

Introduction:

This activity allows participants to gain familiarity with communication style differences and practice how different styles have advantages and disadvantages while discussing an important (yet hypothetical) issue — the size of a pay increase. This activity also highlights that there are multiple ways to be direct, indirect, circular, person-focused, etc., and as a result, helps participants understand that the labels used with communication styles are very subjective. This exercise can be done in 20 to 45 minutes.

This activity works well in showing the effects and implications of using different communication styles or as a more advanced means of demonstrating communication style differences in a negotiation setting.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize advantages and disadvantages to all communication styles.
2. Identify nuance and subjectivity in the ways communication styles are labelled and enacted and give examples of the different ways styles manifest in individuals' behavior.

Time:

45 minutes.

Group Size:

Pairs.

Materials:

Raise Negotiation Activity Handout, Style Descriptions, Style Symbol Printouts, and PowerPoint slides (all in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Openness

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Other Skills:

Teamwork.

Activity Instructions:

1. Before facilitating the activity, decide which communication style labels you will use. Examples can be found in the Raise Negotiation Style Descriptions (in [Downloads](#)). You can decide if you want to distribute these short descriptions to participants or simply go over them first verbally or use the Raise Negotiation Activity PowerPoint Slides (in [Downloads](#)). For the slides, you can remove the descriptions if you'd rather have a discussion with participants or you can keep the descriptions on the slides. Be prepared to define the goals of the communication style and some specific behaviors associated with the style. Also, be prepared to share examples of when this style has worked well and not so well. Note that it's easy to come up with negative examples. The goal here is to help participants see there are advantages and disadvantages to every style. If you do not focus on the advantages, it may be difficult for participants to do so, and they may spend valuable time stereotyping and conceiving of only disadvantages of a particular style.

Example Communication Style descriptions:

Direct: The point is to get to the point. "Don't beat around the bush." Brevity and being linear are often rewarded.

Circular: The goal is to tell a story or provide enough information so that the point "speaks for itself." Typically, a great deal of information is included, allowing the listener to reach the conclusion on his or her own.

Indirect: The purpose is to bring up a point, or respond to an issue, without having to say the message directly. The goal of harmony in relationships is a higher priority than exactness and speed.

Person-focused: Communication is a vehicle for building personal relationships. Also, one can choose to respond to criticism by making personal attacks on another, or one can avoid addressing conflict to maintain a relationship.

Idea-focused: Communication is focused on the ideas presented. A great lively debate between friends, family, or coworkers is satisfying and does not negatively impact relationships.

2. To begin the activity, tell participants they must pay attention because they will have to be able to act out the style that their symbol represents. Using behavioral descriptions, explain the different communication styles and their goals as represented by the symbols you have selected.
3. Pair the participants and assign the roles. You can assign the roles by showing each partner the style symbol they will enact or pass out printouts to each partner in the pairs. You may create the scenario based on your particular training goals for this activity, but the activity is typically facilitated where one partner plays the role of a supervisor/employer and the other plays the role of an employee. Explain to participants that they will be meeting for their annual review. The supervisor offered a 1.5% raise and no bonus, but the employee was expecting a 5% raise and a possible bonus. Both must use their assigned style to conduct a conversation.

Facilitator notes: If you'd like, alternatively, you can assign roles in such a way that neither partner knows the style assigned to the other. Then, after the role play, you can ask each partner pair to guess the style enacted by their partner and why they guessed that particular style. This can bring up interesting insights as to assumptions about how styles "should" be enacted.

If the activity is facilitated virtually, you can pair participants in breakout rooms and enter each breakout room to assign roles, either by asking one participant to close their eyes while you display the assigned style role symbol to each partner on the screen, or by direct messaging the assigned style role to each partner.

4. Debrief as a large group with the following questions:

Facilitator note: It is critical to draw out in the facilitation that not all participants share the same exact idea of what a particular style constitutes (e.g., direct, indirect) nor do they share the same view of when it is appropriate to use various styles in a particular context.

- How comfortable or uncomfortable were you enacting the communication style assigned to you?
- How well were you able to follow the communication style assigned? What affected this?
- How successful did you feel in the negotiation?
- What strategies did you use to negotiate in your assigned style?
- Have you experienced this style before with co-workers or colleagues?
- In what situations would you feel comfortable using the style assigned to you?
- What behaviors did you use to enact a particular style? (Ask this question for each of the styles – indirect, direct, circular, person-centered, and idea-focused.)
 - How easy or challenging was it to follow and respond to your partner's style?
 - What strategies did you observe your partner using during the negotiation? How did this affect your enactment of your own assigned style?
 - How would you assess your partner's success in the negotiation based on the communication styles used?

Related Tools:

- [Building Cultural Bridges to Communication](#)
- [Building Team Communication](#)
- [Can Anyone Hear Me?](#)
- [Communication Continuum Exercise \(Detached, Attached and Intuitive\)](#)
- [Direct-Indirect Communication](#)
- [Engaging with Communication Styles Through Board Games](#)
- [Negotiations](#)
- [Pacing](#)
- [Rational, Emotive, Intuitive](#)