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1

INTRODUCTION

This book is about body language: signals we send out and receive, messages we transmit and decipher, and “statements” we make about ourselves nonverbally. Body language is the most primitive system of communication that we share with other species in the animal kingdom. We use it extensively to exchange information about our claim to territory and status, as well as our mate preferences and deepest desires. We use it in the boardroom and the saleroom, to great or little effect. We send out and decode messages of interest and concern, hope and despair, belief and disbelief in the office every day. It is the language we all speak regardless of background or upbringing. It is in our “DNA”: it is a part of our human nature, the very stuff of communication.

Of course, it is not all there is to communication. Verbal, spoken language and linguistic abilities are much more complex and ubiquitous phenomena that let us articulate such concepts as space–time, religion, love and beauty. Nevertheless, some things are often easier to express by means other than, or in addition to, words and sentences. Emotions, in particular, are hard to put across verbally (or all the talking therapies would have been dead by now), as are expressions of abstract beliefs. Pain, for example, is difficult to describe, as are complex shapes without the use of gesture.

In this book we seek to clarify a few issues. First, we pose and answer the question: What does it entail to communicate via body language; what sort of information do we send, to whom and under what circumstances? Chapter by chapter we introduce and evaluate the different media of nonverbal messages. Gestures, body positions, facial expressions, vocal tones, touch, smell and even our taste in clothes convey messages about who we are and how we feel.

Second, we deal with the issues of how body language can be used and, regrettably, sometimes abused, to mis-communicate. There is

much confusion (and dare we say nonsense) about how to interpret nonverbal signals. Hence a delicate balance needs to be struck between reading too much or too little into small (or large) body signals. Further, while we all praise ourselves as natural “man and woman watchers”, we are particularly susceptible to trusting fake body language. We include a comprehensive section on lying and how to detect it that deals with this issue.

Finally, we choose to concentrate on practical applications of these facts and observations to the world of work and business. Whether you “live to work” or “work to live”, you must have had to meet, negotiate, present and sell (yourself, your ideas or products) at some point in your career. Body language is important at work, from the selection interview to the farewell speech. Awareness of, and ability to manage, one’s own body language and read that of others is at the heart of business success, whatever the business. Nonverbal communication (NVC) is also the essence of political propaganda, PR, marketing and advertising, and understanding how these silent signals work can be a crucial asset to business as well as to consumers’ education.

Most of our adult life is spent at work. In the words of Steve Jobs, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Apple computer company, and the person with the most appropriate surname for this kind of quote, “Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do”. This book will not teach you how to find that dream job or rediscover your passion in life, but it will give you practical tips and advice about how to become better and more successful in business by reading the body language of others and displaying appropriate body language yourself.

WHAT IS BODY LANGUAGE?

Bodily communication is communication without words: it is anything someone does to which someone else assigns meaning. Of course, not all the “signals” a person sends are intentional and often they are not “picked up” or are misinterpreted. Nonverbal behavior, as we shall see, is complex, subtle and multichannel. It may be structured (following certain rules) but is more likely to be unstructured; it may be continuous, unlike language, which comes in disconnected units; it may be learnt, but some functions seem innate; and it may be “right-” as opposed to “left-brained”.

It is no wonder that so many people are fascinated by body language. We are all “humanwatchers” and amateur psychologists, partly because we have to be. In every aspect of communication at work – the selection interview, the annual appraisal, the board meeting – we need to observe others carefully to try to understand better what they are feeling as well as what they are (really) saying. Being adults, we are all skilful deceivers; we have learnt, for myriad reasons, to present ourselves in a particular way; to manage the impression we leave; not always to say directly what we mean (perhaps to protect others’ feelings); to sell products or ideas; and to explain away some undesirable behavior.

Politicians and CEOs are often trained by actors to present themselves in a particular way. They know that while they may have very clever speech writers, it is as much about *how* the speech is delivered as *what* is said. This is very important in our television age, where the camera can focus in on small beads of sweat, fingernail-biting or occasional scowls by important speakers. Experts now record speeches and analyze frame-by-frame the minute changes in facial expressions and body movements, usually to explore evidence that the speaker is being insincere. All actors know the importance of body language when portraying a character; as do comedians who mimic famous people. Often a very simple mannerism, if exaggerated, can immediately signal who it is they are attempting to impersonate.

As a result, many people believe messages conveyed by different body signals, particularly emotional states and attitudes to oneself and others, are in some way more real, more fundamental. We send and “leak” nonverbal signals, which may or may not be picked up in the communication process. The sender of the message may be aware or unaware of the signals he or she is sending. And indeed, receivers may not always be aware of the messages they are picking up. For example, most people are not aware of the dilation of their pupils; nor are observers aware that they can on specific occasions respond positively to dilated pupils (when people are sexually aroused).

There are many ways to define and delineate nonverbal behavior. One feature concerns whether it is speech-related or speech-independent. Another is in terms of its social functions. We know that nonverbal behaviors (NVBs):

- repeat, echo and emphasize what is being said;
- complement, modify and elaborate on verbal messages;
- conflict, contradict or confuse verbal messages to show ambivalence or cover up motives;

- substitute words;
- underline, accentuate, punctuate and moderate language; and
- regulate and coordinate language.

Body language can be subtle or blatant; it can be consciously sent and unconsciously received; it can be carefully practised and displayed but also physiologically uncontrollable; it can let you down by revealing your true beliefs and behaviors, but also (when learnt) help enormously to get across a message. Facial expressions, gestures, head and gaze movements, body contact and orientation, sheer physical proximity as well as tone of voice, clothes and body adornments send clear messages . . . and some of these are even intended!

Consider the ability of actors on the silent screen (Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, for example) to communicate. They had to be very perceptive students of expression. They used sign language (gestures to replace words, numbers and punctuation marks) to convey a bewildering array of meanings. Nonverbal communication is a more primitive and often more powerful means of communication than verbal communication. Some things may be better expressed nonverbally than verbally, partly to keep them ambiguous. Subtle and intentionally vague messages can also be sent through the imprecise channel of nonverbal communication. Cultures, as we shall see, develop specific rules about nonverbal communication, often set out in etiquette books, such as when, where and why to touch others, how to give greetings and so on.

Nonverbal communication is a rather misleading term. “Nonverbal” excludes vocal or paralinguistic cues and signals such as the emotional tone of speech, which is clearly very important. Body language also excludes vocal cues. Communication suggests, furthermore, that giver and sender (encoder and decoder) are conscious speakers of the same body language. Intentional messages may or may not be intentionally received nonverbally. Equally, unintentional messages may be unintentionally sent and received.

NATURE OR NURTURE?

Most human characteristics are the products of nature and nurture, which are difficult to separate. Certainly, we learn at school, at home and from the media the acceptability or unacceptability of various behaviors – touch, gesture, eye gaze. But is it hard-wired? Are we

born with a “body language instinct”? Below is the evidence for the nature side of the debate.

- Blind children who could not have learnt behaviors such as smiling, nodding, scowling from observation, still display them.
- Newborn infants show recognizable emotions such as joy, surprise or interest, and a response to pain. They also start mimicking their mothers’ facial expressions very shortly after birth.
- Identical twins separated soon after birth and raised apart show strikingly similar NVBs such as posture and head movements.
- Primates (apes and monkeys) show a whole range of emotions, particularly anger and fear, in a very similar way to humans.
- Cross-cultural studies done in various countries on all continents show that people not only express basic emotions very similarly (happiness, fear, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness), but also recognize them without hesitation.

In this book we choose to define body language quite broadly. By nonverbal communication we mean all the signs and signals relating to visual, vocal and sensory inputs as well as subtle, but pervasive, social markers such as dress, color and objects with which we surround ourselves. While such a definition might seem unconventional, it allows us to make the most comprehensive review of available material on this fascinating topic.

As such, the term ‘verbal’ is also used throughout the book loosely. A dictionary definition of ‘verbal’ is ‘expressed or conveyed by speech rather than writing’. However, when using ‘verbal’ we refer to the properties of words or the ability to communicate through speech and in writing using the power of words.

THE FUNCTION OF BODY LANGUAGE

Nonverbal messages are used to replace, reinforce, and occasionally (deliberately) contradict, a verbal message. Nonverbal cues can easily substitute for verbal ones: for example, “Yes/No” or “I don’t know”. Often nonverbal cues can stress, underline or exaggerate the meaning of the verbal message. But nonverbal cues can also negate verbal cues. A “kinetic slip” is a *contradictory* signal where words give one message, while voice and expression another: “I’m telling you I’m not

angry” or “Of course it didn’t upset me” can easily be said in one of two ways.

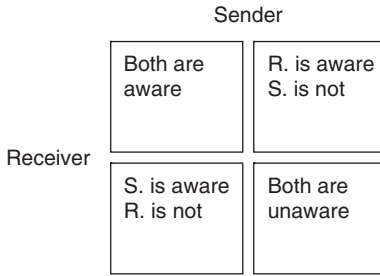
Often bodily communication *complements* speech. One can nonverbally restate a message so as, in effect, *to repeat* it. A nonverbal signal can *substitute* for a verbal message, or indeed accentuate it. Most obviously, nonverbal communication serves to *regulate* or *coordinate* daily dialogue between people. It is through nonverbal cues that we know when it is our turn to talk, and when the topic of conversation is becoming embarrassing; certain things are deliberately not said or are coded in polite body language. That is why it forms such a big part of the concept of *emotional intelligence*.

People also appear to understand nonverbal behavior metaphorically. Thus people use the *approach or distance metaphor*, which suggests that chosen location/distance is an indication of liking or closeness. Physical proximity implies mental closeness, alliance or liking, as all children instinctively know. The excitement or *arousal metaphor* suggests that facial expression, speech rate and speed of movement are indications of excitement, and that all nonverbal behavior gives some insight into how interested, involved and excited a person is. The *power metaphor* emphasizes that nonverbal communication tells us about dominance and submission in everyday communication. Powerful people are “allowed to” engage in more eye contact than less powerful people – and all children know this, too. Put simply, body language tells one about the closeness, relative excitement and status of two or more people communicating with each other. But it also tells us much more than this.

Body language has a clear *biological base* and is a product of evolutionary development. Animals are able to communicate without a need for even the most primitive linguistic system. They touch, smell, gesture and point to each other and so do we. It doesn’t come as surprise, then, that, for example, standing positions that we adopt give out social rank order and mirror those of primates. Yawning, widely regarded as a sign of boredom, is an action even fish engage in. Consequently, the way we sit, hold a cigarette, smile and shake hands could also be interpreted and read into to reveal both the inner state of mind and social status.

Body language is also about *emotion*. It is quite easy to recognize and match facial expressions and underlying emotions. Some emotions appear to be innate and universal – such as fear, happiness and disgust. We can convey emotions through touch as well. Sometimes a hug sends more sympathy than carefully prepared words. What is

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Figure 1.1 **Body language awareness**

more, people are not very good at expressing their emotions verbally, hence the very prosperous industry of psychotherapy, role play and counselling.

Sometimes the signal system of body language works very efficiently. The sender gestures, the receiver sees; and both are aware of the unspoken message. In a conversation, for example, if one person is confused or overwhelmed by what the other is saying, he or she might raise a hand to ask for clarification. This gesture lets the speaker know that they did not express themselves clearly or need to back up their argument. In this case, both people benefit from the silent cue.

Sometimes the sender is unaware of his or her own behavior—fiddling with the hair or wedding ring, moving feet up and down, darting glances to the left or right. The receiver picks this up and interprets it; but the sender remains unaware. This situation works to the advantage of those in the know, as long as the interpretation is correct.

Some “clever” people send signals by lightly touching people, copying their gestures, invading their space. Distracted by words, the recipient is unaware of the sender’s often subtle but deliberate moves. Influencing through peripheral channels of attention by utilizing existing cognitive algorithms of information processing is one of the most powerful ways of persuasion, since it does not require conscious attention on the part of the receiver and does not give them an opportunity to reject the proposition. Successful political and marketing influencing regularly uses this type of communication.

Occasionally neither party is really aware – at least consciously – of what is being signalled. The sender may have dilated pupils or give off pheromonic body odours indicating sexual excitement, but neither of the parties brings the cues to conscious awareness. In romantic relationships this might cause feelings of instant, unexplainable attraction.

SENSE AND NONSENSE ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE

The first scientists to make a systematic study of body language were biologists. It is no surprise that those skilled in bird-watching were easily able to turn their skills to man-watching. Charles Darwin wrote the first acknowledged text in 1873, entitled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt wrote a scholarly popular biology book in 1971 entitled *Love and Hate: Natural History of Behavior Patterns*. But it was Desmond Morris's book, *The Naked Ape*, published in 1967, ninety-four years after Darwin – that electrified popular interest in body-watching. There are now dozens of books on this topic, as a quick internet search will reveal (see Appendix at the end of the book).

Since the early 1980s scientists from different disciplines – anthropology, psychology, sociology and zoology – have brought their methods and concepts together in order to help the understanding of bodily communication. More recently, physiologists, endocrinologists, sexologists, and even marketers and advertisers have taken a particular interest in highly specific physiological processes that have nonverbal consequences.

Despite the excellent and careful research in the area, much nonsense is still written on the topic, often by journalists and other self-appointed “experts”, whose aim is to entertain (and sell) rather than to enlighten and educate. Fascination with the topic, as well as its apparent importance in business, has led many self-styled experts and gurus to make confident proclamations about nonverbal communication. Inevitably, nearly all of their “findings” and “recommendations” over-emphasize the importance and power of nonverbal communication. Often there is no evidence at all that their interpretations of literature are correct; though many exaggerate something that is based on fact.

Misleading and sometimes completely incorrect statements about body language communication seem to fall into four areas: symbolism; power; controllability; and “you can read people like a book”.

Symbolism: all bodily communication is symbolic expression

People with a fondness for psychoanalytic (Freudian) ideas love to interpret explicit behaviors as manifestations of (often unconscious) desires and feelings. Thus one observer believed that Prince Charles's habit of “fiddling” with his cufflinks indicated that he felt chained by handcuffs to the monarchy. Those with a stiff and military bearing

TABLE 1.1 Body language: alternative interpretations

Behaviors	Psychological explanations	Alternative explanations
Hands in pockets	The person is secretive, withdrawn, possibly depressed.	It is cold; the person is searching for a small object.
Folded arms	Defensive act formed for physical reassurance. Indicator of uncertainty and lack of confidence.	It is cold; the arm rests are occupied; it is comfortable
Yawning	Faced with a difficult situation one would prefer to avoid.	Very tired; not enough oxygen.
Crossed legs	Defensive, repressed, even feeling hostile.	Women are taught to cross legs to look more feminine; men do so because it is comfortable.
Nose touching	The person is lying or covering up his or her emotions.	He or she has a cold or an itchy nose.

have “imprisoned anxiety”. Numerous otherwise common behaviors such as the wetting of lips, the crossing of legs and the folding of arms are all indicators of repressed sexuality. A man talking to a pretty woman (or indeed a woman talking to a handsome man) may fiddle with his wedding ring: a psychoanalyst might claim they want to take it off and appear available to the new partner. A person describing their mother may suddenly seem to hug themselves: the symbolic explanation would state that perhaps the person is trying to recreate the warmth and affection of motherly cuddles.

The temptation among too many body language experts is that they favor “unconscious”, Freudian, psychological explanations over more obvious ones. It is too easy to over-interpret incorrectly. For example, look at the table above and consider two types of explanation given for the same behavior (one innocent, the other not).

As noted earlier, people often communicate via body language without being aware of it. However, this should not encourage explanations based on unconscious drives or needs for all idiosyncratic behaviors. People acquire and internalize gestures and other behaviors from parents, teachers, even film actors. Some nonverbal cues are symbolic of unconscious desires, hopes and urges but many, probably most, are not.

Power: bodily communication is always more powerful

It is not uncommon to read statements such as: “Seventy percent of the communicative power of a message is sent nonverbally” or “It is

not what you say but the way that you say it". Body communication pundits have a natural inclination to "talk up" their area of expertise, to over-emphasize its importance. Nonverbal communication can, indeed, at times be extremely powerful – sheer rage or terror are often much more efficiently communicated through facial and body expression than through words, for example. Pain or love can also be signalled by changes in facial expressions, especially by children and others who articulate their feelings via a limited vocabulary. Ability to communicate a message nonverbally is the whole point of the parlour game "Charades".

Yet words have extraordinary precision. Consider, for example, the power of poetry to move people emotionally. It is the precision of words that create sharp and clear imagery, and arouse emotional responses. Tell politicians to give up their scriptwriters and communicate by their nonverbal charm alone: only those with natural charisma and an exciting impromptu message to impart will be able to succeed. Ask all those people who advocate "talking cure" therapies to rely more on nonverbal rather than verbal cues. On the contrary, to actively acknowledge and verbalize a problem is regarded by many as a first step to recovery.

Further, if one uses gesture, for example, to communicate, it is immediately apparent that there are very few gestures compared to words. The power of bodily communication lies primarily in the fact that it often tells one about the physiological state of the individual because of changes in the central nervous system. Certainly, extreme emotions such as anger "leak out", however carefully a person tries to hide them. Sexual excitement is difficult to hide, as often is guilt. But these physiological states are nearly always an expression of emotional extremes that are not that common in everyday life.

Body language can shout and it can be subtle. But those who claim it is so powerful should try to send to a stranger the following, relatively simple messages nonverbally: "Thank you very much", "I totally disagree"; and "I feel very happy for you".

EXAGGERATION, LIES AND HALF TRUTHS

It is common to hear various claims about the power and importance of nonverbal language. To back it up, some even express it in percentages. So one is told that 93 percent of the information communicated in face-to-face meetings is nonverbal. Most of it is

through face and body movements and expressions, and around a third is derived from voice quality and tone.

The lowest percentage is always applied to verbal communication: the words that people actually say. This is, of course, patent nonsense: why would anyone bother to learn a foreign language when they could be communicating nonverbally with 90 percent efficiency.

Max Atkinson (2004), in his charming book, *Lend Me Your Ears*, did the detective work behind those often repeated modern myths. The story goes like this. An American social psychologist, Albert Mehrabian, published a series of papers in the 1960s researching the types of information (visual, verbal and vocal) people give their preference for or find most useful, when presented with messages where these types of information are incongruent. The nature of the task involved participants detecting and matching the feelings and attitudes of people shown in short film clips. The presented messages were either consistent or inconsistent across three channels (the words did or did not match the nonverbal expressions). He found that when the information was incongruent, people put more trust in the nonverbal cues. Mehrabian's analysis converted the frequency of information preference into numerical values: 38 percent of total information liking came from the vocal cues; 7 percent from verbal cues; and 55 percent from facial or visual cues.

This conclusion is quite different from exaggerated claims about universal laws of general communication. It is about judging specific attitudes in the presence of incongruent information. Atkinson asked Mehrabian, the author of original research, what his thoughts were about this, and his response was dismay and discomfort about being completely misquoted.

However once this statistic was publicized and, unfortunately, misinterpreted, it has become an accepted truth repeated since in magazines, training sessions and corporate events. It makes, or should make, people very sceptical about many other claims surrounding body language and nonverbal communication.

Controllability: we can control all the messages we send

Some nonverbal behavior, such as gestures and touch, are naturally controllable; while others, such as sweating and pupil dilation, are not.

Often people want to cover up evidence of their anxiety or specific motives (such as sexual pleasure, for example) but are unable to do so. Most people in conversation are not particularly aware of others, or of their own legs and feet, which if they chose they could control. They are not aware of small changes in posture and micro-facial expressions as certain things are said.

Once these behaviors have been witnessed on a video-recording, it is surprisingly easy to see and understand their meaning. Once an “actor” becomes an “observer” of his or her own behavior, awareness of what is going on is increased.

Naturally, some people attempt to control their nonverbal behavior. Stage actors may be required to weep, rage or demonstrate fear, loathing or passion on cue. They have learnt, often with the help of make-up, to produce certain recognizable signals of those emotions. But most of us are not so gifted. Indeed, the more we try to control emotions – particularly if we try to conceal powerful emotions – the more they leak out nonverbally.

You can read people like a book: decoding nonverbal language is easy

There are many misleading aspects to this analogy. Books are passive, whereas people are not. Most observers are aware that when two people are speaking, each is attempting to “read” the other. However, this reading is often an advantageous feedback mechanism, not a deliberate attempt to outguess the other party. The curious claim of many popular books is that it is possible simultaneously to read techniques of others but hide your own – to disguise one’s secret intentions by putting on a believable poker face.

True experts in the area of nonverbal communication are surprisingly diffident on this point. Research tells us that such a “double blind” show is extremely difficult to perform, if not impossible for many. Indeed, hiding one’s feelings while reading the other person’s mind would mean that a person is engaged in two tasks simultaneously, and people are generally very bad at dividing their attention resources. Further, experts on lying point out how tricky it is to detect it in skilful dissimulators. They all highlight how much information one needs to confirm a hypothesis that “he is lying”, “she is an extrovert” or “they are not competent in this area”.

Just as in learning any language, one can become more fluent, more perceptive and more skilled at reading body signals, but there is no

magical solution, partly because of the subtlety of the cues but also because of the multiple meanings attached to identified behaviors.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT IN BUSINESS?

Certainly, knowledge of nonverbal communication and body language is very helpful in business. Understanding the motives, fears and strengths of those sitting on selection committees, or opponents in bargaining situations, is a considerable asset in the business world. Observing subtle changes in body language as it accompanies speech may be one of the best ways to gain advantage. Also, a knowledge of body language can help people to improve their performance at conferences, in appraisals and even in day-to-day management. If such matters were not important, politicians, business people and diplomats would not spend so much money and time attending workshops on communication skills and body language. Poor performances on stage – at a party political conference, or an annual general meeting, say – can literally wreck whole careers, no matter how talented, productive or hardworking a person might be.

It is no surprise that social and interpersonal skills training contains so much about nonverbal behavior. These are often called “soft” skills, which are unlikely to be taught at school or university. The sudden interest in emotional intelligence, which is largely related to the recognition and management of nonverbal behavioral cues, took the world by storm. We all know talented, educated professionals with all the “hard” skills of their occupation. However, because management is a “contact sport”, they fail to reach their ultimate potential because of their lack of ability to communicate with people. Dismissed as “geeks”, “nerds” or “boffins”, such professionals are seen as technically competent, but interpersonally incompetent. Indeed, they may have spent critical learning periods for interpersonal behaviors (usually early adolescence) avoiding and eschewing learning opportunities.

The higher the level that people reach in business, the more relevant are the soft skills. Senior management is about choosing, directing and motivating specialist teams. Often called charm or charisma, it is about sensitivity and perceptiveness, reading social cues and putting your message across well. All leaders, particularly politicians and senior executives, know the importance of communication skills. They make or break careers.

Nonverbal communication is also at the heart of political and marketing influence. Tell people to buy more of your product and they won't even notice your message. Tell people to vote for your party and they will most likely ignore you. So how do you persuade voters and consumers to act on your message? You make them identify with it, you provoke desire, you create a need. It is the clever use of nonverbal signs, such as images, sounds and colors that distinguishes a successful campaign from a runner-up.

EVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES TO BODY LANGUAGE

It is clear that we are wired to communicate with each other not only by means of verbal language but also via the reading of nonverbal signals. The way we look, stand, dress, walk and smile insinuate how we feel, experience emotions and relate to other people. It also can be indicative of general health condition, mood and energy levels. Why, one might ask, have we evolved such an ability? What is more, how much of it is applicable to the modern-age human?

The premise of evolutionary psychology is the process of natural selection. Floyd (2006) outlines the following principles governing the work of evolution:

1. *Superfecundity* – each generation usually produces more offspring than can survive or grow to maturity.
2. *Variation* – combination of traits are different among members of the same species.
3. *Heritability* – some of these differences are hereditary.
4. *Selection* – those traits that are advantageous for a particular environment in a given species will be inherited more frequently.

It is clear, then, that over time people have evolved particular traits, physique and dispositions to cope better in their natural environment. High neuroticism, for example, a personality trait that is characterized by excessive worry, susceptibility to stress, and general irritability, might have been extremely adaptive in prehistoric times, when extra vigilance meant survival. A bigger build and more muscle have certainly equated to more physical power, and thus meant that those who possessed these characteristics had a greater chance of defending themselves and their offspring from predators. Through this mechanism of “becoming fit for purpose” certain qualities became advantageous in a population. Not surprisingly, then, those who had

them had the upper hand in mate selection and, ultimately, in gene proliferation.

Darwin himself explained how the functional aspects of body language (sending the message) acquired the status of metaphorical. He argued that some gestures had a purposeful role (pinching one's nose to block an unpleasant smell, for example) which over time applied the meaning across the situation and became metaphors (suggesting a foul smell). Most of all, successful living in a group requires a system of communication. Body language most likely has its roots in pre-speech form of information sharing. Animals rely, for example, on olfactory information much more than we do; however, we still do share certain gestures and facial expressions with our closest genetic primate relatives. Hence nonverbal communication evolved as a representation system for states and qualities that benefited human survival.

But how does this notion translate into the present-day environment? Take an example of height. A primate's height used to signal high or low dominance among our ancestors, and not surprisingly, studies of successful business leaders consistently show they tend to be taller than average in the general population. Hair growth quality might have been an indicator of health, thus high-flying managers are more likely (than average) to have their own head hair. Intelligence, a gauge of one's ability to process information correctly and rapidly and use it effectively in novel settings, gave a powerful leverage not only to individuals but to the group as a whole. Predictably, contemporary leaders also tend to be highly intelligent.

Another evolutionary advantage of developing a complement to the speech system of communication is the reduction of cognitive load. Since our brain has only a limited capacity for storage of incoming information (it is restricted to *seven* pieces of information, plus or minus two), combined with the temporal pressures of memory (any information has to be transferred from the initial reservoir of short-term memory to the infinite long-term memory's storage during that time or it will be lost), it is very useful to receive some messages effortlessly, without any thinking involved. Figure 1.2 is a graphical illustration of this idea.

THREE MEDIA, THREE CUES

Some people in business prefer to communicate certain messages in writing while others prefer using face-to-face meetings. Research has

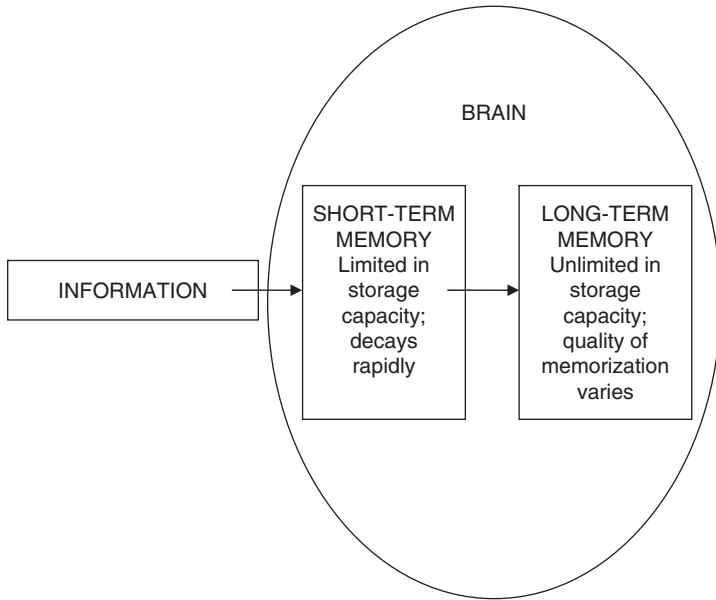


Figure 1.2 The brain’s short-term and long-term storage capacity

shown that the choice of a communication medium can greatly affect the degree of clarity or ambiguity of the message being sent. Oral media (for example, telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings) are preferable to written media, such as notes and memos, when messages are ambiguous (requiring a great deal of assistance in interpreting them), but written media are preferable when messages are clear.

What leads someone to choose one mode or media of communication over another? Why not drop a note in a pigeonhole rather than phone the other person? Why race up three floors to find a person is not in when you could have used an e-mail?

One obvious answer to the question of choice of medium is economy and efficiency. Telephones are faster, letters and memos can be duplicated and so on. However, there are various important psychological advantages and disadvantages to the various media that are well understood but seldom discussed explicitly. Certainly, face-to-face or

TABLE 1.2 Media for sending and receiving body language cues

Medium	TV, Face-to-face	Radio	Print E-mail
Cues	Verbal, Vocal, Visual	Verbal, Vocal	Verbal

video-conferenced communication offers the best option for sending and receiving body language cues.

Verbal cues

We communicate daily using three types of medium. First, we write e-mails (and letters); we text and scribble notes; we compose reports, advertising scripts and so on. A lot of businesses require the ability to write well, to communicate clearly, succinctly and unambiguously on the page. The tools are words and numbers, diagrams and graphs.

The issue at work is how to write documents that communicate meaning most efficiently. We have many choices and options: to use pie-charts, graphs or tables when communicating data; whether, when and why to use color, capitals or italics. These issues are often much more pronounced with PowerPoint presentations. Critics and consultants in this area have numerous “rules” that prevent boredom and fatigue caused by information overload as well as helping people to process the information.

All this refers to verbal communication: communication by words alone in whatever font, color or size one may choose. The limitations of words alone can easily be seen in daily e-mails, where people add emoticons like :-) or :- < to indicate their emotional reaction to a statement. These are innovative, affect-laden, new and imaginative forms of punctuation.

Further, nearly all print media, even rather serious financial reports, use pictures to enhance or illustrate the script. Some favor cartoons, especially if they succinctly and wittily convey an important message. Many PowerPoint presentations attempt to “sex up” the whole process by using pictures and “special effects”, particularly if the content is dull or very emotional.

Verbal communication is the most precise. It is therefore the experts’ preferred communication medium: lawyers, accountants, engineers and scientists communicate primarily by this cool, efficient medium. Colleagues at work e-mail one another despite being two doors away. Children “txt” each other while in the same room or building.

Vocal cues

We also use the telephone a great deal: witness the travelling public and the number now using mobile phones. A phone call is quick,

convenient and usually cheap. In addition to what people say, we get a range of vocal cues: their accents and vocabulary; their speed of speech, and hesitations, whether they lisp or stutter; how and when they laugh.

Actors have voice training, as do some journalist and politicians. There are “golden rules” about “pitch, pause and pace” in speeches. The gravitas, the sexiness, as well as the irony of the message can be conveyed by the voice. Huge amounts of money are spent by advertisers in “voice-overs”: a recognizable person’s voice brings a great deal to the communication.

Vocal cues are nonverbal cues. They indicate a person’s place of upbringing, social class and education. They are clues to emotional state and to unconscious processes. The parapraxis or “slip-of-the-tongue” is a well-known Freudian observation, where people say the wrong word, often the opposite of what they mean. There are also “slips-of-the-pen”, but those of the tongue are more common and often more embarrassing.

We listen to the radio, talk on the phone and buy tapes and disks of speech, poetry and so on. The growth of the audio book – which is recorded by an author or an actor – attests to its popularity. But consider how marketing people choose the actors to read books. Should they be male or female, distinctly northern or perhaps Eastern European?

People try to “hide behind” the spoken word. They take elocution lessons to change their accent and adapt speech styles involving “pitch raises”, or “hip phrases” such as “kind of” or “like”. They do so to ingratiate themselves with others, to join groups, to become accepted or acceptable. But they can “leak” their real background and emotions.

VOICE AND EMOTIONS

Vocal cues are full of emotions, and these emotional overtones can be detected easily. We can distinguish between a happy and a sad voice with no difficulty. However, is it possible to detect lying from the affective coloring of the voice?

That is what voice risk analysis devices claim to do. They are similar to polygraphs or lie detectors in their function and are used to try to detect whether people are telling the truth, especially over the telephone. These gadgets have been tried out by many businesses, from insurance companies to local councils, to detect false

applications and dishonest claimants. The idea behind the technology is relatively straightforward: lying is stressful; thus, when a person lies, his or her vocal patterns change. Stress-induced voice alterations are, however, not always obvious and cannot be picked up by a human ear. The changes in voice tremors are subtle and insidious but can be spotted by sensitive “voice risk analysis” systems. The technology is said to account for individual differences in voice tones and pitches too. After all, some people are naturally shyer than others and might feel tense when making an honest insurance or benefit claim.

Yet it is not clear whether this technology works as a “liar catcher” or a “liar deterrent”. The accuracy rate is far from infallible and the final decision on whether the caller is lying or not still has to be made by a human agent. On the other hand, similarly to lie detectors, voice risk analysis systems seem to work because people believe they do. When warned about being monitored, liars’ detection apprehension increases. This, in turn, results in more stress and more visible voice quality changes, but it also simply discourages unconfident liars to make a fake claim.

Visual cues

For most people, the essence of all good communication is face-to-face. The more important the communication, the more likely it is that people will want to *see* the other person, and preferably not on a video link, which can seem stilted, artificial and unnatural. Interestingly, they cannot always articulate what they want to see, but believe they can communicate better face-to-face.

This book will discuss the many visual cues that occur in everyday behavior, from body posture and gesture to eye contact patterns. Visual cues include how people dress and how they move; how they sit and when they fidget; and how attractive they are.

When we see people face-to-face we also get other silent cues. We get olfactory cues – their scent – which can be powerful indicators of their health, and age and diet. If we shake hands we get details of the other person’s body temperature and perhaps their anxiety level. We get information about how they present themselves to the world through their use of make-up, jewelry and even hair dye.

The richness of nonverbal, visual communication is the topic of this book. It should be pointed out that while one may get pure visual

cues in a photograph and pure verbal cues on the printed page, often they co-occur. The telephone call includes verbal and vocal cues, while face-to-face communication has all three.

Verbal communication media

Consider the letter or its electronic equivalent, the e-mail. It has a number of obvious advantages. Unlike the telephone call or face-to-face meeting (unless this is audio- or video-taped), the letter or printed e-mail is a record of the communication. Hence it is the preferred medium of lawyers, bureaucrats and those concerned with the extraction of money or information. The letter, particularly if produced on a computer, may also be revised so that a precise tone, meaning or deliberate ambiguity may be communicated. Letters and e-mails are a more private means of communication than the telephone or face-to-face meeting, and in some cases they are cheaper than other methods. However, there are some doubts about the security of e-mails.

Curiously, however, two of the major drawbacks of the e-mail are also its major advantages. Letters take time, and feedback is postponed. We tend to impart bad news in writing when we feel inadequate to deal with the feedback we might receive. Angry, but unassertive, people of all ages frequently write letters and e-mails of complaint after receiving poor service, rather than deal with the matter immediately, face to face – often because they are afraid of the negative, aggressive or direct feedback they are likely to receive.

We also write when feedback is likely to embarrass us. People who have recently become bereaved, and sometimes the dying themselves, often explain how they received many letters, gifts and flowers but, strangely, people visited infrequently. As people usually respond in the same medium through which they were initially contacted, the caring friend can expect nothing more threatening than a grateful letter of acknowledgement.

Another advantage of the letter – but less so of the e-mail – is the opportunity it offers for impression management. First, there are the letter-heading and logo features, as well as the quality of the paper. Some people immediately rub the letter heading as a Braille reader might, just to check whether it is embossed. Business letter-headed notepaper is used to identify with the organization. Letters also allow one to state formally one's qualifications and job title.

Vocal communication media

The telephone offers numerous advantages over the letter. Feedback is immediate, if the person is available. It has a rather different legal status; that is, there is no record of the conversation. One can queue-jump, often quite effectively, unless the person with whom one wishes to speak has a filter mechanism such as an unhelpful personal assistant.

But the telephone has two other major advantages, certainly over the face-to-face meeting. The first is that you may speak to somebody while knowing practically nothing about him or her. What psychological or demographic variables can one recognize from a telephone voice? Sex? Probably, though we have no doubt all made embarrassing mistakes in this area. Age? Perhaps people under 10 or over 80 years might sound different, but it is very difficult to make accurate judgments. Education, race? Very unlikely. What about detecting a person's emotions, or whether he or she is lying? Again, unless at the extremes of anger, fear or depression, it is very difficult to detect a person's mood or indeed his or her implicit intentions when communicating over the telephone. We have all, no doubt, experienced surprise at seeing a favorite radio personality on television and finding that he or she is older or younger, balder or more hirsute, plainer or more attractive than one has imagined. Indeed, radio presenters' looks and shape may account precisely for why they are on radio as opposed to television in the first place.

Of course, not knowing much about the other person may be advantageous to either party. Just as you cannot know the age, looks or disabilities of the person to whom you are talking on the telephone, nor can he or she know such things about you. Hence the use of a "telephone voice" – an attempt to present an image through accent and tone of voice that is specious but desirable. The telephone offers some of the major advantages of face-to-face communication, such as speed of feedback, but crucially hides the tell-tale nonverbal cues that allow one to detect how honest, sincere, committed, truthful and so on is the person with whom you are talking.

The telephone offers one other major advantage, though there may be exceptions to the rule. Because one pays for a call in terms of a multiple of time and distance, the average time spent on the telephone is considerably shorter than the average spent face-to-face discussing exactly the same problem. Niceties and trivia are usually reduced and one gets to the point of the communication far more quickly. People may feel the need to provide refreshments when meeting face-to-face,

or may be interrupted by a third party. However, business telephone calls are rarely too long, and furthermore one has a whole host of possible excuses (lies) as to why they need to be terminated (a call on the other line, knock at the door, and so on).

But most people prefer to communicate face-to-face, though, of course, in doing so they lose some advantages of the letter and the telephone as outlined above. They need more than verbal (written) and vocal (audio) cues to give and receive complex messages. Academic ethnologists, zoologists and psychologists have tended to rewrite the songwriter's words, "It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it", so emphasizing the role of nonverbal clues, such as eye-gaze patterns, body posture, movements, gestures and the like in communication. The crucial point is the medium you choose to "say it" through.

CONCLUSION

All animals communicate nonverbally continuously. Unlike animals, human beings have developed the power of speech and the ability to also express thoughts and intentions verbally. Yet a good deal of how we are understood, interpreted and evaluated happens via the "nonverbals" that accompany our speech.

Communication in the business world is extremely important. Communicating effectively and efficiently is highly valued, as is "being a good communicator", which usually means being charismatic and motivational. While body language is particularly important in some situations, it is also possible to over-emphasize the power of the medium by attributing to it more significance than it is capable of delivering.



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