**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Communication is a continuous process that mainly involves three elements which include: the sender, the message, and the receiver. Communication is fundamental to the existence and survival of humans as well as to an organization (Toppr, n.d., para. 1).

Non-verbal communication is a type of communication. It is also called manual language, and it is the process of sending and receiving messages without using words, either spoken or written (Nordquist, 2024, para. 1). The term non-verbal communication was introduced in 195, by psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesech and author Weldon Kees in the book Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations.

By examining research-based perspectives, this paper argues that non-verbal communication is a crucial determinant of effective interpersonal interactions and cross-cultural exchanges.

There are various types of non-verbal communication, such as: gestures, head movement, and posture.

Gestures are movements of body parts, with the aim to express an idea or meaning. There are three types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. Adapters are touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted towards the self, objects, or others (LibreTexts, n.d., para. 1). There are two types of adaptors, self-adaptors or object-focused adaptors. Examples of self-adaptors include scratching, twirling hair or fidgeting with fingers, while object-adaptors can manifest themselves, through bending or fidgeting objects like paper clips. These adaptors can be used to suggest that one is bored or even, in some cases, trying to ease their anxiety.

The other type of gesture is emblems, these have a direct equivalent to direct verbal communication. They complement or replace spoken words, help to put emphasis on key points, create stronger emotional connections with listeners, and they generally make the overall message impactful. An example of this may be when someone makes the silence sign with their finger over the lip.

Lastly, we have illustrators as the most common type of gesture, they illustrate the verbal message they accompany. An example is when one uses hand gestures to show the size of an object or even when drawing a picture in the air. These are used subconsciously as they flow as we speak, they also make communication more engaging and relatable.

Besides gestures, we have head movements and posture. A universal example of head movement is a nod, the up and down shake is known to mean “yes”. Heads are also moved to show interest, and sometimes a head tilt shows interest and gives someone room to feel trusting. Human positions refer to the different physical configurations, the human body can take (“List of Human Positions,” n.d., para.1). The basic positions include: all-fours, kneeling, lying, sitting, squatting or crouching, and standing. An example of how these are used in communication is a situation in which, when sitting, one may lean back, this shows informality and indifference.

The maintenance of eye contact in communication plays a big role in showing concern about what the conversation is about. Too much eye contact may be judged as disrespectful or creepy while lack of eye contact, may show disinterest or inattentiveness, therefore, the amount of eye contact used matters a lot in communication. To overcome challenges with eye contact, one should practice moderation and adapt the eye contact level, depending on the level of comfort of the individual. There are commonly known eye movements such as winking and rolling of the eyes which display different meanings. In the event of delivering a speech, a speaker is expected to maintain eye contact with the audience to illustrate confidence and focus.

Facial expression refers to the movements of the face that convey different emotions, such as smiling or frowning. There are macro and micro-expressions. The macro expressions are obvious, they last between half a second to four seconds and they match the content of what has been said, on the other hand, micro expressions are often missed, they occur within half a second, and they are unconsciously displayed. The face offers the best window into the emotional lives of others, regardless of culture, language, or personal background, all human beings share a common form of non-verbal communication.

Proxemics refers to the distance we keep between ourselves and others. The level of space we have between us and other people can show the amount of trust there is. For example, one may stand close to someone when passing a message that is private. It is defined as the study of the nature, degree, and effect of the spatial separation individuals naturally maintain and how this separation relates to environmental and cultural factors (Study.com, n.d., para.1). There are four spatial zones, as identified by anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, intimate space, personal space, social space, and public space.

Haptics, is the study of touch, as a form of non-verbal communication. There are several factors of how touch is perceived. The factors include: frequency, duration and intensity. Touch is a form of communication, that is manifested through actions such as hugs and handshakes, and it can be used to maintain and initiate relationships. Tactile nurturance is the physical sensation of being held, and it is an important aspect of developing a child since it helps in developing language skills. Touch deprivation is the lack of haptic communication. Research has shown that people who do not receive adequate amount of touch develop various communication problems from reduced learning of speech to aggression (Field, 2002a).

Paralanguage is a type of communication that uses vocalizations and speech modifications to convey meaning. Examples include: vocalizations, speech modifications, non-lexical tokens, prosody, physical features and respiration. Paralanguage makes communication more convincing and effective as it compensates for lack of language command. This means of non-verbal communication, however faces problems due to cultural differences. Tone, pitch, and volume convey emotions and intentions.

Chronemics is the study of the relationship between time and communication, or as Dawna Ballard of the University of Texas at Austin describes it, as it is bound to human communication (Delaney, 2022, para. 2). Cultural differences, greatly influence the attitude towards time, there is monochronic culture in which time is seen as linear, then the polychronic culture, where time is viewed a fluid, since lateness is seen as a sign of flexibility and not rudeness.

Non-verbal communication faces challenges, as different cultures perceive different gestures differently. In the Western cultures the thumbs up sign is known to signify approval while in the Middle East, it is viewed as offensive. Similarly, nodding of the head, to people in parts of India means “no”, while shaking the head means “yes” while in most Western cultures it is vice versa. The misinterpretation of non-verbal cues leads to conflict and breakdowns. It is important for one to learn cultural norms when interacting with people from different parts of the world, in order to foster healthy communication and peaceful interactions.

Non-verbal communication plays an important role in communication, it helps to improve interpersonal skills and ensures efficient interactions. Understanding non-verbal cues can help get someone's real intent, since they contradict verbal communication, for example, if a person communicates that they are okay, but speaks in a low tone, then it may mean that they are actually upset.

Although non-verbal communication is good, it may fail in quite a number of situations. Environmental barriers such as background noise, may alter the tone of someone’s message making communication unclear, situations of poor lighting may make it hard for one to take note of facial expressions, hence missing out on the true meaning of the message being conveyed. People with disabilities and impairments will find it hard to include non-verbal communication when interacting with others. Those with visual impairment may rely on tone rather than facial expressions, and if there is noise it will be hard for them to grasp the message. It is, therefore, important to understand these limitations in order to limit conflict in communication.

In conclusion, it is important to note that non-verbal communication plays a big role in building strong relationships, and understanding that there may be limitations may lead to better communication with reduced conflict. The navigation and awareness of non-verbal cues make it easy to communicate professionally and socially with increased confidence and clarity.

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