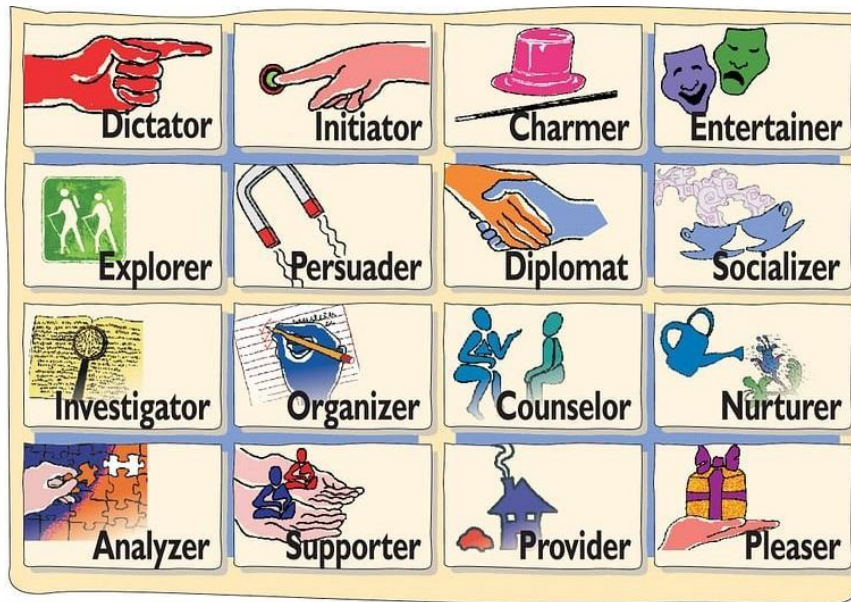


# Communication Styles in the Workplace – 10 Infographics

Today's focus is on communication styles, with 10 infographics.

## Straight Talk®



Research shows us people have four different styles of communicating. We call these styles: Director, Expresser, Thinker and Harmonizer. Each style has its own way of seeing the world. Each favors a certain way of listening, responding, making decisions, and solving problems.

## 1. The Four Communication Styles

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #1

A few points to keep in mind: Most people use two styles more frequently; this blend determines how you communicate. It's important to understand your primary communication style, since this is the one you use most often. No style is best, but it may be to your advantage to play up one over another, depending on the situation.



Key characteristics of each style are shown in the infographic below:

Director	Expresser
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Goal oriented</li> <li>▪ Tells it like it is</li> <li>▪ Makes decisions quickly</li> <li>▪ Always on the go</li> <li>▪ Speaks crisply</li> <li>▪ May seem insensitive or intimidating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People oriented</li> <li>▪ Animated, easily excited</li> <li>▪ Expressive gestures</li> <li>▪ Entertaining</li> <li>▪ Thinks out loud</li> <li>▪ Speaks rapidly</li> <li>▪ May be imprecise</li> </ul>
Thinker	Harmonizer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Task oriented</li> <li>▪ Makes lists</li> <li>▪ Does things “by the book”</li> <li>▪ Speaks deliberately</li> <li>▪ Believes in a right and wrong way</li> <li>▪ May procrastinate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationship oriented</li> <li>▪ Sensitive to others</li> <li>▪ Dedicated, loyal</li> <li>▪ Speaks softly</li> <li>▪ Avoids conflict</li> <li>▪ May over-commit</li> </ul>

To identify a colleague's style, circle each behavior that applies, then total the number of squares you circled in each column. The two columns that get the highest scores will tell you that person’s preferred styles of communicating.

<b>Speech</b>	Opinions	Questions	“right” “wrong”	“good” “bad”
<b>Body language</b>	Fast moving, dynamic	Poised	Tentative, cautious	Relaxed
<b>Eye contact</b>	Direct	Indirect	Distant	Inviting
<b>Response to crisis</b>	Risk taking	Risk averse	Analytical	Empathetic
<b>Filters and frames</b>	<b>Assertive</b>	<b>Probing</b>	<b>Factual</b>	<b>Feeling</b>

Once you’ve circled two styles at the bottom of the chart, use the next chart to determine a person’s primary style.

If a person is:		His or her style is:
<b>Assertive and factual</b>	→	<b>Director</b>
<b>Assertive and feeling</b>	→	<b>Expresser</b>
<b>Probing and factual</b>	→	<b>Thinker</b>
<b>Probing and feeling</b>	→	<b>Harmonizer</b>

## 2. The Matrix of Communication Styles

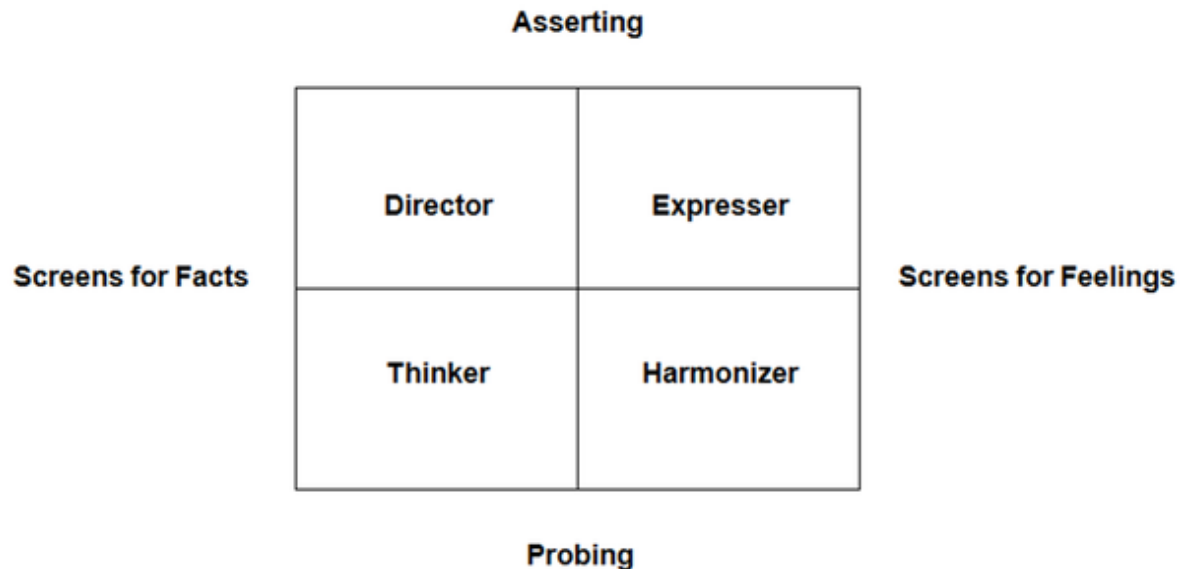
COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #2

Once you instill in your mind a mental image of the Matrix, you can use it to identify another person's communication style, even if he or she hasn't taken the [survey](#). If you split the Matrix into equal quarters, or quadrants, then each quadrant illustrates a primary style—Director, Expresser, Thinker, or Harmonizer.



Each quadrant contains four more squares. Your secondary style determines your particular square within each quadrant.

Filters and frames - both of which occur within our subconscious - help us define the four basic styles. Some people set their filters so that more attention is placed on *facts*; some allow more *feelings* to come through. Some people set their frames so that their responses are more assertive; some respond with questions.



Now you can start to appreciate how the styles at the top of the Matrix are the most assertive, while those at the bottom are the least so. Those on the left side are the most analytical, while those on the right are the most intuitive.

This is not to say that the only thing that distinguishes Directors from Expressers is one filters for facts and the other for feelings. The behaviors of each style are more complex and varied than that. But certain behaviors are "markers" for each style, and these can help us identify a person's style.

### 3. The Four Types of Intent

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #3

Understanding intent is key to improving the quality of communication. There are [four types of intent](#) that underlie all communication: affirming, controlling, defending, and withdrawing. Everyone displays all four types of intent, but the object of excellent communicators is an affirming intent.



If you explain what is motivating you, and then inquire into the other person's concerns and motivations, you can quickly defuse the situation. While there are circumstances where an affirming intent is difficult, it's still the case that the most effective communication occurs when it's present. The key message is: When the stakes are high, and the outcomes are important to you, learn the discipline of using affirming intent. It will always work in your favor.

#### What aspects of communication reflect an affirming intent?

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Showing genuine interest in my views.
- A moderate tone of voice.
- Friendly body language.
- Respect.

Which of these forms of intent do you see most in your workplace? How much more productive would your workplace be if everyone used an affirming intent?

## 4. The Language of Each Communication Style

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #4

You can “flex” other styles as you would a muscle. The more you practice flexing different styles with others, the stronger a communicator you become. Some people find adopting a different style to be unnatural. And it can be. The trick is to act yourself into a way of believing. By adopting the body language, style of speaking, and mannerisms of a particular style, you will find it less of a stretch than you think.



### Speaking to Directors

- Adopt a direct, serious tone
- Give information in “bottom line” terms
- Keep meetings short and succinct
- Assert your own ideas
- Don’t wait for them to invite feedback
- Don’t misinterpret their abruptness as a sign of disrespect or criticism

### Speaking to Expressers

- Express ideas, regardless of how fanciful
- Show you understand their feelings
- Talk about your own feelings
- Use gestures; get excited
- Let yourself “think aloud”
- Touch them lightly on the arm (but only if appropriate)

### Speaking to Thinkers

- Be precise in giving information
- Break down problems into specific parts
- Take time to review every point thoroughly
- Ask them questions and solicit their advice
- Keep a moderate tone and body language

### Speaking to Harmonizers

- Lighten up and relax
- Make them feel comfortable; chit-chat
- Give them information in the form of questions whenever possible
- Converse in a quiet manner
- Avoid saying “no;” find a more gentle way of putting it
- Keep your distance; touching isn’t okay

## 5. The Rule of the Center

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #5

The Greek philosopher Aristotle espoused a simple philosophy of life. “All things in moderation,” he said. Being too courageous meant you were foolhardy. Being too talkative, you were a gossip. If you were too quiet, you were a recluse. The best course lay in the center.



The Matrix has a law of the center, too. If you need to communicate frequently with many different styles, then it helps to modify your style toward the center of the Matrix. [The Rule of the Center](#) is simply a formula for being successful in many different settings with many different people.

**Here’s a set of rules to help you apply the Rule of the Center:**

### Directors

- Be more personal, warmer in your delivery
- Ask more questions about other people
- Acknowledge and validate priorities other than your own
- Show patience
- Walk in other people's shoes
- Express the dilemmas you feel

### Expressers

- Be more precise, analytical in your approach to problems
- Follow through and complete your projects
- Learn to manage your time by planning daily
- Set your priorities and focus on them
- Avoid wasting time – yours or anyone else's
- Express the dilemmas you feel

### Thinkers

- Focus on the big picture, not just the details
- Ask only relevant questions
- Once a decision is made, put it behind you
- Focus on deadlines
- Expect the unexpected
- Communicate the full scope of the problem, not just one aspect
- Express the dilemmas you feel

### Harmonizers

- Keep work issues separate from personal issues
- Remember it's not always important to be liked
- Learn to say “no” and to argue your position
- Prioritize your tasks
- Address problems in a bottom-line fashion
- Express the dilemmas you feel

## 6. The Assumptions of Each Communication Style

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #6

Each communication style makes assumptions about other communication styles because of the way that style processes and interprets information. To communicate productively, a group has to be able to challenge its members' assumptions.



### Directors assume:

- People don't see the big picture.
- People don't get enough done.
- People aren't decisive.
- People take too much time.
- People shouldn't waste time talking about their feelings.

### Expressers assume:

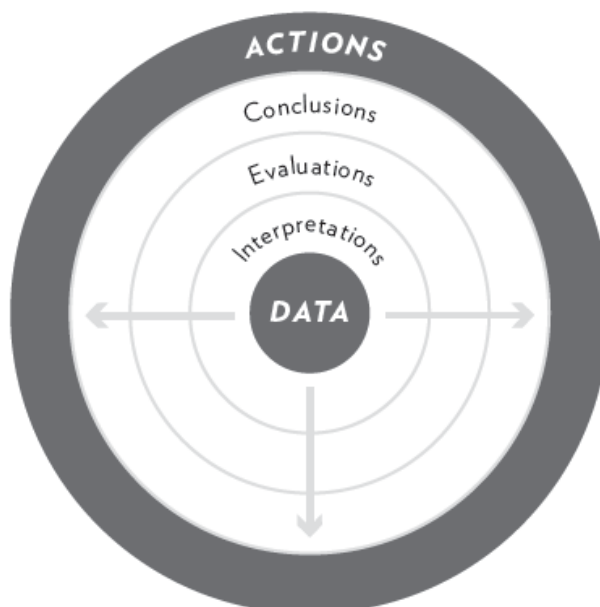
- People aren't creative enough.
- People need to be more daring.
- People need to lighten up and have a good time.
- People should say what's really on their minds.

### Thinkers assume:

- People don't focus enough on details.
- People don't care about getting things done right.
- People don't understand what's involved.
- People don't understand how we do things here.

### Harmonizers assume:

- People aren't sensitive enough to other people's feelings.
- People don't give us enough time to get things done.
- People don't value small talk.
- People argue too much.



When discussing an issue or solving a problem, people often jump to conclusions before they spend time talking about what the problem is – or what data they have at hand. [The Circle of Assumptions](#) teaches us an orderly way to think about problems, starting with data and building toward conclusions. It enables us to see how easily our communication can be garbled by our failure to be aware of our own assumptions – and how they affect the conclusions we reach.



## 7. Managing Meeting Styles

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #7

Different goals each require a different type of meeting, and a different style of communication.



Essentially, there are five types of meetings:

- **Informational** – people exchange information
- **Problem-solving** – people try to solve a specific problem
- **Brain-storming** – people define objectives and generate ideas
- **Performance review** – people review individual and group performance
- **Strategic** – people wrestle with large issues cutting to the heart of the organization’s future, and set goals and priorities

Meeting Type	Preferred Communication Style
Informational	Balance of styles
Problem solving	Thinker
Brain storming	Expresser
Performance review	Thinker
Strategic	Balance of styles

Regardless the meeting type, the following ground rules have proven successful. Each ground rule points to a tool or skill embodied in straight talk.

1. Understand each other’s styles
2. Agree on the meaning of key words
3. Tackle issues, not people
4. Permit one speaker at a time (avoid side conversations)
5. Bring issues to the table (avoid “back room” discussions)
6. Keep discussions focused
7. Explain the reasoning leading to your conclusions
8. Invite inquiry into your views
9. Inquire into the reasoning of others
10. Make “undiscussable” ideas discussible
11. Identify missing data

Read more in the post [The Eleven Ground Rules](#).

## 8. Managing Conflict Styles

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #8

Each communication style tries to manage conflict in different ways. The following chart shows how each style approaches conflict and responds to it, both in positive and negative ways.



Style	Approach	Positive Response	Negative Response
Director	Not adverse to conflict; often the trigger	Responds initially by holding ground; if presented with evidence, will negotiate	Undermines other people; attacks their authority
Expresser	Not adverse to conflict; sometimes the trigger	Responds by looking at big picture and searching for solutions	Criticizes the behavior and attitudes of other people
Thinker	Avoids conflict; normally not the trigger	Responds by analyzing causes and looking for compromises	Resentful; slows down productivity; may withdraw
Harmonizer	Avoids conflict; rarely the trigger	Responds by inquiring after others and seeking safety in the group	Withdrawal; seeks relief by escape, getting sick

Each style has certain “triggers” that spark them to react in negative ways.

- **Directors** are triggered by the perception authority has been reduced.
- **Expressers**, it’s feeling that their ideas aren’t valued.
- **Thinkers**, it’s thinking that procedures aren’t followed.
- **Harmonizers**, it’s thinking that other people’s feelings aren’t considered.

## 9. Managing Communication Culture

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #9

Nine times out of ten, senior leaders dictate the style of the organization. A lack of balance in senior leaders will affect the styles of hundreds, even thousands, of subordinates, and cause the organization to behave in predictable ways. The following chart shows the predictable tendencies of each different culture:



<p><b>Director Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Goal oriented</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on bottom line</li> <li>▪ Makes quick decisions</li> <li>▪ Always on the go</li> <li>▪ Willing to take risks</li> <li>▪ Abrupt, not communicative</li> <li>▪ Lack of meeting time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Expresser Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Idea oriented</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on people</li> <li>▪ Entertaining, fun</li> <li>▪ Willing to take risks</li> <li>▪ Many meetings</li> <li>▪ Lack of clear priorities</li> <li>▪ Difficulty with follow through</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thinker Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fact and process oriented</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on precision</li> <li>▪ Stresses academic credentials</li> <li>▪ Lots of quality control</li> <li>▪ Unwilling to take risks</li> <li>▪ Tendency toward missing deadlines</li> </ul>	<p><b>Harmonizer Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationship oriented</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on team</li> <li>▪ Avoids conflict, change</li> <li>▪ Makes decisions slowly</li> <li>▪ Not clear about purpose, goals</li> <li>▪ Tendency toward bureaucracy</li> </ul>

Here are the assumptions that accompany each communication culture/style:

<b>Director Teams</b>	Action is better than inaction. We should act more quickly. We should reward bold decisions.
<b>Expresser Teams</b>	Every idea is worth considering. People should be willing to try anything once. We should reward creativity.
<b>Thinker Teams</b>	Analysis can solve any problem. There's a right way to do things – and a wrong way. We should reward people who do things the right way.
<b>Harmonizer Teams</b>	Good relationships are essential to our success. People shouldn't argue, but seek to understand. We should reward people who work well together.

As a leader of a team, you should try to help move the team toward a balanced style of communicating. For example, if a team is paralyzed by indecision, then injecting more of the Expresser or Director style will get them moving. If a group is acting too quickly, then a Thinker or Harmonizer style should be added to the mix.

## 10. Achieving a Balanced Communication Culture

COMMUNICATION STYLES IMAGE #10

Knowing how to achieve a balance of styles is a sign of mature management. But the reverse occurs more frequently. The boss selects subordinates who are similar in style to his own; key managers reinforce behaviors they're comfortable with, rather than those that might provide the necessary balance.



The following chart contains a checklist of possible actions that can be taken to address the weaknesses that crop up in each type of culture:

<p><b>For a Director Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hold regular Q&amp;A meetings with all staff</li> <li>▪ Recognize importance of people</li> <li>▪ Push decision-making down through increased information sharing</li> <li>▪ Make it a rule to decide at each meeting who needs information</li> <li>▪ Hire people with strong people skills in key jobs</li> </ul>	<p><b>For an Expresser Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create system for tight agreements on next steps and follow-through</li> <li>▪ Eliminate unnecessary meetings</li> <li>▪ Induce people to write tight, concise reports</li> <li>▪ Emphasize financial analysis in all reports and plans</li> <li>▪ Hire people with strong analytical skills in key jobs</li> </ul>
<p><b>For a Thinker Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hold strategic reviews to focus on big picture</li> <li>▪ Create rewards program for innovation</li> <li>▪ Use "work out meetings" to eliminate bureaucracy</li> <li>▪ Reward risk taking in new projects</li> <li>▪ Hire people with strong people skills in key jobs</li> </ul>	<p><b>For a Harmonizer Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Form executive team to make fast decisions</li> <li>▪ Streamline decision making wherever possible</li> <li>▪ Use "work out meetings" to eliminate bureaucracy</li> <li>▪ Motivate project teams to take risk</li> <li>▪ Hire people with strong analytical skills in key jobs</li> </ul>

## Communication Tools and Resources

- Download our Straight Talk PDF on [The Four Leadership Styles](#)
- Consider Straight Talk [Leadership Coaching](#) for teams or individuals
- Check out our [Straight Talk Communication Workshop](#) for leaders

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