

## ***Using the Communications Styles Instrument for Teambuilding<sup>1</sup>***

***By Robert Youker***

Effective communication is the exchange of meaning with another person or group of persons. Communication is obviously tremendously important in project management where people who may not know each other are teamed together temporarily to accomplish a specific objective. One factor that significantly affects communication is the management style—or personality profile or value orientation—of the persons at each end of the communication.

This paper presents a simple model of four different value orientations or communication styles and a short questionnaire instrument for measuring those four orientations. It then discusses the effect of the interaction of these four communication styles on exchanging meanings for effective project management. It describes how these learnings can be applied in teambuilding and presents exercises to use in teambuilding and training workshops.

There are more than 300 personality profile instruments on the market for describing and measuring various personal traits or styles. Two of the more frequently used are Myers-Briggs and Strength Deployment Inventory (Myers 1986; Porter 1980) (Exhibit 1 in Appendix). All of these can be useful in various degrees, but I have found the Communication Styles Instrument most useful for several reasons (Casse 1981, chapter 9).

The four styles it uses—**Action, Process, People, and Idea**—are directly related to project management. Unlike Myers-Briggs, the words describing the categories are easily understood and not negative in any way. Also, the user can photocopy the forms, rather than having to purchase expensive forms. The Economic Development Institute of the World Bank has given permission for the use of this document for teaching and training purposes provided the copyright notice is included and the Institute is notified.

The visuals in the solution to Activity 3.1.1 provide more detail on each of the four styles: Action, Process, People, and Idea, and describe the characteristics of each style with regard to content and process. Action-oriented people like to get things done, and tend to solve problems quickly. Process-oriented people like to organize, such as preparing a critical path method (CPM) project schedule chart. People-oriented persons are concerned with human relationships, such as communication among the team members. Idea-oriented people like concepts and new approaches; they may solve a problem in a new way and may create new problems!

---

<sup>1</sup> *Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. This paper was originally presented at PMI'96 in Boston, republished here with permission of the author.*

Every person has all four orientations but to different degrees. A person who is nearly equal in all four dimensions can go any way, depending on the project management. The two critical aspects of this model for teambuilding are knowing how to cope when different styles cause communication problems and learning how to adjust our own dominant style to different people in different situations.

The potential and actual problems in communication from the interaction of different styles are obvious. When a process person takes a long time to describe the reasoning behind a plan to an action-oriented project manager, the manager will likely become frustrated and declare, "Get to the point!" When an action-oriented person moves too quickly and upsets social relations in a group, the people-oriented person will focus on the social problems and not on the project problems. The key to using this model in teambuilding is to understand the potential problems and use the four different styles positively. If we know each others' styles in advance we can anticipate certain behaviors and make allowances for them—as well as avoid potentially negative behaviors.

The communication styles instrument can be a very effective tool in teambuilding. To use it in a workshop, have everyone answer the questionnaire and add up their scores. Then describe the four orientations. Discuss the results and ask if people believe the results accurately present their value orientations. (I have never had anyone say no!) Discuss potential problems caused by the interaction of the different communication styles. Then divide people up into four groups based on their value orientations. (You can adjust group size by using a secondary value when the results are close.) Have each group take ten minutes and prepare a set of guidelines to be used to make a presentation from one style to another as follows:

Action to Process  
Process to People  
People to Idea  
Idea to Action

Have each group present its results and ask the other groups to comment. (Do this before passing out the solution to part 2.) It is interesting to see how often a group does not take into account its own style in preparing its guidelines. Finally, as the team members share their styles with each other it will become obvious where patience and coping skills will be necessary to avoid communication problems. The project manager will also have powerful information to use when assigning persons to tasks requiring different orientations. For example, have your process people do the CPM charts. Each team member should learn how to adjust his or her style and how to adjust to each other's style for maximum effective communication. By the way, once you understand the model you can deduce other people's styles simply by observing their behavior.

The use of this communication styles instrument can break down communication barriers and help improve communication and teamwork. The model is simple and effective.

## References

- Myers, Isabel Briggs. 1986. *Introduction to Type*. Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Porter, Elias. 1980. *Strength Deployment Inventory*, revised ed. Carlsbad, California: Personal Strengths Publishing.
- Casse, Pierre. 1981. *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind*. Washington, D.C.: Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research.
- “© World Bank. 2006. *Managing the Implementation of Development Projects: A Resource Kit on CD-ROM for Instructors and Practitioners - Course Syllabus and CD-ROM*. Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13630> License: [CC BY 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

## About the Author



### **Robert Youker**

*World Bank (retired)*

Maryland, USA

**Robert “Bob” Youker** is a prolific writer, speaker, and spokesperson for PM practice around the World. A co-founder of both Project Management Institute, and *asapm*, the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management, he is a long-time contributor to the practice of project management. In addition to the above founding feats, he was a Director of IPMA from 1977 through 1988, taking the seat formerly occupied by Russ Archibald. In addition to his years of service to PMI, he participated and presented in many IPMA Conferences from 1974 through the early 2000s. He presented keynotes at several of them, and organized panels and workshops in others. He introduced IPMA into a dozen government agencies and businesses all over the World, and in many cases, connected those agencies and businesses with IPMA leaders.

Bob introduced and popularized innovations to the practice of project management, from his work in Xerox in the 1960s, to his leadership in the first manual project management planning and tracking tools (Planalog President, 1968-1974). He published an early book on the Critical Path Method, Analysis Bar Charting, by John Mulvaney. As of today, that book has sold more than 30,000 copies. In his work for World Bank, Bob developed training that has benefited thousands of project and program managers, and government officials, mostly in developing countries. He performed that training in over a dozen developing countries around the World over a 30 year period, and continues today, to help developing and developed nations. He was the author and developer of the World Bank’s CD-ROM based project management training kit titled “Managing the Implementation of Development Projects”, still available and widely used today. In the 1970s, to increase Executive visibility for the fledgling practice of project management, Bob engineered the publishing of a Harvard Business Review collection of articles on the subject. He suggested the collection, but was told there were not enough articles for a special collection. He bought copies of the articles, submitted them, and the Harvard Business Review published one of their most popular reprint series, with a number of classic articles on project management.

Bob Youker has contributed massively to the profession or practice of project management, to *asapm*, IPMA, PMI and society. He continues to teach several two-week project management courses each year for participants from developing countries at the International Law Institute in Georgetown, Washington, DC, USA. Bob can be contacted at [bobyouker@att.net](mailto:bobyouker@att.net).

**APPENDIX – Instruments & Exercises**  
**From World Bank's Project Management Training Kit**

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13630>

## **Module 3 Building the Team**

### **Session 3.3 Communication and Motivation**

#### **Activity 3.3.1 Communication Styles**

### ***Teaching Notes***

#### *Notes for the Instructor*

*Purpose:* To determine the learner's communication style and to provide project managers with a tool that they can use for teambuilding and improving team communication.

*Level of Difficulty:* Easy to Moderate

*Time:* Part 1: Individual working time: 15 minutes; class discussion: 20 minutes  
Part 2: Team working time: 20 minutes  
Part 2: Class presentations and discussion: 60 minutes

*Assignment:* This is a two-part activity. In part 1, the Communications Style Inventory is administered and learners, working independently, determine their own dominant communication style. (Some learners may not have one dominant style, but may exhibit two or more.) In part 2, learners are assigned to teams made up of people who have the same style of communication. Each team is to devise a strategy for communicating with people who have a different style of communication. The instructor should prepare for the lecture by filling out the instrument for him or herself and reading the article.

---

#### **Part 1**

1. Distribute the problem statement with the Communications Style Inventory and review the directions.
  - There are 40 paired statements.
  - Select one statement from each pair and circle its number.
  - Select only one from each pair.
  - Do not skip any pairs.
  - Wait for scoring directions when finished.

2. Have the learners complete the instrument.
3. Distribute the solution to part 1 with the score sheet and describe the scoring process.
  - Circle the number of the item you selected.
  - Add up the number of items selected for each style. The maximum is 20 per style, and 40 items should be circled.
  - Write the number of items selected for a style. That is your score for the style.
  - Determine which style is your dominant style. The dominant style is the one with the highest score.
  - Determine your secondary style, which is the one with the next highest score.
4. Using the description of the four styles in the solution to part 1, review the model for participants and explain each style in more detail.
5. Ask participants if the results seem to reflect their styles accurately.
6. Using the two visuals in solution 2, discuss what the scores mean and how the instrument can be used in project management.

## **Part 2**

1. Assign each learner to a sender group composed exclusively of people with the same communication style, either action, process, people, or idea.
2. If a group is too small, you can add participants based on their second-highest score, for example, secondary communication style.
3. Each group must prepare a set of guidelines for communicating with a group that has a different style. Assignments are as follows on the next page.
4. Have each group make a presentation of their guidelines. Assess and point out whether the presentation adhered to the guidelines that the group developed.
5. After all four presentations have been completed, distribute and discuss part 2 of the solution. Review the chart and the checklist provided in the solution.
6. Discuss the following:
  - How well was each group able to recognize its own bias?
  - How well did each group adapt its style to take into account the receiver's style?
7. It may not always be possible to have participants fill out the instrument. In this case, the communication styles checklist can be used to categorize people by observation. Discuss the communication styles checklist in the solution and have participants rate their bosses with it.
8. Discuss the ratings and how participants would use this information when making a presentation to their boss.

9. Review the teambuilding article, Using the Communications Styles Instrument for Teambuilding, which is attached to the solution, and discuss how learners could use the process they have just experienced as a teambuilding exercise with their project staff.

<b>Your Group's Dominant Style (Senders)</b>	<b>Other Group's Dominant Style (Receivers)</b>
<b>Action</b>  <b>To</b>	<b><i>Process</i></b>
<b><i>Process</i></b>  <b>To</b>	<b><i>People</i></b>
<b>People</b>  <b>To</b>	<b>Idea</b>
<b>Idea</b>  <b>To</b>	<b>Action</b>

## Communication: A Self-Assessment Exercise

Please select from each pair of attributes the one that is most typical of your personality. You must select one. Make your choice as spontaneously as possible. There is no wrong answer.

1. I like action.
2. I deal with problems in a systematic way.
  
3. I believe that teams are 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-organized group meetings.
8. Deadlines are important for 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. Cooperation 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 may react to a certain action.
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-actualization is a key word for me.
  
- 73. I enjoy playing with ideas.
- 74. I dislike to waste 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.

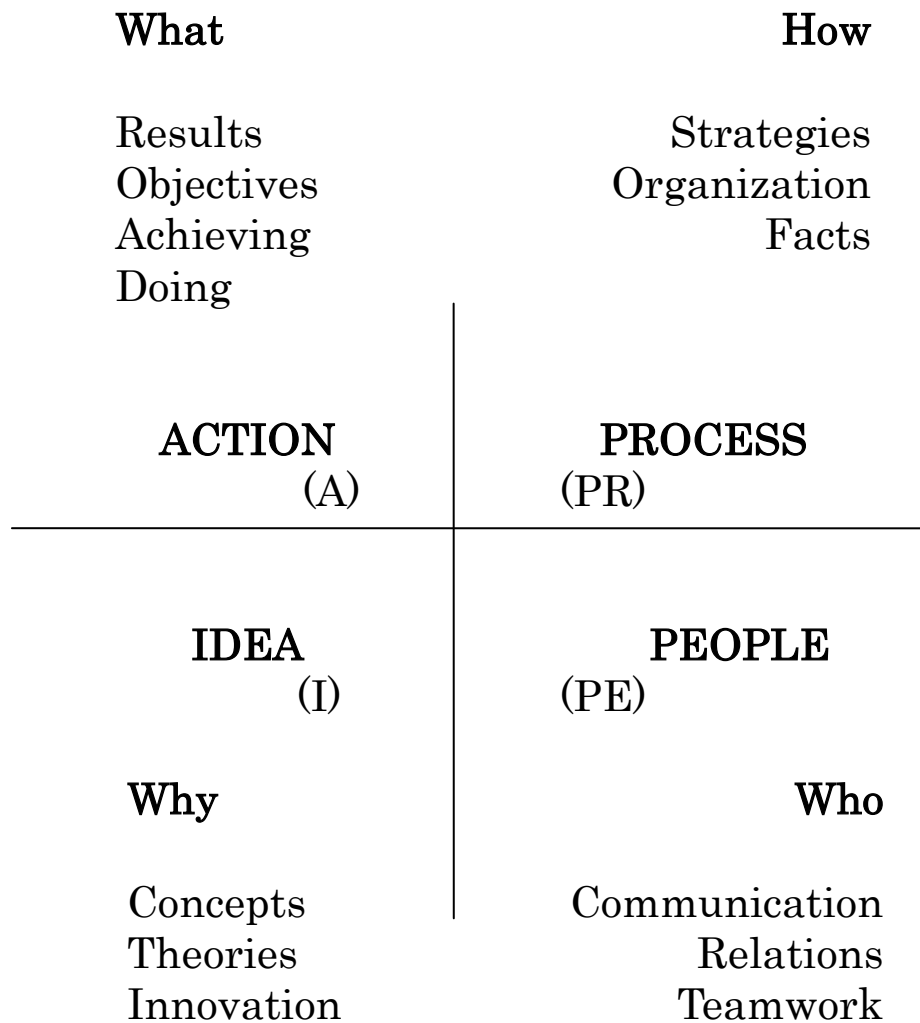
Copyright 1998 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank

---



## *Descriptive Visuals*

### Four Communication Styles



**The Main Characteristics of Communication Styles**

<b>STYLE</b>	<b>CONTENT</b> People with this style talk about	<b>PROCESS</b> People with this style are
ACTION (A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Results</li> <li>· Objectives</li> <li>· Performance</li> <li>· Productivity</li> <li>· Efficiency</li> <li>· Moving ahead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Pragmatic (down to earth)</li> <li>· Direct (to the point)</li> <li>· Impatient</li> <li>· Decisive</li> <li>· Quick (jump from one idea to another)</li> <li>· Energetic (challenge others)</li> </ul>
PROCESS (PR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Facts</li> <li>· Procedures</li> <li>· Planning</li> <li>· Organizing</li> <li>· Controlling</li> <li>· Testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Systematic (step by step)</li> <li>· Logical (cause and effect)</li> <li>· Factual</li> <li>· Verbose</li> <li>· Unemotional</li> <li>· Cautious</li> <li>· Patient</li> </ul>
PEOPLE (PE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· People</li> <li>· Needs</li> <li>· Motivation</li> <li>· Teamwork</li> <li>· Communications</li> <li>· Feelings</li> <li>· Team spirit</li> <li>· Understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Self-development</li> <li>· Sensitivity</li> <li>· Awareness</li> <li>· Cooperation</li> <li>· Beliefs</li> <li>· Values</li> <li>· Expectations</li> <li>· Relations</li> </ul>
IDEA (I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Concepts</li> <li>· Innovation</li> <li>· Creativity</li> <li>· Opportunities</li> <li>· Possibilities</li> <li>· Grand designs</li> <li>· Issues</li> <li>· Potential</li> <li>· Alternatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· What's new in the field</li> <li>· Interdependence</li> <li>· New ways</li> <li>· New methods</li> <li>· Improving</li> <li>· Problems</li> </ul>

## What the Scores Mean

- *Everybody has all four styles to some degree.*
  - *A person who is even on all four can go any way.*
  - *A person's dominant style can change with the situation or after time.*
  - *In a crisis, people tend to fall back on their dominant styles.*
  - *An overdone strength becomes a weakness.*
  - *If you know your profile, you may be able to compensate, depending on the situation.*
  - *It is easier to change the environment than to change your personality.*
- 

## Use in Project Management

- Understand where people are coming from.
  - Anticipate conflict when styles clash.
  - Build needed strengths into your team.
  - Use team members' strengths in jobs.
- 

## Solution

This solution includes the following:

- Chart: *Adjusting to Other Communication Styles*
- Communication Styles Checklist
- Article: *Using the Communications Styles Instrument for Teambuilding*

### Chart: Adjusting to Other Communication Styles

- A. Communicating with an action (A)-oriented person:
- Focus on the results 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.
- B. Communicating with a process (PR)-oriented person:
- Be precise (state the facts).
  - Organize your presentation in a logical order:
    - Background
    - Present situation
    - Outcome.
  - Break down your recommendations.
  - Include options (consider alternatives) with pros and cons.
  - Do not rush a process-oriented person.
  - Outline your proposal (1, 2, 3, ...).
- C. Communicating with a people (PE)-oriented person:
- Allow for small talk (do not start the discussion right away).
  - Stress the relationships 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.
- D. Communicating with an idea (I)-oriented person:
- Allow enough time for discussion.
  - Do not get impatient when he or she goes off on tangents.
  - In your opening, try to relate the discussed topic to a broader concept or idea (in other words, be conceptual).
  - 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 to an idea-oriented person, try to stress the key concepts that underlie your proposal or recommendation at the outset. Start with an overall statement and work toward the more particular.

## Communication Styles Checklist

Choose the number that corresponds to your reaction for each of the following statements and write the number on the line.

Answer	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree Strongly
	1	2	3	4	5

1. In my views, this colleague is **ACTION**-oriented, to the extent that she/he

- Considers deadlines important
- Wants to set his/her own objectives
- Becomes impatient with long deliberations
- Likes to handle several projects at the same time
- Searches for challenging tasks
- Likes to achieve
- Is impatient with long, slow assignments
- Enjoys getting things done
- Jumps from one task to another
- Prefers brief, to-the-point statements.

**ACTION TOTAL**

2. In my view, this colleague is **PROCESS**-oriented, to the extent that she/he

- Deals with problems in a systematic way
- Likes new ideas to be tested before they are used
- Considers the step-by-step approach effective
- Is cool under pressure
- Believes that analysis should always precede action
- Relies on observation and data
- Wants key decisions made in a cautious way
- Thinks that emotions create problems
- Likes to organize
- Is patient with details.

**PROCESS TOTAL**



3. In my view, this colleague is PEOPLE-oriented, to the extent that she/he

- Enjoys working with people
- Tries to understand other people's emotions
- Is sensitive to others' needs
- Considers cooperation a key word
- Is able to assess the climate of a group
- Can express his/her feelings openly
- Likes to be liked by others
- Considers good relationships to be essential
- Learns by interacting with others
- Has confidence in him/herself.

**PEOPLE TOTAL**

4. In my view, this colleague is IDEA-oriented, to the extent that she/he

- Enjoys innovation very much
- Is more interested in the future than the past
- Challenges people around him/her
- Likes creative problem solving
- Is a fast thinker
- Does not like details
- Has a tendency to start things and not finish them
- Enjoys designing new projects
- Tries out his/her ideas on people
- Enjoys playing with ideas.

**IDEA TOTAL**

## Exhibit 1. Comparison of Management Styles Instruments

- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator**

**Extraversion (E)/Introversion (I)**

(Source of Energy)

**Sensing (S)/Intuitive (N)**

(Pragmatic versus Creative)

**Thinking (T)/Feeling (F)**

(Basis of Decisionmaking)

**Judging (J)/Perceiving (P)**

(Stability versus Flexibility)

---

- **Strength Deployment Inventory (Porter)**

