



Workplace Communication

Dr. Shari L. Frisinger | Sājet Solutions

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Do any of these phrases sound familiar?

(Note: Names have been changed to protect the innocent)

“Pilot Paul keeps walking behind me, watching everything I do! Like he doesn’t trust me or thinks I am not working fast enough!”

“Today Scheduler Sally has asked me numerous times when the airplane will be ready. Doesn’t she know that I know this is a quick turn-around and that I am working as quickly and as safely as I can?”

“I can’t talk to Pilot Paula or Mechanic Milt --- they question everything I am doing!”

Communication

Because aircraft are becoming more and more complex, today’s crewmember needs a thorough understanding of avionics, electronics, and cabin systems. High safety standards dictate that proper procedures be followed, and no steps are skipped. Mechanics value their attention to detail, and think and work in a systematic and methodical order.

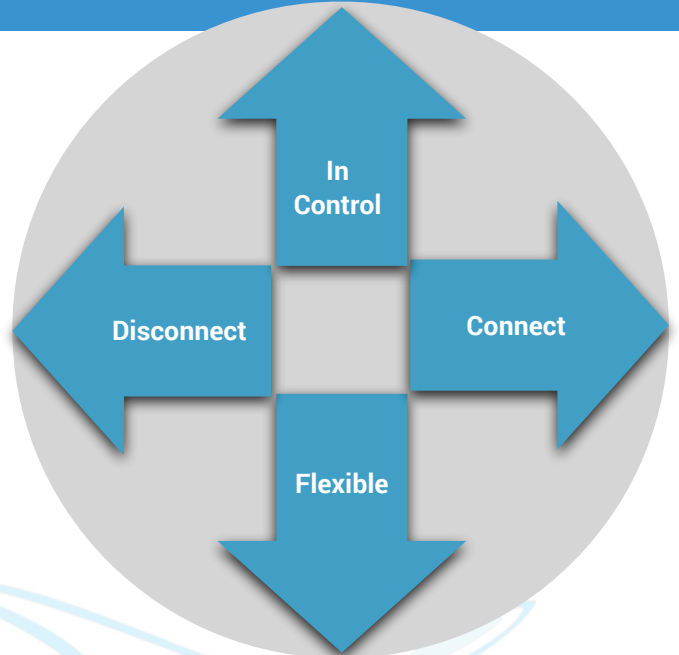
Unfortunately, communicating with other crew members is not like following a set of procedures where doing 'A' will always result in 'B'. Communication deals with human nature; as humans we are subject to stress, pressures and anxieties both at home and at work.

Often we cannot separate the influence one has on the other. Our natural or preferred style of communication – which intensifies when we are under stress, reflects our thinking process and our work values. Conflict arises when we perceive someone threatens to impugn these values and our work reputation.

The way we communicate is a direct reflection on what we need to know and how we process information.

Is action or thoroughness more important?
Do we accept what is presented, or do we question results and accuracy?

We can separate two sets of communication/thinking preferences, as illustrated by the this diagram >

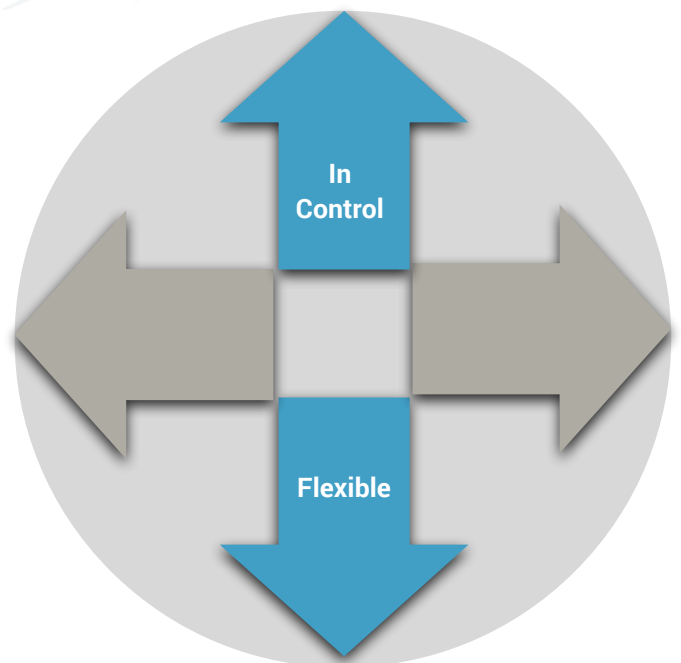


Looking at the trait descriptions below, behaviors become more visible and stronger the closer the description fits the person. These behaviors also become more intense when that person is under stress. The less the description fits the person, the closer to the middle, or to the separating lines they fall and the less obvious or less influential these traits are, and the more likely they are to fluctuate between those traits. Separating these into two sets of opposite arrows, we can identify traits that reflect that particular thinking and communication style.

We will begin with cutting the circle in half horizontally:

In control

These people see the world, and projects, at the 50,000' level. They do not concern themselves with details of any kind, they operate at the 'concept' level. They want results and they want these results told to them quickly and directly. They are energetic and action oriented – walk fast, talk fast, think fast – and have a difficult time sitting still or standing in one place for any length of time. They have a high degree of self-confidence and assertiveness and their attitude can border on arrogance. They are the ones that will take control of a situation, regardless if they have the leader title or not. They are motivated by opportunities, freedom and taking risks.



↓ Flexible

People that fall towards this end are more inwardly focused; they need time to think procedures and decisions through in their own mind at their own pace. As a result, they will not make quick decisions, especially when some of the information is new or has changed. They take notes, pause between sentences and nod their head in acknowledgement or agreement. They need to process information to be sure of their conclusions before they will speak up. They do not feel a need to be in control of the overall project, just over their one area of expertise. They require clear expectations and corresponding timelines as they pride themselves in high standards and following proper procedures. They want proof of a new concept, and need to be assured that it has been vetted with a high degree of accuracy. They enjoy routine and a stable, even-paced environment.

Problems arise when those in control try to exert pressure over areas that are not in their area of expertise, in which they are not doing the actual work. The fast talkers can easily and quickly lose the slower talkers, who will tune the fast talkers out and not pay attention to them. The slower talkers will frustrate the fast talkers because they take too much time to relay information. The top half becomes impatient with the bottom half when details or minutia are shared, and the end result is not immediately forthcoming.

Let's look at the other scale:

→ Connect

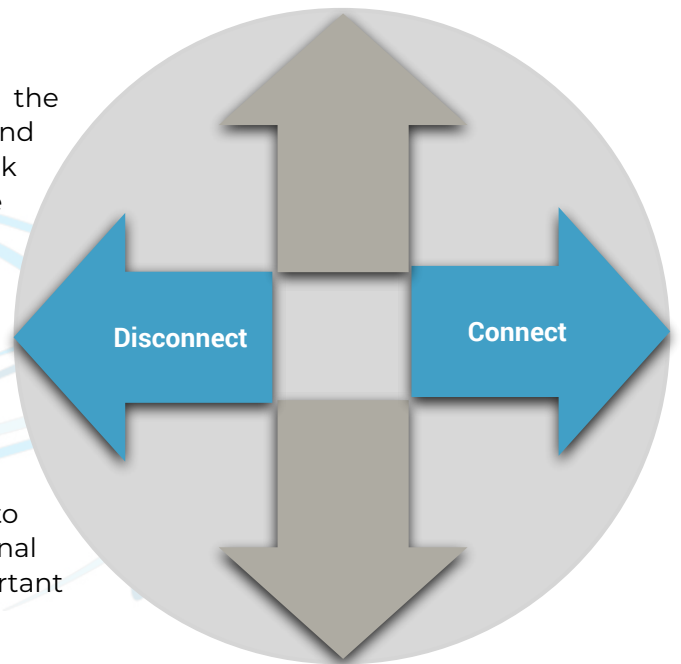
Connecting with people is the top priority for those on the right side. These individuals will ask you how your weekend was or what your weekend plans are. They will also ask about your family and your activities, and they share personal information along with stories of home, family, friends, associations, etc with you. In other words, they enjoy talking about any conversation or event that has people involved – the social aspect. They prefer team activities or interactions where they can exchange and share ideas.

They need to feel they are part of a group. When talking to these people, small talk is essential – just jumping into business will unsettle them. They need the friendly, personal smile that makes them feel like they are an important member of the team.

← Disconnect

Discussions are business related and small talk is considered 'fluff' by these people. They create boundaries around them and maintain their own identity. They value their personal space, their privacy and their autonomy. They do not want to hear about your family, friends, problems or challenges that involve interacting with people, and they don't want you to ask about theirs. Sharing stories of a technical or non-personal nature cements their relationships. Objectivity, data and facts support their decisions. Details (the how, when and why) are important to them. Give them an agenda or a schedule and they will follow it. Persuade them with your logic and rationale.

Problems arise when those who enjoy conversations try to engage those that are more technically or business focused. The initial inattention to business tasks can aggravate those on the left side, and they can become terse or curt in cutting through the small talk.



WORKPLACE COLLABORATION

The final step in this analysis is to overlay both sets of arrows to create overlapping areas. This results in four quadrants, each with a set of separate overlapping traits. This paints a more targeted picture of communication styles and allows you to more easily identify where you and others 'fall':

- In control and Connect: Chatty and expressive, they enjoy telling stories and having fun. They lack follow-up and can be easily bored. They also can appear unreliable, inconsistent and unpredictable. They are spontaneous, ready to have fun at a moment's notice. They are big picture people and do not do well with details. They will use words like energize, enthusiasm, excitement and adventure. Their outcome is encouraging ideas, situations and people.
- In control and Disconnect: Protective about their knowledge and their 'turf', they will challenge people and existing rules. They abhor weakness and will pounce on the one piece of information that does not reinforce their beliefs. They deal swiftly with practical problems, not abstract concepts. They are direct, forceful, impatient and ready for action. The words they use are challenge, performance, achievement, award and power. Their outcome is guaranteeing bottom line results.
- Flexible and Connect: These individuals desire routine days and no surprises. They do not adapt well to change because they want to remain friendly with everyone. Not prone to severe mood swings, they are more consistent in their demeanor. They can however be unassertive and indirectly put forth their ideas and needs. They use words like feeling, caring, teamwork and cooperation. Their outcome is coordinating tasks and events with others.
- Flexible and Disconnect: Reason and logic are the driving force behind these individuals. They pride themselves on their accuracy, their attention to detail and their cautious nature. They can be seen as aloof, however in their circle of friends they are witty. Highly critical, they fear sloppy procedures and pointless activity. They use words like systematic, thorough, analysis and integrate. Their outcome is efficient planning to meet stated expectations.

When you understand the opposing sides of 'In Control' and 'Flexible' as well as 'Connect' and 'Disconnect', you can help reduce unnecessary stresses in the workplace. If you are towards the tip of the 'In Control' arrow, you can temper your impatience when a 'Flexible' person investigates, explores and takes more time completing a project.

After all, you now know it is a personality trait, not a personal vendetta to make your life miserable.





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**DEL (Doctorate of Executive Leadership)
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Dr. Shari Frisinger, a behavioral analyst, works with leaders on ‘maintaining their composure when they really want to strangle someone’. Her human factors programs raise awareness of potentially disruptive or unsafe behaviors (there are many more than you think!) and provide solutions to strengthen safety culture by everyone “playing nice in the same company hangar”. She has researched the “why” of behaviors and has worked with leaders to improve the culture of their department – whether it’s safety (which begins and ends in your mind), customer service (adapting to them, not vice versa), recognizing and perfecting the best of your people.

Dr. Shari has merged her doctoral dissertation on crisis leadership and her ERAU graduate research project on personalities in the cockpit to create programs that address core issues and solid behavior-modifying techniques. The result: a stronger SMS culture and a more unified higher performing team. All of which directly affects your bottom line.

A dynamic keynote speaker, corporate trainer, consultant, executive coach and facilitator, Dr. Shari Frisinger has impacted the bottom line of organizations for decades.

Dr. Shari designs and conducts hands-on, real-world workshops and executive one-on-one coaching tailored to leaders that want to improve their bottom line through enhanced internal and external situational awareness. She is Professor-teaching leadership courses at the undergraduate and graduate level and wrote a monthly article for DOM Magazine. She has served on the NBAA Safety Committee and Professionalism Subcommittee and has presented at many NBAA and other aviation conferences and events.

More about the Researcher



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