

8

Nonverbal communication

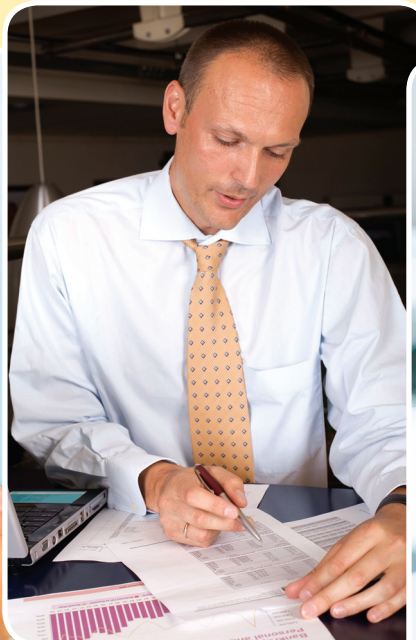


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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Explain the difference between body language and nonverbal communication
- Explain the importance of clustering and congruence for understanding – and avoiding misunderstanding – nonverbal communication
- Use a visual model to explain different aspects of nonverbal communication such as gesture, posture, body movement, touch, eye contact, paralinguistics, environment and time



What is nonverbal communication?

Nonverbal communication can be a very powerful tool in understanding ourselves and others. Are *nonverbal communication* and *body language* the same? No, they are not. Body language involves the physical behaviour of our bodies – eye contact, posture, gesture, orientation and so forth – while nonverbal communication embraces all body language communication, and also includes clothing and adornment, environmental factors and even the manner in which we use time. Nonverbal communication concepts feature heavily in other chapters in this book.

So what does nonverbal communication do for us that verbal communication and good old-fashioned words cannot do? Dickson and Hargie (2003, p. 50) suggest that we use nonverbal communication in order to:

1. replace verbal communication in situations where it may be impossible or inappropriate to talk
2. complement verbal communication, thereby enhancing the overall message
3. modify the spoken word
4. contradict, either intentionally or unintentionally, what is said
5. regulate conversation by helping to mark speech turns
6. express emotions and interpersonal attitudes
7. negotiate relationships in respect of, for instance, dominance, control and liking
8. convey personal and social identity through such features as dress and adornments
9. contextualise interaction by creating a particular social setting.

Tell: a nonverbal behaviour that reveals a person's true state of mind

Cluster: in relation to nonverbal communication, a group of different types of nonverbal behaviours or tells.



This young businesswoman is displaying several different types of nonverbal behaviours or tells. What might her nonverbal cues suggest about her internal state of mind?

Nonverbal behaviours (e.g. a gesture or eye movements) are sometimes referred to as **tells** because they tell us about a person's true state of mind (Navarro 2008, 2011).

Nevertheless, nonverbal communication can be very ambiguous: we should not presume that we can 'read other people's minds' because of what we think they are 'saying' nonverbally. We may be right, but equally we may be wrong. To be more right than wrong, we should not seize upon one gesture or posture in isolation; rather, we need to recognise entire groups or **clusters** of nonverbal behaviour that suggest the same internal state of mind.

We should also not presume, as some do, that nonverbal communication is more important than verbal communication. It has become commonplace, for example, to hear that nonverbal communication comprises 70 to 90 per cent of our communication and that spoken words comprise only a small proportion of the totality of communication. This percentage approach is generally attributed to Mehrabian (1971), who based it on word-ambiguity experiments he conducted using US college students in the late 1960s. From this research he developed the idea that only about 7 per cent of meaning in communication could be extracted from the actual words spoken, while tone of voice accounted for about 38 per cent and body language about 55 per cent of conveyed meaning. This conjecture, based on experimental data that has often been challenged (Oestreich 1999), has wrongly been established in some minds as irrefutable fact relevant to all situations in all cultures. In some situations, of course, nonverbal communication comprises 100 per cent of the message being sent – for example, touching the hand of a grieving relative, or two

lovers gazing into each other's eyes – but in others it might comprise only 10 per cent or less. The idea of applying percentages is misguided anyway. Some specialists in nonverbal communication use the illustration of a television set with the sound turned down: we can tell what is going on they suggest, merely by observing the nonverbal behaviour. This is



Police officers are trained to interpret nonverbal cues, as well as to consider verbal feedback, in establishing the credibility of eyewitnesses and the accuracy of their testimonies.

**Face of interviewee blurred for confidentiality reasons.*

Congruence: the extent to which verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce or contradict each other

a dubious proposition: we might be able to work out, in general terms, what is happening, but we would certainly miss the specifics, and, more often than not, would get things totally wrong. An overemphasis on the previous percentages has been a useful corrective to our historical absorption in the verbal aspects of communication, but it's time the pendulum in the debate was wrenched back again.

Figure 8.1 presents a simple ten-part model of nonverbal communication.

In some respects, it is a false dichotomy to separate verbal and nonverbal communication (Jones & LeBaron 2002). Truly effective communication occurs when the two aspects are in harmony. When they are not **congruent** with each other – when, for example, a friend says ‘I’m OK, really’, but her mournful expression, slumped posture and teary eyes indicate otherwise – then we need to pay attention to the imbalance between the two channels of communication. Navarro (2008), for example, an FBI agent skilled in reading nonverbal communication, was interviewing a suspect in a rape case. The suspect denied involvement, saying that he had turned left and gone home, but his hand gestured to his right (he subsequently confessed). In many circumstances, therefore, it sometimes makes sense to give more credence to the nonverbal message than to the verbal message.

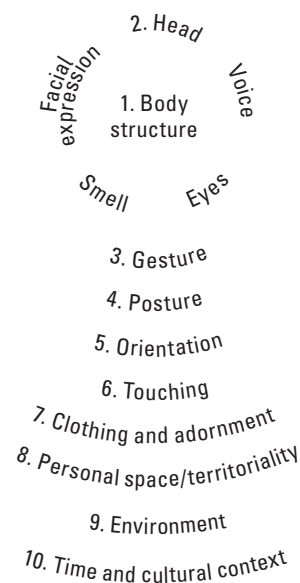


FIGURE 8.1 A model of nonverbal communication

Source: Adapted from Eunson (1987).

here is almost a code for ‘modern urban’, and even rural areas of low-context cultures tend to be relatively high-context in a number of ways.

Examples of new insights into context and chronemics are:

- It may be useful to distinguish between *monochrons* (people who prefer work to be structured in linear flows, with a minimum of interruptions) and *polychrons* (people who are happy to work on multiple projects at the same time and who don’t get thrown by interruptions).
- Women may be more polychronic than men.
- Monochronic behaviour may be linked to stress-prone Type A behaviour.
- Vietnamese migrants to the United States may be more encouraged to use North American hospitals if a no-appointment, drop-in time zone is set up and if family members are encouraged to attend consultations.
- Chinese managers may make remarkably limited direct use of low-context tools, such as computer-based information systems, and western managers may need to bear this in mind.
- Within broad ethnic groupings, such as ‘Asians’, there may be significant variations: for example, Koreans may be considerably more low-context than Japanese.
- Southern European polychrons are under pressure to conform to Northern European mono-chronic time usage.

(Hall 1977; Houston 2002; Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist 1999; Martinsons & Westwood 1997; Frei, Racicot & Travagline 1999; Thomas 1998; Cunha & Cunha 2004)

Nonverbal applications A: applying the model

Figure 8.1 presented a model of nonverbal communication. Now let’s try to apply that model to understanding different situations we might find ourselves in. We will ignore the physiological constant of body structure and use the remaining categories to analyse five behavioural states: respect, liking, hostility, distress and deceit. The brief analysis given in table 8.3 cannot, of course, hope to capture the full complexity of an individual’s nonverbal behaviour, and its cultural bias is primarily Euro-American. Nevertheless, you may find it useful to analyse situations you have experienced and will find yourself in. Remember not to jump to conclusions with nonverbal communication: a gesture or posture or other manifestation in isolation may mean nothing. Groups or clusters of behaviours or tells may build up a more predictable picture. If, for example, you find yourself dealing with an individual exhibiting virtually every behaviour in one column of the table, then you can be reasonably sure that you would need no further words to identify and confirm the operation of that unique behavioural state.

TABLE 8.3 Nonverbal characteristics of five behavioural states

Expression	Emotion				
	Respect	Liking	Hostility	Distress	Deceit
Head movements	■ Head bow	■ Rapid nodding ■ Tilt	■ Jaw thrust forward ■ Tilt ■ Shaking of head (in disapproval)	■ Shaking of head (despair)	■ Nodding when saying ‘no’, shaking when saying ‘yes’

(continued)

TABLE 8.3 (continued)

Expression	Emotion				
	Respect	Liking	Hostility	Distress	Deceit
Facial expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open expression Mild smile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smiling Moistening lips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scowling Glaring Bared teeth Clenched teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anguished expression Rapid swallowing Rapid biting, wetting of lips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asymmetrical expression
Eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Averted gaze 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil dilation Wide Narrowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrowing Glaring Rolling in disgust Averted gaze 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid blinking Darting Downcast gaze 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid blinking Pupil dilation Averted gaze
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deferential tone Silence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher pitch Deeper pitch Warmer tone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deeper pitch Loud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaking voice Non-words, repetitions, partial words Stumbling over words Higher pitch Sighs often 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaking voice Non-words, repetitions, partial words Stumbling over words Higher pitch
Gesture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Palms out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grooming, preening Mirroring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaking fist Obscene gestures Crossed arms Hands on hips Pointing finger Picking lint from own clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hands around mouth Wringing hands Jiggling legs Feet turned in Crossed arms Fidgeting with adornments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scratching Finger under collar Rapid crossing of legs
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bow Standing at attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relaxed Mirroring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigid Shoulders raised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slumped over Rocking body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing noticeable
Body movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes oriented away Synchronised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oriented towards Synchronised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oriented away in disgust Oriented towards in confrontation Unsynchronised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oriented away Unsynchronised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oriented away Nothing noticeable
Touching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touching clothing, feet, hands Allowing oneself to be touched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handshake Hand-holding Caress Patting Embrace Kiss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push Elbow Punch Kick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand-holding Self-touching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing noticeable Feigned liking gestures
Clothing and adornment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitation Sexually revealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rank display Wealth display 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disorganised, ungroomed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncharacteristic clothing, display
Territoriality/ personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain distance Patient waiting (queues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Come closer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep distance (disgust) Invasive approach (aggression) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep distance (shame) Invasive approach (seeking solace) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing noticeable Feigned liking gestures

Expression	Emotion				
	Respect	Liking	Hostility	Distress	Deceit
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subdued colours ■ Lack of noise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Warm colours ■ Quiet ■ Soft furnishings ■ Attention to physical needs (food, drink) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Harsh colours ■ Noise ■ Uncomfortable furnishings ■ Lack of attention to physical needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disorganisation, untidiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nothing noticeable
Time and cultural context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Observing local chronicity patterns ■ Matching time-use style to that of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Observing local chronicity patterns ■ Generosity with time ■ Matching time-use style to that of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ignoring local chronicity patterns ■ Being late ■ Making people wait ■ Stinginess with time ■ Forcing others to adopt alien time style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Confusion about local chronicity patterns ■ Lateness ■ Procrastination ■ 'Hurry sickness' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nothing noticeable

Nonverbal applications B: becoming less dyssemic

Dyssemia: the condition of having difficulties in understanding or sending nonverbal information

According to Nowicki and Duke (2002), many people have difficulty fitting into social and professional situations because they are in fact '**dyssemic**'— that is, they experience difficulties in understanding or sending nonverbal information.

Dyssemic people, they suggest, tend to behave inappropriately in social situations. For example, they may:

- avoid eye contact when walking past people
- stare excessively at others
- stand too close to people when interacting
- spread their materials beyond their personal area when working
- speak in a monotone
- fail to alter their speech volume to suit the situation they are in
- maintain an expressionless face when discussing emotional topics
- not smile back when smiled at
- not care about their clothing or grooming
- persevere in actions or comments regardless of their adverse impact
- not check their appearance in mirrors or window reflections
- start talking before others have finished
- not listen to what others say
- arrive late for meetings
- finish eating long before or long after others (Nowicki & Duke 2002).

Exhibiting one or two of these behaviour patterns is unlikely to present overwhelming problems, but more than this may indicate that such individuals are socially 'out of synch' (Kranowitz & Silver 1998). If they were to study nonverbal communication in some depth and then try to apply what they have learned, such dyssemic people might find they fit in better with those around them, and experience fewer communication breakdowns, misunderstandings and conflicts (Wocadlo & Rieger 2006).

What do the following gestures stand for?

1. Leaning forward	
2. Leaning backward	
3. Tilting head	
4. Stroking nose, rapid blinking	
5. Yawning, cupping chin in hands	
6. Mouth guard	
7. Continued straight gaze, no head movement	
8. Looking over spectacles, narrowing eyes	
9. Shifting position continually, avoiding eye contact	
10. Sidelong glance	
11. Rubbing the eye and looking away	
12. One hand on back of neck	
13. Drumming fingers, tapping foot	
14. Glasses removed and put down	
15. Leaning back with both hands supporting the head	
16. Palm placed on the back of the neck	
17. Removing spectacles deliberately, and carefully cleaning the lens	
18. Arms closed over the chest	
19. Sitting on the edge of the chair	
20. Straddling the chair, using the back of the chair as a shield while sitting	