

Interpersonal Communication in Professional and Social Meetings: Exploring Best Practices for Meaningful Human Encounters

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal communication plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of professional and social meetings. Although meetings are a routine part of academic, organizational, and community life, many fail to produce meaningful interaction or productive dialogue. These shortcomings often stem from poor communication practices, rigid hierarchies, unequal participation, and limited empathetic engagement. In the contemporary era of digital distractions and time constraints, the human dimension of meetings is frequently overlooked, negatively affecting collaboration and decision-making. This study examines best practices of interpersonal communication that promote meaningful human encounters in meeting contexts. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and systematic observations across various professional and social settings. The analysis focuses on verbal exchanges, listening behaviors, non-verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and relational dynamics among participants. Special attention is given to the influence of power relations and communication styles on participation and mutual understanding. The findings indicate that active listening, empathetic responsiveness, respectful communication, and inclusive participation significantly improve trust, cooperation, and collective problem-solving. In contrast, barriers such as dominance by authority figures, inattentiveness, digital multitasking, and dismissive behaviors hinder effective interpersonal engagement. The study highlights the importance of human-centered communication ethics, reflective interaction practices, and emotional awareness in creating more productive meeting cultures. By providing practical recommendations, this research contributes to the understanding of interpersonal communication in organizational and social environments. It offers actionable insights for educators, administrators, professionals, and community leaders seeking to enhance the quality of interaction and relational outcomes in meetings. Strengthening interpersonal communication practices is essential for fostering collaboration, mutual respect, and more meaningful human encounters in both formal and informal meeting contexts.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication; Meetings; Human Encounters; Active Listening; Empathy; Communication Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is central to human interaction and forms the foundation of effective engagement in both professional and social settings. Meetings whether academic, organizational, administrative, or community-based serve as significant spaces where individuals encounter one another to exchange ideas, negotiate meanings, make decisions, and build relationships. Despite their importance, meetings often fall short of enabling meaningful human encounters, frequently becoming procedural, hierarchical, or task-driven rather than dialogic and relational. In an era marked by increasing professional pressures, digital mediation, and reduced face-to-face sensitivity, the quality of personal interaction during meetings demands scholarly attention.

Effective interpersonal communication extends beyond the mere exchange of information; it involves active listening, empathy, emotional intelligence, respectful language, and appropriate non-verbal cues. Scholars in communication studies emphasize that meaningful encounters emerge when participants feel heard, valued, and respected. However, contemporary meeting cultures often prioritize efficiency over human connection, resulting in disengagement, misunderstanding, and weakened collaborative outcomes. This disconnect is particularly evident in professional environments where power asymmetries, time constraints, and technological distractions shape interaction patterns.

In social and academic contexts, meetings are also critical sites for collective learning, consensus-building, and social bonding. The absence of healthy interpersonal communication practices in such encounters not only affects decision-making processes but also influences organizational climate, interpersonal trust, and individual well-being. Studies have indicated that ineffective communication in meetings can lead to conflict, reduced participation, and diminished morale, thereby undermining the very objectives meetings are intended to achieve.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore best practices of interpersonal communication that facilitate meaningful human encounters during professional and social meetings. By examining how individuals communicate, listen, and respond to one another in real meeting contexts, this research aims to identify communication behaviors that foster inclusivity, empathy, and mutual understanding. The study adopts a human-centered perspective, recognizing meetings as social encounters where ethical communication and relational sensitivity are as important as task accomplishment.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on interpersonal communication by foregrounding the experiential and ethical dimensions of meetings. It offers insights relevant to educators, administrators, professionals, and community leaders who seek to enhance interaction quality and promote constructive meeting cultures. In doing so, the study aligns with contemporary communication scholarship that advocates for dialogic engagement, participatory interaction, and respectful human encounters in institutional and social life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal communication is widely understood in communication scholarship as a transactional and meaning-centered process in which participants simultaneously send and receive messages through verbal and nonverbal behaviours, co-constructing understanding rather than merely transmitting information. Such interaction unfolds across both formal and informal settings, particularly meetings where collaboration, shared interpretation, and relational alignment are expected outcomes. Transactional perspectives emphasize the fluidity of roles and the continuous influence of context, making them especially relevant for analysing interaction quality in professional encounters. Within this framework, active listening has emerged as a best practice, defined as intentional and responsive listening that incorporates feedback mechanisms such as paraphrasing, clarification, and reflective responses to ensure mutual understanding.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that active listening enhances rapport, openness, and relational satisfaction while reducing miscommunication, thereby strengthening inclusivity, task clarity, and team cohesion an effect that becomes even more critical in hybrid and virtual meeting environments where nonverbal cues may be constrained. Nonverbal communication further plays a decisive role in shaping interaction quality, as cues such as eye contact, posture, gesture, facial expression, and vocal tone convey relational and emotional meanings that influence trust, engagement, and perceived credibility. Micro-level nonverbal behaviours, including behavioural mimicry and shared affect, have been shown to foster group cohesion and communicative effectiveness during meetings, while discrepancies between verbal content and nonverbal signals often shape message interpretation.

Interaction patterns such as turn-taking, interruption management, and equitable participation are also central to meeting effectiveness, with research indicating that proactive and respectful verbal behaviours significantly predict participant satisfaction and performance outcomes. Additionally, contemporary studies of remote and technology-mediated meetings highlight how multitasking, role expectations, meeting duration, and engagement norms influence communication dynamics. Finally, cultural and contextual dimensions remain critical, as communication norms shaped by hierarchy, language practices, and high-context cultural orientations affect participation, authority negotiation, and conflict management in meetings. Together, international scholarship and contextual insights underscore the necessity of adapting interpersonal communication best practices to specific cultural realities through facilitative strategies that encourage inclusive participation, empathetic engagement, and the reduction of hierarchical silence, thereby enabling more meaningful and effective human encounters in meeting environments.

RESEARCH GAP AND RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Current literature convincingly shows that active listening, nonverbal communication, and interaction patterns influence the quality of interpersonal encounters. However, research

tends to treat these factors in isolation or in domain-specific contexts (e.g., virtual teams, therapy). There is a gap in integrative studies that examine *how these interpersonal communication components interact holistically in meeting environments*, especially in culturally diverse and hybrid professional contexts. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring best practices that enable meaningful human encounters in both professional and social meetings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in established theories of interpersonal and organizational communication that conceptualize communication as a dynamic, transactional, and contextually embedded process. The Transactional Model of Communication provides the primary theoretical base, viewing communication as a continuous exchange in which participants simultaneously act as senders and receivers, co-constructing meaning through verbal and nonverbal cues. This perspective is particularly relevant to meeting contexts, where interaction quality, role fluidity, and relational dynamics influence collaborative outcomes. The framework further draws on Interpersonal Communication Theory, which emphasizes relational competence, empathy, and responsiveness in human interaction. Within this lens, active listening is positioned as a core communicative skill that enhances clarity, trust, and relational satisfaction by reducing ambiguity and fostering mutual understanding during meetings.

Additionally, Nonverbal Communication Theory informs the study by highlighting the role of facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures, and vocal tone in shaping message interpretation and perceived credibility. Congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication is theorized to strengthen engagement and trust, whereas inconsistency may lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore, Sociocultural and Contextual Communication Perspectives are incorporated to account for the influence of cultural norms, hierarchical structures, and contextual expectations on meeting interactions. These perspectives underscore that interpersonal communication practices are shaped by social and cultural realities, particularly in high-context and hierarchical environments. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide an integrated framework for examining how interpersonal communication practices influence meeting effectiveness, participation, and meaningful human encounters.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to examine interpersonal communication practices in professional and social meetings. Quantitative data may be collected through a structured questionnaire administered to participants from academic, organizational, or community meeting contexts, focusing on active listening behaviours, nonverbal communication, interaction patterns, and perceived meeting effectiveness. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques (such as correlation and regression analysis) can be used to

test the proposed hypotheses. To enrich and contextualize the findings, qualitative data may be gathered through semi-structured interviews or focused group discussions, allowing participants to reflect on lived experiences of interaction, participation, and cultural influences during meetings. Thematic analysis can be employed to identify recurring patterns and contextual meanings. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enables a comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal communication practices shape meaningful and effective human encounters in meeting environments. The variables of the study are as follows:

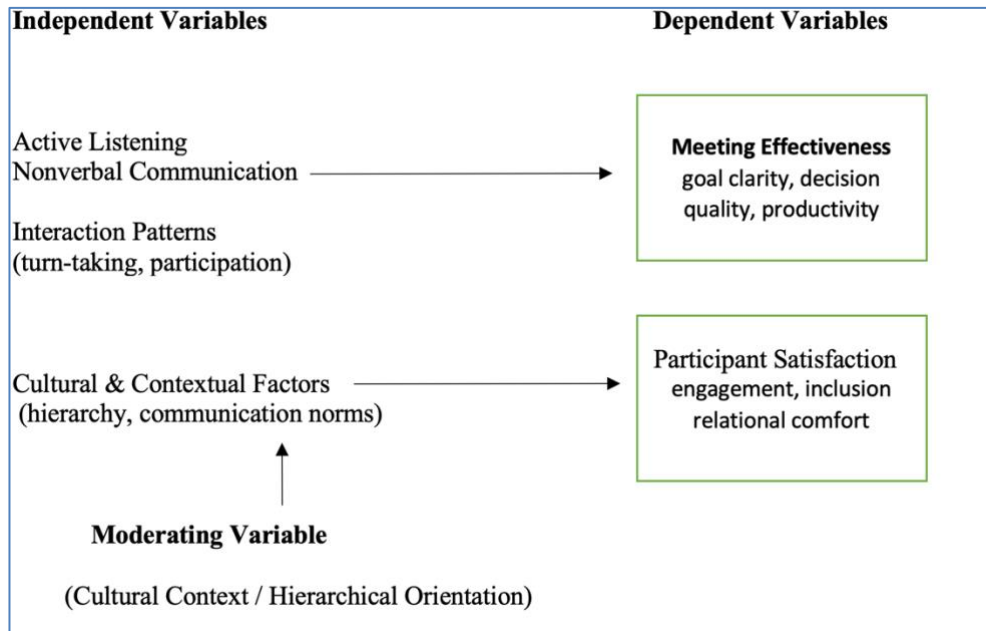


Figure.1: Variables of the study

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between key interpersonal communication variables and meeting outcomes. Active listening, nonverbal communication, interaction patterns, and cultural–contextual factors function as independent variables influencing meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction. Cultural context and hierarchical orientation act as moderating variables that shape how interpersonal communication practices affect meeting outcomes across professional and social meeting environments.

Table 1: Variables impacting the Interpersonal Communication

Type of Variable	Variable	Description / Indicators
Independent Variable	Active Listening	Attentive listening, paraphrasing, clarification, feedback, empathetic responses during meetings
Independent Variable	Nonverbal Communication	Eye contact, facial expressions,

		posture, gestures, vocal tone indicating engagement and attentiveness
Independent Variable	Interaction Patterns	Turn-taking, interruption management, response behaviour, equitable participation
Independent Variable	Cultural and Contextual Factors	Hierarchy, communication norms, language practices, organizational culture
Dependent Variable	Meeting Effectiveness	Clarity of objectives, quality of decisions, task understanding, perceived productivity
Dependent Variable	Participant Satisfaction	Perceived inclusion, engagement, comfort, and relational satisfaction
Moderating Variable	Cultural Context / Hierarchical Orientation	Degree to which cultural norms and power distance influence communication behaviours
Control Variables (Optional)	Meeting Type and Mode	Professional/social meetings; face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid settings

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the nature and scope of interpersonal communication in meetings.
2. To analyse the role of active listening and nonverbal communication in interaction quality.
3. To investigate interaction patterns and participation dynamics.
4. To explore cultural and contextual influences on meeting communication.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does interpersonal communication operate in professional and social meetings?
2. What roles do active listening and nonverbal communication play in shaping interaction quality?
3. How do interaction patterns affect meeting effectiveness?
4. How do cultural and contextual factors influence meeting communication?

HYPOTHESES

- H1: Effective interpersonal communication positively influences meeting satisfaction and effectiveness.
- H2: Active listening and positive nonverbal cues enhance trust and clarity.
- H3: Equitable participation patterns improve engagement and meeting outcomes.

- H4: Cultural and hierarchical contexts moderate interpersonal communication behaviours.

UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING

The universe of the present study comprises individuals who regularly participate in professional and social meetings, including faculty members, administrative staff, research scholars, postgraduate students, and professionals from organizational and community settings. These participants represent communication-intensive environments where interpersonal interaction and collaborative decision-making are central to meeting processes and outcomes. The universe includes participants engaged in face-to-face as well as virtual meeting contexts.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who had recent and direct experience of participating in structured meetings. For the quantitative component, a sample of 120 respondents was selected. This sample size is considered appropriate for a research paper in communication and social sciences, as it allows for meaningful descriptive analysis and basic inferential testing while remaining feasible within time and resource constraints. Methodological literature suggests that a sample size of 100–150 respondents is sufficient to identify patterns and relationships in survey-based interpersonal communication studies.

Additionally, a sub-sample of 12 respondents was drawn from the main sample for qualitative inquiry through semi-structured interviews. This size was considered adequate to achieve thematic saturation and to provide contextual depth to the quantitative findings. The combined sampling approach enhances the reliability and validity of the study by integrating breadth with interpretive insight.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	46.7
	Female	64	53.3
Age Group	Below 30 years	38	31.7
	31–40 years	44	36.6
	Above 40 years	38	31.7
Role	Faculty/Professional	52	43.3
	Research Scholar	34	28.4
	PG Student	34	28.4
Meeting Mode	Face-to-face	48	40.0
	Virtual/Hybrid	72	60.0

Analysis:

The table indicates a balanced representation of gender and age groups. A majority of

respondents regularly participated in virtual or hybrid meetings, reflecting contemporary communication practices.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Active Listening	3.89	0.61
Nonverbal Communication	3.74	0.58
Interaction Patterns	3.68	0.65
Cultural & Contextual Factors	3.52	0.70
Meeting Effectiveness	3.81	0.63
Participant Satisfaction	3.77	0.60

Analysis:

Mean scores above the midpoint indicate that respondents generally perceived active listening, nonverbal communication, and interaction patterns as positively influencing meeting effectiveness and satisfaction.

Table 4 : Correlation between Interpersonal Communication Variables and Meeting Outcomes

Variables	Meeting Effectiveness	Participant Satisfaction
Active Listening	0.62**	0.59**
Nonverbal Communication	0.55**	0.57**
Interaction Patterns	0.48**	0.51**
Cultural & Contextual Factors	0.41*	0.45*

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Significant at $p < 0.01$

Analysis:

Active listening shows the strongest positive correlation with both meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction, supporting the study’s hypotheses regarding the central role of listening behaviour in interpersonal communication.

Table 5 : Regression Analysis Predicting Meeting Effectiveness

Independent Variable	β (Beta)	t-value	Significance (p)
Active Listening	0.38	4.96	0.000
Nonverbal	0.29	3.82	0.001

Communication			
Interaction Patterns	0.21	2.97	0.004
Cultural Factors	0.17	2.41	0.018
R ² = 0.56			

Analysis:

The regression model explains 56% of the variance in meeting effectiveness. Active listening emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by nonverbal communication and interaction patterns, confirming H1–H3 of the study.

Table 6 : Major Themes from Qualitative Interviews (n = 12)

Theme	Key Indicators	Illustrative Insight
Listening Culture	Attention, acknowledgment	Feeling heard improves engagement
Nonverbal Sensitivity	Eye contact, tone	Nonverbal cues signal respect
Participation Equity	Turn-taking	Inclusive meetings feel productive
Hierarchical Influence	Authority, silence	Juniors hesitate to speak

Analysis:

Qualitative findings reinforce quantitative results by highlighting how listening practices, nonverbal sensitivity, and hierarchical norms shape meeting experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide empirical support for the significance of interpersonal communication practices in shaping meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction. Descriptive analysis revealed that respondents generally perceived active listening, nonverbal communication, and interaction patterns as positively present in professional and social meetings, as indicated by mean scores above the scale midpoint. This suggests a growing awareness of communicative competence as a critical factor in collaborative environments.

Correlation analysis demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between active listening and both meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction. This finding confirms H1 and H2 and reinforces existing interpersonal communication scholarship that positions listening as a foundational element of effective human interaction. Participants who experienced attentive listening, acknowledgment, and feedback reported higher levels of clarity, trust, and engagement during meetings. This aligns

with transactional communication perspectives, which emphasize mutual meaning-making and responsiveness.

Nonverbal communication also showed a significant positive association with meeting outcomes. Respondents perceived eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and vocal tone as important indicators of attentiveness and respect. These findings support nonverbal communication theory, which argues that affective and relational meanings are often conveyed beyond verbal content. The results further suggest that congruence between verbal and nonverbal cues enhances credibility and relational comfort, particularly in group interaction settings.

Analysis of interaction patterns, including turn-taking and participation equity, revealed moderate but significant relationships with meeting effectiveness and satisfaction, lending support to H3. Meetings characterized by balanced participation and minimal disruptive interruptions were perceived as more productive and inclusive. This finding resonates with group communication and interaction process theories, which argue that equitable communicative structures promote engagement and shared ownership of outcomes.

The study also found that cultural and contextual factors, particularly hierarchical orientation, significantly influenced interpersonal communication behaviours, thus supporting H4. Qualitative insights revealed that participants in hierarchical settings often hesitated to express dissent or initiate interaction, leading to communicative silence despite active cognitive engagement. This finding underscores the relevance of sociocultural communication perspectives, especially in high-context cultures where respect for authority and indirect communication norms shape interaction dynamics.

Qualitative themes further enriched the quantitative results by highlighting participants' lived experiences. Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of being "heard" and "acknowledged," suggesting that interpersonal communication in meetings is not merely task-oriented but deeply relational. Nonverbal sensitivity and listening culture emerged as key facilitators of psychological safety, while hierarchical constraints were identified as barriers to open participation.

Overall, the findings confirm that interpersonal communication in meetings operates as a multidimensional process influenced by listening behaviours, nonverbal cues, interaction structures, and cultural context. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthens the argument that meaningful and effective meetings require not only procedural efficiency but also empathetic, inclusive, and context-sensitive communication practices.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, several practical and academic suggestions are proposed to enhance interpersonal communication in professional and social meetings. First, organizations and educational institutions should incorporate active listening training into faculty development, leadership programmes, and professional communication workshops. Structured listening practices, such as reflective feedback and paraphrasing, can significantly improve clarity, trust, and participant engagement.

Second, greater emphasis should be placed on nonverbal communication awareness, particularly in leadership and facilitation roles. Training modules focusing on eye contact,

posture, vocal tone, and attentiveness can help participants convey openness and respect, thereby strengthening relational dynamics in meetings. In virtual and hybrid meeting environments, explicit attention to camera presence, vocal modulation, and turn-taking cues becomes especially important.

Third, meeting facilitators should adopt inclusive interaction strategies to promote equitable participation. Techniques such as structured turn-taking, agenda-based discussion slots, and invitation-based contributions can help minimize dominance and communicative silence, especially among junior or less vocal participants. Such practices can enhance collective decision-making and meeting satisfaction.

Finally, communication practices must be context-sensitive and culturally informed. In hierarchical or high-context settings, facilitators should consciously create psychologically safe spaces that encourage dialogue while respecting cultural norms. Academic curricula and organizational policies should integrate intercultural communication competencies to address diverse participation expectations and communication styles.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined interpersonal communication practices in professional and social meetings, with particular focus on active listening, nonverbal communication, interaction patterns, and cultural context. The findings demonstrate that effective interpersonal communication significantly enhances meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction. Active listening emerged as the most influential factor, underscoring its role in fostering trust, clarity, and relational engagement. Nonverbal communication and equitable interaction patterns further contributed to meaningful participation and collaborative outcomes.

The study also highlights the moderating influence of cultural and hierarchical factors, emphasizing that interpersonal communication cannot be understood or applied in isolation from its social context. Meetings function not merely as procedural spaces but as relational environments where meaning, authority, and participation are continuously negotiated.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study contributes to interpersonal and organizational communication scholarship and offers actionable insights for educators, leaders, and practitioners. Promoting empathetic, inclusive, and context-aware communication practices can transform meetings into more meaningful human encounters, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness and social cohesion.

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