

Nonverbal Communication Variables*

PROXEMICS

- Proxemics refers to how perceptions of personal space and the use of physical space vary culturally.
- Researchers have identified four zones *of personal space*:
 - Intimate—touching to 18”
 - Personal—18” to 4-6 feet
 - Business or social—4-6 feet to 10-12 feet
 - Public—beyond 12 feet
- Latin Americans and Arabs tend to perceive personal space as closer than the Germans or Japanese. Americans are in the middle of the range defined by those two extremes.

KINESICS

- Kinesics refers to the use of facial expressions, gesture, and posture.
- For example, when and how to *smile* varies from culture to culture:
 - To many other cultures, the American smile often appears frozen and insincere.
 - In Japan, men do not smile in public, and women are not supposed to show their teeth. Japanese will often cover their mouths when laughing.
 - Germans smile less often than Americans. The Germans believe that life is doing one’s duty, and duty does not lend itself to smiling.
 - Koreans consider it inappropriate for adults to smile in public. The smile is often a sign of embarrassment.
- Similarly, individuals express *anger* differently:
 - In the West, a frown can indicate anger, doubt, questioning of authority, suspicion, or disagreement.
 - The Japanese avert their gaze so as to hide anger; to show anger openly even through frowning is considered inappropriate in business contexts.
 - Another way of showing anger is through shouting and gesturing. Germans, Canadians, Arabs, and Latins often raise their voice in anger. Japanese seldom raise their voices.

*Based on Neal Hartman, “Notes for Nonverbal Communication in Intercultural Situations,” Sloan School of Management, MIT.

- **Gestures** are used in the following ways:
 - In most cultures, **moving one's head** up and down is seen as agreeing. Shaking one's head from side to side is seen as responding negatively although Bulgarians do the opposite. In southern India, moving one's head from side to side is not negation.
 - In most cultures, men tend to use larger **arm gestures** than women, but the Japanese use far fewer arm movements than both men and women from the U.S. Arab men use their arms even more than men from the U.S.
 - **Posture**, including the way one sits, stands, and walks, sends messages. In Western culture to stand tall conveys confidence. While in most business situations, people sit on chairs, in many Arab cultures men conduct business while sitting on the floor, and the Japanese sit with their legs tucked under themselves.
 - **Handshakes**
 - U.S. Firm
 - France Softer
 - Germany Firm handshake for men, traditionally accompanied by a slight bow
 - Japan Handshake with arm firmly extended, accompanied by a bow
 - Middle East Handshake and free hand placed on forearm of other person for men; men and women are often prohibited from touching

NOTE: The study of variances in rules for touching is known as **HAPTICS**.

CHRONEMICS

- Chronemics refers to the perception and use of time. Three major characterizations are: linear, flexible, and cyclical as described in the chart on the following page.*
- How late one can be before one is *late* varies from culture to culture (as well as from situation to situation): Latin American, Southern European, African, and Arab cultures tend to have a less precise sense of time than North American and Northern European cultures

*From: Sana Reynolds and Deborah Valentine, *Guide to Intercultural Communication*, Prentice Hall, 2003.

Characteristic	Linear Time	Flexible Time	Cyclical Time
<i>Perception of Time</i>	Views time as an entity to be saved, spent, or wasted	Views time as fluid and flexible	Views time as circular and repetitive
<i>Implications for completion of tasks</i>	Completes tasks sequentially	Works on multiple tasks simultaneously	Completes tasks over a long period of contemplation and reflection
<i>Focus</i>	Focuses on the task to be completed within a certain time frame	Focuses and nurtures the relationships represented by the tasks	Focuses on the long term in both tasks and relationships
<i>Implications for relationship between work and family</i>	Separates work from family and social life	Views work, family, and social life as one	Sees connections and interrelatedness between people and events
<i>Locus of control</i>	Seeks to control time by maintaining a rigid appointment schedule	Reacts as the day's events evolve	Believes that life controls time
<i>Orientation</i>	Focuses on the future	Focuses on the present	Focuses on the past

PARALANGUAGE

- Paralanguage lies between verbal and nonverbal communication; it involves sound but not words.
- ***Vocal qualifiers*** refers to volume, pitch, and overall intonation.
- ***Vocalization*** refers to nonwords (“um” or “er”) and fillers (in English, “O.K.” or “like”; in Japanese (“hai,” which is literally translated with “yes”).
- The ***use of silence*** also varies culturally with East Asian cultures tending to value silence more than western cultures.

OCULESICS

- Oculesics is the fancy term for eye behavior. In most cultures, who may look who in the eye is determined by hierarchy.
- Examples:
 - In the U.S., it is customary to look at the speaker’s mouth when listening, but to make intermittent eye contact with the eyes of the listener when speaking. This does not vary between people in superior and subordinate positions because eye contact communicates openness, trustworthiness, and integrity.
 - In China, the superior rivets the subordinate with sustained, unbroken eye contact.
 - Arabs use eye contact to detect real intentions. To see the eye more clearly, Arabs will often move closer.
 - In Japan, to look someone in the eye is to invade their space; it is considered rude.

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