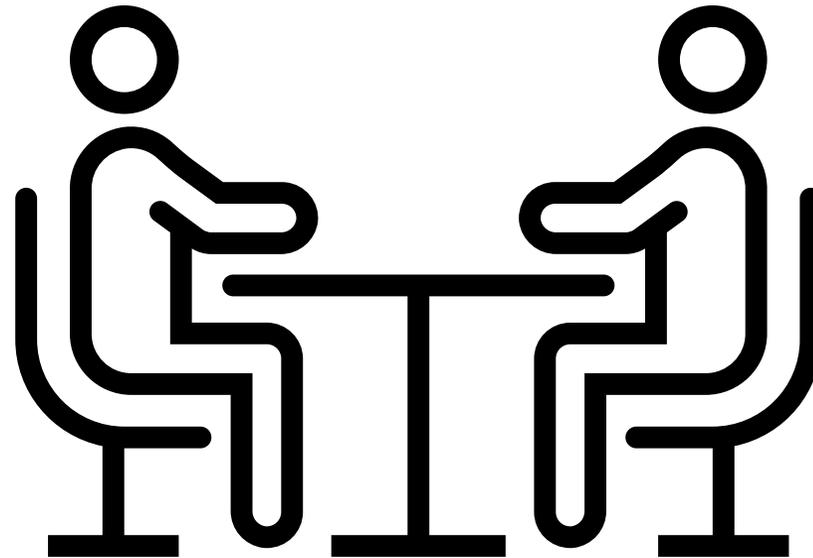


Direct or indirect?

A communication check at FerdOcean





At FerdOcean

At FerdOcean, you will collaborate with colleagues across Northern Europe and Asia. Differences in communication style are common, especially around how direct or indirect people are.

- This short module helps you:
 - interpret intentions more accurately
 - avoid common misunderstandings
 - adapt your own communication when needed

What do we mean by direct and indirect communication styles?

Direct communication (Low context)

- Meaning is stated clearly in words
- Feedback explicit
- Efficiency and clarity are highly valued



Indirect communication (High context)

- Meaning is shaped by context, tone, silence and relationship
- Feedback may be softened or implicit
- Harmony and “saving face” are prioritized

Neither style is better. Problems can arise when intentions are misread. Communication styles may vary depending on context, relationships, and situation.

(Thomas & Peterson, 2018)

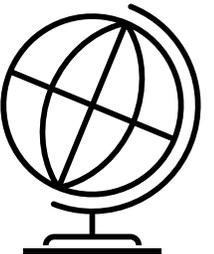
A note on regional tendencies

In many Northern European context, communication tends to be more direct and lower context. In many Asian contexts, communication tends to be more indirect and higher context.

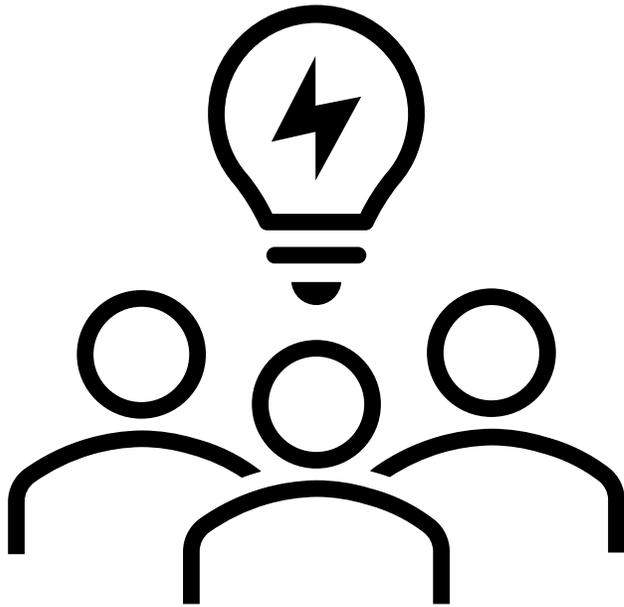
- However;
 - No culture is only direct or indirect
 - Communication style depends on situation, hierarchy, and relationship
 - Individuals may shift their style depending on context



Think of it as a tendency, not a rule!



(Thomas & Peterson, 2018)



Scenario

You present an idea in a cross-regional meeting.

A colleague responds:

“This is interesting. Maybe we can explore it further later.”

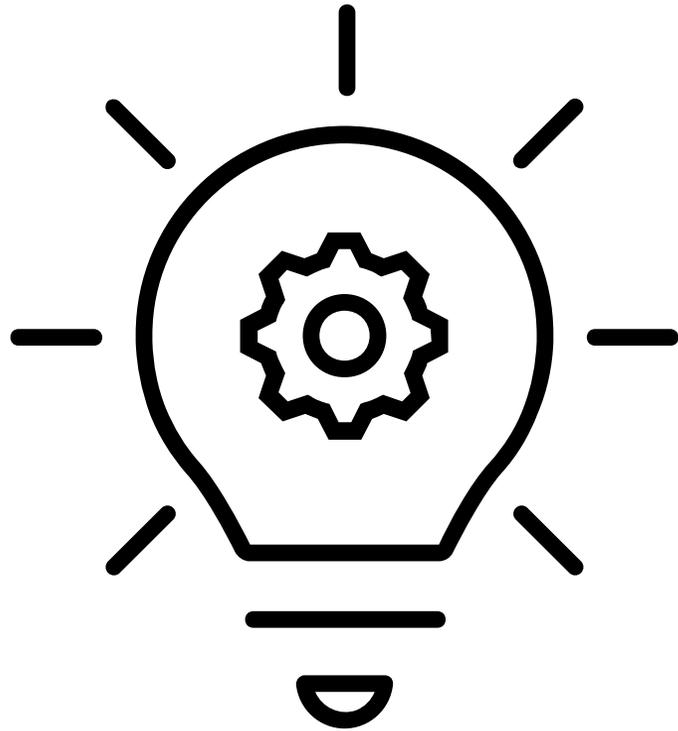
How might this be interpreted?

- > They fully agree
- > They may have concerns they are not stating directly
- > They are trying to be polite and avoid tension
- > Silence or limited response may reflect reflection or respect, not disengagement
- > You may need to clarify next steps before acting

Why this matters:

In some high-context settings, how something is said, tone of voice, pauses, or what is left unsaid, may carry more meaning than the words themselves. A calm or polite response does not necessarily signal agreement.

Assuming shared understanding too quickly can lead to frustration or loss of trust.



Small adjustments can make collaboration smoother across cultures – especially in global and virtual teams

Tips: What you can do instead

- If you prefer direct communication:
 - Pause before assuming agreement
 - Ask clarifying, non-threatening questions
 - *“How do you see the next step?”*
- If you prefer indirect communication:
 - Be slightly more explicit when decisions matter
 - Signal your expectations clearly
 - *“Just to be clear, should I move forward with this?”*
- *In virtual and cross-cultural teams:*
 - *Consider a short-written follow up after meetings*
 - *Helps ensure shared understanding across languages, accents, and communication styles*

(Thomas & Peterson, 2018)

A quick communication check

- Test your communication skills here:
 - <https://forms.gle/2Jy9SZepTacPfPTk8>



Your communication toolkit



PAUSE
ASSUMPTIONS
BEFORE ACTING



READ BEYOND
WORDS



CLARIFY INTENT, NOT
COMPETENCE



ADAPT YOUR
MESSAGE, NOT THE
PERSON



USE FEEDBACK TO
LEARN, NOT TO
JUDGE

Bibliography

- Thomas, D. C., & Peterson, M. F. (2018). *Cross-cultural management: Essential concepts*. (Fourth edition / David C. Thomas&Mark F. Peterson.). SAGE.