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COMMUNICATION STYLES

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Caption

The paradigm of mind *The Mind Gymnasium* prefers takes an optimistic view of humanity and of our mind's capacity for self-direction and co-operation. It sees people as creative, intelligent and responsible and acknowledges the emotional dimension of communication. Coupled with a strong emphasis on learning through experience, these fundamental principles have led to a wide range of methods for teaching interpersonal skills.

One such method involves looking at the range of communication styles you use. When other people are talking, can you choose to be silent? Can you move freely from challenging someone to being supportive? Can you switch easily from giving advice or instructions to eliciting information? One of the new paradigm's main achievements has been to draw attention to the ways in which our personal history may be limiting our choices, especially in the way we interact with other people. The first step in seeing whether our choice of responses is limited is to look at the range of options that is available to us.

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Communication styles

Over the last 30 years, the Human Potential Research Project at the University of Surrey, UK, has developed a very practical analysis of interpersonal behaviour based on the initiatives of John Heron, its first director. It identifies six basic ways of responding or intervening in situations with other people.

Known as the Six Category Intervention Analysis, training takes the form of a workshop in which you are invited to recognize the six different communication styles in yourself and others, to identify which you use frequently, which occasionally, and which not at all, and to work on the neglected ones. While none is better than the others, attention is given to the ways in which some styles may be missing or over-used, due to **distressed**, or **omitted**, or **distorted learning**.

Initially, as with any checkout of this kind, there may be some surprises, but with patience and intensive practice, a considerable increase in empathy, flexibility, spontaneity and authenticity results. This technique is a powerful tool for personal and professional change, and is especially relevant for **facilitators** and anyone whose work involves a lot of interviewing.

The following screens present a resumé of the six types of intervention. Use it as a quiz to sharpen up your knowledge of how you communicate.

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Informative

Aim: to impart information. You give your basic viewpoint, your perception, your opinion, your own experience or other people's opinions. You make predictions, suggest plans, explain a context or background, give feedback, describe images, give handouts or references, or demonstrate.

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Result: other people have a more intelligent appraisal of their situation.

[more](#)

Directing (or prescriptive)

Aim: to guide other people's behaviour.

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[more](#)

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[more](#)

Confronting

Aim: to challenge other people's automatism, to awaken them to aspects of their behaviour that may not be working in their best interest. You challenge them with facts about their unconscious 'frozen needs', unaware, oppressive, or collusive behaviour, unnoticed group behaviour and sexist or racist discrimination.

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Aim: to help other people to deal with painful or difficult emotions, such as grief, that may be distorting their behaviour. You enable them to shift from analysis to experience, to move into the present, to re-enact a previous experience, to relax, or to express positive or negative feelings.

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[more](#)

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These three communication styles are basically facilitative. They take the form of 'you tell me...'. Of the three, the releasing, or cathartic style seems to give the most difficulty because it may involve the activation of old distress in both people. The supportive style, which implies being loving and caring, is an essential precondition for all other styles of intervention.

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See also ▾

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An interactive guide to personal and professional development

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