Where Do Our Communication Styles Come From?

Our research has shown that there are four basic communication styles. Since these styles have such an impact on our relationships, why do we have them in the first place? Wouldn't it be simpler if we were all the same? Why do we need different styles?

For an answer, we turn first to the science of anthropology.

Claude Levi-Strauss has noted the existence of four universal roles – or archetypes – that exist in societies around the world. These four archetypes may form the basis for our styles of communicating.

The Ruler

The first archetype is the ruler, the person who makes decisions, dispenses justice, divides wealth, appoints successors. He is omnipresent in primitive societies ranging from the Anasazi Indians to early Asian tribes. In primitive societies, there could be just one leader. In our society, there can be many: governors, presidents, CEOs. Regardless of title, however, their role is to lead.

The Story-Teller

The second archetype is the story-teller. His or her role is to entertain, to be a social mirror. The story-teller gives the tribe its memory, its cultural beauty, its intellectual life, its sense of humor, and its art. Through their stories and teachings, story-tellers provide inspiration and wisdom.

The Problem-Solver

The third archetype is the problem-solver. They build, hunt, farm, cook, clean, scout, fight and make crafts. They create tools, drive cattle, build skyscrapers, design computer systems. They like to excel in a specific branch of knowledge or cultivate a particular skill.

The Care-Giver

The fourth archetype is the care-giver. Many can hold this role: doctors, nurses, mid-wives, priests, teachers. Their focus is predominantly in the realm of human relationships. They use their practical skills to care for people and to heal them. They endeavor to make sure that people feel loved. Where the story-teller may heal through inspiration, the care-giver heals through nurturing.

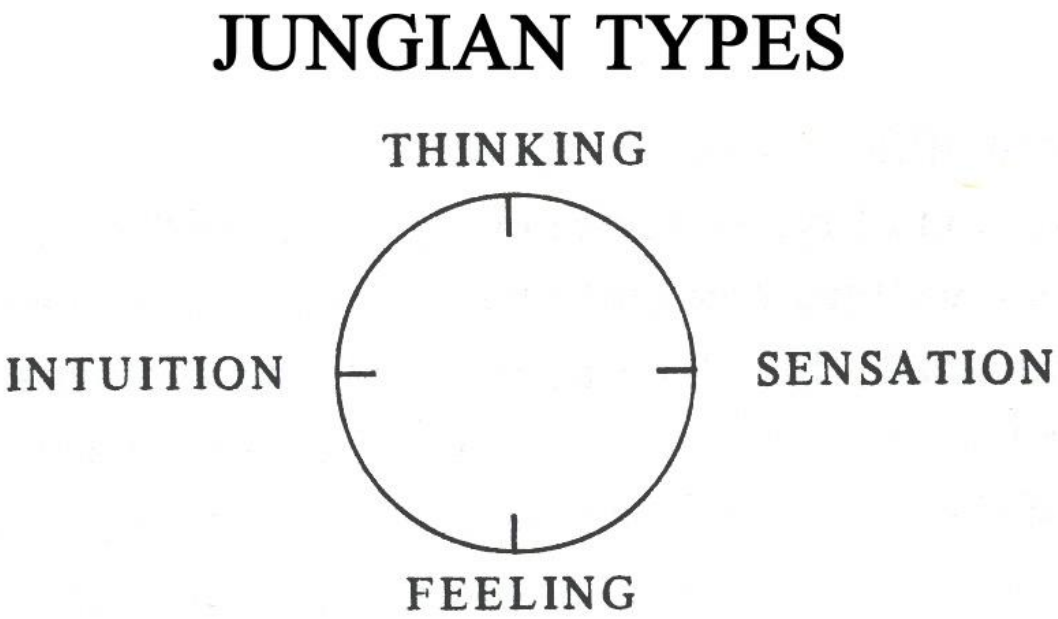
This, then suggests one solution to the question of why we communicate in these four fundamental ways. Our styles of communicating grew out of the needs of society. Carved out for us by our ancestors, and ingrained in our culture like ancient riverbeds, our styles of communicating naturally flow in one of these four directions because society needs them to thrive.

Anthropology helps answer the question, "where did our communication styles come from?" Psychology, and particularly research into personality, further reinforces the idea that there are four distinct communication styles.

One branch of personality theory was developed by Carl Jung.

He based his work on the premise that it is the difference in *how* and *what* we perceive that creates our different personalities.

He theorized that there are four types of perception and that each of these results in a particular pattern of relating to the world. The following chart shows these four different ways of perceiving, and the resulting personality types:



Perceives the World Through:	Personality Type:
Actions	Sensor
Values	Feeler
Facts	Thinker
Ideas	Intuiter

Jung's work led to the Meyers Briggs Personality Type Indicator.

The work of Jung led to the development of the Meyers Briggs Personality Type Indicator in the 1960s. The MBTI, widely used in organizations today, separates people into sixteen distinct personality types, each based on Jung's insights into how we perceive and relate to the world.

The Five Factors Model

Jung's work was *inductive* – it began with a theory. The second branch of personality theory is *deductive*, founded by empirical psychologists who examined the words we use to describe personality. They employed a series of statistical tests to categorize those words into five separate factors.

Adherents of the "Five Factors Model" disagree on the precise definitions of these factors, but one mainstream definition (by Borgatta) is **assertiveness**, **likeability**, **task orientation**, **emotionality**, and **intelligence**. But this school of thought contains the majority of scholars who work on personality typing today.

Both schools – the Jungian and the Five Factors Model – lend weight to one of the fundamental ideas of Straight Talk: That people have very different styles of communicating, and that understanding those styles is crucial for straight talk.

Conclusion

Communication styles are a manifestation of our personalities. But they are not the same. Scholars and researchers agree that personality is relatively stable, changing only subtly over time. Our style of communicating, on the other hand, is a learned behavior. We can modify it once we learn how. In fact, skilled communicators can modify their style on the spot, as the situation warrants.

Just like reading a book, hitting a baseball, or diving into the pool, modifying your communication style is a skill. It doesn't come naturally. But once you learn it, it's a skill you can use all your life.