



Communications

**Non-Verbal Communication**

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A spiral-bound notebook with a cream-colored page and a brown cover. The spiral binding is on the left side. A yellow rectangular box is centered horizontally on the page.

**When actions speak louder than words...**

**Non-Verbal Communication is  
communication between people by  
means other than speech or writing**

**i.e.**

**communication  
without  
words**

## **Albert Mehrabian (1972)**

**Emotional meaning of a message is communicated:**

**7% verbally**

**38% by paralanguage  
(non-verbal use of the voice)**

**55% non-verbally**

## **Why is NVC important?**

**NVC communicates emotions**  
(What we do vs. what we say)

**Actions speak louder than words**  
“I could tell he was lying!”

**No such things as no communication**  
‘poker-face’/silence at table

## **Tubbs and Moss:**

**“A non-verbal message functions in one of three ways; it replaces, reinforces or contradicts a verbal message”**

**e.g. pointing the way to the bathroom**


**e.g. interrupting the interviewer**

**(studio vs phone)**

## **The problem of 'Leakage'**

**When a non-verbal message contradicts your verbal message**

**e.g. "John avoid his interrogator's eyes. He took a step back, folded his arms and fixed his eyes on the ceiling. 'I'm telling you the truth. I paid the money back', he said."**

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**NVC should not be  
considered separately from  
speech but in addition to it**



## **Interpreting NVC**

**Mehrabian has identified three primary dimensions:**

## **Immediacy:**

**We move towards persons and things we like and away from things we don't.**

## **Arousal:**

**When we are interested in  
communicating with somebody we  
become more animated**

## **Dominance**

**Non-verbal communication can indicate the balance of power in a relationship**

## **High status:**

- 1. More relaxed body posture**
- 2. More space around the person**
- 3. Larger office**
- 4. More barriers – e.g. hallways, doorways, gatekeepers (secretaries etc)**

**Also, furniture, clothing, location...**

## Challenges when studying NVC

**Non-verbal cues are ambiguous**

*(Is it NVC or just a random gesture?)*

**Non-verbal cues are continuous**

*(No grammar – just continuous signals without indication of change of topic)*

## Challenges when studying NVC

Non-verbal cues are culture-bound

*e.g. different concepts of personal space apply in different cultures. Swedes and Irish stand at a greater distance apart than Arabs or Italians.*

*e.g. smiles and frowns (universal)  
vs. thumbs up (culture-bound)*

## **Challenges when studying NVC**


**Non-verbal cues are multi-channel**

**Thus we interpret unconsciously –  
intuitive but difficult to analyse**



**Non-verbal communication comes from the following major sources:**

- **Eye contact**
- **Mouth/Facial Expressions**
- **Posture**
- **Orientation**
- **Body distance (Proxemics)**

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- **Gesture**
  - **Smell**
  - **Skin (blushing)**
  - **Hair (length, style)**
  - **Clothes**

## Body Distance/Proxemics

*Intimate: 15 centimetres*

*Personal: 15 centimetres - 1 metre*

*Social: 1 metre - 3 metres*

*Public: 3 metres +*

*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Intimate space**

*People who have a close intimate relationship will interact within a space of about 15 cm*

*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Personal space**

*In a reasonably close, personal relationship, we will interact between a distance of 15 cm and 1 metre.*

*This is the 'body bubble'*

*Strangers within this space make us uncomfortable*

*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Social/consultative space**

*This is the area outside our body bubble within which we are happy to interact with strangers.*

*Between 1 metre and 3 metres*

*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Public space**

*We find it strange to interact with people more than 3 metres away from us except in some circumstances:*

*e.g. calling across a room/classroom/open-plan workplace*

*e.g. address by a public speaker*

*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Exceptions**

*Penguins*

*Students in a cold classroom*

- **Compensatory actions**

**e.g. parallel posture - staring ahead**



*Body Distance/Proxemics*

- **Experiment**

*‘The window shopper’*

# Proximity and Eye Contact

## *Meeting a stranger*

**At a distance: eye contact**

**Within eight feet: ‘civil inattention’  
(Goffman)**

*Proximity and Eye Contact*

- **Experiment**

*Cut-out photo vs. person (Argyle)*

*“Sit as close as is comfortable to see well”*

*Proximity and Eye Contact - Experiment*

<i>Position in inches of nearest approach under different conditions</i>				
<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Photo</b>	<b>Eyes Shut</b>	<b>Eyes Open</b>
<b>Adults</b>	6	35.7.	34.0	42.7
<b>Children</b>	6	16.9	27.6	31.4
<b>Total</b>	12	26.3	30.8	37.1

## Posture

### *Dominance:*

**Full height**

**Leaning forward**

**Relaxed**

### *Inclusive vs. non-inclusive*

**Circle or 'Bookending' (Scheflen)**

**Blocking postures – reaction to excessive closeness**

*Posture*

***Congruence:***

**Getting into similar posture**

**Old friends disagree – adopt similar posture for mutual reassurance (Schefflen)**

*Posture and Eye Contact*

- **Experiment**

**Territorial behaviour**

**Two people stand apart in the street, stare at each other;**

**Moving further apart;**

**Need for ‘ a control’**


**Non-verbal aspects of speech can be divided into two aspects:**

**Prosodic**

**or**

**Paralinguistic**





**Prosodic aspects are those which  
affect the meaning of the words  
used, e.g.**

**Pitch**

**Stress**

**Paralinguistic codes communicate  
information about the speaker, e.g.**

**Accent**

**Tone**

**Volume**

**Speech Errors**

**Speed**

**etc**

## **Improving non-verbal communication**

### **Check context**

**Don't try to interpret cues isolated from other cues or from verbal communication or from physical or emotional context, e.g. folded arms – sign of defensiveness or just of a cold room?**

## **Improving non-verbal communication**

### **Look for ‘clusters’**

**This means you look for cues that support each other, for example:**

- **arms crossed**
- **resistance to eye contact**
- **flat tone of voice**

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## **Improving non-verbal communication**

### **Consider past experience**

**Focus on patterns of behaviour in particular people, e.g. ‘My mother always cries when she’s happy.’**

## **Improving non-verbal communication**

### **Practice ‘perception checking’**

**i.e. Ask Questions**

**You deliver some news. He/she is silent.  
Don’t assume he/she is upset. Maybe  
he/she is just stunned.**

**Ask.**