

The Significance of Nonverbal Communication in Business

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ABSTRACT

There were numbers of research on business communication topic. Many researches concluded that successful businesses relied so much on effective communication. One of the most concerned factors was on nonverbal communication, which considered as the most important form of the communication and accounted for more than 90% in overall communication process. This research then focused on the significance of nonverbal communication when utilizing in Thai business circumstances.

The researcher implemented qualitative research approach using interview techniques to verify the significance of nonverbal communication in business. The sample included twenty (20) respondents from business executives, leaders, managers, and salespeople in Thailand. The interview guideline comprised of five (5) questions regarding nonverbal communication.

The result found that nonverbal communication was significant for the business. In order for the business to grow positively, effective communication must be concerned. Fortunately, nonverbal communication would help increase the efficiency of communication in the business world.

Keywords: Nonverbal Communication, Body Language, Micro Expression, Business Communication

บทคัดย่อ

ที่ผ่านมา มีงานวิจัยหลายเรื่องเกี่ยวข้องกับหัวข้อการสื่อสารทางธุรกิจ นักวิจัยหลายๆ ท่านได้สรุปไว้ว่าความสำเร็จของธุรกิจนั้นส่วนหนึ่งมาจากการสื่อสารที่มีประสิทธิภาพทั้งภายในและจากภายนอกองค์กร ประเด็นที่ได้รับความสนใจเพิ่มมากขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่องคือการสื่อสารด้วยอวัจนภาษา เนื่องจากการสื่อสารด้วยอวัจนภาษามีอิทธิพลต่อกระบวนการสื่อสารมากถึง 90% การวิจัยครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) พิสูจน์ความสำคัญและประโยชน์ของการสื่อสารด้วยอวัจนภาษาในทางธุรกิจ (2) อธิบายและวิเคราะห์สถานการณ์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการสื่อสารด้วยการใช้อวัจนภาษาในทางธุรกิจ (3) ศึกษาการใช้อวัจนภาษาในบริบทของ

นักธุรกิจในประเทศไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นพนักงานระดับผู้บริหาร หัวหน้างาน และพนักงานขาย จากบริษัทข้ามชาติแห่งหนึ่งในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ได้มาโดยการสุ่มตามระดับชั้นต่างไม่เป็นสัดส่วน รวมทั้งสิ้น จำนวน ๒๐ คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ การสังเกตและการสัมภาษณ์ด้วยคำถาม จำนวน 5 ข้อ ตรวจสอบคุณภาพคำถามโดยการปรึกษาจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านอวัจนภาษา และตรวจสอบความยากของเนื้อหาก่อนทำการสัมภาษณ์ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า อวัจนภาษามีความสำคัญต่อการสื่อสารไม่เพียงแต่การสื่อสารในระดับทั่วไป แต่ยังมีมีความสำคัญอย่างยิ่งต่อการสื่อสารทางด้านธุรกิจในบริบทของคนไทยด้วยเช่นกัน แม้ว่าคนไทยจะไม่ได้สื่อสารด้วยอวัจนภาษามากเท่ากับชาวต่างชาติในบางภูมิภาคของโลก แต่การใช้อวัจนภาษาในการสื่อสารจะสามารถช่วยให้การสื่อสารนั้นๆ มีประสิทธิภาพมากยิ่งขึ้น และยังเป็นหนึ่งในปัจจัยสำคัญที่ช่วยส่งเสริมให้ธุรกิจเติบโตได้ด้วยเช่นกัน

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารด้วยอวัจนภาษา, ภาษากาย, การแสดงความรู้สึกจับปล้น, การสื่อสารทางธุรกิจ

INTRODUCTION

Whether personal or professional, good communication is important for making relationships in daily life. It can affect business's interactions, connections, sales and profitability. Without good communication in an organization, there may be misunderstandings between leaders and employees, misperceptions between colleagues, misconstructions between salespeople and clients, and finally it can lead to the termination of the business as both internal and external structures could be damaged by its various challenges in communication.

There are two major forms of communication; one-way communication and two-way communication. The two-way communication method helps make good relations more than the one-way method. On the other side of the same coin, it can

ruin the relationship easier than the one-way method. According to numerous experts in communication, nonverbal communication skill is one of the techniques that help make communication more effective. To become a successful businessman, verbal communication is important as speech and content can help winning the sales and dealing with customers; but comparing to nonverbal communication, its percentage is very little. Nonverbal communication brings people into others' minds. Having adequate nonverbal communication skills helps people to observe the parts that could barely be controlled such as gestures, movements, and facial expressions. They will show true feelings and thoughts of someone; consequently, it is critical to control our nonverbal signals and lead them to the good meanings in order to represent the best image of the business.

Understanding and practicing nonverbal communication skills would help leaders to communicate with team more effectively, salespeople to communicate with prospects more accurately, and team members to communicate with colleagues more truthfully (Ekman, 2003).

LITERATURE REVIEW

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is on the contrary of spoken communication. It is a communication without the utilization of verbal language. It includes gestures, facial expressions, body languages, micro expressions, unspoken understandings, environmental conditions, or through matters like hairstyles, dress code, and smells which may have a major influence on human interaction. Most of studies on communication concluded that nonverbal communication accounted for ninety percent of communication (Goman, 2008). If someone wants to mask own feelings, nonverbal signs are the ones that frankly reveal the truth inside. Ones are allowed to go into other persons' mind by reading their nonverbal signs. Researchers on communication suggested observing the conflict between verbal and nonverbal messages since nonverbal signs might tell something different and more correctly from the voice or words which can be controlled,

as Mark Twain once said, "Actions speak louder than words!"

According to Owen Hargie (2006) in his book "The Handbook of Communication Skills", nonverbal behavior research was categorized into six categories: body language, paralanguage, physical contact, proxemics, physical characteristics, and environmental factors.

BODY LANGUAGE

Body language (referred as Kinesics) includes movements of head to toes (Pease & Pease, 2006). It involves eye contact, eye movements, smile, facial expressions, head, shoulders, arms, hands, legs, feet, and all of the gestures. In business, body language plays two major functions; one for managers to use body language to lead the team members more effectively and two, the knowledge of body language will let team members communicate more efficiently with colleagues or individuals outside the organization whether they are clients or partners or even competitors (Reiman, 2007).

PARALANGUAGE

Paralanguage (referred as Vocalics) is defined as a component of communication, which consciously and unconsciously expressed when communicating. It is associated with speech such as prosody, voice pitch, volume, intonation, filled pauses, silent pauses, etc. Paralinguistic properties play an

important role in business communication. It helps influencing speech or linguistic matter more effective. Paralanguage is one among several subdivisions in the study of nonverbal communication.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical contact is the touching in practice. In business, ones need to be really careful about it since touch means different things to different people. Touch is one of the communication methods but unlike others, it is based on context (Hogan, 2008). Touching in one situation may have different meaning in another situation. Gender, culture, status and authority are also needed to be concerned. Touching wrong person and wrong part of the body may send different signals to the receivers. It can be used to comfort others, create a bond, give a guide, get attention, or can be interpreted in many senses. Thus, context is the most important factor in using this. In business, physical contact as a form of touching may be avoided unless the same understandings are established.

Additionally, if ones are involving with the international business, cultural aspects strongly need to be focused when it comes to touching. Some people from some countries may feel offended by one's friendly touch. Head is also the most avoiding part to touch since many of Asians (and some parts of the world) consider this part as

personal and inappropriate part to touch as a sacred spirit is residing in there.

PROXEMICS

Proxemics involves interpersonal spacing, population density, and norms of territoriality. It was defined as "the interrelated observations and theories of humans use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture (Hall, 1963)." According to Hall's study, proxemics was emphasized on interpersonal communication. His study of proxemics revealed that personal space was important not only in personal life but also professional life. A space in the organization or during the meeting evaluates hidden relationship between people. As well as physical contact, space and distance between individuals should be concerned according to gender, culture, status and authority.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical characteristics such as dress code, perfume, jewelry, or watch may not determine the effectiveness of individuals but it does lead the way of how you want others to perceive about you. Basically, individuals are judged by their appearance. Image is the big deal for any managers, leaders, salespeople, and all positions in the business field. Image of individuals may affect the organizational image. This means taking into account of the audiences, partners, clients, and so on; and prepare for the appropriate codes. Many

businesses realize about it and that is why there are so many training centers coaching for the professional look and corporate image.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Environmental factors deals with the physical setting in which communication takes place such as an office, meeting room, restaurant, or co-working space as well as surrounding artifacts. Related factors to environment and artifacts are appropriateness, climate, microenvironments, scent, temperature, lighting, color, and sound. These are able to influence nonverbal behavior of individuals.

MICRO EXPRESSION

Micro expression is a facial expression which shown instinctively on the face for a really short moment according to the experiencing emotion of the person. Micro expressions appear when a person unconsciously shows how they are feeling or when they are consciously trying to hide all signs that show how they are feeling (Wisankosol, 2015). Unlike other expressions, micro expressions are difficult to conceal and control as they happen in a fraction of a second and last very brief in duration, only about 1/25 to 1/15 of a second (Wisankosol, 2015). It can express seven universal emotions, which are happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and surprise. However, it was later expanded in the 1990s by Paul Ekman into

pleasure, amusement, embarrassment, relief, guilt, pride, anxiety, shame, and contentment (Ekman, 1999).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to the communication model by Albert Mehrabian (1981), the total significance of a message are 55% from body language and facial expressions, 38% from tone of voice, and only 7% from words or verbal cues. In communications, when someone says something, these three elements will be congruent. For those who have knowledge of body language or nonverbal communication, they can catch incongruence in the message that means there may be a hidden agenda in that communication. Nonverbal elements are dominant; as a result, people can understand others with a different language background just by observing their nonverbal language (Mulder, 2012).

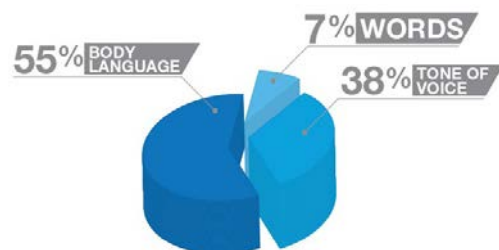


Figure 1. Albert Mehrabian's Communication Model (1972)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher implemented qualitative research approach using interview techniques to verify the significance of nonverbal communication in business. The sample in this research included twenty (20) respondents from business executives, leaders, managers, and salespeople in Thailand. The interview guideline comprised of five (5) questions regarding nonverbal communication.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Instrument 1: Interview Guideline

The researcher designed an interview guideline for all participants to investigate their awareness and appreciation on nonverbal communication aspect. All five questions were open-ended questions in order to discover further opinions and views.

Instrument 2: Observation Guideline

The researcher designed an observation guideline to notice samples' responses. The checklists regard to interest and awareness in nonverbal communication of the respondents. At the end, this was interpreted with the results from an interview process.

THE FINDINGS AND EVALUATION

Question 1: Is nonverbal communication the most significant form of communication?

95% of the respondents agreed with the question and verified that nonverbal communication was the most significant form of communication since they always observe body language of others and somehow became sensitive with the nice tone of voice. Only 5% said that nonverbal communication was significant but not the most significant in business communication. Here are some excerpts from the respondents:

"I tried to act confidently when meeting with customers."

"I always look into other people's eyes as somebody said eyes are the window of all truth."

"After the nonverbal communication class has done, I got more sales and customers."

According to the result from this question, the researcher concluded that nonverbal communication represented the most significant form of communication for business people and it is important for the business communication.

Question 2: In a business meeting with clients or partners, do you concern about the differences such as cultural differences and react accordingly?

All of the respondents concerned about all differences with their clients or partners such as gender, authority, religion, and most importantly culture. Today businesses

were more internationally, some respondents deal regularly with foreigners and they could react in a proper way. Here are some excerpts from the respondents:

"I did practice for a firm handshake for more than 300 times."

"Our leader has lots of foreign guests."

"I'm sometimes not sure whether I should shake hands with my lady clients or not."

According to the result from this question, the respondents concerned and learned about the differences among individuals especially on cultural difference and react properly according to the situation. Even though some of them agreed that it was not easy to understand all the differences but they were willing to learn when the situation comes.

Question 3: Do you think having knowledge on nonverbal communication and body language will benefit your career?

All of the respondents agreed with this question. Since they had more knowledge about body language and nonverbal communication, they realized that it is important for everyone to learn. When it comes to emotional situation or nervousness during the meeting, they could handle and remove all the negative feelings away from their mind by moving the body to positive postures. Leaders used it with their staffs.

Salespeople used it with their clients. Members used it with their team. Here are some excerpts from the respondents:

"It's our first language (body language). But we left it behind since we've learnt the new language (verbal language)."

"Body language knowledge made me a charming person. Better than that, I got more customers."

"I'm sometimes not sure whether I should shake hands with my lady clients or not."

According to the responses from respondents, nonverbal communication and body language would benefit them in not only career but also in their personal lives. They got better relationship among the team, better relationship at home, better relationship with customers, and greater sales as well.

Question 4: What is the first thing you observe on the first time meeting with your guests (clients, interviewees, or partners)?

There were three noticeable things: facial expression, dress code, and body posture. The respondents agreed with all of them. To list, body posture was number one, followed by dress code, and facial expression respectively. The reason was that body posture was the biggest picture that one could see and judge at first sight. Looking a bit deeper, dress code would be concerned and people in those codes were decoded and interpreted by their

clothes. Here are some excerpts from the respondents:

"The way he walked was so smart."

"Coming into the room with a smile on her face, that's the friendly look."

According to the result from respondents, 90% of respondents said that they looked from the biggest view to the smallest one and interpreted them step-by-step.

Question 5: In your opinion, what are the most powerful nonverbal signals to build a rapport (with your clients, leaders, colleagues, or partners)?

Several of them were listed as smile, dress code, eye contact, active-listening sounds, and mirroring. Here are some excerpts from the respondents:

"First impression is the most important topic for all candidates."

"You will never have a second first impression."

"Eye contact is important for me."

Building a rapport is one of the most important activities for all salespeople and body language will help them to be loved.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Nonverbal communication is the most significant form of communication especially in business communication. Numbers of

researches and theories all around the world have proved for years for that. This research was then operated to verify the significance of nonverbal communication in Thai business circumstances and suggested how to be successful in leadership, sales activities, business negotiations, and business meetings. Nonverbal signs are much more powerful than people realize; employers are sensitive and aware of nonverbal signals more than employees realize it. All actions and behaviors were translated into perceptions since one walked into the room and started the conversation until they finished their last speech and walked out of the room. In the business world, nonverbal communication is a secret weapon to help closing the deal with customers, achieving best results in a meeting, gaining more sales, or winning the heart of colleagues and teams.

According to the findings from this research, the significance of nonverbal communication in Thai business circumstances was proved as shown by the evaluations from questionnaire and interview. All of the respondents agreed that body languages and other nonverbal signals were important in both of their professional lives and personal lives, some even learned to practice it as they concerned that nonverbal communication would construct successful businesses.

I would suggest the further researches to study about the differences between ones who use proper nonverbal and body language signs and other individuals that do not concern

about it as well as study about effective activities and trainings to increase nonverbal communication skills of a person.

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