



The Question of Compatibility

The 5 Elements report provides a solid grounding in which communication styles are more easily compatible with each other and which could potentially struggle and clash. Whilst we've approached this from a working perspective, it might well be applied in the instance of friendships, or even romantic interest. At the end of the day, communication is a huge part of any type of relationship, professional or otherwise, and if we cannot "speak the other person's language" then we're unlikely to get along except on a surface level.

This issue is a deep topic, and the report is already incredibly detailed, so this of course means that some things have to be left out for the sake of sanity. As a result, one question that is not immediately obvious from reading the initial report is "Are the communication styles compatible with their own type?" In other words, does like attract like?

First, let's have a recap on what the five "elements" or communication styles are. Remember, it is entirely possible to have more than one of these styles in your profile (or even in rare instances all five!). Each person is a unique blend, but some dominant traits are more universal:

Visioning is concerned with the top-level "vision" of "Where do we want to be?". It is ideas-orientated and the preferred method of communication is via speech. The Visioning-style is imaginative – they are visualising the future before it happens.

Planning is concerned with the question "How do we get there?" and creating a practical step-by-step procedure for getting to where we want to be. Planning is also future-orientated, (you need a plan before you can leap into action!) but the preferred method of communication is written. They like structure.

Facilitating is about resourcing, and the question "What do we need to get there?". The Facilitating-style is present-orientated and focused on relationships – facilitating others, facilitating the vision. It tends to be high energy and optimistic. The Facilitator is socially aware and all about the preferred mode of communication is dialoguing.

Doing is naturally concerned with the question "What actions happen?". It is present-orientated and focused on the task at hand, as well as the details of the operation in general. It is a classic instance that the Doing-style communicators on the ground feel that the upper brass have no idea about the real "ins and outs" of how things work. They tend to like listening carefully.

Checking is about "What have we achieved?" and "What could we do better next time?" It is past-orientated, so looking at past results and also precise in thinking about how things can be improved next time. The Checking-style tends to be about facts and analysis, and their preferred mode of communication is written or through asking questions.

Now that we know what the five styles are, we can address the question of whether the styles are compatible “with themselves”. The answer to this question, as some of you may have already guessed, is “It depends on the style”.

VPFDC: STEREOTYPING - OPPOSITION OF STYLES

V	D	V may see D as too casual, unresponsive, slow and immune to new ideas
D	V	D may see V as too impulsive, disruptive, and too uninterested in the real issues (and details) on the ground, not caring about people, and premature in judgements
P	F	P may see F as too light-weight, over-optimistic, lacking tenacity and far too talkative, thus preventing others from being able to explain things
F	P&C	F may see both P and C as too slow on uptake, academic, fussy over irrelevant details, over-cautious, difficult to persuade and often kill-joys
D	F	D may see F as a flashy fast-talker, lacking substance and understanding of what is really involved in any project, impatient and lacking perseverance
C	F	C may see F as far too careless, blind or unwilling to see the risks ahead, too garrulous, and so often seeming to be thoughtless when they speak
V	C	V may see C as slow, pedantic, boring, and likely to have missed the train before they get anything actually done!
C	V	C may see V as idealistic, rash, impractical, not in the real world, but full of feverish hot air!



Visioning individuals, as the name suggests, have a vision. They like talking about the future, about ideas, about possibilities. On the surface, this would suggest a high level of compatibility with other Visioning-style people; they have a common ground of future- and ideas-orientation. One might even reach for the real-world example of a writers’ group; creative people like to spend time with other creative people, it seems, and millions of these groups exist across the world. However, if we consider this more deeply, multiple visions are often not compatible. Yes, creative people do often congregate, but they also notoriously fall out! These groups for artists or writers or other creatives are often designed to facilitate creative potential, but allow each individual to pursue their own vision. In other words, Visioning-styles are compatible, but only when their vision is not being trodden on!



For Planning-style communicators, there is far greater possibility for collaboration. So long as problems are being solved, the Planning-style communicator has no issue with other Planners. They like structure, and are cautious, and so they are likely to establish clear boundaries in the way they work together.



Facilitator-style communicators are socially focused and present-orientated. They are likely to get on with other Facilitators who also have a social focus. However, there is a small danger that needs to be considered: their need to be constantly facilitating can become tiresome to someone who feels they don't need to be facilitated, and another Facilitator is likely to feel that way! Provided that the Facilitators can establish an equilibrium of "give and take" then it could work out very well, but without this balance, both will go mad trying to facilitate and "fix" the other's problems and rejecting their efforts of facilitation in return.



Doing-style communicators are all about action. They resent flashy talkers and ideas-orientated people without pragmatic substance (hence they often clash with Visioning-styles). This can lead to a degree of solidarity with other Doing-style communicators. They're likely to have greater respect for those "in the trenches" and action with them than those "calling the shots". Doing-style communicators like to listen, and so they are likely to hear the concerns of their fellow Doers.



Checking-style communicators thrive on being in groups of other Checkers, because this is the safe place to be! In fact, Checkers establish the rules and procedures of their world with reference to others: what is the normal, what is the standard, what is the default? Large groups of Checkers can become what is known as a "change-blocker" in corporate speak. But in terms of whether Checkers are compatible: very much so.

This is a very brief answer to a complex issue, and we certainly don't believe in stereotyping people. Exceptions to the rules abound. And the key thing about 5 Elements is that it is not a static model like a personality profile, but suggests ways that we can improve our communication with others by gaining awareness of our preferences and aversions. If we are in a situation where we are talking to someone, and we know or are fairly certain of their communication style, how can we adapt not just *what* we say, but *how* we say it to improve that interaction? This is the quintessence of 5 Elements thinking!

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