

Observing Non-Verbal Communication Patterns



Rationale:

Considerable variations exist between cultures with regard to verbal and non-verbal communication styles. Non-verbal signals are mainly given and received subconsciously and may vary from one culture to another. Making inferences from other people's non-verbal signals may thus be difficult and may lead to misunderstandings. Unfamiliar non-verbal communication patterns often create a feeling of discomfort as one cannot interpret them correctly. This activity encourages participants to consciously observe the different aspects of non-verbal communication and the associated meaning of them.

Learning outcomes:

In order to become able to communicate effectively across cultures, participants are made aware of the different aspects of non-verbal communication. They get a feeling for other's as well as their own non-verbal communication signals and how they are perceived and interpreted by individuals from other cultures. Moreover, participants should learn about different ways of expressing their emotions and gain the ability to really understand each other.

Time:

60 – 90 minutes

Participants:

min: 10 max: 25

Group composition:

- Monocultural
- Multicultural

Level:

- A
- B

Target groups:

- Undergraduate students
- Recent graduates
- Young professionals
- Experienced mid-career professionals from multiple disciplinary areas
- Foreign language / culture educators and trainers
- Human resource managers

Biography
My

Ethnography

Intercultural
Interaction

Communicative
Interaction

Diversity
Management

Intercultural
Responsibility

Emotional
Management

Working in
MCTs

Materials required:

- Copies of the worksheets for each participant

Accompanying documents:

- Handouts 1 and 2

Mode of learning:

- Group-study
- Self-study

Procedure:

1. Have participants form monocultural groups of at least two and up to four maximum.
2. You may provide them with a number of readings on non-verbal communication patterns in preparation for this activity. Distribute Handout 1 prior to class. Tell them to find out as much as possible about the individual aspects of non-verbal communication in their own culture. Have them prepare a group presentation of up to 10 minutes where they present their findings. Tell them that they can and should include specific situations and act them out during the presentation where they see fit.
3. In class, give a very brief introduction to aspects of non-verbal communication patterns. This lecturette may also precede the formation of the groups.
4. Start with the presentations of the individual groups. Assign two observers that closely watch the non-verbal communication signals displayed throughout the presentation based on Handout 2, and another two participants to focus on the content. The rest of the audience should also observe carefully and make notes on Handout 2.
5. Following each presentation, discuss how the individual elements were perceived and interpreted by the audience.
6. Following the presentations, discuss major differences between the presentations with regard to non-verbal communication patterns and refer back to the assigned readings. Ask participants the following questions:
 - To what extent is your personal “cultural observation” different from other participants’ coming from different cultures?
 - What are the reasons for this?
 - Which forms of non-verbal behaviour displayed by the participants reflect the speaker's personality and which could be attributed to culture?

References:

Kharbanda, O. R. and Stallworthy, E. (1991). "Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication." *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 10 - 13.

Molinsky, A. L., Krabbenhoft, M. A., Ambady, N. and Choi, Y. S. (2005). "Cracking the Nonverbal Code: Intercultural Competence and Gesture Recognition across Cultures." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 380 - 395.

Worksheet: Observing Non-Verbal Communication Patterns



Handout 1

Together with your group members, please prepare a presentation on non-verbal communication patterns in your own culture. The following list will help you to know which areas to focus on. The presentation can and should include specific situations typical for your culture. Feel free to act them out during your presentation:

Gestures (Kinesics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hands - body - general: many / few 	
Facial Expressions (Kinesics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - smile - frown 	
Eye contact (Oculectics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct or not - extended - between same-sex 	
Touch (Haptics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - who touches whom (differences in gender / status)? - frequency - friends / stranger 	
Interpersonal distance and personal space zones (Proxemics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - close - gender specific 	
Attitude towards time (Chronemics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasis on relationships or on schedules - what is considered arrival "on time"? 	
Communication (Paralinguistics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - listening behaviour - communication overlap - volume of speech - rate of speech - tone of voice - use of silence 	

Worksheet: Observing Non-Verbal Communication Patterns



Handout 2

Please watch the presentation carefully and take notes on each person presenting. The following list of non-verbal communication patterns provides some guidance regarding what you should watch out for.

Gestures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hands – where are the hands positioned? - body – moves, stiff - general: many / few 	
Facial Expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - smiles, crinkles 	
Eye contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct or not - extended 	
Interpersonal distance and personal space zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - close – where does the presenter stand in the room, close to the audience? 	
Communication – paralinguistic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - listening behaviour – does the audience listen to the presentation? - communication overlap – is the presentation well prepared? - volume of speech - rate of speech - tone of voice – when does the voice change (when talking about certain feelings, sensitive issues about the presented culture)? - use of silence 	