

Communication style preferences

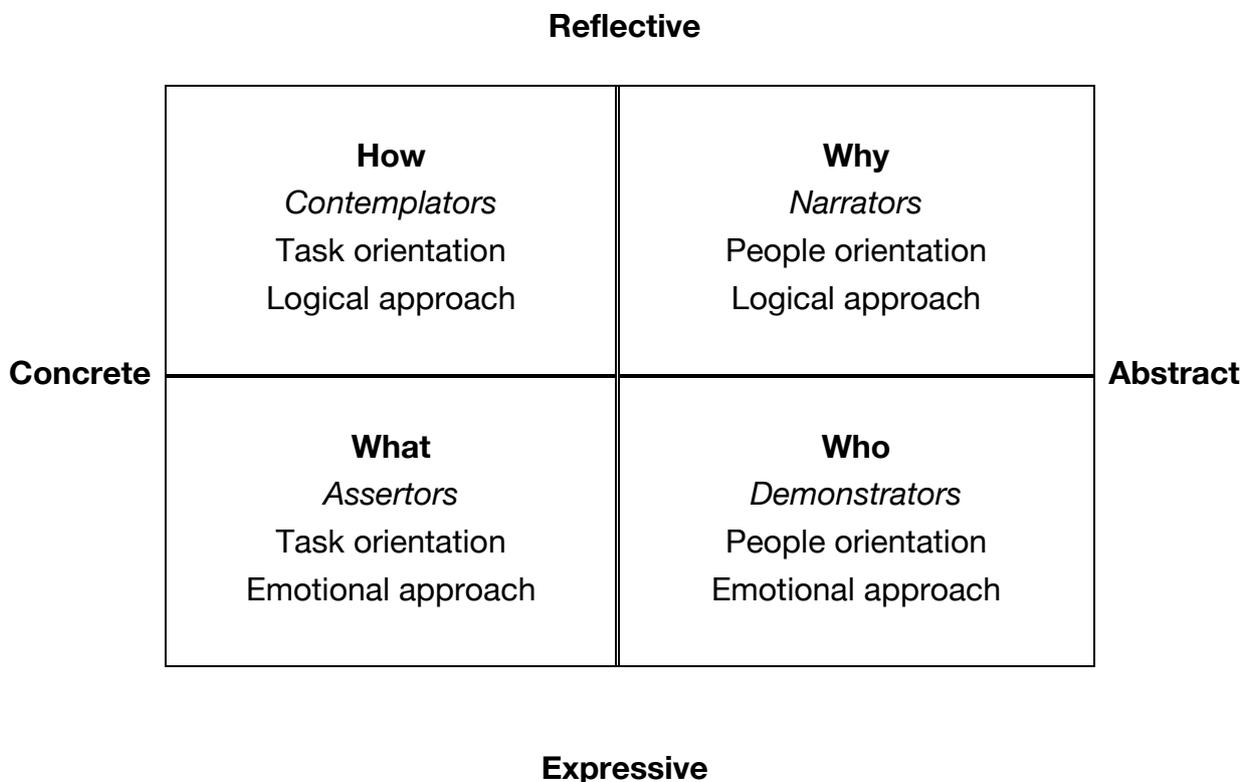
“The problem with communication is the illusion that it has occurred.” George Bernard Shaw

The big idea

Kirk Bridgman (2010) has created an approach that looks at different communication behaviours called the Communication Style Preference Model (CSPM). The model suggests that there are four styles of communicators:

1. Contemplators who have a logical approach and focus on tasks
2. Narrators who also have a logical approach but are more people-focused
3. Assertors who have an emotional preference and focus on tasks
4. Demonstrators who have an emotional preference and are people-focused

Figure 1 Communication style preference matrix



Purpose

The CSPM is a useful tool to better understand the communication needs of an audience, thereby allowing more effective message preparation for:

- Individual conversations
- Group discussions
- Formal and informal presentations
- Education and information delivery
- Marketing

Messages that are aligned with a recipient's preference are likely to be taken on more quickly and facilitate communication. It is important to note that, as individuals and groups, we are able to communicate from more than one quadrant. But we are likely to have one dominant preference, two secondary preferences and one recessive quadrant.

The tool

The following matrix (Figure 2) gives a breakdown of the message approaches that.

How	Why
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Precise, to-the-point information• Proof of validity• Research references• Quantifiable numbers• Subject matter expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Playful, surprising approaches• Pictures, metaphors, overviews• Freedom to explore• Quick pace and variety in format• New ideas and concepts

Bridgman recommends for the different preferences. If you are trying to communicate your vision, consider the preferences that your audiences are likely to have.

Figure 2 Preferred message approaches

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organised consistent approach• Complete subject chunks• Practical applications• Examples• Clear instructions/expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involvement• Personal connection• Use of the senses• User-friendly experience• Sharing and expressing

In applying the tool, work through the following steps:

1. Make a list of all the people and groups you need to communicate with in terms of sharing your business vision
2. Now assess their likely communication preferences
3. Against these, assess your communication channels
4. Review your recent communications and assess if your business has a particular preference in the way it communicates at the moment
5. Consider involving people with different preferences in planning your campaign
6. Create a communication action plan
7. Run some pilot activities to test the appropriateness of your channels and messages

Take the next step

Think about a conversation you have had recently with a customer, audience member or colleague. Which preference or preferences do you think they were exhibiting? What leads you to think that was the case? How might you communicate with them differently as a result of thinking about their preference/s?

Top tips

- Remember that the preferences are simply that; they are not a mechanism for labelling people
- There is no right or wrong preference
- Groups as well as individuals are likely to exhibit particular preferences

- Consider the influence that your own preference has on the way you deliver your message
- Ensure that you not only use multiple channels for communicating about your business but also that your content considers the different preferences

References

Bridgman, K. (2010). Creating Communication Strategies. Retrieved 2nd February 2011, from <http://ps-research.blogspot.com/2010/03/creating-communication-strategies.html>