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Business Applications of Nonverbal Communication

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A number of popular books proclaim the importance of nonverbal communication in businesses and organizations. For instance, the cover of the book, *Body Language in the Workplace*, by Julius Fast (1991), claims "to show us how to understand not just the obvious in the workplace but how to go beyond that to the real meanings and hidden agendas of our co-workers ... [the book] can be used to benefit business dealings of all kinds." In addition, nearly every management textbook mentions the important role that nonverbal communication plays in organizational behavior. Yet, there has been surprisingly little research directly examining nonverbal communication processes in business and organizational settings.

There are several reasons for this paucity of research. First, communication in work settings is quite complex and occurs nonstop. Estimates by Mintzberg (1973), for example, suggest that managers spend 80 percent of their workday engaged in communication. Yet very few of these workplace interactions lend themselves easily to study by nonverbal communication researchers. Second, relatively few nonverbal communication researchers from Psychology, Communication, and other social sciences, are interested in studying organizational behavior. Finally, business organizations typically view research as a nuisance and rarely cooperate with research focusing on basic processes, such as nonverbal communication, that do not seem to have direct ties to organizational productivity and profits. In addition, concerns about privacy issues and rising employment litigation deter researchers from obtaining the videotaped samples of employees' behavior necessary for nonverbal cues analysis. Still, there is great interest in the role

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that nonverbal communication plays in the workplace, and this interest is growing in a world of work that is increasingly focused on the quality of communication and of the interpersonal relationships among workers.

There are several important trends affecting the world of work (Riggio, 2003, Chapter 1): First, is an increased emphasis on human resources in organizations. Work organizations have come to realize that among their most valuable assets are the quality of their workers, the knowledge and skills that they bring to their jobs, and the ability of these workers to perform well together. Thus, organizations today regularly talk about their "human" or "social capital." A second, related trend is the increased use of teamwork to get the job done. Workers typically work in highly interdependent teams that require a great deal of coordination and social interaction to perform their collective tasks. Both of these trends suggest that the performance of working individuals and work teams are dependent on the quality of communication that takes place on the job. As we know from research on social relationships (see Noller, chap. 9, this volume), nonverbal communication is critically important to the development of good interpersonal relationships, both at home and at work. Finally, two other important trends are the increasing cultural diversity of the workforce, and the increased use of virtual work groups that communicate electronically. Both of these trends have important implications for nonverbal communication in the workplace, related to potential communication "breakdowns." Cultural differences in nonverbal communication (see chap. 11) can lead to miscommunication, and a major concern of scholars studying electronic communication media, such as e-mail, is the impact that the absence of nonverbal cues has on the effective flow of electronic communication (see Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). So, it can be argued that nonverbal communication plays an increasingly important role in the workplace of today and of the future.

This chapter will focus on reviewing research on nonverbal communication in work organizations, focusing mainly on the areas that have received the most research attention, outlining what we have learned from research on nonverbal communication at work, and suggesting what the limitations are for applying this research in business and organizations. Specifically, we will review the role that nonverbal communication plays in person perception in work organizations, with a specific focus on evaluating potential employees (i.e., hiring interviews) and current employees (i.e., performance appraisals). A major portion of the chapter will focus on the role of nonverbal communication in managing relationships with employees—focusing on the role of nonverbal communication in organizational leadership and in teamwork. Also examined will be the role that nonverbal communication processes play in business transactions, including how nonverbal communication impacts sales effectiveness and customer service. Finally, we will briefly review research on non-

verbal communication (or the lack thereof) in electronic communications and in the virtual work group.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EVALUATION OF PERSONNEL

Much of personnel work involves the evaluation of workers. Personnel professionals attempt to gather information about the suitability of potential employees via resumes, job applications, and employment tests, but especially through evaluations made in hiring interviews (Eder & Harris, 1999). Nonverbal communication plays an important part in the hiring interview from both the applicant's and the interviewer's perspectives (see Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). First, the savvy applicant engages in careful impression management, thoughtfully monitoring verbal responses to emphasize job-related strengths and hide potential weaknesses (Fletcher, 1989; Gilmore, Stevens, Harrell-Cook, & Ferris, 1999). In addition, the applicant strives to display a positive, interested demeanor. Research on the role of nonverbal cues in the hiring interview suggests that applicants displaying more expressive visual nonverbal behaviors, and cues of nonverbal immediacy, such as greater incidence of eye contact and smiling, more interviewer-focused, outward gestures, and a more direct body orientation (e.g., forward lean), receive more favorable evaluations than non-expressive interviewees (Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985; Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern & Tinsley, 1978; Wexley, Fugita, & Malone, 1975). In addition, paralinguistic cues, such as speech rate and fluency, the absence of speech errors/disturbances, and pitch variability are also positively correlated with evaluations of applicants in interviews (DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999). Interestingly, static nonverbal cues of physical attractiveness, appropriate business attire, and good grooming also have a positive effect on evaluations of interviewees—typically outweighing the influence of expressive cues (Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981; Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988; see also Andersen & Bowman, 1999).

Despite the impact of nonverbal cues on evaluations of interviewees, it is clear that greater attention is paid to what the applicant is saying, with certain verbal misstatements having a huge impact on whether an interviewee is viewed as "hireable" (Riggio & Throckmorton, 1987, 1988). Because one goal of the interview is to uncover the "truth" about an applicant's suitability for a job, research on deception is applicable to interview settings. Some of the deception research and research on channel inconsistencies in affect suggests that if there is perceived inconsistency in what the individual is saying and the nonverbal behavior accompanying the statement, then the nonverbal channel may be given greater weight than the applicant's words in forming an overall impression of the applicant (DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979; Mehrabian, 1972; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Vrij, 2000; see also Vrij & Mann,

chap. 4, this volume). Generalizing to the interview setting, this would be consistent with interviewers who report that although the interviewee gave appropriate answers in the interview, "something did not seem right," causing them to doubt the veracity of the interviewee and to give him or her an overall negative evaluation (see Harris & Eder, 1999).

The increased use of electronic communication technology has led to greater use of videoconferencing to conduct hiring interviews. In a very interesting recent study, Chapman and Rowe (2001) found that interviewers tended to make more positive overall evaluations of applicants in videoconference versus face-to-face interviews. In attempting to interpret this difference, the authors concluded that face-to-face interviews give interviewers access to additional nonverbal cues, most likely cues that reveal the interviewees' anxiety and discomfort, which then leads to more negative evaluations of the more "nervous-looking," live interviewees.

Typically, the impact of nonverbal cues in evaluations made in hiring interviews can be seen as a potential source of bias, particularly such seemingly "irrelevant" cues as physical attractiveness and smiling (Arvey, 1979). Yet, the key question is whether an applicant's nonverbal style in the hiring interview can actually predict future job performance. An interesting study by DeGroot and Motowidlo (1999) had existing managers in a news publishing company participate in a simulated interview where they acted as if they were applying for their current jobs. Content analyses were conducted of both interviewees' visual (e.g., smiling, eye contact) and vocal/paralinguistic cues (e.g., speech rate, pauses, pitch, amplitude). Results indicated that vocal nonverbal cues, but not visual cues, significantly predicted both evaluations of the interviewees (i.e., ratings of "credibility" and "trust") and later performance evaluations conducted by the interviewees' supervisors. The authors concluded that nonverbal vocal style in the interview may predict success in interpersonal relationships at work which was a very important component of these managers' job performance.

It is also important to note that in today's competitive job market, hiring interviews serve as a "marketing tool" for attracting good employees. In other words, it can be as likely that the applicant is "sizing up" the prospective company, as it is that the interviewer is evaluating the suitability of the applicant. Prospective employees may use the hiring interview as a "test" of what the company's culture is like, affecting their decisions to accept certain positions. For example, interviewers who show interest in the applicant and enthusiasm for the vacant position will likely be more influential in encouraging an applicant to accept a job offer (Connerley & Rynes, 1997). The interviewer's nonverbal behavior can also play an important part in influencing the applicant's behavior during the interview. In an interesting study (Liden, Martin, & Parsons, 1993), interviewers behaved in either a "cold" or "warm" manner (little versus more eye contact and smiling

and a more or less direct and forward orientation toward the applicant—all cues that signal immediacy). Judges evaluating only the applicants' behavior rated applicants interviewed by the nonverbally warm interviewer as performing better than applicants in the cold interview condition. Clearly, nonverbal behavior of both applicant and interviewer can play a critical role in the success of interviews as a selection tool (Parsons, Liden, & Bauer, 2001).

From the interviewer's perspective, the hiring interview requires skill in decoding nonverbal cues. Similar to a deception situation, the interviewer is processing the verbal content of the interview, but also scrutinizing the interviewee's nonverbal behavior in an attempt to check the veracity of the verbal statements, as well as attempting to discern actual underlying attitudes and temperament that may suggest that the employee is both a good worker and a good "fit" for the job and the organization (see Riggio, 2001).

Do interviewers vary in their ability to successfully decode nonverbal cues? Although there is no direct evidence, we do know that certain interviewers are better than others at selecting successful applicants (e.g., Graves, 1993; Graves & Karren, 1999; Heneman, Schwab, Huett, & Ford, 1975; Zedeck, Tziner, & Middlestadt, 1983), and it has been determined that interviewers can improve their accuracy via training and experience (Pulakos, Schmitt, Whitney, & Smith, 1996), at least partly attributable to presumed improvements in interviewers' interpersonal skills (Connerley, 1997).

Another personnel setting where nonverbal communication plays an important role is during a formal performance appraisal or "coaching" session. In these sessions, a supervisor provides an employee with an evaluation of the employee's recent performance and furnishes constructive feedback to maintain or improve performance. Although there has been no research directly examining nonverbal communication in performance feedback sessions, this, like the hiring interview, represents a significant setting in the workplace where a supervisor's nonverbal encoding and decoding skills are particularly important (see Riggio, 2001). The performance appraisal is also an opportunity for supervisors to energize and motivate workers for future performance, and it is likely in this setting that the importance of the supervisor's positive expectations, and conveying those positive expectations to the worker, is highlighted.

Perhaps the most impactful line of research has examined the role of self-fulfilling prophecies, or the Pygmalion Effect, in the workplace (Rosenthal, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; see also Harris & Rosenthal, chap. 8, this volume). The Pygmalion effect involves the subtle, often nonverbal, communication of expectations to another individual that influences his or her behavior. In the case of work performance, the Pygmalion effect would most often occur when the expectations of a supervisor are conveyed to the supervising worker, affecting his or her work performance.

Research by Dov Eden and his colleagues (Eden, 1990, 1993; Eden & Shani, 1982), and others, has demonstrated that supervisors can have a significant impact on boosting worker productivity by holding positive expectations about worker performance and conveying these positive expectations via both verbal and nonverbal channels. Conversely, supervisors are cautioned to avoid conveying negative expectations, termed the "Golem effect," to low performing supervisees (Davidson & Eden, 2000).

Two recent meta-analyses of studies examining the Pygmalion effect in the workplace have demonstrated that it has consistent positive effects on worker performance, but that Pygmalion effects seem to be stronger in military rather than business organizations, tend to more consistently affect male rather than female employees, and have greater influence on initially low-performing workers than on already high-performing employees (Kierin & Gold, 2000; McNatt, 2000). Because of these positive research results, and because of its popularity in management circles, there are a number of programs that train supervisors/leaders to communicate positive expectations, both verbally and nonverbally, to their workers. However, recent evaluations of these training programs have been disappointing, suggesting that it is not easy to train managers to hold positive expectations for subordinates, and for them to then be able to successfully communicate these in order to positively influence workers' behavior (Eden, et al., 2000; White & Locke, 2000). More likely, ability to communicate effectively, particularly communicating nonverbally, is a complex skill—one that leaders develop over time (or one that helps these skilled individuals attain positions of leadership).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

As mentioned, effective communication and good interpersonal skills have always been considered critical for workplace managers and leaders (Bass, 1990). In particular, leaders who are sensitive to and responsive to followers' needs (presumably much of this skill involves nonverbal decoding) consistently outperform leaders who lack sensitivity (Bass 1960, 1990). Kenny and Zaccaro (1983) suggest that more than 50% of the variance in leadership concerns "the ability to perceive the needs and goals of a constituency and to adjust one's personal approach to group action accordingly" (p. 678).

A number of popular leadership theories emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills in developing high quality leader-follower relationships. For example, according to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, effective leadership is a function of the quality of the relationship between the leader and particular group members (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In high quality leader-member relationships, the leader provides emotional support and

motivating encouragement to the follower. These high quality relationships are also characterized by mutual trust, respect, and the leader's sensitivity to the follower's needs (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The leader's ability to decode follower's feelings and attitudes, presumably emitted substantially through nonverbal channels, and the leader's provision of emotional support and motivation, presumably implicating nonverbal expressive behavior, are critical to leader success. Most recently, Uhl-Bien (2003) suggests that the leader's nonverbal communication skills are some of the key "ingredients" of building effective leader-member relationships.

In addition to the ability to manage relationships, effective leadership depends on the ability of leaders to manage impressions (see also Goethals, Chapter 5, this volume). Indeed, "image management," along with "relationship development" and the leader's ability to utilize the resources at his or her disposal, is one of the three core aspects of leadership according to Chermers' (1997) integrative theory of leadership. Research has found that leaders' self-monitoring—ability to monitor and control one's social behavior, including nonverbal behavior (Snyder, 1974)—is predictive of who emerges as a leader (Dobbins, Long, Dedrick, & Clemons, 1990; Ellis, 1998). In addition, the nonverbal display of dominance and power conveyed through such nonverbal cues as eye contact and posture (e.g., Mehrabian, 1969), amount of speaking time (e.g., Mast, 2002; Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989), and even choice of seating place (e.g., Bass, 1990; Heckel, 1973), can be used to both emerge as a group leader and to help maintain an image of leadership (also see Andersen & Bowman, 1989). Yet, the relationship between displays of power and person perception may be more complex. For instance, it has been found that a more relaxed facial expression and direct eye contact were associated with greater perception of power and credibility in males (Aguinis, Simonson, & Pierce, 1998), but not for females (Aguinis & Henle, 2000).

The role of nonverbal communication in leadership, particularly the communication of emotions, is most clear in theories of charismatic, inspirational, and transformational leaders. Both inspirational and charismatic leaders are characterized by their abilities to arouse and inspire followers and to spur them to action. It is a general consensus that emotional expressiveness underlies much of the charismatic leaders' success in this regard (Bass, 1990; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Riggio, 1987, 1998; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Indeed, studies that experimentally manipulated speakers' nonverbal delivery via "strong" and "weak" expressive behavior (i.e., less or more: eye contact, gesturing, facial expressiveness, and variations in pitch) found that a more expressive nonverbal speaking delivery was associated with ratings of speakers' charisma (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Holladay & Coombs, 1993, 1994; Howell & Frost, 1989). Using actual workplace leaders and a self-report measure of emotional expressiveness (the Emotional Expressivity Scale from the Social Skills Inven-

tory; Riggio, 1989), Groves (2003) found that more emotionally expressive leaders were rated as more charismatic by their followers than leaders scoring low on expressiveness. However, it is clear that while nonverbal expressive skill contributes to the charismatic leader's dynamic persona, successful charismatic leaders are also exceptional decoders of followers' nonverbal cues—being able to “read” the desires and needs of followers and be responsive to them. It is easy to conjure up the image of the prototypical charismatic leader using forceful and expressive emotional cues to arouse and inspire the crowd, with the leader “feeding off” of the crowd's emotional reactions to bring them to higher and higher levels of collective emotion.

In the related theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1998), leaders use their nonverbal skills to not only inspire followers, but the transformational leader is a careful impression manager, using herself or himself to model appropriate behavior for followers. Furthermore, the transformational leader establishes good interpersonal relationships with individual followers in an effort to “transform” followers into leaders—stimulating them to be creative problem solvers, and developing followers' communication and relational skills. Effective transformational leaders likely possess both good nonverbal encoding and decoding skills (see Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; George, 2000).

With the recent surge of interest in the construct of emotional intelligence, best-selling books such as *Primal Leadership* (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), suggest that ability to communicate emotionally—involving both skill in encoding and decoding nonverbal cues of emotion, along with the ability to regulate emotions (see Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2002; Humphrey, 2002; Riggio, 1987)—are the keys to leadership success. Leadership researchers often refer to the importance of a leader's “empathy” as a critical determinant of the leader's ability to be responsive to followers. This “empathy” can refer both to nonverbal decoding skill, but also ability to take the followers' perspectives (e.g., Kellet, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2002; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; see also Eifgenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Although it is clear that there is a connection between charismatic leaders and nonverbal expressiveness, how do charismatic leaders use nonverbal cues to affect followers? One way is through the emotional contagion process (see Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). In an early study that captured the emotional contagion process, Friedman and Riggio (1981) had emotionally expressive and non-expressive individuals sitting face-to-face in a waiting room while their moods were measured at the beginning and ending of the silent waiting period. The results showed that the moods of the non-expressive persons were affected by the mood of the expressive person in the 3-member groups—with their moods “converging” on the mood of the highly emotionally expressive, silent “emotional leader” of the group. An interesting series of studies by Cherulnik and his associates (Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel, & Miller, 2001), found that followers did indeed imi-

tate the nonverbal cues of affect (e.g., smiles) emitted by charismatic speakers, but not the cues of non-charismatic speakers. This pattern was replicated by showing viewers excerpts from the Clinton-Bush debates, with viewers imitating only the nonverbal affect cues of the more charismatic Clinton. In addition to individuals varying in their emotional expressiveness, there is evidence that people also vary in their susceptibility to emotional contagion processes (see Doherty, 1997).

While most research on the expression of emotion in managers and leaders has focused on positive, “motivating” emotions, there is also evidence that some charismatic leaders can be emotionally manipulative and emotionally demanding and exploitative, sometimes creating unhealthy emotional dependency relationships with followers (Conger, 1990).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND MANAGING EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Commensurate with the explosive interest in research on emotions has been increased attention to the role that emotions play in the workplace (e.g., Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Zerbe, 2000; Lord, Klimoski, & Kanfer, 2002). In brief, emotion management in the workplace has to deal with limiting and controlling the expression of negative, undesirable emotions (e.g., anger, jealousy, anxiety) and the encouragement of positive, desirable emotions (e.g., pleasantness, enthusiasm, enjoyment, appreciation). Nonverbal communication is implicated in making employees, particularly managers/leaders, more sensitive to the display of negative emotions in others (e.g., realizing that the behavioral display of anger can be an indicator of a worker's frustration, or may be a precursor to workplace violence; decoding cues of worry or rejection in a supervisee; see Fitness, 2000), and helping employees to express desirable emotions (e.g., encouraging workers to provide service with a smile; providing motivating words and cues of encouragement). It has been suggested that individuals may emerge as leaders of work groups because they are good “managers” of the group's emotion—inspiring them when necessary, displaying positive affect and optimism, and setting or maintaining the group's positive emotional climate (Pescosolido, 2002).

It is interesting to note that although there is a great deal of interest in the expression, decoding, and regulation of emotions in the workplace, the “practice” is getting ahead of the research attempting to understand these processes. For example, a recent article in the practitioner-oriented *Academy of Management Executive* proposes “strategies for developing an emotionally healthy organization,” suggesting management take steps to “assess the emotional impact of jobs”, create a positive emotional climate, and select and train employees for emotional skills (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). The problem is that it is unclear that research has progressed to the point that we can

accurately assess and identify an organization's "emotional climate" or the appropriate emotional skills in prospective and current employees.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN SALES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Ask anyone who has encountered a surly retail salesclerk, or a cheerful and attentive waiter, and it is clear that nonverbal behavior plays an important part in the quality of customer service. However, research actually examining nonverbal behavior and customer service has not progressed much past the "service with a smile" notion. Specifically, there is some evidence that "positive" and more "immediate" nonverbal behaviors by sales and service workers (e.g., smiling, eye contact) are associated with a more positive experience by customers, even to the extent of leading to larger tips for smiling as opposed to unsmiling waitresses (Tidd & Lockard, 1979)—with the effect carrying over to smiling faces drawn by the waitperson on the check (Rind & Bordia, 1996). An interesting study by Davis et al. (1998) suggested that it may indeed be cues of immediacy that are important, as waitpersons who crouched down to the customers' table level received higher tips than upright standing waitpersons. This is consistent with the finding that waitpersons who lightly touch customers also receive higher tips (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986). However, work conditions may also play a part. Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) found that as retail stores became busier, salespersons' positive affect declined in comparison to non-busy stores, but of course sales were better in the busier stores despite the lack of salespersons' positive affect.

In spite of the limited research evidence that suggests a friendly, positive nonverbal style will lead to better quality customer service, and subsequently greater profits, there is a strong belief in the business world that it does indeed matter (e.g., Bonoma & Felder, 1977; Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Training programs in friendly, expressive customer service abound, and there is some evidence that service workers can be trained to be "friendlier"—engaging in more positive and immediate nonverbal behavior (Brown, & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Komaki, Blood, & Holder, 1980).

An area of personal sales that has received a great deal of attention draws on research on interactional synchrony or nonverbal rapport (see Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1987, 1990, for overviews of research on nonverbal behavior and rapport). The basic idea is that as greater levels of rapport is achieved, interactants begin to mimic each other's nonverbal cues and synchronize them (mirroring posture, gestures, voice tone and inflections, etc.). This mimicry is associated with more positive evaluations of and liking for interactional partners (e.g., Bernieri, 1988; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; LaFrance, 1982).

6. APPLICATIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

The application of nonverbal rapport and mimicry began in psychiatry and clinical psychology as a means of facilitating the therapeutic process by Schefflen (Schefflen, 1964, 1965). This was later applied to the development of an entire "program" of personal selling, called neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). In NLP salespersons are taught to pay attention to potential buyers nonverbal behavior and to mirror their style. Although the claims for the effectiveness of NLP are extensive and enthusiastic (usually from practitioners who have received training in the technique), there has been little in the way of direct, sound empirical investigations of the efficacy of NLP. This is a classic example of putting the "practitioner cart" before the research "horse," as researchers are just beginning to understand how mimicry actually affects people in social interaction (e.g., Lakin & Chartrand, 2003; Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003). For example, it is a far cry from research demonstrating that nonconscious mimicry is correlated with a sense of rapport and liking to determining whether it plays a direct part in persuasive selling when a seller intentionally mimics a potential buyer's behavior. Indeed, it has been suggested that NLP may be effective, not because of any direct influence of mimicry, but because by studying buyers' nonverbal behavior in an effort to mimic them, salespersons are actually becoming more interpersonally sensitive (DePaulo, 1992). In addition, there is evidence that overdoing the intentional mimicry of potential customers can backfire (DePaulo, 1992).

Finally, there has been considerable interest in mass marketing and advertising on the role of nonverbal cues in influencing the buying public. This includes the use of nonverbal cues in both print and television advertisements (e.g., use of music, sound effects, concern for the appearance cues of individuals in ads, voice tone and inflections of product spokespersons, etc.; see DePaulo, 1992 and Hecker and Stewart, 1988, for overviews). Most recently, research in marketing has been looking at emotional contagion effects on purchasing (e.g., Howard & Gengler, 2001)—an issue that is a main theme of the best-selling book, *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2000).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND THE VIRTUAL WORK ORGANIZATION

As workers and work teams rely more and more on electronic communication—including the use of virtual work teams who rarely, if ever, have face-to-face meetings—there is a great deal of concern over what is lost in the electronic modalities. For the most part, the main difference is the significant loss of nonverbal cues in electronic communication (Kiesler, et al., 1984). Many nonverbal cues of immediacy, visual turn taking cues, and cues of status and affect are missing from all forms of electronic communication except for live videoconferencing, and both visual and auditory nonverbal cues are missing from e-mail and text messaging. In a recent study, it was found

that evaluative feedback was more positive and more accurate in face-to-face as opposed to e-mail interactions presumably because of the presence of nonverbal cues (Hebert & Vorauer, 2003). This has important implications for conducting performance appraisals in a computer-mediated format.

Moreover, without visual and vocal feedback cues, e-mail users may engage in harsh and insensitive criticism of others (termed "flaming"), which could seriously damage personal and work relationships (Sproul & Kiesler, 1991). This has led to a concern about how to develop and maintain high quality interpersonal relationships among members of virtual work teams (e.g., Lipnack & Stamps, 1997).

Interestingly, people in virtual groups have devised a number of creative strategies to compensate for the missing nonverbal cues in electronic communication. Most notable is the use of "emoticons"—the various smiley-faced characters used to express emotions in e-mail communications (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). In addition, it has been suggested that users of text-based electronic communication may become more precise in their language use to more clearly communicate feelings and emotions, and avoid having the tone of a written message misunderstood by the receiver (Newlands, Anderson, & Mullin, 2003). This even goes so far as to clarify the communication of silence. In face-to-face communication, certain forms of silence can communicate approval, or can indicate confusion or a lack of understanding. Graham and Misanchuk (2004) suggest clarifying episodes of silence verbally in computer-mediated communication (e.g., typing agreement or disagreement; giving reasons for a pause—"I'm thinking it over").

Although much attention has been given to what is lost in computer-mediated electronic communication, there may also be some gains due to the absence of nonverbal cues. For example, the lack of feedback cues may reduce social interaction anxiety and induce people to be more open and willing to disclose personal information (Sproul & Kiesler, 1991). In addition, research on electronic as opposed to face-to-face "brainstorming" (a group strategy intended to stimulate the generation of creative ideas), suggests that electronic groups may be more productive, partly due to the decreased arousal and evaluation anxiety (not to mention the inability to show nonverbal displeasure) in computer mediated brainstorming groups (Paulus & Dzindolet, 1993).

This is obviously an important area, one that deserves the attention of researchers interested in how the ever-present and ever-increasing use of electronic communication affects the communication process, the development of relationships, and the effectiveness and quality of interactions among work team members (see Riva, 2002).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH

Clearly there is great interest in the business world in understanding how nonverbal communication affects the behavior of workers and

work groups. Yet, it is likely that most business decision-makers do not view the area of nonverbal communication—whether it be improving the nonverbal communication skills of organizational members, or improving the process of nonverbal communication to improve work group interactions and relationships—as a high-priority topic. So, the challenges are twofold: First, for practice purposes, how to emphasize the importance of understanding and applying nonverbal communication research to improve the functioning of organizations and their members? Second, for researchers, where are the areas of opportunity for studying nonverbal communication in the business world?

Conducting research on nonverbal communication in the workplace requires observation of samples of behavioral interactions among workers. The use of videotaped hiring interviews, for example, has led to greater understanding of how nonverbal communication impacts hiring decisions. Another emerging opportunity to videotape workers occurs in assessment centers used either to select or train workplace managers (Thornton, 1992). In assessment centers, participants engage in simulated work exercises, such as group discussions, in a performance appraisal coaching session with a subordinate (actually an actor), or while making a formal presentation. This allows for detailed observation of workers' performance in these simulated work settings. The use of videotaped exercises has been hailed as a cost-effective alternative to live observer assessments (e.g., Riggio et al., 1997), and also offers nonverbal communication scholars research opportunities.

Additional opportunities to both apply nonverbal communication research to the work setting and gather research data may be afforded through certain employee training and selection programs. Specifically, there are a variety of training workshops offered to employees to improve communication skills, including nonverbal skill training. Often, these programs use videotaped segments of trainees practicing communication skills, and engaging in various role-playing exercises with other trainees. These could be used as research data.

As employers realize the value of employees' and managers' communication skills as key elements in performing their jobs, greater attention will be given to systematic assessment of communication skills in employee screening and selection. This offers another opportunity for nonverbal communication scholars to be involved in both developing the means for assessing nonverbal communication skills (as a significant piece of the broader repertoire of communication skills), as well as affording research opportunities. There has been some limited research using communication skill assessment in employee evaluations (see, e.g., Riggio & Taylor, 2000, see also Riggio, 2001), although this research has looked at general skill in communication, or in specific, work-related skills such as interpersonal sensitivity. Yet, one could imagine that certain elements of nonverbal communication skills, such as skill in self-presentation, decoding others' emotional

and nonverbal cues, via instruments such as the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS, Rosenthal et al., 1979) or the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy (DANVA; Nowicki & Duke, 1994, 2001), could be used as part of a selection battery for positions in management, sales, public relations, or even in customer service jobs.

As can be seen, the potential for applying nonverbal communication research to the work setting is great. Yet, research in this area is rather scarce. It is hoped that the interest shown by those in business in the potential applications of nonverbal communication theories and research to the work setting, along with renewed interest in "hot" research areas such as emotions, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal communication will help spur additional research.

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