

Communication and Body Language

1. Learning Outcomes

After successfully understanding the information given in this session the participants shall be able to:

- Contextualize their use of leg and head gestures in their communication settings.
- Enlist a number of leg and head positioning gestures they use in communicating and signaling different meaning
- Observe and identify different gestures of other participants and sharing their interpretation.
- Use in an observable manner the leg and head gestures for effective communication.

2. Key Concepts and Content

Some of the most common and yet most neglected gestures are the leg gestures and the head positioning. These are a bit less observable and can be discreet. They need conscious efforts to be observed and then interpreted in a specific context. The simple reason being that leg gestures do not fall within the natural purview of our eyes focus and identically noting head positioning gets dominated by the facial expressions.

Key Concept 1: Leg gestures

Cross-leg gestures.

Like arm barrier gestures, crossed legs are a signal that a negative or defensive attitude may exist. The purpose of crossing the arms on the chest was originally to defend the heart and upper body region and crossing the legs is an attempt to shield the genital area. Crossed arms also indicate a more negative attitude than do crossed legs and the arms gestures is more obvious. Care should be taken when interpreting crossed leg gestures with women as many have been taught that this is how to 'sit like a lady'. Unfortunately for them, however, the gesture can make them appear defensive.



The Standard leg-cross position.

One leg is crossed neatly over the other usually the right over the left. This is the normal crossed-leg position used by European, British, Australian and New Zealand cultures and may be used to show a nervous, reserved or defensive attitude. However, this is usually a supportive gesture that occurs with other negative gestures and should not be interpreted in isolation or out of context. For example, people often sit like this during lectures or if they are on uncomfortable chairs for long periods. It is also common to see this gesture in cold weather. When the crossed legs gesture is combined with crossed arms, the person has withdrawn from the conversation.



The figure 4 leg-lock position.

This leg cross indicates that an argumentative or competitive attitude exists. It is the sitting position used by many American males as well as Pakistani “Chaudhrys”, “Wadiras”, i.e., influential land lords with authoritative positions within their own fiefdoms. This being the case, it is difficult to interpret the attitude of an American during a conversation. An urban Pakistani would find it rather rude and identically it would be quite obvious when a British citizen uses

this gesture. This gesture is not observable in female generally unless one is mentally a male – a tom boy.



Leg clamp

A person who has a hard and fast attitude in an argument or debate will often lock the figure 4 into place with one or both hands, using them as a clamp. This is a sign of the tough-minded, stubborn individual who may need a special approach to break through his resistance.

Standing leg cross gestures. The next time you attend a meeting or function, you will notice small groups of people all standing with their arms and legs crossed. Observation will also reveal that they are standing at a greater distance from each other than the customary one, and that, if they are wearing coats or jackets, they are usually buttoned. If you were to question these people, you would find that one or all of them are strangers to the others in the group. This is how most people stand when they are among people whom they do not know well.



The ankle-lock gesture

Crossing or folding the arms or legs suggests that a negative or defensive attitude exists, and this is also the case with the ankle lock, which is often combined with clenched fists resting on the

arms of the chair. The female version varies slightly; the knees are held together, the feet may be to one side and the hands rest side by side or one on top of the other resting on the upper legs.

The foot lock

Women almost exclusively use the gesture. The top of one foot locks around the other leg to reinforce a defensive attitude and, when this gesture appears, you can be sure that the woman has become a mental recluse or has retreated like a tortoise into her shell. A warm, friendly low-key approach is needed if you eventually hope to open this clamp. This position is common to shy or timid women.

Key Concept 2: Picking Imaginary Lint

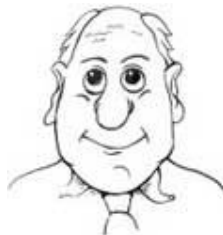
When a person disapproves of the opinion or attitudes of others but feels constrained in giving his point of view, his non-verbal gestures that occur are known as displacement gestures, that is, they result from a withheld opinion. Picking imaginary pieces of lint from clothing is one such gesture. The lint picker usually looks away from the other people towards the floor while performing this minor, irrelevant action. This is the most common signal of disapproval.



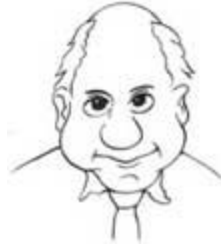
Picking Imaginary Lint

Key Concept 3: Head Gestures

Head is very important in body language. People tell a lot with their head position. When people keep their head straight tilted and head down looking through below of eyebrows. These gestures tell the mood of acknowledgement, approval, doubt and interest in a person.



Neutral Head Position



Disapproval Position

Key Concept 4: Everyone Uses Body Language

People cannot live without each other, we are social beings. As soon as we are in contact with others we are communicating. For this, in our general understanding we only make use of spoken and written language. In these ways we make the content of a message clear to each other. However we also communicate without words. This kind of communication tells us something about the relationship between people. Often, this is more important than getting the content of the message across. The communication about this non spoken communication, which tells us something about the relationship between people, is called Meta-Communication: Communicating about communication!

Key Concept 5: Words Are Inadequate

When we connect with a person, we also have to make it clear to each other how the content of a spoken message needs to be interpreted. How we do this says something about the relationship we have with the other person, or think we have anyway. Often words are inadequate for this purpose. For instance, we do not tell each other that easily how we feel about each other, or how the words of a message need to be interpreted. To make the meaning of our words clear, we use body language. Body language is a language without spoken words and is therefore called non-verbal communication. We use body language all the time, for instance looking someone in the eyes means something different than not looking someone in the eyes. When we are in contact with others, it is just not possible to be *not* communicating something.

Key Concept 6: Communication of the Subconscious

Usually body language occurs unconsciously. Yet, the body language we use decides to a large extent the quality of our communication. It follows that therefore it would be good to become conscious of our own and others' body language. We can learn to use our body language for a purpose. As well as learn to understand and interpret body language of others. It is important to note that body language has different meanings in different cultures. How we can interpret body language depends on the situation, the culture, the relationship we have with the person as well as the gender of the other. This means that there is not one signal that has the same meaning all over the world. If you do not take this into account, you may get yourself in some serious trouble! Body language is also interlinked with spoken language and a whole pattern of behavior from a person. As well as that, various body language signs can complement each other to make a particular meaning crystal clear or strengthen the meaning of what we communicate. Some groups have developed a whole specific body language which can be very explicit in its meaning and is used to communicate where the use of words may otherwise be difficult or dangerous. Examples of this are mostly groups, such as combat platoons, people in slavery, prisoners, etc.

Key Concept 7: Used To Express Feelings

Body language is used especially to express feelings. For instance, if we do not like someone, it is often difficult to say that directly to the person. However, we can make it clear either intentionally or unintentionally through body language. The opposite is also true. We may say that we ARE angry through words yet our body language may be saying loud and clear that we are NOT. This can be very confusing for the receiver. This is usually described as giving out double messages - one message in words and the other one in body language. It is also difficult to lie or cover up our feelings through body language. People may give their true feelings away by not being aware of their body language. Research has shown that most people pay more attention to, and believe more readily, their impression of how a person acts through body language than what is said through words. As a consequence, we tend to doubt, or put a question mark behind the spoken words if they do not correspond with the language of the body.

Key Concept 8: The Importance of Knowing How We Communicate

How we come across to someone is decided only in a small part by the words we speak. To leave a good impression behind, say at a job interview, it is important that we know, and to a certain extent can control, our body language. The person on the receiving end of our body language will have a feeling or impression that is often difficult to describe - difficult to put into words or difficult to prove what actually was communicated. Haven't we all said at times: 'I have a feeling he/she likes me', or something like: 'I doubt if what he/she is saying is really the truth'. This type of feeling is called intuition. Body language plays a big role in intuition as it gives us messages about the other person that we can interpret at an intuitive level. It is therefore necessary to get to know our own body language first. We should learn about it so that we can recognize it in others as well as in ourselves. For this purpose, all the different aspects of body language that we can learn something from are essential.