

Approaches to Non-verbal Communication in the Management of Organisation

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Non-verbal communication – communicating meanings by means of non-verbal clues (facial expressions, gesticulation, posturics, proxemics) is an inseparable part of communication in corporation. Apart from supplementing verbal communication it unmasks emotional part of personality of communicators. In this article we focus on the mapping of superiors' use of facial expressions and proxemics in communication with subordinates in a transport company in Košice. We analyse data collected by means of a questionnaire.

Introduction

Interpersonal communication is interaction by means of symbols (Vybírál 2000, p. 19). By symbols we mean not only language (applied in verbal communication), but also facial expressions and gestures (used in non-verbal communication).

Nonverbal communication could be defined as sharing messages by means nonverbal clues (facial expressions, gesticulation, posturics, proxemics; Ferjenčík, 2001, p. 7, 8). **Facial expressions**–,face language' (winking, raised eyebrows, pouted lips, ' language of eyes, etc.) are based on innate programmes (in contrast to other forms of communication we do not have to learn them). They send out information about emotions (fear, joy, surprise etc.). **Gesticulation** is communication by movements of arms, legs or head. Like facial expressions it provides others with information about emotions. However, it is determined by upbringing and acquired by experience to a larger extent (nodding head, pointing finger etc.). We consider **posturics** to be a language of body postures as it communicates an attitude (relation) of a communicator to their partner in communication, to themselves and an object of communication (slouched body and stooped shoulders, bowed head–submissiveness, meekness, resignation; upright posture, raised head and chin – dominancy superiority, etc.). **Proxemics** (the language of distances) pays attention to the position of communicators in space and the maintenance of mutual distance (intimate, personal, social, public; Bašistová – Treščáková, 2007, p.93-95).

All components of non-verbal communication are objects of interest of many scientific reflections due to their uniqueness. In this paper we focused our research on the finding of usage of non-verbal communication (specifically facial expressions and proxemics) in the transport company in Košice.

The aim of the paper

The aim of the paper is to ascertain the current status of the non-verbal communication of management representatives in the transport company in Košice and to propose changes which would improve non-verbal communication and remove communication imperfections.

Research methodology

We carried out research by means of a questionnaire in two departments of the transport company in Košice (for the purpose of this paper we designated them as a department A and a department B) in autumn 2007. The questionnaire items mapped the overall situation in vertical and horizontal communication in the organisation. For the purpose of this paper we evaluated the part aimed at the finding of non-verbal communication between the superior and subordinate employees.

Research question

What distance do the superiors maintain when they communicate with the subordinates at the workplace?

Hypothesis

H1: 80% of the respondents think that the superiors maintain social distance: 1,2–2,1 m when they communicate with them at the workplace.

Research sample

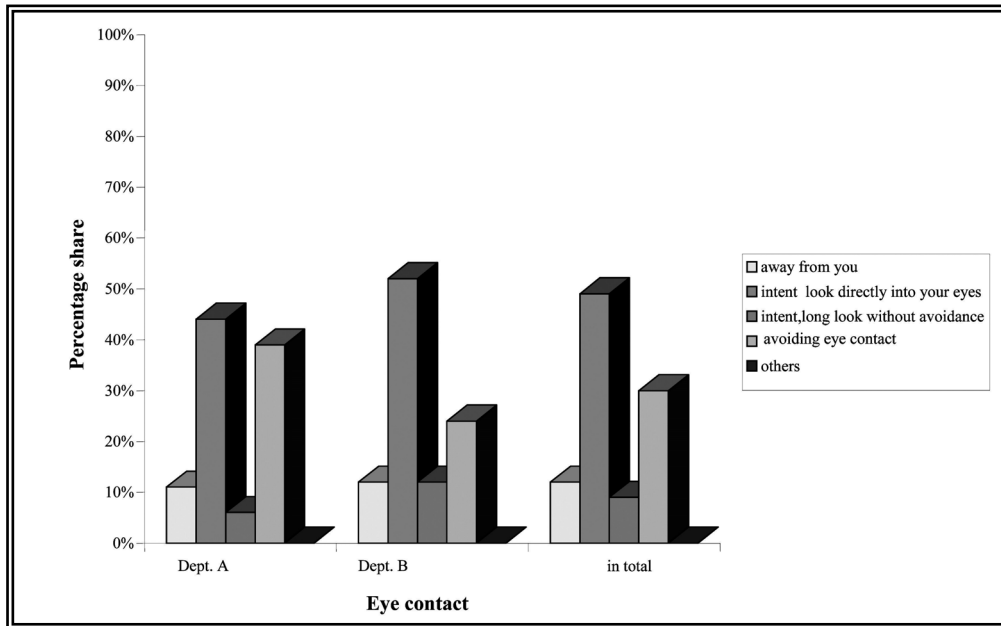
Research sample was formed by the 43 – superior and subordinate employees of the transport company in Košice. The employees of the two departments took part in the research (department A – 25 respondents, department B – 18 respondents). There were 51 % of males and 49 % of females. The respondents with university education constituted 60%, with secondary education 40 % and with primary education 0% of all the enquired. Concerning the numbers of years in the

company, the employees who have worked in the company for 1 – 5 years made up 49 %, the employees who have worked in the company for 6 – 10 years comprised 37 %. The employees who have worked in the company for less than a year made up 14 % of all the respondents.

Analysis of research results

In this part we analyse the data focused on non-verbal communication, specifically the use of facial expressions (eye contact) and proxemics in communication between the superiors and the subordinates of the explored company.

Question number 1: Where does your superior look when he or she communicates with you?



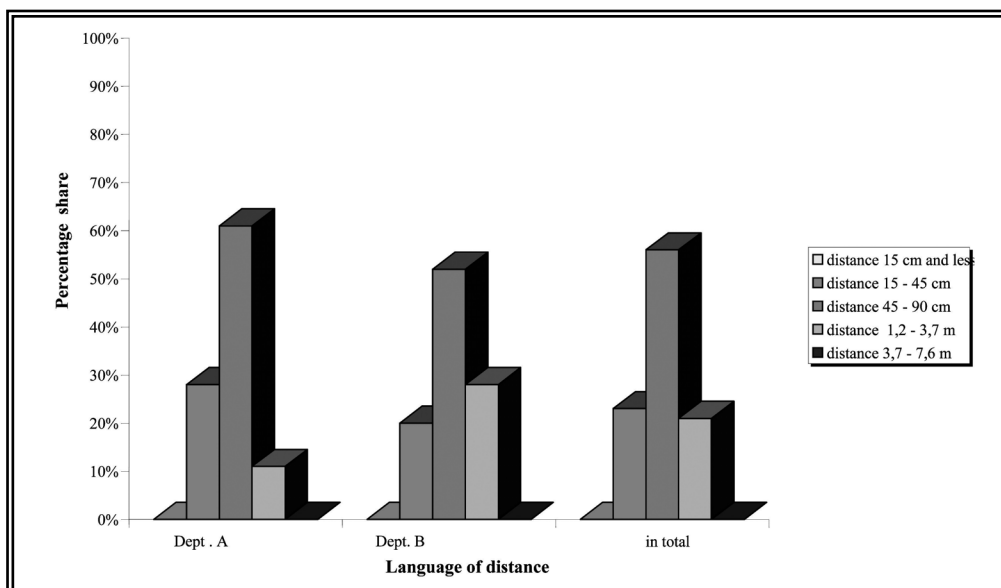
Graph 1 Eye contact of the superior in communication with the subordinate

Source: Own graph

Of a total number of the respondents 49 % stated that the superior looks directly into their eyes in communication with them. 9% of the respondents selected the option – intent, long-lasting look without turning away. 39

% of the respondents from the department A, and 24% of the respondents from the department B said the superior avoids eye contact with them.

Question number 2: What distance does your superior maintain in communication with you?



Graph 2 Distance in communication

Source: Own graph

In both department A and B the superiors move within the personal zone most often when they communicate with the subordinates. They keep personal distance (space 45–90 cm) – this option was chosen by 56% of the total number of the enquired (61% from the department A, 52% from the department B). 23% of the respondents stated that the superior communicates with them in intimate distance. Only 21% of all the examined reported that the superior communicates with them in optimal (social) distance – distance 1,2 – 3,7 m.

Hypotheses verification

On the basis of the result analysis we refuse hypothesis H1: 80% of the respondents think that the superiors maintain social distance: 1,2–2,1 m when they communicate with them at the workplace, as the most respondents (56% - 61% from the department A, 52% from the department B) stated that the superiors move most often in personal zone in communication with the subordinates, they maintain personal distance (distance 45 – 90 cm).

Suggestions and recommendations in the field of non-verbal communication

Scientific studies prove that a person perceives approximately 80 % of information by sight. The act of looking signifies interest in the object and the other way round. Our culture requires eye contact in communication. The fact that the superior and the subordinate look directly into the eyes in communication (49% of the respondents selected this option) indicates interest in feedback, which can be highly appraised in an organisation. On the other hand the superior's avoidance of eye contact in communication (in total 30% of the respondents chose this option) could result into the subordinate's feeling of insecurity and give the impression of superior's disinterest. This could cause communication breakdown and conflicts at the workplace. Thus, it is necessary to prevent such undesirable phenomena by for example communication training sessions.

Exploring the positioning of the communication participants we found out that in both department A and B the superiors use personal zone (distance 45 – 90 cm) most frequently in contact with the subordinates. Although this is the most common distance in the explored company the superiors should maintain mainly social zone (1,2 – 3,7 m) in formal communication with employees. Such a distance provides communication participants (in our case mainly the subordinate employees) with the feeling of psychic security.

All leading employees should master necessary communication skills, they should be led to self-reflection and to

personal development in this field (Butoracová Šindleryová, 2006). As a result we suggest that the company start in-company training and education in the field of non-verbal communication or more precisely communication training. The training should be focused not only on the improvement of verbal and non-verbal communication, but also on the identification and elimination of the most frequent flaws in communication. After undergoing the communication training the leaders will demonstrate better knowledge and information in the field of verbal and non-verbal communication, which could significantly help the company increase the work productivity (Mrvová, 2006, p. 270) and improve relations at the workplace.

Conclusion

Body language, non-verbal communication can put the finishing touches to the meaning of exchanged information since posture, facial expressions or gestures add emotional charge to the content of communication. They can highlight, question, gloss or utterly deny the content of the information. A manager should be familiar with the forms of non-verbal communication so that he or she could apply them within vertical communication (in relation to subordinates), but also in horizontal communication (in contact with employees in the same position) appropriately and effectively. The mastery of non-verbal communication would enable managers to eliminate signals revealing their weaknesses and decode non-verbal communication of other co-workers in the organisation.

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