



SupEFL: Supplemental Self-help in English as a Foreign Language
for Learners with Specific Learning Differences/Difficulties
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Interpersonal Communication



Summary

This self-help learning module is suitable for people who want to improve their interpersonal communication in English and/or their native language. You will understand yourself and others better. It will enable you to become a more accomplished, effective and versatile communicator.

This self-help learning module is suitable for you if:

- You have had misunderstandings when communicating with someone
- You have a feeling that or your communication partners are taking things too literally
- You are not sure what is appropriate for you to do in your interpersonal communication
- You are not sure what the people you are communicating with are really trying to say
- You sometimes have difficulties understanding people



Required level of English language proficiency to read and understand this module:

B1 or higher (<https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cefr-en.pdf>)

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|---|
| Independent User | B1 | <p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.</p> <p>Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.</p> <p>Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.</p> <p>Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p> |
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Estimated time to complete the module:

 8 hours

Objectives

Upon completion of this module you will be more motivated in your interpersonal communication and able to:

- Assess your own communication style preferences
- Determine the communication style of others
- Apply the art of style-shifting to your communication

Methodology

This E-learning book is an open educational resource. It uses open-source technology and multimedia. It is mobile-friendly and device-independent. It is delivered online but there also is an offline version. The self-help learning program is designed for individual learners to work on their own and includes practice activities. It can also be used in a classroom as part of a facilitator-led training program.

The program includes mini-inputs and demonstrations as well as activities for self-reflection and practice. It is important that participants reflect their past communication experience. For the training to be effective, participants are encouraged to form a small group (of 4-6 persons) in their social network who are also interested in improving their interpersonal efficacy in English. Because the practice activities involves self-disclosure it is very important to maintain a safe atmosphere within the group.



1. Get to know each other and begin practicing



So nice to meet you. What is your blood type?



Activity:

Aim: Appoint a facilitator and begin assessing your individual communication profile.

To determine your communication profile, please refer to the following page. Pick 4-6 adjectives to describe yourself from the list on 2. and pick 1 adjective from the list for every other person to describe them.

Even if you do not know the other persons very well, you will already have formed a first impression based on your intuition. We've all heard about the importance of first impressions. The saying goes: "You don't have a second chance to create a first impression." Within a few seconds of meeting someone, we form an "impression" about someone. Those judgments may or may not be accurate, but they tend to endure. For this reason, you don't need to know each other very well to give each other feedback.

Instructions for students: Get together as a group, discuss the agenda and appoint a **facilitator** to guide the discussion. Read through the entire program and be prepared to keep the time. Don't let the conversation drift.



2. Adjectives to describe yourself and others

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| accurate | independent |
| action-driven | lively |
| adventurous | logical |
| analytical | motivating |
| appreciative | optimistic |
| charming | orderly |
| considerate | patient |
| cooperative | persuasive |
| demanding | popular |
| detail-oriented | powerful |
| diplomatic | results-oriented |
| dominant | sentimental |
| dramatic | spontaneous |
| eloquent | steady |
| enthusiastic | strong-willed |
| even-tempered | task-oriented |
| exact | technical |
| frank | thorough |
| generous | trusting |
| imposing | understanding |



3. Assessing your communication style

Activity: Please underline the words, you chose to describe yourself. Please mark the words others used to describe you. You will learn what the four quadrants mean later.





4. Communication Style - The Basic Idea

A basic behavior structure

- We all carry a basic behavior structure inside.
- We are all affected by genetic, educational and environmental influences.
- We are often not aware of our own patterns of behavior.

Interpersonal conflicts

- Interpersonal conflicts are often caused by this lack of awareness.
- We accidentally act in ways guaranteed to affect negatively people with other styles of behavior.

Versatility can be learned

- We can create a temporary, neutral platform on which to co-operate.
- By moving towards the other person's style we create empathy.

“Win-Win” team communication

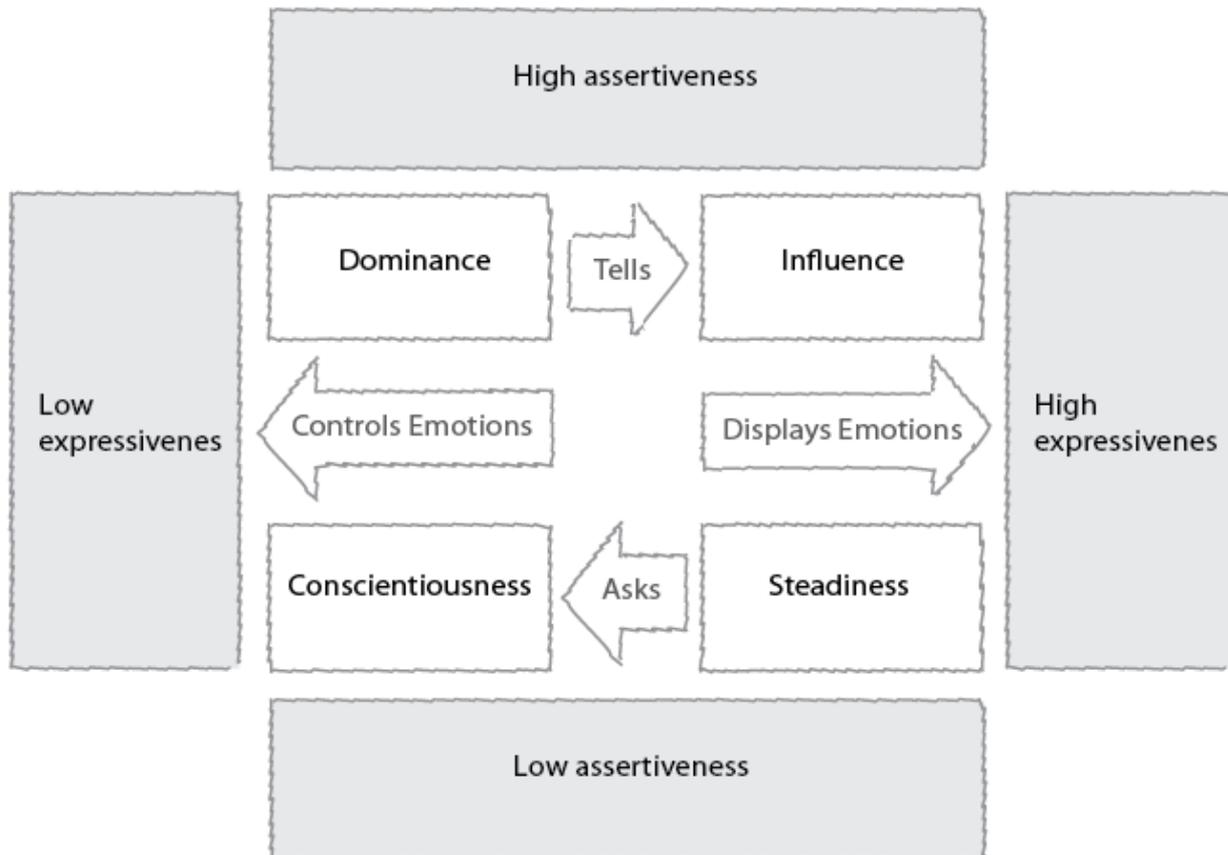
- By being aware of each other's styles and encouraging versatility in this style-shifting, teams can avoid accidental conflicts

Four basic premises

- We are creatures of habit.
- We all form distinct impressions of other people when we first meet them.
- Social style deals only with perceived behavior.
- The two major behaviors we communicate are assertiveness and responsiveness.

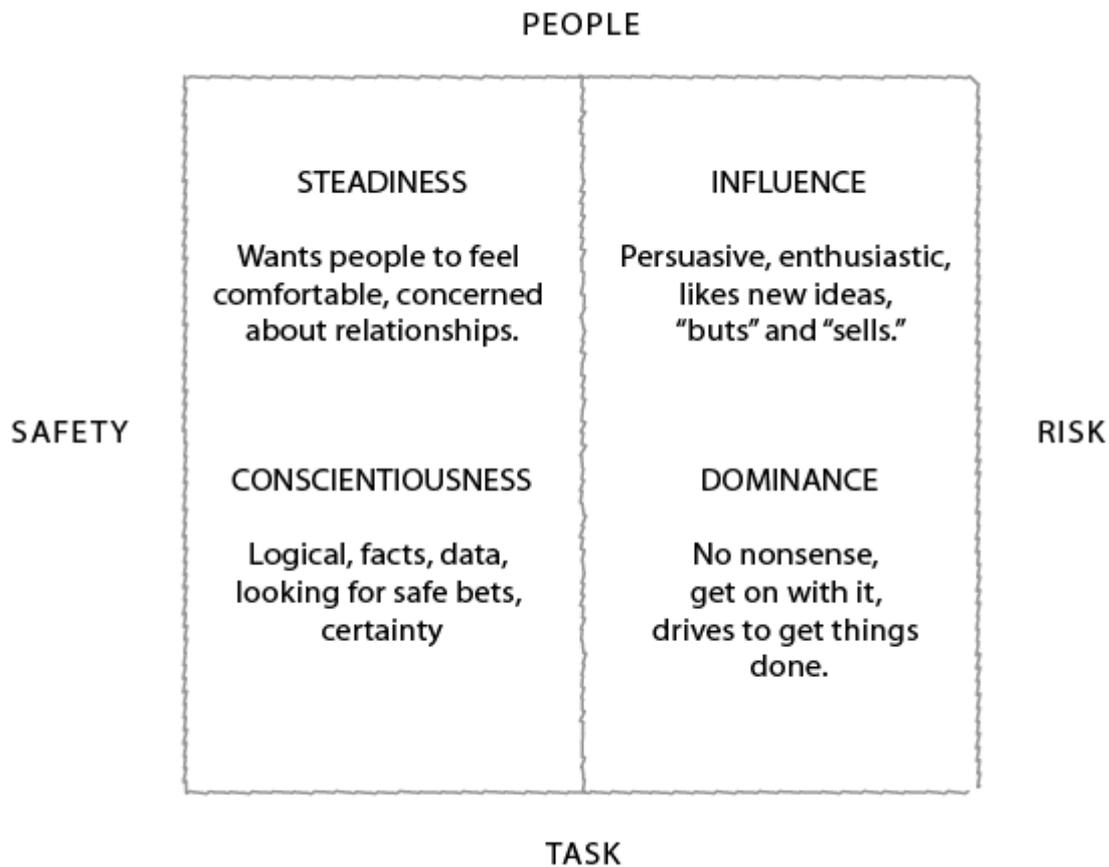


5. The Dimensions of Style



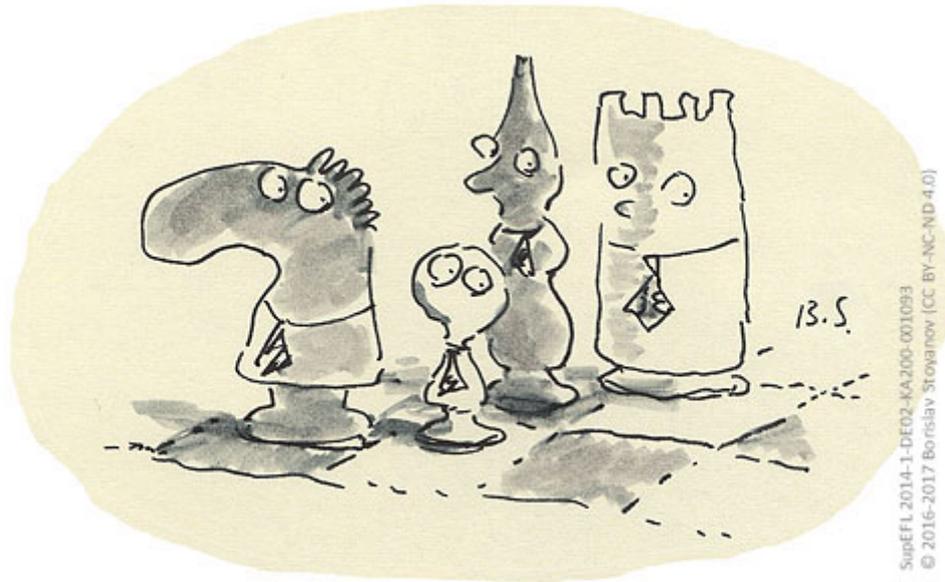


6. The Dimensions of Style II





7. Social Style Descriptions



Background

Everyone acts according to their basic behavior pattern. This means that it is possible for you to predict people's reactions in many situations.

Moreover, it is also possible to predict someone's reaction to your own style of behavior. In recognizing and becoming attuned to different social styles and, therefore, to other people's needs, you are more likely to create an atmosphere of understanding.

No one style is “better” than the other. Each style has its strengths and weaknesses. In good teamwork we need all four styles to balance and complement each other.



The Steady

Steady types are concerned with emotions and their point of view is often personal. They often ask who has done what to whom. They look for private reasons in people's behavior and find it hard to believe they are only acting on principles or practical considerations or simply to make life more exciting. They are concerned with happiness, warmth, social activities and personal relationships and they usually contribute to these. Often steady people are interested in folklore, traditions and even mysticism. They are reluctant to change their minds about things concerning themselves. They prefer comfortable familiarity rather than the risks of the unknown. They avoid decisions that affect this “comfortableness”. In business, their strength is their ability to be accepted by everyone. Subdued determination and sensitivity in dealing with other people are inherent in the steady style. They should sometimes realize the need for better structure in their work and be prepared to be more assertive at times.

Key strengths: Personal relations and support.

The Conscientious Style

Conscientious types determine their behavior according to facts, figures, principles, logic and the consistency they find in reality. They make plans and organize and manage systematically from start to finish. This interest in fact gathering sometimes slows down decision making and gives the impression of disinterest or lack of enthusiasm. But in order to avoid the risk of an unreasonable decision, all possibilities must be analyzed first. Faith in principles, facts, and logic may be more important than friendship or personal satisfaction. In business, they are concerned with structuring their environment. They are detail “specialists”. They put vague assignments in order, provide statistical evidence, plan schedules, organize manpower and draw up budgets. They are not very assertive and sometimes need the “symbols” of authority to compensate for lack of natural leadership.

Key strengths: Systematic thinking and analysis.



The Dominant Style

Dominant types seem to know what they want and seem to have no difficulty in stating their opinion, especially on matters concerning themselves. Their slogan could be, “Do it now and do it right!” Dominant people live in the present and are action oriented. Their style is quick, precise and efficient. They sometimes seem to be indifferent to people's emotions and private affairs, which may give the impression of coldness, harshness or criticism. Delays make them impatient. They try to influence situations and make them more to their own liking. In business they are highly assertive, often with an inborn authority. This may suppress the creativity of people around them. Their quick decisions may cause resentment or frustration. They often grasp the overall picture very clearly but can be impatient with those that don't. As “control” specialists they should try to loosen their hold on structured assignments and delegate more.

Key strengths: Independent action and control.

The Influencing Style

Influencing types often focus on dreams of the future that sometimes makes them seem unrealistic, impractical and irresponsible. But they can rouse people's enthusiasm and stimulate and excite people. Restless in their search for the future, they sometimes jump from one idea or action to another. Their ideas are often intuitive and therefore creative and imaginative. But they can go wrong if their actions are based solely on opinions and emotions rather than facts and the current situation. In business they have natural leadership qualities and are people oriented. They suffer if they have to work within narrowly defined rules or structures but need some help in organizing and analyzing their work. They can inspire teams to reach their goals but sometimes need to delegate to others and better structure their own work.

Key strengths: Intuition and inspiration.



8. The Impact of the Styles on Communication

| | DOMINANCE | INFLUENCE | STEADINESS | CONSCIENTIOUSNESS |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Verbal | decisive direct speech doesn't necessarily stop to greet | expresses opinions readily generalizes persuasive | listens close, personal language supportive language | focuses on specific details precise language avoids emotions |
| Paraverbal | speaks quickly loud tones may use formal speech | lots of voice inflection animated loud tones | speaks slowly soft tones patient speech | little vocal variety brief speech even delivery |
| Body Language | direct eye contact firm handshake strong, clear gestures | quick actions lots of body movement enthusiastic handshake | gentle handshake comfortable with hugging slow movement | poker face controlled movement may be uncomfortable with touching |
| Personal Space | may keep physical distance may display graphs at work workspace may suggest power | workspace may be cluttered may have personal slogans in office comfortable with close physical space | may have family pictures in workspace likes side-by-side seating may carry sentimental items | a strong sense of personal space charts, graphs in office tidy desktop |



9. Which Social Style?

Read the short descriptions below and fit the correct style to each description.

- A. Is calm, modest and helpful; a warm, friendly listener with whom one can get on easily; likes personal contact and shared responsibility; tends to reach their goals on the base of solid personal relationships. Minds risks and quick decision, if strong support or precise data are missing. Is “smoothing” and tends to avoid interpersonal conflicts.

Style: _____

- B. Is subject-oriented in their relationship to others as well as aggressive; an initiative taker and distinctly result-oriented. Demands new ideas, reacts quickly to others and does not hesitate to object to statements. Is “straightforward,” acts quickly, takes chances and is energetic. Likes to be in charge and have things under control. Not prepared to show feelings and emotions or let others participate in their internal considerations. Communicates in a direct manner and talks mainly about the task at hand.

Style: _____

- C. Is friendly, inspiring and emotional but also aggressive and an initiative-taker. Takes time for friendly conversation before coming to the point and starting the actual task. Decisions are based a lot on feelings/ emotions and lets others share their findings and dreams. Excitable, enthusiastic, laughs often and makes jokes. Future oriented, risk loving and creative.

Style: _____



D. Is thoughtful, reserved and very logical. Listens, likes procedure, balances all alternatives and then tends to stick to their own ideas and goals. Is disciplined and independent, leaves interpersonal initiatives to others and is normally free of aggression. Is perceived as unemotional but fixed in their relationships. Is rather more interested in details than in the general picture and looks for structure safety and facts before taking decisions. Often technically minded. Interested in discovering and solving problems.

Style: _____



10. Communication Style Strengths

Each style has definite strengths that are evident in communication. Knowledge of these strengths allows people to draw on them and to find situations in which the strengths are a benefit.

Dominance

- gets to the bottom line
- speaks forcefully
- maintains eye contact
- presents position strongly
- quick to act
- takes risks / seeks change
- persuasive & competitive

Influence

- is persuasive
- is a good storyteller
- focuses on the big picture
- uses motivational speech
- socially skillful
- experimenting & flexible
- inspiring & enthusiastic

Conscientiousness

- presents precisely
- focuses on facts
- is efficient in speech
- has a well-organized workspace
- economical & practical
- detail-oriented & analytical

Steadiness

- listens well
- is a good counselor
- uses supportive language
- builds trust
- thoughtful & amiable
- cooperative & loyal



Dominance

People with a dominant style tend to take charge of their lives. They prefer to be in control and are quite capable of working independently. They are decisive in their actions and are high achievers. Dominant people thrive on competition. They enjoy the challenge of a fight and enjoy the win even more. They maintain a fast pace as they work single-mindedly on their goals. Dominant people are good in positions of authority in which independence is required. They possess strong leadership skills and have an ability to get things done. They are not afraid to take risks to get what they want.

Influence

People with an influencing style are enthusiastic and friendly. They prefer to be around other people and thrive in the spotlight. Because of their positive focus and their lively nature, they are able to generate motivation and excitement in others. Influencing people work at a fast pace because they prefer stimulation. They are well suited to high-profile positions in which public presentations are important. The spontaneity of influencing people promotes quick and decisive action. They are good at building alliances and using relationships to accomplish work.

Steadiness

People with a steady style value warm, personal relationships. They often have good counseling skills and others come to them for support because they are good listeners. Steady people are cooperative and enjoy being part of a team. They are reliable and considerate. Therefore, they are always aware of other's feelings. Steady people work best in an environment in which teamwork is essential. Their ability to help others makes them suitable for any of the helping professions in which they can care for others.

Conscientiousness

People with a conscientious style place a heavy emphasis on accuracy and objectivity. They make their decisions based on facts and attempt to leave emotions out of them. Their reliance on data makes them excellent problem solvers. They tend to be persistent in their analyses, maintaining a critical focus throughout their work. Conscientious people can work independently and follow-through on tasks, they are well-suited for independent, technical jobs.



11. Communication Style Trouble Spots

All of the four styles contain potential trouble spots. Some of these spots stem from the simple fact that any good thing taken to an extreme can become a problem.

For example, no one would question that being friendly is a positive attribute. If someone is overly friendly to the point of losing professional decorum, however, that attribute can become a negative.



People who are under stress tend to take their style behaviors to an extreme. In addition, a strong emphasis on one style generally means a weakness in another. For example, a highly objective person may find him- or herself neglecting people's feelings.



Dominance

- is a poor listener
- is impatient with others
- does not heed advice
- likes to argue
- may appear/become: arrogant, impulsive, anarchistic, coercive, gambling, distorting

Influence

- does not hear details
- tends to exaggerate
- generalizes
- can be over dramatic
- may appear/become: inconsistent, childlike, volatile, spineless, manipulative, self-deluding

Conscientiousness

- focuses too much on details
- fears personal disclosure
- can be terse
- uses little variety in vocal tones
- may appear/become: uncreative, mean, stubborn, plodding, hypercritical, over-elaborate

Steadiness

- avoids conflict
- gives in easily
- keeps opinions to oneself
- overemphasizes feelings
- may appear/become: self-denying, gullible, paternal, perfectionist, obliged, over-committed



Dominance

When stressed, dominant people may cross the line from controlling to overbearing. Their need to get things done quickly may cause them to overlook fine details, which may lead to mistakes. Focusing on feelings is not a strength of dominant people and personal feelings may be pushed aside. People with a dominant style may have a tendency to view every situation as competitive. This view may make others uncomfortable and create needless tension. Dominant people also may become workaholics if left unchecked.

Influence

When stressed, influencing people tend to intensify their verbal behavior. They may exaggerate for effect in their stories. They also might respond to criticism with verbal attacks. They often generalize and gloss over important details because of their enthusiastic support of an idea. Influencing people are rarely concerned with time constraints and may not control the use of their time.

Steadiness

When stressed, steady people may try to assure themselves by sticking with what is comfortable and avoiding change. Because they dislike conflict they may tell others what others wish to hear. This avoidance of conflict may result in steady people not achieving what they want. Unfortunately, their unachieved wants and needs may linger under the surface and they may become resentful. Future interaction with those who thwarted the steady person will be tense.

Conscientiousness

When stressed, conscientious people may continually seek more information to make them feel confident. This information seeking may hide their avoidance of an issue or their withdrawal from others. It may also delay decision making. Because they are uncomfortable with emotions, they may avoid having to express them at all costs. They tend to put quality and accuracy ahead of feelings, even if it might hurt others. Conscientious people often appear impersonal to others.



12. **Activity:** Style Understanding Exchange

Answer the following questions:

1. *How would you describe your individual communication style? Create a list of descriptive words.*

2. *Does your self-assessment match with that of others? If not, why not?*

3. *What are your particular strengths and weaknesses (please list 3 of each referring to the previous sections)?*

4. *Do you have an opposite communication style (one which you have the least in common with)? What three things can you do to communicate more effectively with people that have this style?*



13. Style Indicators

1. *If you could only hear a person – e.g. on the phone – what would help you identify their social style? (voice, pace, inflection, message)*

Dominant:

Influencing:

Steady:

Conscientious:

2. *If you could only see a person – e.g. through a glass door – what would help you identify their social style? (gestures, expression, eyes)*

Dominant:

Influencing:

Steady:

Conscientious:

3. *If you were talking to someone, i.e. in a conversation, how could you identify their social style and which kind of questions would help?*

Dominant:

Influencing:

Steady:

Conscientious



14. Social Styles: Versatility

“The degree to which a person is perceived as helping others feel comfortable.”



Low Versatility

- has limited desire to adapt to meet the needs of others
- prefers to do things for own reasons
- uses position power rather than personal power
- is predictable in actions
- lacks sensitivity to differences between people
- runs the risk of making other people uncomfortable

High Versatility

- adapts to meet the needs of others
- attempts to do things for other's reasons
- uses personal power
- appears unpredictable at times
- asks the question: what can I do to make the other person comfortable with me?



15. Consequences for People with Low Versatility

Conscientious:

Perceived as maintaining low-assertive and low-responsive behavior no matter who the other person is. Has a tendency to stick to business, use facts and behave in a deliberate manner in most situations. A tendency to overuse analysis, conservative thinking, modesty and standard operating procedures.

Would be more effective with more:

- willingness to change pace and approach to accommodate others
- understanding of the importance of feelings
- willingness to take risks and shortcut procedures
- initiative and independent action

Influencing:

Perceived as maintaining high-assertive and high-responsive behavior no matter who the other person is. Has a tendency to be impatient, work mainly through the relationship, use feelings and emotions and quick actions in most situations. A tendency to overuse praise, enthusiasm, optimism and overselling.

Would be more effective with more:

- objectivity and careful analysis of data
- attention to detail
- emotional control
- control of time and focus on results

**Dominant:**

Perceived as maintaining high-assertive and low-responsive behavior no matter who the other person is. Has a tendency to stick to business, work independently of others and to try to control others in most situations. A tendency to overuse impatience, bluntness, competition and overbearing attitude.

Would be more effective with more:

- understanding of impact on others
- patience and concern about people
- pacing of personal effort, relaxation

Steady:

Perceived as maintaining low-assertive and low-responsive behavior no matter who the other person is. Has a tendency to work through the relationship, use feelings and behave in a deliberate manner in most situations. A tendency to overuse the indirect approach, kindness and tolerance of others.

Would be more effective with more:

- initiative and sense of urgency
- strength, firmness and self assertion
- willingness to take a direct approach, take a stand on issues



16. The Practice of Style Shifting



Definition

Style shifting is the ability to expand our own views, behaviors and thought patterns and choose the appropriate style according to the situation.

Interpersonal communication

If we have only one pattern, we cannot style shift. This is why it is important first of all to learn about both our own and the other's style. Learning and style shifting go together. The Wilson Social Style analysis is one tool we can use to do this. If we know that we are basically an “influencing” type of person and that another member of our team is basically a “conscientious”, then we may choose to try and communicate in a more factual, logical and structured way when talking to the person. In the Wilson system this is called “versatility.”



Cross-cultural communication

It is a significant skill to be able to adjust our style – in meetings, presentations, negotiations, as sales persons, leaders, etc. - in situations where we are interacting with people from different cultures. The key is to learn the other people's cultural values and communication styles. For example, Japanese communication styles tend to be more indirect and formal than most European styles. An enthusiastic, direct and fast speaker should therefore become more patient and silent and soften his voice when doing business with Japanese clients.

Why style shift?

Style shifting is always a personal choice depending on the situation. As a general rule in business, if we are trying to sell an idea, product or service it is probably better that we make the most effort to style shift. If we are the buyer, we can expect the other to shift his style more towards our style.

Practice

A key ingredient in style shifting is the ability to handle the “discomfort” we feel in doing something in a very different way to “normal.” Here are a very few simple style shifts you can make to practice:

- Men: take off your tie! // Women: kick off your shoes!
- Shake hands with the person sitting next to you very softly. Now strongly.
- Hold a conversation and avoid direct eye contact. Now keep strong eye contact.
- Sit close to the person you are talking with. Sit at a greater distance.
- Use a lot of gestures as you talk. Sit on your hands.
- Be very direct in your language. Be very indirect and polite.
- Make a lot of listening noises and nod. Be silent and still as you listen.

Monitor your inner feelings. Become familiar with these feelings and your inner judgments about what is “wrong” and “right.” Practice expanding your “comfort zone.”



17. Tips for Better Communication

Steady Types:

Try to:

- start with a personal comment to break the ice
- show sincere interest in them as people
- find areas of common experience
- listen and be responsive
- be non-threatening and informal
- ask “how” questions to draw out their opinions
- watch out for hurt feelings and personal reasons if you disagree
- provide assurances that their decision will minimize risk and harm to others
- provide back-up support

Try not to:

- rush into the agenda
- stick to business constantly
- force quick responses
- be domineering, demanding or manipulative
- use threats
- debate facts and figures at length
- be patronizing
- offer many options
- offer assurances you cannot live up to
- decide for them or they will lose the initiative

Influencing Types:

Try to:

- be stimulating, entertaining, fast-moving and fun
- leave time for socializing
- deal with the big picture, not “petty” details
- ask for their opinions and ideas
- support their hopes and dreams
- provide concepts for implementing ideas
- provide examples from people they see as important
- offer special deals and incentives

Try not to:

- be cold and aloof
- lay down the law
- press hard for factual based solutions
- deal in too many details, esp. in writing
- leave things hanging in the air or they will be left there
- talk down to them
- be dogmatic
- dream with them if time is of the essence



Conscientious Types:

Try to:

- prepare your case in advance and be as accurate as you can
- be direct and stick to business
- take your time but be persistent
- present specifics and do what you said you would do
- draw up a timetable for action plans
- follow through if you agree
- make a logical presentation of your position if you disagree
- show reliability
- provide practical, tangible evidence
- provide guarantees

Try not to:

- be disorganized or messy
- casual, too informal or loud
- rush the process
- fail to follow through
- waste time
- leave things to chance
- provide personal incentives
- threaten, moan or coax
- use someone else's opinion as evidence
- be manipulative

Dominant Types:

Try to:

- be brief, specific and to the point
- use time efficiently
- stick to business, don't chit-chat
- come well-prepared with a well-organized "package"
- plan to present your facts clearly and logically
- ask specific "what" questions
- provide alternative solutions to allow them to decide
- if you disagree, take issue with the facts and not the person
- if you agree, support the result and the person

Try not to:

- waste their time by rambling
- build up a personal relationship unless they initiate it
- be disorganized
- leave loopholes or "cloudy" issues
- come with predetermined decisions
- speculate wildly or offer unsubstantiated guarantees
- direct them or order them around
- let your disagreement reflect on them personally



18. Practicing Versatility

Activity: You are working on a project with John... You have set up a meeting with John to talk about the idea. How can you be versatile in your discussion?

1. How would you open the conversation?

- if John were a Conscientious Type?
- If John were a Dominant Type?
- if John were a Steady Type?
- If John were an Influencing Type?

2. How would you conduct the conversation?

- if John were a Conscientious Type?
- if John were a Dominant Type?
- if John were a Steady Type?
- if John were an Influencing Type?

3. How would you end the conversation?

- if John were a Conscientious Type?
- if John were a Dominant Type?
- if John were a Steady Type?
- if John were an Influencing Type?