVATE

“The Talking stick, used in many indigenous cultures,...ensures a code of conduct of respect during meetings is followed. The person holding the stick, and only that person, is designated as having the right to speak and all others must listen quietly and respectfully.”

— Description from the Indigenous Corporate Training website, <http://www.ictinc.ca/>

Borrowing from indigenous cultural traditions

For my **empathy assignment**, I switched from a co-located to a remote lead role. Several insights from this assignment helped me envision ways to improve remote collaboration. As a by-product of my business trip, I also had the opportunity to observe a co-located team's group meeting. This gave me additional insights for ways to improve collaboration when large teams meet face to face.

I had taken a "Sociological Perspectives on Northwest Indian Tribes" course some years ago, where I learned about the "talking stick" tradition of the Coast Salish people. Seeing the struggle to rein in multiple speakers competing for floor time in the meeting I observed sparked a connection for me to the talking stick tradition.

Many Native American tribes use a talking stick to manage who gets to speak when the tribe comes together. The simplicity of "the one who has the stick speaks, everyone else be quiet" lends itself to chaotic communication situations—large meetings, elementary school classrooms, even the B.C. legislature!

This idea led to the formation of the insight "Adaptive communication techniques spark connections," which I have now further refined to:

Spark collaborative ideas by adapting cultural traditions



Elder Elmer George, Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon, Speaker Linda Reid, and Elder Mary Anne Thomas welcome Coast Salish talking stick to the B.C. legislature chamber.

Image Credit: B.C. Government
















“People drive business, so relationships are key”

— *“Holly” a content writer at a major telcom for more than 6 years*

Embrace tools for collaborative team synergy

For the **interview assignment**, I spoke with “Holly,” a remote team member. Holly made several key points about collaborative work relationships when team members are not co-located. Based on her comments, I brainstormed a “People Tracker” concept for better team collaboration.

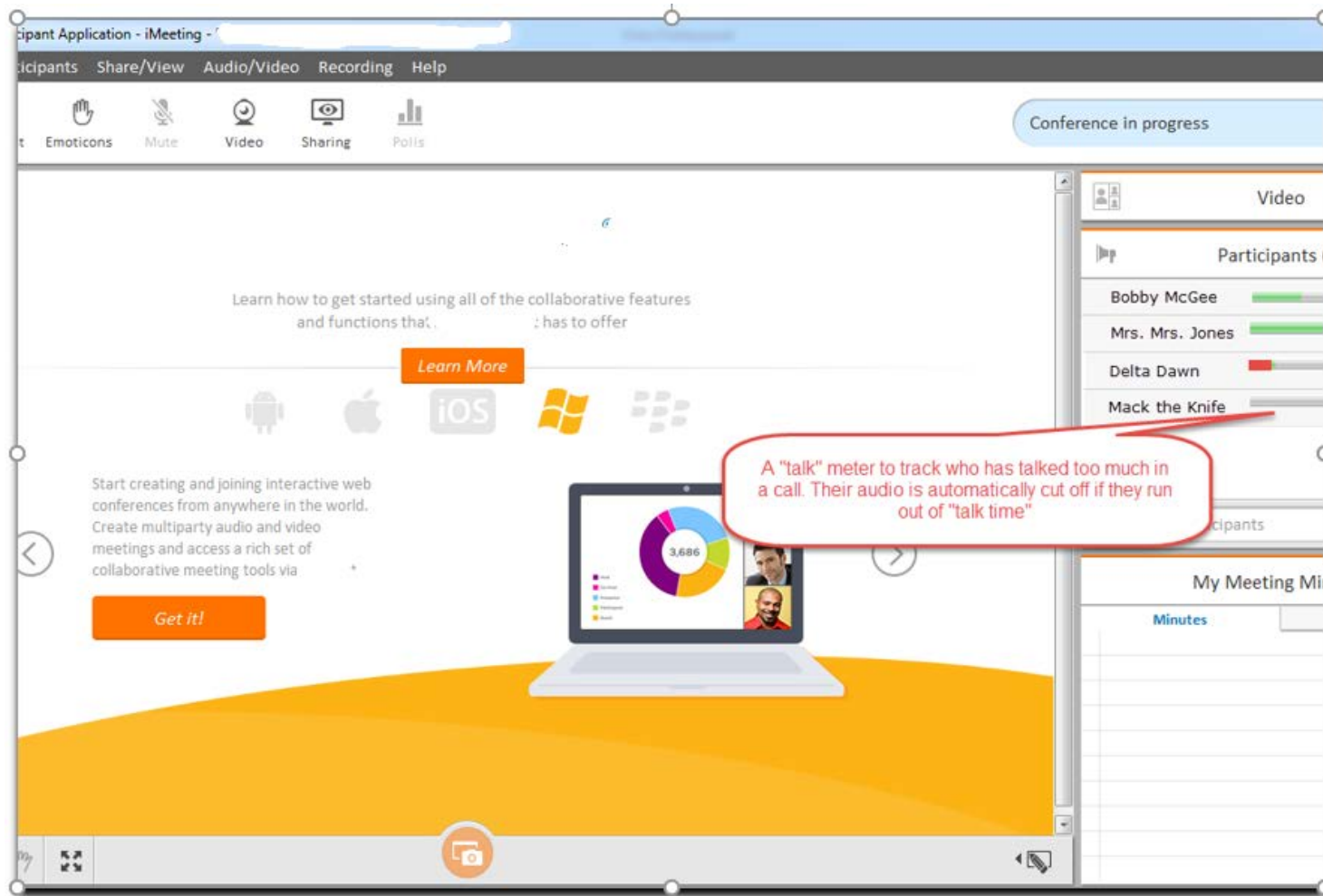
- **Insight:** It is important to be cognizant of the communication method a person prefers and what type of information you are trying to find out.
 - Idea:* Establish a team directory of preferred communication methods.
- **Insight:** Deciphering people’s tone and interacting with them without visual cues about mood can make remote communication challenging.
 - Idea:* As part of the team directory, have a Mood column that that people can update throughout the day.
- **Insight:** Collaboration with team members happens across multiple time zones.
 - Idea:* Include a Time column in the directory that gives the current time at the team member’s location.

Who	Time	Connect with me	Mood
Bobby McGee	1:00 PM		
 Mrs. Mrs. Jones	1:00 PM		
Sarah Smile	2:00 PM		
Billy Joe McCallister	3:00 PM		
Mack the Knife	12:00 PM		
Delta Dawn	12:00 PM		
Peggy Sue	1:00 PM		

Update
Close

“The Fogg Behavior Model shows that three elements must converge at the same moment for a behavior to occur: Motivation, Ability, and Trigger. When a behavior does not occur, at least one of those three elements is missing.”

— Dr. BJ Fogg, founder of the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University (<http://www.behaviormodel.org/index.html>)



Spark collaborative ideas...

In my **observation assignment** I noticed that quiet people had trouble breaking into conversations in a meeting, and that meetings often devolve into only a few people dominating the conversation.

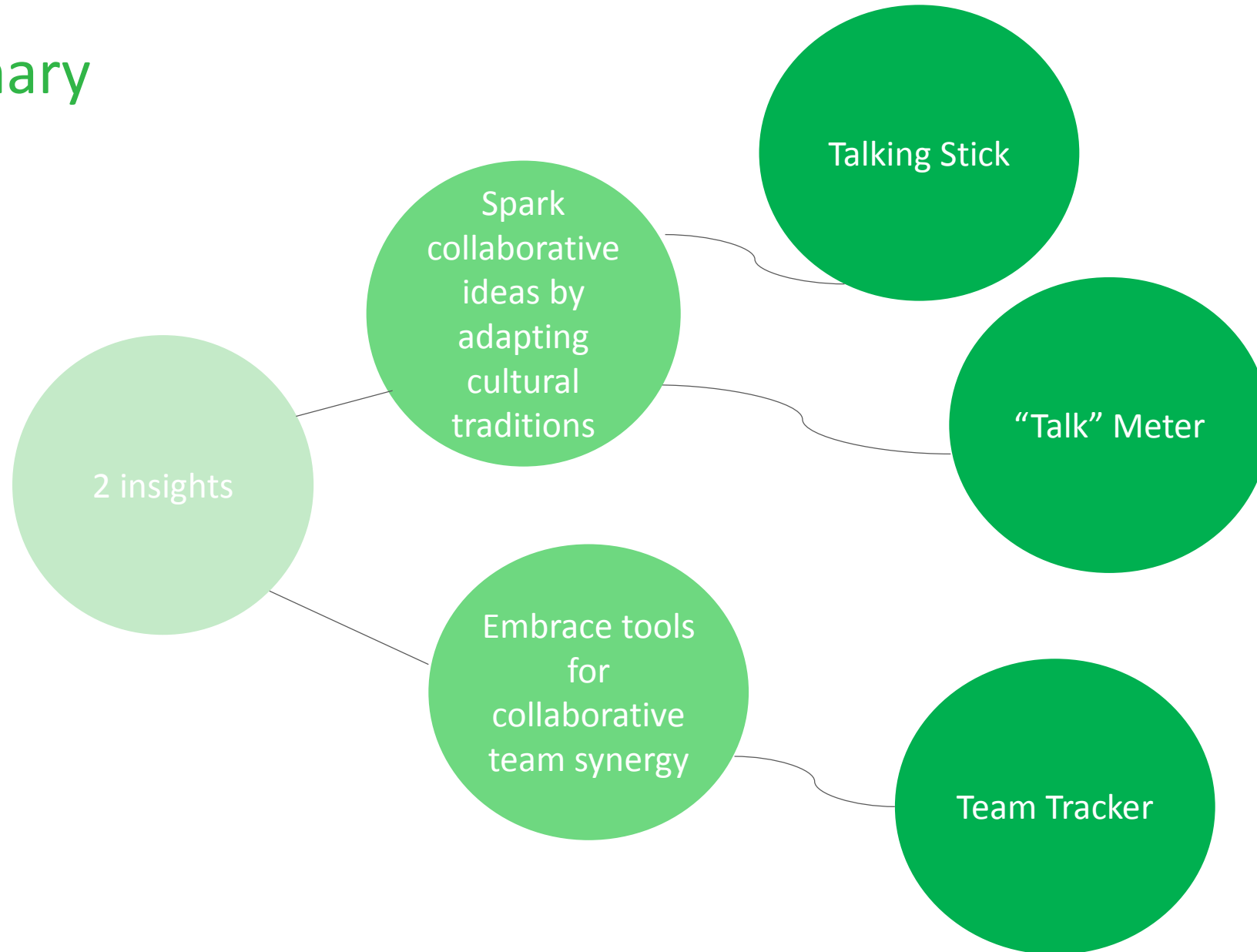
Using the Fogg Behavior Model and bringing a game-design element into an unexpected context help engage meeting participants and ensure that everyone has a fair chance to speak.

Like a video game character “dying” once their health meter is empty, we could use a method to detect when someone’s audio is on and cut their audio when their “talk” meter is empty.

Expanding this idea a bit more could also lead to:

- “Donating” talk time if you don’t need it.
- Earning extra talk time through positive comments in the meeting.
- Increasing talk time by winning votes for sharing good ideas.
- Immediately losing all talk time if the moderator feels you have violated an established group social norm.

Summary



Thank you!