Executive Body Language Course: Gesture, Posture and Voice Cues in Negotiations and Boardrooms

7 – 11 December 2026
Amsterdam

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Ref: 745_35810 **Date:** 7 – 11 December 2026 **Location:** Amsterdam **Fees:** 4800 GBP

Programme Summary

Executive body language is the subject of this one-week training course for directors, senior managers and heads of function at strategic level, ending in a non-verbal presence plan for one high-stakes meeting. Leaders often read rooms by instinct and discover too late that their own posture, pace or tone sent a different message from their words. The programme moves from the evidence on non-verbal signals to observation, self-presentation and the reading of others, then applies each to a live scenario. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on executive body language to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Negotiations, board discussions and public presentations are decided partly by what is seen and heard, not only by what is said. A leader whose gestures, stance and voice contradict the spoken message loses credibility, while one who misreads a silent room misses objections until they surface as delays. Bankers, procurement chiefs and hospital executives all meet this problem in different settings.

- Meeting Effectiveness: Improves as leaders notice disengagement and objections while the discussion is still open.
- Negotiation Quality: Strengthens as signals of hesitation are tested with questions rather than assumed.
- Stakeholder Confidence: Rises as spoken and non-verbal messages stay consistent.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Mehrabian Inconsistent-Message Studies: Examine how listeners weigh words, tone and expression when feelings and attitudes conflict, and the programme applies them only within that narrow scope, in Session 1.
- Signal Clusters and Context: Treats a single gesture as weak evidence and reads groups of signals against a person's usual behaviour, in Sessions 2 and 4.
- Cultural Variation in Display: Recognises that eye contact, distance and gesture carry different meanings across cultures, in Sessions 3 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Directors who chair boards and committees and need to sense the mood of a room.
- Senior managers who lead negotiations with suppliers, partners or regulators.
- Heads of function who present proposals to executive teams.
- Leaders of international teams who work across cultures.

Typical settings include banking, healthcare, energy, public administration and professional services.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to evaluate the strength and limits of research on non-verbal communication.
2. Participants will be able to construct a baseline observation of a person before interpreting changes in behaviour.
3. Participants will be able to diagnose mismatches between their own spoken message and their posture, gesture and voice.
4. Participants will be able to prioritise signals worth testing during a negotiation or meeting.
5. Participants will be able to design adjustments for cross-cultural settings.
6. Participants will be able to justify a non-verbal presence plan for a high-stakes meeting.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Executive Body Language: Evidence and Limits

What can non-verbal signals tell a leader, and what can they not?

- Research Claims Review
- Signal Channel Map
- Myth and Evidence Sort
- Observation Log Template
- Self-Awareness Questionnaire

Day 2: Observation and Baselines

How is a change in behaviour told apart from a person's normal style?

- Baseline Observation Sheet
- Signal Cluster Grid
- Silence and Pause Analysis
- Video Replay Debrief
- Hypothesis and Test Card

Day 3: Presence, Posture and Voice

How do stance, gesture and voice shape the message a leader sends?

- Posture and Space Audit
- Gesture Range Drill
- Vocal Pace and Pitch Profile
- Camera and Remote Meeting Check
- Message Consistency Review

Day 4: Reading Rooms and Negotiations

How are signals read, tested and answered across cultures and tables?

- Seating and Distance Plan
- Cross-Cultural Display Comparison
- Negotiation Signal Tracker
- Clarifying Question Bank
- Objection Surfacing Script

Day 5: Non-Verbal Presence Plan for One Meeting

Do the earlier tools form one plan that a leader can use in a real meeting?

- Applying the Session 2 Baseline Observation Sheet
- Testing the Session 3 Message Consistency Review
- Reviewing the Session 4 Negotiation Signal Tracker
- Rehearsing the Opening Minutes
- Completing the Non-Verbal Presence Plan

Methodology

The programme uses simulation with recorded role plays, built on a prepared scenario for one supplier negotiation and one board presentation. Participants take turns as leader, counterpart and observer, then review the recordings against the observation tools. Feedback is given on behaviour that can be changed, not on personality.

- Suggested activity: Observing a silent counterpart and listing three signals to test with questions.
- Suggested activity: Re-recording an opening statement after adjusting stance and pace.
- Suggested activity: Comparing two cultural readings of the same gesture.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a non-verbal presence plan for one high-stakes meeting. It holds a self-observation summary, a baseline sheet for a counterpart, a list of signals to test, a set of voice and posture adjustments and an opening sequence. The plan is used at work to prepare for the meeting and review it afterwards.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is an executive body language course suitable for leaders with no training in psychology?

Yes. Executive body language is taught through recorded exercises and structured tools. It assumes experience of leading meetings or negotiations, but no earlier study of psychology or behaviour.

What evidence does executive body language rest on?

Executive body language rests on the Mehrabian studies, applied within their narrow scope, together with signal clusters read against a baseline and an awareness of cultural variation in display.

How is the plan from executive body language used at work?

You use the non-verbal presence plan to prepare for a high-stakes meeting, test signals with questions during it and review what you observed afterwards.

How does executive body language differ from a presentation skills course?

Executive body language concentrates on observing signals, consistency of message and reading rooms and counterparts, while a presentation skills course concentrates on structuring content and delivering a talk.