The Development of Conceptual Model for Leader’s Nonverbal Communication in the Construction Industry

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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal communication comprises an essential part of the interactions between leader and follower. Although numerous studies have been conducted on nonverbal communication in multiple industries, there has been limited attention given to the effect of nonverbal communication in the construction industry. Additionally, there is a lack of a reliable model for a leader’s nonverbal communication in construction. Therefore, this study specifically aims to contribute to this gap by linking leaders’ nonverbal communication to an under-researched outcome of the leader-follower relationship, namely, followers’ job satisfaction. This study also emphasises the mediating effect of followers’ emotions in the aforementioned relationship. For this purpose, the literature review is built upon nonverbal communication, job satisfaction, and emotion, which were identified through scientific manuscripts and electronic databases. Consequently, this study proposes a model for the leader’s nonverbal communication and followers’ job satisfaction. The literature review illustrates the significance of nonverbal communication in the construction industry to improve the productivity and effectiveness of followers. This research suggests investigating the proposed model virtually and developing deeper insights on leaders’ nonverbal communication and its possible impact on job satisfaction.

Keywords: nonverbal communication, job satisfaction, emotion, construction industry

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INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication (NVC) is significant in interpersonal communication, accounting for most of the meaning conveyed in social interactions which is about 65 to 93 percent (e.g., Barnum & Wolniansky, 1989; Crane & Crane, 2010; Mehrabian & Williams, 1969). According to Ambady & Weisbuch (2010), NVC is the transmission and reception of thoughts and emotions through non-verbal behaviour. There are different studies on NVC in various contexts, such as hospitality (e.g., Jung & Yoon, 2011; Lin et al., 2020; Nikian, 2017), education (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2009; Muchemwa, 2013; Sarah & Zani, 2012), healthcare (e.g., Dimitriou, 2020; Mast, 2007), and business and organisation (e.g., Brown, 2014; Mujezinovic, 2011; Peleckis & Peleckienë, 2015). Although Günhan et al. (2012) noted that the construction industry (CI) is a service industry that requires a high degree of NVC in order to address the challenges of construction projects and enhance communication, there is a lack of any reliable model for NVC in CI.

Construction industry is the environment of the project, which is characterised in nature as dynamic, complex, fragmented, and involving numerous parties (Gamil & Rahman, 2018; Rahman & Gamil, 2019). Archer et al. (2010) emphasise the significance of leadership and people in the CI and highlight the main challenges of perceived ignorance, which can result in losses and insufficiency. Leadership is the process of influencing or controlling the behaviour of others in order to achieve a common goal (Yukl, 2010). Moreover, the role of leadership is critical in the success of construction projects (Khan et al., 2019), as it involves the essential contribution of others in the group of society (Liphadzi et al., 2015). Ngo (2017) mentioned that as leaders face a more dynamic work environment, research on NVC in a leadership context is necessary. Since CI is a dynamic and project-based industry (Hoezen et al., 2006), research on leaders’ NVC in CI is mainly important. It goes along with Günhan et al. (2012), who mentioned that NVC is the essential element of leadership development and communication improvement in CI. Additionally, Saha (2017) stated that in modern project management, focusing only on the classical communication styles is not sufficient, as leaders and managers must also concentrate on NVC in order to make the project a success. Nonetheless, there is very little research on the leader’s NVC in CI. Thus, the purpose of this research is to undertake an in-depth analysis of NVC in order to comprehend the concept from a broader perspective and to provide a conceptual model for CI.
METHODOLOGY

In this study, the method adopted is based on reviews of previous literature. With the purpose of demonstrating the significance of NVC in a project context and identifying the significance of the study, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. This paper presented the 135 literature relating to NVC, job satisfaction, and emotion through scientific manuscripts and electronic databases in order to propose a conceptual model for NVC in the CI. The electronic databases searched were: Emerald, Science Direct, APA PsycInfo, Google, Google Scholar, Sage, Taylor & Francis, Civil engineering database, Wiley Online Library, PubMed, ProQuest, and SpringerLink. The time periodical spans 1969 through 2020.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a discussion of the existing literature in the area of NVC in various fields, including job satisfaction and follower’s emotions. It starts by justifying the need for NVC in the CI, followed by a theoretical and empirical review of NVC, and ends with a discussion. The result of this review will help in developing the components of the conceptual model of this study.

Leaders’ Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication abilities play a significant role in leadership (Stein, 1975). According to the contingency model of leadership effectiveness, leaders contribute to the motivation, control, and influence of group members through verbal and nonverbal communication (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974 cited in DeGroot, 2006). Individuals in leadership positions assert authority and power verbally and nonverbally in order to persuade followers; however, it has been proposed that NVC in the leadership context is more important than verbal communication (Darioly & Mast, 2014). When the verbal and nonverbal communications of a leader conflict, the followers are more likely to trust the leader’s NVC (Remland, 1981).
By using NVC skills, leaders build a high level of trust, unity, and sensitivity to the needs of their followers (Yukl, 2013). Darioly & Mast (2014) investigate the role of NVC in leadership, demonstrating that a leader’s NVC is a significant factor in shaping the relationship and ensuring effective leadership. Schyns & Mohr (2004) explore the importance of NVC in the context of leadership. Appropriate use of NVC not only improves communication, but it also helps establish and develop credibility in leadership (Fatt, 1998b). Binsfrahm (2014) mentioned that NVC skills will improve the communication level of the leader, which will have a positive effect on work performance. Effective interactions between leaders and followers improve the leaders’ ability to motivate employees, which enhances productivity, goal achievement, and corporate performance (Luthra & Dahiya, 2015).

According to Burgoon et al. (1990) leaders employ NVC to influence and persuade their followers by displaying more facial expression, speaking more fluently, and altering the pitch of their voices (van Adrichem, 2017). Ngo (2017) concurred that nonverbal communication affects how followers evaluate a leader’s attributes. Gitter et al. (1975) found that NVC was the most influential independent variable on the impression of a person’s leadership ability. Baird & John (1977), as cited in (Čulo & Skendrović, 2010) also discovered that members’ perceptions of leadership are influenced by both the frequency and type of NVC.

Many studies have been conducted to determine how NVC influences a leader’s ability to lead effectively. Dethmers (2017) indicates that leaders’ NVC affects perceptions of effective leadership. There is a favourable association between the positive aptitude of followers and the leadership of supervisors. Uhl-Bien (2003) that the leader’s nonverbal interpersonal skills are one of the important characteristics required to develop effective relationships between the leader and followers. NVC is therefore a factor that contributes to effective leadership. Bellou & Gkorezis (2016) investigated the effect of a leader’s positive kinesics and paralanguage on the impression of his or her leadership effectiveness. The findings revealed that suspicion moderated the mediating effect of trust in leaders on the relationship between kinesics and paralanguage and the impression of leader effectiveness. In addition, Lauk (2019) investigates the impact of leaders’ verbal and nonverbal behaviour on the perception of their leadership
effectiveness. Findings shows that the leaders’ gazing behaviour and the frequency with which they display so-called adaptors influences followers’ assessments of their leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, hand gestures, facial expressions, and adaptors appeared to influence experts’ judgements of leadership effectiveness.

However, in the workplace, where interactions between leaders and followers are the primary component in conducting business, NVC is an important but rarely studied topic, as the scientific literature is quiet on predictors of specific nonverbal communication of leadership (van Adrichem, 2017). Additionally, Lauk (2019) management researchers have yet to acknowledge the significance of NVC within the context of organisations, particularly in terms of leadership. Leadership is vital to the success of any activity that needs collaboration among a group (or groups) of individuals; however, due to the nature of building projects, leadership is especially crucial (e.g. Nguyen & Ogunlana, 2004; Odusami, 2002; Ofori & Toor, 2012). In addition, effective leadership is one of the key solutions to the construction industry’s problems (Ofori & Toor, 2012) and is recognised as one of the factors contributing to the success of construction organisations (Ismail & Fathi, 2018). Moreover, leadership effectiveness has a substantial influence on team performance, job satisfaction, and organisational performance (Boots, 2019; Shah & Khan, 2018; Zaccaro et al., 2001). According to Dethmers (2017) and Lauk (2019) the NVC of leaders influences views of effective leadership. Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding the relationship between a leader’s NVC and a follower’s job satisfaction in CI.

Leader’s Nonverbal Communication and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has always been one of the most challenging issues in project-based organisations (Cao et al., 2020). According to Nidadhavolu (2018) the modern construction sector is plagued by management issues that make it difficult to keep employees satisfied and achieve organisational objectives. Thus, leaders must consider job satisfaction in order to successfully achieve organisational objectives. Borcherding & Oglesby (1975) stated that dissatisfaction in the construction industry is a factor that generally leads to a decrease in productivity, resulting in project cost
overruns and delays (Solís-Carcaño et al., 2015). Job satisfaction is defined as a combination of positive and negative feelings among employees (Davis & Newstrom, 1985, as cited in Inuwa, 2016).

Research reveal that the NVC of supervisors influences job satisfaction (Girard et al., 2018; Madlock, 2006b; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000a). According to Tjosvold (1984), leaders’ NVC can influence the satisfaction, motivation, and performance of their followers. Naile & Selesho (2014) also explored the ability of leaders to affect employee motivation and job satisfaction. It was shown that a leader’s perceived verbal and nonverbal acts had an effect on the motivation of employees (Naile & Selesho, 2014). According to Rajan (2016), there is a strong association between employee motivation and job satisfaction. According to Mishra (2013), a supervisor who utilises nonverbal communication is more likely to receive high levels of employee job satisfaction and favourable feedback. In addition, Richmond & McCroskey (2000a) stated that supervisors’ nonverbal communication has the ability to boost subordinate motivation and job satisfaction. Moreover, Ciuffani (2017) found a correlation between a leader’s hand gestures and job satisfaction. Van Adrichem (2017) examined the relationship between a leader’s gazing behaviour and the followers’ trust and job satisfaction. The leader’s NVC affects not only the leader’s evaluations but also the follower’s results (Darioly & Mast, 2014). Despite the importance of nonverbal communications (NVC) of leaders and supervisors for job satisfaction, relatively little study has been undertaken to date on the effects of specific nonverbal communications on job satisfaction in the organisational setting, particularly in connection to leadership (Girard et al., 2018; Lauk, 2019). Considering the importance of leadership and job satisfaction on the success of any construction project, it also appears that no research has been done on the impact of a leader’s NVC on job satisfaction in CI (Ismail & Fathi, 2018; Kamaruddeen et al., 2019).

**Leader’s Nonverbal Communication and Follower Emotion**

Emotion is an essential part of everyone’s life. People differ in their ability to recognise, manage, and express emotions, including but not limited to the basic types of joy, love, sadness, anger, fear, and surprise (Ekman, 1992). These differences have an impact on individual adaptability in a variety of circumstances, including the workplace (Cherniss, 2010).
As emotions can influence behaviour in both positive and negative ways (Humphrey et al., 2008; McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002), emotions appear to play a significant part in a person’s enthusiasm for their employment. Consequently, leaders who can recognise emotions can motivate employees to work more efficiently and effectively (Grossman, 2000, as cited in Zehir & Narcikara (2016) and Dabke & Bedekar (2012).

Due to the importance of recognising emotions in the workplace, researchers are becoming cognisant of the need to explore emotions in the workplace (e.g., Ashkanasy et al., 2009; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Barsade et al., 2003; Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Bower & Cohen, 2014; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Kautish, 2010; Malvini Redden, 2013; Nakasi, 2019; Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015). Generally, emotions are often classified as positive and negative (Diener et al., 1995; Shaver et al., 1987). Positive emotions are described as those feelings that are beneficial to the achievement of the organisational objectives, while negative emotions are characterised as those that are destructive to organisational success (Larsen & Dickson, 2004).

Leadership is a profession in which effectively expressing one’s emotions (Trichas & Schyns, 2012). According to research conducted by Bono et al. (2007), who examined the impact of organisational leaders on employees’ emotional experiences, leaders have a significant impact on the emotions and feelings of their employees. It is argued that leaders who use emotion effectively in communication perform at a higher level (Goleman, 1998). In their empirical study, Pirola-Merlo et al. (2002) demonstrated that leaders can boost followers’ performance by enhancing their emotions. Further research has also demonstrated that leaders exert the most of their influence by recognising the emotions of their followers (Tsai et al., 2009).

Emotional contagion is one of the most significant ways in which leaders influence the emotions of their followers and team members (Daniel et al., 2002). Emotional contagion occurs when people imitate each other’s body language, emotional expressions, and vocal tone to disseminate their feelings (Hatfield et al., 1994). Barsade (2002) also illustrated how easily emotions are communicated between members of a working group. Emotional contagion would convey the leaders’ feelings to the employees. Emotional contagion in the context of leadership has been examined and its effect on leadership perception has been established (Cherulnik et al.,
2001a, 2001b; Halverson, 2004; Lewis, 2000; O’Malley et al., 2009; Sy et al., 2005). Additionally, Sy et al. (2005) demonstrated that leaders’ emotions impacted the feelings of group members, and that when leaders expressed a positive emotion, team members also felt more positive emotions and were thus more willing to cooperate.

On the other hand, follower emotions derived from daily interaction with superiors can significantly impact the development and maintenance of relationships, as well as the overall workplace experience. Nonverbal communication has an important role in conveying emotional states and first impressions (Hess, 2016). These emotions are affected by external environmental factors (Lord et al., 2002). Due to the crucial role that nonverbal immediacy plays in human emotions (Mehrabian, 1981), a supervisor’s nonverbal immediacy can be viewed as a ‘emotion-inducing’ factor (Dillard, 1998; Jia et al., 2017). Nonverbal communication behaviours are the main means for conveying emotions (Mehrabian, 1981 in Jia, 2013). According to Mehrabian (1981), people pursue things they like and avoid things they dislike. These ‘liking’, or ‘disliking’ emotions or feelings are usually stimulated by nonverbal behaviours of others, whether received or perceived. Hence, NVC is used to communicate and express feelings, emotions, and thoughts to build and sustain relationships and to influence people (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1998). According to Saputra and Sutopo (2016), emotional expression occurs predominantly through alterations to the eyebrows, eye muscles, pupil dilation, amount and direction of gazing, lips, and cheek. Various research in social psychology (e.g., Lee & Wagner, 2002) has revealed that emotional stimuli can impact a person’s facial expressions.

The Emotional Response Theory (ERT) was created by Mottet et al. (2006) for the instructional setting. According to this hypothesis, there is an inherent connection between the NVC of the instructor and the mood of the learner. Although ERT has been studied predominantly in classroom settings, scholars in organisational and instructional communication have advanced the prospect of extending theories gained in one environment to another (e.g., Horan et al., 2013; Myers, 2006). Jia et al. (2017) also utilised this theory to investigate the connection between the supervisor’s nonverbal immediacy and the employee’s emotional experience in the workplace. There is a dearth of research addressing the relationship between the leader’s
nonverbal communication (NVC) and follower emotions in CI, as well as subsequent follower conduct. Thus, this research examines the emotion of the follower as a component of the conceptual model.

**Follower’s Emotion and Job Satisfaction**

Organisations have acknowledged the prevalence of followers’ emotions in the workplace. Emotions are not only an integral aspect of the workplace, but also play a vital impact in the job satisfaction and performance of employees (Owoseni, 2015). George & Brief (2006) also mentioned that a follower’s emotions have a substantial effect on leadership, team spirit, decision-making skills, turnover, job satisfaction, and job performance. It was discovered that reinforcing positive emotions promotes job satisfaction, while suppressing negative emotions decreases job satisfaction (Cote & Morgan, 2002). In addition, it has been stated that the role of emotions at work is a crucial factor in determining job satisfaction and employee performance in the organisation (Arvey et al., 1998; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Fisher (2000) and Mishra (2013) revealed that both positive and negative emotions are significantly associated with overall job satisfaction. Brief and Roberson (1989) also note that emotions (positive and negative) are significantly related to overall job satisfaction. In addition, Schiopu (2015) indicates that both positive and negative emotions experienced by subordinates have a direct effect on job satisfaction and the desire to continue working for the same organisation. Moreover, employee work satisfaction is a broader perspective of their emotions and feelings regarding their job experiences (Price, 2002). Besides that, Locke (1976) viewed job satisfaction to be a happy or positive emotional state that is the consequence of an evaluation of one’s employment or the experiences they have had on the job. This definition suggests that emotional states have an impact on job satisfaction and performance. In fact, the expression of emotions at work is a major determinant of employee satisfaction and performance (Okeke et al., 2016). Therefore, an employee who frequently experiences positive and pleasant emotions at work will report greater overall job satisfaction than an employee who frequently experiences negative and unpleasant emotions at work (Georgel & Jones, 1997).
Pedragosa et al. (2015) investigate the connection between the emotions of fitness consumers and their overall satisfaction. He reveals that positive emotion has a significant positive impact on enhancing the degree of overall satisfaction, while negative emotion has a negative effect on consumers’ overall satisfaction with fitness centres. The findings of some studies supported the idea that customers’ emotions determine their level of satisfaction (Donovan et al., 1994; Han & Back, 2007; Han et al., 2009; Jung & Yoon, 2011; Nikian, 2017; Oliver, 1993; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Turley & Fugate, 1992; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Positive or negative emotions elicited by an employee’s nonverbal actions have a significant impact on client satisfaction (Jung & Yoon, 2011; Nikian, 2017). Furthermore, Weiss & Cropanzano (1996) proposed the Affective Events Theory (AET), which states that emotions experienced while work are the raw materials that accumulate to generate the affective component of job satisfaction. AET reveals that employees react emotionally to workplace occurrences, and that this affects their job satisfaction and performance. Both this theory and the existing literature provide evidence that there is a connection between the emotions of a follower and their level of job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

Based on the above research, the proposed conceptual model for this study was developed with the objective of emphasising the importance of a leader’s NVC in a project-based setting in order to enhance the job satisfaction and productivity of followers. Suher et al. (2016) stated that job satisfaction influences employee dedication, performance, and business success. Existing research indicates that nonverbal communication in the construction business receives insufficient attention. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to build a conceptual model for leaders’ NVC in CI, including components based on adoption and a blend of theories and prior literature.

As stated previously, there are two theories adopted in this study which are the Emotional Response Theory (ERT) and Affective Events Theory (AET). ERT establishes an inherent connection between a leader’s NVC and a follower’s emotions, whereas AET illustrates the connection
between a follower’s emotions and job satisfaction. Additionally, these two theories are integrated with prior research on NVC, job satisfaction, and the emotions of followers. Few studies have examined the significance and role of a leader’s NVC in a project-based context. In light of this, it is crucial that a conceptual model be developed in this work in order to bridge this knowledge gap.

RESULT

This section presents a discussion of the conceptual model. Based on identified theories and previous research, the authors combine and produce the proposed conceptual model of this study. The following Figure 2 indicates a proposed conceptual model of the current research.
Conceptual Framework Development

The process of conceptual model development is explained as follow:

Level 1:

- Communication
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
- Leader's nonverbal communication
- Followers' satisfaction

Level 2:

- Leaders' nonverbal
- Followers' emotion
- Follower's job satisfaction
- Leaders' NVC
- Followers' emotion
- Followers' job satisfaction

Figure 1: Research Context (Level 1, 2)
The proposed conceptual model of this study is presented below in Figure 2.

![Proposed Conceptual Model](image)

**CONCLUSION**

Nonverbal communication is a prominent topic within the management literature. Management researchers, however, have overlooked this significant form of communication (Birlik & Kaur, 2020; Bonaccio et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2019). In addition, there is less emphasis on leaders’ nonverbal communication in a project-based context. On the other hand, in project-based companies, the subject of follower job satisfaction has always been one of the most difficult challenges. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to develop a conceptual model for a leader’s NVC based on theories and previous research in CI. Based on this model, there is a correlation between a leader’s NVC and a follower’s job happiness; furthermore, the follower’s emotion might modulate this relationship.

However, the conceptual model presented requires further development. Thus, this study identified a number of recommendations for future research. First, it is advised to gain a deeper awareness of which components of a leader’s nonverbal communication behaviour have the greatest impact on the job satisfaction of a follower. Second, it is advised to conduct a questionnaire and interview to examine and validate the proposed conceptual model. By taking these steps, it is intended that a comprehensive understanding of the impact of NVC on employee job satisfaction in the construction industry will emerge.

**References**


REFERENCES


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