BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Every manager in an organization is primarily a communicating centre. Managers maintain a complex network of relationships with a variety of contacts both inside and outside the organization. Since information is key input to decision making and action, interpersonal and group communication become important part of organizational activities. Also, every organization has to communicate with various stakeholders -investors, customers, government, and supply chain members- according to their needs to keep enterprise going. As such communication is regarded as life blood of any organization. If effective, it builds image and generates sales and profits. If ineffective, it mars the chances of progress and leads to failure. Communication is basically a social process of exchanging information between two or more persons, through an appropriate medium, to create a mutual understanding

DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

- John W.Newstrom (2007) defined communication in the following terms. “Communication is the transfer of information and understanding from one person to another person. It is a way of reaching others by transmitting ideas, facts, thoughts, feelings, and values. Its goal is to have the receiver understand the message as it was intended”
- Keith Davis explains communication as a bridge of meaning among people so that they can share what they feel and know. By using this bridge, a person can cross safely the river of misunderstanding that sometimes separates people.
- Uma Sekaran describes communication as follows. It is a process of sharing information to express our thoughts and as a mechanism to control and manipulate behavior. It can best be described as the interpersonal process of sending and receiving messages and symbols with meaning attached to them.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION

The significance of communication can be understood by knowing information needs of managers in an organization. Spend Most of the Time Communicating Mintzberg estimated that managers spend up to 80 percent of their time in verbal communication.
Davis and Olson noted that managers obtain factual information for decision making and pass on soft information in terms of instructions, orders and requisitions.

Creates Mutual Understanding for Co-operation Communication is the means by which people relate to one another in an organization. If there is no communication, employees cannot know what their roles are, what their associates are doing and what kind of contribution is expected from them from time to time. In essence, there will be lack of cooperation and synchronization, the two basic facets of coordination.

Improves Effectiveness of Decision Making Decision making becomes easy when information is available and people affected give their acceptance for its implementation. This is why organizations follow the norm: Make informed decisions close to the scene of action. The following example given by Newstrom 6(2007) illustrate the effectiveness of this norm.

Managers of a firm decided to reduce electricity consumption and production losses by asking its employees to bring their coffee and have it at their work spots. They arranged a meeting and made a presentation on cost-benefit analysis of the two alternatives:

(i) have coffee at cafeteria and

(ii) at work spot.

The employees understood the savings involved in the new coffee-break policy and accepted it.

Enhances Chances of Achievement :Effective communication tends to encourage better performance and job satisfaction. When people better understand their jobs and roles, the feelings will be positive, involvement is high and the result is committed team work or individual performance. Excellence is outcome of enlightenment and enlightenment is the result of good
communication.

Desire to be Informed :Today's employees are interested in knowing because they are in a knowledge society ushered in by information revolution and political democracy. Working from different locations, they are integrating by information connectivity and if this link is not effective, they experience a feeling of isolation and alienation and develop desire to quit their jobs.

PROPER SELECTION OF MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The Factors are:

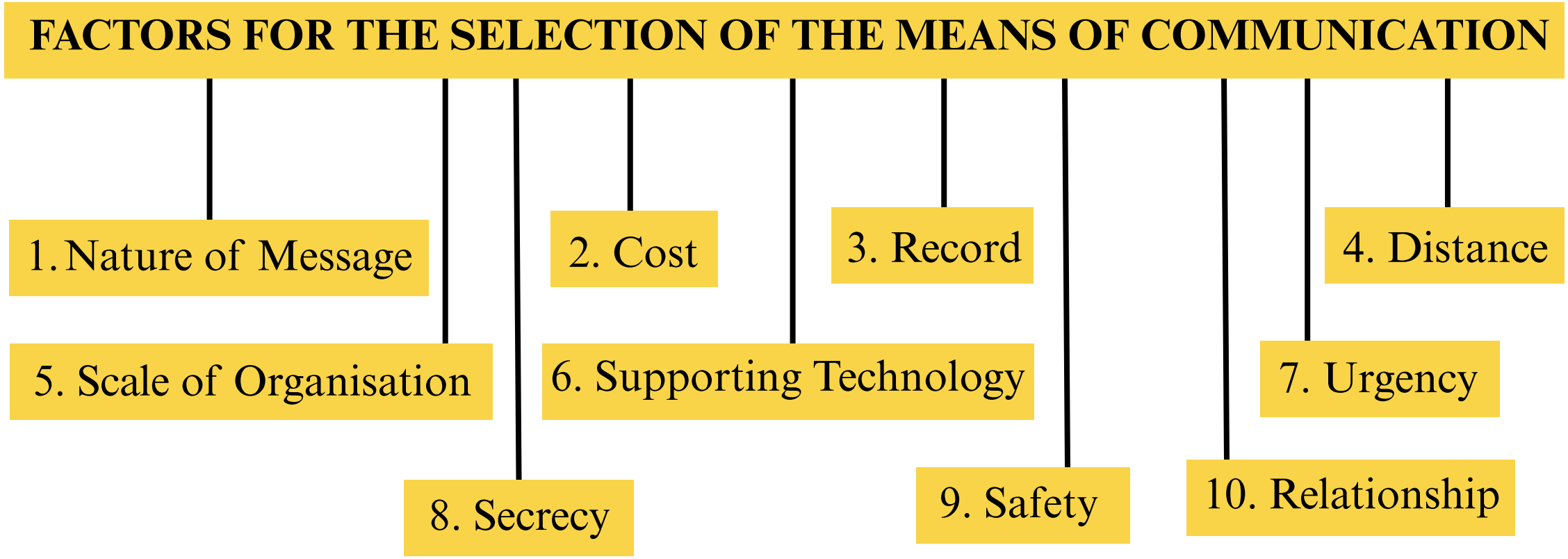
1. Nature of Message
2. Cost
3. Record
4. Distance
5. Scale of Oragnisation
6. Supporting Technology
7. Urgency
8. Secrecy
9. Safety
10. Relationship

- Factor # 1. Nature of Message: The means of communication depends upon the nature of the message. Urgent, confidential, private and important messages should be distinguished from ordinary, routine, open and less important messages and the means of communication are to be chosen accordingly.
- Factor # 2. Cost: The cost of sending a message is also to be considered while selecting a mode of communication. The result obtained should justify the expenditure.
- Factor # 3. Record: If the record of the communication is important it should be written, otherwise oral communication is sufficient.
- Factor # 4. Distance: Distance is another factor for consideration. The mode of communication to be chosen depends on whether the message is to be sent to a nearby place or somewhere at a long distance.
- Factor # 5. Scale of Organisation: Means of communication in large-scale business is different from that in the small-scale. In small business most communication is oral while in large business it is written.

- Factor # 6. Supporting Technology: Both the sender and the receiver must have supporting technological communication tool to make communication through a particular medium. Suppose, A sends an e-mail to B. To get the e-mail B should have a personal computer. Again, to get a fax message one should possess a fax machine. Therefore, while selecting a means of communication one has to consider whether supporting technological tool is available at the other end.
- Factor # 7. Urgency: Selection of the means of communication is to be made keeping in view the urgency of the communication. Time available is the main factor here. Higher cost may be justified for sending the message in time.
- Factor # 8. Secrecy: If the message to be communicated is secret or confidential, such means are required to be adopted that can maintain secrecy. A telephone call can be overheard, an e-mail or fax may not be appropriate, and an office memo may be less confidential. In such cases, face-to- face talking may solve the problem.

- Factor # 9. Safety: The sender has to be careful about the safety of the message. He/She has to decide whether the message would be sent by ordinary post or by registered post; through courier or messenger, etc.
- Factor # 10. Relationship: The relationship between the sender and recipient may be a decisive factor in the choice of the means of communication. Message of private nature may require personal contact whereas formal relationship demands official and conventional mode of communication.

Selection of the Means of Communication



COMMUNICATION GAP

Communication gap is said to exist when the communication fails to accomplish its basic goals of:

1. Reaching the receiver and
2. Creating the intended understanding.

THE GAPS ARE OUTCOME OF SEVERAL BARRIERS AS GIVEN UNDER:

Gender Gap
Communication gaps arise because their styles are different. Tannen found in his research that women speak and hear language of connection and intimacy; men speak to hear a language of status, power and independence. In presenting a problem women aim at gaining support; men look for solution. Women tend to be less boastful than men. Men tend to see the phrase “I am sorry” as a sign of weakness; women use it frequently as an expression of understanding and caring about the other person’s feelings rather than an apology.

Psychological Gap
Communication is effective when the sender and receiver have same frame of mind, they should be similar in their emotions which act as a filter in communications. We see and hear what we are emotionally conditioned or tuned to see and hear. When the perceived reality of receiver is different to the actual reality or expectations or differently coloured, there result will be misinterpretation of the message. This is why communication experts developed the expression which indicates the receiver’s stance: “No matter what you say, it is not”. Mary was unhappy with her performance at the employment interview and

was in bad mood. However, she was selected and the same news was promptly informed to her by her friend. To this Mary's reply is "No kidding please, It is not possible". It required effort and evidence to convince her.

Generation Gap

Each generation of people will have their own mind sets-perceptions, cognitive approaches and motivations. When communication transaction takes place between two persons who belong to two different generations — old and new, traditional and modem, communication gap will be present. For instance, the older generation of employees prefers paper based filing systems and working at office whereas the modem generation sees benefits in paper less, working at home approaches. The new generation will enthusiastically participate in IT based initiatives whereas the traditionalists find them threatening and boring.

Spatial Gap

When the communication fails to reach the destination from the source point this gap arises. The failure may be due to transmission problems. The chosen channels may fail partly or fully and communication is delivered either late or never. Messages can be transmitted through either face-to face or through the telephone. Physical distance or noise in telephone lines can reduce chances of clear messages reaching the receiver. In case of written communication, postal or courier delays, lost telegrams, and bounced back e- mails may create communication failures.

Cultural Gap

Culture is a composite of language, tradition, values and habits. When cross-cultural transaction takes place, differences in values and language may lead to different interpretations leading to communication gaps. Latin American and Asian cultures generally favour closer distances for personal conversations.

Knowledge Gap

Communication fails when there is knowledge gap between two parties. Technical presentations make use of a jargon which only persons with technical background can appreciate. Jargon is specialized language of a group that includes the acronyms (abbreviations) and slang (words unique to an ethnic or professional group). When making technical presentations speakers should take into cognizance the level of understanding of the audience. A scientist will not present a topic in the same way when addressing school students and group of scientists. He will fine tune the presentation to their levels of understanding. He will choose less technical approach when addressing students.

Status Gap

Each level in the hierarchy is associated with a set of authority, responsibility and work. High- status people tend to exhibit their esteem, authority and commitment to organization and try to establish the proposition I am O.K - You are not O.K. In this struggle, low -status people become submissive, defensive, or repulsive. In any case the free flow of communication is hindered, meanings are wrongly

interpreted. Today when I wished our boss good morning, he wished me good morning. I am sure he has some work to exploit me. When I submitted the report boss asked for within time, he said, “You are great”. What does he mean? Is he sarcastic or simply appreciative of my work? Comments of this kind are common in many offices. They signify the communication gap created by the factor status.

Credibility Gap

Communication credibility is based on three factors: trustworthiness, expertise and dynamism. If any one of them is missing in the sender of the message, the receiver will not try to understand it. When a boss says something and does not stand by it in practice, he loses trust. In one organization, boss told his subordinates that he is interested in their suggestions. Whenever, the subordinates met him and told him they have a suggestion, boss used to tell them,” Well! I am excited. But I do not have time now.” Obviously, his subordinates stopped trusting their boss. Expertise is another factor. A patient trusts a qualified doctor and not a common man. Organizations take advice on tax matters from chartered accountants.

COMMUNICATION SKILL

The effective communicator at different levels of management is the product of both business and communication knowledge and skills (Penrose, Rasberry and Myers, 2007). The skill requirements are as given below:

- Entry level: Minimal skills beyond accepted grammar and punctuation are needed or expected; literacy is assumed. Messages may be complex and detailed. Audience is small; sometimes may be limited to a single supervisor.
- Supervisory level: Require skills of composing sentences, paragraphs, and messages for coherence. Spoken communication is usually one-to-one or one-to-a-few.
- Middle managers: Written communication is important. They must be capable of transmitting clear directions to supervisors, with a motivational or authoritarian tone, They have to respond concisely to messages from the upper levels. With peers, they share ideas, work, and social occasions.

- Upper managers: Audience size increases. The upper manager is spokesperson who represents the organization as a speaker at community group meetings and may be a leader in church or civic groups, such as the Rotary Club. Upper manager takes responsibility for the final appearance of many written documents, such as reports or newsletters, which often are largely prepared by subordinates. Upper manager may prepare communications for top management, such as written speeches or reports to a board of directors. Clarity and precision characterize the manager's communication style.
- Top managers: They spend much of their communicating with their peers. They often present terse, clear, goal-oriented messages to large audiences at one time, such as in annual reports, commencement addresses, or media interviews. Top managers also will communicate to a substantial degree with subordinates, usually at a level or two below. The top manger's communication may be directive or persuasive.

PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

By definition, communication is transmission of message from sender to receiver and creating understanding. There are basically two models, which describe the process of communication, based on the way information is transmitted to create understanding.

They are :

1. Action Model/Bull ' s-eye theory
2. Interaction Model/Ping-Pong Theory

Action Model/Bull's-eye Theory

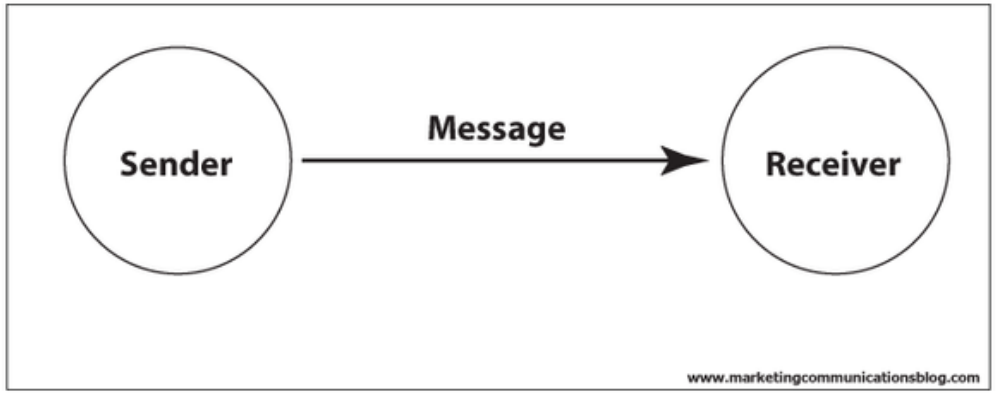
The action theory is based on the communication contexts of the kind given below:

1. Public speaking.
2. Class room lectures.
3. Autocratic superiors giving orders to subordinates.
4. Public announcements.

The famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle observed mainly persuasive forms of communication in use in public meetings, legislative assemblies and court rooms. With their power fill speeches and arguments, speakers try to impress audience by a one-way process. He wrote based on this observation, Rhetoric, the first formal treatise on communication. The modem 'Information theory' deals with transmission of information in a coded form from source to destination. Coding is done to compress the information to achieve transmission efficiency and economy. When the code is known to receiver, he or she decodes the message and understands the meaning.

The steps involved in the process are: 1. Sender has an idea. 2. Sender formulates a message in a coded form. 3. Sender chooses a channel for transmission and transmits the message. 4. Receiver receives message and decodes it to understand the message.

It is a one-way process. It is called in lighter vein, Bull's eye theory. It is like shooting an arrow into a target. You shoot, and you hit the bulls-eye, get close, or miss. The simple, one-way model is a useful diagnostic tool.



The Merits and Demerits of this Theory

Merits

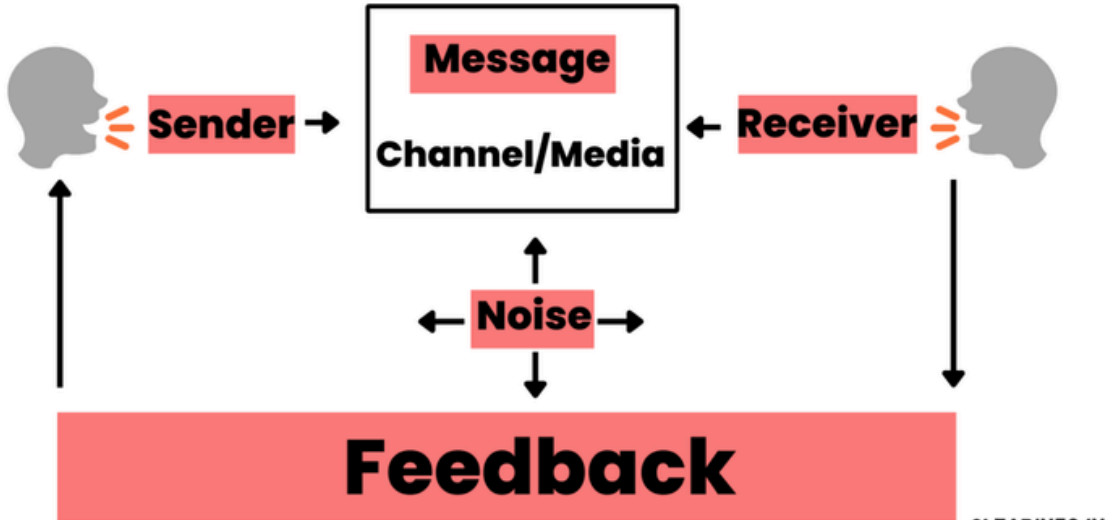
- Sender has knowledge or authority to formulate message of his or her choice.
- Sender feels free and secure in delivering the message.
- Appreciation is given to expert orators and speakers who speak with enlightened interest.
- Economical. The cost of transmission is low being one -way.

Demerits

- Receiver, who is passive participant in the process, feels powerless. When not interested, he or she experiences frustration and exhaustion.
- Receiver may be gripped with tension when his or her confidence levels are low. This is common in
- training and evaluation sessions.
- Receiver requires high level of decoding or listening skills.
- Ineffective many times. As there is no way to understand by way of understanding - feedback the level of in terms of content and accuracy - may be low.

Interaction Model/Ping-Pong Theory

The theory is developed to improve one-way communication process by adding the concept of linear feedback. Feedback is the response or return communication from receiver to sender. Feedback permits the receiver to determine whether the message is understood as intended by the sender.



The steps involved in the process are:

- Ideation - Sender has an idea, an instruction or information to pass on to the receiver.
- Coding- Sender selects a code or language - a medium of expression to develop idea into a message form.
- Transmitting - Sender chooses a channel for transmission for transmitting the message. The channel can be social (messengers) or institutional (institutions like post, telephone, telegraph and courier) and technological (fax, telephone and internet systems)

- Sending - Message is sent to receiver with or without prior intimation.
- Receiving - Receiver receives message
- Decoding - Receiver decodes the message and attempts to understand the message.
- Feedback- Receiver sends return message to obtain clarifications or confirm his or her understanding of the received message.

Thus, it is a two-way process. In a lighter vein, the process is compared with a ping-pong game in which the ball swings forward and backward. It represents action and reaction and stimulus and response models.

FEEDBACK IS A KEY FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

In two-way communication, feedback is the most important element of two-way communication process. How to give feedback on a person's behavior?

1. Clear Intent: Feedback should have a clear purpose. It should not be considered as a casual, routine response that should be given. It should be purposeful, encouraging, and lively. Feedback can make an important contribution to the creation and maintenance of sound interpersonal relationships.

2. Right Content: Feedback is considered effective when it produces intended result - rationally and logically. It should be informative, constructive and instructive. It should be brief and objective to facilitate better understanding among the recipients.

3. Right Emotions: Feedback should create not only an understanding of message but also enhance emotional stability. Feedback should generate favorable attitudes towards sender and message. Instead of making one defensive, it should encourage one to open up and freely discuss the issues.

1. Right Place Feedback should be given in private on one-to- one basis especially when personal issues are involved. Example: performance appraisal and counseling. When it is related to group or a piece of good news about a group member, it can be given openly in a group. When given in group it helps mirroring other's feelings and behaviours. A group particularly can act as a many-angled mirror in which the individual can see himself or herself through the reactions of others to know their feelings and behavior.

2. Right Time

Feedback should be a reactive process occurring as an immediate response to the action of a person (sender sending message). Delayed feedback may not have right impact. For example, when superior helps you in getting a project finished, you should thank him immediately. If you, do it after three days, it will be ineffective and you may get a cold response.

Communication Media

Based on media, communication may be divided into three forms:

- Oral communication
- Written communication
- Non-verbal communication

Oral Communication

Oral communication is the predominant form of communication in the lives of people and in organizations. Oral communication is generally complemented and substituted by non-verbal communication and audio-visual media for effectiveness. Technological advances have opened up new vistas for communication across the globe with never-before imagined benefits. Television, films, computer, projectors, provided a new specialized communication with audio and visual impact. Video-conferencing has helped realize the dream of global village.

Written (Print) Communication

The dynamic and instantaneous oral communication is not always suitable for communication. Written communication replaces it in such contexts and in some other contexts reinforces it.

Written communication is necessary at least in two contexts:

1. When messages are to be carefully formulated, through editing and revising processes.
2. When a record of the transactions is to be built for future reference or storage (long term memory). The main methods of written communication are: letter, memos, reports, circulars, notices, bulletins, brochures, leaflets, advertisements, fax, e-mail and questionnaires.

Nonverbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is more universal and pervasive than oral communication. There may be people who cannot speak, and occasions that does not suit to oral communication. But in all occasions, we use non-verbal communications. In face-to-face encounters, non-verbal communication is expressed through body language, distance, and time. Non-verbal communication includes audio signs like - voice pitch and intensity and visual signs like body movements like postures, gestures, and appearance.

Thank You

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