



Potential Problems in Non-Verbal Communication

Gurjeet Singh “Net qualified June 2012” (Psychology)

Abstract: The definition of **nonverbal communication** can be as short or as elaborate and specific as one wants to make it. In general – the nonverbal communication describes any and all communication that occurs outside the realm of written or spoken words and is expressed by generation of either intentional or subconscious cues or their recognition. Commonly, nonverbal communication is divided into subcategories describing individual areas that transmit communication cues. These areas, among others, include kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, haptics, oculosics, and physical appearance. Understanding and effective application of nonverbal communication skills is becoming increasingly important in the modern world of business for various reasons. In this article mainly secondary data used for describe the nonverbal communication.

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



Introduction: Nonverbal communication term papers show that nonverbal communication involves multiple channels, is continuous and more ambiguous in nature, and often contradicts the spoken word. When nonverbal and verbal communication conflict, individuals are much more likely to rely on nonverbal clues as a means to interpret the sender’s true meaning. Nonverbal communication is communication expressed by expressions of the face and eyes, movement and body posture, vocal characteristics, clothing, physical environment and distance among other methods. Nonverbal communalization plays a role in all communication: it is impossible to communicate without sending out nonverbal clues. These clues help others determine the truth behind one’s words and their true feelings. Nonverbal communication is a powerful form of communication in that it expresses and reveals attitudes and attributes that may not be expressed by the words spoken.

One broad area of nonverbal communication involves body position and motion. Referred to as kinesics, this area of nonverbal communication encompasses posture, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and body orientation. Individuals use these channels to convey a variety of emotions as well as to display important clues regarding their personality.

Posture is a powerful way in which individuals send nonverbal clues. Posture clues are often very subtle in nature so that individuals have to really look in order to see them. On the other hand, some posture clues are very apparent. For instance, when an individual slumps forward he or she is usually perceived as being bored or extremely interested. A person who sits with their arms crossed is sending out a nonverbal message that they are closed to information. Posture clues are the easiest to interpret when the receiver notices subtle changes the sender may not be aware of.

An individual’s posture provides important clues as to how an individual is feeling on the inside. A person who is sitting in a rigid position is usually threatened by something or someone, while a person sitting in a relaxed position appears to be comfortable in their surroundings. In addition, posture can often signal real or perceived status. In general, lower status individuals are usually more rigid and tense in posture, while those of a higher status appear more relaxed.

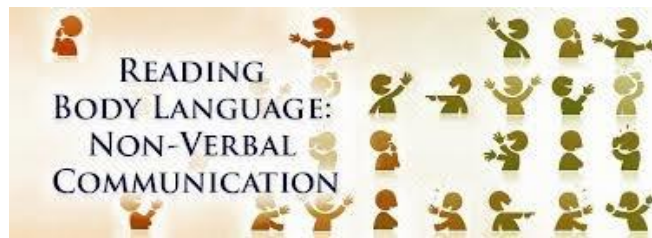


Figure -1

General differences in nonverbal communication:

Differences in nonverbal communication in men and women are categorized in two ways:

- **Hereditary characteristics of maleness and femaleness** — This category includes developmental differences in bone structure, as it affects the way we walk, their gestures, and body shape, as it affects posture (Reiman 2013).
- **Modeling of same-sex role models** — Children tend to model the behavior exhibited by their parents. Sons learn to copy the nonverbal patterns of their fathers while daughters model the behavior of their mothers.

The Importance of Recognition and Use of Nonverbal Communication Elements: Importance of effective recognition of the nonverbal cues is difficult to overestimate. According to popular scholarly beliefs, between 60 and 93 percent of the meaning in the interaction may be generated by the nonverbal aspects of communication (Leigh 2). Some break it down even further stating that “people respond to body language 55 percent of the time, tone of voice 38 percent of the time, and actual words a mere 7 percent” (Arthur 2). As business organizations and interactions become more and more complex, the room for error diminishes greatly and the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining the competitive edge become increasingly important. Areas of sales, consulting, auditing, investment banking and many others where primary business revolves around client interaction, information acquisition and analysis, and persuading individuals are the ones that must be extremely effective in nonverbal communication. For example, a sale manager communicating with a new client over the telephone can benefit from skillful utilization of paralanguage, because the initial call creates a base on which the future interaction and is built (Leigh 1). In the service industry, the recognition and acceptance of nonverbal communication can too benefit the employees as well as the business process in general. Customer satisfaction depends on more than just adequate execution of the service, it also includes the nonverbal context of what is being done or said. Managers who realize the significance of the nonverbal aspect of communication and effects it has on the success of the business interaction will be able to seek out individuals with better developed nonverbal communication skills and integrate them in the optimal position of the business process (Gabbot 9).

Potential Problems with Nonverbal Communication: In addition to the benefits of nonverbal communication, some problems exist as well. As the research suggests, little correlation exists between one’s self-rated accuracy of decoding of the nonverbal cues and the actual performance (DePaulo 239). Some individuals also tend to concentrate more on their strongest areas of nonverbal communication while neglecting the other aspects. As in the example presented by Diane Arthur, the kinesic cues, contradictory to other verbal and nonverbal behavior, significantly undermined the credibility and effectiveness of the presenter (Arthur 2). Another problem area within the realm of nonverbal



communication is the ambiguity of generated and transmitted cues. Since the appropriate meaning and interpretation of nonverbal cues are highly contextual in nature, the same gestures, facial expressions or posture can and do mean different things in different interaction environment and settings. Often, perceivers tend to venture farther than available context allows and interpret the signals according to their mental map, or to put it in other word - their previous knowledge, experience, stereotypes and others perceptual filters. Problem is further escalated due to the natural tendency of humans to be overly confident of the purely subjective judgments reached according personally-relevant information (Druckman 178). This idea develops into yet another obstacle in the interpretation of body language. Differences in cultural backgrounds of those involved in the interaction may interfere with correct decoding the encoded message. Most common cultural differences would probably be in kinesics. For example, a nod in the United States, as well as in many other cultures, signifies understanding or agreement. However, in the Middle East, a single nod represents disagreement or rejection (Arthur 2). Similarly, other commonly used gestures or other aspects of nonverbal communication may have completely different meanings in various cultures. With this said, one must realize that the term culture does not refer to the various ethnic and geographical groups exclusively. Culture can describe anything from sex to interorganizational culture. Therefore, in order to correctly decode the nonverbal cues one must not only analyze the ones that are relative to the context of what is being communicated, but also to attempt to interpret them in light of the decoder's cultural background. The task of understanding nonverbal cues clearly is extremely complex and misunderstandings are common.

Communication learned during childhood: Dr. Tannen continues to say that the majority of our communication skills are learned from childhood and that boys and girl are often taught vastly different lessons. For example, men are often more aware of personal space and tend to be withdrawn rather than bodily engaged, whereas women use bodily contact more frequently and are much warmer in their communication (Schmidt).

Men also desire more personal space, usually only touch each other when engaged in playful aggression, and have the tendency to move around more when they are uncomfortable. Women, on the other hand, tend to align their bodies to face the other person, use more hand gestures, and typically sit still. Further, women have shown to be more fluid in their gestures while men have been observed to have sharp, direct movements (Merchant 2012).

There are differences in posture, as well; while women are more likely to keep their arms near their bodies and cross their legs, men often have wider postures and stand with their arms further away from their bodies and their legs apart. Clearly, the body language of men and women are highly different and can make communication between the genders a bit cloudy.

Solutions for Effective Nonverbal Communication: At least partial solutions to the problems of nonverbal communication can and should be implemented in the business organizations of today through training, analysis and practice. Managers, as the trained professionals and business leaders are responsible for the training and, partially, for analysis aspects of the solution. In addition, each individual is responsible for continuing analysis and practice of his or her nonverbal skills. The managers can aid the employees and coworkers by explaining and ensuring that the employees understand the significance of nonverbal side of communication process. Initially training seminars or classes should be offered to everybody and later readily available for anyone who needs them. Constant feedback is also crucial to



ensure continuous learning and analysis process (Sundaram 12). William Nolen cites examples of George Patton and Richard Nixon practicing their facial expressions in order to appear more determined or trustworthy. They realized the importance of nonverbal communication in portraying the desired image. Not unlike U.S. General and U.S. President, today's business people must portray a number of images depending on the situation and their field (Nolen 1). Therefore, one must not only understand the importance of nonverbal communication and be able to recognize them, but also to be continuously improving one's own nonverbal behavior.

Modern communication in social settings: Modern communication can have an effect on social and dating situations in the ways men and women interpret proximity. For example, women are likely to stand closer to each other as a way of attempting to create a sense of closeness and intimacy. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to see close proximity as aggressive or confrontational (Carnes 2015). Similarly, men are more likely to associate physical contact with sexual intentions, while women use physical contact to communicate sympathy or friendship.

If a man and woman are communicating and the woman believes she is establishing a relationship while the man believes that she is being aggressive, this can cause a misinterpretation of the other's communication (Carnes 2015). Likewise, if a man is standing close to a woman to establish his interest in her, she might think he is merely trying to connect with her, causing another lapse in communication between them.

Nonverbal communication in the workplace, dating, and social interaction: Gender roles are usually defined in the workplace, and the way men and women communicate can affect the way they interact in the workplace. Women, for example, tend to focus on building up relationships with each other by sharing experiences. Men, though, tend to share experiences as a way to one-up each other. In addition, women attempt to build relationships with the people they work with while men attempt to assert their status and dominance in the workplace hierarchy.

This can cause an issue in communication because while a woman might think she is building rapport with a man she works with, he may perceive the situation completely differently (Leigh 2010). The misinterpretation of the woman's message will influence his response, which will not be an accurate reaction to what she was actually trying to convey.

Sexual interest between men and women: The differences in the way that men and women communicate nonverbally can have an effect on dating behaviors and social situations and relationships. As previously stated, when a woman is attempting to connect with someone, she is more likely to face them and touch them in an attempt to establish a rapport and relationship.

Men, on the other hand, are more likely to interpret the physical contact as an attempt to establish dominance or claim or express sexual interest (Merchant 2012). While women see the contact as an attempt to cooperate while men may see it as a more aggressive or assertive move.

Another way that dating and social relationships can be affected by differences in nonverbal communication between the sexes is that way that men and women interpret nodding. As noted earlier,



men usually nod to show that they agree with something (Lieberman). Women, however, nod to show that they are listening.

Conclusion: From the information presented, the importance of the nonverbal communication in modern business is obvious. The fact that a great number of successful CEOs, auditors and sales people refer to psychology of human behavior as one of the most useful non-business skill they possess demonstrates the vitality of using such skill appropriately and effectively. Employees empowered by this analytical tool are more likely to accomplish better results, avoid unnecessary confusion which may result in delays, sell the product or close an important deal simply because they are one step ahead of the game. Companies as a whole can create a corporate structure that conforms to the company's business model and promotes it via the employees into the markets. Although, some aspects of the nonverbal communication still lack sufficient empirical research to be interpreted conclusively, its benefits obviously can and should be utilized as much as possible on various levels of modern business environment. It could be as beneficial on the micro level – the individual's self analysis and continuous improvement of his hand gestures during presentations – for example, as it could be on the greater scale, perhaps – the development of corporate image through the marketing campaign.

Reference:

- Carnes, David. "Do Men & Women Use Nonverbal Communication Differently?" LiveStrong.com. EuroStar, 17 May 2015.
- "Gender and Non-Verbal Communication." West Virginia Department of Education. WVDE, N.d.
- Leigh, Edward. "Men & Women Communicating in the Workplace." The Center for Healthcare Communications. The Center for Healthcare Communications, 2010.
- Lieberman, Simma. "Differences in Male and Female Communication Styles." Simma Lieberman Associates. GHI Internet Services, N.d.
- Merchant, Karima. "How Men And Women Differ: Gender Differences in Communication Styles, Influence Tactics, and Leadership Styles." Diss. Claremont College CMC Senior Theses and Student Scholarship. Claremont College. 2012.
- Reiman, Tonya. "Gender Differences." Body Language University. BodyLanguageUniversity.com, 2013.