

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

How Do You Define Non-Verbal Communication?

Communication is generally defined as having both a verbal and nonverbal component. Whereas verbal communication often refers to the words we use in communication, nonverbal communication refers to communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues, for example) (Knapp & Hall, 2002).¹ The five primary functions of Nonverbal Behavior (Argyle, 1988) are:²

1. *Expression of Emotion* — emotions are expressed mainly through the face, body, and voice.
2. *Communication of Interpersonal Attitudes* — the establishment and maintenance of relationships is often done through nonverbal signals (tone of voice, gaze, touch, etc.).
3. *Accompany and Support Speech* — vocalization and nonverbal behaviors are synchronized with speech in conversation (nodding one's head or using phrases like "uh-huh" when another is talking).
4. *Self-Presentation* — presenting oneself to another through nonverbal attributes like appearance.
5. *Rituals* — the use of greetings, handshakes or other rituals.

Traditional Dimensions of Nonverbal Communication

- **Physical Appearance** — Appearance messages are generally the first nonverbal messages received and can be used to develop judgments about people based on how they look, what they wear, and their level of attractiveness, among other things (Virginia P. Richmond & McCroskey, 2004).³ Physical attractiveness impacts how people perceive others as similar to themselves and is used to evaluate credibility and general attractiveness (Hickson III & Stacks, 1993).⁴
- **Territory and Personal Space (Proxemics)** — Personal space refers to the space an individual maintains around him or herself, while territory is a larger area an individual controls that can provide privacy (for example, an office or a specific chair in the conference room). Invading another's territory may cause that person discomfort and the desire to defend his or her space (by turning away or creating a barrier, for example) (Argyle, 1988).² Culture can influence the way that individuals use space. Individualist societies like the United States emphasize personal rights and responsibilities, privacy, and freedom, whereas more collectivist societies emphasize community and collaboration (Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002).⁵

1 Knapp, M. L., & Hall, J. A. (2002). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. Crawfordsville, IN: Thomson Learning.

2 Argyle, M. (1988). *Bodily Communication*, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Methuen.

3 Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2004). *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon/Pearson Education.

4 Hickson III, M. L., & Stacks, D. W. (1993). *NVC Nonverbal Communication Studies and Applications*. Dubuque, IA: Wm C. Brown Communications.

5 Andersen, P. A., Hecht, M. L., Hoobler, G. D., & Smallwood, M. (2002). Nonverbal communication across cultures. In W. B. Gudykunst & B. Moody (Eds.), *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- **Facial Expressions** — The most important non-verbal channel for expressing attitudes and emotions to other people is the face (Argyle, 1988).² Researchers have attempted to categorize facial expressions that express emotion and typically agree on six: happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, anger, disgust/contempt. (Ekman, 1982 cited by Argyle, 1988).⁶
- **Gestures & Posture** — Gestures and postures are frequent and continuous movements of the body that reflect individual thought processes and regulate communication (Goldman, 1994).⁷ For body language to be interpreted as positive and genuine, it is important that it appear to be natural. Lewis (1998)⁸ suggests individuals stand erect and walk with shoulders back and stomach in. This helps communicate a message of self-confidence, awareness, and enthusiasm.
- **Touch (Tactile Communication)** — Argyle (1988)² writes that “the most basic meaning of touch is that an interpersonal bond is being offered or established” (p. 226). While touch can be used for consolation, support, and congratulations depending on the relationship, touch is often culturally regulated in organizations (Harris, 2002)⁹ meaning it may be regulated to behaviors such as handshakes. Touch, like any other communication message, may elicit negative and positive reactions depending on the configuration of people and the circumstances (Knapp and Hall, 2002).¹
- **Eye Contact** — Eye contact regulates conversation and signals the exchange of speaker and listener roles. It occurs during 10–30% of the conversation. Eye contact is used to acknowledge or avoid the presence of others and can reveal information about attitudes, emotion, dominance and power in social relationships. When there are breakdowns in conversation it may be because the people conversing have different patterns of eye contact (which can be a result of differing cultural backgrounds). When individuals respond with their eyes they allow others to have a sense of their emotional state and can increase feelings of communication satisfaction (Webbink, 1986).¹⁰
- **Vocal Cues that Accompany Speech (Paralanguage)** — Vocal cues include intonation, voice quality and vocal emphasis and that can enhance verbal meaning. Laughing and crying are also considered vocal cues. These cues may reveal an emotional state, attitudes towards others, social class, or origin. Individuals may exercise dominance with a loud projecting voice and indicate submission by using a lower, softer pitch. When communicating verbally it is important to ensure that the paralanguage aligns with the verbal messages it accompanies (Lewis, 1998).⁷
- **Time (Chronemics)** — The way an individual talks about or uses time can communicate much non-verbal information about him or her. Individuals may view time as the location or duration of events, the interval between events, or as patterns of intervals (routines or cycles of behavior) (Knapp & Hall, 2002).¹ Individuals may also have differing psychological time orientations that influence how they think about and perceive time in their daily lives. Individuals may be more *past-oriented*, using the past to shape the present, or *future-oriented*, working towards tomorrow. Individuals can also be *present-oriented*, living mostly for today. Culture can play a role in determining time orientation, so it is important to be aware of these differences and their potential impact on communication (Virginia P. Richmond & McCroskey, 2004).³

6 Ekman, P. (1982). *Emotion in the Human Face*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

7 Goldman, E. (1994). *As Others See Us*. New York, NY: Routledge.

8 Lewis, H. (1998). *Body Language: A Guide for Professionals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

9 Harris, T. E. (2002). *Applied Organizational Communication: Principles and Pragmatics for Future Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.

10 Webbink, P. (1986). *The Power of Eyes*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Selected Principles of Nonverbal Communication in Organizations (as cited by Harris, 2002)⁸

- *People judge relationship quality through nonverbal cues* (Hickson & Stacks, 1985; Remland, 2000).^{11 12}
- Nonverbal communication is more believable than verbal communication when the two are incongruent (Knapp, 1972; Malandro & Barker, 1983; Mehrabian, 1981).^{13 14 15} Therefore, *individuals should concentrate on making nonverbal behavior consistent with our desired messages* (Hackman & Johnson, 2000).¹⁶
- *Inadvertent actions by an individual can still be meaningful to another person.* Nonverbal communication can be assigned meaning even if only by one party (Hickson & Stacks, 1985).¹¹
- Perception is an important part of nonverbal communication. *We can send positive messages to others by paying more attention to them and utilizing non-verbal behaviors that show immediacy* such as forward leans, relaxed posture, or decreased distance (Hickson & Stacks, 1985).¹¹
- *Rules for nonverbal behavior often vary depending on age, sex, and culture* (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 1985).¹⁷ Context, social situation, and power relationships may also determine the rules and the roles for nonverbal communication (Anderson, 1999; Henley, 1979; Remland, 2000).^{18 19 12} *Members of an organization will learn and adapt nonverbal communication* as they become part of the organizational culture (Wilson, Goodall, & Waagen, 1986).²⁰
- In *informal organizational settings, nonverbal communication is more important than verbal communication* as power or affiliation may be shown through nonverbal communication (Richmond, McCroskey, & Payne, 1987).²¹

Leadership and Nonverbal Communication

- *A leader's ability to decode follower's feelings and attitudes and communicate support and motivation are key to their success.* Charismatic leaders are typically good at decoding the nonverbal cues of others and are able to read and respond to the needs of their followers (Riggio, 2005).²²
- Richmond and McCroskey (2004)³ write that *one of the roles of nonverbal communication is to define the status of individuals within an organization.* Dominance and power are conveyed through nonverbal cues including eye contact, posture, speaking time, and seating placement (Bass, 1990; Heckel, 1973; Mast, 2002; Mehrabian, 1969; Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989 cited by Riggio, 2005).^{22 23 24 25 26}

11 Hickson III, M. L., & Stacks, D. W. (1993). *NVC Nonverbal Communication Studies and Applications*. Dubuque, IA: Wm C. Brown Communications.

12 Remland, M. S. (2000). *Nonverbal Communication in Everyday Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

13 Knapp, M. L. (1972). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

14 Malandro, L. A., & Barker, L. (1983). *Nonverbal Communication*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

15 Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

16 Hackman, M. Z., & Johnson, C. E. (2000). *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 3rd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

17 Berko, R.M., Wolvin, A. D., & Wolvin, D.R. (1985). *Communicating: A Social and Career Focus*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

18 Anderson, P. A. (1999). *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functioning*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

19 Henley, N. M. (1979). *Body Politics: Power, sex, and nonverbal communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

20 Wilson, G. L., Goodall, H. L., Jr., & Waagen, C.L. (1986). *Organizational Communication*. New York: Harper & Row.

21 Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Payne, S. K. (1987). *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

22 Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*, 3rd ed. New York: Free Press.

23 Heckel, R. V. (1973). Leadership and voluntary seating choice. *Psychological Reports*, 32, 141-142.

24 Mast, M. S. (2002). Dominance as expressed and inferred through speaking time: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28, 420-450.

25 Mehrabian, A. (1969). Significance of posture and position in the communication of attitude and status relationships. *Psychological Bulletin*, 71, 359-372.

26 Mullen, B., Salas, E., & Driskell, J.E. (1989). Saliency, motivation, and artifact as contributions to the relation between participation rate and leadership. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 545-559.

- Burgoon and Dunbar (2000)²⁷ report that *exhibiting power or dominance in interpersonal communication is linked to individual social skills* as well as to the situation and relationships that people have with others.
- Aguinas, Simonson, and Pierce (1998)²⁸ report that nonverbal behaviors do impact perceptions of power. They report that facial expressions impacted the perception of five bases of power (reward, referent, legitimate, expert, and credibility) particularly when a relaxed facial expression was used. Direct eye contact had an effect on ratings of credibility.
- *Interpersonal dominance may be characterized as having five interrelated dimensions, many of which are communicated nonverbally.* The five dimensions include: persuasiveness or influence, conveying focus and poise, conversational control, and self-assurance (J. Burgoon & Johnson, 1998).²⁹

Impression Formation and Management of Nonverbal Communication (Leathers, 1997)³⁰

- *Impression Management* is an individual's conscious attempt at control over communication behaviors and cues for the purposes of making a desired impression (often with nonverbal communication).
- Two functions important for impression management: 1) *Presentational function* (consciously trying to control the impression he/she makes on the person with whom he/she is communicating with), and 2) *Affect management* (consciously controlling your emotional response) (Patterson, 1987 cited by Leathers, 1997).³¹
- The impressions we make on others are defined by four dimensions: credibility (how competent and trustworthy you are), likeability (that another will judge you likable), interpersonal attractiveness, dominance (showing power and assertiveness). (Ross, 1998 cited by Leathers, 1997).³²
- The kind of person you are judged to be is influenced more by nonverbal than verbal cues. When we make judgments about others *we typically give disproportionate weight to nonverbal behaviors and cues than to their actions* (for example, looking at their posture to judge their level of self confidence).
- Factors that influence the impressions we form about other people: a) *Stereotypes* that we hold about individuals that belong to certain groups; b) *First impressions* that might affect all subsequent perceptions and may be resistant to change; c) *Selective perceptions* whereby we pay attention to things that are consistent with our own past experiences and concerns; and d) *Last impressions* in which we disproportionately weigh the influence of an individual's most recent action or our last contact with the individual.

27 Burgoon, J. K., & Dunbar, N. E. (2000). An interactionist perspective on dominance-submission: Interpersonal dominance as a dynamic, situationally contingent social skill. *Communication Monographs*, 67:1, 96.

28 Aguinis, H., Simonsen, M., & Pierce, C. A. (1998). Effects of nonverbal behavior on perceptions of power bases. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 138, 455-469.

29 Burgoon, J., & Johnson, M. L. (1998). The nature and measurement of interpersonal dominance. *Communication Monographs*, 65:4, 308.

30 Leathers, D. G. (1997). *Successful Nonverbal Communication: Principles and Applications*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

31 Patterson, M. L. (1987). Presentational and affect-management functions of nonverbal behavior. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 11, 110-122.

32 Ross, C. S. (1998). *Image Dimensions and Impression Managers' Perception of Nonverbal Behavior*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

CommGAP

The **Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP)**, a global program at the World Bank, seeks to confront the challenges inherent in the political economy of development. By applying innovative communication approaches that improve the quality of the public sphere – by amplifying citizen voice; promoting free, independent, and plural media systems; and helping government institutions communicate better with their citizens – the program aims to demonstrate the power of communication principles, processes and structures in promoting good and accountable governance, and hence better development results.

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