

Communication Styles: A Self-Assessment Exercise

*(Based on the work of P Case “Teaching for the Cross-Cultural Mind” Washington, DC, SIETAR, 1981)*

**Instructions:** Please select **from each pair** of attributes the one which is most typical of your personality. No pair is an either-or proposal. Make your choice as spontaneously as possible. There is no wrong answer. Check the box of your choice of the pair.

1. I like action.

2. I deal with problems in a systematic way.

3. I believe that teams are much more effective than individuals.

4. I enjoy innovation very much.

5. I am more interested in the future than in the past.

6. I enjoy working with people.

7. I like to attend well-organised group meetings.

8. Deadlines are important to me.

9. I cannot stand procrastination.

10. I believe that new ideas have to be tested before being used.

11. I enjoy the stimulation of interaction with others.

12. I am always looking for new possibilities.

13. I want to set up my own objectives.

14. When I start something, I go through until the end.

15. I basically try to understand other people’s emotions.

16. I do challenge people around me.

17. I look forward to receiving feedback on my performance.

18. I find the step-by-step approach very effective.

19. I think I am good at reading people.

20. I like creative problem solving.

21. I extrapolate and project all the time.

22. I am sensitive to others’ needs.

23. Planning is the key to success.

24. I become impatient with long deliberations.

25. I am cool under pressure.

26. I value experience very much.

27. I listen to people.

28. People say that I am a fast thinker.

29. Co-operation is a key word for me.

30. I use logical methods to test alternatives.

31. I like to handle several projects at the same time.

32. I always question myself.

33. I learn by doing

34. I believe that my head rules my heart.

35. I can predict how others my react to a certain situation.

36. I do not like details.

37. Analysis should always precede action.

38. I am able to assess the climate of a group.

39. I have a tendency to start things and not finish them up.

40. I perceive myself as decisive.

41. I search for challenging tasks.

42. I rely on observation and data.

43. I can express my feelings openly.

44. I like to design new projects.

45. I enjoy reading very much.

46. I perceive myself as a facilitator.

47. I like to focus on one issue at a time.

48. I like to achieve.

49. I enjoy learning about others.

50. I like variety.

51. Facts speak for themselves.

52. I use my imagination as much as possible.

53. I am impatient with long, slow assignments.

54. My mind never stops working.

55. Key decisions have to be made in a cautious way.

56. I strongly believe that people need each other to get work done.

57. I usually make decisions without thinking too much.

58. Emotions create problems.

59. I like to be liked by others.

60. I can put two and two together very quickly.

61. I try out my new ideas on people.

62. I believe in the scientific approach.

63. I like to get things done.

64. Good relationships are essential.

65. I am impulsive.

66. I accept differences in people.

67. Communicating with people is an end in itself.

68. I like to be intellectually stimulated.

69. I like to organize.

70. I usually jump from one task to another.

71. Talking and working with people is a creative art.

72. Self-actualisation is a key word for me.

73. I enjoy playing with ideas.

74. I dislike wasting my time.

75. I enjoy doing what I am good at.

76. I learn by interacting with others.

77. I find abstractions interesting and enjoyable.

78. I am patient with details.

79. I like brief, to the point statements.

80. I feel confident in myself.

**Scoring Sheet for the Communication Styles Assessmen**t

**Instructions:** Find the numbers you selected on the previous pages, and select them in the sections below. Add up the totals for each **style** (one point per answer) and select the total you received for each style from the drop down box provided. The maximum is 20 per style and your total for the four styles should be 40.

**Style – Select your answers here Total Score**

**(max. 20)**

**Style 1**

1 – 8 – 9 – 13 – 17 – 24 – 26 – 31 – Choose an item.

33 – 40 – 41 – 48 – 50 – 53 – 57 – 63 –

65 – 70 – 74 - 79

**Style 2**

2 – 7 – 10 – 14 – 18 – 23 – 25 – 30 – Choose an item.

34 – 37 – 42 – 47 – 51 – 55 – 58 – 62 –

66 – 69 – 75 - 78

**Style 3**

3 – 6 – 11 – 15 – 19 – 22 – 27 – 29 – Choose an item.

35 – 38 – 43 – 46 – 49 – 56 – 59 – 64 –

67 – 71 – 76 - 80

**Style 4**

4 – 5 – 12 – 16 – 20 – 21 – 28 – 32 – Choose an item.

36 – 39 – 44 – 45 – 52 – 54 – 60 – 61 –

68 – 72 – 73 - 77

# The Four Communication Styles

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Style 1: WHAT** | **Style 2: HOW** |
| **ACTION** (A)  Results Objectives Achieving Doing | **PROCESS** (PR)  Strategies Organization Facts |
| **Style 4: WHY** | **Style 3: WHO** |
| **IDEA** (I) | **PEOPLE** (PE) |
| Concepts Theories Innovation | Communication Relationships Teamwork |

**The Main Characteristics of Communication Styles**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Style** | **Content** – people with this style talk about… | | **Process** – people with this style are… |
| **Action (A)** | Results | Responsibility | Pragmatic (down to earth) |
| Objectives | Feedback | Direct (to the point) |
| Performance | Experience | Impatient |
| Productivity | Challenges | Decisive |
| Efficiency | Achievements | Quick (jump from idea to idea) |
| Moving ahead | Change | Energetic (challenge others) |
| Decisions |  |  |
| **Process (PR)** | Facts | Trying out | Systematic (step- by-step) |
| Procedures | Analysis | Logical (cause and effect) |
| Planning | Observations | Factual |
| Organizing | Proof | Verbose |
| Controlling | Details | Unemotional |
| Testing | Cautious | Patient |
| **People (PE)** | People | Self-development | Spontaneous |
| Needs | Sensitivity | Empathetic |
| Motivation | Awareness | Warm |
| Teamwork | Cooperation | Subjective |
| Communications | Beliefs | Emotional |
| Feelings | Values | Perceptive |
| Team spirit | Expectations | Sensitive |
| Understanding | Relations |  |
| **Idea (I)** | Concepts | What’s new in the field | Imaginative |
|  | Innovation | Creativity | Charismatic |
|  | Interdependence | Opportunities | Difficult to understand |
|  | New ways | Possibilities | Ego-centered |
|  | New methods | Grand designs | Unrealistic |
|  | Improving | Issues | Creative |
|  | Problems | Potential | Full of ideas |
|  |  | Alternatives | Provocative |

**Adjusting to Other Communication Styles Communicating with an Action (A) oriented person:**

* + Focus on the result first; state the conclusion at the outset.
  + State your best recommendation; do not offer many alternatives.
  + Be as brief as possible.
  + Emphasize the practicality of your ideas.
  + Use visual aids.

# Communicating with a Process (PR) oriented person:

* + Be precise; state the facts.
  + Organize your discussion in a logical order:
    - Background
    - Present situation
    - Outcome
  + Break down your recommendations.
  + Include options and alternatives with pros and cons.
  + Do not rush a process-oriented person.
  + Outline your proposal.

# Communicating with a People (PE) oriented person:

* + Allow for small talk; do not start the discussion right away.
  + Stress the relationship between your proposal and the people concerned.
  + Show how the idea worked well in the past.
  + Indicate support from well-respected people.
  + Use an informal writing **style**.

# Communicating with an Idea (I) oriented person:

* + Allow enough time for discussion.
  + Do not get impatient when he or she goes off on tangents.
  + Try to relate the discussed topic to a broader concept or idea
  + Stress the uniqueness of the idea or topic at hand.
  + Emphasize future value or relate the impact of the idea to the future.
  + If writing, try to stress the key concepts that underlie your recommendation at the outset. Start with an overall statement and work toward the particulars.

## **Communication Problems**

1. **Failure to Listen:**

* Distraction – removal of phones and electronic devices, no noise etc
* Interrupting – remind all to treat all how you would like to be treated
* Disrespect – need to earn respect, set a great example (managers)
* Planning what to say next – write notes instead
* Short attention spans – keep contributions brief
* Difficulty hearing – ensure all can hear, keep the room quiet etc
* Misunderstandings – repeat back what is said to ensure understanding

1. **Culture Differences:**

* People with similar cultures tend to ‘hang’ together with others familiar with their culture or habits
* Often these groups don’t interact or mix well within teams
* Strategies have to be employed to draw people out and get all to contribute

Small group dynamics:

* Mix people together
* Have assigned seats
* Brainstorm and ensure all contribute, even if have to walk the floor and ask people directly
* Repeat back what is heard to avoid misunderstandings (reframe)

**3. Type of Communication:**

Distance communication can lead to:

* Detachment
* Inability to interact
* Delays
* Misunderstandings – direct face to face communication is less often misunderstood; try to have appointments face to face

Poorly written communication can lead to confusion

* How many people have had emails misunderstood?

**4. Attitude and Ego:**

* Egos can sometimes get in the way of problem resolution
* Conflict can arise due to inequity
* A discussion that doesn’t go someone’s way can be confused with ‘losing’ an argument instead of co-operation (practice assertive not aggressive methods of communication)
* Sometimes people need to just agree to disagree

**5. Gender Bias:**

* Discussing which gender makes the best leader is taking focus away from real issues
* Sometimes workers only want to relate to people of the same gender
* Shyness or aloofness with the opposite gender is difficult. Cultural issues need to be considered

**6. Knowledge/Inadequate Knowledge:**

* Ineffective education
* Lack of understanding
* Information essential to the group not passed on – ‘knowledge hoarding’
* Remember though that some part of the responsibility for increasing your knowledge is up to YOU.

**7. Cliques, groups and friendships:**

* Unintentional exclusion
* Deliberate exclusion
* Some people won’t communicate effectively or at all unless they are comfortable in their group or one-on-one
* Enabling communication between groups is a skill that can be developed

**8. Lack of Feedback:**

* This may be from the top down or the bottom up
* Managers may not praise when due or reprimand when required, or not give any feedback at all
* Staff may not be comfortable about approaching their manager about issues, so important information is not given to the people who can fix them

## Dealing with conflict:

Practice this method for more effective communication and conflict resolution:

1. **Stay Focused**

Sometimes it’s tempting to bring up past seemingly related conflicts when dealing with current ones. It feels relevant to address everything that's bothering you at once and get it all talked about while you're already dealing with one conflict. Unfortunately, this often clouds the issue and makes finding mutual understanding and a solution to *the current issue* less likely, and makes the whole discussion more taxing and even confusing. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, your feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.

2. **Listen Carefully**

People often *think* they’re listening, but are really thinking about what they’re going to say next when the other person stops talking. (Try to notice if you do that the next time you're in a discussion.) Truly effective communication goes both ways. While it might be difficult, try really listening to what the other person is saying. Don’t interrupt. Don’t get defensive. Just hear them and reflect back what they’re saying so they know you’ve heard. Then you’ll understand them better and they’ll be more willing to listen to you.

3. **Try to See Their Point of View**

In a conflict, most of us primarily want to feel heard and understood. We talk a lot about our point of view to get the other person to see things our way. This is understandable, but too much of a focus on our own desire to be understood above all else can backfire. Ironically, if we all do this all the time, there’s little focus on the other person’s point of view, and nobody feels understood. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. (If you don't 'get it', ask more questions until you do.) Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.

4. **Respond to Criticism with Empathy**

When someone comes at you with criticism, it’s easy to feel that they’re wrong and get defensive. While criticism is hard to hear and often exaggerated or coloured by the other person’s emotions, it’s important to listen to the other person’s pain and respond with empathy for their feelings. Also, look for what’s true in what they’re saying; that can be valuable information for you.

5. **Own What’s Yours**

Realise that personal responsibility is a strength, not a weakness. Effective communication involves admitting when you’re wrong. If you both share some responsibility in a conflict (which is usually the case), look for and admit to what’s yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows maturity. It also often inspires the other person to respond in kind, leading you both closer to mutual understanding and a solution.

6. **Use “I” Messages**

Rather than saying things like, “*You* really messed up here,” begin statements with “I”, and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, “I feel frustrated when this happens.” It’s less accusatory, sparks less defensiveness, and helps the other person understand your point of view rather than feeling attacked.

7. **Look for Compromise**

Instead of trying to "win" the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody’s needs. Either through compromise or a new creative solution that gives you both what you want most, this focus is much more effective than one person getting what they want at the other’s expense. Healthy communication involves finding a resolution that both sides can be happy with.

8. **Take a Time-Out**

Sometimes tempers get heated and it’s just too difficult to continue a discussion without it becoming an argument or a fight. If you feel yourself or the other person starting to get too angry to be constructive, or showing some destructive communication patterns, it’s okay to take a break from the discussion until you both cool off. This can mean taking a walk and cooling off to return to the conversation in half an hour, "sleeping on it" so you can process what you're feeling a little more, or whatever feels like the best fit, as long as you do return to the conversation. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.

9. **Don’t Give Up**

While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a constructive attitude, mutual respect, and a willingness to see the other’s point of view or at least find a solution, you can make progress toward the goal of a resolution to the conflict.

10. **Ask For Help If You Need It**

If you have trouble staying respectful during conflict or if you’ve tried resolving conflict with people on your own and the situation just doesn’t seem to be improving, you might benefit from a few sessions with HR or a therapist.

**Tips:**

Remember that the goal of effective communication skills should be mutual understanding and finding a solution that pleases both parties, not ‘winning’ the argument or ‘being right’.

Keep in mind that it’s important to remain respectful of the other person, even if you don’t like their actions.

Remember, good communication is a skill that can be taught and learned.. No matter your age!

## **Feedback**

## Giving Feedback

* Check your motives. Why are you doing it? Feedback is supposed to improve performance – this can’t be accomplished by being harsh, critical or offensive. Be fair and balanced.
* Be timely. The closer to the event you address the issue, the better.
* Make it regular. It is not a once-per-year or once-every-three-months event. Simple, informal feedback should be much more often than this.
* Prepare your comments. Not to script the conversation, but to stay on track and stick to the issue/s
* Be specific. Stick to the facts, state exactly what you mean. Avoid words like ‘never’ and ‘always’ because the person will get defensive. Discuss impact of the behaviour. Don’t get personal or seek to blame.
* Criticise in private
* Use ‘I’ statements – rather than ‘you’ statements. ‘You’ statements tend to make people defensive.
* Limit your focus. A feedback session should discuss no more than 2 issues or the person will feel attacked or demoralised. Also stick to behaviours you can actually change/influence.
* Ensure you give both positive and negative feedback, not just negative.

## Receiving Feedback

REMEMBER: feedback given in a respectful, constructive way is NOT bullying

* Learning to accept constructive criticism is not something that comes naturally to most people, even if it is entirely accurate.
* In the heat of the moment, many people react defensively and angrily attack the person giving feedback
* BUT we need to get over it. There is value in constructive criticism; it helps us improve performance, improve relationships, and become more successful in all we do.
* So how do you learn to stop being defensive??

## 6 Steps to Better Receive Feedback

1. Stop your first reaction.
2. Remember the benefits of getting feedback.
3. Listen for understanding.
4. Look the person in the eyes and thank them for sharing their feedback.
5. Ask questions to deconstruct the feedback.
6. Request time to follow up.

## Aggressive Communication

* A mode of communication or behaviour where one expresses their feelings, needs, and rights without regard or respect for the needs, rights, and feelings of others
* Recipient: causes feelings of stress, victimisation, feeling bullied, and relationships suffer
* Aggressor: causes feelings of stress, affects personal relationships, reduces achievement of personal goals

## Aggressive vs Assertive Communication

Use ‘I’ rather than ‘You’ statements, eg:

**AGGRESSIVE** **ASSERTIVE**

You never listen to me! I don’t feel like you have heard me

You’re always leaving messes that I have I would appreciate it if you would clean up

to clean up! after yourself

You never understand my point of view! I don’t think you have understood my point

of view

You’re ruining my day! I am struggling with this situation

## **Suggested Communication Improvement Tasks:**

1. Honestly evaluate all the ways (verbal & non-verbal) in which you communicate and implement strategies to improve your skills.
2. Learn to appraise those you are working with to determine their predominant communication styles.
3. Practice adapting your communication style to suit the other people you work with, especially those with whom you’ve had communication issues in the past.
4. Identify the communication problems in your workplace, and determine ways to reduce or eliminate them.
5. When communicating, ensure the perceived message is the intended message. Have strategies in place to check this and constantly adapt your strategies to ensure success.