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Non-verbal communication inside world of business

Non-verbal communication is an important factor in the world of business. It is all about how one appears, behaves and body language. In fact, "non-verbal communication is every possible external message source, other than words, to which people respond" (Kreps 42).

Non-verbal communication actually means communicating without the involvement of words. It is the transmission and reception of visible signs. Visible symbols are, according to Thonssen and Gilkinson, "[extending] our observations to include different situations and types of speaking, we find a variety of visible actions which can be placed in certain categories or classes" (63). These classes are artifacts, kinesics, oculosics, paralinguistics, tactilics, proxemics, and chronemics. In order to understand these classes we need to annotate them carefully.

The **Artifacts** is ones **physical** and **personal appearance**; with **kinesics** we mean the **movements** and the **way people position** themselves. The **occulosics** are our **facial** or **emotional expressions**; these include the way our eyes behave. Facial expressions are complex and occupy as a mirror of our mind. The expression provided by our eyes is complex; it functions as a **visual connection system**. **Para-linguistics** can be defined, according to Kreps, as "the **vocal cues** accompanying speech, as well as **environmental sounds**. These include the volume, pitch, tone and expression in a voice and the rate of speech." (44) The **tactilics** are all our **touching behaviours**; these include, touching oneself, touching others and touching objects. **Touch** is probably the most intimate **channel** of communication between humans. "*Research has indicated that human touch fulfills physiological and sociological needs*" (Montagu, 1971). **Proxemic** is

the **distance** between people and objects. The proxemic system of non-verbal messages is thus of great importance in organizational life. Every person maintains an expandable self-surrounding spatial bubble as an interpersonal buffer against others. This is referred to as **personal space**, and finally **chronemics: the aspect of time**. Chronemics refers to the duration of communication. The way we **plan** is respectively seen as an aspect of chronemics (Kreps 42 - 48).

All this is fantastic but, what can we do with all this information? Nothing, at least not before we understand how non-verbal communication actually works and what its basis is. We communicate, oversimplified, by sending a message to a certain receiver. In order to understand this we need to explain the complete system of communication. We can do this according to the model of Shannon Weaver; I have changed this model a bit. First we start with the source who is the sender of the data. The data needs to be encoded into a message and after that is done, the message needs to be transmitted via a certain channel. Next comes the decoding process. These three processes can cause a certain noise which affects the correctness of the message. Finally, the message reaches its receiver. The message can be changed from its original meaning in numerous ways this creates the possibility that the receiver receives the information incorrectly. The same applied to non-verbal communication. Imagine the following situation: you run a sportswear company and you decided to replace the boring suits of your salesmen into a sporty outfit that represents the company's aim. The salesmen will, from now on, appear in sports clothes. One week later the new outfits are available. Now we can go to selling the sportswear to other companies. We are received in the office of the director. The director comes in. His first thought will raise the question: Excuse me mister but, may I ask you what you are doing here? Analysing this occasion, the rules of the dress code were broken and the original positive meaning is changed into a negative one. On top of all; the occasion becomes a disaster. This demands a broader explanation. What do I mean by; 'rules were broken', 'dress code', and 'meaning'?

The possibility of being able to break rules means that non-verbal communication is a system based on rules, in other words, non-verbal communications is based on syntax, or better said, grammar based. The code of dressing refers to the fact that non-verbal communication works through the use of codes. Codes are a set of signs with a meaning and a set of agreed rules or, grammar. Meaning is not that simple. Meaning is, when compared to colours, grey. Grey is not as easy a colour as black or white. The fact that meaning is actually given by the receiver and not by the signs makes it complex. However, this implies that meaning is based on our own experiences including all that we learned by society. We could say that meaning is something like the truth and cannot be real. There is not such thing as truth; there are only versions of it. Real is all that what is not an idea.

I highly recommend studying the use of grammar in non-verbal communication. I will give an example: I have an important business meeting and I cannot appear on that meeting in my underwear. Actually this is an incorrect statement, it is possible. However, I break the rules. The consequence of doing so will be that I probably will be seen as someone insane. Besides grammar, non-verbal communications do also involve a vocabulary, or lexis. Lexis could be defined as a system of signs carrying a meaning. I must note that language should be considered as a sign system, meaning that words are signs. However, in non-verbal communication the lexis could be defined as the system of **all visible** signs. For a better understanding we need to divide lexis into two divisions. In the first division we have a set of agreed signs and in the second division we have a set of signs without agreement. The first division; for example is when someone gives you a thumb up to show you that you did a good job; another example is nodding your head for a 'yes' or 'no'. Decoding the set of agreed signs is not as simple as it seems; interpretation mistakes do often happen. For instance, once upon a time there was a man willing to buy a bookshelf, there were two other persons who wanted buy the same bookshelf as well. He was asked if he was willing to pay more than was asked for this bookshelf in first case, and he replied by nodding his head 'no'. However, he actually meant 'yes'.

Why did he behave like this? Why did he not provide them with a verbal answer? We might never find out, but, what we do know is that he did not get what he wanted simply because, as he later argued, he was thinking about something other than replying to the question.

Earlier I mentioned that non-verbal signs are provided by the way we think; they represent our thoughts and function as mirror of our mind. There are no



exceptions to this rule. However, misunderstanding these signs or incorrectly decoding is definitely possible. The woman pictured on the left is active in the information technology. This picture represents, as it seems, a happy woman, having a fantastic phone call. However, she is having a very difficult time and is dealing with a very difficult customer. Besides doing so, she seems to be good at

multitasking; she is watching a comedy on television. This comedy is the real reason for her smile. It is simple to misunderstand non-verbal signs; decoding the message correctly requires more than only non-verbal signs.



The woman pictured on the right seems to be thinking about something. Or wait, she might be listening intently, or she brings the pen up to point at someone. As you can see there are many possibilities based on decoding non-verbal signs differently with as result that we create different meanings.



The picture on the left represents the office of a web developing company. There are two women and one man present as you can see. The man is working on a paper and does not seem to need his laptop at the moment. The women are discussing something while enjoying a cup of coffee or tea. We can suppose that they drink coffee because they look fit. That refers to the fact that it is not yet afternoon,

and thus morning. The man has a coffee cup on his desk as well. This entire 'coffee thing' represents a relaxed sphere, and both genders are working in the same office but not together. This can be a set up or maybe they shape a great team. Of course it also might be possible that the picture has been taken at the wrong moment. Further more we can see that the lady on the left does hold a pen in her hand, which might means that she takes notes. This discussion, in fact, could be as well an interview or maybe is the other lady a client. Maybe she came to order a product and is now questioned to explain her ideas and demands. Unlimited possibilities appear while reading and decoding the non-verbal signs provided.

The point is, we cannot conclude what is going on at the moment the picture was taken. We also cannot understand it because of the little information available. We cannot consider non-verbal communication as an independent system of communication. And besides that, we cannot decode messages correctly without the accessibility of verbal signs.

We should remember that it is impossible to determine what the signs of a code are; that the signs are specific to a cultural context and that signs are arbitrary. Furthermore, we should understand that noise in the system of communication should be considered as a dangerous factor of influence on understanding a message's meaning correctly. Error already can be caused by the process of encoding the data into a message. I showed the problems of decoding non-verbal signs, explained non-verbal communication in general, and showed the connection between the receiver, sender, and its message.

Today, in the world of business, we are supposed to master the rules of non-verbal communication fully. We are supposed to apply our knowledge correctly. We are taught how to smile, to look, and to sound correctly. We are taught to hide all emotional expressions; however, they always seem to be visible, no matter how hard we try hiding them. We are taught to read and decode the signs

provided by people we face; by understanding these signs we can mirror ourselves, and with help of that, we might be willing to adjust our behaviour.

I considered the way we act in business and I must say that it is simply absurd; we wear suits, we pretend that we are a professionals and that we know all about everything. But in fact, we are nothing more or less than any other human being on this planet. I have been active in this 'absurd' world of business for a couple of years. I found that it does not matter how you dress or what you say, but that it is the way you combine your non-verbal and verbal communication that makes the difference. I always visited my clients in person, because face-to-face communication is an important aspect for both parties. Face-to-face communication helps to combat the misunderstanding because the strength combining verbal and non-verbal communication together.

What might the future of non-verbal communication hold? The web cam has, in my opinion, a great future because it enables us to communicate verbally and non-verbally by internet. More of such inventions will follow, because the business world depends not only on verbal and non-verbal communication but also on speed. Consider meetings while sitting in front of the computer. The software for this is already in development. Imagine a world where waiting in queues of cars is history and where you simply can cook dinner while meeting with your colleges to consult ideas for the project you are working on. Formal ways of dressing will become less important or maybe even disappear. More freedom will be created and people will be more who they really are, themselves. Intelligent programs able to decode the non-verbal signs more efficiently than humans will become available. We will lack the non-verbal signs more and more, without being aware of it.

To close, we are born with the gift to decode non-verbal signs, but we will disable this amazing gift slowly; we are victims of our need to explore, a need caused by our need to survive. Because of this need we are curious and because of our curiosity we ask ourselves questions, questions that are seen as

challenges. We, thus, create challenges, and then we use these challenges and beat these challenges, a process we do constantly. This means that we learn constantly and thus grow constantly, satisfying our need to survive; the moment we fail to create new challenges, we die. This is the reason why we live and why we die.

One of the most complex and enveloping social processes on earth is human communication, because communication is indispensable to human beings; everything one does is a form of communication. Non-verbal communication is a valuable supplement to the intended communication expressed in words. Non-verbal communication frequently expresses the emotional side of a communication; however, one should always decode non-verbal communication in relation to the words accompanying it. Non-verbal communication provides valuable feedback for both the encoder and decoder. The meaning we create contains valuable information that helps us to understand, interpret, and predict phenomena. Personal communication shows our respect for the person and tends to be a humanizing form of interaction. Non-verbal communication is, thus, indispensable in order to communicate.

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