

Session Objectives:

The objective of this session is to understand:

- Characteristics of nonverbal communication
- Components of nonverbal communication

Characteristics of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal messages primarily communicate emotions, attitudes: Nonverbal messages are very effective in communicating a person's subjective responses to a particular situation which may take the form of anger, dislike, happiness, etc. Non-verbal communication is however ineffective to communicate concepts and ideas.

Example: It is not possible to effectively convey the message that there will be a budget session on Tuesday by using nonverbal communication. However, the response to the announcement of budget session can be nonverbally expressed by displaying disinterest, anxiousness and so on.

Nonverbal cues substitute for, contradict, emphasize or regulate verbal messages:

Very often, our body language contradicts what we say. Our body language reveals our actual responses, even though we may try to conceal expressing our true feelings.

Example: At the end of the talk, the speaker asks the audience: 'How was my talk'? The reply from the audience was: 'It was great', but with a groan. The verbal response as such may appear to be positive but the groan which is 'non verbal', conveys the real response, which is negative in nature.

Nonverbal cues are often ambiguous: It is very difficult to understand nonverbal cues. They may convey a totally different meaning from what was originally intended to be conveyed. Sometimes they may also mean nothing to the person receiving the message.

Example: You find that someone is waving in your direction as you walk down the street. You are confused regarding what the person is trying to convey. "Is he calling me, or is he calling someone else?" could be the typical response.

Nonverbal cues are continuous: Unlike verbal communication, nonverbal cues cannot be controlled and are continuously given out.

Example: You may not have expressed your anger to your friend in words, but remaining silent for a long period of time conveys that something is wrong and unacceptable. Thus, even though it is possible to avoid using verbal communication to express anger, it is not possible to stop giving out nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal cues are generally seen as more reliable: In any situation where verbal and nonverbal communication contradict each other, nonverbal communication is considered to be more reliable because it is difficult to fake emotions.

Nonverbal cues are culture bound: Gestures and body language varies from one culture to another. There is also no universally correct meaning for nonverbal expressions.

Components of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal signals or cues can be studied under three main areas:

Paralanguage: Paralanguage is the study of how we say, what we say

Kinesics : It is the study of body language and facial expressions.

Proxemics: It is the study of how people's usage of the physical space around them reveals the kind of relationship they are willing to share with others.

Paralanguage

Two similar verbal messages can communicate totally different messages, depending on the tone that is used to deliver the message. The tone of voice, its loudness or softness, rate of speech and the point of emphasis are important factors in communication.

Example: When you wish to ask your friend as to why he hasn't mailed you for very long, you may do so in two ways:

- Why haven't you mailed? I am missing your mails.
- Why the hell haven't you mailed??? Are you so busy?

Components of Paralanguage

Paralanguage has the following components:

Voice Qualities: Voice quality depends on a number of factors such as volume, rate of speech, pitch, rhythm, pronunciation and enunciation.

Volume: When a person speaks loudly, his intention may be to attract others' attention or even to make a point. It is needless to say that most often, speaking in a loud volume only annoys the listeners. Soft spoken people, on the other hand, may communicate an impression of being weak or indecisive. Hence, it is always important that an appropriate level of volume be used, depending upon the situation.

Example: While speaking to your boss or to elders at home you may speak softly. But if you are to speak at a public meeting during students' union elections, then you may have to speak loudly to ensure that your message reaches the audience.

Rate of speech: On an average a person speaks 150 words per minute. When a person speaks faster or slower than this rate, such speech can communicate negative signals.

Example: When a person speaks too fast he/she is considered to be nervous. When the speech is too slow, it may convey that the speaker is unsure of what he/she is saying.

Voice pitch: Voice pitch is considered to reflect the emotional state of the person. High pitch is associated with excitement or nervousness while a low pitch indicates the person's control over the situation.

Rhythm: It indicates the regular or irregular pattern of the voice.

Pronunciation and enunciation: The manner in which words are pronounced communicates a lot about the person delivering the message. Despite having a good vocabulary, poor pronunciation undermines the image of the speaker. 'Enunciation' is more about articulation of words. People with poor enunciation slur while pronouncing words, the endings of words are left out, or they lack clarity in speech.

Voice Qualifiers: Voice qualifiers are temporary variations in the volume, pitch or rate of speech of a

person. If a person adopts a volume that is unlike the one that is generally used, it is very easy to identify that something is not right.

Example: Your friend who is usually bubbly and enthusiastic over the phone, talks to you in a low voice. It is then obvious that something is wrong.

Vocal Characteristics: Certain audible sounds are produced when people communicate. These may be in the form of sighs, clearing of the throat, growling and so on. These sounds are known as vocal characteristics and convey a subtle message about the person.

Vocal Segregates: These are meaningless sounds used while speaking which only form awkward components of speech and serve no useful purpose in communication.

Example: Very often we come across people using sounds like hmmm, errrrrrrr etc. while speaking.

Kinesics

It involves the study of body postures, gestures and facial expressions.

Posture : The posture of a person is the manner in which he sits or stands. The body posture adopted by a person may communicate confidence, anxiety, fear, and a host of other emotions.

Example: A teacher who wants to assert his authority while reprimanding a student may do so by leaning forward and peering down at him. This posture communicates superiority.

Gestures: Gestures mainly comprise of ***emblems, adaptors, regulators and illustrators***. Emblems are gestures that are easily understood by most people. However, some gestures may be culture specific. Adaptors are learned behavior patterns which are most often imbibed during one's childhood. Regulators are gestures that control the flow of communication. Illustrators are gestures that support what is being said verbally.

Example:

Gestures: The gestures used by classical dancers convey a specific meaning.

Adaptors: The way we use a spoon while eating, the manner in which we clean hands before and after eating and so on.

Regulators: The audience cheers the artists and encouraging them to perform better.

Illustrators: Asking someone to be seated accompanied with a wave of the hand.

Facial expression: They have plenty to convey to the audience.

For instance, By maintaining eye contact with the listener, the person speaking conveys honesty on his part.

Proxemics

The invisible boundary that is created by individuals around themselves is known as personal feature space. A closer observation of the physical space between two individuals can reveal the relationship between them. As far as organizations are concerned, control of space communicates one's personal powers over others, within the organization.

There are four categories or zones into which personal feature space can be divided:

Intimate distance zone: The zone enclosed within a radius of 18 inches around a person is known as

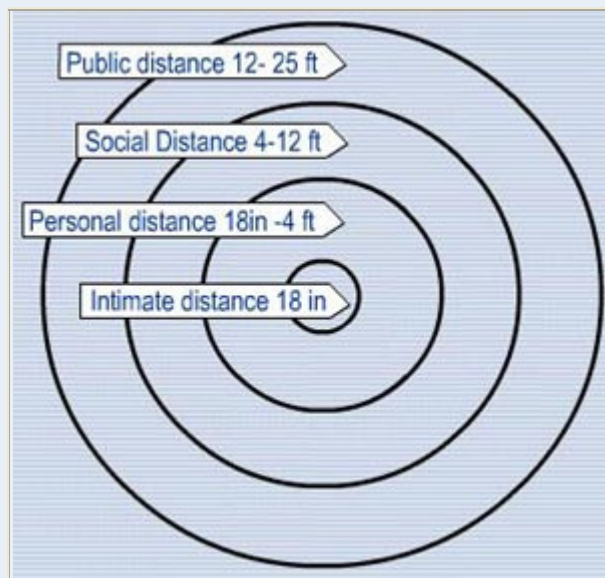
intimate distance zone and is reserved for friends and close relations.

Personal distance zone: Extends from 1½ to 4 feet and is reserved for friends and family.

Social distance zone: Extends from 4 to 12 feet distance around a person. Business transactions usually take place at this distance.

Public distance zone: Extends from 12 to 25 feet. This is the farthest distance within which effective communication can occur on a face-to-face basis.

Diagrammatic representation of Personal feature space categories



Other forms of nonverbal communication

- **Use of time:** The manner in which a person utilizes his time conveys information about the kind of person he is. Also, the amount of time that a person allocates to a certain task indicates the relative importance he gives to the task.
- **Mode of dress:** The first impression about a person is created by his/her mode of dressing. Not surprisingly, in organizations, sometimes even promotions depend on this factor.

Summary

Oral communication is a mix of nonverbal and verbal communication. Nonverbal cues substitute for, authenticate, reinforce, and at times, contradict verbal messages. An understanding of nonverbal communication is thus important for effective business communication.