

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION: AN INFLUENTIAL TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

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### **ABSTRACT**

*While one can choose to shut off all the linguistic outlets of communication, it is impossible to circumvent the non-verbal communication as the body keeps sending signals intentionally or subconsciously. It is, therefore, that the non-verbal cues become a powerful tool for controlling, organizing, directing and coordinating in any field which significantly involves interpersonal relationship and group dynamics. To be able to produce powerful messages through one's non-verbal signals and to be able to interpret non-verbal communication correctly are important skills one must master for effective management and workplace relationship. The present paper attempts to establish the role of non-verbal communication in effective management. It examines the case specifically by keeping under review the four areas of nonverbal communication: kinesics, proxemics, vocalics, and chronemics.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Non-Verbal Communication, Effective Management, Kinesics, Proxemics, Vocalics, Chronemics*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nonverbal Communication has been a buzz word all over the academia and industry in the recent years. Jacquelyn Smith in Forbes blog post reiterates the importance of Nonverbal behavior at workplace listing 10 Nonverbal Cues That Convey Confidence at Work<sup>1</sup>. We constantly teach our final year UG and PG students during training sessions for job placements that interviewers form an opinion of a candidate within 7 seconds of meeting, as also accentuated by Anna Pitts in Business Insider.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, C. K. Goman asserts that Leaders have a “silent language,” and body language can win negotiations and build trust<sup>3</sup> and Amy J.C. Cuddy further insists that in order to succeed at a workplace, women must practice some deviations from general feminine behavior and should display some “power poses”<sup>4</sup>. Despite a lot of value attached to body language and nonverbal behavior in general for effective management and workplace harmony, it is noticed that management scholars fail to make adequate efforts in understanding and practicing this ostensibly significant form of communication. This is also one of the important factors leading to the

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, J. 2013. 10 nonverbal cues that convey confidence at work. Forbes, March 11. <http://www.Forbes.Com/sites/>

<sup>2</sup> Pitts, A. 2013. You only have 7 seconds to make a strong first impression. Business Insider, April 8. <http://www.businessinsider.com/only-7-seconds-to-make-first-impression-2013-4>.

<sup>3</sup> Goman, C. K. 2011. The silent language of leaders: How body language can help or hurt how you lead. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>4</sup> Cuddy, A. 2013. Want to lean in? Try a power pose [Harvard Business Review blog post]. March 20. <https://hbr.org/2013/03/want-to-lean-in-try-a-power-po-2>

decreasing employability of the passing-out management graduates. This research paper attempts to review the literature on nonverbal behavior with special emphasis on its application and implication in organizational system.

### **Nonverbal Behaviour: Definition**

The definition of nonverbal communication has evolved considerably over time. Contrary to the old perceptions of it as a communication without words or language, the modern theories propound that like verbal messages, nonverbal communicant too acquire vocal characteristics. Where verbal vocalic denotes the content of the message, nonverbal vocalic refers to the manner in which the message is conveyed. It includes both visible and audible cues delivered with the message content.

Each fragment of nonverbal behavior has the potential to communicate meaning. The term 'behavior' is very much synonymous with 'cue' as it serves as an audio, visual, tactile or any other sensory information which is used by the receiver in forming an opinion about the sender. Likewise, it also affects the response from the receiver.

All the conscious, subconscious or unconscious nonverbal cues transmitted by the sender have an immense impact on the overall message conveyed. They need to be practiced, perfected, and even controlled by a leader for effective management at the workplace. And therefore, it requires rigorous training and practice sessions in the curriculum of management education. Nonverbal behaviour can complement a verbal message by adding to its meaning (e.g. a smile with a nod to show cordial agreement), substitute for the verbal message especially if it is blocked by noise or any other interruption (e.g. a sneer instead of a statement of disapproval), accent it (e.g., using intonation for emotionally charged messages), or contradict it (e.g. a shrunken forehead with a statement of appreciation).

### **Categories of Nonverbal Codes**

Nonverbal Codes can be classified into four categories in accordance with the manner of communication: body, sensory, contact, and spatio-temporal.

**Body Codes** include kinesics, artifacts, and oculesics.

**Kinesics** is communication through body movement, including gestures, posture and gait, and facial expression. According to Wikipedia, kinesics is the interpretation of body motion communication such as facial expressions and gestures, nonverbal behavior related to the movement of any part of the body or the body as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Ray Birdwhistell, considered the founder of this area of study, argues that all movements of the body have meaning, and that nonverbal behavior has a grammar that can be analyzed in similar terms to spoken language. Thus, a "kineme" is "similar to a phoneme because it consists of a group of movements which are not identical, but which may be used interchangeably without affecting social meaning."<sup>6</sup> Kinesics becomes the crucial means of interpreting the true meaning of a message; it often supports or even supersedes the verbal messages.

Ekman and Friesen<sup>7</sup> have identified five categories of kinesics. The first category of 'adaptors' denotes changes in posture and other movements like self-touch which are made with little or no awareness in order to make the person more comfortable. They chiefly involve body-focussed movements, such as rubbing, touching, scratching etc. Owing to their

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinesics>

<sup>6</sup> Knapp, M. 1972. Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction. Reinhart and Winston, New York, pp. 94-5

<sup>7</sup> Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. 1969. The repertoire of nonverbal behavior: Categories, origins, usage, and coding. *Semiotica*, 1: 48-98.

involuntary occurrence, they're regarded as the keys to understanding someone's real internal state. For instance, a candidate's anxiety or nervousness is revealed if he repeatedly touches his face or hair during an interview. The second category of 'emblems' refers to non-verbal signals with a verbal equivalent. Emblems are the direct replacement for words as they easily recognized as they are recurrently used in specific contexts. The third category of 'illustrators' are subconscious movements that create a visual image, and support the spoken message. For instance, in order to denote a size one holds the hands apart. The fourth category is that of the 'regulators', the body movements that control, adjust, and sustain the flow of a conversation e.g. nodding and eye movements. The fifth, the 'affect displays', are the facial gestures that exhibit particular emotions like expressions of love, frustration, or anger.

**Oculesics** encompasses eye contact, levels of gazes and ocular expression. Connotations pertaining to eye contact during a conversation are generally culture- specific. Oculesics, in general, is involuntary but eye contact and gaze levels can be controlled. Eye contact regulates conversation, gives cues of dominance, or forms the basis of suspecting a liar. These nonverbal signals form a vital part of being able to read a person's attitude and thoughts. A gaze can be hard, angry, blank, sad, happy, defiant, cold, and jealous and so on. One can easily tell a fake smile from a real one by looking at the eyes. The eyes narrow and create lines, at the outer corners when someone smiles genuinely whereas they remain completely open when the smile is fake and is made just to hide real emotions. 'Gaze' is an important part of management style. In fact, people draw a lot of conclusions out of the way a manager looks at them.

**Sensory and Contact Codes** include haptics, vocalics, and olfactics.

**Haptics** is the language of touch. Meaning is communicated by the place of touch as well as its intensity and type. Principles related to touch are also culture- specific. Haptics is a nonverbal language that expresses varying levels of intimacy. The acceptability of a warm-friendly touch as an appropriate nonverbal workplace behavior may depend on the organizational standards. For example, a brief congratulatory hug is common in an egalitarian work culture but not in a hierarchical one.

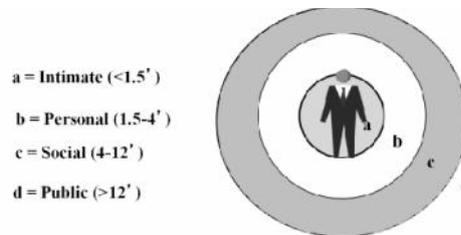
**Vocalics** are as important carriers of meaning as the verbal message. The perception of a communication is highly influenced by the pitch, intonation, volume, accent, and pronunciation. These vocal cues tend to involuntarily convey emotions. At the workplace, vocal signals like pitch and volume and intonation more associated with the chain of command so much so that listeners can deduce the hierarchy of the speakers on account of their vocalics, and likewise the speakers take on different vocalics to express their hierarchy. Moreover, silence is also taken as an important vocal cue. The emotions like fright, anger, rejection, dissatisfaction, and resentment are powerfully expressed through silence. The true meaning behind the silence can be connoted with the associated facial expression & posture.

**Olfactics** is communication through scent and smell. Though scent plays a role in social functioning it is less studied while exploring organizational behavior than the other nonverbal codes.

**Spatiotemporal Codes** comprise proxemics, chronemics, and environment.

**Proxemics** is the use of personal or territorial space to communicate. The norms of apposite personal space are governed by culture and the relationship between two individuals. It indicates the level of intimacy and degree of dominance or sub-ordinance in a relationship. Minding an appropriate personal space in communication is respecting other person's privacy. Territorial space differs from culture to culture. Edward T Hall specified four distance zones which are

commonly observed by North Americans<sup>8</sup>: the intimate zone is 1.5 feet, personal zone between 1.5 to 4 feet, the professional zone between 4 to 8 feet and public interactions to occur at greater than 8 feet distance. Infringement of personal space can indicate bullying or victimization, or an overture, and is taken negatively



**Figure 1**

**Chronemics** is the study of time as a communication code. It incorporates the pace of walking, the swiftness of working, alacrity, and punctuality, which together communicate meaning in relation to how a person or an organizational culture perceives, understands and exploits time.

As stated by Mohammed & Harrison, recent researches in team management and leadership have been augmented with the study of individual differences in relation to time, such as the tendency to hurry, an inclination to multitasking, time perception, and pacing style.<sup>9</sup>

### **Suggested Adaptations for Influential Leadership**

Managers can exercise power through a practice of “power postures”. Carney et al. define high power postures by physical expansiveness such as standing straight with a broad chest and hands on hips. In contrast, a low power posture could be characterized by standing hunched with arms folded and head lowered.<sup>10</sup>

Charismatic leaders practice controlling and augmenting their body language in order to complement their inspirational visions. Though not completely, kinesics can be controlled to different degrees depending upon their involuntary and voluntary nature. Though it can be hard to hold back some natural behavior like blushing in embarrassment, but other elements of kinesics can surely be trained by regular exercise, following “Fake it until you make it” concept. Great leaders and powerful public speakers have been found enacting programmed hand gestures and postures in order to make their verbal messages more powerful.

Furthermore, positive attributes of intellect, competence, courage, and health can be displayed through appropriate selections of clothing, accessories, perfumes, and colors to make the appearance prominent. Power dressing is an influential instrument that can be used, especially by women to mark their powerful presence in the organization. Practicing appropriate vocal cues to express authority, control, warmth, motivation, and conviction as and when required may be of great help in developing oneself into an influential manager.

Working on eye contact is yet another important step in the process of creating and controlling right work culture.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, E. T. 1968. Proxemics. Chicago: University of Chicago

<sup>9</sup> Mohammed, S., & Harrison, D. 2013. The clocks that time us are not the same: A theory of temporal diversity, task characteristics, and performance in teams. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 122: 244-256.

<sup>10</sup> Carney, D. R., Cuddy, A. J., & Yap, A. J. 2010. Power posing brief nonverbal displays affect neuroendocrine levels and risk tolerance. *Psychological Science*, 21: 1363-1368.

Power Gaze, the centering of the look in the center of the triangle formed between the two eyes and the forehead of the listener, is a very influential method.

Augmenting the chronemic signals can help the management professionals become more influential in team administration. The leaders, who walk swiftly, stay cool, present an example of efficient multitasking and are punctual, are found to organize, coordinate, and administer the pacing of work very effectively and have the positive influence on team performance, especially when the team is heterogeneous in composition.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nonverbal codes, being omnipresent components of communication, act as significant means of producing meaning in all forms of organizational interactions. Well-organized nonverbal conduct helps stimulate and sustain interpersonal relationships imbued with trust and commitment between a leader and team members. Powerful team coordination can be achieved through nonverbal demonstrations of competence, self-esteem, and authority. A team tends to willingly follow a leader who exhibits magnetism, passion, and competence, and nonverbal cues can greatly help in communicating these elements in a charismatic leader.

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