

When Styles are Out of Sync

When trying to determine if communication style is the factor causing difficulty in an interaction, it is helpful to explore the various ways that communication style conflicts may come into play.

1. One party will not let go of an issue or topic, perhaps repeating it several times in varying ways. This could be a method to indicate the topic's importance, a sign that the speaker does not feel heard or appropriately acknowledged, and/or that the speaker expects you to ask questions about the topic to understand the point in more depth.
2. A communicator seems to suddenly shift style, consciously or unconsciously. This can happen even in a quick interaction in a store: a friendly clerk suddenly becomes "official" or "professional" or a vivacious talker suddenly falls silent and thoughtful.
3. Someone appears confused or has a "blank" face. The person may be wondering what point you are trying to make, what your real message is, or is shocked at what she thinks she is hearing.
4. Conversations with a particular person leave you exhausted. Perhaps you hesitate to complain because you know it will require so much energy to communicate what you want.
5. Tension permeates the communication climate and strains the communication process. Each party seems superficially cheerful and cautious or perhaps angry and agitated.
6. Communicators seem to avoid face-to-face interaction, avoid certain conversational topics that elicit difficult communication styles, appear to limit nonverbal cues while focusing on verbal aspects, or seem to emotionally or psychologically "check out" of a conversation.
7. One party uses exaggerated compensatory behaviors, whether consciously or subconsciously, as a response to communication style of another person. Perhaps the person speaks more loudly or gestures more profusely.
8. Two individuals are in agreement, but they don't recognize it. Others need to point out their agreement to them.

Source: Communication Highwire: Leveraging the Power of Diverse Communication Styles (Intercultural Press), 2005, Dianne Hofner Saphiere, Barbara Kappler Mikk, and Basma Ibrahim Devries, pp. 224 -225

