**Chapter**

# 1

# Apply Commununication Principles in the Workplace

## Self-assessment tool

*In this chapter you will learn how to:*

|  | Competent | Needs further development |
|---|:---:|:---:|
| ■ differentiate the different forms of communication | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ identify each element of the communication process | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ highlight the role of nonverbal behaviour in the communication process | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ identify seven areas of nonverbal behaviour | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ use nonverbal communication appropriately | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ confirm with the sender of the message the meaning of their nonverbal communication | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ identify the purpose of four different listening responses | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ practise appropriate questioning responses | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ practise various listening skills and provide feedback through reflective listening | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ use your nonverbal and listening skills appropriately | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ identify barriers to communication | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ discuss the importance of good communication in the workplace | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ identify the communication aspects of a multicultural society | ❏ | ❏ |
| ■ apply ethics to your workplace communication. | ❏ | ❏ |

**Evaluate your communication skills by completing the self-checklists in the chapter.**

## Case study—The key to successful project management
### By Christine Long

In the Australian labour market, people with project management experience and the right mix of skills are in high demand across a range of industries. The project management role requires high-level time management, budgeting, stakeholder management, procurement and communication skills.

Andrew McCauley, General Manager of ETM Placements, recently recruited a number of project managers for the Roads and Traffic Authority. He makes the point that, in particular, communication skills and focusing on a partnership approach are proving to be more and more important to successful project management. In the past, a project manager's typical approach has been a confrontational one, but it was found that this simply does not get the project delivered. Effective project managers use a combination of high-level project management and communication skills to perform their role well.

*Source:* Points in this case are adapted from Christine Long, 'When there's a job to do', My Career, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition, 4–5 September 2004, p. 1.

## KEY TERMS

**communication climate**
**active listening**
**adaptors**
**affective displays**
**artefacts**
**attending listening**
**barriers**
**body movement**
**clarifying**
**closed question**
**communication barrier**
**communication channel**
**communication process**
**context**
**cross-cultural communication**
**cultural nonverbal communication**
**cultural sensitivity**
**decode**
**discrimination**
**emblems**
**empathy**
**encode**
**encouraging listening**
**ethics**
**feedback**
**form of communication**
**graphic communication**
**horizontal channel**
**illustrators**
**inclusion**
**intentional message**
**intercultural communication**
**listening**
**message**
**multicultural society**
**noise**
**nonverbal communication**
**open question**
**paralanguage**
**paraphrasing**
**perception**
**personal nonverbal communication**
**probing question**
**proximity**
**receiver**
**reflecting listening**
**reflective statement**
**regulators**
**sender**
**summarising**
**total message**
**unintentional message**
**universal nonverbal communication**
**verbal communication**
**vertical channel**
**vocalisations**

People who are successful at work are often communication-oriented. They demonstrate empathy, awareness and concern for others; they have good listening skills and are aware of their own concerns and needs. These people are open, approachable and supportive of others.

Communication is any behaviour – verbal or nonverbal – that is perceived by another. Knowledge, feelings or thoughts are encoded and sent from at least one person and received and **decoded** by at least one other. Meaning is derived from this message as the receiver interprets the message. A connection is made between the people communicating. Communication allows us to learn more about ourselves and the world around us, share experiences with others, persuade and influence others, and relax and enjoy ourselves.

*Communication is the transfer of meaning.*

# Communication at work

Communication skills are essential in the workplace. Communication takes place through various communication channels. A communication channel (discussed later in this chapter) is the means or technique used to signal or convey a message. Whatever communication channel is used as the vehicle for a message, we require the skills appropriate to using that particular communication channel.

Communication is classified into three forms:

*Workplace communication is classified into three forms.*

1. **verbal communication**, either spoken or written
2. **nonverbal communication**
3. **graphic communication**.

Skills in spoken and written, nonverbal and graphic communication are all essential in the workplace.

Verbal communication can be either spoken words between two or more people or written words.

Nonverbal communication is sent by any means other than words or graphics. Nonverbal components occur in oral, written and graphic communication. In oral communication, for instance, these include facial expressions, body movement, posture and dress. Format and layout are some of the nonverbal components of written and graphic communication.

Graphic communication represents ideas, relationships or connections visually with shapes, diagrams and lines. Graphic communication can have both verbal and nonverbal components – for example, some of the graphic-only signs which prohibit smoking displayed in public places.

The ability to communicate is acquired by learning skills from others and from experience. As experience widens, new learning is taking place. The communication style of individuals and organisations develops through using and adapting new techniques. Anyone who believes they can control the communication process is unaware that communication is an intricate and interactive process. The interactions of several elements affect the people who are communicating. You can do a great deal to influence and facilitate the communication process but you cannot control someone else's perception, outlook, values and attitudes; each of these affects the way communication is received.

## The communication process

*Communication is an interactive process.*

The process of communication is dynamic and interactive. Someone sends, someone receives and the outcome is a message. As information flows, people perceive meaning and structure on the messages received from others.

The communication process takes place in various situations for different reasons, with the potential for many interpretations. It has seven main elements.

1. **sender**
2. **message**
3. **receiver**
4. **feedback**
5. **communication channel**
6. **context** or setting
7. **noise** or interference.

There are many models of the communication process. The diagrams presented in this chapter are representations of how communication works. It should be stressed that these cannot be used as a complete guide; they simply place the most significant elements of the process in a meaningful sequence.
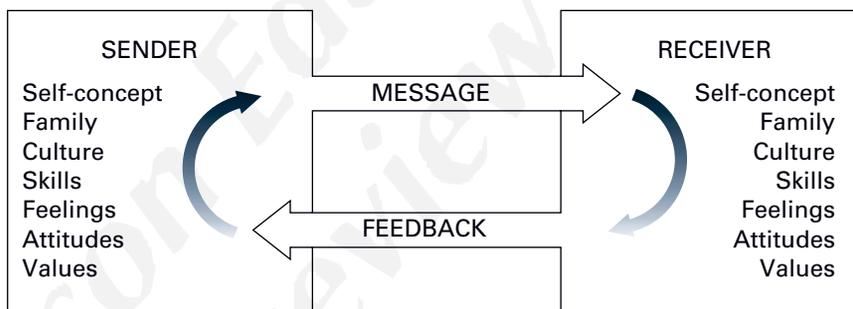
The main action, as communication occurs, is that the sender and receiver interact by sending (encoding) and receiving (decoding) messages.

## The sender

Figure 1.1 shows four elements of the communication process, which begins with the sender. Senders are individuals who respond to situations from a unique vantage point, interpreting ideas and filtering experiences through their own perception (see Figure 1.2). Unique to individual senders, and integral to all the communication they engage in, is a background of accumulated attitudes, experiences, skills, cultural conditioning and differences that influences how they communicate. The sender **encodes** an idea and/or a feeling in words or signs that the receiver will recognise and transmits this message to the receiver.

Communication begins with the sender.

#### Figure 1.1 Four elements of the communication process



SENDER

Self-concept
Family
Culture
Skills
Feelings
Attitudes
Values

MESSAGE

FEEDBACK

RECEIVER

Self-concept
Family
Culture
Skills
Feelings
Attitudes
Values

## Message

The message is the idea or feeling transmitted from the sender to the receiver to achieve understanding. It makes a connection between sender and receiver.

The message connects the sender to the receiver.

## The receiver

The receiver decodes or interprets the message to achieve understanding. In doing this, the receiver is also acting as an individual from a unique vantage point, interpreting the idea according to a particular personal perception of the message. This perception is the result of the receiver's unique background of experiences, beliefs, concerns and many other factors.

### Perception

Perception influences communication.

Since **perception** has a significant influence on communication, it is useful to look closely at it. The way a message is intended by the sender may be quite different from the way the receiver perceives the message.

Perception is the way people understand or give meaning to their environment. Perception and interpretation of the same message varies according to how each individual is influenced by experience, attitudes and beliefs, and a range of acquired skills or expectations – for example, one person may perceive the colour blue as cool, peaceful and comforting while another person may see blue as old-fashioned or formal. The particular or specific meaning is influenced by past experience. Even the context or setting of the communication affects perception. Blue may be calming and relaxing one day, but too formal on another.

Perception can be described as a pair of spectacles through which we process all the signals received from others. The lenses place a particular focus on what we see, hear and understand and they influence the way we react to the message. The particular colour and focus of a message are affected by the pair of spectacles worn; the lenses may distort the picture.

**Figure 1.2 Perception**
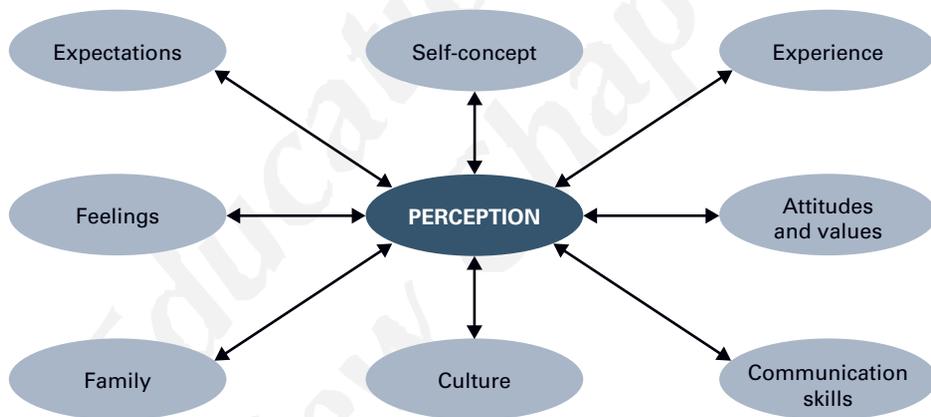


### Feedback

Feedback is an essential part of effective communication.

There is a constant feeding back of information as people interact. As well as encouraging the speaker to continue, listeners respond in a way that shows their comprehension and acceptance or non-acceptance of the message. Feedback is an essential part of successful interpersonal communication. It is the receiver's response to the sender's message, and can be intentional or unintentional.

Feedback:

- gives the communication continuity
- indicates understanding or misunderstanding of the message
- stimulates further communication and discussion.

Both sender and receiver need feedback. As you communicate, check with your receivers to establish that their understanding of the message is correct. Ask the receiver to rephrase what has been said and acknowledge your agreement or disagreement. Feedback is important to

the speaker to determine how the message is being received and helps receivers understand how their behaviour affects others.

It can help or hinder your communication and the climate you create. In the workplace most people communicate face to face with their leaders, supervisors and colleagues, so providing appropriate feedback can assist the development of good working relationships and the productivity of the business.

## Communication channel

A communication channel is the means or technique used to signal or convey a message – for example, a conversation, letter, telephone call, radio/television program. Information technology provides a fast channel of communication that is becoming more widely available and easier to use than in the past. Information technology is used to store, send, receive and present information.

All organisations have internal channels of communication and external channels. Figure 1.3 shows three more elements in the communication process – the channel, interference and context.

Choose a channel that suits your communication purpose, your needs as the sender of the message and the needs of the receiver. Should you send a message by electronic mail to a person who is afraid of technology and unable to access the computer screen, and communication barriers will occur because the channel is inappropriate. Write a memo or business letter to this person and the message is more likely to be easily understood and accepted.

The flow of communication moves through the organisation along different lines or channels. **Horizontal channels** operate between colleagues at the same level of the organisation's structure, while **vertical channels** move communication up and down between different levels.

*The channel is the vehicle for the message.*

### Figure 1.3  The seven elements of the communication process
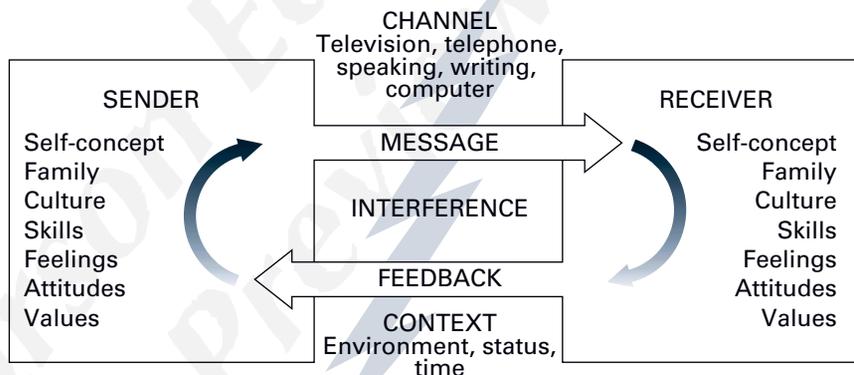


## Context

Context consists of the situation, circumstances or setting within which communication takes place. Context plays an important part in how a message is encoded and decoded. The same message can carry a completely different meaning depending on the situation, since emotions and reactions to ideas and events vary in different situations – for example, communication

*Context affects the message.*

at a conference, in the lunchroom or at a formal meeting is taking place in different settings. It may use different language, and operate on a different set of relationships and authority to achieve the communication purpose of each situation.

## Noise or interference

*Noise interrupts the communication.*

The message received is not necessarily the same as the message sent. Something other than the intended meaning may be received because of noise or interference, which interrupts and distorts the intended message. Noise or interference interrupts smooth communication flow between sender and receiver and is likely to lead to misunderstanding, or to confused or ambiguous communication. Communication barriers occur as a result of a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the message. These barriers can be caused by the sender, the receiver, lack of feedback, a poor choice of channel, the wrong context or any other element in the communication model. Even when communication barriers occur, something is communicated to the receiver but the noise or interference distorts the intended message.

### PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. To help introduce group members to each other, take turns to tell the whole group the following information:

   ■ your name

   ■ your job and position, and/or the course you are enrolled in

   ■ what springs to your mind when you think about communication – this can be a brief explanation of, for example, good experiences, bad experiences (written, verbal or other); what you have learned (the hard way) about communication, or who you admire (such as a politician, colleague, manager, media personality) for their communication skills, and explain why.

2. Work in pairs for this exercise.

   a. Stand face to face a comfortable distance apart for conversation.

   b. Take it in turns to give a 1-minute spiel about any topic to your partner. Your partner must stand in front of you and not react in any way to what you are saying. No facial expressions, no body movement, no speaking.

   c. When you have both had a turn, return to the whole group.

   d. Discuss how it felt to talk to someone and get no response at all. Which elements of the communication process were missing?

3. a. How has your ability to communicate been developed?

   b. Who has had the greatest influence on the way you communicate?

   c. Has this influence been positive or negative in terms of communication in the workplace?

4. Consider your own experiences as a message receiver where you misunderstood the message. What caused the misunderstanding? Was it related to your perception as the receiver, the communication channel, the context or interference? Suggest ways the communication process could have been improved to prevent the misunderstanding.

# Nonverbal communication

*Actions speak louder than words.*

The ability to focus on nonverbal communication allows us to plan and deal with situations in a purposeful, positive way and to communicate clearly. This in turn enables others to

respond more easily because it lets them know what sort of person they are dealing with and how that person is likely to respond to various situations.

The nonverbal aspects of communication are so closely intermingled with the verbal that it is difficult to separate them. People receiving verbal and nonverbal messages interpret them within the context of the communication and derive the **total message**.

Nonverbal communication consists of that part of a message not encoded in words. The nonverbal part of the message tends to be unconscious and often reveals the sender's feelings and preferences more spontaneously and honestly than the verbal part. If the verbal message does not match the nonverbal communication, people tend to believe the nonverbal message.

In working towards better communication, particularly in interpreting the nonverbal part of the message, it is helpful to consider the four different types of nonverbal messages shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Nonverbal messages**

| Type | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Personal nonverbal communication | Involves various kinds of nonverbal behaviour unique to one person. The meaning is also unique to the person sending the message. | A person may laugh due to nervousness or fear, while another may cry. These responses nonverbally communicate discomfort. |
| 2. Cultural nonverbal communication | Characteristic of, or common to, a group of people. It is learned unconsciously by observing others in the society or group. | Generally, women tend to feel free to touch each other, where as men are more self-conscious about this. In Aboriginal cultures, eye contact is less acceptable than it is in European culture. |
| 3. Universal nonverbal communication | Behaviour that is common to humankind. It shows happiness, sadness or deep-seated feelings. | A smile, frown or tears. |
| 4. Random nonverbal communication | Unrelated to the verbal message, while it can distract from the verbal message, it has little effect on the meaning. | A sneeze. |

Nonverbal communication can be classified into four types.

Cultural nonverbal communication is shared by those in the culture.

## Body movement

The way body movement is received by others, and the type of feedback given, determines how the communication will flow. Ekman and Friesen's (1969) five main categories of body movement are listed in Table 1.2.

Often we conform to the rules we learned as children about nonverbal messages. These rules create a level of cultural consensus and sense of belonging. However, intercultural variations in the rules are significant. While universal and random nonverbal communication are unlikely to cause communication barriers, personal and intercultural nonverbal communication may raise barriers to understanding between people. For this reason, we need to be aware of the different ways individuals communicate nonverbally and of variations caused by cultural differences.

Nonverbal behaviour should be interpreted in its context.

## Analysing nonverbal communication

People communicate nonverbally with body movement and with personal relationship behaviours. This nonverbal communication changes or complements the verbal communication. Nonverbal communication always occurs in a context or framework. The context often

Table 1.2 The purpose of the five categories of body movement

| Category | Definition | Purpose | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emblems | Emblems are nonverbal acts learnt through imitation. | To reinforce or replace the words. | The nonverbal signal for 'okay' is a nod or a smile. |
| Illustrators | Illustrators are nonverbal acts that relate to, and illustrate, the spoken word. | To accentuate or emphasise a word or phrase. | A nod of the head and wave of the arm in a certain direction, accompanying the words 'Over there' |
| Affective (or feeling) displays | Affective displays are changes in facial expression that display emotion. | Unconscious displays reflect feelings, whereas intentional expressions can disguise or hide feelings. | Unconscious displays 'drop' with surprise or shock; a smile may be used to deceive or disarm the listener. |
| Regulators | Nods and other head movements are nonverbal acts that regulate communication between people. | To maintain and control the flow of speaking and listening. Regulators indicate whether to continue, repeat, elaborate or change from speaker to listener. | A nod to encourage another person to continue speaking. |
| Adaptors | Nonverbal acts performed unconsciously in response to some inner desire. | To display instinctive responses. | Scratching an itchy ear; raising the arms in shock or horror |

determines the meaning of the nonverbal behaviour. On different occasions the same nonverbal gesture may have completely different meanings. Without context and spoken words, nonverbal behaviour is almost impossible to interpret with any accuracy.

Theoretical writings and research classify nonverbal communication into the seven main areas shown in Table 1.3.

To consider each of the seven aspects in Table 1.3 in isolation is artificial. In practice, what is sent as a complete message is a cluster of nonverbal cues in association with the spoken words.

# Matching the nonverbal and verbal parts of the total message

The total message combines spoken words with nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication adds meaning to, modifies or changes the spoken words in six ways.

1. *Repeating* – for example, pointing when giving directions.
2. *Contradicting* – for example, looking at your watch and backing away while telling someone, 'I'm very interested in what you're saying'.
3. *Substituting* – using facial expressions as a substitute for words, to show pleasure, disappointment and a range of feelings and experiences.

Nonverbal messages may contradict or complement verbal messages.

The total message includes the words and the nonverbal behaviour.

Nonverbal communication can be misinterpreted.

**Table 1.3  Classifications of nonverbal communication**

| Area | Description | Example | |
|------|-------------|---------|---|
| **1.** body movement (kinesic behaviour) | Body posture – the way a person stands, leans forward or back, and moves the head – all affect the message. Includes movements of the hands, head, feet and legs, posture, eye movements and facial expressions | A person leaning forward, pointing and shaking a finger at someone is seen as trying to dominate the other person. | |
| **2.** physical characteristics | Physical characteristics, first impressions and images of others can be associated unconsciously with past experiences of people with similar physical characteristics. They are important parts of nonverbal communication. | People react to factors such as body shape, general attractiveness, body and breath odours, weight, hair and skin colour. These factors often determine our responses in interpersonal encounters. | Physical characteristics can cause a reaction. |
| **3.** touching behaviour | Touching can console or support the other person and show feelings such as affection, sexual interest or dominance. Hand gestures demonstrate feelings and convey thoughts and words through movement. A handshake, for example, can express neither dominance or equality. | Stroking, hitting, holding or guiding the movements of another person are touching behaviours that communicate nonverbally. Each adds a different meaning to a message – a pat on the arm can convey intimacy or control. | Touching adds meaning to the message. |
| **4.** vocal qualities (para-language) | **Paralanguage** is that part of language associated with but not involving the word system. It consists of the voice qualities and vocalisations that affect *how* something is said rather than what is said.<br>**Vocalisations**, the tone of voice, rate of speaking and voice inflection are an important part of the total message. | Voice qualities include:<br>■ pitch range<br>■ pitch control<br>■ rhythm control<br>■ tempo<br>■ articulation control<br>■ resonance.<br>Vocalisations (such as sighing, groaning, volume, 'um' and 'ah') also give clues to the total message. A tired person, for example, will speak more slowly than usual; a disappointed person may speak with a flat tone, while the tone of voice of someone excited about a coming holiday reflects this excitement. | Paralanguage is how something is said. |
| **5.** space (proximity) | **Proximity** means nearness, in terms of physical space. Research has shown that Australians speaking to acquaintances or work colleagues leave about an arm's length of space between themselves and the other person. People speaking to friends and family leave about half an arm's length between themselves and others. People in intimate relationships allow direct and close contact when speaking to each other. The use of space reflects the way people feel about others. | Personal space varies according to gender, status, roles and culture. People can use their height and weight to convey a message. If you tower over other people in a way that intrudes on their personal space you may cause their discomfort and withdrawal. How people use their personal space and that of others communicates a message about how that person perceives and feels in that space.<br><br>*Continues* | Space can be used to indicate status. |

Table 1.3 *Continued*

<table>
<tr><td>**Area**</td><td>**Description**</td><td>**Example**</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>**6.** artefacts</td>
<td>**Artefacts** are objects used to convey nonverbal messages about self-concept, image, mood, feelings or style. Many artefacts are common to the group but we also use artefacts, particularly clothing, as an individual **form of communication**.
Appearance and clothing are important and highly visible parts of nonverbal communication. The choice of clothes reflects your mood and your attitude to the occasion. Other people notice and place their own interpretation on your dress.</td>
<td>For example, perfume, clothes, lipstick, glasses and hairpieces project the style or mood of the wearer. A police badge, a nurse's uniform, a university lecturer's gown and an Italian suit are all artefacts that can signal power or lack of power in a situation. If a plain-clothes police officer shows the police badge at an accident, others immediately perceive his or her authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**7.** environment</td>
<td>The environment can influence the outcomes of communication – for instance, organisations give careful consideration to office space, factory layout, the sales area and conference venues. The environment should put people at ease and match their expectations; an unsuitable environment can produce 'noise' that causes communication **barriers** and interferes with the communication process.</td>
<td>Natural and artificial light, colour, temperature, tables, chairs, desks, lounges, plants, sound, artwork, magazines, and floor and wall coverings all have an impact on people's perception of an organisation.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Clothes are vehicles for conveying nonverbal messages.

Environmental factors influence communication.

4. *Complementing* – modifying, emphasising or elaborating words in a way that conveys attitudes and intentions towards others; for example, standing in a casual way or using a careless tone of voice that conveys a lack of respect for the listener.
5. *Accenting* – moving the head and hands to emphasise parts of the verbal message; for example, shaking the head as you say 'No'.
6. *Controlling the flow of communication* – nodding your head or changing position can indicate that the speaker should continue or give you a turn.

## Dealing with contradictions between the verbal and nonverbal message

The accurate interpretation of nonverbal messages comes from knowing people and their pattern of interpersonal communication, both verbal and nonverbal. The nonverbal communication is seldom consciously observed unless it confuses the receiver. On some occasions, it is possible to ignore nonverbal communication that is confusing. At other times, it must be acknowledged or even confronted – for example, when the verbal message conveys agreement while several nonverbal signals (such as pitch of voice, facial expression or posture) indicate lack of agreement or even ridicule, check the meaning of the nonverbal part of the message. It is useful to check the meaning when you:

■ are in doubt
■ are uncomfortable with the communication
■ have to make a decision on the basis of the total message.

Because your cultural background influences the way you interpret the nonverbal messages of others, it is important to consider specific messages in context. If you discover inconsistencies between the verbal and nonverbal messages of someone from another culture, stand back and consider the message in the context of the situation. This allows you more scope for interpretation and a better chance of understanding the intended message rather than the one your cultural background suggests.

## How to check the meaning of nonverbal behaviour

When you are in doubt about the meaning of nonverbal behaviour, confirm it with the sender and try not to make assumptions or pass judgment. Gestures and **body movements** (body language) are nonverbal behaviours that contribute to the total message. The total message is understood more easily when you follow the four-step process below.

1. Hear (and listen to) the words.
2. Observe the nonverbal behaviour.
3. Confirm their meaning with the sender when the verbal and nonverbal messages conflict or confuse you.
4. Consider the context or setting.

For example, suppose someone in a meeting sits back and folds their arms. If you say, 'I see you're in a closed posture', you are making an assumption about the nonverbal part of the message. It is more useful to confirm the meaning by replacing your interpretation with a simple description: 'You've just folded your arms'. This allows the person to reply: 'Yes, my shoulders are aching' or 'Yes, I feel uncomfortable, even threatened by the suggestion' or 'I'm cold' or 'I'm bored'.

Next time you are uncertain about the meaning of someone's nonverbal behaviour, simply check it out by completing these two steps.

1. Describe the behaviour.
2. Ask the sender what the behaviour means.

In this way, you avoid misinterpreting the communication. As a result, there are fewer communication barriers and misunderstandings. There are, however, so many messages and so many variables that it is impossible to check out everything.

### PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Work in pairs for this exercise.
   Use nonverbal communication to convey the following messages.

   - OK!
   - Sorry, I didn't hear what you said.
   - Please go away.
   - I feel frustrated.
   - I'm tired.
   - I don't believe you.
   - Well done!
   - Look over there.
   - I'm happy.
   - I'm sad.

2. Again working in pairs, take it in turns to send a happy, positive verbal message to your partner, but accompany it with nonverbal behaviour that is threatening or sad. To deal with the contradiction between the verbal and the nonverbal message, the receiver should follow the steps below.
   a. Describe the behaviour.
   b. Ask the sender what the behaviour means.

   As part of a whole group discussion, explore why the nonverbal behaviour confused the message. Discuss or demonstrate the type of nonverbal behaviour that would have been more appropriate for the verbal message.

3. In small groups, refer to Table 1.3, Classifications of nonverbal communication, and discuss examples of each type of nonverbal communication that you have experienced either at work, at school or college, or at home.
   a. Comment on the kind of message that was sent by the nonverbal communication you received.
   b. Do you think the nonverbal communication matched the intended message?
   c. Look around at the nonverbal behaviour of the members of the small group you are in. Identify the nonverbal cues and discuss and interpret what they might mean. Each group member should wait until their own nonverbal behaviour has been discussed before revealing its correct meaning.

# The process of listening

*Listening is an active process.*

There is a difference between hearing and **listening**. *Hearing* is a physical process. The ears receive sensations or stimuli and transmit them to the brain – for example, a loud, sudden or unfamiliar sound catches our attention. *Listening* refers to the interpretative process that takes place when we hear something. When we listen, we store, classify and label information, all of which involves attention, interpretation and understanding. Listening to another person takes time and effort.

The nonverbal communication accompanying the words reinforces and adds meaning to our message. Listening skills help us to understand and interpret the other person's message. Both these interactive skills assist us to send and receive the intended messages. Successful communication requires both sender and receiver to have interactive skills.

*Each different type of listening skill involves a set of behaviours.*

At work, people listen in order to understand instructions, receive new information, understand changes in procedure and interact with other people. Whatever the purpose, concentration and a deliberate effort to be interested in the speaker's message will increase listening effectiveness. If you listen well, you will understand the content, meaning and feelings of the message. If you are distracted, much of this will be lost.

Listening serves two broad purposes in the process of talking to others.

1. As the sender of a message, listening to your receiver's answers tells you how the other person has interpreted your message.
2. As the receiver of a message, listening to the other person allows you to understand their meaning.

A variety of listening skills can be learned and developed with practice. Listening is so important that it is worth practising the different skills in each type of listening shown in Table 1.4. Sometimes you will use only one of these types of listening skills. On another occasion you might use all in combination. Each type of listening involves a set of behaviours or skills. They enable you to focus on the speaker, invite the speaker to continue, give feedback or show empathy with the speaker.

**Table 1.4  Four listening skills**

| Type | Purpose |
|------|---------|
| Attending listening | To focus on the speaker |
| Encouraging listening | To invite the speaker to continue |
| Reflecting listening | To mirror the feelings and content in the message |
| Active listening | To show empathy with the speaker |

# Focus on the speaker

In 'attending listening', you focus on the speaker by giving them your physical attention. You use your whole body, and the environment you create, to provide feedback that assures the speaker of your total attention. Some ways of offering this feedback are eye contact, posture and body movement.

The quality of your attending listening skills is also improved by:

■ understanding the impact of moving into the personal space of others
■ the impact of the environment
■ the capacity to ignore distractions.

Listening is an active process. Show interest in the speaker by using the behaviours listed in Table 1.5.

Show interest in the speaker.

**Table 1.5  Attending listening**

| Factor | Behaviour |
|--------|-----------|
| Eye contact | ■ Use supportive eye contact.<br>■ Focus your eyes on the speaker without being intimidating.<br>■ Show sensitivity – avoid staring directly at the speaker for long periods, as the speaker may feel uncomfortable. |
| Posture | ■ Use your posture to show you are attending to the other person.<br>■ Lean slightly forward towards the speaker in a relaxed way.<br>■ Face the person squarely.<br>■ Maintain an open position with arms and legs uncrossed. |
| Body movement | ■ Avoid moving about a lot.<br>■ Avoid fiddling with objects, crossing or uncrossing legs, signalling or speaking to  passers-by. |
| Personal space | ■ Position yourself at a distance that is comfortable for both you and the speaker.<br>■ Comfort in the use of physical distance depends on culture and personal preference. |
| Environment | ■ Avoid moving into the speaker's personal space.<br>■ Create an environment without distractions or interruptions.<br>■ Remove any physical barriers between you and the speaker.<br>■ Establish an environment where you can both feel relaxed. |
| Avoid distractions | ■ Face the speaker and maintain contact with them.<br>■ Ignore distractions, rather than turn away from the speaker.<br>■ Stop what you are doing and focus your attention on the other person. |

# Invite the speaker to continue

Offer feedback.

'Encouraging listening' indicates that the listener is willing to do more than listen. Encouraging listening provides feedback that invites speakers to say more and to disclose their thoughts and feelings. The following strategies will encourage the speaker to continue.

## Invitation to disclose

Invite speakers to continue but without pressuring them to disclose their feelings or thoughts. They may be feeling ambivalent about whether to discuss their feelings or keep them private. Continue to give attention by using eye contact and an open posture and let them choose whether or not to disclose. For example, if the speaker seems upset or annoyed, you might say something like, 'You seem to be upset about the discussion with that last client. Would you care to talk about it?'

## Minimal and brief responses

Minimal and brief spoken responses let speakers know you are listening and encourage them to continue. Some of these responses are 'mm', 'hmmm', 'yes', 'I see', along with an attentive posture. Nonverbal cues like nodding and facial expressions also convey your interest.

## Pause

A pause, or brief silence, allows the speaker time to consider, reflect and decide whether to continue the conversation. As a listener, use this time to watch the speaker's body movement. This can give you clues to the total message – its content and the speaker's feelings. Let the speaker have time to think. Allow silences.

## Use encouraging questions

Use open questions.

Asking open questions will encourage the other person to share more personal feelings and thoughts. An example of an open question is: 'How did you go about collecting the files?' An example of a closed question is: 'Did you collect the files?' Open questions encourage the speaker to answer at greater length and in more detail, whereas closed questions usually lead to a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

Avoid 'why' questions because they can make the other person defensive. A 'why' question urges them to justify their actions and can also sound disapproving.

By asking open questions about what, when, where, how and who, you can help the speaker to be more specific and revealing. Although encouraging questions show that you are interested in talking, they do not necessarily show that you understand the communication. To show you understand, make **reflective statements** that clarify and summarise the other person's communication without interrupting the flow of words or thoughts.

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### 1.1 Self-Checklist – Attending and encouraging listening

**1.** Work in pairs to practise attending and encouraging listening skills. Take turns to act as speaker and listener.

The speaker: Think of a current affairs report or an opinion you heard recently that you passionately agree or disagree with. Describe the details of the story or opinion to your listener and explain why you feel so strongly about it.

The listener: Use attending and encouraging listening skills to focus your listening. When the speaker has finished speaking, check your use of skills against the self-checklist.

| *Did you:* | *Yes* | *No* |
|---|---|---|
| ■ show your interest in the speaker by your body movement – did you face the speaker; make eye contact; lean forward, keeping an open posture? | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ take note of the speaker's body movement, to help identify the feelings that may underlie the spoken message? | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ invite the speaker to continue by using brief responses? | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ ask open questions to encourage the speaker to share feelings and thoughts? | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ use familiar, comfortable language that you both normally use and understand? | ☐ | ☐ |

**2.** At the end of the exercise, consider your checklists and discuss with one another your effectiveness as listeners.  Which points in the list could you confidently tick off and which points could you improve upon? Repeat the question 1 exercise if you would like to practise and improve.

# Mirror the content and feelings in the message

'Reflecting listening' restates both the feeling and content of the speaker's message, to show that you understand. There are several techniques you can use to provide this kind of feedback.

> Show the other person you understand.

**Paraphrasing** helps to achieve a full understanding of the content. It rephrases the essential part of the message concisely in your own words. Listen for the main ideas and direction of the message and rephrase it for the speaker.

The speaker either agrees with your summary or disagrees and can then rephrase the message – for example, phrases such as, 'You're saying that . . .' or 'I see, you would say that . . .' help you to paraphrase the message. Avoid repeating the other person's statements word for word.

Paraphrasing is useful at work to confirm instructions or information before you take action.

Reflective statements are made by expressing briefly the essential feelings you receive from the message – for example, to reflect feelings from the message: 'I thought I would have got that last promotion. Seems like I miss out every time'; the listener replies, 'It's really discouraging' or 'You seem discouraged'. This lets the speaker know that you understand their feelings.

**Clarifying** the meaning establishes with the speaker that your understanding is correct. Make clarifying remarks in terms of describing your feelings, rather than as criticisms of the speaker – for example, if you feel confused by what the speaker has said, you might say something like, 'Could you repeat that? I don't think I understood' or 'Could you give me an example of . . .? I'm not sure I followed what you said'.

If you have misunderstood, the speaker can then rephrase the message. Clarification of the message gives the speaker feedback and shows what the listener understands. It takes the guesswork out of communication.

**Summarising** is used to gather up and condense the most important points made in a long conversation, to conclude it and give it shape or direction. As you summarise, use statements such as: 'So far we've covered . . .' or 'Your main concerns seem to be . . .'. Summarising lets the other person know you understand what is most relevant, and their thoughts and feelings.

Such feedback results in clear communication. Both sender and receiver understand the message.

# Show empathy with the speaker

While reflective listening restates the feelings and content of the message, 'active listening' goes one step further. It also communicates to other people that you understand the problem from their point of view. An active listener has **empathy** with the speaker.

*This technique lets the speaker either confirm or correct the listener's feedback. Active listening also helps other people to reach their own decisions and form their own insights.*

## Active participation

The process of active listening involves actively participating in the conversation with the other person. It requires a conscious attempt to empathise with the speaker in terms of the content and feelings, and to enable them to express and recognise those feelings – for example, a response by the listener such as: 'You seem to be feeling down about this . . .' lets the speaker either agree or disagree with that response. Listening responses that help you to participate actively are shown in Table 1.6.

**Table 1.6  Examples of listening responses**

| Type of response | Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Attending | ■ 'I hear you . . .'<br>■ 'I see . . .'<br>■ 'Oh . . .'<br>■ 'Uh, hmmm . . .' |
| Encouraging questions | ■ 'I'd like to hear how you feel.'<br>■ 'Would you like to talk about it?'<br>■ 'You'd like to talk further?'<br>■ 'Perhaps you'd like to tell me?' |
| Reflective statements | ■ 'You really dislike some . . .'<br>■ 'Sounds as if you're really . . .'<br>■ 'It's really exciting . . .'<br>■ 'You feel it is a good idea . . .'<br>■ 'You seem to be feeling discouraged . . .' |
| Clarifying questions | ■ 'I think you're saying . . .'<br>■ 'Could you give an example . . .?'<br>■ 'I feel a bit confused. Could you repeat that?' |
| Active listening: empathy | ■ 'I understand how you feel.'<br>■ 'You seem to be feeling upset about this.'<br>■ 'I see. It really means that . . .'<br>■ 'On another occasion you'd like . . .' |

When you use active listening, you are giving the other person all your attention in order to understand their perspective, and to communicate your understanding. Active listening also lets speakers find their own understanding and insights.
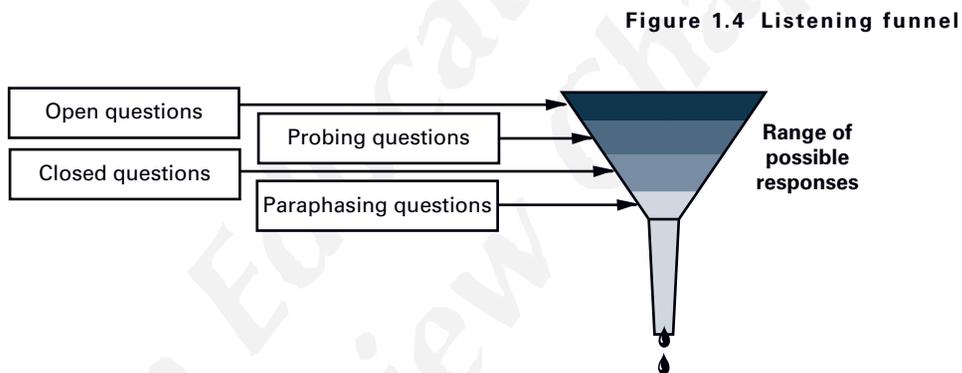
Attending, encouraging and reflecting listening are separate listening skills that we combine as we interact with one another. As well as using these skills, an active listener understands the situation from the other person's point of view. Speakers who are given the opportunity to talk with active listeners are more likely to find their own satisfactory resolution to the problem or issue of concern.

### Feedback

What you choose to listen to, understand and interpret affects how you respond to the speaker. If you listen for both the words and the feelings and receive the message accurately, it is possible to give feedback that helps the understanding of both speaker and listener. A good listener gives feedback in a way that is appropriate to the speaker's needs and to the situation. Feedback is the connecting or completing link between listener and speaker, and is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, Implement and Maintain Effective Workplace Relationships.

By listening well, you can avoid directing or leading, blaming, judging or evaluating the other person. Rather than feeling the need to be responsible for others or to confront them, a good listener accepts different views and is accepted by others. Skill in listening lets you enjoy the company of others as you listen for pleasure, to get information, to help others or to interact in a work team.

Different types of questions are used for different reasons. **Open questions** such as: 'Tell me about . . .' or 'Tell me how . . .' allow the person to give a lot of information. The listening funnel in Figure 1.4 shows how **probing questions** such as: 'In what way were you able to . . .?' start to narrow the listener's range of responses. **Closed questions** such as: 'When did you do that?' 'Where?' 'Who?' usually have only yes/no or specific answers. Paraphrasing questions are used to check that your understanding of the message matches the sender's meaning.

**Figure 1.4 Listening funnel**

Feedback is the connecting, continuing or completing link.



Open questions
Probing questions
Closed questions
Paraphasing questions

**Range of possible responses**

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### PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Working individually, to each of the following statements, write a response that demonstrates reflecting listening skills. Be sure to mirror the content or the feeling in each statement.

    a. 'I can do it by myself. I've done it before, you know.'

    b. 'There's nothing like a run after work to wind down after a busy day.'

    c. 'I'm never sure whether you really want my input or not. You say you'd like to hear other people's opinions about the project but when I give you my opinion, you ignore it and move on to the next thing.'

    d. 'Sure, I've got time to type it out for you. I'll just be here till 10 o'clock tonight. Don't worry about me.'

2. Working in small groups, discuss each of your responses to the statements in question 1. As a group decide on one alternative, improved response for each statement.

3. As a whole group, discuss and make a list of the most common excuses for not listening. Then suggest possible problems that can be caused by not listening in the workplace.

4. a. Why is displaying empathy such an important listening skill?

   b. Identify five ways that you as the listener can demonstrate empathy with the speaker.

# Causes of communication barriers

Effective communication often passes unnoticed, while poor communication is obvious – the message and its meaning are distorted or interrupted.

*Barriers interfere with the message.*

- Some of the factors that cause **communication barriers** are:
- inappropriate choice of words
- inappropriate channel
- inappropriate message
- receiver inattention
- lack of courtesy by the sender or the receiver
- nonverbal communication that does not support the words
- different cultural backgrounds
- poor layout and presentation
- inappropriate timing
- inadequate feedback.

It is impossible for one person in the **communication process** to control the process, as one person cannot be responsible for someone else's communication style or for all the other factors that contribute to communication barriers.

However, recognising the causes of poor communication is an important step towards avoiding them. Consider the possibilities shown in Table 1.7.

**Table 1.7 Communication barriers**

| Cause of barrier | Outcome | Strategies to avoid barrier |
|---|---|---|
| Differences in perception | People often see and interpret the same event or action in a different way. | Listen carefully. Speak clearly and directly to the other person. Ask questions. Give feedback. |
| Different attitudes and values | People often form different interpretations. | Listen carefully. Speak clearly and directly to the other person. Ask questions. Give feedback. |
| Inconsistency between and spoken nonverbal communication | Poor communication and confusion due to an ambiguous message. | Match the verbal and nonverbal parts of the total message. |
| Withholding information | Others operate with only part of the message so mistakes are more likely to occur. | Plan and structure the message to include all necessary information. |
| Passing judgment by telling people their reaction is stupid | The receiver can become angry and retaliate. | Listen actively. Ask questions. Give feedback. |
| Dismissing others' concerns or points of view | The receiver may withdraw. | Listen carefully. Show you are aware of the other's point of view. Ask questions. |

### Empathy breaks down barriers

To reduce the chance of communication barriers and associated problems, communicate with empathy – a feeling for and awareness of your receivers and their points of view. Also, be willing to provide appropriate and sufficient feedback to achieve understanding.

# Barriers to listening

**Barriers** may be due to the listeners themselves when some aspect of their own background interferes with their perception of the speaker or of the spoken message. Barriers may also be due to any one of the elements in the communication process – sender, receiver, message, channel, environment or ineffective feedback. An unclear message caused by static or interference on the telephone line is an obvious example of a communication barrier caused by the channel. Neither the listener nor the sender can prevent such a barrier.

Listening is made easier when the speaker can send a clear, unambiguous message. It is also made easier when the listener avoids barriers. Some examples of such barriers include:

- boredom or lack of interest
- the listener's dislike of the speaker's personality or physical appearance
- a desire to change rather than accept the speaker
- a tendency to make premature conclusions or to listen only for a pause so the speaker can be interrupted
- the intrusion of the listener's own values or attitudes
- the listener's tendency to judge the speaker
- the listener's willingness to hear only that part of the message they agree with
- the listener's opinion that the speaker lacks credibility.

You will recognise some of these barriers, and perhaps be able to add to them from your own experience as a listener or as an observer of another listener. As a sender, no matter how skilled you are at speaking or communicating the message, communication will fail if the receiver does not listen.

It is important to be aware that ineffective verbal responses by the listener can also contribute to communication barriers. Table 1.8 provides examples.

**Table 1.8  The impact of a listener's ineffective verbal response**

| Listener's ineffective response to the speaker | Example of barrier | Speaker's response to the barrier |
|---|---|---|
| Ordering, directing or commanding | 'Stop it or else . . .' 'You must do this.' | Resentment |
| Warning and threatening | 'You'd better do this or else . . .' | Anger |
| Lecturing or preaching | 'It's in your own best interest to do this.' | Resistance |
| Judging, criticising | 'I think you've gone too far this time.' | Offence |
| Disagreeing | 'I think you're totally wrong.' | Put down |
| Blaming | 'It's all your fault.' | Defensiveness |
| Name calling | 'You're stupid.' | Distress |
| Probing, interrogating | 'Why did you . . .?' | Defensiveness |
| Using ridicule or sarcasm | 'Someone like you is not expected to know . . .' | Hurt |

### 1.2 Self-Checklist – How good are you at listening effectively?

1. Consider the factors in the self-checklist below that have the potential to interfere with effective listening. How often do they interfere with your own ability to listen effectively?

| | Often | Sometimes | Never |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of attention to the message | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The status or role of the speaker | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The rate at which the message is spoken | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The speaker's accent | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Lack of interest in the subject | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| A poorly organised message | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The speaker's resemblance to someone you dislike | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The importance of the subject | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The speaker holding opinions and beliefs that differ from your own | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The gestures made by the speaker | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| A tendency to let your mind wander | ■ | ■ | ■ |

2. Recall a particular instance when each factor you marked with 'often' or 'sometimes' interfered with your ability to listen effectively. In hindsight, how could the barrier have been overcome? Give details.

## PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Working in small groups, discuss and make notes on:
   a. a written or spoken comment made to each of you that was inappropriate or insensitive to your feelings
   b. the communication barriers caused by each of these statements
   c. how the comment could be reworded for more effective communication.
2. Working individually, for each of the following elements of the communication model – sender, message, receiver, feedback, channel and context – identify a possible barrier to communication. Compare your answers with the person next to you.
3. 'It is possible for one person to control the whole communication process.' Discuss.

# Communication in a multicultural society

Never before has it been easier for people to move between countries. As a result, Australia has an expanding tourist industry, an increasing number of foreign students paying for education in this country, and greater opportunities to trade with other countries. Australia is a **multicultural society** with a population drawn from diverse cultural, racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

# Intercultural communication

**Intercultural communication** is communication between people who live in the same country but come from different cultural backgrounds. Over time, a culture develops distinctive national patterns of communication and social behaviour. These patterns are the customs and conventions regarded as the characteristics of a particular culture. They affect the way people communicate and act as individuals or in groups.

What information we take in, which part of the message we choose to remember and which response we give are all a result of our perception. Effective communicators acknowledge differences in perception. They also use communication strategies that avoid the communication barriers caused by the ineffective intercultural communication techniques shown in Table 1.9.

**Table 1.9 Strategies for effective intercultural communication**

| Discriminatory communication techniques | Purpose | Inclusive communication techniques |
|---|---|---|
| Derogatory labelling another culture or group. | To put down people from another culture or group. | Refuse to use derogatory labels. |
| Stereotyping people belonging to a particular group | To isolate or exaggerate certain factors and apply them to all people in that group | Recognise and avoid the use of language that stereotypes groups of people. |
| Invisibility | To subsume one group into another by label, name or term. | Use inclusive language and language preferred by the minority group. |
| Imposed labellilng | To reinforce the majority group's view because the minority lacks the power to define themselves. | Avoid the use of one single generic name for a number of different groups of people. |
| Extra visibility | To emphasise a difference such as sex, race or ethnic background. | Avoid emphasis on differences such as sex, race and ethnic background. |

Effective intercultural communicators acknowledge differences in perception.

## Effect of perception

Although people may live in the same country, their various cultural backgrounds and rules may mean that they see the same event differently and place different interpretations on it. We are limited by the 'baggage' of background experience that we carry. Our perception is determined by a background consisting of:

- values
- attitudes
- life concerns
- cultural conditioning
- skills
- other factors.

If we are aware of our background and its impact on our perception, then we can choose more appropriate messages or responses. Consequently, we can perform better in the workplace and become more willing to learn new ways to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

### Intentional and unintentional messages

Both culture and individual experience shape each person's perception, style of communication and interpretation of others' **intentional messages** and **unintentional messages**. Some of the many aspects of nonverbal communication influenced by culture are tone of voice, inflection, rate of speech, facial expressions, touching and body movement. Intentional and unintentional messages may lead to misunderstanding because of a message that is poorly constructed by the sender, or due to the receiver's perception and cultural background.

## Rules and patterns of behaviour

*Cultural sensitivity leads to better communication.*

The common rules and patterns of behaviour of one country may be very different from those of another. **Cultural sensitivity** leads to effective **cross-cultural communication**. Whereas intercultural communication takes place between people living in the same country but from different cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural communication occurs between people living in different countries.

Awareness of the different customs, rules and social behaviour in different cultures reduces the barriers caused by prejudice, stereotypes and **discrimination.** In Australia, people whose culture involves rigid rules on who speaks first or last in conversations, or the belief that to look down as someone speaks to you is courteous, would seem discourteous. This impression might lead to their exclusion from the conversation without them knowing why. What we assume and how we expect others to behave is affected by our cultural filter.

*Our cultural filter influences our perceptions according to our cultural background.*

Different cultural groups have different rules for:

- humour and irony
- courtesies in speech, such as when to say 'please', 'thank you' or 'excuse me'
- the meaning of 'yes' and 'no'
- rules of politeness – who can speak to whom, and who can begin a conversation
- dress
- deference to others
- drinking alcohol
- use of time.

## Discriminatory language

The language people employ as they communicate can be used as a vehicle of discrimination or a vehicle of **inclusion** (see Table 1.9).

The need to offer Australia's diverse population equality of access to opportunities in education, jobs and promotion makes communication strategies such as Plain English and inclusive communication an essential part of workplace communication. These two strategies are presented more fully in Chapter 16, Writing Memos and Short Reports.

### PRACTICE EXERCISES

Communication and perception in a multicultural society

1. Define the following terms:
   a. multicultural society
   b. intercultural communication
   c. cross-cultural communication.
2. Explain how perception effects intercultural and cross-cultural communication.
3. Quick quiz: check your cross-cultural awareness in the self-checklist below.

### 1.3 Self-Checklist – Cultural beliefs – naming systems and general etiquette

|  | True | False |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Cultural beliefs – naming systems and general etiquette | | |
| a. The naming system in China places the surname first | ☐ | ☐ |
| b. The Arabic naming system places the surname last | ☐ | ☐ |
| c. In China, descent is traced through the female line | ☐ | ☐ |
| d. In Vietnam, the naming system places the surname first | ☐ | ☐ |
| e. Direct eye contact is a sign of discourtesy in Australia | ☐ | ☐ |
| f. People in Asian cultures find it easy to say 'No' | ☐ | ☐ |
| g. Muslim people do not use the left hand to pass things to each other | ☐ | ☐ |
| h. Sharing the cost of an outing is not accepted custom in Thailand | ☐ | ☐ |
| i. In Asia, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect | ☐ | ☐ |
| j. To touch South-East Asians on the head is an act of extreme discourtesy | ☐ | ☐ |

2. In an article in the *Harvard Business Review* entitled 'Barriers and gateways to communication', Rogers and Roethlisberger (1952) suggested: 'The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our tendency to judge, to evaluate and to approve (or disapprove) the statements of the other person or the other group.'

   a. In small groups, discuss this idea, drawing from your own experiences.

   b. Report your findings to the large group.

3. A new work colleague has been transferred from the Shanghai office of your organisation. He speaks English reasonably well, but his behaviour when communicating with others in the team is clearly different to everyone else's behaviour.
   Suggest ways to:

   a. gain a better understanding of the new person's cultural rules and patterns when it comes to communication

   b. let the new person know about the accepted rules and patterns for communication in Australia.

4. Consider the effect your own background has on your perceptions of:

   a. time

   b. dress

   c. touching others during conversation

   c. male and female skills and abilities.

   Compare your perceptions with the perceptions that might be held by people from cultures different to your own. Set your answer out in a table format.

# Ethics in communication

We all have ideas about what is right and wrong, and we derive them from a variety of values and conventions throughout our lifetime. Personal **ethics**, professional ethics and corporate ethics are sets of moral principles by which we judge human actions and proposals as good or bad or right or wrong.

## The importance of ethics

Ethical behaviour requires us to act with equity, fairness, impartiality and respect for the rights of others. Professional ethics are the conventions for the correct professional conduct or practice. In the workplace we are expected to behave according to the established rules and standards. Ethical behaviour leads to professional behaviour. People working for an ethical company behave with integrity.

Most organisations have a code of ethics, which is a statement of its primary values and the ethical rules it expects its employees to follow. In a company without a code of ethics, people may be uncertain about how to deal with an issue or problem.

A code of ethics benefits the company and the individual by:

■ reinforcing the organisation's standard of conduct
■ reminding staff that management wants ethical issues considered in all decisions made
■ identifying practices that are and are not permissible
■ allowing leaders, managers and others to share experiences and ideas about what is and is not an ethical position
■ developing a shared culture based on ethics and accountability.

### What makes an ethical business communicator?

Business communication is an integral part of any company's activities. Professional business communicators behave ethically when they:

■ follow the organisation's policies, procedures and guidelines
■ communicate factual information objectively
■ avoid using distortions of fact and misleading information
■ respect the dignity of each person, irrespective of ethnic background, religion or gender
■ follow their company's code of ethics.

---

### 1.4 Self-Checklist – The ethical dilemma

When you feel unsure about the ethics of the messages you communicate or the actions you take, use the 10-point self-checklist below.

| Self-checklist: The ethical dilemma | Yes | No | Unsure |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  Is what I'm doing legal? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2.  Is my message objective and based on fact? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3.  Do I know who will gain from my message or actions? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

4. Do I know who will lose from my message or actions? ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Would I be happy for my co-workers, family and friends to know about my message or actions? ☐ ☐ ☐

6. Will I ask for the opinions of people who are knowledgeable about the subject? ☐ ☐ ☐

7. Would I willingly seek an objective second opinion? ☐ ☐ ☐

8. Does the language I use accurately describe the real issue or cloud it? ☐ ☐ ☐

9. Am I willing to acknowledge the position and interests of those opposing my message or actions? ☐ ☐ ☐

10. Would I feel confident if I had to defend my message or actions at a meeting? ☐ ☐ ☐

## PRACTICE EXERCISES

1.   a. Define the terms 'ethics' and 'ethical behaviour'.

b. Why should business communicators behave ethically?

c. How can a company's code of ethics help staff in their workplace?

2.   Work in groups of three for this exercise.

a. Brainstorm three potentially unethical situations that involve workplace communication.

b. Swap ethical dilemmas with another group of three.

c. Discuss how you would deal with each situation you were given by the other group.

d. Apply the 10-point ethical dilemma self-checklist if necessary.

e. Present a summary of the actions you would take to the whole group.

## Summary

**Differentiate the different forms of communication.** Communication is any behaviour, verbal or nonverbal, that is perceived by another. Nonverbal communication consists of all that part of a message that is not encoded in words – for example, tone of voice, facial expression or gestures and movement.

Successful communication sends or transmits ideas, values and attitudes to others through three different forms of communication: verbal, nonverbal and graphic. Meaning is derived from the message as the receiver perceives, structures and interprets it.

**Identify each element of the communication process.** The seven elements of the communication process are the sender, message, receiver, feedback, channel, context and noise (or interference).

**Highlight the role of nonverbal behaviour in the communication process.** Verbal and nonverbal messages communicate as a total message. They may be in agreement with each other, or contradictory. If the verbal and nonverbal messages are inconsistent, the nonverbal part of the message has the stronger effect and is the more credible part of the total message. Nonverbal behaviour may be specific (e.g. pointing in the direction of the bus stop) or general (e.g. waving in the general direction of the next suburb). Body movement aims to communicate more than can be said with words alone. It is expressive (e.g. enthusiastic or weary) so it also conveys emotions or attitudes.

Nonverbal communication is either personal (unique to the individual), common to the group or culture, universal or random. The part of the nonverbal communication that is common to a range of people is

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a clue to what they consider to be acceptable behaviour. Personal nonverbal communication characteristics such as gestures and mannerisms create an impression of the sender's personality.

**Identify seven areas of nonverbal behaviour.** The seven aspects of nonverbal behaviour are body movement (kinesic behaviour), physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal qualities (paralanguage), use of space or proximity, artefacts and the environment. A combination of these aspects makes up the nonverbal part of the total message.

Good nonverbal communicators identify the seven main areas of nonverbal communication and learn to blend them with the verbal and contextual information to convey or grasp the total message. Effective listening and nonverbal communication provides feedback and leads to positive interactions and mutual understanding

**Use nonverbal communication appropriately.** Nonverbal communication is sent by at least one person and received by at least one other person. The accuracy with which it is interpreted and its value in clarifying the message depends on the sender's ability to communicate accurately and on the receiver's ability to interpret the message accurately. The appropriate use of nonverbal communication and the ability to interpret nonverbal communication accurately are two of the skills demonstrated by good communicators. These skills are used as each of us listens, speaks, questions and communicates with others. The seven main aspects of nonverbal communication have been presented in isolation in this chapter. In practice, they occur in clusters and must be read and used together.

**Confirm with the sender of the message the meaning of their nonverbal communication.** When you observe other people's nonverbal communication, it is more useful to confirm with them the meaning of their nonverbal communication than to make your own interpretations or assumptions. Confirming the message reduces the chance of misinterpreting the nonverbal message.

**Identify the purpose of four different listening responses and provide feedback through reflective listening.** The four listening responses are attending, encouraging, reflecting and active listening. Attending listening focuses on the speaker. Encouraging listening invites the speaker to continue. Reflecting listening mirrors the content and feelings of the message.

Good listeners provide feedback by paraphrasing, using reflective statements, clarifying and summarising. The result is a fuller understanding and clear

communication. Their listening is active and shows empathy with the speaker.

**Practise appropriate questioning responses.** Open questions encourage the other person to share their thoughts and feelings. Encouraging questions are open questions about what, when, where, how and who. Clarifying questions let you, as the listener, check your understanding of the message with the other person. Use closed questions only when a 'yes' or 'no' answer is required. Avoid 'why' questions because they may make other people feel defensive and justify their position rather than seek new ideas or further understanding.

**Practise various listening skills.** The practice exercises in this chapter enable you to practise attending listening skills that focus your attention on the speaker, and encouraging listening skills that allow speakers to say more and to disclose their feelings and/or thoughts. You will also be able to practise reflective listening, a response that shows the other person you understand the content and feelings conveyed by the message. Active listening lets you restate the content and feeling, and also lets the other person know that you understand the situation from their point of view – that is, you demonstrate empathy.

**Identify barriers to communication.** Barriers to communication interrupt its flow and lead to confusion and misunderstandings. They can be caused by the sender, the receiver, lack of feedback, a poor choice of channel, the wrong context or any other factor that interferes with the message.

Barriers to listening can be caused by the sender, the receiver, the message, the channel, the environment or the way in which feedback is given. Barriers from the listener may be due to boredom, a difference in values, lack of interest or ineffective verbal responses.

**Discuss the importance of good communication in the workplace.** Good communication establishes a connection and understanding between two or more people. It enhances individuals, work performance and relationships with others. It allows individuals to interact to satisfy their own needs and to develop their personal, social and work relationships. It also enables leaders and managers to control work procedures, motivate others and balance the needs and goals of individuals with those of the organisation. Successful people and organisations are usually those who communicate well, because they convey clearly to other people what they are doing and what they require. Successful communicators apply their interpersonal skills to listening, speaking, questioning, assertiveness, verbal and nonverbal communication.

**Identify the communication aspects of a multicultural society.** In a multicultural society, people in the same country have different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication occurs between these people. Culture conditions our perception of and reactions to signals and messages. It also determines the meanings we give to communication, events and situations. Aim to achieve successful intercultural communication by applying empathy and an open manner.

**Apply ethics to your workplace communication.** Ethical communicators give honest and accurate information. They let others know about matters or information that affect them and maintain confidentiality of private information. They avoid spreading malicious gossip, putting others down or taking the credit for someone else's work. They communicate openly to achieve mutual understanding.

# Review questions

1.  Describe the three forms of communication.
2.  a.   How do the sender and the receiver interact?
    b.   Where does communication begin?
    c.   What is the purpose of a message?
    d.   Define the term 'perception'.
    e.   How does perception effect the message that is received?
    f.   What role does feedback play in effective communication?
    g.   Define the term 'communication channel'.
    h.   Explain the importance of context in the communication process.
    i.   What effect does noise or interference have on the intended message?
3.  a.   Recall and describe a situation in which you believe communication was successful.
    b.   Give three reasons why the communication worked well.
4.  a.   Define the term 'nonverbal communication'.
    b.   Why is it often said that 'actions speak louder than words'?
    c.   Define the four types of nonverbal communication and give your own example of each.
    d.   Define the five categories of body movement and give your own example of each.
    e.   List and briefly describe the classifications of nonverbal communication.
5.  a.   Explain the difference between hearing and listening.
    b.   List the four listening skills and what they are used for.
    c.   List several attending listening behaviours that demonstrate to the speaker that you are focused on what they are saying.
    d.   Describe how you can invite the speaker to continue communicating with you.
    e.   Collectively, what is the term used to describe paraphrasing, reflective statements, clarifying and summarising? What purpose do these feedback techniques serve?
    f.   What kind of feedback does a good listener give the speaker?
6.  What type of listening responses are the following?
    a.   'I see . . .'
    b.   'Would you like to talk about it?'
    c.   'You seem to be feeling discouraged . . .'
    d.   'Could you give an example?'
7.  a   Define the term 'communication barrier'.
    b.   List five factors that may cause communication barriers.
    c.   Explain how you can avoid the communication barrier caused by differences in perception.
    d.   List ten ineffective responses by the listener. Why are they ineffective?
8.  a.   Give details of four techniques you could use to ensure inclusive communication in a multicultural society.
    b.   What influences our perception?

c. Explain how cultural rules and patterns of behaviour influence communication.
d. List two factors that are essential in effective communication in a multicultural workplace.
e. What would you find in an organisation's code of ethics?
f. Describe the behaviour of an ethical communicator.

# Learning activities

1. Sabrina is the communications coordinator for a large plumbing supplies company that has eight regional branches across the state, plus a head office based on the North Coast. At a recent manager's meeting, it was decided to introduce regular contact with all customers listed on the client database who had bought something in the past 18 months.
   The regular contact would serve the purpose of keeping customers informed of new products and services, innovative solutions to renovation problems, and technological developments in the industry. The managers initially suggested that the contact take the form of a quarterly email, a printed newsletter or a telephone call. Sabrina was asked to prepare her own ideas and recommendations for the next managers' meeting.
   a. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of the three suggested channels of communication.
   b. What channel or channels do you think Sabrina should recommend at the next meeting? Give reasons for your choice.
   c. Explain how the perception of each customer who receives the communication may influence its effectiveness. Provide examples.
2. a. Describe how you personally use written, spoken and nonverbal communication to effectively communicate in your workplace, college or home.
   b. List ten examples of graphic communication that you encounter every day at work, college or home.
   c. Explain the role nonverbal communication has in a conversation between two people.
3. Ben and Aaron are both project officers for a charity organisation. They are meeting in Aaron's office to discuss a new project they will be working on together. Their task is to prepare a plan for the project to present to their colleagues at a staff meeting being held in the morning. During their discussion, the following events take place:
   ■ Aaron answers and deals with a telephone call
   ■ a colleague asks for a quick word with Ben to clarify an important issue – they hold a brief conversation just outside Aaron's office, then Ben returns to his discussion with Aaron
   ■ after a few minutes Aaron rises to leave for another meeting
   ■ at the end of their discussion they have prepared a plan outline in two sections – Ben will present the first section at the meeting, and Aaron the second section.
   At the meeting in the morning, they discover they have both prepared the first section to present.
   a. Identify the communication barriers that occurred and explain briefly how they contributed to the misunderstanding between Ben and Aaron.
   b. List two sources of noise during the initial meeting.
   c. How could Ben and Aaron have dealt with the noise or interference during their initial discussion?
4. Use Self-checklist 1.5 to help evaluate your answers.

### 1.5 Self-Checklist – Communication barriers

To identify noise or communication barriers, have I:

|  | Yes | No | Unsure |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| ■ considered the responsibility of the sender? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ evaluated the appropriate channel? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ examined the message? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ considered the role of the receiver? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ identified the place of feedback? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ considered the impact of the context? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

1. Role play procedure
   This activity allows you to practice your nonverbal communication skills. Look at the nonverbal behaviour in Self-checklist 1.6 before you start the role plays to double check the behaviour you should be demonstrating.
   a. Divide into groups of three.
   b. Nominate one person to be Jim (the team leader), one person to be John (the team member) and one person to be the observer.
   c. Jim is to ask John to come to the meeting room to see him at 9 in the morning. John, curious, asks 'What will we be discussing?'
   d. Jim is to communicate his message in three different ways:
      – assertively
      – aggressively
      – passively.
   e. The observer uses the nonverbal behaviour self-checklist to give the person playing Jim feedback on how successfully they used assertive, aggressive and passive nonverbal communication in their role.
   f. All three people in the group should take a turn playing the roles of Jim, John and the observer.
   g. At the end of the activity, discuss:
      – how easy or difficult you found it to use nonverbal communication to show assertive, aggressive and passive behaviour
      – other possible ways to show assertion, aggression and passivity nonverbally
      – the effect each type of behaviour had on the person playing John.

## 1.6 Self-Checklist – Nonverbal behaviour

| Nonverbal behaviour | Assertive | Yes/No | Aggressive | Yes/No | Passive | Yes/No |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Posture | Upright and relaxed | ☐ | Leaning forward | ☐ | Shrinking away | ☐ |
| Head | Firm and comfortable | ☐ | Chin pushed forward | ☐ | Head down | ☐ |
| Eyes | Direct and regular eye contact | ☐ | Staring, often piercing or glaring | ☐ | Glancing down with ittle eye contact | ☐ |
| Face | Appropriate, courteous and friendly expression | ☐ | Rigid and set | ☐ | Hesitant, smiling even when upset | ☐ |
| Voice | Confident, with appropriate speed, pitch and volume | ☐ | Loud, fast and dramatic | ☐ | Soft, trailing off at ends of words or sentences | ☐ |
| Arms/hands | Relaxed, moving easily and reflecting the verbal message | ☐ | Controlled, sharp gestures with fingers pointing and jerky movements | ☐ | Still or slow, not reflecting the verbal message | ☐ |
| Movement/ walking | Confident and measured pace appropriate to the context | ☐ | Overly confident heavy or fast, deliberate | ☐ | Slow and without confidence, or fast and uncertain | ☐ |

2.  Reflecting listening
    Break into groups of four for this activity.
    The roles are: – one speaker
                      – one listener
                      – two observers.
    The speaker makes the following statements, one at a time.
    a.  'He's out to get me, I swear. He always gives me the worst jobs!'
    b.  'We have had a number of complaints from customers that the advice they are given on product use is incorrect. If you're not sure about a product or the way to use it, please ask a senior staff member rather than risk misleading the customer.'
    c.  'I'm not doing it. It's not my job.'
    d.  'We all feel that you expect too much from us. When we get more than 50 orders day there is no way they can be filled before 5pm, and we don't get paid for overtime.'

    The listener responds to each statement by:
    a.  paraphrasing
    b.  clarifying
    c.  reflecting feeling
    d.  reflecting meaning.

The observer's tasks are to:
   –note when each listening skill has been used
   –complete the effective listening self-checklist below according to how well the skill and the appropriate nonverbal behaviour (body language, facial expression and eye contact) was used
   –compare results with each other
   –provide the listener with feedback.
Swap roles for each new statement.

### 1.7 Self-Checklist – Effective listening

|  | Successfully | Satisfactorily | Poorly |
|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Paraprased | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Clarified | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Reflected feelings | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Reflected meanings | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Used attentive body language | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Used facial expressions that encouraged the speaker | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| ■ Maintained eye contact | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

1.   a.   Conduct some Internet research on one of the following topics:
         – cross-cultural communication barriers
         – nonverbal communication
         – ethics in communication
         – listening skills.
Look for information that is not already covered in this chapter.
     b.   Make notes about what you discover. Focus on one particular area rather than the whole topic if you find something you are especially interested in.
     c.   Write a brief paragraph about how the information you uncovered can be applied in a work situation.
     d.   Share your research findings with another participant or with the whole group.

Answers to Self-check 1.3 Cultural beliefs-naming systems and general etiquette, question 1, on page 25: aT, bF, cT, dT, eF, fT, gT, hT, iF, jT.

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