

Communication: Barriers, Verbal, and Non-Verbal

Aruni Mahapatra, Ph.D

HSI 101: Soft Skills

Autumn 2024—2025

Soft Skills in a Technical World

- All workplaces require the management of emotions
- An increasingly automated world sorely needs human decision makers
- Choice
- Feelings
- Chatgpt plus

Why Communicate?

- What makes us Human?
- The need/desire/impulse to communicate?
- How to become effective communicators *by* becoming better human beings, more compassionate citizens.
- Empathy is key.

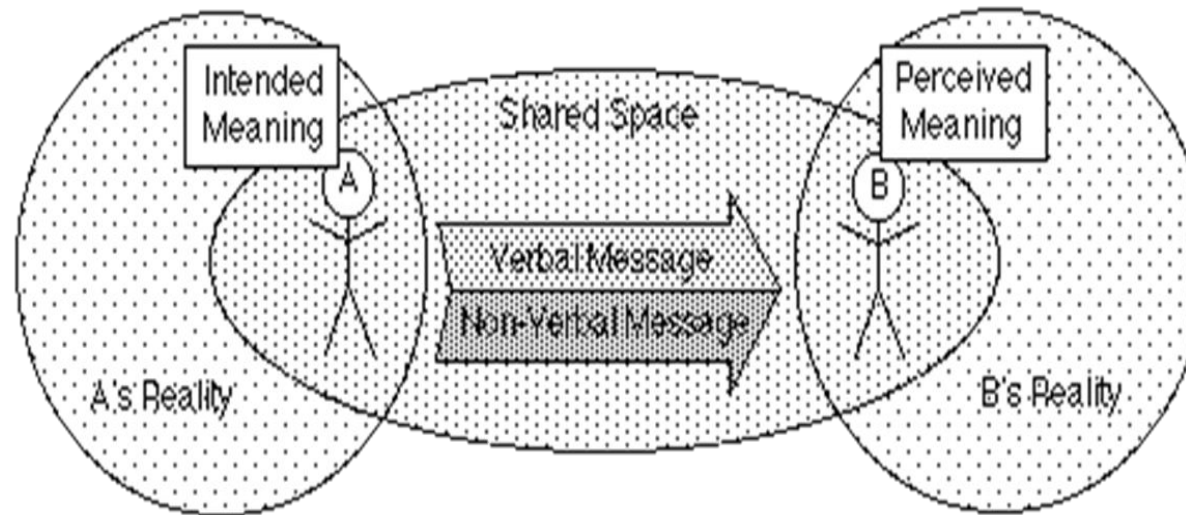
Communication

- A word of Latin origin.
- English “communication” from Latin “communicare”
from root Communis: “to make common”, “to share”
- We communicate through symbols.
- Words are one kind of symbols; we use verbal and non-verbal cues to communicate.
- A common (shared) frame of reference.

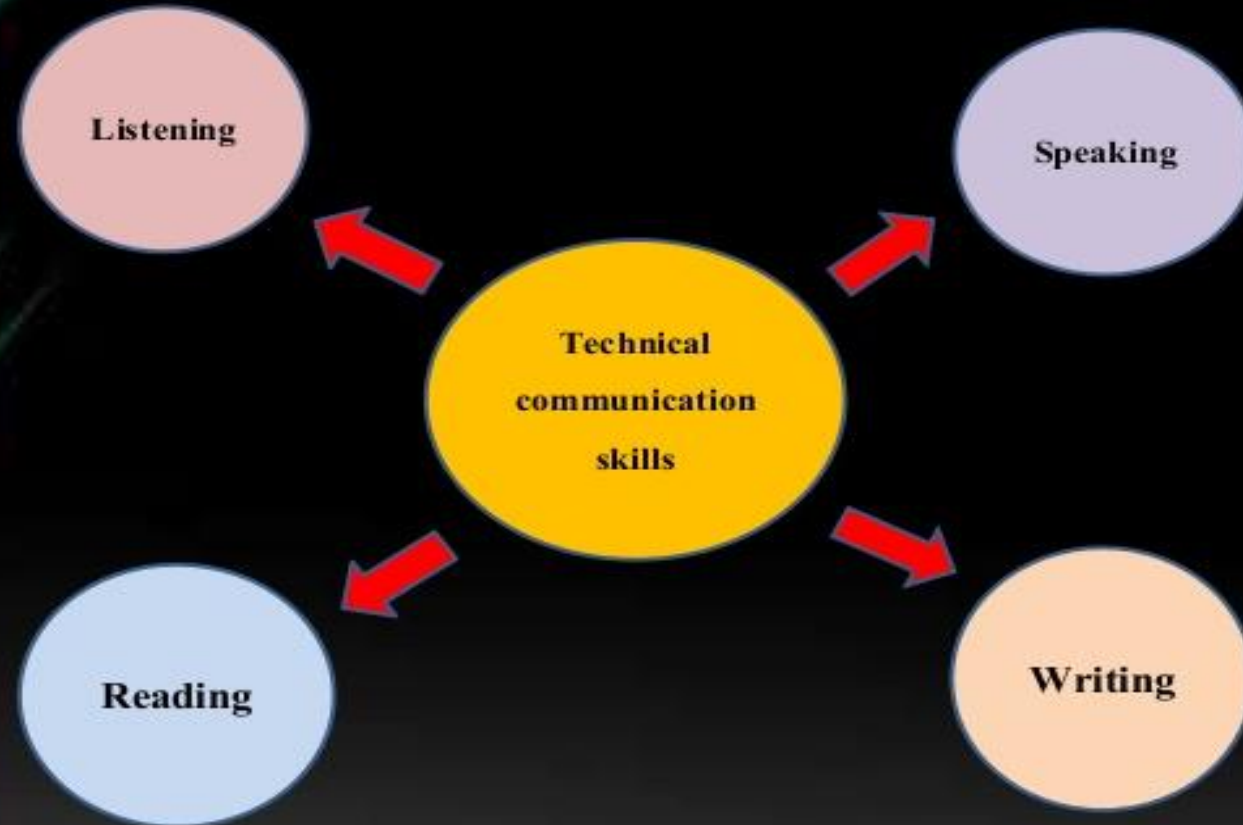
What is Communication?

- Research Paper
- Journal Article
- Facebook post
- Whatsapp message
- Instagram story

Communication as an Interpersonal Dialogue



Technical communication skills



What do engineers write?

- ❖ Business Letters
- ❖ Reports
- ❖ Memorandum
- ❖ Letter Reports
- ❖ Circular
- ❖ Notice, Agenda & Minutes
- ❖ Electronic Mail
- ❖ Technical Proposal
- ❖ Research Paper
- ❖ Blog

Also:

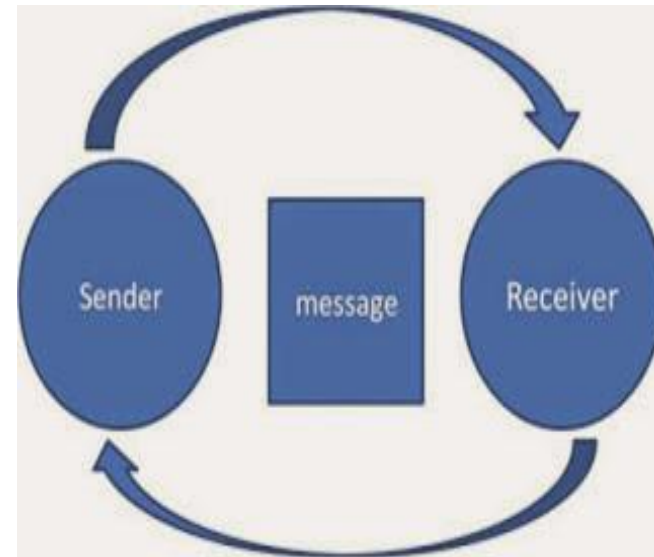
- Facebook Posts
- Tweets, Tweet threads
- Captions for Instagram posts
- “Stories”
- Scripts for Reels/Shorts/Tiktok

Features of Effective Writing

- ✓ Clarity
- ✓ Concision
- ✓ Elegance

COMMUNICATION AS PROCESS

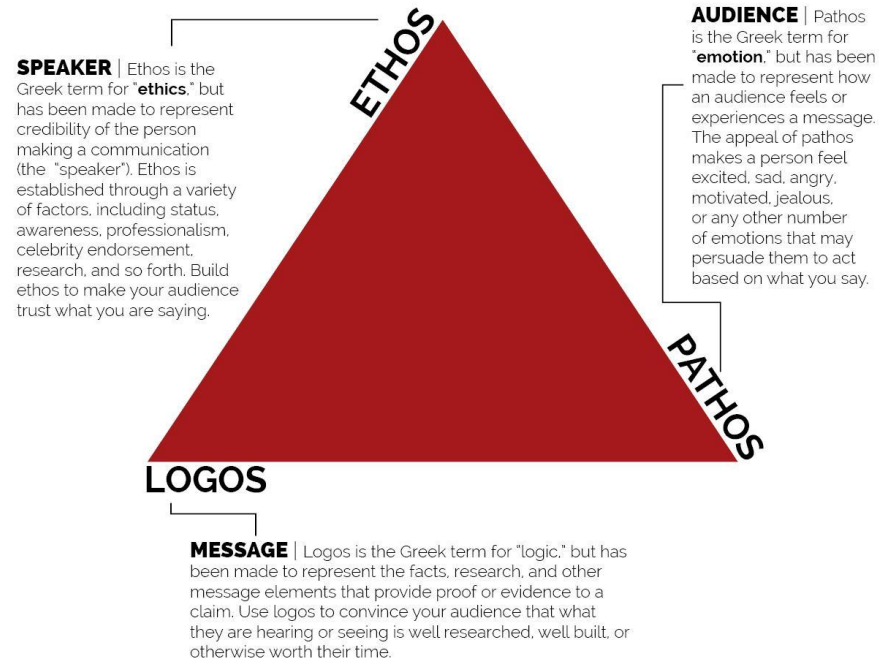
- ❖ Sender has an idea
- ❖ Sender encodes idea in message
- ❖ Message travels over channel
- ❖ Receiver decodes message
- ❖ Feedback travels to sender



Rhetorical Triangle of Appeals

THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE THREE RHETORICAL APPEALS



ETHOS = CREDIBILITY

In English, the direct translation of *ethos* from Greek is “ethics.” But when we talk about the rhetorical appeals, “ethos” makes broader reference to **what makes the speaker (person or organization) credible**. When you create a communication, you want to establish ethos by employing rhetorical devices that will make you appear **credible**. Credibility, depending on the topic or substance of a communication, can take years to establish.

Examples of How to Build Ethos in Communications:

- Use **appropriate and professional language** for your intended audience
- Design your communications professionally
- Conduct sound and ethical research (and cite all sources)
- Follow established conventions and paradigms
- Make logical connections between ideas and avoid logical fallacies at all costs

WHAT IS LOGOS?

In English, the direct translation of *logos* is “logic.” But when we talk about the rhetorical appeals, “logos” makes broader reference to the message as a whole and, more specifically, the **facts and statements** that build a logical argument. Consider, for example, a cell phone company trying to market a new phone. To appeal to their customers, they might build an argument around all of the phones’ features: size of screen, durability, length of battery life, water resistance, and so forth. These are logical appeals, or use of “logos.”

Examples of How to Use Logos to Be Persuasive:

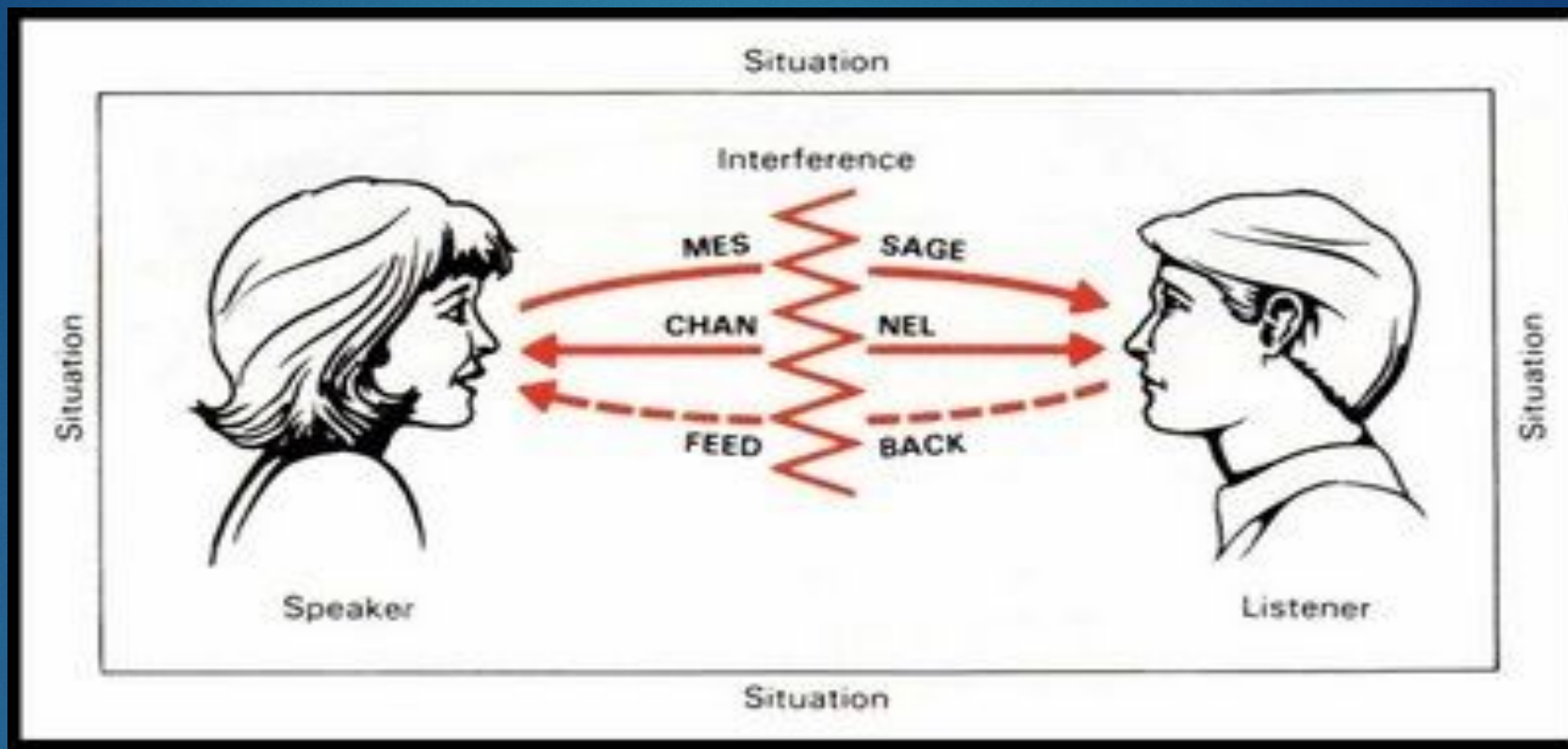
- Use statistics or established facts
- Reference research in support of your claim
- Make logical connections between concepts
- Be specific (when appropriate, be as specific as possible and avoid generalizations)

“PATHOS” = EMOTIONS

- In English, the direct translation of *pathos* is “emotion.” But when we talk about the rhetorical appeals, “pathos” makes broader reference to the audience and the way in which they react to a message.
- The idea behind *pathos* is that **you want your audience to feel a certain way when you communicate to them.**
- What do you want your audience to feel when you communicate with them?
 - Confident?
 - Sad?
 - Angry?
 - Challenged?
 - Motivated?
 - At peace?

Communication Breakdown/Barrier

18



What are Communication Barriers?

19

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Any step in the communication process which blocks, restricts or interferes with the smooth flow of messages can be termed as communication barrier.

Why do barriers arise?

20

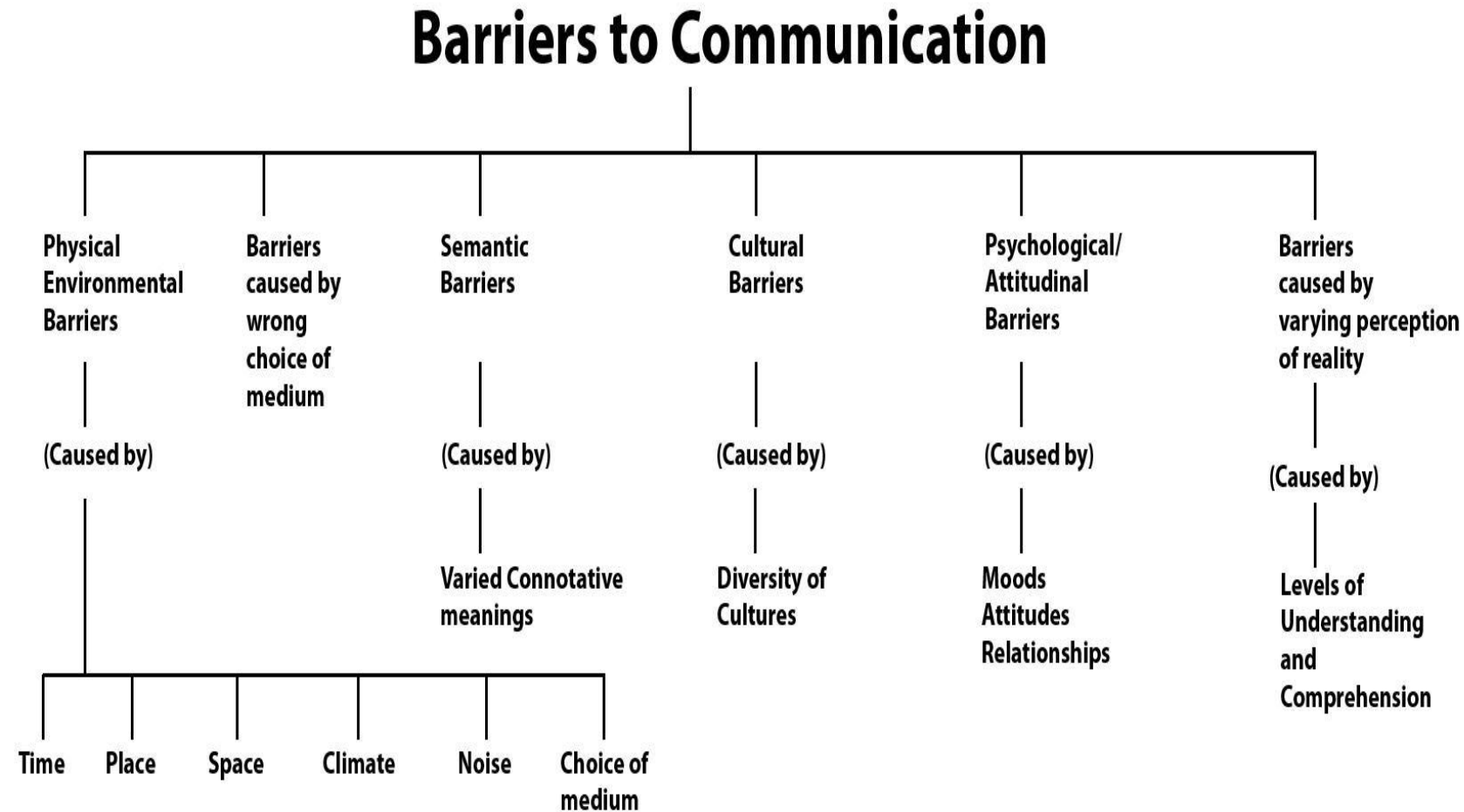
Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Perceptual and language differences
- ▶ Restrictive environments
- ▶ Distractions
- ▶ Deceptive techniques
- ▶ Information overload

Different Categories of Barriers

21

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024



Breakdown at source

22

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Perception is people's individual interpretation of the sensory world.
- ▶ Perception of reality
 - selective perception
- ▶ Language –an arbitrary code

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain

Contd.

23

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Faltering with words
- ▶ Indecisive about content
- ▶ Unfamiliarity with audience/environment

Restrictive Environments

24

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Communication climate
- ▶ Information at times gets distorted, blocked/fragmented
- ▶ Lack of management interest /effective means

Distractions

25

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Physical
- ▶ Emotional
- ▶ Non- verbal

Deceptive Tactics

26

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Organization of message
- ▶ Avoid the following:
 - exaggerating
 - hiding negative information
 - presenting opinions as facts
 - presenting big pictures

Information Overload

27

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Excessive dependence on technology
- ▶ Constantly tied to task
- ▶ Lack of time to think

Communication Barriers: Types

28

Intrapersonal Communication Barriers

- Differences in background and language
- Differences in perception
- Fact-inference confusion
- Rigid categories

(frozen evaluation, polarization)

- Categorical thinking
- Insufferable know-it-alls

Interpersonal Barriers

29

- Emotional reactions
- Negative emotional behaviour
- Negative attitudes about a message or source (*lack of credibility/interest*)
- Ineffective information gathering
- Inappropriate timing of messages

Organizational Barriers

30

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- Organizational Characteristics
- Fear of Superior's Perception
- Negative attitudes in organization
- Misunderstood application of Media
- Information Overload

Gender Based Barriers

31

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Different socialization experiences of men and women
- ▶ Men are encouraged to be independent and strong
- Women are encouraged to value relationships and emotions
- Cultural differences determine to what extent one becomes assertive in dealings with the opposite gender.
- They also decide and condition the levels of assertiveness acceptable in the behavior of people of different gender
- Gender biases often present themselves as normal, status quo, and equitable.
- Such barriers differ from country to country.

Ethical Considerations

32

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ *Difference between what you have a right to do and what is the right thing to do*
- ▶ *Plagiarism*
- ▶ *Misquoting*
- ▶ *Predictions*

Cultural Barriers

33

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ Multi-cultural setting
- ▶ Non-verbal aspects
- ▶ Team work ethics
- ▶ Global issues - environment, pollution, peace
- ▶ Gender sensitivity

High- and Low-Context Cultures

34

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ "High-" and "low-"context cultures typically refer to language groups, nationalities, or regional communities.
- ▶ Also apply to corporations, professions and other cultural groups, as well as to settings such as online and offline communication.

Contd.

35

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ▶ High context culture
- ❖ Japan, China, Spain, Mexico, Greece and Arab
 - believe in non verbal cues
 - more flexible, sociable and derive meaning even from the people's gestures
 - Value interpersonal relationships
 - involves less-direct verbal and nonverbal communication, utilizing communication gestures, reading more meaning into less-direct messages
 - Prefer oral communications
 - Focus on longer forms of communication that do not always focus on basic questions.

Contd.

36

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

► **Low context culture**

- ❖ German, Scandinavian, American, English, French and Italian
 - Individualistic
 - value tasks over relationships
 - members form several short-term relationships
- direct verbal communication is needed to properly understand a message being communicated
- Relies heavily on explicit verbal skills. Rarely is anything implicit or hidden.
- Low-context cultures favor written communications

Some instances of cultural differences

37

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ❖ Leaning on a wall
- ❖ Using an index finger
- ❖ Moving things with one's feet

Areas of Concern in Intercultural Communication

- ▶ Self-awareness
- ▶ Self-respect
- ▶ Interaction
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Adaptability
- ▶ Certainty
- ▶ Initiative
- ▶ Acceptance

Measures to overcome barriers

39

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- Adopt an audience- centred approach
- Encourage open communication climate
- Reduce the number of levels
- Facilitate feedback
- Commit to ethical communication
- Create lean, efficient messages

Other Measures

- ▶ *The greater the differences between cultures, the greater the chances for misunderstanding.*
- ▣ Respect other cultures as you respect yours.
- ▣ Be generous and patient .
- ▣ Avoid making false assumptions.

Factors for Effective Communication

4
1

Communication Barriers
21/08/2024

- ⦿ Ensuring Cordiality & Co-operation
- ⦿ Listening Skills
- ⦿ Comprehending Messages
- ⦿ Communicating to build a positive culture

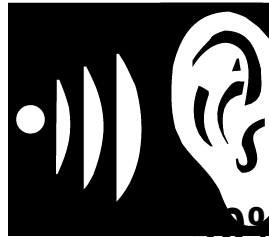
Effective Communication: The need for a sound non-verbal communication



- "Actions Speak Louder Than Words"
- "Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter" (Keats)

The Communication Equation

- What you hear
- Tone of voice
- Vocal clarity
- Verbal expressiveness



10% of the message

- What you see or feel
- Facial expression
- Dress and grooming
- Posture
- Eye contact
- Touch
- Gesture



50% of the message

- WORDS ...



10% of the message!

Nonverbal Communication

- Nonverbal communication is culture bound
- However, certain universals exist (e.g. smile)
- Effective communication is the combined harmony of verbal and nonverbal actions.

Types of Communication

	Vocal Com.	Nonvocal Com.
Verbal Com.	Spoken words	Written Words
Nonverbal Com.	Tone of voice, sighs, screams, vocal qualities (loudness) etc.	Gestures, movement, appearance, facial expressions, etc.

Verbal vs Nonverbal

Verbal

Nonverbal

7% verbal

38 % vocal
(volume, pitch,
rhythm, etc.)

55% nonvocal-
body
movements
(mostly facial
expressions)



Differences between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- Single vs Multiple Channels
- Discrete vs Continuous
- Conscious vs Unconscious
- Clear vs Ambiguous

Single vs Multiple Channels

In Verbal Com. □ emphasis on orderly and sequential sentences (one word after the other)

In Nonverbal Com. □ messages bombard us simultaneously from a multitude of channels (facial expressions, posture, gesture, clothing, proxemics etc.)

Discrete vs Continuous

- Verbal messages usually have clear beginnings and endings
- Nonverbal com. provides a constant flow of messages (continuous and never ending)
- Communication is a continuous process (even an unanswered call or email is a message)

Conscious vs Unconscious

- In Verbal Communication: usually think about what we want to say before speaking
- Most nonverbal messages aren't deliberate (that's why it offers so many cues as to how one is feeling)

Key Takeaway:

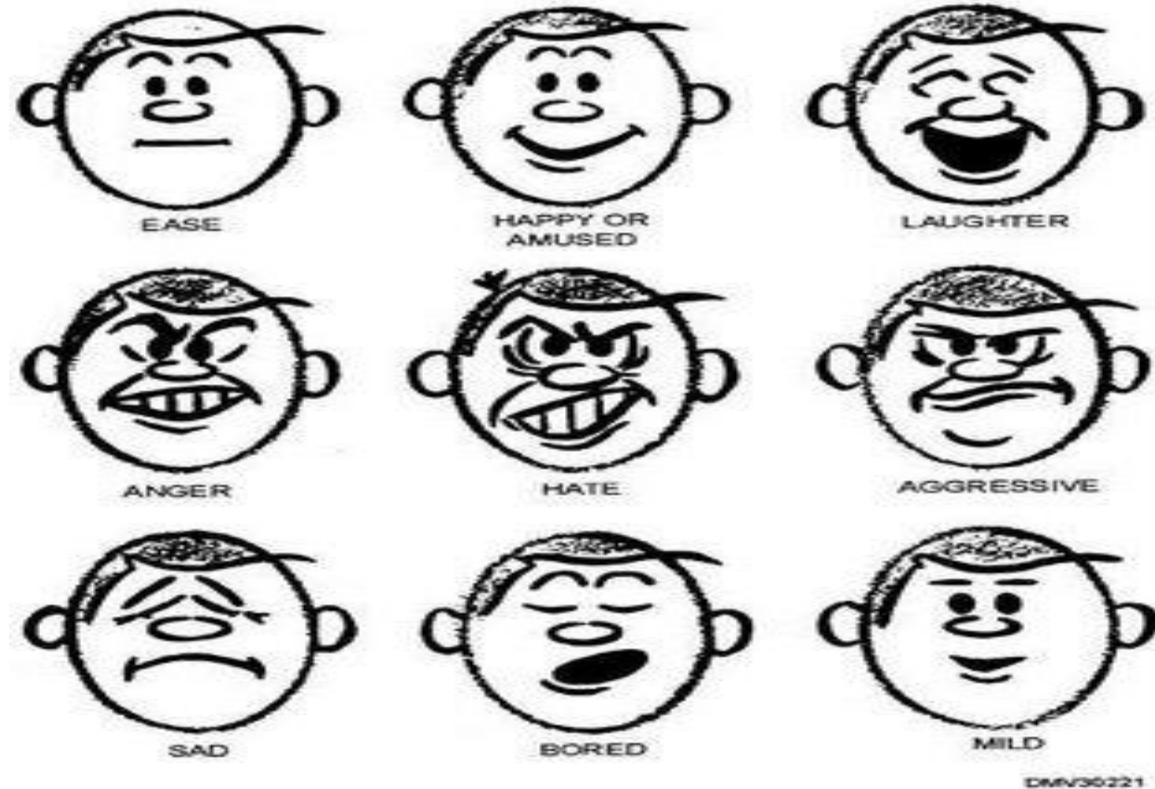
- We have some control and can predict, with some certainty, how our verbal messages will be understood by others
- We typically have less control, once the process of communication starts, over the manner in which our non-verbal cues will be understood

- So what do we do: try to understand, as well as possible, all the potential for misunderstanding.
- If we remain aware of how gestures may be misread, we can make misreadings unlikely by avoiding those gestures.

Types of Non-verbal Communication

- **Kinesics:** Facial expression, posture, and gesture.
- **Oculesics:** Eye contact.
- **Haptics:** The communication of touch.
- **Proxemics:** The communication of space and proximity.
- **Paralinguistics:** Variations in pitch, speed, volume, and pauses.
- **Chronemics:** The effects of time on communication

FACIAL EXPRESSION



- **Sign.** The act of communicating a mood, attitude, opinion, feeling, or other **message** by contracting the muscles of the **face**.

Summary of facial expressions.



- 1. *Nose: nostril flare* (arousal).
- 2. *Lips: grin* (happiness, affiliation, contentment); *grimace* (disgust, pain or fear); *lip-compression* (anger, emotion, frustration); *canine snarl/grinding teeth* (disgust); *lip-pout* (sadness, submission, uncertainty); *lip-purse* (disagree); *sneer* (contempt; see below, *Sneer*).
- 3. *Brows: frown* (anger, sadness, concentration); *brow-raise* (intensity).

Contd.

- 4. *Tongue: tongue-show* (dislike, disagree).
- 5. *Eyelids: flashbulb eyes* (surprise); *widened* (excitement, surprise); *narrowed* (threat, disagreement); *fast-blink* (arousal); *normal-blink* (relaxed)
- 6. *Eyes: big pupils* (arousal, **fight-or-flight**); *small pupils* (**rest-and-digest**); *direct-gaze* (affiliate, threaten); *gaze cut-off* (dislike, disagree); *gaze-down* (submission, deception)

POSTURE



- *Nonverbal **sign**.* **1.** A bearing, pose, or stance of the body or its parts: e.g., a **crouched** posture. **2.** A fixed, stationary body position as opposed to a fluid **body movement**.
- *Usage:* When sustained (i.e., held longer than two seconds), a body movement such as a **bowed head** may be considered a posture. Postures frequently are more expressive of attitudes, feelings, and moods
- *Salesmanship.* "Your posture is almost military but not stiff and uncomfortable-looking. Your **shoulders** are not stooped with the weight of the world, because you are not bent and broken by your burdens " (Delmar 1984:33).



Kinesics, Haptics, and Proxemics: Aspects of Non-Verbal Communication

- The word kinesics comes from the root word kinesis, which means “movement”, and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements.
- There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators.

Adaptors/Regulators

- Adaptors - behaviors and movements that indicate internal states, typically resulting from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings.
- Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others.
- E.g. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way of venting our excess energy.

Emblem

- Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning.
- E.g. Raised thumb signifying the “OK” sign, ‘V’ sign made with index and middle-finger signifying victory or peace

Illustrator

- Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany.
- For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object.
- Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have meaning on their own and are used more subconsciously than emblems.

Eye Contact (oculesics)

- The term oculesics comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning “eye.”
- “The eye is an extension of the brain and a window of the soul”.
- Eye contact is a means of gaining feedback, enabling the speaker to alter, adjust and reframe his message.
- A better eye contact leads to more effective communication.
- The face and eyes are the main points of focus during communication.
- Along with our ears, our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us.
- Eye contact serves several communicative functions, including regulating interaction (cuing others to speak or hint what we are about to say), monitoring interaction (shifting of eye contact from speaker to listener), conveying information, establishing interpersonal connections (paying attention and showing interest in what another person is saying).

Facial Expressions

- Our faces are the most expressive part of our body and can communicate an array of different emotions.
- Light-hearted or humorous message - smile, bright eyes, slightly raised eyebrows
- Serious or somber message - a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth

Haptics (touch)

- Haptics is a form of non-verbal communication using a sense of touch.
- Some forms of Haptics communication is handshake, or a gentle pat on back, or a high-five. The sense of touch allows one to experience different sensations.
- For professional success, functional and social haptics play an important role

Haptics (touch)

- Co-workers should know the effectiveness of using touch while communicating to their subordinates but need to be cautious of how touch can be misunderstood.

E.g. A hand on shoulder may be supportive for one person, but depending on gender, age, and culture, may be perceived as negative by another.

- Haptics, such as using handshake, is meant to gain trust and introduce oneself.
- Haptics rules change according to different cultures, context and status of relationships.

Touch (haptics)

- Key idea: knowing what touch means
- Good/Bad VS Safe/Unsafe touch
- Maintaining safe space
- Importance of knowing safe and unsafe touch
- Importance of considering how others perceive your presence
- Avoid sexism/patriarchy/chauvinism at all costs
- Problem in India: men raised to be men, not raised as human beings, aware of other people, other ways of knowing and feeling

PROXEMICS

- *Spatial signs, signals and cues.* According to its founder, Edward T. Hall, proxemics is the study of humankind's "perception and use of space" (Hall 1968:83).
- Proxemics is the study of human use of space and the effects that population density has on human behaviour, communication, and social interaction. It deals with the amount of space that people feel as necessary to set a communication.
- Proxemics can be used in showing the nature of relationships without explaining.

PROXEMICS

- Like **facial expressions**, **gestures**, and **postures**, space "speaks."
- It is culture-specific.

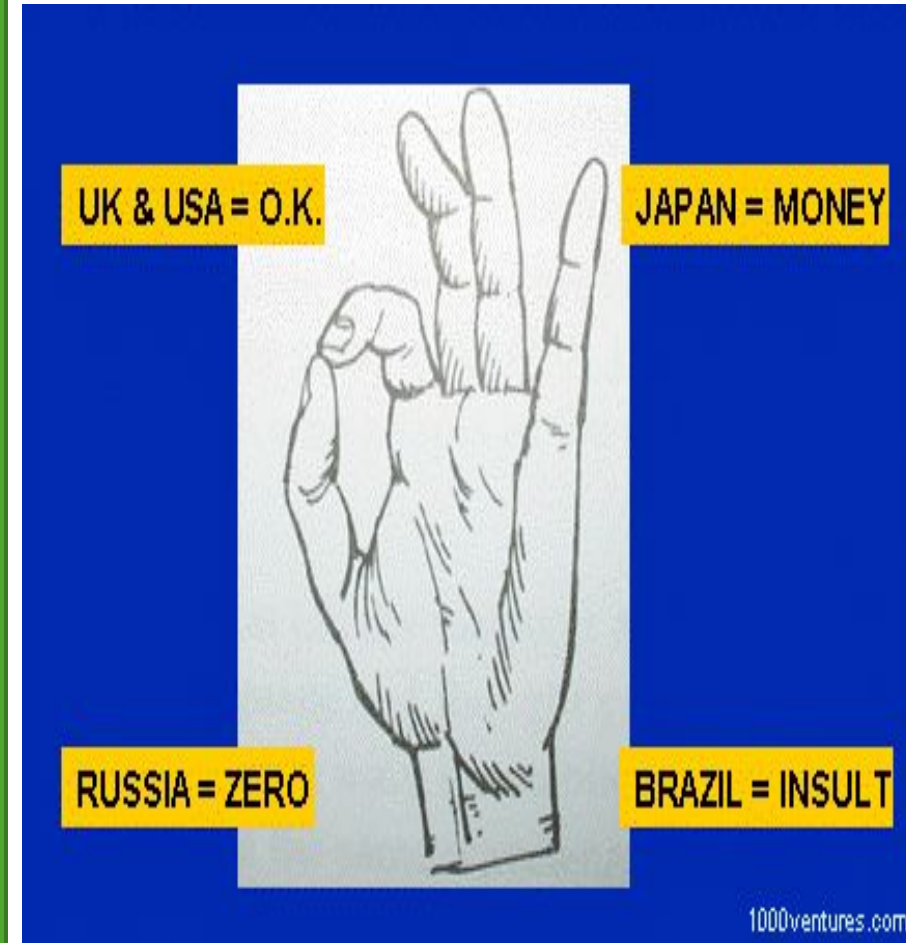
Hall identified four bodily distances—

- *Intimate (0 to 18 inches),*
- *Personal-casual (1.5 to 4 feet),*
- *Social-consultative (4 to 10 feet),*
- *Public (10 feet and beyond)*

Different cultures set distinctive norms for closeness.

Space and Distancing: It differs from culture to culture. In formal gatherings it may be ranging from 4-12 feet.

- What is considered usual or polite behavior in one culture may be seen as unusual or impolite in another.
- One culture may determine that gentle slap on the back is a sign of congratulating; the other culture may consider this gesture rude.
- In many cultures, people express grief openly. In Indian culture, the general belief is that it is unacceptable to show emotion openly.



Pay close attention to the following

- **Posture:** Refers to the way one stands, sits and walks. The movement of the body, the position of hands and legs and other parts of the body reveal an individual's personality—whether he is vibrant, alive, nervous or jittery, confident and self-assured.
- A good speaker stands tall, feet together with the weight directly over the instep keeping his chin parallel to the floor.
- **Caution:** A drooping shoulder and a protruding stomach indicate that the speaker is discouraged, tired, and worn-out.

Contd.

- **The posture of sitting** may exude an air of optimism, or despondency, or be indicative of a sense of failure or inattentiveness.
- **Walk gracefully**, move legs freely from the hips; lift your feet from the floor; walk in a straight line; avoid a stride or tiny steps.

Contd.

- A well-timed gesture can drive a point home.
- All oral communications are accompanied by gestures such as shrugging of shoulders, movements of the hands, movements of the head etc.
- These gestures enhance the impact and add a greater value to what is being said.
- **Facial Expressions:** Of all parts of body, face is the most expressive.
- A smile (Friendliness), a frown (Discontent), raising the eyebrows (Disbelief), or tightening the jaw muscles (Antagonism) can add to the meaning conveyed through verbal means.
- A wooden expression on the face may annoy the listeners whereas a brightness in the eyes may keep their interest sustained.



NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR	INTERPRETATION
Brisk, erect walk	Confidence
Standing with hands on hips	Readiness, aggression
Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly	Boredom
Sitting, legs apart	Open, relaxed
Arms crossed on chest	Defensiveness
Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched	Dejection

