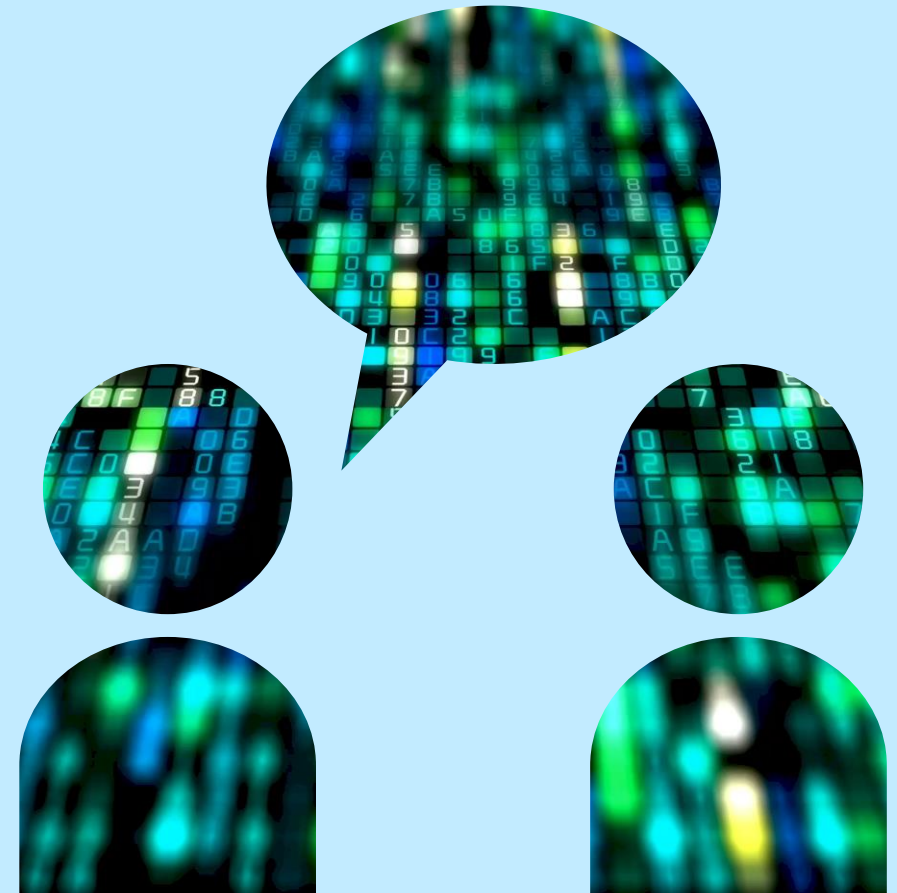


# Develop your students' communication skills with Avatar AI bots

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Esther Schagen (FSS)

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## Who are we?



**Wybren Bosma**  
Co-founder & CEO  
at Meta-Skills



**Esther Schagen**  
Lecturer  
Communication Science VU

## Kick-off questions

Please go to [menti.com](https://www.menti.com)  
and use this code: **2161 1556**

Or

Use the QR code

Answer the three questions about  
student collaboration and the use of  
digital tools in your courses



## Goal of this session

Today we would like to:

1. Discuss with you the **importance** and **challenges** of teaching **collaboration skills** in higher education
2. Experience together with you how **practicing communication skills** with a **genAI driven avatar** can support the collaboration process
3. Show you how you can **successfully implement** this tool in your curriculum

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# 1. Importance and challenges of teaching collaboration skills in higher education



The increase of **globalization** and **internationalization** has influenced the labor market, by demanding more **interdisciplinary** and **specialized skills**

more **complex tasks** require **collaboration** and **communication skills**

# 1. Importance and challenges of teaching collaboration skills in higher education



Collaboration and communication skills are vital for students

1. Enhance job preparedness
2. Contribute to increased enjoyment of learning
3. Contribute to improved academic outcomes

# 1. Importance and challenges of teaching collaboration skills in higher education

However, upon graduation, students often lack preparedness for the demands of teamwork



# 1. Importance and challenges of teaching collaboration skills in higher education

**Comprehensive** and **transverse integration** of training on effective collaboration and communication into the curriculum is necessary (González-Salamanca et al., 2020)

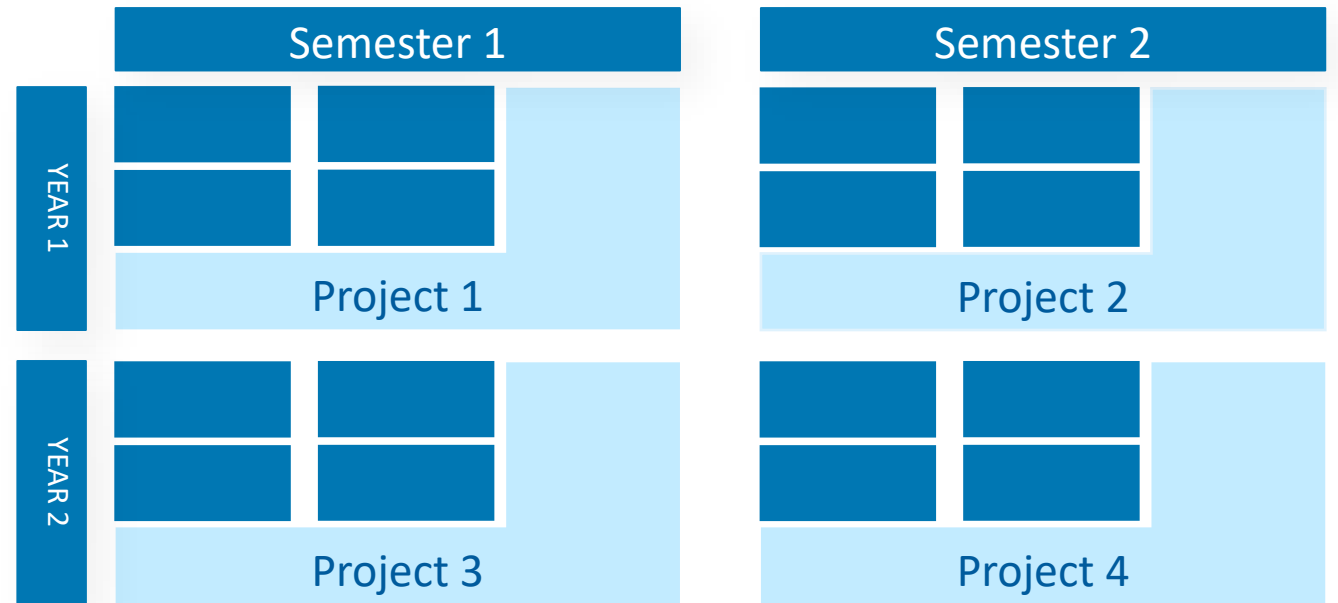
Developing these skills requires **practice**, **reflection** on **personal experiences**, and **effective instruction** with opportunities for **feedback** (González-Salamanca et al., 2020)

Research has shown that **group learning activities**, characterized by collaborative projects extending beyond a single lesson, **positively contribute to collaborative skill development** (De Hei et al., 2018)

To successfully support collaborative skill development, emphasis should be placed on the collaborative learning process, **guided by teachers who facilitate meaningful interactions** in a safe, inclusive learning environment (De Hei et al., 2020)

# Communication & Collaboration BA Communication Science

- 4 Project courses (PBL)
- Learning goals on collaboration
- Learning activities to support collaboration:



Collaboration toolkit – set of questions (<https://vu.nl/en/student/study-skills/self-help-kit-group-work>)

Team collaboration contract

Workgroups about peer feedback, group dynamics, self-disclosure, reflection etc.

But....

while students acknowledge the importance of collaboration, they struggle to take ownership of the collaborative process and to deal with team issues or conflicts.

How to solve this issue?

## Teaching our students how to give peer feedback on behaviour

(O'Neill et al., 2019; Van Rompay-Bartels & Geessink, 2023)

But....

- **Addressing behaviour** requires more practice and personal insights than are currently supported in our program.
- This is especially important in the **international classroom**, in which cultural differences complicate interaction and collaboration (De Hei et al., 2020)
- However, this is **time-consuming**, and our teachers feel **under-equipped** to fulfill this role.

The answer is in technology

- The use of digital tools in education has proven to be effective in the development of skills
- Rise of AI can create greater learning experience → customization and personalization in learning, tailored to the individual student
- Simulated skill-practice has been demonstrated to enhance quality of performance in real-life situations
- New developments in genAI pave the way for more complex and personalized interaction training

## genAI powered avatar training

- We asked students about difficult situations in teamwork
- We will do focus-groups with students about cultural differences in feedback
- We will integrate practicing with the avatar in a more defined learning path on (intercultural) collaboration and communication in the project courses



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# genAI powered avatar training



English



Dutch



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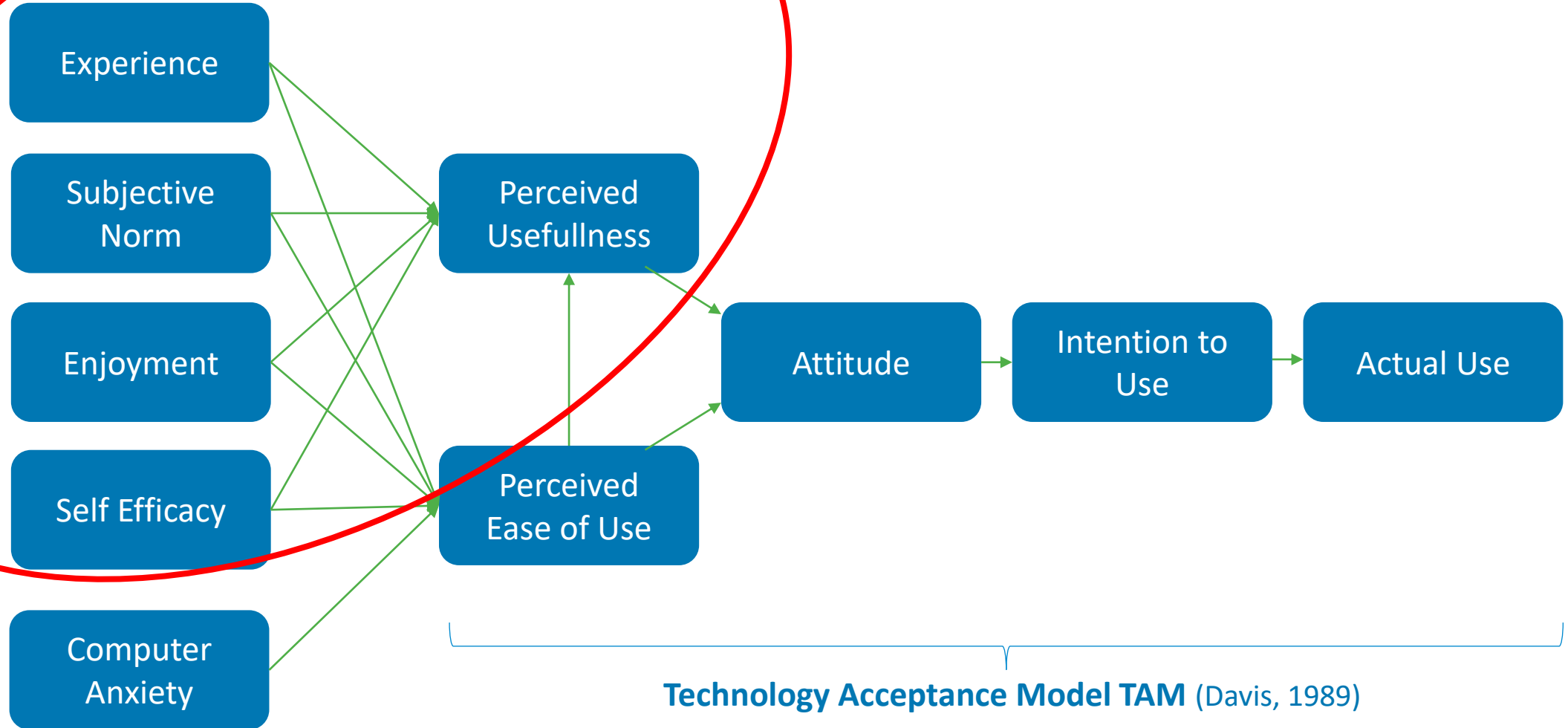


## Quick question

Callback to the menti question at the start of this presentation:

- What do you think influenced the way you filled it in?
- Do you think the way you did would have been different if we had asked you to do this at home in preparation for today?

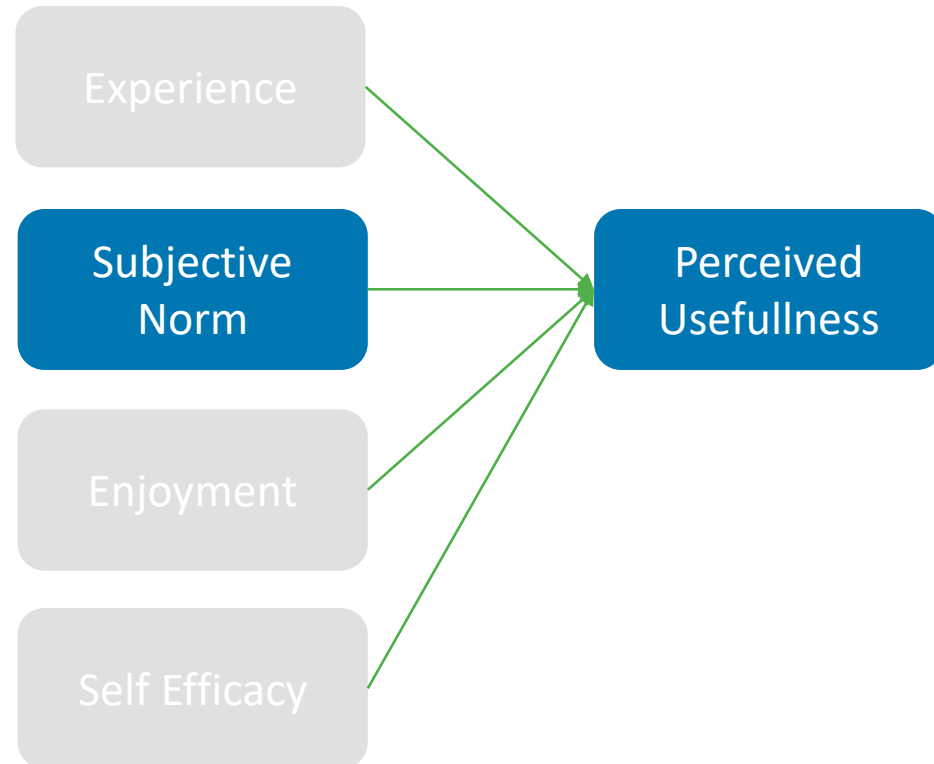
# Theoretical Break



Technology Acceptance Model TAM (Davis, 1989)

General Extended Technology Acceptance Model for E-Learning GETAMEL (Abdullah & Ward, 2016)

## Theoretical Break

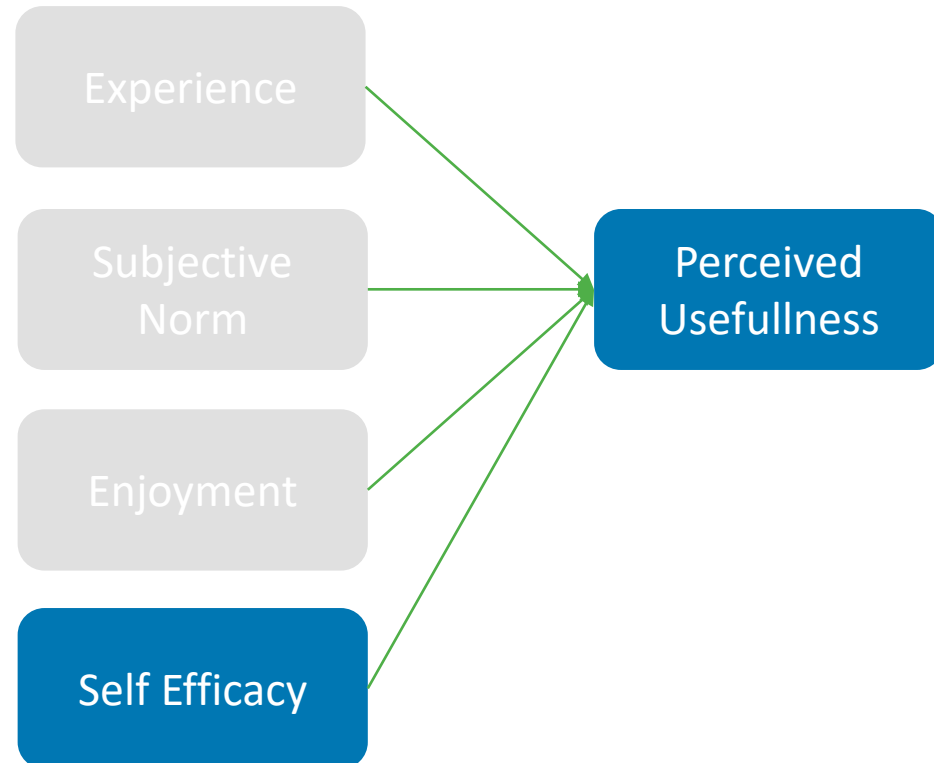


## Subjective Norm:

*“If a person perceives that people **who are important to him/her/them** (such as peers and teachers) think he/she/they should use an e-learning system, then the person will incorporate their beliefs into his/her/their own beliefs system, and consequently perceives the system more useful in its purpose”*

(Abdullah & Ward, 2016)

## Theoretical Break



## Self Efficacy:

*“one's belief about his/her/their ability to accomplish a particular task using a computer”*

*“students who have higher e-learning Self-Efficacy are more likely to use e-learning”*

(Abdullah & Ward, 2016)

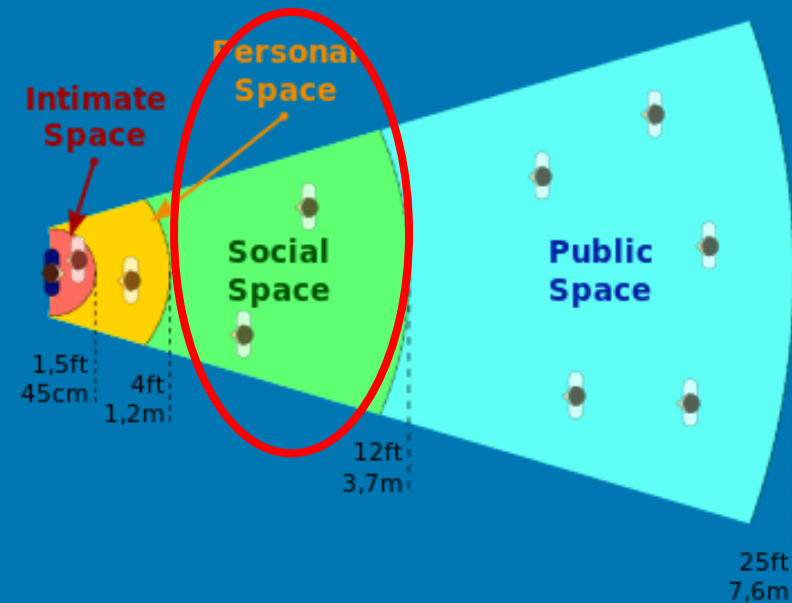
# Importance of (physical) space within the technology acceptance process?

## Physical Space

“Space creates expectations of behaviour, suggests how to act, and communicates what is valued”

Adam Finkelstein, Associate Director Learning Environments, McGill University

## Space impact on interaction (instructional Proxemics)



(Perkins & Wieman, 2005)

## Case: introducing the avatar

We assume that by initiating the acceptance process offline:

1. We will be able to influence the **subjective norm** (by using the social space and the physical learning environment)
2. We will be able to enhance the perception of **self-efficacy**
3. We will make a start with **experiencing** the tool

This will lead to:

- higher acceptance of the use of the tool (higher perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use)
- a higher involvement in and development of giving and receiving peer-feedback

## Conclusion: introducing the avatar

Properly introducing a digital tool in learning environment can lead to:

1. Higher student engagement/acceptance
2. Better developed peer feedback skills
3. Increased enjoyment of learning
4. Improved academic outcomes
5. Enhance job preparedness



Thank you for your attention.  
Questions?