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## Unit 401: Effective communication in business

### Handout 12 : Recognition of and response to non-verbal communication in business environments

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Non-verbal communication (NVC) within a business environment can be as important as the message itself. The various roles played by non-verbal communication are outlined in the table below.

Role	Details
Repetition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVC may repeat the message the person is making verbally, confirming the message's validity</li> </ul>
Contradiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVC may contradict a message the individual is trying to convey – either totally or partially</li> <li>If the message is complex, NVC may contradict just a part of the entire message</li> </ul>
Substitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVC may substitute for a verbal message (for example, a person's eyes can convey a far more vivid message than words)</li> </ul>
Complementing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVC may complement (add to) a verbal message, for example patting a person on the back in addition to giving praise can increase the impact of the message</li> </ul>
Accenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVC may accent or underline a verbal message; hitting the table, for example, could accentuate a message</li> </ul>

Adapted from: The Importance of Effective Communication, Edward G. Wertheim

The latter two roles (complementing and accenting) are often grouped together as the term **enhancing**. Enhancing is probably the most easily (and subconsciously) recognised relationship between non-verbal communication and the verbal message being communicated.

In order to aid understanding of NVC, various categories have been identified as shown in the table below.

Term	Behaviour or gestures that:
• Adaptors	• Help us to feel comfortable or indicate emotion or mood
• Affect displays	• Express emotion or feeling
• Complementing	• Reinforce verbal communication
• Contradicting	• Contradict verbal communication
• Emblems	• Carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
• Illustrators	• Reinforce a verbal message
• Masking	• Substitute more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
• Object-adaptors	• Use an object for a purpose other than its intended design

Term	Behaviour or gestures that:
• Regulators	• Control, encourage or discourage interaction
• Repeating	• Repeat verbal communication
• Replacing	• Replace verbal communication
• Self-adaptors	• Adapt something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose

Adapted from: McLean, S. (2003) The basics of speech communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon

The key to recognising NVC and utilising it effectively is to **manage the stress of the moment**. Managing stress removes one of the biggest obstacles in responding to non-verbal communication.

Stress:

- frequently compromises the speaker's ability to communicate
- often prevents the recipient from correctly reading the speaker's NVC
- causes off-putting or confusing non-verbal signals
- is contagious – one person's stress is likely to trigger emotional responses in others.

**Emotional awareness** is also important in business communications. NVC frequently reveals the underlying emotions of the parties in a communication.

Emotional awareness may enable:

- trust to be created in communications (when non-verbal signals match the words)
- people to respond in ways that show others they understand, notice, and care
- communicators to decide whether the communication is meeting their requirements, allowing them to correct any perceived inaccuracies.