Supervisor Nonverbal Behavior and Employee Satisfaction and Motivation

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ABSTRACT
Communication researchers have established that when leaders use positive nonverbal behaviors, it increases followers’ perceptions of the leader’s competence (Tenev, 2007; 2010). Studies have shown that leaders are perceived to be more transformational if they are open, which is displayed through extraversion, approachability, trust, and reciprocity and interpersonal interactions (Norton, 1978). While these variables seemed intuitively related to nonverbal communication, studies have not explicitly examined supervisors’ nonverbal behaviors and subordinate perceptions of their own motivation and satisfaction. We used a Qualtrics survey distributed via email and Facebook, which asked participants to answer questions about how nonverbal interactions with their superiors influence the employee. Results provided insight on employees’ motivation and satisfaction based on their supervisor’s nonverbal behavior, and can be used in the future to inform supervisors in ways to improve their employees’ performance.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Participants
- 157 people
- 93 females, 61 males, 1 non-binary, and 2 other.
- Ages 18-64
- Educational levels were High School/GED Equivalent, some college, Associate’s degree, Bachelor’s degree, and Master’s degree.
- The participants were recruited from Facebook and email.

SCALES

- Adapted Behavioral Indicants of Immediacy Scale
  (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987)
  - Sample item: My immediate supervisor usually looks at me while talking. (None at all - A great deal)
  - Reliability (α = .82, M = 51.89, SD = 8.20)
- Generic Job Satisfaction Scale (MacDonald & MacIntyre, 1997)
  - Sample item: I feel good about working at this company. (Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree)
  - Reliability (α = .82, M = 40.78, SD = 6.66.)
- Adapted Student Motivation scale (Beatty, Behnke & Froelich, 1908)
  - Sample item: I feel interested in my work. (Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree)
  - Reliability (α = .93, M = 52.49, SD = 10.62)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

RQ:
Are employee perceptions of supervisors’ positive nonverbal displays associated with a) motivation and b) job satisfaction?

RESULTS

- Nonverbal communication and motivation were significantly correlated (r= .3, p< .01).
- Nonverbal communication and job satisfaction were significantly correlated (r= .46, p< .001).
  This study looked at whether or not employee perceptions of supervisors’ positive nonverbal displays were associated with motivation and job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to show the relevance of nonverbal behavior by supervisors on the motivation and job satisfaction of their employees, and our results support these associations. We can conclude from this study that supervisors with better nonverbal behavior increase their employees’ motivation and job satisfaction. Previous research showed that nonverbal behavior by leaders incites different actions based on the expectations of the leader. Therefore, these nonverbal behaviors make followers perform differently and actually self-fulfill the expectation of the leader (Schyns & Mohr, 2004). Our study identified that nonverbal behavior by supervisors specifically impacts employees’ motivation and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, our additional findings indicate that when employees find their supervisor’s nonverbal behavior to be more favorable, they are more likely to indicate an intent to stay at their current company and to have a desire to move into a higher position at their company. This research is important for supervisors to note. Having better nonverbal communication may help supervisors retain their good employees for longer and motivate them to move into higher positions. This implies that training supervisors to utilize positive nonverbal behavior can improve employee retention. Nonverbal behavior may create a more satisfying and productive work environment through increased job satisfaction, motivation, intent to stay with a company, and intent to seek higher positions within a company.

Little research has been done to date on the effects of specific nonverbal behaviors (such as spatialvasion or facial expression) on motivation and job satisfaction. A recommendation for future research would be to examine specific nonverbal behaviors and how they affect those two variables. This study would be able to be further developed given more time.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Employee motivation and employee intent to stay were significantly correlated (r= .60, p< .01).
- Nonverbal behavior and employee intent to stay were significantly correlated (r= .24, p< .05).
- Job Satisfaction and employee intent to stay were significantly correlated (r= .55, p< .01).
- Employee motivation and intent to seek higher position were significantly correlated (r= .37, p< .01).
- Job Satisfaction and employee intent to seek higher position were significantly correlated (r= .34, p< .01).