



4. INTERACTIVITY

How to communicate with a lack of non-verbal signs

CONTEXT

Non-verbal communication – the way one listens, looks, moves, and reacts – reveals much more than just words. When non-verbal signs match words, trust and clarity increase. When they do not, tension, mistrust, and confusion might emerge among participants. How do you communicate and understand the intentions of others when you communicate virtually and are unable to see non-verbal signs?

THEORETICAL BASIS

Pragmatic competence includes, among other things, knowledge of how to organise and structure discourse, understanding of different meanings such as irony, turn-taking, and non-verbal signs (e.g. eye contact). Participants might not be able to see each other's faces if the cameras are turned off, which creates difficulties in terms of turn-taking. Therefore, cameras are recommended during distance communication.

ACTIVITY IN A NUTSHELL

Being able to recognize and control non-verbal communication is crucial in interactions with other people. You can improve how you are perceived in discussions and negotiations as well as read how other people are responding to you in important scenarios. This small activity will show the importance of non-verbal communication and how it can change the listener's perspective.

Activity/Solutions

CONTACT TYPE

Online

TIME NEEDED

15-20 minutes

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

Over 6

ACTIVITY TYPE

Group work

TARGET GROUP

- All target groups

VARIATION OF THE ACTIVITY

This activity can easily be adapted to face-to-face meetings.

Goal

- To increase clarity and avoid misunderstanding during distance communication when there is a lack of non-verbal signs.

How to prepare

- As a moderator, choose a list of non-verbal actions in advance of the task that could be performed remotely and seen on camera.
- Make a list of the meanings by using pictures or symbols, e.g. thumbs up = good performance; thumbs down = not so good; clapping hands = happy; etc.

Activity step by step

First activity:

1. Ask the participants to turn on their camera.
2. Tell them that you are going to give a series of instructions and that you want them to follow them as quickly as possible.
3. Deliver commands, and ask the participants to do them while you are performing an opposite action. For example, place your hand on your nose; clap your hands; stand up; touch your shoulder; sit down; cross your arms; place your hand on your mouth (but while saying this one, place your hand on your nose).
4. Observe how many participants copied what you did instead of what you said.
5. Share this observation with your group and lead a discussion on how body language can influence our understanding and reactions.

Second activity to support the use of appropriate non-verbal sign:

1. Ask the participants to discuss in small groups (2-4 person) a theme (e.g. how to introduce a new product or education to customers) and then to use some non-verbal signs to support their dialogue.
2. Share a list of non-verbal actions with their meaning to help the participants understand the task.
3. After some time, ask a group to present the dialogue to others and discuss their observations together.