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Improving instructional design consultation through the use of nonverbal communication

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Improving instructional design consultation through the use of nonverbal communication

Abstract

Communication skills play a critical role in the instructional design (ID) process. As an instructional materials developer, the instructional designer must rely heavily on verbal communication skills; as an instructional consultant, the instructional designer must rely heavily on nonverbal communication skills. The importance of nonverbal communication skills is underscored in the literature, which suggests that approximately 90% of the message in a two-way communication is based on nonverbal elements of the message (Englesman, 1974; Garrison, 1984). Thus, an effective instructional designer must develop the ability to interpret and send nonverbal messages properly.

IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN CONSULTATION THROUGH
THE USE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication skills play a critical role in the instructional design (ID) process. As an instructional materials developer, the instructional designer must rely heavily on verbal communication skills; as an instructional consultant, the instructional designer must rely heavily on nonverbal communication skills. The importance of nonverbal communication skills is underscored in the literature, which suggests that approximately 90% of the message in a two-way communication is based on nonverbal elements of the message (Englesman, 1974; Garrison, 1984). Thus, an effective instructional designer must develop the ability to interpret and send nonverbal messages properly.

Applications of behavioral science research in the communication process help explain how and why people respond as they do in given situations. Many trial lawyers, for example, employ behavioral science methods in the 'voir dire' process resulting in a technique referred to as 'scientific jury selection' (Starr, 1981). The assertion of this paper is that this same behavioral science knowledge can be used by instructional design consultants to increase their awareness and understanding of nonverbal cues, thereby improving their communication skills, and ultimately producing more successful consultation experiences.

In the next section, a description of the instructional design consultation process emphasizes the importance of nonverbal communication to the entire consultation process. Next, the review

of nonverbal communication literature examines four areas of nonverbal communication particularly relevant to the ID consultant. In the discussion which follows, specific recommendations are made for improving the ID consultation process using an increased awareness of nonverbal communication principles. Using these specific recommendations, the summary and conclusion highlights implications for the preparation of ID consultants and for the practice of ID consultation.

CHAPTER 2

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN CONSULTATION

Instructional design (ID) consultation is consistent with the general principles and processes of consultation. The ID consultant (help giver) facilitates the transfer of knowledge from a consultee (help seeker) to learners (recipients of the consulting effort). According to Gallessich (1982), the consultation process consists of five major phases--entry, diagnosis, intervention, evaluation, and termination. Each phase requires specific functions of the ID consultant.

During the entry phase, a match is determined between the needs of the consultee and competencies of the ID consultant. After a tentative contract, in which problems and solutions are defined in general terms, is negotiated, the ID consultant physically enters the organization and begins to meet with the consultee. Once a consultant gains the trust of the consultee and other organization members, psychological entry occurs, ideally resulting in open communication with staff.

At the entry phase the ID consultant examines the formal and informal communication structure of the organization to determine how the interaction of organization members may affect the consultation process. The consultant investigates how members of the organization relate to each other, who the power brokers and opinion leaders are, and also examines the relationship between the consultee and the client (i.e., the learner who will eventually benefit from the consultation).

The relationship between the ID consultant and the consultee is determined in part by the nature of the consultation situation. Factors that influence the relationship are the consultee's coping abilities and difficulties, and the consultant's need to establish expertness and credibility in that role. Relationship building between the ID and the consultee takes place throughout the consultation process, but is particularly important during the entry phase.

During the diagnosis phase, the problem or needs of the organization are examined by gathering and interpreting sufficient data to formulate a working hypothesis. Once a diagnosis is made and the context of the problem examined to sufficiently understand the forces and/or systems affecting it, the consultant and consultee weigh alternative goals and select one or more, based on urgency and the feasibility of corrective action.

The ID consultant is responsible, independently or collaboratively with the consultee, for data gathering and assessment during the diagnosis phase. The nature of the problem, as expressed by the consultee, will determine whether this is an individual or joint effort. The ID consultant then focuses attention on a client problem, a consultee problem, or an administrative/program problem. Goal setting is also an independent or collaborative effort, as determined by the nature of the problem and the skill level of the consultee.

The intervention phase involves the exploration of intervention alternatives (i.e., possible remedies) and selection of one or more

strategies that are the best methods for goal achievement. Implementation of the chosen strategies follows and is the responsibility of the ID consultant and/or the consultee.

The nature of the consultation problem and the level of consultee skill in dealing with the problem determines the extent of ID consultant involvement in the intervention phase. The consultant prescribes, develops, and administers intervention strategies whenever it is inappropriate for the consultee to do so (i.e., consultee-centered problem or when the consultee lacks the skill to effectively implement corrective action).

During the evaluation phase the intervention outcomes are measured to determine the degree to which goals were met, to identify the factors that contributed to positive and negative outcomes, and to calculate the cost/benefit ratio of the intervention. Because ID consultants need feedback for professional development, an evaluation of overall effectiveness of their particular performance should also be conducted.

The evaluation phase is a two-fold process. The ID consultant is involved, either independently or collaboratively, in both the program evaluation and the evaluation of the consultant performance. Program evaluation is based on goals that were set during the diagnosis phase. The ID consultant evaluation is determined, in part, by the results of the program evaluation, and also an examination of consultant/consultee interaction during the entire consultation process.

Although termination may occur at any point in the consultation process, it is ideally the final phase, when all conditions of the contract have been met. During this period of disengagement, the ID consultant's involvement is gradually reduced and finally ends. The ID consultant functions during the termination phase by assuming partial responsibility for the appropriate timing of the termination. Termination of the consultation is facilitated by gradually transferring responsibilities from the ID consultant to the consultee and reducing the frequency and duration of consultant involvement in the organization. Scheduling of culminating activities and final meetings is handled by the ID consultant.

Throughout the ID consultation process the consultant is in regular communication with the consultee, thus making interpersonal communication a skill essential to effective consultation. Given the dominant role nonverbal communication plays in the coding and decoding of messages, it stands to reason that the ID consultant should be versed in nonverbal as well as verbal communication. The next section of this paper highlights four areas of nonverbal communication that are particularly relevant to the ID consultant.

CHAPTER 3

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioral science research recognizes four major areas of nonverbal communication--kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, and paralinguistics. Each area will be addressed independently in the literature review which follows. The relevance of the areas to ID consulting will then be discussed. It should be noted, however, that nonverbal communication should not be interpreted singularly and out of context, but rather holistically and within the broader context of the total message.

Kinesics

Kinesics is the study of body motion as it is related to speech. More commonly called body language, it includes such physical reactions as eye contact, pupillary reflex, facial expression, gestures, posture, and bodily orientation during the verbal communication process. Each of these reactions are described below.

Both the frequency and pattern of eye contact are important (Sannito, 1983). Generally, the more frequent the eye contact, the more positive the interaction. However, excessive eye contact or staring is usually interpreted as a sign of hostility or rudeness. Where eye contact is direct, there is an indication of honesty and good rapport between the speaker and listener. Conversely, gaze aversion (i.e., looking down and to the side) is interpreted to mean doubt, discomfort, anxiety, uneasiness, or guilt in confrontation situations. The gaze averter may have something to hide or an attitude the person does not want others to know.

Hess conducted early studies of pupillary reflex and concluded that the pupils dilate when people look at something they like, contract when they see something distasteful, and remain unchanged when they are indifferent (cited in Sannito, 1983). The change in the pupil size of the eye is an unmistakable measure of interest and attitude (Peskin, 1980).

Facial expressions also communicate attitude. Rosenfeld found that people seeking approval seem to smile frequently; and Mehrabian and Williams observed that people trying to persuade others display increased facial activity (cited in Baird, 1979). In other research, Ekman divided the face into three regions and attempted to determine which regions best express certain emotions. He found that happiness is expressed most by the eyes and lower face; sadness is revealed primarily in the eyes; surprise is indicated by the eyes and lower face; anger is revealed in the lower face, brows, and forehead; and fear is shown most clearly in the eyes (cited in Baird, 1979).

After a while, certain patterns of lines develop in the face from repetitious expressions (Sannito, 1983). Specific emotions are indelibly imprinted there. For example, parallel bars or worry lines down the center of a person's forehead indicate the individual has a high need to be correct. This individual spends time worrying about how to prevent mistakes and dislikes being wrong. Fear of failure causes the person to agonize over every decision.

Gestures are learned behaviors which vary from culture to culture and are important elements of kinesic communication. There are two basic types of gestures: extrovertive and introvertive.

Extrovertive are usually large, expansive, assertive, and outgoing. Introvertive are limited in area, close to the body, and self-protecting (Garrison, 1984). Gestures are used to supplement verbal communication, but if used excessively or randomly, may distract listeners from the verbal content of the message. Positive attitudes toward other persons are indicated by frequent gesticulation, while dislike or disinterest usually produces few gestures (Baird, 1979).

The types of gestures being displayed also enter into the nonverbal communication process. Random fidgeting (e.g., drumming the fingers, or twiddling the thumbs) conveys negative attitudes. Aggressive gestures (e.g., clenched fists and menacing postures) convey hostile feelings; while positive attitudes are expressed through frequent use of relaxed, open-palmed gestures (Baird, 1979). Gestures are somewhat instinctive and generally consistent with the message being communicated.

A specific gesture used rather infrequently in American society is touch. Yet, there are indications that touch may be an extremely important element of communication. Baird (1979) reported that studies conducted involving touch in the communication process have revealed reactions rating touch as trustful, sensitive, natural, mature, serious, and warm. Appropriate use of this element of nonverbal action could do much to improve communication among people.

'Steepling,' an important hand gesture made by unobtrusively placing the thumb and forefingers together in the shape of a steeple or castle, is a sign of smug, superior, regal, authoritative, or pontifical attitude (Sannito, 1983). The greater the authority, the

more likely the person is to steeple while offering advice. The more confident a person is, the higher one steeples--lap level, chest level, chin level (Sannito, 1983).

The 'crossed arm' posture appears to be used throughout the world to communicate defensiveness (Sannito, 1983). Often the arm-crosser feels threatened and is preparing to resist what is being said. With this position, in particular, it is important to make certain it is not a resting position for tired arms.

General bodily movements also have message value. Baird (1979) reported that in studies of bodily posture, Mehrabian found a close relationship between posture and liking for the other person. When confronting a person they dislike intensely, women tend to be very indirect and look away from that person as much as possible. If they like the other person, they fluctuate between looking squarely at the person and looking away. When dealing with a total stranger, they commonly look directly at that person. Similar, although less consistent results were obtained for men.

Bodily orientation provides signs of a person's feelings (Behavioral Insights, 1983). Positive attitudes are indicated by sitting directly facing another person, moving toward another person, and nodding the head. Positive feelings are typically noted by leaning toward someone; negative feelings are typically denoted by leaning away. Behaviors that indicate dislike include gazing at the ceiling, cleaning one's fingernails, or playing with one's hair.

To understand fully the nonverbal message a person receives, the congruence of gestures must be understood. Body language must be

examined in the context of a cluster of gestures, not in the context of isolated gestures. Never base a conclusion on a single sign. To interpret body language correctly, cross-check each tentative conclusion, derived from one cue, with other signs (Sannito, 1983). "Understanding the congruency of gestures is a monitoring device for discovering a person's attitude and then assigning meaning to his actions. The gesture-endorsed spoke word is the total package" (Peskin, 1980, p. 6).

Proxemics

Proxemics addresses the personal and cultural spatial needs of people and their interaction with their environment. Simply put, proxemics is the study of the relationship between space and communication--how close or far people stand in relation to one another, where they sit in a room, or how they arrange office furniture. People communicate by the use of space around them, which reflects an attitude toward personal territory.

Appropriate distances are learned as a result of interaction within the culture. Cultural differences and gender determine personal territory. With consent, closeness expresses enjoyable intimacy; without consent, closeness raises anxiety to an uncomfortable level (Peskin, 1980).

Hall described four territorial settings and the distances required for each (cited in Peskin, 1980). Public setting ranges from twelve feet to infinity; formal setting ranges from one and one-half to three feet; and intimate setting ranges from zero to one and one-half feet. Most business interviews and social exchanges are

conducted within the informal setting or the formal social setting. The measured distance of the zones varies somewhat with personality and environmental factors.

Research indicates that people located in relatively close proximity are perceived as warmer, friendlier, and more understanding than people located at a further distance (Baird, 1979). Status differences in people are emphasized by physical distance and minimized by more closeness. Assuming a position close to an employee or colleague seems to convey a positive attitude toward that individual.

Furniture arrangement has an impact on establishing superior/subordinate relationships. The arrangement can establish a cold, formal, authoritative environment or a warmer, informal, cooperative setting (Baird, 1979). In interview situations, furniture arrangements are dynamic aspects of communication. Hall reported a study which suggested that a corner arrangement of chairs in the interview will encourage openness and communication as opposed to a more formal arrangement which emphasizes a superior/subordinate relationship (cited in Delahanty, 1970).

Garrison (1984) used Golhaber's principles to describe the use of space in organizations. A person with high status is rewarded with more and better space. That person not only protects his/her own territory effectively, but also finds it easy to invade the territory of lower status personnel within the organization.

Environment, used effectively, can complement a message (Nonverbal Communication, 1984). A serious message that reflects a

person's position can be conveyed by choosing a setting that suggests authority. An opportunity for participation, interaction, and input is created by selecting a setting in which all participants feel equal. If the location makes interactants feel equal, they assume that their contribution carries equal weight. It may be more effective to convey the message in the receiver's space, rather than the speaker's, or in a neutral area, depending on the purpose of the meeting.

Chronemics

Chronemics concerns the temporal dimension of nonverbal communication. Time communicates and conveys meaning in interpersonal relationships.

In the organizational hierarchy a definite relationship exists between time and status (Garrison, 1984). Members with high status are usually able to get appointments sooner and their meetings with supervisors are usually longer in duration. If a supervisor sees an employee immediately, devotes sufficient time to the meeting, and consults with the employee often, he or she demonstrates esteem for that person. If a supervisor keeps an employee waiting a long time (probably more than ten minutes), devotes insufficient time to a meeting, or meets infrequently with the employee, then the supervisor is communicating a negative, disrespectful attitude toward the individual (Baird, 1979).

Paralinguistics

Of all the various components of nonverbal communication, paralanguage is most closely related to verbal communication.

Paralinguistics examines voice quality through the combined study of pitch, intensity, tone, timbre, tempo, stress, and volume (Peskin, 1980/1981). It focuses on the sound, rather than the content, of the message.

Used effectively, paralinguistics adds variety and animation to the human voice, thus giving it needed flexibility (Peskin, 1980/1981). Voice flexibility increases listener interest and reveals information about speaker personality, thoughts and emotions. A speaker can manipulate the voice to convey various meanings.

The pitch of a speaker's voice is one of the most sensitive indicators of emotion. If a person responds to a question by finishing an answer with a rising pitch, he/she is uncertain of the statement being made and wondering if the reply is acceptable. Confident speakers signal their certainty by punctuating their sentences with lowered pitch (Sannito, 1983).

Another pitch quality that indicates emotionality is pitch change. A less emotional person can be identified by a level, even voice. An effective speaker must have flexibility of pitch and be able to use dramatic changes in pitch to highlight a phrase or thought.

Speech rate is dependent on the temperament, personality, communication habits of the speaker, and the regional customs, as well as the content of the message (Peskin, 1980). Conversation is more casual in nature and tends to be more rapid than formal speaking. Studies have detected that at twice the normal rate of speech, listeners comprehend 90% of what is being said. As speech

rate increases, the listener's perception of the speaker's sincerity, objectivity, and intellect also increases without a significant loss in listener comprehension. In one-way communication situations, the fast talker is generally considered more persuasive and is more favorably regarded by listeners. Additionally, listeners tend to learn more from the fast talker.

A speaker's intelligibility is affected by flexibility in the rate of speech (Peskin, 1980/1981). Speech rate must be appropriate to the situation, the message, the acoustics, the mood of the occasion, listener reaction, and speaker personality. Speech rate can be varied to convey feeling and thought, as well as to evoke reaction from the listeners.

Another equally effective technique for emphasis is the pause. Important statements can be indicated by a marked delay preceding or immediately following the utterance. The pause is a purposeful interval of silence giving listeners time to digest the information just heard. The pause punctuates what a speaker has said in the same way periods and commas separate words into thought groups in written communication (Peskin, 1980/1981).

"Loudness, the strength or amplitude of the voice is related to perceived credibility, the trait of dominance, and the emotions of anger and contempt" (Sannito, 1983, p. 28). Packwood (cited in Sannito, 1983) found a positive relationship between loudness and credibility. An effective speaker has flexibility of loudness. One must be able to adjust the loudness to fit acoustical conditions as well as the subject matter. The variation in loudness is essential

for proper emphasis. Timing the moments of loudness should therefore coincide with making important ideas stand out.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

The preceding review of nonverbal communication literature focused on four areas--kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, and paralinguistics, each of which have implications for the ID consultant. Throughout the instructional design consultation process, the various elements of nonverbal communication come into play. The ID consultant must be sensitive to nonverbal messages being sent by the consultee as well as those he or she may be sending. In the discussion which follows, specific recommendations are made for improving the ID consulting process using this increased awareness of nonverbal communication.

The ID consultant should listen and watch for clues to aid in formulating the next question or response. The way a person responds physically during a verbal exchange will provide valuable feedback about how well the message is being received. For this reason it is important to observe the body language of the listeners while a person is speaking, as well as to think about one's own body language while listening to others (Nonverbal Communication, 1984).

Nonverbal cues are indirect messages requiring interpretation. The cues are only significant if they are a reaction to something. Therefore, the context within which a nonverbal response takes place should be considered to give the response meaning. It is important to cross-check nonverbal cues with other signs to ensure correct interpretation. Gallagher (1984, p. 26) points out that: "Evaluation of nonverbal response must be assimilated with all other data and

verbal responses." The congruency of gestures reveals the nonverbal message being communicated.

Awareness of nonverbal cues in the area of kinesics, or body language, direct the ID consultant's attention to such manifestations as eye contact, pupillary reflex, facial expressions, gestures, touch general bodily movements, bodily orientation, posture, and the congruence of gestures. The consultant must interpret these bodily responses within the context of the verbal exchange to ensure accurate decoding of the expressor's intended message.

During verbal exchanges the ID consultant should establish and maintain direct eye contact with the consultee. This technique communicates honesty and interest, which aid in fostering good rapport. The consultant should also note pupillary reflex in the consultee, an indication of interest and attitude.

The ID consultant should be aware of messages communicated by the consultee's facial expressions both during the verbal exchanges and by observing the facial lines indelibly impressed as a result of repetitious expressions. These provide clues to the consultee's personality, attitudes, and emotions.

Watch for and use gestures in a manner that is consistent with the verbal message. Gestures are somewhat instinctive and should be used naturally to supplement what is being said. Gestures can provide clues to the speaker's personality, attitudes, and self-perception. If overused or improperly used, gestures can detract from or distort the verbal message.

The ID consultant should use bodily orientation to communicate feelings. Convey a positive attitude by sitting directly facing the consultee, leaning forward to emphasize a point, and nonverbally expressing agreement with the consultee, whenever appropriate.

An ID consultant who is knowledgeable regarding proxemics, the relationship of space and communication, has the ability to create an atmosphere of comfort for both the consultant and the consultee. Considerations include territoriality, furniture arrangement, and the use of space in organizational settings.

Conduct consultation meetings in an environment that is conducive to the specific meeting agenda. Meeting location and furniture arrangement can affect the extent to which an environment fosters open communication and a collegial relationship where participants feel their contributions are valued, or to establish the consultant or the consultee as an authority figure.

Understanding chronemics, the way time communicates, helps the ID consultant to understand the relationship of time and status in an organization. Through efficient and productive meetings with the consultee, an ID consultant communicates respect for the other person's time as well as one's own.

The ID consultant should schedule meetings at times that are convenient for the consultee. Also, prepare a meeting agenda that includes beginning and ending times to ensure that pertinent topics are discussed and to encourage the goal-directed use of time.

An understanding of paralinguistics, cues of voice quality, cause the ID consultant to listen not only to what is being said, but

to how it is being said. Elements of voice quality should be noted as the consultee speaks as well as in the consultant's own speech pattern.

Listen for and use voice quality to nonverbally reinforce the spoken message. The tone of voice, flexibility, speech rate, variable pitch, volume, and pause all convey the speaker's emotion and affect the listener's comprehension of the message. The consultant should speak in a manner and listen for speech mannerisms that are consistent with what is being said.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Communication skills are critical to the success of an instructional design consultant. Throughout the five phases of the ID consultation process--entry, diagnosis, intervention, evaluation, and termination, the consultant must be able to interact with the consultee by sending and receiving messages effectively.

According to Watzlwick, Beavin, and Jackson (cited in Baird, 1979), there are two levels of communication. One level is the content or words one person transmits to another. The second is the relationship or nonverbal cues accompanying those words.

Nonverbal behaviors help define the relationship between interactants by indicating how the spoken words should be interpreted. Nonverbal communication helps express emotions, convey interpersonal attitudes, present personality, and regulate interactions among people (Baird, 1979). In presenting his model of the communication process, Berlo noted that the reliability of verbal communication depends on the dynamic, on-going, nonverbal aspects of the source, the encoder, the message, the channel, the decoder, and the receiver, as these are found within a particular social system (cited in Delahanty, 1970).

Optimally, nonverbal communication supplements and highlights verbal communication. It can aid in sending a clearer message. In some situations nonverbal behavior contradicts what is being said, leaving the receiver confused and uncertain which message to respond to (Nonverbal Communication, 1984). Verbal language is conscious,

rational, and describes emotion; while nonverbal language is unconscious, subjective, and expresses emotion (Miller, 1983). When verbal and nonverbal messages conflict, people tend to rely on the nonverbal, trusting actions more than words.

Behavioral science research recognizes four major areas of nonverbal communication that are particularly relevant to instructional design consultants. Kinesics, more commonly called body language, is the study of body motion as it is related to speech. Proxemics is the study of the relationship between interpersonal space and communication. Chronemics is the study of the way time communicates in interpersonal relationships. Paralinguistics, the area most closely related to verbal communication, is the study of voice quality.

The four areas of study--kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, and paralinguistics provide an increased awareness of nonverbal communication. This knowledge is the basis of ten recommendations for improving the instructional design consultation process.

1. Listen and watch for clues to aid in formulating the next question or response.
2. Cross-check nonverbal cues with other signs to ensure correct interpretation.
3. Establish and maintain direct eye contact with the consultee.
4. Be aware of messages communicated by the consultee's facial expression.

5. Watch for and use gestures in a manner that is consistent with the verbal message.

6. Use bodily orientation to communicate feelings.

7. Conduct consultation meetings in an environment that is conducive to the specific meeting agenda.

8. Schedule meetings at times that are convenient for the consultee.

9. Prepare an agenda for each meeting.

10. Listen for and use voice quality to nonverbally reinforce the spoken message.

By recognizing the value of nonverbal communication and utilizing the recommendations listed above, ID consultants can enhance their communication skills and ultimately improve the entire consultation process.

The preceding discussion highlighted several implications for the practice of instructional design consultation and the preparation of instructional designers. Behavioral science research provides an understanding of the importance of the nonverbal aspects of communication. Effective communication is essential to the success of instructional design consultants. If university programs are going to adequately prepare students to practice instructional design consultation, training in nonverbal communication methods should be included either in a study of the ID process or a study of the consultation process. Practicing instructional designers could also improve their skills through a study of nonverbal communication techniques in professional development programs.

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