

## Chapter 2

# Interpersonal communication

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- 2.1 distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion and other-orientation
- 2.2 explain the roles and different aspects of nonverbal communication
- 2.3 describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations
- 2.4 discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions.

### WORKPLACE INSIGHT

#### **What makes for effective business and professional communication?**

Business and professional communication requires a good understanding of the interpersonal skills of listening, questioning and nonverbal communication. Listening and paying close attention to the other person's words and nonverbal communication reveals whether the person is distracted, confident, bored, thinking about something else, being truthful or even deceitful. Posture, eye contact, tone of voice and hand gestures communicate. Questioning to obtain information, clarify a point, reduce misunderstanding or show interest in the other person's beliefs, opinions, ideas and attitudes are common reasons for asking questions.

Communicating effectively means being clear about what you mean, knowing what you want to achieve and choosing an appropriate channel when you interact with others. Good interpersonal skills when conveying information allow you to achieve your purpose while showing respect for the point of view of others. When presenting a case, a persuasive credible argument supported by positive nonverbal communication helps you find common ground. Good listening, questioning and nonverbal communication, as well as the ability to read the body language of others, assists you to form good working and social relationships. Think about how you used your interpersonal skills when you last worked with a group. What worked well, and what could you have improved? How will you make improvements?

Interpersonal communication enables interaction with others. The skills of interpersonal communication develop relationships, enhance influence and manage interactions to the satisfaction of both parties. This chapter examines the interpersonal communication skills of assertion, other-orientation, nonverbal communication, listening, questioning and feedback. Knowing about and practising these skills enhances:

- interpersonal communication competence in professional, social and personal interactions
- adaptation and adjustment of messages to enable interactions appropriate to the time, place and overall context
- relationships in professional, business, social and personal situations based on understanding, positive and supportive interactions.

Assertive people tend to demonstrate open, expressive and relaxed behaviour when engaging in conversation, negotiating, making requests, refusing unreasonable requests, standing up for their opinions, asking for favours, and giving and receiving compliments in a range of situations. They are able to build honest, fulfilling relationships.

Nonverbal communication consists of the part of a message that is not encoded in words. The nonverbal part of the message tends to be less conscious and reveals the sender's feelings, likings and preferences more spontaneously and honestly than the verbal part. If the verbal message does not match the nonverbal communication, there is a tendency to believe the nonverbal part of the message. Reactions to nonverbal communication have an impact on liking and disliking, and on the way in which others respond and relate in personal and professional situations.

Listening is the interpretative process that takes place with what we hear. Through listening, we comprehend, store, classify and label information. The key to effective listening in any context is mental alertness, physical alertness and active participation. A focus on listening at both the individual and organisational levels can lead to better leadership and teamwork, recruiting and retention advantages, improved productivity and innovation, more effective meetings, fewer conflicts and errors, greater respect, rapport and trust, and fewer miscommunications and mistakes.

Active listening focuses attention and provides feedback, allowing speakers to express their feelings and identify what is really happening. Skill in active listening enhances understanding and improves relationships with colleagues and professional contacts. It minimises misunderstanding and avoids wasted time, energy and resources due to miscommunication. Enhanced understanding decreases the potential for conflict and enables people to work together productively.

In an organisation, appropriate and constructive feedback and questioning create a positive communication climate, which in turn creates an open and encouraging organisational climate. Constructive feedback focuses on what needs to be done.

### Objective 2.1

Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion and other-orientation

**Assertive behaviour** is based on high self-esteem and an acceptance of self.

**Aggressive behaviour** is based on domination and often leads to conflict.

## ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

In their interactions, people who exhibit **assertive behaviour** recognise and adapt their messages to the motives, goals, experiences and needs of the other person as well as to their own needs. Those who behave assertively are acknowledging both their rights as individuals and the rights of other people. Such people feel comfortable with themselves and with others, and are able to satisfy their own needs without undermining the rights and needs of others. This is the ideal attitude to have at work and in our everyday lives.

Assertive people can select suitable behaviour when the occasion demands and recognise when their own behaviour is assertive, aggressive or non-assertive. Although assertive people want to be heard and acknowledged, they are able to accept that others may have different perceptions and opinions. Assertive people are generally respected and liked by others.

In contrast, people who exhibit **aggressive behaviour** may try to win at all costs, even to the point of humiliating others. They are often in conflict and may be disliked by others.

Table 2.1: Characteristics of assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviour

Assertive behaviour	Aggressive behaviour	Submissive behaviour
Is self-enhancing of others	Is self-enhancing and dominating of others	Is self-denying
May achieve desired goal	Achieves desired goals regardless of others	Does not achieve desired goals
Has a positive self-concept	Devalues the contribution of others	Feels hurt or anxious often
Makes decisions for self	Makes decisions for others	Allows others to make the decisions
Is expressive	Is expressive and often overbearing	Is inhibited
Feels comfortable with and equal to others	Feels uncomfortable with and superior to others	Feels uncomfortable with and of less worth than others
Is able to present a point of view and accept a different point of view	Is able to present a point of view and may try to impose it by dominating	Is unable to present a point of view

At the other end of the scale, people who exhibit **submissive behaviour** are unable to assert themselves or promote their point of view. They are worried, anxious and lack confidence, and may be disliked because of their insecurity. Table 2.1 contrasts the characteristics of *assertive*, *aggressive* and *submissive* behaviour.

**Submissive behaviour** is based on accepting the opinions of others without asserting one's own point of view; it comes from low self-esteem.

## Verbal assertion skills

Self-confident and assertive behaviour treats both self and others with respect. A verbally assertive person states their wishes, thoughts and feelings clearly, openly and confidently while understanding other people's point of view and without coercing them to relinquish their needs. Assertive people control their emotions and interact positively to focus on action and results.

Balanced, open-minded responses that respect and treat others as equals are neither passive nor aggressive. For example, a team leader who is verbally assertive when presenting the team with a proposed update and change to payroll procedures is likely to avoid resistance and aggressive or passive responses. Rather than being overbearing and dominating, the team leader focuses discussion with thoughtful, objective language. Team members are likely to respond positively to the team leader's empathic and respectful explanations. When interactions between the team leader and team members are neither aggressive nor passive, the resulting positivity and openness encourages members to contribute ideas, negotiate change, counter objections and engage in decision making.

A manager and employee in a performance appraisal who are both able to use verbal assertion build a positive relationship based on the foundation skills of self-awareness, self-management, situational awareness and assertion. The positive communication climate encourages open, honest exchanges, rather than defensive, self-protective and aggressive responses.

## 'I' statements

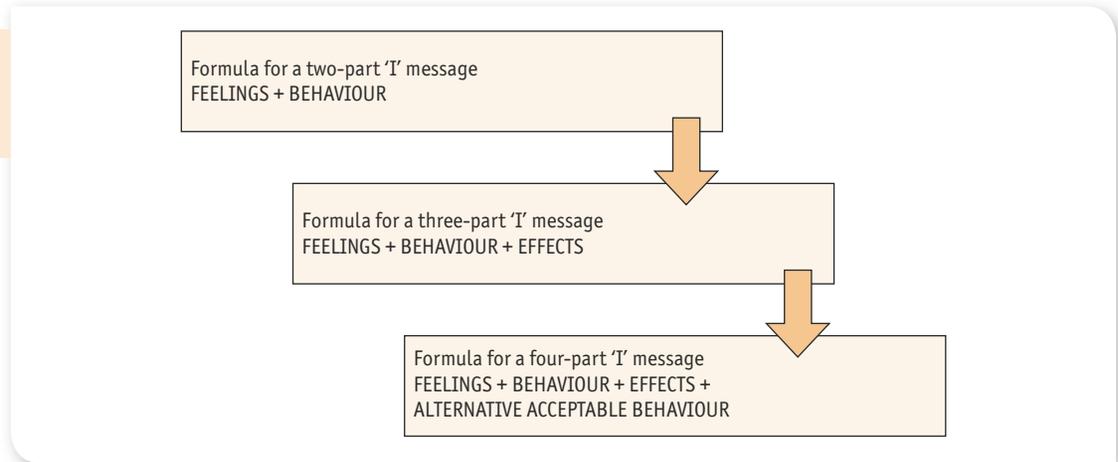
A useful technique for demonstrating assertion and showing openness with others is the **'I' statement** or **'I' message**. 'I' statements are a way of sharing emotions and letting others know how their behaviour is perceived and how it affects you. One of the most effective ways to begin assertive statements is to say: 'I feel . . . when . . .' For example, the message may be: 'I feel annoyed when you don't let me know you will be late.' People can express their needs and wants with an 'I' message. It shows their personal involvement plus a willingness to share their feelings. It also lets them own their own reactions.

'I' messages can be used to express both positive and negative feelings; they may talk about behaviour that is acceptable and pleasing, or behaviour that is unacceptable and displeasing. Because 'I' messages dealing with behaviour that is unacceptable are more difficult to express,

**'I' statements/messages** are assertive statements that help to send a clear message. 'I' statements can have two, three or four parts.

**FIGURE 2.1**

Formulae for 'I' messages



this section focuses on their construction. The formulae for two-, three- and four-part 'I' messages in Figure 2.1 provide a useful framework for offering constructive, non-threatening feedback.

In a two-part 'I' message, the speaker's feelings are owned and the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete terms. Following the two-part 'I' message formula, a two-part assertive message could be: 'I feel angry when the dirty clothes are left in the bathroom.' In the second part, take care to *describe* the *behaviour* of the other person, rather than interpret, judge or evaluate it.

In a three-part 'I' message, the speaker's feelings are owned, the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete terms, and the effect of the behaviour on you (i.e. the consequences for you) is stated in concrete, factual words. The statements may occur in any order. Following the formula, a three-part assertive statement could be: 'I feel annoyed when you don't let me know you will be late, because I'm unable to reschedule my timetable.'

In a four-part 'I' message, the feelings are owned, the behaviour that is causing the feeling is described in concrete words, the effect of the behaviour is stated in concrete, factual words, and an alternative acceptable behaviour is offered. Following this formula, an assertive message could be: 'I feel annoyed when you don't let me know you will be late, because I'm unable to reschedule my timetable. I would like you to ring me and let me know you will be late.' The fourth part of the message is used to suggest, initially, an alternative acceptable behaviour or to negotiate a behaviour that is acceptable to both people.

### Owning your reactions

Part of being able to give successful 'I' messages is 'owning your reactions'. This means being able to recognise and identify your feelings. One way to own your reactions is to use the following two-part feedback formula:

- Describe the other person's behaviour.
- Describe your reaction to it.

In this way, the other person's behaviour is linked with your reaction. For example, if you say, 'When you shout, I feel afraid', you are describing your reaction to their behaviour. You have identified your feelings. On the other hand, if you said, 'When you shout, you frighten me', you are blaming them or holding them responsible for your reaction.

Successful 'I' statements communicate in a non-threatening way that is acceptable to the other person. They do not blame or interpret the other person's conduct. Aggressive statements often start with 'You make me feel . . .' and blame the other person for their behaviour and your feelings. Once you become skilled in using 'I' messages, you will frame them in your own words and may omit the words 'feel', 'when' and 'because'. 'I' messages are particularly useful when people need to give and receive information and reach agreement.

## Other-orientation

Rather than simply focusing on their own interests, skilful interpersonal communicators consider the perspective, feelings and attitudes of the other person. To be other-oriented means to consider the other person's thoughts and feelings when deciding how, when and where to communicate a message.

In professional, business, social and personal relationships, an other-oriented person communicates attentiveness to and genuine interest in the other person. **Other-orientation** allows them to adapt their message to the communication purpose and context.

The behaviours of people with whom we enjoy talking socially or in business are typically other-oriented. DeVito (2011) describes the following behaviours as other-oriented.

- *Show consideration.* Demonstrate respect—for example, ask if it's all right to dump your troubles on someone before doing so, or ask if your phone call comes at a good time.
- *Acknowledge the other person's feelings as legitimate.* Expressions such as 'You're right' or 'I can understand why you're so angry' help focus the interaction on the other person and confirm that you're listening.
- *Acknowledge the other person.* Recognise the importance of the other person. Ask for suggestions, opinions and clarification. This will ensure that you understand what the other person is saying from that person's point of view.
- *Focus your messages on the other person.* Use open-ended questions to involve the other person in the interaction (as opposed to questions that merely ask for a yes or no answer), and make statements that directly address the person. Use focused eye contact and appropriate facial expressions; smile, nod and lean towards the other person.
- *Grant permission.* Let the other person know that it's okay to express (or to not express) her or his feelings. A simple statement such as 'I know how difficult it is to talk about feelings' opens up the topic of feelings and gives the other person permission either to pursue such a discussion or to say nothing.

A person who is other-oriented is aware of other people's thoughts, feelings, goals and needs and able to respond in ways that offer them support. An other-oriented person behaves thoughtfully, honestly and with respect for self and others. Rather than just agree or give in to the demands of others, they remain true to their own values and beliefs, and interact with integrity using verbal assertion, 'I' messages, positive nonverbal communication, and a range of listening and questioning skills. Other-oriented communicators are willing to adapt their message to the receiver, and to the situation, to ensure understanding and achievement of goals.

Self-focused, self-absorbed, egocentric communicators focus on their self-interest without regard for the other person. Failure to consider the other person and to adapt the message to their needs, experiences and personality, or to the time and place of the interaction, may hinder communication. Rather than achieving the intended communication purpose, barriers may arise.

Adaptation of messages to the receiver and the situation is essential given the variety of communication channels now in use in business and the professions. Other-orientation enhances honest, open communication in face-to-face situations, online, through social media, or with colleagues working remotely and in different cultures and countries.

**Other-orientation** is consideration by the person communicating for the thoughts, needs, experiences, culture and goals of the other person while still retaining their own integrity.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS 2.1

- 1 a Contrast assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours.  
b Describe the features of verbal assertion.
- 2 a What does an 'I' statement do?  
b What does 'own your reactions' mean?
- 3 a Briefly explain what it means to be other-oriented.  
b Contrast the likely outcome from self-focused, self-absorbed communication with the outcome from other-oriented communication.



**Objective 2.2**

Explain the roles and different aspects of nonverbal communication

**Nonverbal behaviour**

includes movement of the hands, head, feet and legs; posture; eye movements; facial expressions; vocalisations; and voice qualities.

## THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

There are few situations where words alone convey the whole message. The words are the content part—what is said. The relationship part (nonverbal) of a message—how something is said—conveys the sender's attitudes, emotions, power and regard for the other person. Our capacity to match the content and relationship parts of our messages affects the quality of our intimate, social and working relationships. In any meeting, negotiation or conversation, the relationship part (nonverbal) accompanying the content (words) reinforces and adds meaning to them.

Birdwhistell (1970) claimed that the average person actually speaks for a total of only 10 to 11 minutes daily and that the standard spoken sentence takes only about 2.5 seconds. He estimated that verbal components carry about one-third, and nonverbal components about two-thirds, of the social meaning of the situation. Mehrabian (1971, p. 44) commented that a person's **nonverbal behaviour** communicates feelings or attitudes more than words. His equation is:

$$\text{Total feeling} = 7\% \text{ verbal feeling} + 38\% \text{ vocal feeling} + 55\% \text{ facial feeling}$$

Mehrabian (1971, p. iii) stated that 'people who have a greater awareness of the communicative significance of actions not only can ensure accurate communication of their own feelings but also can be more successful in their intimate relationships, in artistic endeavors such as acting, or in work that involves the persuasion, leadership, and organisation of others'. The ability to send clear nonverbal messages facilitates communication.

The *total message* contains spoken words and nonverbal communication. Birdwhistell (1970) noted that 35% of meaning comes from the verbal part of the message and 65% from the nonverbal part. Words alone are not enough to convey the message. Nonverbal communication adds meaning and modifies or changes the spoken words. Table 2.2 shows six ways of doing this.

**Table 2.2: Nonverbal communication**

Purpose	Example
Repeating	Pointing when giving directions.
Contradicting	Looking at your watch and backing away while telling someone, 'I'm very interested in what you're saying.'
Substituting	Using facial expressions as a substitute for words, to show pleasure, disappointment and a range of emotions.
Complementing	Modifying, emphasising or elaborating words in a way that conveys attitudes and intentions. For example, a person who disrespects another may stand in a casual way or use a tone of voice that conveys a lack of respect when talking with this person.
Accenting	Moving the head and hands to emphasise parts of the verbal message—for example, shaking the head as you say 'No'.
Controlling the flow of information	Nodding the head or changing bodily position can indicate to the speaker to continue or to give the other person a turn.

Argyle (1983) confirmed that research shows that 'the non-verbal style had more effect than the verbal contents, in fact about five times as much; when the verbal and non-verbal messages were in conflict, the verbal contents were virtually disregarded'. Argyle outlined four different nonverbal communication roles:

- *Communicating interpersonal attitudes and emotions.* From birth, we see and read messages sent by nonverbal communication. It is an innate part of our social behaviour 'used for negotiating interpersonal attitudes, while the verbal channel is used primarily for conveying information' (1983, p. 44).
- *Self-presentation.* The self-presentation role conveys information about our self-concept, image and feelings. Artefacts such as badges, clothes and hairstyle send information about the self nonverbally.

- *Rituals*. The patterns of behaviour used in rituals and ceremonies, such as university graduations, school speech days, engagements and weddings, confirm social relationships and send messages about status or changes in status (such as from undergraduate to postgraduate).
- *Supporting verbal communication*. The role of nonverbal communication in supporting verbal communication is shown in vocal cues such as timing, pitch, resonance, rhythm and articulation. They support the verbal message.

Givens (2016) presents the concept of **nonverbal learning** as the act of gaining knowledge or skills apart from language, speech or words. A great deal of knowledge in organisations (e.g. from how to dress to how to make a major public presentation on behalf of your organisation) is gained by watching, imitating and practising the nonverbal communication of someone who knows. Givens highlights the importance of nonverbal directions at airports, shopping centres and theme parks, and on the roads. They are linked nonverbally via international graphic symbols in a pictorial format to show people where they are and where they need to go.

**Nonverbal learning** is the extralinguistic transmission of cultural knowledge, practices and lore.

## Aspects of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is more powerful than verbal communication in conveying emotions, attitudes and reactions. Charles Darwin published the first scientific study of nonverbal communication in his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Since then, there has been considerable research into nonverbal cues. Discoveries in neuroscience funded during 1990–2000, the ‘Decade of the Brain’, have provided a clearer picture of nonverbal communication. Body language has come of age in the 21st century as a science to help us understand what it means to be human (Givens 2016).

Theoretical writings and research classify nonverbal communication into the seven main areas shown in Table 2.3. However, it should be noted that to consider each of these aspects in isolation is artificial. In practice, what is sent as a complete message is a cluster of nonverbal cues in association with the spoken words.

**Table 2.3: Classifications of nonverbal communication**

Area	Description	Example
Body movement (kinesic behaviour)	Body posture, body movements (eye, head, hand, feet and leg movements) and facial expressions all affect the message.	A person leaning forward and shaking a finger is seen as dominating. Fiddling with jewellery or pens may convey nervousness and insecurity.
Physical characteristics	Physical characteristics, first impressions and images of others can be associated unconsciously with past experiences of people with similar characteristics.	In interpersonal encounters, people react to factors such as body shape, general attractiveness, body and breath odours, weight, hair and skin colour.
Touching behaviour	Touching can console or support the other person and show feelings such as affection, sexual interest or dominance. Hand gestures demonstrate feelings. A handshake, for example, can express either dominance or equality.	Touching behaviours, stroking, hitting, holding or guiding the movements of another person are behaviours that communicate. For example, a pat on the arm can convey intimacy or control. Some touching is ritualistic, such as a handshake as a greeting.
Vocal qualities (paralanguage)	<b>Paralanguage</b> is that part of language associated with, but not involving, the word system. Voice qualities and vocalisations—the tone of voice, rate of speaking and voice inflection—affect <i>how</i> something is said, rather than <i>what</i> is said.	Voice qualities include pitch range, pitch control, rhythm control, tempo, articulation control and resonance. Vocalisations (such as sighing, groaning, volume, ‘um’ and ‘ah’) also give clues to the total message.

**Paralanguage** is that part of language associated with, but not involving, the word system. It is the voice qualities and vocalisations that affect *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said.

*continues*

**Proximity** means nearness in place.

**Artefacts** are objects that convey nonverbal messages.

**Table 2.3: Classifications of nonverbal communication** *continued*

Area	Description	Example
Space (proximity)	<b>Proximity</b> means nearness, in terms of physical space. Hall (1969) identified four distances that people maintain between themselves and others: 1 Intimate space is 0-45 cm. 2 Personal distance is 45-120 cm. 3 Social distance is 1.2-3.6 m. 4 Public distance is 3.6 m to out of sight.	Personal space varies according to gender, status, roles and culture. Height and weight can be used to convey a message. Towering over another in their personal space may cause discomfort and withdrawal. When speaking to acquaintances or work colleagues, about an arm's length of space is usual; to friends and family, about half an arm's length is fine; in intimate relationships, contact is direct and close.
Artefacts	<b>Artefacts</b> are objects used to convey nonverbal messages about self-concept, image, mood, feelings or style. Many artefacts are common to the group. Others (particularly clothing) are individual and highly visible, and may create a positive or negative first impression.	Perfume, clothes, glasses and hairpieces project the style or mood of the wearer. A police officer's ID, a nurse's uniform and an Italian suit can signal power in a situation. If a plain-clothes police officer produces official identification at an accident, others immediately perceive the person's authority.
Environment	Office space, factory layout, the sales area and conference venues have an impact on perceptions, morale and productivity. The environment should match expectations to avoid 'noise' that may cause communication barriers.	Natural and artificial light, colour, temperature, tables, chairs, desks, lounges, plants, sound, artwork and floor coverings all have an impact. The environment should satisfy instincts such as the need for privacy, familiarity and security.

Movements of the hands, arms, feet and head are closely oriented with the spoken words. They convey messages about emotions, feelings and attitudes. Knapp (1978) has presented Ekman and Friesen's five main categories of body movement: emblems, illustrators, affective or feeling displays, regulators and adaptors. These categories are explained in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4: Categories of body movement**

Category of body movement	Definition	Purpose	Example
Emblems	Emblems are nonverbal acts learned through imitation.	To reinforce or replace the words.	The nonverbals for 'okay', such as a nod or a smile.
Illustrators	Illustrators are nonverbal acts that relate to and illustrate the spoken word.	To accentuate or emphasise a word or phrase, or to complement what is said.	A nod of the head and wave of the arm in a certain direction, accompanying the statement 'over there'.
Affective or feeling displays	Affective displays are changes in facial expressions that display emotion.	Unconscious displays reflect feelings, whereas intentional expressions can disguise or hide feelings.	Facial expressions and eye contact—for example, a smile to express happiness.
Regulators	Regulators are nonverbal acts, such as head-nods, that regulate communication between people.	To maintain and control the flow of speaking and listening. Regulators indicate whether to continue, repeat, elaborate or change from speaker to listener.	A head-nod to encourage another person to continue speaking, or raising of the eyebrows to invite an answer to a question.
Adaptors	Adaptors are nonverbal acts performed unconsciously in response to some inner desire.	To display instinctive responses.	Scratching an itchy ear, or raising the arms in shock or horror.

Vocalisations also give clues to the total message (see Table 2.5). The tone of voice of a person excited about a coming holiday reflects this excitement. A higher voice pitch than usual is interpreted as dishonesty or discomfort. A salesperson who speaks too quickly may be greeted with suspicion. Someone who raises their voice at the end of a sentence may sound uncertain and less authoritative than one who ends a sentence with a lower voice pitch. Sounds and other actions express a great deal about emotions and state of mind. Clearing the throat, fidgeting, perspiration or hand-wringing, for example, may display apprehension. Sideways glances, rubbing one's eyes, touching and rubbing of the nose, or buttoning the coat while drawing away may imply or create suspicion.

**Table 2.5: Vocalisations**

Type	Example
Vocal characterisers	Vocal characterisers include laughing, crying, sighing, yawning, clearing the throat, groaning, yelling, whispering.
Vocal qualifiers	Vocal qualifiers include intensity, such as too loud through to too soft, and pitch level, from too high to too low.
Vocal segregates	Vocal segregates are sounds such as 'Uh huh', 'Um', 'Uh' and 'Ah', silent pauses, and intruding sounds from the environment.

How people use their own personal space and the space of others defines the relationship; it communicates and reflects the way they feel towards others. Mehrabian (1971, p. 1) explains that 'people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer'. He refers to this as the *immediacy principle*.

### Verbal and nonverbal contradictions

Most nonverbal communication is clear and easy to understand, but on occasions the nonverbal part of the message may be ambiguous and confusing. A nonverbal message that does not align with the spoken message can contradict the verbal component of the total message. The message is two-edged because the facial and vocal expressions, postures and gestures do not match the words. The percentages for the three components that make up total feeling in Mehrabian's (1971) formula (see p. 30) show that facial expressions have the greatest impact on the message. The cues in the vocal qualities have the next greatest impact. The experiment shows that, when we are resolving the general meaning of an inconsistent message, words make up the smallest percentage of the message.

Usually, nonverbal communication is not consciously observed unless it causes some confusion or doubt in the receiver. Sometimes, it is possible to ignore confusing nonverbal communication, but on other occasions it must be acknowledged or even confronted. For example, the verbal message may convey agreement, while a range of nonverbal signals—such as pitch of voice, facial expression or the body held back—indicates lack of agreement or even ridicule. It is useful to check the meaning whenever you are in doubt, are uncomfortable with the communication or have to make a decision on the basis of the total message.

When the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent, or different from one another, the total message can be understood more easily by following this four-step process:

- 1 Hear the words.
- 2 See the nonverbal behaviours.
- 3 Check the meaning with the sender.
- 4 Consider the impact of the context or setting.

Nonverbal communication always exists in a context or framework. The context often determines the meaning of the nonverbal behaviour. On different occasions the same nonverbal gesture may have a completely different meaning because of its context. Nonverbal

behaviour separated from its context and the spoken words that accompany it is almost impossible to interpret with any accuracy.

## Personal, cultural and universal nonverbal communication

In working towards more effective communication in our profession and workplace, particularly in interpreting the nonverbal part of the message, it is helpful to consider three types of nonverbal message:

- personal to the individual
- common to a group of people or culture
- universal to humankind.

To assist in understanding nonverbal communication, Givens (2018) has compiled a *Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs and Body Language Cues*. The items in this dictionary have been researched by anthropologists, archaeologists, biologists, linguists, psychiatrists, psychologists, semioticians and others (including Givens) who have studied human communication from a scientific point of view. This dictionary defines every aspect of nonverbal communication, from 'Adam's-apple-jump' to 'zygomatic smile'.

### Personal nonverbal communication

**Personal nonverbal communication** is the use of nonverbal actions in a way that is personal or unique to a person.

**Personal nonverbal communication** is the use of nonverbal actions in a way that is personal or unique to that person. Givens (2016) states: 'Each of us gives and responds to literally thousands of nonverbal messages daily in our personal and professional lives—and while commuting back and forth between the two. From morning's kiss to business suits and tense-mouth displays at the conference table, we react to wordless messages emotionally, often without knowing why. The boss's head-nod, the clerk's bow tie, the next-door neighbor's hairstyle—we notice the minutia of nonverbal behaviour because their details reveal (a) how we relate to one another, and (b) who we think we are.'

Givens believes 'nonverbal messages are so potent and compelling because they are processed in ancient brain centres located beneath the newer areas used for speech'. Nonverbal cues, he asserts, are produced and received below the level of conscious awareness.

Conditioning in the developmental years of childhood, and identification with others who are trusted and respected, influence personal nonverbal communication. Over time, people develop preferences for certain patterns of nonverbal communication based on experience. A person's style of dress or image is a form of communication personal to the individual. Statements about self are made through appearance and clothing.

In personal nonverbal communication the meaning is unique to the person sending the message. One person may laugh through nervousness or fear of crying, while another person may cry. Someone may talk while working, while another person may work in silence.

Nonverbal communication reflects the emotional response in personal, social and professional interactions. How would you interpret, for example, the emotional response of a person sitting with their arms folded in front of the body, eyes downcast and a tense facial expression? The gestures and body language show the person is unhappy, disinterested or disengaged.

Every person has their own unique nonverbal signals. Accurate interpretation of the nonverbal messages comes from knowing the person and their pattern of interpersonal communication, both verbal and nonverbal.

### Cultural nonverbal communication

**Cultural nonverbal communication** is rule-governed behaviour learned unconsciously from others in the culture.

It is generally acknowledged that different national cultures interpret body language, gestures, posture, vocal noises and amount of eye contact in slightly different ways. Nonverbal behaviour learned from others communicates meaning and establishes the traditions, attitudes and patterns of behaviour typical of the prevailing culture. **Cultural nonverbal communication** is learned unconsciously by observing others, receiving direct instructions,

or modelling and imitating the behaviour of others in the group. In order to belong, individuals share and conform to the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour of others in the culture.

Culture is the attitudes and patterns of behaviour in a given group. Culture initiates the difference in the way most people who live in one country think and behave from people who live in another country. The attitudes and behaviours considered normal or typical within each country are the cultural norms that influence every aspect of the lives of people in each country. The **cultural norms** reflect what people value, their attitudes and behaviour. People are often unaware that their beliefs and behaviour are influenced by a culture and its norms.

National cultures influence how people communicate, behave, conduct work, negotiate, and solve challenges, problems and conflicts. The combination of values (beliefs) and behaviours they share supports cultural norms. Deference to cultural norms regulates communication (verbal and nonverbal) and interactions between those in the culture.

Hall (1976) originally identified the concepts of high context and low context to classify differences in communication styles. From his findings, cultures are classified according to where they fall on a continuum between high- and low-context cultures. In a high-context culture, a large part of the message is influenced by the background and basic values of the communicator and is implied in the message's context. Typical characteristics of high-context cultures are high sensory involvement (high-contact touch behaviour and close proximity due to low personal space needs). The message conveys only a limited portion of the meaning in what is said and must also be interpreted in terms of how and where it is said, and the body language of the speaker. Time sense is polychromic, so things may happen simultaneously and proceed at their own pace.

In a low-context culture, the words in the message are explicit and nonverbal cues have less impact on the intended meaning. Typical characteristics of low-context cultures are low sensory involvement (low-contact touch behaviour and high personal space needs). The words in the message convey explicitly most of the meaning in the communication. Nonverbal cues have less impact. Time sense is monochromic, so things happen one at a time and in sequence, and planning and punctuality are a priority.

Other research by Lewis (2005) compared the communication styles and cultural features of different nations. The research classified cultures into three broad types: linear-active, multi-active or reactive.

- *Linear-active cultures* are calm, factual, task-oriented, decisive and highly planned, and prefer doing one thing at a time—for example, Germans, Swiss and Britons.
- *Multi-active cultures* are warm, animated and loquacious, and prefer to plan and do many things at once—for example, Latin Americans, Arabs and Italians.
- *Reactive cultures* are called 'listening cultures'. They are courteous, accommodating, compromising and respectful—for example, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese.

The different national norms may lead to communication barriers caused by differing perceptions of the meaning of gestures, posture, silence, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance and other nonverbal cues. Refer to Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of high- and low-context cultures.

As cultural background influences the way people send and receive nonverbal messages, it is important to consider the cultural factors in the message, as well as interpreting the message within its context. Differences in cultural norms about the use of facial expressions and eye contact may cause misinterpretation. Many Asians and Africans, for example, show respect by looking down and avoiding direct eye contact, while Europeans and North Americans consider the avoidance of eye contact as a lack of attention or a sign of disrespect. Inconsistencies between the verbal and nonverbal messages of someone from another culture may be acceptable norms within their culture.

Positive intercultural relationships can be built by acknowledging cultural differences and developing cultural awareness and sensitivity. Development of an other-orientation towards people from other cultures and a willingness to move away from your cultural mindset in order to behave flexibly in intercultural interactions improves intercultural relationships.

**Cultural norms** are the attitudes and patterns of behaviour considered normal, typical or average within a cultural group.

Refer to Chapter 5 for a discussion of approaches and strategies that help bridge differences in background and culture.

## Universal nonverbal communication

**Universal nonverbal communication** refers to body movements common to humankind, such as smiling or crying.

**Universal nonverbal communication** is behaviour that is common to humankind. Morris and colleagues (1979) found that some gestures are highly localised in a culture, while others cross national and linguistic boundaries. A person smiling with outspread arms and upturned open hands communicates welcome universally. Universally, facial expressions and gestures are indicators of emotion. Darwin (1872) suggested that emotions have evolved as part of our biological heritage. An emotion such as displeasure or puzzlement is expressed through a pattern of muscular facial movements that we call a frown.

Universal nonverbal messages often show happiness, sadness or deep-seated feelings—for example, a smile or tears or expressions of surprise. Their basis is physiological change related to emotions, rather than rituals stylised by a society. According to Metcalf (1997), the universal sign for a person withholding their true feelings is putting one or both hands to the face. While an adult may rub the mouth, upper lip or nose with one finger, a teenager may cover the mouth. Children, who are less experienced than adults or teenagers at sending and interpreting messages, will cover their face.

Occasionally, nonverbal behaviours such as a sneeze are unrelated to the verbal message. A sneeze is simply random behaviour that may distract but does not change the meaning. Unrelated nonverbal communication can distract from the verbal message, although it has little effect on the meaning of the verbal part of the message.

Givens (2018) asserts that body-language signals can be learned behaviour, innate behaviour or a mixture of both. He lists the thumbs-up and military-salute gestures as examples of learned signals and the eye-blink and the throat-clear as examples of inborn or innate signals. Laughing, crying and shoulder-shrugging he considers to be 'mixed', because, although they originated as innate actions, cultural rules have later shaped their timing, energy and use. Other researchers are in disagreement about the nature–nurture issue, some believing that most or all gestures are learned.

A

### REVIEW QUESTIONS 2.2

- 1
  - a Identify the seven aspects of nonverbal communication.
  - b What is the purpose of each of the five main categories of body movement identified by Ekman and Friesen?
  - c Briefly explain the four types of space that dictate the rules of proximity in a society or culture.
  - d What part do artefacts play in nonverbal communication?
- 2
  - a Develop a list of up to five examples of nonverbal communication that strengthens or reduces the impact of verbal communication.
  - b When faced with mixed signals between the verbal and nonverbal message, which part is a listener most likely to believe?
  - c Explain why they are likely to believe that part.
- 3
  - a List three universal communication body movements.
  - b Discuss with examples at least three aspects of behaviour influenced by a nation's culture.
  - c Discuss strategies you can use to build positive intercultural relationships.
- 4
  - a 'Any nonverbal communication needs to be seen against related cultural norms.' Explain this statement.
  - b Identify and compare characteristics of a high-context and a low-context culture.

## APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

### Work individually

- 1 Reflect on a recent communication interaction in which someone gave you feedback that met the verbal assertion guidelines discussed in this section of the chapter. Did that person understand you? Did your interaction have the intended effect? How did the interaction make you feel?
- 2 a Use the table to conduct a survey (over the next week) of assertive and submissive behaviour. Record examples you observe of assertive responses in column 1 and a list of submissive behaviours in column 3.

Survey findings			
Assertive behaviour	Outcome from assertive behaviour	Submissive behaviour	Outcome from submissive behaviour

- b In column 2, identify the outcome from assertive behaviour; and in column 4, the outcome from submissive behaviour.
- c In a short written answer, suggest interpersonal strategies that could change the submissive responses in column 3 into assertion.
- 3 Imagine your shared house mate is driving you crazy: she uses your things without asking, she never does the dishes, and she often has her friends stay over without asking you first.
  - a How would you respond assertively? How would you respond passively? How would you respond aggressively?
  - b Write two or three paragraphs detailing how other-orientation could help you come up with a reasonable solution together.
- 4 a Differentiate the four different nonverbal communication roles identified by Argyle (1983) in a short written answer (about 250 words).
  - b Brainstorm to create a list of examples of each of these roles.
  - c In which of the four nonverbal communication roles do you feel most comfortable?
  - d In which of the four roles do you feel least comfortable?
  - e What actions could you take to make yourself feel more comfortable in that role?

### Work in groups

- 5 Work in pairs.
  - a Discuss a situation when interpreting nonverbal messages through your own gender and cultural rules caused miscommunication.
  - b Describe the results of the miscommunication.
  - c Suggest strategies you could use to bridge the differences between background and culture.
  - d Report back to the large group.

- 6 Work in pairs by standing together. While person A stands still on exactly the same spot, person B positions themselves comfortably in relation to person A. Person B, who has made the decision on comfortable distance, then says what made them choose their position. Person A, who is standing still, then talks about how they feel—that is, whether person B is standing too close, the angle, the amount of contact, the impact of height difference, gender issues, body size and body space.

### Objective 2.3

Describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations

**Listening** is a conscious, knowing response to a message.

## THE LISTENING PROCESS

**Listening** is the ability to accurately receive, understand and interpret messages. Research into the time adults spend listening found an average of 45% of time is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, Rosenfeld & Proctor 2001). The research showed that listening occupied more time than any other communication activity. While hearing is a passive process, listening is a conscious, knowing response to the message. The listener hears sounds, interprets those sounds, and attaches meaning to the sounds in the message. The five stages in the process are as follows:

- 1 Receiving the verbal and nonverbal messages.
- 2 Understanding the speaker's thoughts and emotions.
- 3 Remembering and retaining the message.
- 4 Evaluating or judging the message.
- 5 Responding or reacting to the message.

Hirsch (1986) divided the cognitive components of listening into ten parts: (a) making the physiological and neurological connections; (b) interpreting the sounds; (c) understanding the sounds; (d) assigning meaning to the sounds; (e) reacting to the sounds; (f) receiving some sounds and ignoring others selectively; (g) remembering what was received; (h) attending to the sounds purposely; (i) analysing the information presented; and (j) filtering communication information on the basis of past experiences. Whatever its purpose, concentration and being interested in the speaker's message will increase listening effectiveness. In interpersonal interaction, the process of listening, responding to what the speaker is saying and participating in the communication interaction as an equal partner with the speaker is of crucial importance. In professional interactions, the willingness to listen enables the listener to understand the viewpoints of others, to build positive relationships and to enhance their professional image.

By listening well, a listener is able to avoid directing and leading, blaming, judging or being insensitive to others. Rather than feeling the need to be responsible for others or being in confrontation with others, an effective listener is accepting of, and accepted by, others.

## Types of listening

Skill in listening and an understanding of the different types of listening shown in Table 2.6 empower people to interact effectively in personal and professional situations.

Effective dialogical or conversational listeners acknowledge differences in perception and avoid communication barriers caused by past experiences and background. Conversational listening involves both surface and in-depth listening skills. Conversations are dynamic interactions between the speaker(s) and the listener(s). Research by Reardon (1987, p. 101) suggests that conversations move through five steps or phases:

- 1 *Initiation phase*: to exchange greetings and open the channels of communication.
- 2 *Rule-definition phase*: to determine the purpose of the interaction and the time it will take.
- 3 *Rule-confirmation phase*: to gain agreement about the purpose and time.
- 4 *Strategic development phase*: to discuss the actual topic of the conversation.
- 5 *Termination phase*: to say farewell or to move on to another topic—that is, start another conversation.

Table 2.6: Types of listening

Type	Characteristics
Discriminative listening (the most basic type of listening)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discriminate and make sense of the differences between sounds, including the phonemes (smallest sound units in a language)</li> <li>hear the subtleties of emotional variation in another person's voice</li> <li>listen as a visual, as well as an auditory, act, to understand meaning communicated through body language as well as words.</li> </ul>
Comprehension listening (the next step of making sense; also known as content listening, informational listening and full listening)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>comprehend the meaning</li> <li>relate to the lexicon (vocabulary) of words, rules of grammar and syntax to understand what others are saying</li> <li>interpret the nonverbal components of communication</li> <li>extract key facts and items to comprehend major points, ideas and content</li> <li>filter information on the basis of past experiences</li> <li>focus on the content to understand accurately and fully.</li> </ul>
Dialogical or conversational listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learn through conversation</li> <li>engage in an interchange of ideas and information</li> <li>seek actively to learn more about another</li> <li>share and respond to the different levels of meaning</li> <li>concentrate on the message and look for key points</li> <li>question to verify understanding and gather additional information</li> <li>find the general theme among the facts and details in the message</li> <li>listen for any gaps or omissions from what is being said</li> <li>observe the verbal and nonverbal parts of the message.</li> </ul>
Biased listening (hearing only what the person wants to hear)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>misinterpreting what the other person says based on previously held stereotypes and other biases</li> <li>firm, opposing or different views, or a resistance to the speaker</li> <li>projection of own position onto the speaker and the words when under pressure or feeling defensive</li> <li>making the speaker's words fit what you want them to fit.</li> </ul>
Evaluative or critical listening (evaluating and judging what the other person is saying)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>form an opinion about what is being said</li> <li>assess strengths and weaknesses, agreement and approval</li> <li>listen to the speaker's ongoing words and at the same time analyse and relate what is being said to existing knowledge and rules</li> <li>assess the objectivity of what is being said, think critically and ask questions</li> <li>evaluate what is said against own values and assess as good or bad, ethical or unethical</li> <li>distinguish between subtleties of language and comprehend the inner meaning of what is said</li> <li>weigh up the pros and cons of an argument when the speaker is trying to persuade a change in behaviour or beliefs.</li> </ul>
Partial listening (intending to listen to the other person but then becoming distracted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>stray thoughts or something said by the other person</li> <li>thinking about a question to ask, rather than listening</li> <li>lack of concentration</li> <li>daydreaming and losing the thread of the conversation, having to ask the speaker to repeat what was said.</li> </ul>
False listening (pretending to listen but not hearing what is being said; an old proverb says, 'There is none so deaf as those who won't hear')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>nodding or smiling at the appropriate time to make a good impression without taking in anything</li> <li>engaging in inconsequential listening—for example, politicians and royalty who move on after a short space of time</li> <li>turning-off or letting one side do most of the talking; may lead to conflict when there is a need for a relationship, as in couples.</li> </ul>

continues

Table 2.6: Types of listening *continued*

Type	Characteristics
Attentive 'data-only' listening (listening only to the content and failing to receive all the nonverbal sounds and signals, such as tone of voice, facial expression, reaction of speaker)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening only to cold facts and figures</li> <li>• failure to gather and respond appropriately to the emotions, feelings and situation of the other person</li> <li>• strong results motive, driven by 'push and persuade'—for example, salespeople</li> <li>• manipulation and force to win against the other party</li> <li>• focus on short-term gains at the risk of destroying constructive and sustainable results.</li> </ul>
Active listening (listening—without two-way emotional involvement—to the verbal and nonverbal components of the message)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interpret body language such as intonation, facial expressions and body movement</li> <li>• see and feel the situation from the other person's position</li> <li>• give empathic feedback without transmitting sympathy or identifying with the other person's feelings and emotional needs</li> <li>• attend to, encourage, summarise and mirror the content and feelings in the message.</li> </ul>

Regardless of a conversation's purpose, listeners who reach a shared understanding with the speaker have listened attentively and shown supportive verbal and nonverbal interest in the whole message. They listen to and balance the meaning in the surface message and any in-depth message. Their response is appropriate in that it meets the needs of the speaker, the purpose of the conversation and their needs as listener in the context of the particular interaction.

## Active listening

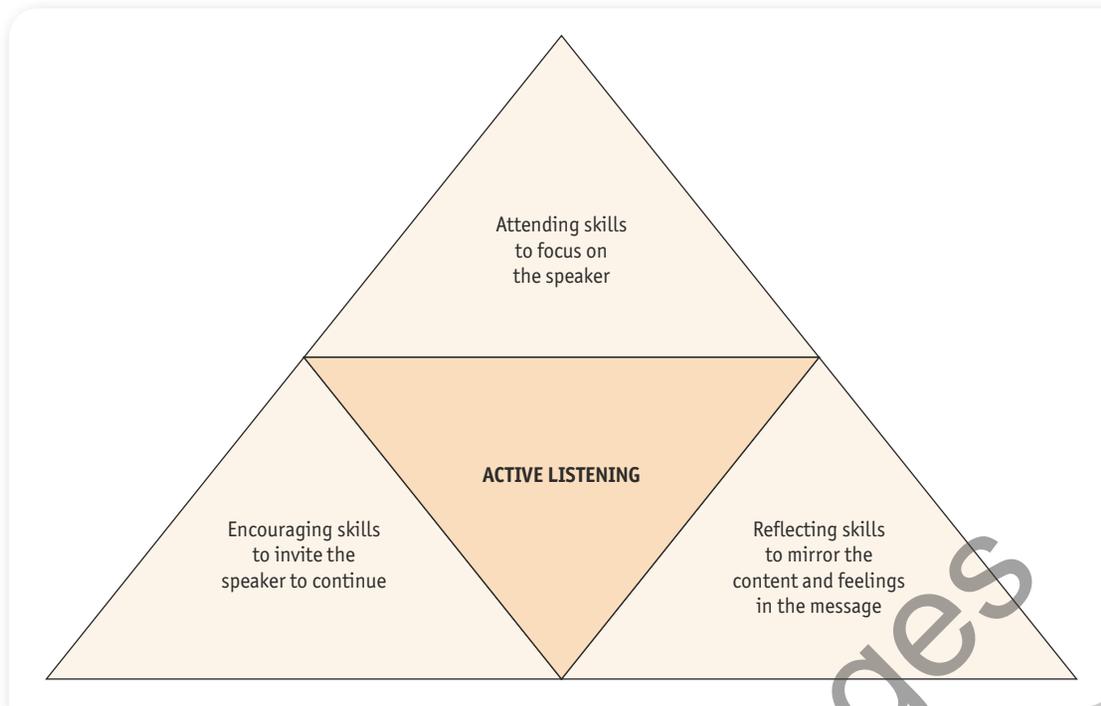
**Active listening** is empathic listening, without two-way emotional involvement, to the verbal and nonverbal components of a message.

**Active listening** is empathic listening, without two-way emotional involvement, to both the verbal and nonverbal components of a message. Active listening focuses on the other person's message and provides appropriate feedback. The active listening method:

- helps the listener to bypass the personal filters, beliefs assumptions and judgements that can distort the speaker's message
- acknowledges and provides feedback to the speaker, as well as verifying what the listener has heard
- enables the person to reach their own decisions and form their own insights
- confirms communication and facilitates understanding between the speaker and the listener.

Covey (1989) recommends listening in professional and personal situations to establish communication and using empathic listening to perceive or sense a situation from the point of view of the speaker. The reward is a whole new level of communication and problem solving because the listener acquires the ability to see a situation simultaneously from multiple points of view.

One profession where a listening-centred approach is essential is marketing and sales. For example, in the first meeting between a salesperson and a potential client, active listening on the part of the salesperson builds rapport, uncovers the client's explicit needs, and helps mutually determine whether there is a fit between the company's product or service and the client. Since an ongoing relationship is built between the salesperson and the client, active listening is essential to the maintenance of this relationship, the discovery of facts, and the uncovering of issues, dissatisfactions, concerns, problems and desired outcomes. By actively listening, the salesperson focuses on the client, asking questions to encourage them to continue and reflecting understanding of their message. This not only deepens the listener's understanding of the client's needs, but also leads the client to new insights into their own needs and the value of the listener's product or service.



**FIGURE 2.2**  
Cluster of active listening skills

Bolton (1987) describes active listening as a cluster of attending, encouraging and reflecting skills used together in order to pay attention to the content and feelings that comprise the whole message. The purpose of each of these skills is shown in Figure 2.2. These skills are techniques that allow the listener to give the speaker their full attention until the speaker is able to communicate the real message. Sometimes a listener will use only one of these techniques, while on other occasions they may use them all in combination to provide feedback that encourages the speaker to continue.

### Focus on the speaker

In **attending listening**, listeners use their body language and words to provide feedback that assures the speaker of their total attention. Some ways of offering this feedback are eye contact, posture and body movement. A capacity to ignore distractions, and an understanding of the impact of moving into the personal space of others and the impact of the environment, also improve the quality of attending listening skills. The six factors in Table 2.7 help listeners to give their complete attention to the speaker.

**Attending listening** focuses on the speaker by giving physical attention.

### Invite the speaker to continue

**Encouraging listening** indicates that the listener is willing to do more than listen. Encouraging listening invites the speaker to say more and to disclose their thoughts and feelings, but without pressuring them. It is their choice, so let them decide. They may be experiencing feelings of ambivalence about whether to talk or to keep their feelings private. Continue to provide attention by using eye contact and an open posture, and give them the opportunity and freedom to disclose. For example, if the speaker seems upset or annoyed, a listener might say something like, 'You seem to be upset about the discussion with that last client. Would you care to talk about it?'

**Encouraging listening** invites speakers to disclose their thoughts and feelings.

Minimal and brief spoken responses let the speaker know the listener is listening and encourage them to continue. Some of these responses are 'mm', 'hmmm', 'yes', 'okay', 'I see', coupled with attentive posture. Other nonverbal cues such as head-nodding and facial expressions convey the listener's interest to the speaker without attempting to control or divert the conversation away from the area of interest.

Table 2.7: Attending listening

Factor	Techniques
Verbal attending responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I hear you ...'</li> <li>• 'I see ...'</li> <li>• 'Oh ...'</li> <li>• 'Uh hmmm ...'</li> </ul>
Eye contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use supportive eye contact.</li> <li>• Focus eyes on the speaker without being intimidating.</li> <li>• Show sensitivity and occasionally shift the gaze from the other person's face.</li> <li>• Avoid staring directly at the speaker for long periods, as the speaker may feel uncomfortable.</li> </ul>
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use open posture (i.e. not folded arms or crossed legs) to attend to the other person.</li> <li>• Lean slightly forward towards the speaker in a relaxed way.</li> <li>• Face the person squarely.</li> </ul>
Body movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid moving about a lot.</li> <li>• Avoid fiddling with objects, crossing or uncrossing legs, signalling or speaking to passers-by.</li> <li>• Stay still and concentrate on the speaker.</li> </ul>
Personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a comfortable distance between listener and speaker—comfort in the use of physical distance depends on culture and personal preference.</li> <li>• Avoid moving into the speaker's personal space.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment without distractions or interruptions.</li> <li>• Remove any physical barriers between listener and speaker.</li> <li>• Establish an environment where both people can feel relaxed.</li> </ul>
Avoid distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face and maintain contact with the speaker.</li> <li>• Ignore distractions, rather than turning away.</li> <li>• Stop and focus your attention on the other person.</li> </ul>

A pause or silence allows the speaker time to consider, reflect and decide whether to continue the conversation. As a listener, use this time to attend to and watch the body movement of the speaker. This can give you clues to the total message, both the content and the feelings in the conversation. Allow silences and give the speaker time to think.

Encouraging listening invites speakers to disclose their thoughts and feelings. Examples of encouraging questions are: 'I'd like to hear how you feel', 'Would you like to talk about it?', 'You'd like to talk further?' and 'Perhaps you'd like to tell me?' Although encouraging questions let the other person know that the listener is interested in talking with them, they do not necessarily show that the listener understands. To show understanding, change encouraging questions into reflective statements such as 'So you are ...', 'It sounds as if you are going to ...', which clarify and summarise the other person's words without interrupting the flow of words or thoughts.

### Mirror the content and feelings in the message

**Reflective listening** restates or mirrors to the speaker the feeling and content in the message. It informs the speaker that the listener has heard and understands the intended message. Several techniques for providing feedback in reflective listening are detailed in Table 2.8.

**Reflective listening** restates to the speaker the feeling and content in the message.

Table 2.8: Feedback in reflective listening

Technique	Description	Example
<b>Paraphrasing</b> focuses on the content rather than the feelings and helps to achieve accurate understanding of the content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restate the essential part of the message concisely in your own words.</li> <li>Listen for the main ideas and the direction of the message and mirror the content to the speaker.</li> <li>Agree or disagree with what was said and then rephrase the message.</li> <li>Avoid repeating the other person's statements word for word.</li> </ul>	Respond with phrases such as: 'You're saying that ...' 'I see, you would say that ...' 'You feel it is a good idea ...' These help you to paraphrase the message.
<b>Reflective statements</b> reflect feelings from the message and help the speaker to focus on the feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Express in brief statements the essential feelings you received from the message.</li> <li>Let the speaker know you understand their feelings.</li> <li>Respond to a statement such as: 'I thought I would have got that last promotion. Seems like I miss out every time.'</li> </ul>	Respond with phrases such as: 'It's really discouraging ...' 'You really dislike some ...' 'Sounds as if you're really ...'
<b>Clarifying statements</b> establish with the speaker that the listener's understanding is correct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State clarifying remarks in terms of the feelings, rather than as criticisms of the speaker. If the listener's understanding is inaccurate, the speaker has the opportunity to rephrase what they said.</li> <li>Give feedback to the speaker and show your understanding of the message.</li> <li>Take the guesswork out of communication.</li> </ul>	A listener who feels confused by what the speaker has said can use phrases such as: 'Could you repeat that? I don't think I understood.' 'Could you give me an example of ...? I'm not sure I followed what you said.'
<b>Summarising</b> lets the speaker know the listener understands their thoughts and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present relevant points again to give accurate feedback that links issues, ideas and information.</li> <li>Restate, in a condensed way, the most important points of concern in a long conversation.</li> <li>Use at the end of a discussion to conclude and give direction.</li> </ul>	Respond with phrases such as: 'So far we've covered ...' 'Your main concerns seem to be ...'

**Paraphrasing** is restatement by the listener of what was said, using different words.

A **reflective statement** lets the speaker know that the listener understands the underlying feelings.

A **clarifying statement** confirms the listener's interpretation of the message, enabling the speaker to confirm as correct or add more information.

**Summarising** is used in listening to restate in a condensed way the most important points.

Active listening builds empathy with the other person and creates positive interpersonal relationships. It is a technique that lets the speaker either confirm or correct the feedback from the listener. The process of active listening involves the listener in active participation with the other person. When listeners use active listening, they are giving the other person all their attention in order to understand the issues or situations from the other person's perspective or point of view. As well as communicating their understanding of the other person, active listeners also enable the speaker to find their own understanding and insights. The speaker, given the opportunity to talk to an active listener, is able to find their own satisfactory resolution or answer to the issue of concern.

## Barriers to listening

Obstacles to listening given by Hargie and Dickson (2004) are *dichotomous listening*, which occurs when ‘an individual attempts to assimilate information simultaneously from two different sources’ (p. 188), and *inattentiveness*, not only on the part of the listener but also of the speaker, who may either consciously or unconsciously confuse, distract or mislead the listener(s). Typical causes of poor listening are a preoccupation with self, a preoccupation with external issues, and pre-conceived expectations of people and events.

Many poor listening behaviours are conditioned responses learned from people such as parents, relatives, teachers or peers in childhood. Poor listening in any workplace leads to problems. At work you will listen to your manager, supervisor, team leader and colleagues give project, task and other instructions. Any of the following **barriers to listening** will cause you to miss the main point, forget the message, or be unable to determine what you are supposed to do in response to the message:

**Barriers to listening** are restraints or obstacles that interfere with the message.

- the tendency to reconstruct messages so that they reflect our own attitudes, needs and values
- listener apprehension caused by fear of misunderstanding, misinterpreting or being unable to adjust to the spoken words
- attitudes towards the speaker, desire to criticise and ambush the speaker—the friend-or-foe factor
- listening only for the pause that lets the listener interrupt, change the subject, or combat the speaker’s words to promote their own ideas and viewpoint
- filtering out or distorting unpleasant or difficult messages through oversimplification or the elimination of undesirable details
- unchecked emotional responses to words, concepts or ideas that raise emotions and prevent the listener from focusing on the speaker’s message
- mind drift when the listener daydreams and drifts off into their own thoughts rather than listening
- mind-reading and attempting to read too much into the speaker’s words and nonverbals without clarifying the meaning with the speaker
- assuming a topic will be boring, resulting in lack of concentration, partial and false listening
- allowing the speaker’s personality or mannerisms to overpower the message
- information overload and interruptions from smartphones and other technological devices.

Gamble and Gamble (1996) describe six behaviours demonstrated by poor listeners. In their words, people use these behaviours to ‘unlisten’. Table 2.9 identifies the purpose of these behaviours.

**Table 2.9: Poor listening behaviours**

Behaviour	Purpose
Nodders	To imitate listening by pretending to use attending listening skills while thinking or daydreaming about something else.
Ear hogs	To express their ideas and monopolise the interaction by interrupting and dominating.
Gap fillers	To make up for what is missed or misinterpreted by manufacturing information in order to give the impression that they heard it all.
Bees	To zero in on parts of the message by listening only to the parts that interest them.
Earmuffs	To avoid information they would rather not deal with by acting as if they are not listening at all and side-tracking or distracting the speaker.
Dart throwers	To attack what the speaker has to say by waiting for them to make an error and then criticising or cross-examining them.

**Table 2.10: The impact of a listener's ineffective verbal response**

Example of a barrier	Receiver's response
Ordering, directing or commanding: 'Stop it or else ...', 'You must do this ...'	Resentment
Warning and threatening: 'You'd better do this or else ...'	Anger
Lecturing or preaching: 'It's in your own best interest to do this ...'	Resistance
Judging, criticising: 'I think you've gone too far this time ...'	Offence
Disagreeing: 'I think you're totally wrong ...'	Put-down
Blaming: 'It's all your fault ...'	Defensiveness
Name calling: 'You're stupid ...'	Distress
Using ridicule or sarcasm: 'Someone like you is not expected to know ...'	Hurt

Table 2.10 provides examples of ineffective verbal responses and their impact on the speaker. Everyone succumbs to some of these unhelpful approaches occasionally. A number of these barriers are caused by habitual behaviours learned from childhood. Breaking old habits is difficult. Irrespective of how skilled the speaker is at speaking or communicating the message, if the receiver does not listen, the communication will fail.

Robbins and colleagues (2018, p. 560) cite research that shows: 'The average person normally speaks at a rate of 125 to 200 words per minute. However, the average listener can comprehend up to 400 words per minute.' The difference between the speaking rate and comprehension may allow idle thoughts about holidays, sporting events, children and next weekend to create distractions. Listeners who take responsibility for their listening participate to move the meeting, negotiation or other activities towards effective outcomes.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS 2.3

- 1
  - a Identify the five stages of the listening process.
  - b Briefly outline the abilities of an effective evaluative or critical listener.
- 2
  - a Explain the cluster of active listening skills.
  - b Think of a person you regard as a good active listener, and then think of one who is a poor active listener. Identify three aspects of their listening techniques that make them either a good listener or a poor listener.
  - c When is active listening most useful?
  - d List the benefits of using active listening skills.
- 3
  - a Briefly explain four barriers to effective listening caused by the listener.
  - b Choose one of the barriers and discuss behaviours the poor listener can use to overcome the barrier.

## THE ROLE OF QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

At work, people ask questions and give and receive feedback in personal and professional situations. Asking questions requires the other person to listen, think and respond. Giving and receiving effective feedback supports, values, encourages and underpins positive relationships. It lets people know how well they are performing, and how their work contributes to their team's and organisation's goals. Constructive feedback lets others know what they are doing

### Objective 2.4

Discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions

well and how they could improve. Regardless of whether the feedback is positive or negative, the total feedback message—words, nonverbals, questioning and listening—should always be constructive.

## The value of questions

A skilful questioner asks the right question for the desired result. The outcomes from effective questions include:

- positive connections with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders
- greater understanding of the needs of your clients
- gathering of better information from a variety of sources
- improved negotiation and conflict-management skills
- capacity to receive positive and constructive feedback
- facilitation of solution-oriented problem solving and decision making
- acknowledgement and encouragement of others to cooperate and collaborate
- ability to work more effectively with your team and to help others to take responsibility for their actions.

Some types of questioning are effective, while others are ineffective. Table 2.11 provides examples of different types of effective and ineffective questions.

Table 2.11: Effective and ineffective questions	
Effective question types and purpose	Ineffective question types and problem
Open questions invite the other person to talk. 'How do you see this situation?'	Multiple questions that cover a number of issues. 'Do you think you can do the project scoping, and how will you involve the external stakeholders?'
Closed questions invite the other person to give a 'yes' or 'no' response. 'Do you have concerns about the project?'	Ambiguous or vague questions that confuse. 'To what extent did using project management software and the company intranet help various stages of the project?'
Probing questions gain more details. 'Could you provide more information about how you reached your conclusion?'	Implied value questions that reflect your values. 'Do you agree that project communication plans are more trouble than they are worth?'
Reflective questions restate and clarify what the other person said. 'Then you haven't had time to work on the new project?'	Aggressive questions that attack the other person. 'So what are you going to do, pull a fast one on us?'
Challenge questions examine assumptions, conclusions and interpretations. 'How else might we account for the increasing number of equipment failures?'	Leading questions to get the answer you want. 'With all these benefits we've highlighted, don't you think that the benefits of this approach make it the best way for all of us to go forward?'
Hypothetical questions probe and explore options. 'If you were project leader, how would you proceed?'	Rhetorical questions that do not need an answer. 'Isn't it obvious that we should proceed to the next stage?'

## Open questions

By asking open questions the listener is able to encourage the other person to share their more personal feelings and thoughts. Open questions ask 'what', 'when', 'where', 'how' or 'who'. In combination with effective listening, open questions gather specific, precise and sometimes revealing information. The following are examples of open questions that are useful in a range of situations, such as client interviews, meetings and negotiations; when gathering further

information; when you want to find out what someone has already done to resolve a problem; or when working with others to plan how to do a task or take action.

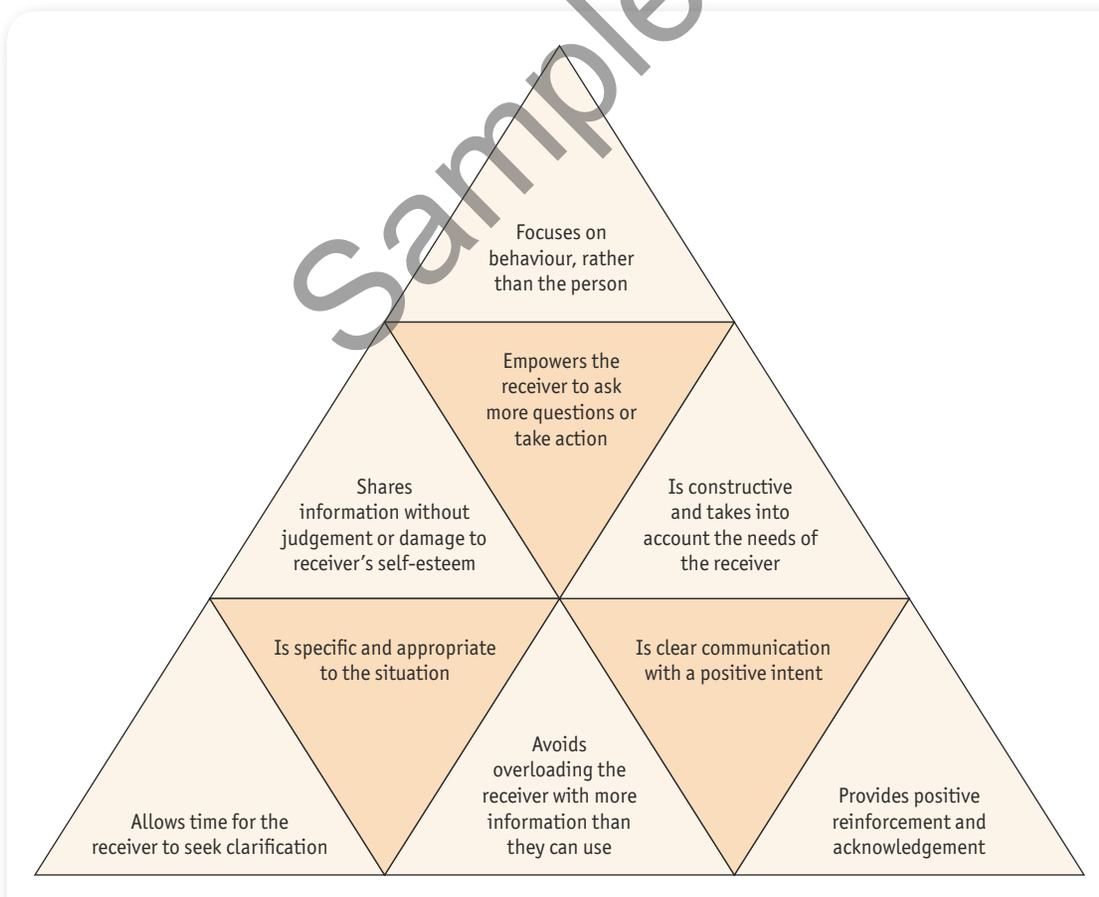
- *To identify an issue:* ‘What seems to be the problem?’, ‘How do you feel about . . .?’, ‘What do you think about doing it this way?’, ‘What other possibilities should we consider?’
- *To gather further information:* ‘What do you mean by . . .?’, ‘Tell me more about . . .’, ‘What other ways have you tried so far?’
- *To plan how to do a task or an action:* ‘How do you want . . . to turn out?’, ‘What is your desired outcome?’, ‘If you do this, how will it affect . . .?’, ‘What are your next steps?’

Open questions help improve your communication and understanding of a client or colleague because they encourage the speaker to answer at greater length and in detail. In contrast, closed questions can close down communication because they usually elicit a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer—for example, ‘Is there a problem?’ Avoid asking ‘why’ questions because they can be interpreted as interrogative and personal—for example, ‘Why did you do that?’ Instead of encouraging the speaker to explore their actions, ‘why’ questions encourage them to justify their actions. The speaker may feel threatened because the ‘why’ question sounds as if the listener disapproves of their actions.

## The value of feedback

Effective feedback is always timely, appropriate and constructive. Regular feedback ensures there are no surprises. It creates a positive communication climate, which in turns creates an open and encouraging organisational climate. Figure 2.3 identifies characteristics of feedback that is effective.

In contrast, ineffective feedback can create a rigid or competitive environment that can make many people reticent or hesitant to communicate and provide ideas. How feedback is



**FIGURE 2.3**

Characteristics of effective feedback

given, and the type of feedback, has an impact on motivation, performance, interpersonal relationships and the communication climate in an organisation.

By giving and receiving feedback, it is possible to understand the expressed idea, opinion or attitude from the other person's point of view. An understanding connection is made. By acknowledging, owning and expressing feelings as feedback, a relationship is built on trust and openness. Feedback lets people understand instructions and what needs to be done; as a result, activities are easier to understand and are completed accurately and to the required standard.

It is generally accepted that human behaviour is goal-oriented. People have a need and are motivated to take some action to satisfy that need. Motivation is the desire or will to do something. Motivation directs behaviour or actions towards a goal. Relevant and timely feedback is motivating.

## Types of feedback

Different types of feedback used within organisations and businesses include informative feedback, immediate and specific feedback, positive feedback, negative feedback and no feedback at all. Table 2.12 shows the purpose and strategies used to achieve each of these types of feedback.

Type	Purpose	Techniques
Informative feedback	To show understanding, and to reinforce positive behaviour or results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide factual information about the situation and use effective listening skills.</li> <li>Focus on the content of the message; identify the other person's purpose and main ideas by rephrasing or summarising.</li> <li>Withhold judgement and empathise with any unexpressed feelings.</li> <li>Share perceptions and feelings about the message.</li> </ul>
Immediate and specific feedback	To describe what has been done, or needs to be done, rather than judging or threatening the other person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep feedback clear, specific and tied to actual behaviour—for example, 'This file could do with a tidy-up', instead of 'Your files are always untidy'.</li> <li>Avoid abstract, vague and sweeping statements.</li> <li>Respect the other person's right to respond.</li> <li>Take the time to listen, and acknowledge their response.</li> </ul>
Positive feedback	To acknowledge the role and contribution of the other person. Positive feedback encourages the repetition of behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide timely feedback in an appropriate context.</li> <li>Be specific about the behaviour and listen to the other person's response.</li> <li>Invite feedback from the other person: 'What do you think about my suggestions?' The feedback flow becomes an open-ended, two-way process.</li> </ul>
Negative feedback	To correct and change unsatisfactory behaviour or results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide definitive, responsive feedback.</li> <li>Orient the feedback on the task; do not criticise the personal characteristics of the other person.</li> <li>Give feedback at an appropriate time and place.</li> <li>Only include behaviour that the receiver is able to change, and only what the receiver can handle at the time.</li> </ul>
No feedback at all	To procrastinate and avoid any unpleasantness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignore team members and colleagues.</li> <li>Let both poor and good performance pass without comment.</li> <li>Let things slide.</li> <li>Complain about a person behind their back.</li> <li>Believe that people think no news is good news.</li> </ul>

## Constructive feedback

Feedback should be constructive, rather than destructive. Constructive negative feedback is preferable to destructive negative feedback. An example of constructive negative feedback is: 'From what you contributed in that meeting, it was clear that you had done little research on the topic. Before the next meeting, please find time to research thoroughly. We really need your contribution.' An example of destructive negative feedback is: 'From what you contributed in that meeting it was obvious that you did no research. You always expect others to do the hard work. Next time, get it done.' It is destructive to bring up past behaviour and grievances. Instead, make feedback timely and deal with the current situation.

On occasions when you hear feelings as well as content in a message, in-depth listening to both content and feelings will help you give feedback that reflects the meaning accurately. An in-depth listener hears the paralinguage in the message in the tone, volume, pitch, rhythm, speed and resonance. An in-depth listener can engage in **verbal following** by using probing questions to move beneath the surface.

As you give feedback, ask questions related to the speaker's message. Follow up on the meaning of the message in order to gain a shared understanding of the speaker's ideas. Check the nonverbal messages being sent—for example, by your stance. Body orientation sends a message about the relationship between you and the other person. Standing at a 90° angle to the other person as you give or receive feedback indicates a cooperative stance, while facing the other person directly may indicate intimacy or aggression. Nonverbal behaviour—such as smiles, head-nods, an attentive posture and eye contact—demonstrates the listener's involvement and interest. One nod gives the speaker permission to continue. Alternatively, rapid nods may indicate the listener's wish to speak (Fiske 1990; Givens 2016). As you give feedback, the receiver's impression of you and their response to the feedback is affected by their perception of your verbal and nonverbal communication. The ability to give feedback well enhances your performance and credibility in the workplace.

Being able to receive as well as give feedback in personal and professional interactions improves understanding, the flow of information and performance. Useful strategies to use when receiving feedback include:

- being open, receptive and assertive
- separating objective and subjective information
- listening, paraphrasing and asking questions
- avoiding emotional responses such as defensiveness, aggression, excuses or blaming others
- considering feedback information and focusing on areas of improvement
- incorporating useful feedback, planning future outcomes, taking action and following up.

## Reframing

The meaning of any situation or of any set of circumstances is found in the **frame of reference** of the person viewing it—that is, their unspoken assumptions, including beliefs, values and attitudes, that influence their perception of the situation. Differing frames of reference mean people experience and interpret the same event in different ways. If any part of that frame of reference is changed, the inferred meaning of the concept or situation may change.

**Reframing** means stepping back from what is being said and done to consider the frame, or 'lens', the other person is using in the situation. Reframing expands our own and others' perceptions by understanding something in another way—providing a new frame through which to view a concept or situation. The listener recasts the speaker's words to give new meaning to the statement. Reframing can also help to view a problem as an opportunity; for example, 'You say it can't be done in time. But what if we staged delivery or got in casual help?' or 'Let's look at it another way.' When negotiating or interacting in a potential conflict situation, reframing is a useful strategy to:

- defuse the parties' strong, negative emotions
- shift attention away from positions and towards interests

**Verbal following** probes more deeply into what the speaker has said.

**Frame of reference** is a person's set of complex assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes that influence meaning or perception of a situation.

**Reframing** recasts or reframes the words of the speaker to create new perspectives.

**Undercurrent language**

is the hidden part of the message; the part of the message the sender wants to conceal or is unable to convey.

- focus the parties on broadening and choosing mutually beneficial options, rather than focusing on win–lose or lose–lose outcomes.

For more information on reframing, see Chapter 4.

By practising and using feedback skills at work, people come closer to understanding the verbal, nonverbal and *undercurrent messages* sent by others. An **undercurrent language** is something the sender wants to conceal or is unable to convey (feelings and/or content). In addition, practice facilitates understanding of how to communicate well.

A

**REVIEW QUESTIONS 2.4**

- Provide three examples of ineffective questions, and explain why they are ineffective.
  - What is the purpose of open questions? Provide an example.
  - What is the purpose of closed questions? Provide an example.
- Discuss the characteristics of effective feedback.
  - Identify five types of feedback used in organisations, and explain the purpose of each type.
- What does reframing do?
  - What is the purpose of verbal following?
  - Discuss strategies you can use when receiving feedback.

**APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE****Work in groups**

- Work in pairs to practise attending and encouraging listening skills. Take turns to act as speaker and listener. As the speaker, choose a controversial topic on which you hold a very definite position, or a topic you feel strongly about, and speak to your listener about this for three minutes. Use familiar, comfortable language you both normally use and understand.

As the listener, use the following guidelines to focus your listening:

  - Show your interest in the speaker by your body movement. Face the speaker. Make eye contact. Lean forward, keeping an open posture.
  - Notice the speaker's body movement. This may indicate the feelings underlying the spoken message.
  - Use feedback to invite the speaker to continue by using minimal responses.
  - Ask as few questions as possible. However, if you do ask questions, use attending and encouraging questions.
  - At the end of this exercise, discuss with one another your effectiveness as listeners. Refer to points (a) to (d).
  - Think about your own ineffective listening behaviours. Choose two and decide how you could improve these behaviours. Practise using them over the next week.
- Share situations when barriers to listening have adversely affected a group of people or an organisation.
  - Choose one of the situations and discuss:
    - What were the barriers?
    - What was, or could have been, done to overcome them?
    - How effective in eliminating the barriers was/would have been this intervention?

- c Report your findings to the large group.
- 3 a Briefly discuss the outcomes from effective questions.
- b What is the value of open questions in professional situations?
- c Choose three types of ineffective questions and identify the problem(s) caused by each.
- d Discuss strategies to overcome or avoid these problems.

## Summary of learning objectives

### 2.1 Distinguish between assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviours, and identify reasons for using verbal assertion and other-orientation

Assertive people take responsibility for their actions and respect the rights of others. Their perception of messages is usually correct, and their approach to people is motivated and confident. Assertive behaviour demonstrates a high degree of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, confidence and the ability to be 'other-oriented'. It avoids both aggressive and submissive behaviour.

T statements let others know how you feel about a situation, a circumstance or their behaviour. Verbal assertion skills encourage open, honest exchanges, rather than defensive, self-protective responses. Assertive verbal statements achieve a result without using power or coercion. People are able to interact and respond appropriately to feedback and influence others to achieve results.

### 2.2 Explain the roles and different aspects of nonverbal communication

The purpose of nonverbal communication is to repeat, contradict, substitute, complement or accent the words in the message. The seven aspects of nonverbal communication are body movement or kinesics, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal quality or paralanguage, the use of space or proximity, artefacts and the environment. Combined, these aspects make up the nonverbal part of the total message.

Nonverbal communication is either personal to the individual, common to the group or culture, or universal. Personal nonverbal communication is behaviour unique to the person and creates a picture of the sender's personality through their gestures and mannerisms. Nonverbal communication that displays a pattern common to a group of people is a clue to acceptable norms of behaviour within that group—for example, a football

code or a national culture. Universal nonverbal communication such as an expression of fear crosses cultural and national boundaries.

### 2.3 Describe the listening process, and explain how active listening has value in personal and professional situations

Listening is a five-stage process of receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding to a message. While hearing is the physiological process of sensing sound waves, listening is a conscious knowing response. It requires concentration and deliberate effort to interpret and respond to the speaker's message. A range of different types of listening—discriminative, listening for comprehension, dialogical or conversational, biased, evaluative, partial false, attentive 'data-only' and active listening—are used as people engage in personal and professional interactions. The purpose of active listening is to focus on the speaker, invite them to continue, mirror the content and feelings in the message, and show empathy with the speaker. Effective listeners use nonverbal and listening skills that complement their spoken communication.

### 2.4 Discuss the role of questions and feedback in personal and professional interactions

At work, people need feedback about their performance and acknowledgement of their efforts. Feedback is the connecting, continuing or completing link in the communication process. The four types of feedback are informative feedback, specific feedback, negative feedback and positive feedback. Constructive feedback can be positive in the case of work well done; constructive negative feedback is about shortfalls in performance and how to make improvements. Constructive feedback is impersonal, goal-oriented, balanced, actionable and timely.

## Key terms

active listening	40	nonverbal learning	31
aggressive behaviour	26	other orientation	29
artefacts	32	paralanguage	31
assertive behaviour	26	paraphrasing	43
attending listening	41	personal nonverbal communication	34
barriers to listening	44	proximity	32
clarifying statements	43	reflective listening	42
cultural nonverbal communication	34	reflective statements	43
cultural norms	35	reframing	49
encouraging listening	41	submissive behaviour	27
frame of reference	49	summarising	43
'I' statements/messages	27	undercurrent language	50
listening	38	universal nonverbal communication	36
nonverbal behaviour	30	verbal following	49

## Activities and questions

### Work individually

- It is 3 pm. You feel tense because you have to respond to three emails from clients and finalise a major piece of work in the next two hours. A colleague asks you to help him immediately with the agenda for next week's committee meeting. It has to be sent by email attachment this afternoon.  
Write a four-part assertive message in which you state that you are unable to help with the agenda. Follow the four-part 'I' message formula.
- Givens (2016) points out that 'each of us gives and responds to literally thousands of nonverbal messages daily in our personal and professional lives—and while commuting back and forth between the two'.
  - Compare and contrast the kinds of nonverbal messages you give in your professional life and your personal life.
  - What, in Givens' view, makes nonverbal messages so potent and compelling?
- Assume your team leader has requested you to develop a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation on listening and feedback tips for distribution at the next team meeting. Develop the presentation. (Include at least two or three slides outlining the benefits of active listening.)
- Reflect on interpersonal skills and how they help you in your current work situation or future career.
  - Nominate one behaviour pattern that interferes with your effectiveness at work, and identify one technique you could use to alter and improve this behaviour.
  - List four nonverbal behaviours that would be congruent with the new technique you have identified and aim to use to replace the old ineffective behaviour.
  - Describe a time when you have seen the effects of giving feedback on performance destructively rather than constructively. What were the outcomes?
  - Explain why the skills of active listening and giving effective feedback are important to your workplace performance.
  - Write a description of your findings in a short information report, and explain how the demands of the current business workplace require people to use their interpersonal skills more effectively.

- 5 a Develop a matrix with four columns. The purpose of the matrix is to analyse your nonverbal communication in three behavioural states.
- In column 1, list the following five aspects of nonverbal communication: body movement, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, vocal qualities and use of space.
  - Label column 2 'Respect', column 3 'Hostility' and column 4 'Distress'.
- b Using columns 2, 3 and 4, indicate which nonverbal communication you display for each of the five aspects of nonverbal communication to express each of the three emotional states.
- c Reflect on your matrix. In columns 2, 3 and 4, indicate the nonverbal communication you would expect a person from a high-context culture to display. (Refer to Table 5.1 for examples of characteristics of high-context cultures.)
- d Understanding the different aspects of your nonverbal communication and how culture influences it (at least in part) is the first step in adjusting and modifying your nonverbal behaviour as appropriate for greater effectiveness in intercultural interactions. On the basis of this understanding, write a briefing note explaining to a team member (who will be representing your organisation at a global conference next month) the reasons for being willing to adjust their mindset and behave flexibly in intercultural interactions.

### Work in groups

- 6 a People from different countries communicate in different ways. Briefly discuss typical characteristics of the three types of culture identified by Lewis.
- b Identify possible interpersonal communication barriers that may arise in business interactions between those from a linear-active culture and those from a reactive culture.
- c Provide an example of universal nonverbal communication, and suggest how the timing, energy and use of that innate nonverbal behavior can be shaped.
- 7 a Brainstorm and list the factors that contribute to effective listening.
- b Compile a short group report that:
- describes the main purpose of encouraging listening and reflective listening
  - defines the term 'paraphrasing' and explains its purpose as a listening response
  - defines the term 'clarifying question' and explains its purpose as a listening response
  - defines the term 'summarising' and explains its purpose as a listening response
  - explains the importance of effective listening and other-orientation in workplace activities.

### Is Bella really listening?

Emily, the CEO of Combined Services, a regional, remote and rural home-care service, works with a team leader, Bella, who is not a good listener. Bella's body language often shows that she is distracted and only partially paying attention to what is being said. Bella often has to ask Emily to repeat what she has said. Occasionally, she will say: 'Bella, there are none so deaf as those who won't hear. Please focus, so that you hear and understand what I'm saying and asking.'

Bella also has a reputation for selective amnesia. The team might have a productive meeting, create a plan and then Bella will forget what was discussed. Emily has sometimes noticed that Bella is slow to respond, her voice pitch, rhythm and articulation are hesitant, and she fiddles with her jewellery. Emily feels that these behaviours indicate that Bella is not listening to what is being said.

Last year, Combined Services embarked on an innovative Wellness Program that would include exercise to enhance the physical independence of its aged clients. It would need to recruit

qualified health and fitness advisors, exercise physiotherapists, yoga and fitness instructors, lifestyle assistants, remedial massage therapists and gym assistants from all over the country with specific knowledge of the impact of wellness on physical, mental and social wellbeing. It was an innovative and specialised opportunity not to be missed.

As any miscommunication could cost Combined Services its reputation for providing valued and equitable services to clients, Emily needed to convey to Bella the importance of successfully implementing the Wellness Program. She said: 'We have a goal of recruiting the required number of qualified specialists by the 30th of March. This is really important, because at the same time as we are recruiting, we are also attending local Seniors Festivals to let people know about the innovative program and Wellness gym openings. We have to meet our deadlines. Failure to do so means there are consequences such as loss of funding and loss of clients to other providers.'

Emily followed up with Bella through email to reinforce the project timeline and deliverables, and to confirm their understanding of the decisions and actions required to implement the program successfully. She also had another face-to-face meeting with Bella to verify that she understood what needed to happen.

Emily knew she had to emphasise with Bella the importance of strong communication, but she wanted to avoid making Bella feel defensive. To show Bella that she was looking out for her, she said: 'Let me tell you about a former colleague who became distracted as we were discussing a project. We missed our funding deadline because he was not paying attention. We learned the hard way. Without the funding, we had to delay the opening of a new centre for 12 months and had to increase the client waiting list. We're trying to avoid a situation like that occurring again, which is why I need your help.'

### Questions

- 1 a Identify the 'I' message in the case study.  
b Is Emily an other-oriented communicator? Justify your answer.  
c Comment on the methods Emily has used to help Bella understand the message and the importance of implementing the innovative program successfully.
- 2 Discuss aspects of nonverbal communication that would indicate Bella is distracted rather than listening.
- 3 How is Bella likely to feel, given the way in which Emily gave feedback about the need for good communication? Justify your answer.
- 4 Develop a set of questions Bella could ask to check her understanding of Emily's and the team's plans.
- 5 Describe the type of listening that would help Bella understand Emily's messages accurately and fully.

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