

# Role of Body Language and Appearance on Interpersonal Relationships at Workplace

Bushra Begum, Mohd Azam\*

Kanpur Institute of Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

## ABSTRACT

Body language is a significant aspect of modern communications and relationships. Appearance at workplace has been a debatable topic whether it affects the productivity or not. Right body language and appearance of a person helps in making positive interpersonal relationships at workplace which foster a healthy environment and thus enhances the performance of employees which results in better productivity. This research is aimed at examining the importance of body language and appearance on interpersonal relationships at workplace. During interactions at workplace, visual aspects like body language and appearance are a great contributor in creating impression on others mind. This impression will decide the interpersonal relationships at the workplace because people want to be associated with personalities with great appearance and body language.

**Keywords:** Appearance, Body language, Gestures, Non verbal, Postures, Performance, Productivity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine the people around communicating with no movements, no actions. Here, comes the importance of non-verbal communication. Out of the two types of communication-verbal and non-verbal, the latter plays a very important role since it is a part of every face to face communication. When it comes down to bodily movements displayed by humans, it is rather interesting to see how different people are using a variety of gestures and facial expressions to convey their messages either together with or completely without the words. This also makes us wonder about the essentials of nonverbal communication and how one could interpret other people's body language better even if the latter did not say a single word (Lewis, 2010). Professor Mehrabian in his research also found that during interactions, only 7% is verbal communication and the rest 93% weight age goes to non verbal communication. We have examples of various successful public speakers-be it political or motivational and the success credit for their powerful speeches goes more to their non verbal communication style.

Knowing how to read body language gives you an advantage because you start reading between the lines and can witness both the image you are projecting and how other people are trying to project themselves. In this case, one may easily detect a lie or display confidence by

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**Corresponding Author:** Mohd Azam, Kanpur Institute of Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, e-mail: mohd.azam@kit.ac.in

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means of resorting to body language while also gaining more insight into people's emotional states based solely on their physicality (Birdwhistell, 2010).

The overall importance of learning body language consists in the fact that it may give individuals even more advantages that a mere ability to spot liars. From the perspective of interpersonal relationships, body language could be one of the most effective instruments allowing you to 'stimulate' someone's interest in you: based on whether the person is crossing their arms in front of you or has dilated pupils and a spark in their eyes, you will be able to find out what a person truly thinks about you rather quickly (Kuhnke, 2012). When going through a generic business scenario such as sales or even a job interview, a person could display their most confident body language in order to persuade others (Lewis, 2012). Coherent body language brings not only persuasion but also trustworthiness, which is just as

much important as knowing how to use body language. When a person is calm and confident, we see them as authoritative because they are practically presenting the best version of themselves. Most importantly, choosing the right posture could also help a person boost their confidence even if they are diffident (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

One cannot afford to ignore the fact that actions speak louder than words, that is the body language is much more powerful than the words. Body language or bodily movements play a very important role when we interact with people. A person's appearance which includes clothing, hairstyles, accessories and other factors affecting appearance are also considered very crucial which can alter people's reactions, judgments and the impressions people will make of us. It is very natural that man being a social animal so to fulfill his social needs, he interacts with people and build relations at workplace too. The non verbal aspects of people that is the kind of body language they carry and their appearance are a major deciding factor in deciding with whom they make relationships with. Everyone loves to be around confident personalities who motivate us, who possesses the right attitude, and carries the right professional appearance. People with right body language and appearance are perceived to be confident and serious towards work and people *get along* well with such personalities. Organizations which focus on the non-verbal aspects like appearance, attire, body language and other related factors while hiring the candidates have more professional and healthier working environment. Research has demonstrated that healthy relationships at work can improve individual employee attitudes like job satisfaction, commitment, engagement and perceived organizational support (Cherniss,1991; Ellingwood,2001; Jehn and Shan, 1997; Morrison, 2009; Riordon and Griffeth,1995; Robinson *et al.*,1993; Song and Olshfski,2008; Zagenczyk *et al.*, 2010).

### Statement of the Problem

Body Language has been a very important factor when the communication process takes place. Similarly, the appearance of a person also plays a crucial role in determining the kind of personality of a person and leaving an impression on people's mind. Non verbal factors , are also a deciding factor in the interpersonal relationships at workplace. For eg :- A person coming to the office shabbily dressed and carrying wrong body language versus a person coming to the office in well dressed manner and with full of

confidence, in both cases people will mix along well with the latter case. So, the study was directed to answer this question, what is the role of appearance and body language on interpersonal relationships at workplace?

### Research Question

The paper intends to provide answers to these questions:

- What is the role of non verbal factors on interpersonal relationships at workplace?
- Can body language and appearance of a person lead to increase in productivity?
- Can people with right body language and good appearance create healthy professional environment?
- Can we improve interpersonal relationship and productivity at workplace by hiring candidates with right body language and appearance?

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was-

- To find out the role of body language and appearance on interpersonal relationships at workplace.
- To find out if there is any relationship between appearance , body language and productivity of an organization.
- To find out if organizations can improve their productivity by paying focus on body language and appearance as well when hiring.

### Significance of the Study

The study of determining the role of body language and appearance on interpersonal relationships at workplace will help the organizations, employers and concerned people in a number of ways. This study will help to unveil the importance of non verbal factors at workplace and provide the employers with the results that whether they should lay focus on non verbal factors while hiring or not. Also this study will be beneficial for organizations to know the linkage between productivity, healthy environment and personalities with right body language and appearance at workplace.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Body language is a type of non verbal communication that relies on body movements (such as gestures, postures and facial expressions) to convey messages. Appearance conveys non verbal impressions that affect receivers attitudes towards the verbal message even before they read or hear them (Murphy). Physical appearance includes one's looks, clothing, accessories etc. Inter personal relations at workplace constitutes



day to day interaction between co-workers, managers or employees.

## **BODY LANGUAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORKPLACE**

Body language and appearance are one of the most powerful aspect affecting the workplace relationships. While speaking to the entire company at a meeting or while conversing with a co worker , the body language and appearance affects the entire communication. Positive non verbal communication helps colleagues in the workplace build positive business relationships, whereas negative nonverbal communication can cause conflicts and other negative disturbances in workplace. Body language is not just about how one hold and move the body. It also includes how the human bodies are positioned and the space between two people while communicating (proxemics), the facial expressions and the movement of the eyes, etc are part of body language. These non verbal behaviors send strong messages and can make people enjoy your company or not. A person with right body language is perceived as an honest and trustworthy person. If the content spoken and the body language are different, one is perceived as dishonest by people in the organizations. Eg:- If a person says 'yes' by shaking head no will give the listener a mixed signal and he will be confused. Healthy interpersonal relations happen to be the core of the success of any organization as it enhances the team spirit. Folded arms, slouching, frowning, turning of body away from others or poor eye contact destroy the relationships at the workplace as these postures signals a negative image of the person. On the other hand, open body position; unfolded arms, using upright posture with relaxed and open facial expressions make healthy interpersonal relations between two people. Maintaining proper eye contact and smiling at appropriate time always make relationships stronger. Some of the major aspects of body language includes :

### **Eye Contact**

The famous saying 'Eyes are the window to the soul' is absolutely true in the sense that when communication takes place, the reaction of one's eyes-movement, focus or expression and the reaction of the other party contributes in mutual assessment and understanding consciously and unconsciously. Maintaining eye contact while interacting with people at workplace signifies genuineness. People often attribute trustworthiness to people who speak while maintaining good eye contact

and vice versa. It also makes people look confident and is an indication that one is interested in the conversation.

### **Facial Expressions**

The Six Universal Facial Expressions are used universally by all to express the feelings or emotions. These are- Happiness, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, Surprise, Anger. Facial expressions are helpful as they may show hidden emotions that contradict verbal statements. Eg:- An employee may deny having knowledge of a problem, but also have a fearful expression and glance around guiltily. Similarly, a forced smile can look fake and indicate that the person wants to hide his/her true feelings.

### **Postures and Gestures**

Posture is the way of sitting, standing, walking or holding head and creates a huge impact on the overall personality of a person. Gestures are using body movements, especially of hand or head to express an idea or meaning. Eg:- If a colleague raises a hand during a heated discussion, the person may want everyone's attention or may want others to stop talking. Hand gestures are especially rich conveyors of communication. Less conscious gestures such as scratching of nose, stroking of hairs can communicate messages inadvertently and affect the image of a person and hence affect interpersonal relationships.

### **Touch and Hand Contact**

Touch is a powerful method of non verbal communication. A pat on the back for appreciation, a hug, with or without words strengthen interpersonal relations at workplace. However, such touch should happen between same sex as these could be inappropriate or objectionable at workplace if it happens between opposite gender. Shaking of hands builds good relationships between people and develops a feeling of trust and confidence among them. Shaking hands when meeting or parting with people at workplace can make both the parties feel good and improve relations. Skin to skin contact creates a bond of trust between co-workers. Refusing to shake hands can insult others and worsen the relations.

### **Smile**

Smile is a part of body language and indicate positivity or negativity of a person.

Therefore, smiling at right time can improve the relations at workplace, e.g., Wishing your seniors with appropriate smile or replying with a smile when someone wishes you in the organization can make relations healthy and stronger.

## **APPEARANCE AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AT WORKPLACE**

Visual impact is as important as verbal impact. People quickly make assumptions based on the person's appearance, which includes, the clothes one wear, and how well-groomed a person is. It has been observed that people wearing right formal dress with appropriate accessories and makeup (in case of females) creates a positive impression in the minds of their colleagues. On the other hand, people who do not pay attention to their appearance are taken less serious and also a negative image gets created in other's mind.

Some major contributors in appearance are:

### **Dress**

Dress at the office affects the overall impression and environment. The kind of dressing depends on the nature of business. Strict professional business attire is required for settings like law offices or corporate headquarters. Suits for both men and women is common in such organizations and gives a formal look to the personality. Business casual dress like pants, khakis, skirts etc. can also be worn. The type of dressing can create an impression in people's mind which also affects interpersonal relationships. It has been observed that bosses who lay focus on their dressing are taken more serious and have a professional image of themselves in their colleagues minds. On the other hand, if people around are not dressed appropriately, people don't perceive them as serious professionals which can hamper interpersonal relations.

### **Accessories**

Watches, footwear, minimal jewellery add a classy look to one's personality and creates a positive impression in other's minds. However, tattoos and piercings are less professional. So, accessorizing oneself enhances the look and make us likeable and improve interpersonal relations at the workplace.

### **Grooming**

Maintaining personal hygiene like body cleanliness, hairstyle, clean trimmed nails makes a positive impression in others mind. As per the survey conducted on 100 working people of different organizations, 70 people preferred clean shaved look being more professional as compared to bearded look whereas 30 people preferred beard look at workplace. However, beard should be properly trimmed.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NON-VERBAL CUES (BODY LANGUAGE, APPEARANCE) ON THE PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY OF ORGANIZATIONS**

In organizations, the manager's attitude, which is mostly communicated by non verbal messages (body language and appearance) can produce either positive or negative attitudes by the employees. This affects the employee's attitude when performing job duties which in turn can either enhance their performance or lower it. The body language and appearance of a person portrays his confidence level which makes a positive or negative impression in the workplace. It has been observed that when a person competes for anything, they generally look at his competitors and creates an impression in his mind regarding the level of competition. For e.g., a student going for an inter-school cycling competition would look at all participants and judge them based on their look and body language and make an impression in his mind about the level of competition. So, in such situations also people make use of body language and appearance as a parameter to judge the intensity of competition. Thus, a right body language and a great appearance could be used as a competitive advantage. According to the theory called 'embodied cognition' the physical movements can shape and influence the thoughts and moods. Carrying right posture or expression affects the way we feel and thus the way we work.

Observing the body language of oneself and others can improve the performance and productivity of the organizations by taking corrective steps when needed. Making eye contact, nodding the head while other party is talking or leaning towards the other party while they speak indicates the person has full attention towards them. Similarly, leaning back in the chair, fidgeting their fingers indicates boredom or distraction. Observing these messages, one can responds towards such people or the team for corrective measures. Leadership also requires correct body language and appearance. The appearance actually affect the overall work performance due to the fact that it has a strong impact on how others perceive, creates an overall reputation of a person at job. Organizations having a formal dress code were found more productive because of more professional environment existing there. However, a strict dress code is not necessary in today's time. Even big companies like Infosys have removed the dress code system but the fact that a formal attire as per the environment



is necessary. Organizations that lay focus on the non verbal aspects like body language and attire while hiring the candidates are more productive as compared to others.

Following points show that how body language and appearance increases productivity:

### The Perception

People wearing clean, ironed professional clothes are taken more serious at workplace as it indicates the effort and time, they have invested into presenting themselves. This enhances the confidence level which reflects in the performance and in their ability to be productive. People in a position of power are heavily judged based on what they wear.

### Sense of Trust

People like to work personalities who look professional. It gives ease and sense of trust. Hence, appearance affects the productivity.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work is descriptive in nature as a detailed study has been done by the researcher to describe all the aspects relating to body language and appearance and its impact on interpersonal relations at workplace. The data has been collected using both primary and secondary sources.

Various websites, articles, published research papers and journals are used as secondary sources. Survey method and personal interaction has been used for collecting first hand data. A survey was conducted on 100 people belonging to different age groups (20–45 years) working in different organizations.

## FINDINGS

77 out of 100 respondents believe that the body language and appearance has a significant role during interactions at workplace. The body language and appearance are considered an important factor by the respondents while making interpersonal relations at workplace.

86 respondents believe that they can easily get along well with people having attractive appearance and right body language at their workplace.

95 people believe that people having right body language and appearance can in a much better way convey their thoughts and also have more influencing power in the organizations.

76 people believed that a leader must possess the right body language and have good appearance.

76 respondents said that people with right body language and appearance have an extra advantage in the organizations in the sense that they are taken more serious and more professional in their approach.

70 out of 100 people preferred clean shaved look as more professional over beard look for males. While in females, 82 respondents believed that makeup and right attire builds confidence in females and make them look more professional.

## CONCLUSION

Body language and appearance are very important tool to help us communicate with others in a more effective way and leave a positive impression on others. This paper shows how powerful body language and appearance can be. Thus, carrying the right body language and emphasizing on the appearance builds confidence in oneself which impacts the performance of an individual. It also develops healthy interpersonal relations between people which builds a healthy environment and thus enhances the productivity of whole organization.

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