



THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE

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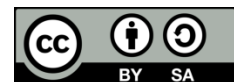
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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal communication plays a strategic role in fostering effective interpersonal relationships, particularly in dynamic work environments such as the event organizer (EO) industry. This study is motivated by the limited research that specifically explores how nonverbal communication elements enhance coordination and team interaction quality in high-pressure EO settings. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the role of nonverbal communication in strengthening interpersonal relationships within the EO workplace and to identify the most influential nonverbal cues contributing to team effectiveness. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method at a selected EO company in Medan, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The study involved purposively selected participants, including supervisors, event coordinators, field staff, and liaison officers, based on their direct experience with team communication. The findings reveal that nonverbal elements such as facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures, and body posture play crucial roles in conveying instructions, fostering team unity, and building trust among team members and with clients. However, challenges such as cultural differences in interpreting nonverbal cues and high work pressure sometimes hinder effective communication. The study concludes that nonverbal communication serves as a vital tool in creating cohesive teamwork and a harmonious working atmosphere in EO environments. Practically, this research implies the need for structured nonverbal communication training for EO staff to improve coordination and minimize misunderstandings. Academically, it contributes to the development of organizational communication studies and offers a foundation for future research in creative industries and other high-pressure work settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the workplace, nonverbal communication plays an important role in creating effective and harmonious interpersonal relationships. In the event organizer (EO) industry, communication is a crucial element that supports the success of team coordination and event organization. Unlike conventional work environments, EO has dynamic characteristics, where limited time and high pressure often require workers to communicate quickly and efficiently without always relying on verbal communication. Nonverbal communication elements, such as eye contact, facial expressions, hand gestures, and body posture, can help speed up message delivery and build better understanding among team members (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016). In fast-paced work situations, the use of effective nonverbal communication allows EO teams to adapt to sudden changes, avoid misunderstandings, and increase synergy in working together.

This phenomenon is increasingly interesting to study because although nonverbal communication plays a major role in building interpersonal relationships in the EO work environment, there has not been much research that specifically explores how nonverbal communication elements are used to improve team coordination and effectiveness. Previous studies have highlighted that nonverbal communication can influence first impressions, build trust, and strengthen emotional attachment in the work environment (Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang, 2020). However, in the context of EOs that often face emergency situations and demands for fast communication, nonverbal communication can be a more dominant tool than verbal communication in conveying instructions or expressing emotions appropriately. For example, in a situation where an event coordinator must provide directions to technical staff in the midst of the hustle and bustle of an event, firm hand gestures and sharp eye contact can be more effective than verbal commands that may not be heard clearly.

Although various studies have proven the importance of nonverbal communication in improving the quality of interpersonal relationships in various contexts, there are several research gaps that have not been widely explored, especially in specific work environments such as event organizers (EOs). Research by Jacob et al. (2023) and Zakaria (2021) emphasize that nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions, eye contact, and body movements, can strengthen interpersonal connectedness and improve professional performance. However, these studies generally focus on general work contexts or specific professions and thus do not provide a detailed picture of how nonverbal communication is applied in unique and dynamic work dynamics such as in EO, which often operates under time pressure and requires rapid coordination between team members.

Therefore, there is a need to conduct more in-depth research on the role of nonverbal communication in improving the quality of interpersonal relationships specifically in the EO work environment. This study is expected to fill the knowledge gap by identifying the most influential nonverbal communication elements in building teamwork, understanding how nonverbal communication can be used to overcome communication challenges under time pressure, and exploring its impact on work effectiveness and project success. Thus, this study will provide new contributions that not only enrich the nonverbal communication literature but also provide practical guidance for EO professionals to improve the quality of their interactions and work productivity. The case study on event organizers was chosen because the nature of their work is highly

dependent on teamwork and efficient communication. In the process of planning and implementing events, nonverbal communication is often the main tool to convey instructions quickly and ensure smooth coordination. For example, hand signals or eye contact can be used to give signs without disturbing the event. In addition, nonverbal communication also plays an important role in building good relationships with clients, where a confident body posture and a friendly smile can increase trust and strengthen the EO's professional image. Thus, a deep understanding of nonverbal communication not only improves relationships between team members but also strengthens the reputation and competitiveness of EOs in a competitive market (García et al., 2021).

This study aims to analyze the role of nonverbal communication in improving the quality of interpersonal relationships in the work environment, especially in event organizers. Through a case study of an EO, this study attempts to identify the forms of nonverbal communication that have the most influence on teamwork effectiveness and event success. In addition, this study also aims to explore how understanding and using nonverbal communication can improve coordination between team members, strengthen trust with clients, and create a harmonious work environment. The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to communication management in the creative industry sector, as well as enrich academic studies in the field of organizational communication (Burgoon et al., 2016; Matsumoto et al., 2020).

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in building and strengthening interpersonal relationships in the work environment, especially in the event organizer industry. Through this case study, it is expected to find empirical evidence that supports the hypothesis that the use of appropriate nonverbal communication can improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, strengthen teamwork, and improve overall organizational performance (Burgoon et al., 2016; Matsumoto et al., 2020; García et al., 2021). This research is expected to not only provide theoretical contributions to the development of communication science, but also offer practical recommendations for professionals in the field of event organizers to optimize nonverbal communication in carrying out their duties.

Nonverbal Communication Theory

Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of human interaction that includes various elements such as facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body posture, tone of voice, and interpersonal distance. According to Argyle (1975), nonverbal communication is often more dominant than verbal communication in conveying emotions and building interpersonal relationships. In the work environment, nonverbal communication can provide social signals that help individuals understand the intentions and feelings of their coworkers, even though no words are spoken. Elements such as friendly facial expressions, open gestures, and appropriate eye contact can create a more harmonious and productive work atmosphere.

In workplace interactions, nonverbal communication plays an important role in building perceptions of colleagues and superiors. Studies show that nonverbal cues such as open body posture and a friendly tone of voice can increase trust and cooperation between employees (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016). Conversely, negative nonverbal

communication, such as unfriendly facial expressions or closed body postures, can create a less friendly impression and hinder the effectiveness of teamwork.

Therefore, a good understanding of nonverbal communication is key to building a conducive work environment and increasing the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in an organization.

In addition, nonverbal communication also plays a role in strengthening or inhibiting messages conveyed in verbal communication. Research shows that a mismatch between verbal and nonverbal communication can lead to distrust and misunderstandings in work interactions (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2014). For example, a leader who talks about the importance of teamwork but has a flat tone of voice and minimal eye contact can reduce the effectiveness of his message. Thus, a good understanding of nonverbal communication can help individuals convey messages more effectively, improve interpersonal relationships, and create more positive work dynamics in the organizational environment.

Nonverbal communication can also be interpreted as the creation and exchange of messages without using words, this communication uses body movements, body posture, intonation (high or low tone), eye contact, facial expressions, closeness, and touch. It can also be said that nonverbal communication is all events surrounding the communication situation that are not related to spoken or written words and include all nonverbal stimuli that in a communicative setting are generalized by the individual and the environment of the individual who uses it. (Weri, 2007)

Interpersonal Relationships in the Work Environment

Interpersonal relationships in the workplace are interactions that occur between individuals who work in an organization or agency. In this case, interpersonal relationships involve not only verbal communication but also nonverbal communication, which plays an important role in building understanding and trust between coworkers. This kind of interaction can affect the overall work atmosphere and productivity, especially in a dynamic work environment such as an event organizer.

Nonverbal communication has a major contribution to interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Nonverbal components, such as facial expressions, body language, and voice intonation, help convey emotions and intentions that are difficult to explain through words. For example, smiling when talking to a coworker not only shows friendliness but also strengthens a sense of togetherness within the team.

In an event organizer work environment, where work pressure and dynamics are often high, nonverbal communication can be an effective tool for maintaining team harmony. Positive body language, such as nodding or eye contact, can show that someone is paying attention and respecting the opinions of others. This increases mutual trust among team members.

Good interpersonal relationships also depend on an individual's ability to understand and adjust their nonverbal communication to the context of the situation. In event organizers, this ability is very important because interactions with various parties, such as clients, vendors, and team members, often require a deep understanding of nonverbal communication to create harmony.

According to (Robins, Judge, & Judge, 2007), interpersonal relationships in the workplace encourage productive cooperation and provide economic, psychological, and social satisfaction. In the context of nonverbal communication, this means that elements

such as friendly voice intonation or open body posture can make coworkers feel appreciated, so they are more motivated to work together to achieve common goals.

In conclusion, nonverbal communication plays a very important role in building interpersonal relationships in the workplace, especially in demanding industries such as event organizers. By understanding and practicing effective nonverbal communication, individuals can strengthen teamwork, increase productivity, and create a harmonious work atmosphere.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Case studies were chosen because this study focuses on an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of nonverbal communication in building interpersonal relationships in the event organizer (EO) work environment. This approach allows researchers to understand the dynamics of nonverbal communication contextually, based on the direct experiences of actors in the EO industry.

The research subjects in this study were individuals who work in the event organizer (EO) industry, including managers, event coordinators, operational staff, and other personnel involved in event planning and implementation. The research subjects were selected based on their experience and involvement in team communication in EO, especially in situations that require fast coordination and close cooperation. Thus, this study can provide in-depth insight into how nonverbal communication plays a role in supporting the effectiveness of teamwork and the success of events managed by EO.

The number of informants in this study will be adjusted to the principle of saturation point (data saturation point), which is when there are no more new findings emerging from the interviews and observations conducted (Creswell, 2014). It is estimated that this study will involve 5 main informants, including EO supervisors, event coordinators or field staff, and MCs or liaison officers. The data analysis technique in this study uses data reduction, namely by coding the existing data according to the research topic, then presenting the data, namely the coded data is presented according to related topics, and drawing conclusions.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Based on research conducted at Event Organizer X, nonverbal communication has been shown to play an important role in improving interpersonal relationships in the work environment. Observations made show that in a dynamic and stressful work environment, nonverbal communication elements such as eye contact, facial expressions, hand gestures, and body posture become the main tools in conveying messages effectively. The EO team often uses nonverbal cues to provide quick instructions during the event, considering that working conditions often do not allow for long verbal communication. Nonverbal communication also appears to play a role in building a more harmonious work environment, where team members can understand each other's feelings and responses without always having to rely on words.

During the implementation of various events, it was found that eye contact and facial expressions were the dominant elements in conveying interpersonal meaning. Supervisors and event coordinators used certain facial expressions to signal agreement, disagreement, or urgency to team members. In addition, clear and firm hand gestures were often used to provide quick directions amidst the noise of the event. The use of this nonverbal communication not only increases the effectiveness of team coordination, but also reduces the potential for misunderstandings that can arise due to limited verbal communication in busy work conditions.

In addition to technical coordination, nonverbal communication has also been found to contribute to building closer professional relationships among team members. Open body language, smiles, and light touches such as pats on the shoulder are often used as forms of moral support and motivation. In interviews with several team members, they mentioned that positive nonverbal communication provides a sense of togetherness and increases work enthusiasm. This is in line with the findings of Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang (2020) who emphasized that nonverbal communication has a major influence in building emotional attachment and increasing team cohesion in the work environment. However, this study also found challenges in implementing nonverbal communication in the EO environment. Differences in perception of certain facial expressions or gestures can sometimes trigger misunderstandings, especially for team members who have different cultural backgrounds or work experiences. In addition, high time pressure in organizing events often makes nonverbal communication less noticed or misinterpreted. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the elements of effective nonverbal communication is needed as well as more systematic training to improve these skills among EO members.

Nonverbal Communication in Improving Interpersonal Relationships at Event Organizer X

Nonverbal communication is a crucial aspect in interpersonal interaction, especially in a dynamic work environment such as event organizer. Based on the theory of nonverbal communication proposed by Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016), nonverbal communication functions to clarify, strengthen, or even replace verbal communication in daily interactions. In the context of Event Organizer X, nonverbal elements such as facial expressions, eye contact, and hand gestures are actively used to convey instructions and build team understanding in the midst of a busy and stressful work atmosphere. The effectiveness of this nonverbal communication allows team members to coordinate quickly without having to rely on verbal communication which can be hampered by noise or time constraints. Furthermore, Hall's (1966) proxemics theory which discusses the use of space in communication shows that the interpersonal distance used in work interactions can affect the effectiveness of nonverbal communication. In the setting of Event Organizer X, the use of space and proper physical contact can strengthen a sense of togetherness and increase the efficiency of work coordination. For example, in urgent situations during an event, event supervisors and coordinators often use body language such as hand gestures or facial expressions to give directions to the team, replacing verbal commands that may be difficult to hear in the midst of a crowd (Hall, 1966). This shows that effective use of nonverbal communication not only increases interpersonal connectedness but also facilitates a more synchronous workflow in the EO environment.

In addition, Ekman's (2003) emotional expression theory explains that facial expressions play an important role in communicating emotions and building trust between individuals in a work group. In Event Organizer X, smiles, head nods, or facial expressions that indicate assertiveness are often used by team leaders to emphasize instructions or provide emotional support to team members. Ekman (2003) emphasizes that nonverbal communication that is in line with emotions can increase trust and strengthen interpersonal relationships. This is evident in the research conducted, where positive nonverbal communication contributed to increased work enthusiasm and a sense of togetherness in the EO team.

From the results of interviews and observations, there are five main factors that influence the success of nonverbal communication in EO X, namely:

1. Trust between coworkers reflected through eye contact and open body language;
2. Supportive attitudes shown by gestures such as nodding or smiling to relieve pressure;
3. Clarity of messages transmitted through consistent and easy-to-understand body movements or facial expressions;
4. A physically and psychologically conducive work environment that supports the proper interpretation of nonverbal signals; and
5. Differences in cultural background and work experience that influence the interpretation of nonverbal cues.

These factors are in line with Robbins & Judge's (2007) interpersonal communication theory and Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, which explains the importance of managing space, expression, and context in successful communication.

Field findings indicate that the success of nonverbal communication in the EO environment depends not only on the technical ability to convey signals, but also on the social sensitivity of team members to differences in interpretation of nonverbal symbols. The socio-cultural context, time pressure, and work dynamics influence how messages are interpreted. This confirms the argument of Matsumoto et al. (2020) that the success of nonverbal communication is closely related to cultural intelligence and contextual awareness. Therefore, training on nonverbal communication should not only be technical, but should also include affective and cultural dimensions so that the communication that occurs is truly effective, humanistic, and adaptive. Successful integration of nonverbal communication will ultimately strengthen team cohesion, increase work efficiency, and build a professional and supportive work climate.

Obstacles Faced in the Field

In the dynamics of Event Organizer X's work which is characterized by time pressure, multitasking, and constantly changing work situations, nonverbal communication becomes a vital instrument in maintaining workflow and team harmony. However, the results of the study show that although nonverbal communication contributes positively to building interpersonal relationships, its implementation is faced with a number of significant obstacles. These obstacles do not only come from technical or environmental factors, but also from psychosocial factors and individual differences in understanding nonverbal cues. The existence of these obstacles is a serious challenge to the effectiveness

of coordination and the quality of relationships within the EO team, especially when verbal communication is difficult to do optimally. Based on observations and interviews with several team members, several major obstacles were identified. First, differences in perception of nonverbal cues, especially facial expressions and gestures, which can lead to misunderstandings. Second, different cultural backgrounds and work experiences lead to inconsistent interpretations of nonverbal symbols. Third, high time pressure during the implementation of the event makes individuals tend to ignore nonverbal elements or express them inconsistently. Fourth, the physical conditions of the noisy or cramped work environment limit the space for optimal nonverbal communication. Finally, the lack of specific training on nonverbal communication causes some team members to be unaware of the importance of this aspect in daily work interactions.

This finding is in line with the theory of intercultural communication proposed by Hall (1976), which states that differences in cultural contexts influence how individuals interpret nonverbal messages. In a multicultural work environment such as EO, misunderstandings can arise when nonverbal symbols are interpreted based on each individual's background. In addition, Ekman's (2003) theory on emotional expression shows that although facial expressions are universal, the nuances of emotions and their reception are greatly influenced by situational and personal factors. In conditions of high stress, facial expressions or tone of voice can be misinterpreted as a form of anger or displeasure, when in fact it is only a response to work pressure. This shows the importance of emotional awareness and empathy in interpreting nonverbal signals accurately.

Limitations in understanding and applying nonverbal communication not only disrupt the workflow, but can also reduce the quality of interpersonal relationships in the EO team. When nonverbal messages are misinterpreted, this has the potential to trigger conflict, reduce trust, and create psychological distance between team members. Therefore, the solution offered is the need for structured and experience-based nonverbal communication training, emphasizing aspects of cultural diversity, emotional management, and skills in reading the context of situations. Thus, nonverbal communication is not only a communication tool, but also a strategic competency in creating a solid, resilient, and adaptive team in facing the work pressures typical of the event organizer industry.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been conducted, it can be concluded that nonverbal communication has a strategic role in building and improving interpersonal relationships in the work environment of Event Organizer X. In dynamic, fast, and stressful work situations, nonverbal communication elements such as facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures, body posture, and voice intonation have proven effective in conveying messages, accelerating coordination, and creating a harmonious work atmosphere. Nonverbal communication not only strengthens verbal messages, but also becomes the main tool in maintaining interaction efficiency, strengthening emotional ties between team members, and increasing mutual trust which is very important in collaborative work in the event organizer industry.

This study also revealed that the success of nonverbal communication is influenced by various factors, including the level of trust between colleagues, supportive attitudes,

clarity of expression, a supportive work environment, and diverse cultural backgrounds and work experiences. These factors, if managed properly, can be the main strength in forming solid and productive work relationships. However, there are also a number of obstacles that are challenges in the application of nonverbal communication, such as differences in perception of signals, limitations of space and time, lack of special training, and misinterpretation due to work pressure. These barriers can interfere with the effectiveness of communication and reduce the quality of interpersonal relationships if not addressed systematically. Therefore, it is important for organizations such as Event Organizer X to consciously develop an adaptive and inclusive nonverbal communication culture.

Nonverbal communication training, increasing sensitivity to cultural differences, and creating a work environment that supports positive interactions are strategic steps that can be taken to overcome existing obstacles. This study provides theoretical contributions to the development of organizational communication studies as well as practical contributions in increasing the effectiveness of teamwork in the creative industry. With properly managed nonverbal communication, harmonious interpersonal relationships can be formed, supporting team productivity, and ultimately driving the success of events managed by event organizers.

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