

X-ray specs & badges

Think you're good at reading people's expressions? Well, think again. New software is ten per cent better at it than the average person. There's even a device to improve your emotional intelligence.

Every time you interact with people, you give off unconscious signals that you're following what they're saying. For example, you might nod to show that you're following or squint a bit to show that you've lost track. However, we're not very good at interpreting these signals. In fact we only get it right about half of the time.

Now social X-ray glasses can help you interpret some of these signals better by means of a built-in camera linked to software which analyses facial expressions. The six basic emotional facial states it recognises are: thinking, agreeing, concentrating, interested, confused and disagreeing. The device can read 24 'feature points' on a face and identify which of these six general facial states is being expressed. You get the information via an earpiece, which tells you how the listener is responding. There's also a traffic light system displayed on the lens with a red, amber or green light to show that the listener is interested, moderately interested or not interested. If it shows red, it's time to shut up!

The other novelty is sociometric badges. These are designed to provide feedback on how often you're speaking, for how long and who with. Each person is represented by a dot, which is larger if you're talkative and smaller if not. If you speak in a monologue the dot will turn red, but if it's a dialogue it turns white. The interaction between speakers is represented by lines between them, so a thick line if two people speak a lot to each other and very thin if they barely speak. The information is sent wirelessly to any device that can display it graphically. In one experiment, although some of the speakers started with very different dots, by the end of the experiment all the dots were more or less the same size and colour, indicating that people had changed their behaviour and made the interaction more even.

Think how differently our interactions with people could be if we could read their reactions to what we're saying with x-ray specs and track how well we work as a group with a sociometric badge! It's early days, but these devices may well transform how we interact with each other in the future.

1 Read the text and then write a definition of *x-ray specs* and *sociometric badges*.

2 Read the text again and answer the following questions.

- 1 What/Who is better at interpreting how the listener feels: people or x-ray glasses?
- 2 Do we know that we're showing the speaker how we feel about what they're saying?
- 3 Find two examples which show if we're following what the listener is saying or not.
- 4 What are the six basic expressions the glasses can recognise?
- 5 How do the glasses show you if your listener is interested or not?
- 6 What three things do sociometric badges track?
- 7 What do the dots represent?
- 8 What do the lines represent?
- 9 How did the lines and dots change in the experiment and what did this show?

3 Without looking at the text, see if you can remember the actual word or phrase used in the text, to replace the words in brackets with the same meaning.

- 1 You can improve your _____ (ability to understand your feelings and those of other people) by using a sociometric badge.
- 2 The _____ (machine or piece of equipment) can read 24 'feature points' on a face.
- 3 You _____ (produce) unconscious signals that you're following what they're saying.
- 4 The x-ray glasses can help you _____ (understand an action) these signals better.
- 5 The other _____ (new thing) is sociometric badges.
- 6 ... a thin line if they _____ (almost don't) speak.
- 7 It's early days, but these devices may well _____ (make completely different) how we interact with each other in the future.

4 There are a number of verbs we use when interacting with other people. Match the verbs below, some of which are from the text, to how British people typically use them.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 stare _____ | 6 nod _____ |
| 2 squint _____ | 7 shake your head _____ |
| 3 wink _____ | 8 bow _____ |
| 4 frown _____ | 9 raise your eyebrows _____ |
| 5 yawn _____ | 10 shake hands _____ |

- a to answer 'yes' to a question or to show that you agree or understand
- b to close your eyes slightly, which could be because of a bright light or because you're not following
- c to show you're surprised
- d to bend your head or body forwards, often to show respect
- e to move your eyebrows down and closer together because you are annoyed, worried, or thinking hard
- f to look at someone or something very directly for a long time
- g to quickly close and open one eye as a sign to someone, for example a sign that what you have just said is a joke or a secret
- h to open your mouth wide and take a big breath, usually because you are tired or bored
- i to turn your head from side to side to say no
- j to hold someone's hand and move it up and down several times as a way of greeting them or of showing that you agree to something

5 Now use the verbs above to show how these movements above are used in your country / culture or other countries or cultures, eg *in some countries people raise their eyebrows to answer 'yes' to a question.*

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- How useful would you find the x-ray specs or sociometric badge?
- Can you think of any situations where x-ray specs or sociometric badges might be useful?
- Have you had any experience of different countries or cultures with different ways of interacting?
- What would be the most important advice you could give someone coming to your country to make sure they used the right ways of interacting in your country?

Glossary

dot (*noun*) – a very small spot of ink or colour

emotional intelligence (*noun*) – the ability to understand your own personal feelings and those of other people, and to consider other people's feelings when making decisions

even (*adj*) – equal in amount

feature (*noun*) – a part of your face such as your eyes, nose, or mouth

lose track (*verb*) – to no longer know what is happening

monologue (*noun*) – a speech made by someone who talks for a long time and does not let anyone else say anything

track (*verb*) – to follow or find someone or something by looking for evidence that shows where they have gone