

FEEDBACK REPORT

Communication **EFFECTIVENESS**

When times are tough it's
more important than ever to
ensure your message stands out
from the competition.

ActionCOACH
business coaching

Personalized Report For:
Sample Report
7/24/2010

INTRODUCTION

This Communication Effectiveness Feedback Report consists of six components, which are described below.

1. Overall Summary

The summary results chart provides a quick visual representation of your scores in the seven competencies that make up the Communication Effectiveness profile. The areas to concentrate on are those scores above 3.5 (strong) and below 2.75 (need further development). Please note that these competency scores are averages; individual question scores can be viewed by clicking on the individual competency link.

2. Category Descriptions

There are three sections for each of the seven competencies. The first of these three sections explains the competency, lists average scores, and then provides high and low score interpretation notes. The second section provides a graphical representation of individual question scores. The third section provides broadly-based improvement actions for those individuals wanting to develop their competencies.

3. 10/10 Report

The "10/10" Report page provides the raw scores for the 10 highest scoring questions and the 10 lowest scoring questions out of the 84. It also identifies which competency each question is from.

4. Course and Reading Suggestions

Development suggestions for the two lowest scoring competencies, including specific recommendations regarding training courses and books that will provide useful information on the topic are included.

5. Development Plan

The development plan lists questions with the five lowest scores from the assessment and puts them into a one-page template. Individuals can use this template to record the specific actions they plan to take over the next twelve months based on the general guidance offered in their feedback report and the coaching tips.

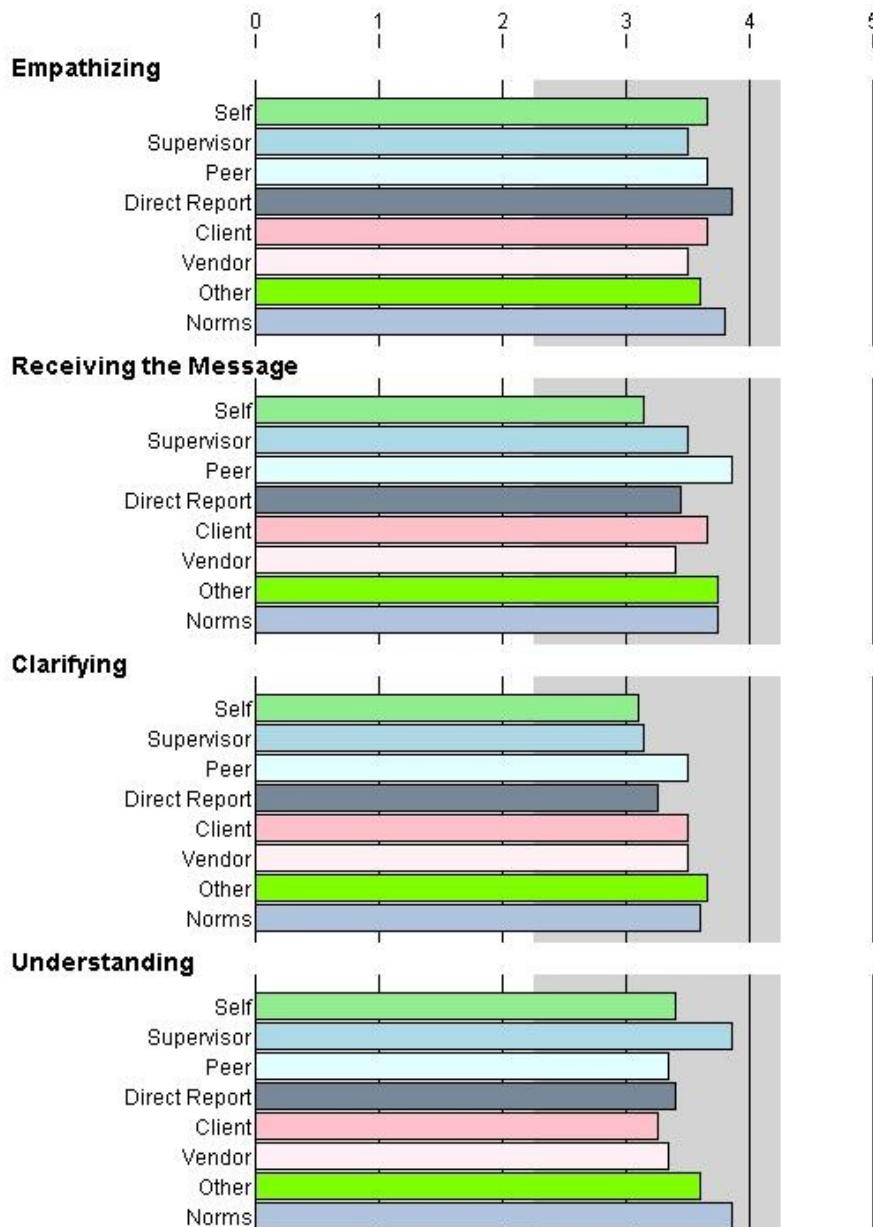
6. Coaching Tips

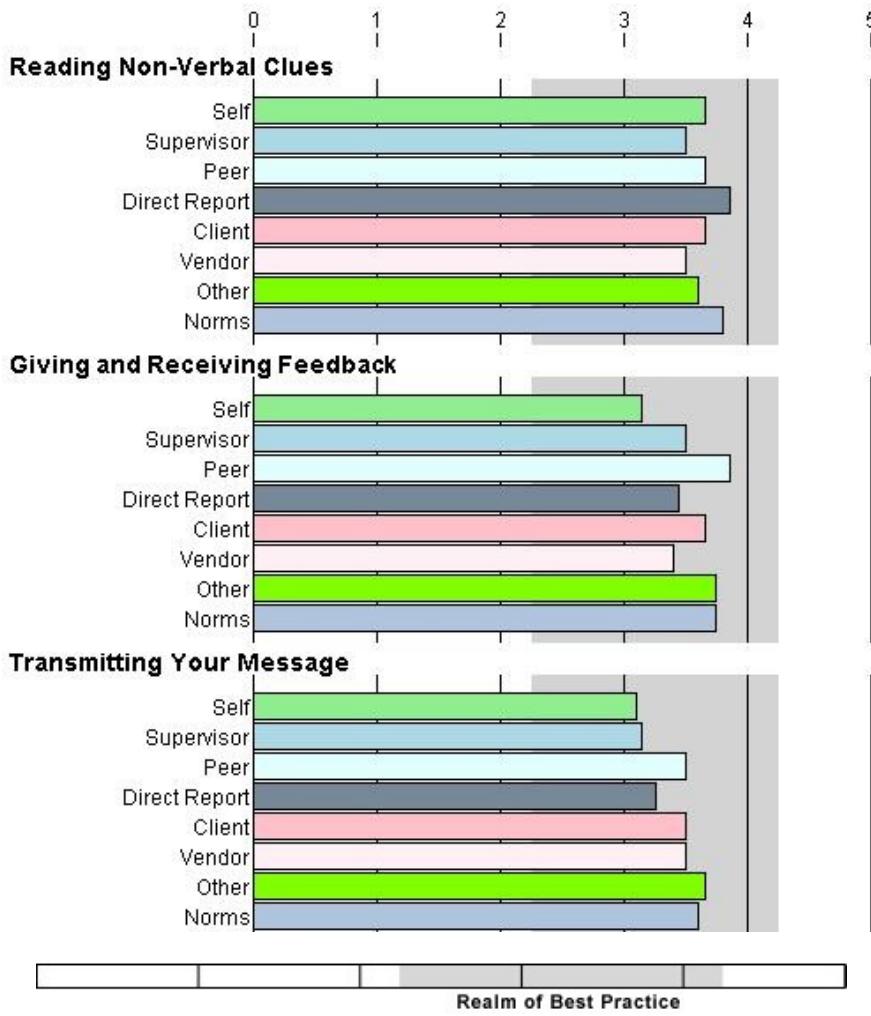
Detailed coaching tips for the five lowest scoring questions are provided in this section. They offer specific advice on what individuals might do to improve their skills in this competency and learn new behaviors.

Note on 360 Degree Feedback

If you received feedback from your supervisor, direct reports or peers using this assessment, please note the following: Ratings responses from all persons who completed the assessment are averaged to produce the results in the 10/10 Report, Course and Reading Suggestions, Development Plan, and Coaching Tips.

OVERALL SUMMARY





Norm bars shown on all graphs in this report are the progressive average scores of all individuals rating themselves on this questionnaire.

EMPATHIZING

This section on Empathizing examines the extent to which you think about the perspectives and feelings of others when they are communicating with you, and the degree to which you adjust your style to accommodate them. This category asks the question: "How well do you create a climate of warmth and sincerity, where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts because they know you will listen?"



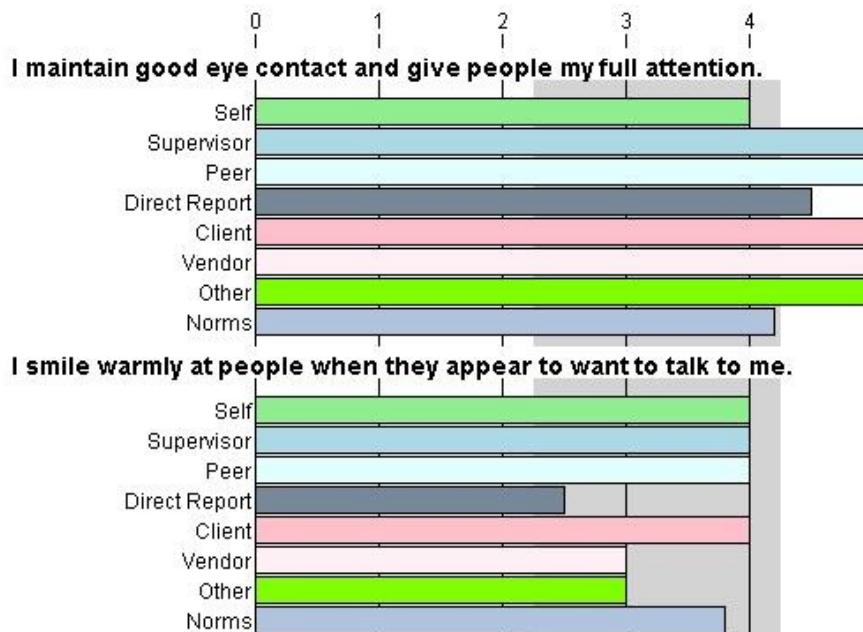
Interpretation

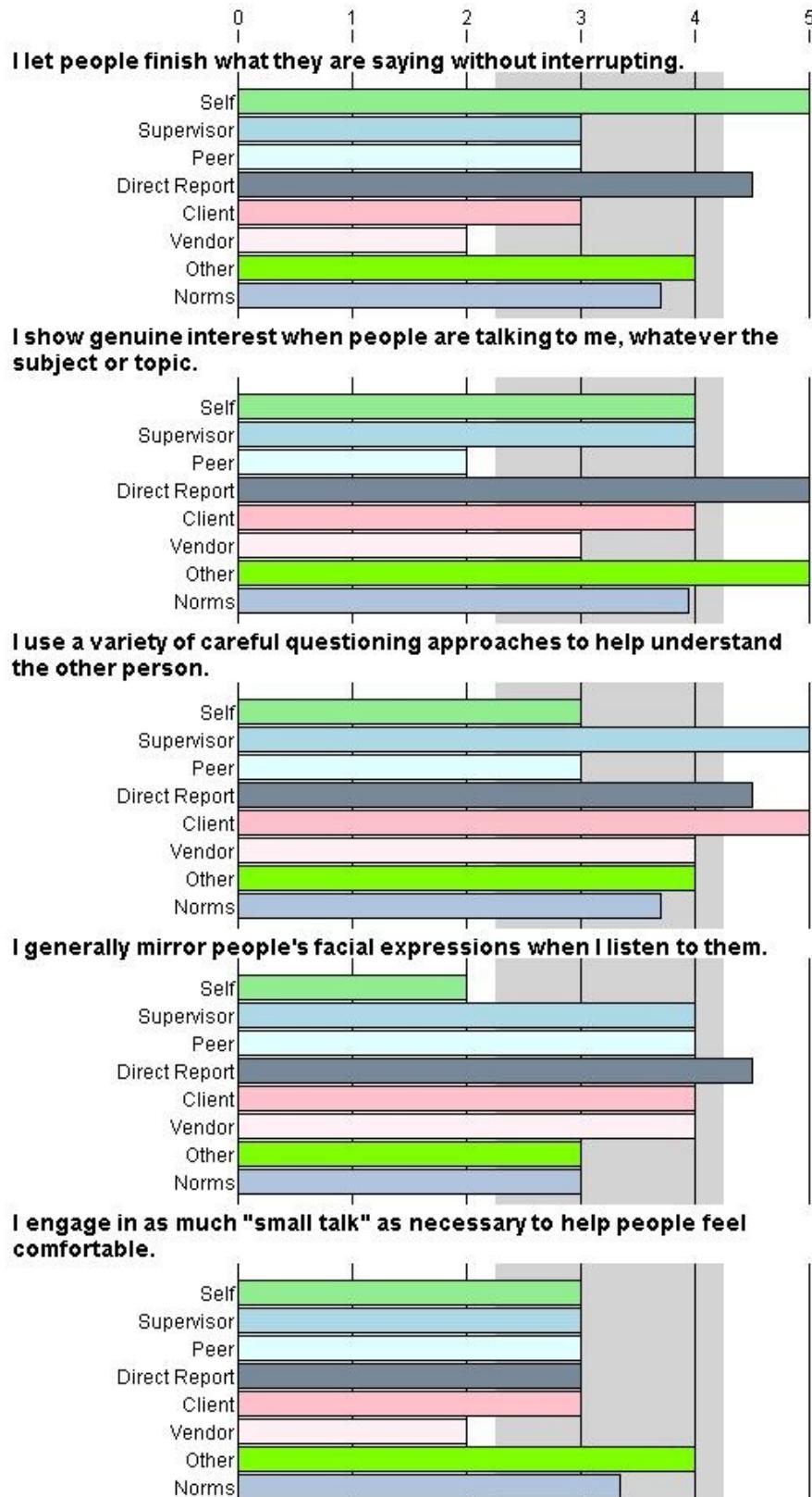
LOW (less than 2.75)

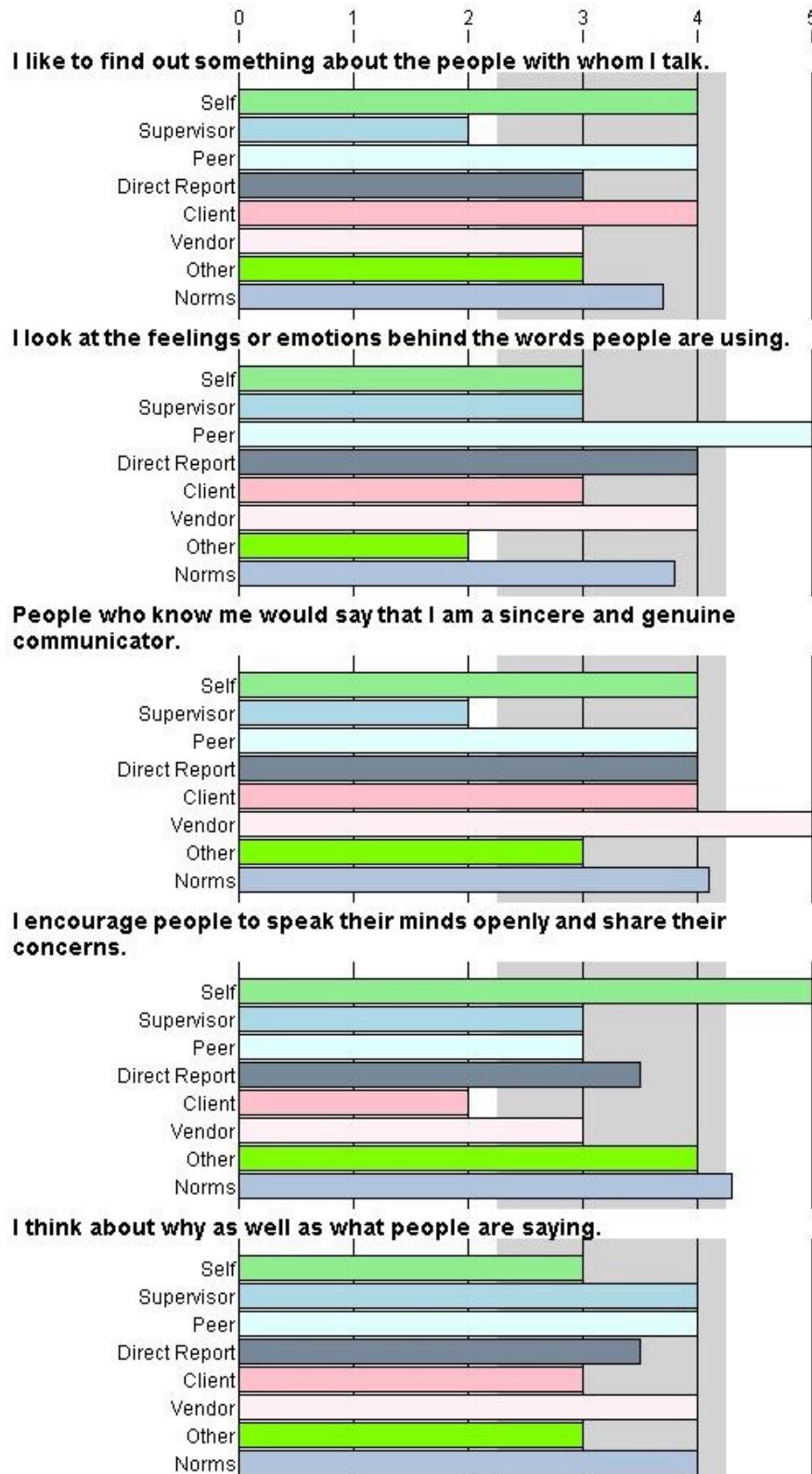
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you have a more "transactional" communication style, where a discussion or conversation is only a functional exchange of words. You are not likely to consider any circumstantial context or feelings, and you show a tendency to push your own agenda or communication priorities at the expense of the other party. An individual who scores low in this area will usually keep their communication very direct, putting personal outcomes or needs at the forefront. Such people tend to interrupt frequently and guess what the other person is going to say before he or she says it. Because of this, they often miss important parts of the overall message and create the impression that they have only a limited attention span for deeper or more complex issues.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you naturally generate a spirit of warmth toward others, and offer lots of help and support in facilitating an easy "flow" of two-way conversation. You usually listen attentively and adapt or adjust your personal style to suit the situation as much as necessary to create the best possible climate. A high score indicates that you're likely to spend as much time as necessary engaging in "small talk" or conversation that helps you understand where the other party is coming from so you can offer supportive and insightful comments that can help to open up the discussion. You try to establish the most appropriate communication climate for the circumstances, and offer an empathetic ear.







This section on Empathizing examines the extent to which you think about the perspectives and feelings of others when they are communicating with you, and the degree to which you adjust your style to accommodate them. This category asks the question: "How well do you create a climate of warmth and sincerity, where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts because they know you will listen?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to develop an ability to generate more warmth and sincerity in all their conversations, and show genuine care and interest in what other people have to say on a consistent basis. This will involve being more patient, taking more time to engage in "small talk," and trying to appreciate the other person's feelings and emotions just as much as the words that they hear.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Empathizing

- Try to smile at people more often, and be as friendly and sincere as you can when they are talking to you.
- Make a strong effort to put yourself in the other person's position and to imagine what they might be feeling or where they might be coming from in sending their message.
- Let people express their thoughts and feelings fully without interrupting, as much as you can.
- Discover areas of common interest with each person you communicate with regularly, and use this to help build your relationship with them.
- Openly share your interests with other people, and encourage them to share their interests with you.

RECEIVING THE MESSAGE

This section on Receiving the Message looks at how well you listen to and successfully "process" what others are saying (verbal and non-verbal messages) before you respond. This category asks the question: "How attentive or empathetic are you in a listening situation so that you can fully appreciate what the speaker is trying to convey?"



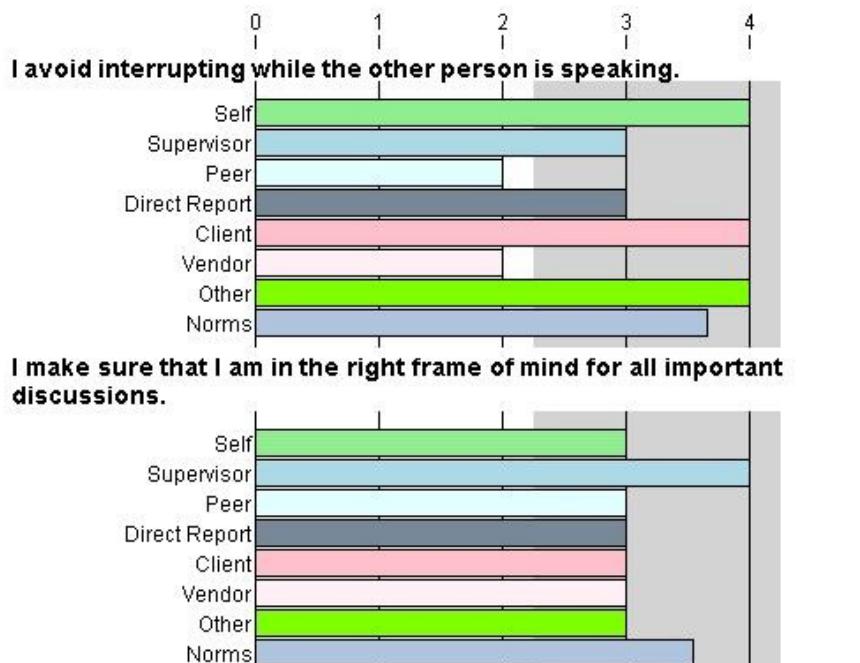
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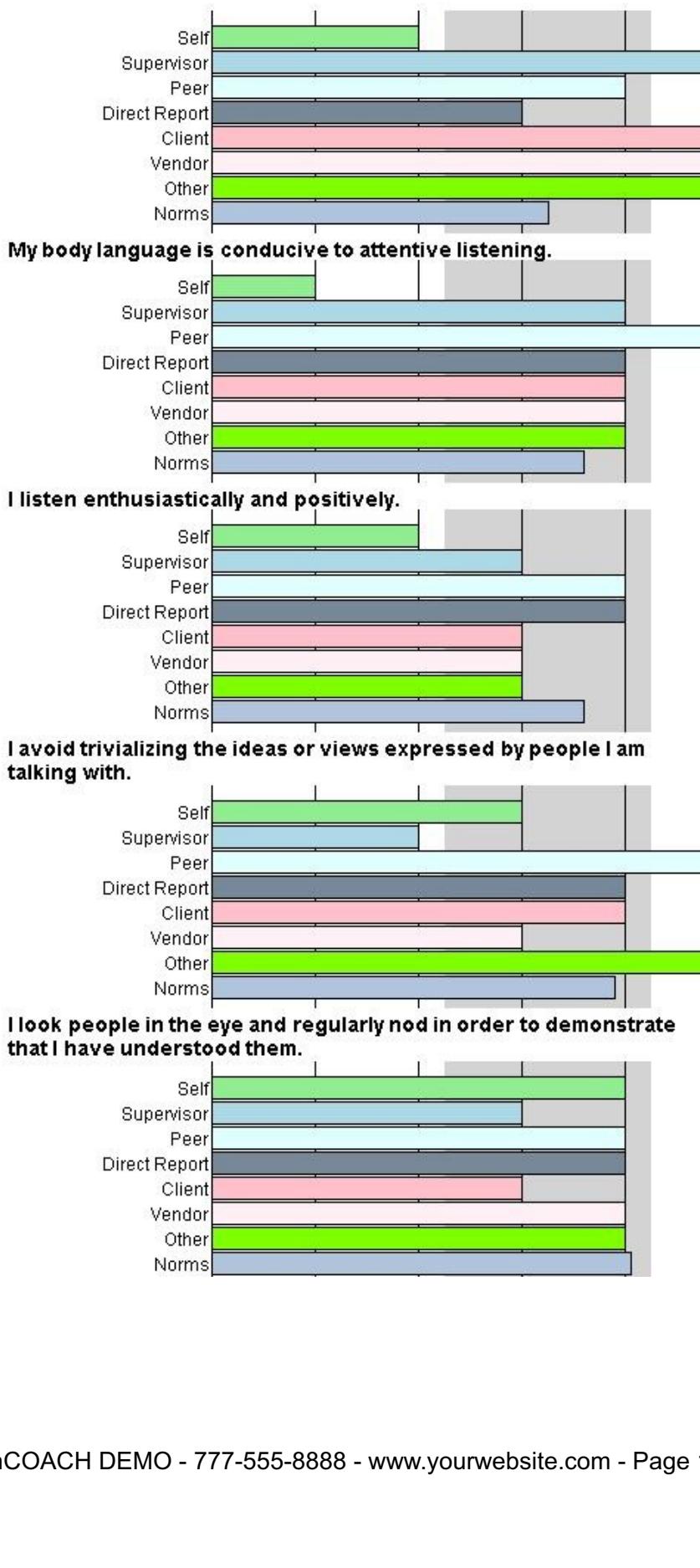
LOW (less than 2.75)

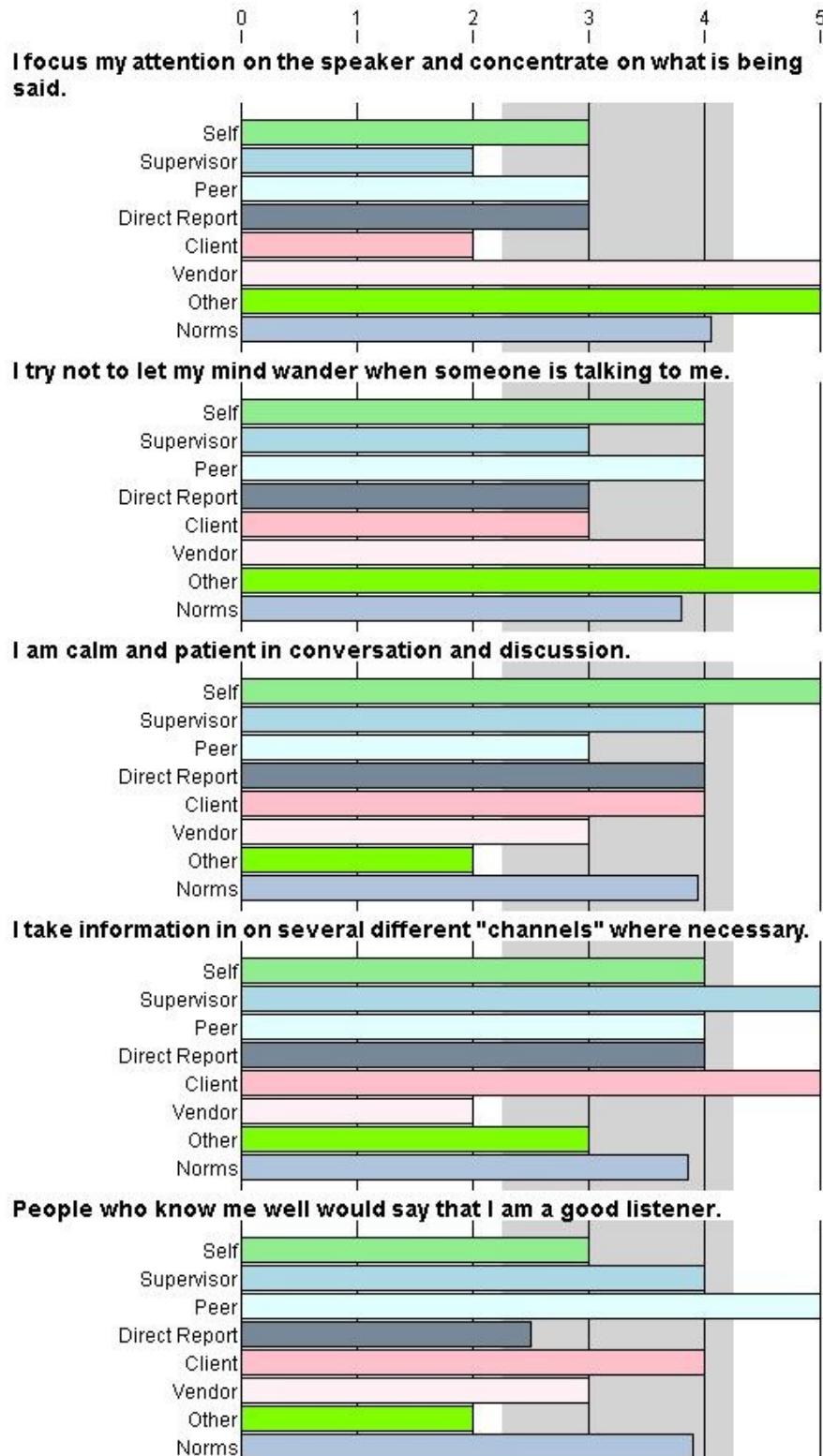
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you do not always fully appreciate what people communicate, and thus you miss important components of the overall message. You are also prone to being easily distracted, and tend to jump into conversations before the other person has finished speaking. An individual who scores low in this area is likely to find communication frustrating or even confusing. This is sometimes the speaker's fault, but more likely it is one result of poor listening habits the listener hasn't focused or taken enough time to "hear" the complete message, and the mind has been allowed to wander to other things and other priorities or tasks.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you are an attentive listener and appreciate the "tenor" of most communications, in whatever form they are conveyed. You are genuinely interested and you try to concentrate on what people are saying, maintaining a calm and patient demeanor so people can get their message across without interruption. High scorers are appreciative and attentive listeners who freely give all their attention to the speaker in order to hear and appreciate the complete message. A person who scores high in this area makes an especially valuable contribution when important or complex information needs to be communicated for insight or comment.







This section on Receiving the Message looks at how well you listen to and successfully "process" what others are saying (verbal and non-verbal messages) before you respond. This category asks the question: "How attentive or empathetic are you in a listening situation so that you can fully appreciate what the speaker is trying to convey?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to speak less and listen more. To do this, they need to find more-conducive listening environments, avoid interrupting, and keep their minds from wandering. Most of all, they need to try to quietly hear the whole message being communicated, without jumping in too soon.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Receiving the Message

- Nod or show that you have understood in other ways at regular points in any conversation.
- Maintain as much direct eye contact as you can, and show genuine and focused interest in the communication.
- Avoid showing any distraction, physical or mental.
- Try to be as calm, quiet, and patient as you can in general conversations (especially with quieter people).
- Focus on and between the words that you hear in order to appreciate the sender's full communication.

CLARIFYING

This section on Clarifying looks at the extent to which you use careful and incisive questioning techniques to successfully "translate" the words and actions of the other party in order to understand their meaning. This category asks the question: "How well do you gently question and probe the other person in a conversation or discussion, in order to ensure that you accurately interpret their message?"



Interpretation

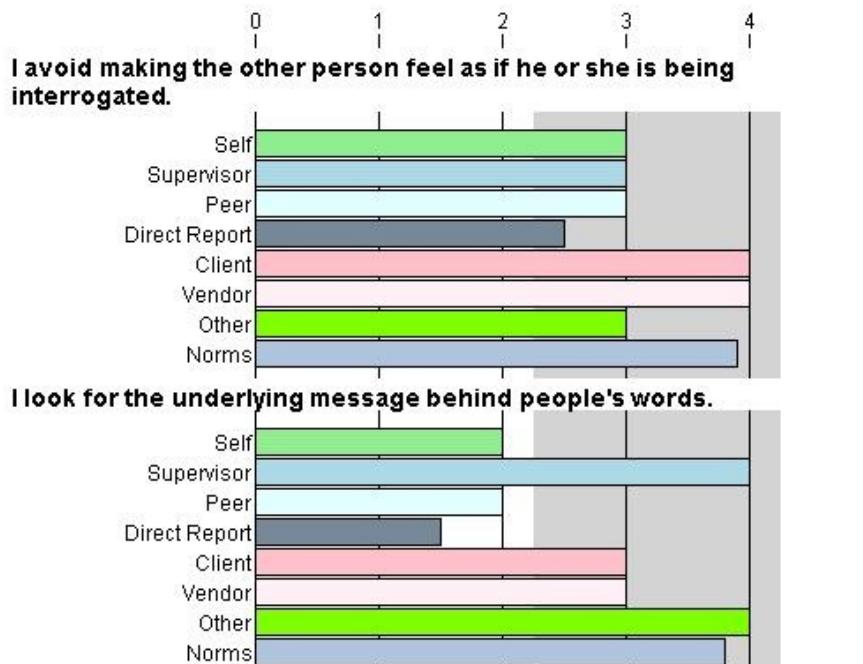
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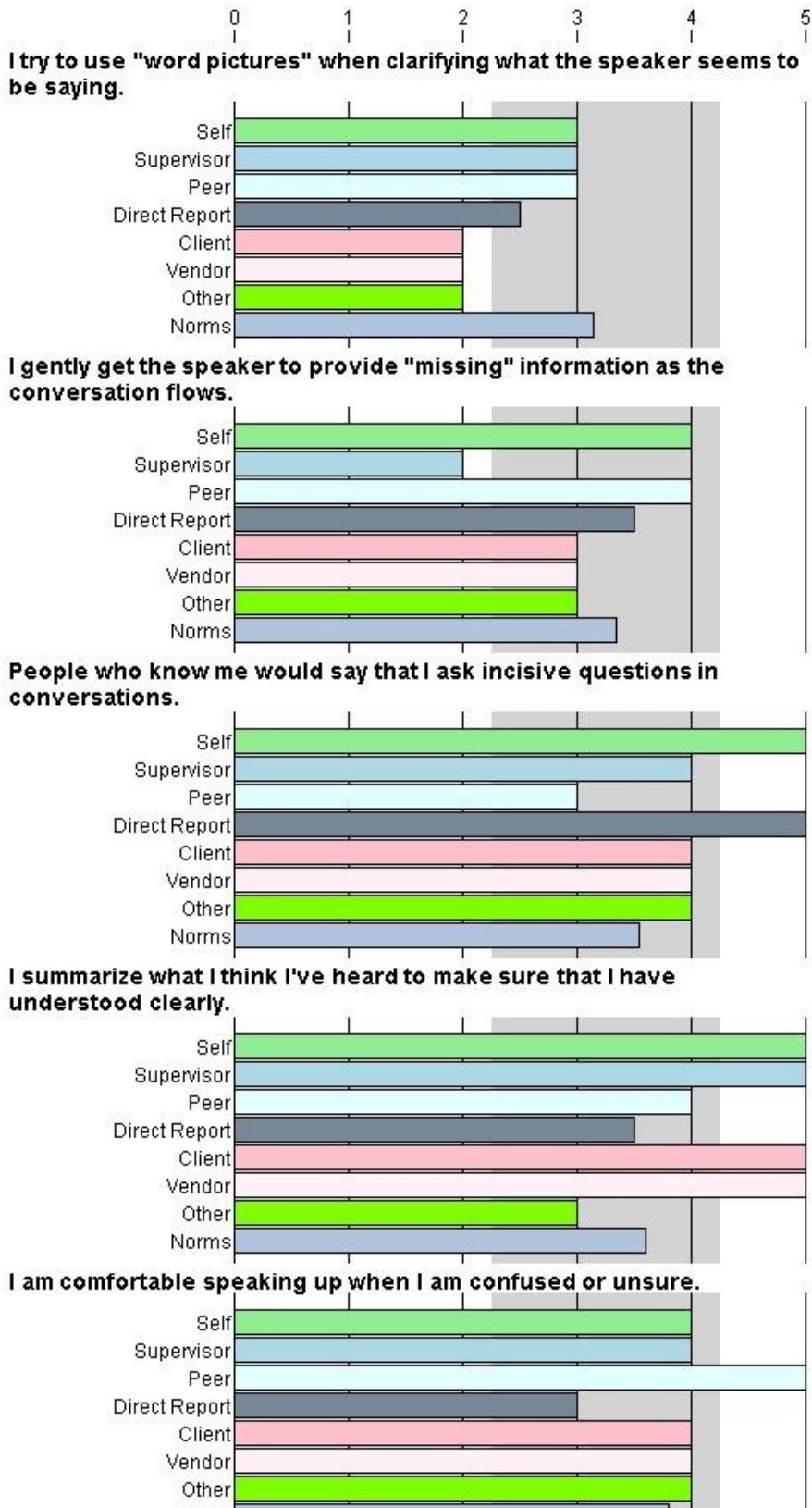
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you rarely use questions to increase your understanding, or your questions are somewhat vague or give the impression that you have not been listening or are not interested in all the other person has to say. An individual with a low score generally engages in highly "transactional" discussions and conversations; questions of clarification are asked only rarely. These individuals are unlikely to summarize or paraphrase the sender's message, thus creating the impression that their mind is elsewhere. They will usually ask questions only when they want more information on subjects that are of interest to them.

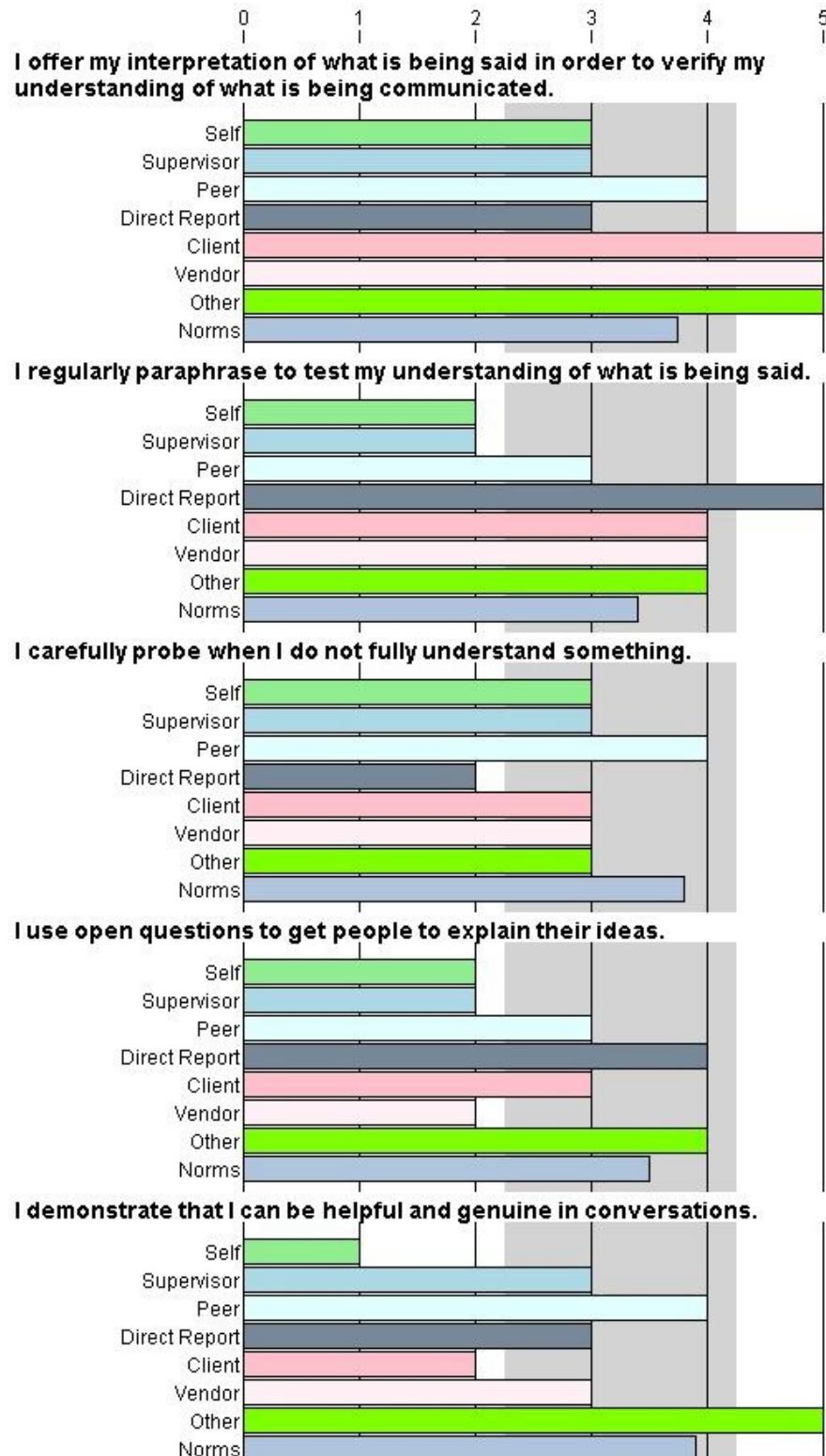
HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you are skilled at using a variety of conversational techniques in order to check information without making the other party uncomfortable, or feel that they are being interrogated. You generally adopt a gentle and careful questioning approach whenever you feel unsure or are not clear about the message being transmitted.

A high score suggests that the individual is likely to create a climate in which the speaker sees that the listener is concentrating and trying to completely understand the communication. This is achieved by using questions to demonstrate openness and demonstrating a genuine desire to understand, rather than showing off superior knowledge or asking a question for the sake of saying something.







This section on Clarifying looks at the extent to which you use careful and incisive questioning techniques to successfully "translate" the words and actions of the other party in order to understand their meaning. This category asks the question: "How well do you gently question and probe the other person in a conversation or discussion, in order to ensure that you accurately interpret their message?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to practice asking genuine and sincere questions when their understanding in a discussion is less than it should be. They should also practice asking different kinds of questions, and offer simple summaries of key points at appropriate conversational intervals.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Clarifying

- Practice asking questions in a variety of different ways so you will be able to get people to say more or to elaborate fully on what they mean.
- Use more paraphrasing, examples, and analogies when you are clarifying what you hear, or ask the other person directly to explain what they are saying in a different way.
- Summarize points frequently and make sure that you have understood each statement that has been made as a discussion unfolds.
- Try to elicit more information whenever necessary to ensure that your knowledge and understanding about what is being said is balanced and complete at all times.

UNDERSTANDING

This section on Understanding looks at the extent to which you make sense of what you see and hear in order to engage fully in a conversation and respond intelligently, according to the circumstances. This category asks the question: "How well do you reflect and process information while someone is speaking, in order to understand the key aspects of what is being communicated and how you might respond?"



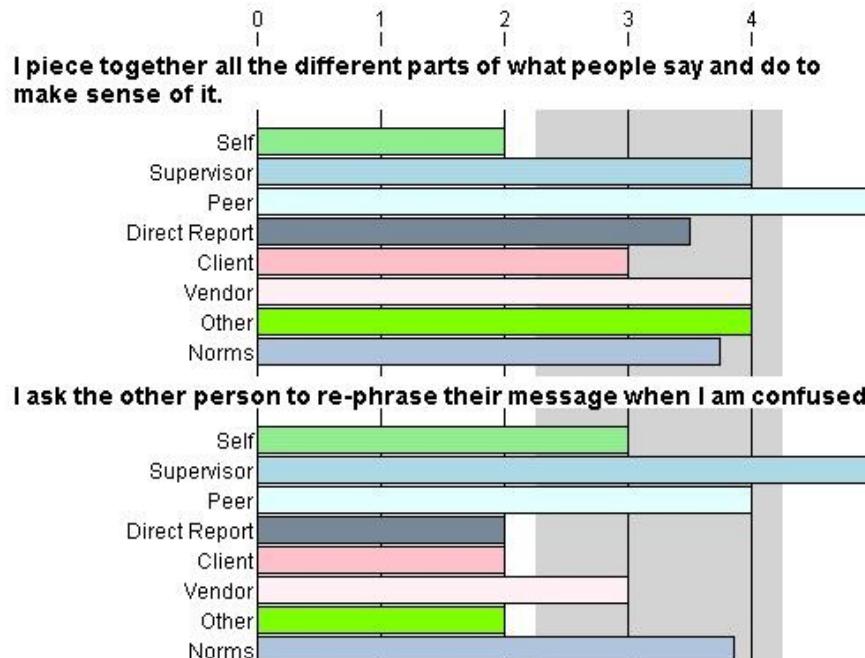
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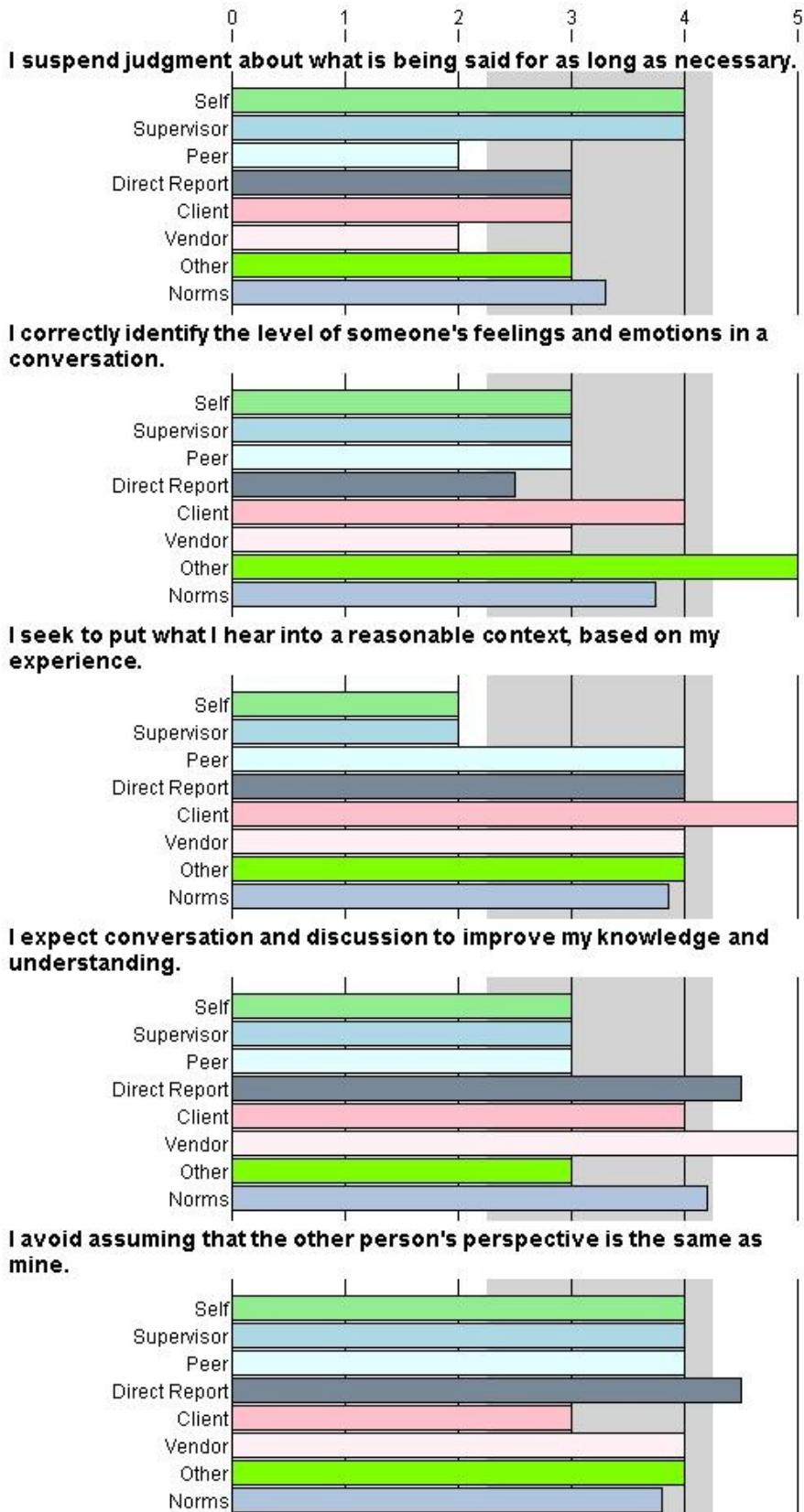
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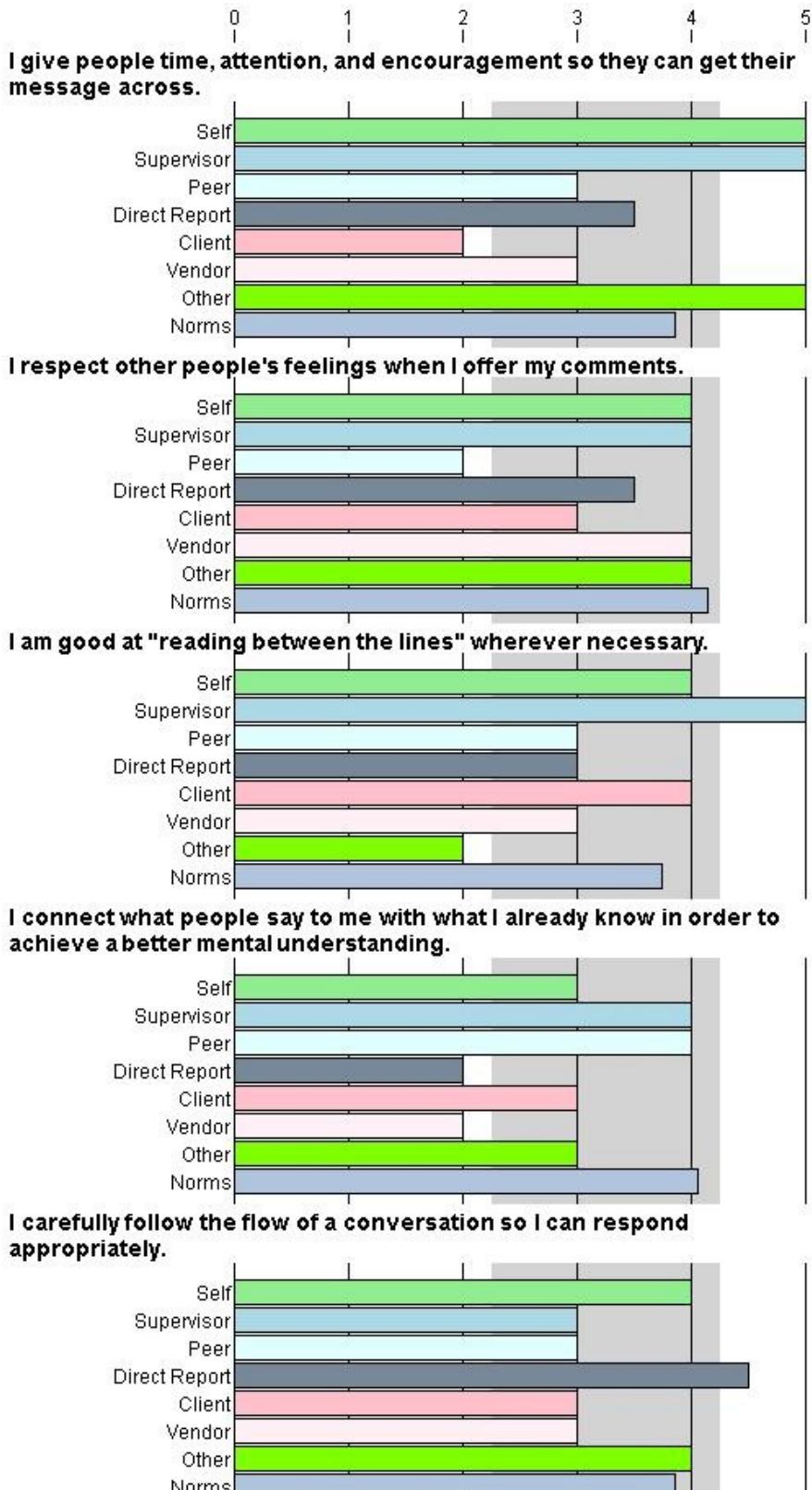
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you tend to be lost in longer or more-complex conversations, and fail to spot the more subtle or underlying messages that are communicated. You do not usually take the opportunity to reduce or eliminate your confusion by asking questions, paraphrasing, or summarizing. A low scorer does not always follow another person's line of discussion or argument and doesn't find it easy to predict where the conversation is headed. As a result, such people don't participate as actively in a conversation as they might, and their responses are not as helpful and intelligent as they could be.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you carefully sift and sort what you see and hear when individuals are talking. You work hard to understand the entire message, and respond in a way that amply demonstrates your understanding. A high scorer uses empathetic listening techniques and avoids making judgments regarding how other people think or send their messages. They will progressively assemble the information that is communicated, and look beyond the words to feelings, emotions, and other contextual factors.







This section on Understanding looks at the extent to which you make sense of what you see and hear in order to engage fully in a conversation and respond intelligently, according to the circumstances. This category asks the question: "How well do you reflect and process information while someone is speaking, in order to understand the key aspects of what is being communicated and how you might respond?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers should take note of all the verbal and non-verbal clues and figure out what is really being said, and why. They also should concentrate more on the overall "flow" or logical development of each conversation, and ask questions and paraphrase to be sure they are not misunderstanding the message.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Understanding

- Avoid pre-judging people's messages or intentions. Concentrate on the entire communication over as long a time as is necessary.
- Look for key themes or core points in conversations.
- Use questions to confirm your understanding before responding.
- Carefully assess the context in which people give you information and the entire way in which they communicate with you.

READING NON-VERBAL CLUES

This section on "Reading Non-Verbal Clues" looks at the extent to which you pick up on body language and tone of voice in order to understand the complete communication message. It asks the question: "How well do you assess the other person's feelings and meaning by looking beyond the spoken words that you hear?"



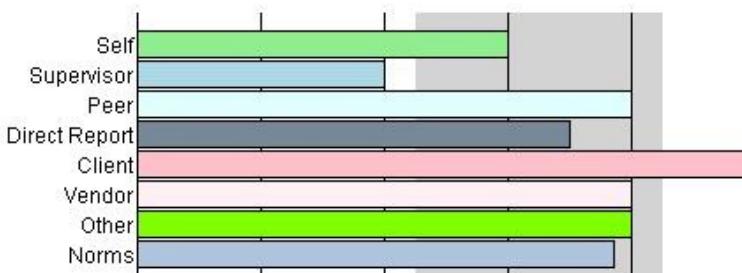
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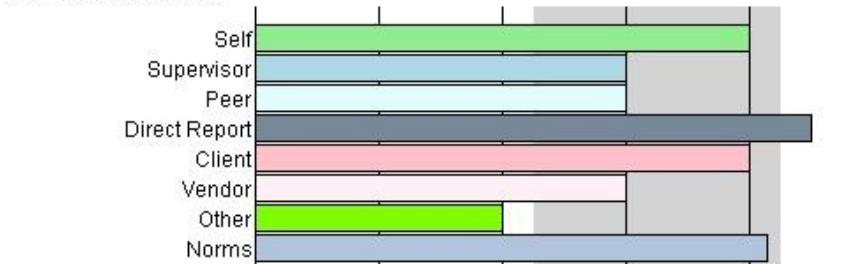
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you generally miss or misinterpret non-verbal clues given by others because you don't see their significance or understand what they mean. Because of this, you are not likely to be good at reading other people, sensing the climate for communication, or spotting general discrepancies between verbal and non-verbal messages. A low scorer tends to be almost completely reliant on the words that people use in communication, though words are only about 10% of the entire meaning. Low scorers are also somewhat oblivious to clues from facial expressions, movements of the hands or feet, changes in inflection and tone, and other behaviors that help paint a complete picture of what people are saying and feeling.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

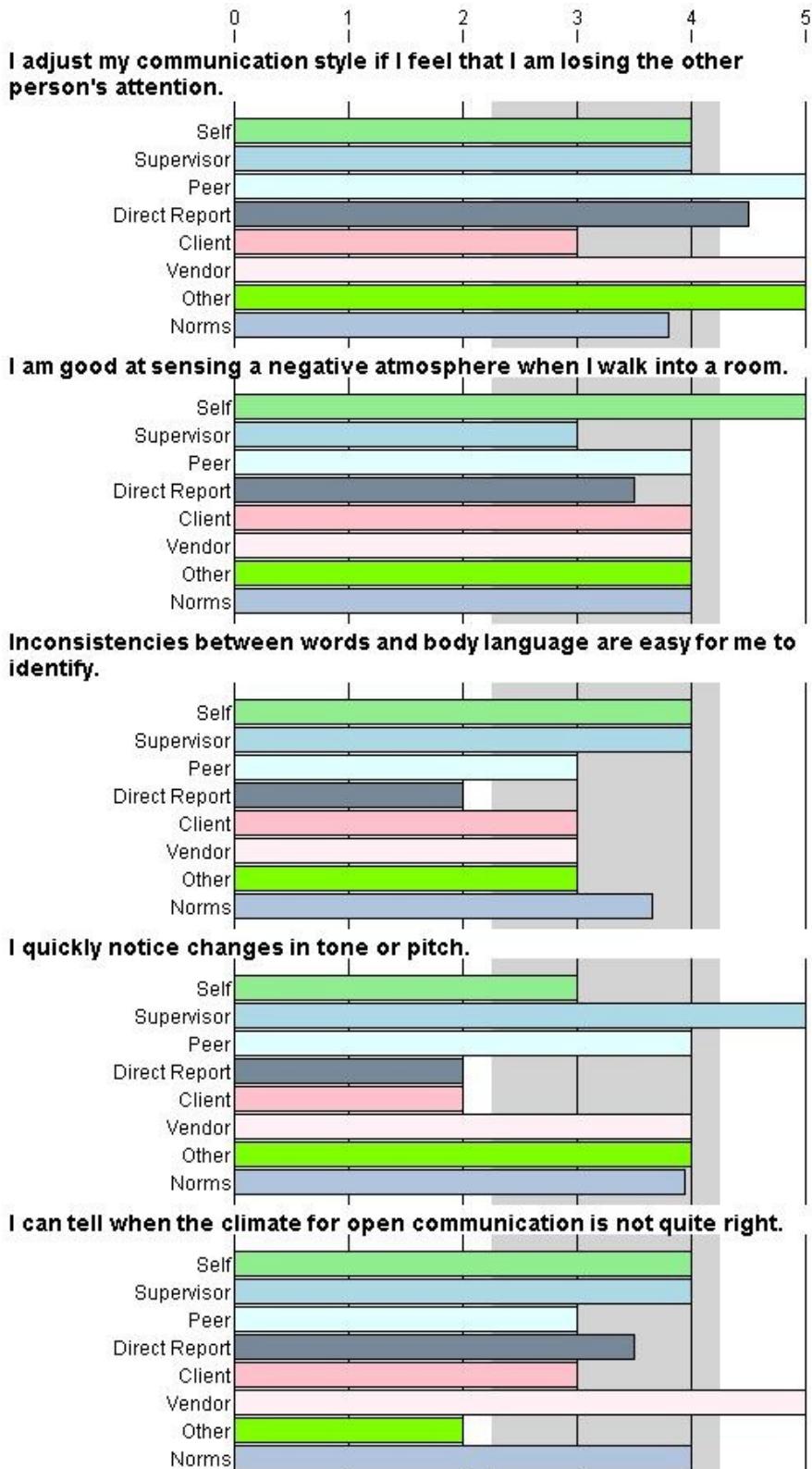
Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you are tuned in to the non-verbal clues or signals that are deliberately or accidentally offered by other people in different kinds of communication. You are usually alert to the signals and are able to interpret them successfully. A high scorer focuses as much on non-verbal communication as on the words being spoken, and constantly looks for reinforcement of underlying feelings or inconsistency. Such people tend to almost intuitively "read" people and situations, even where words are few or non-existent.

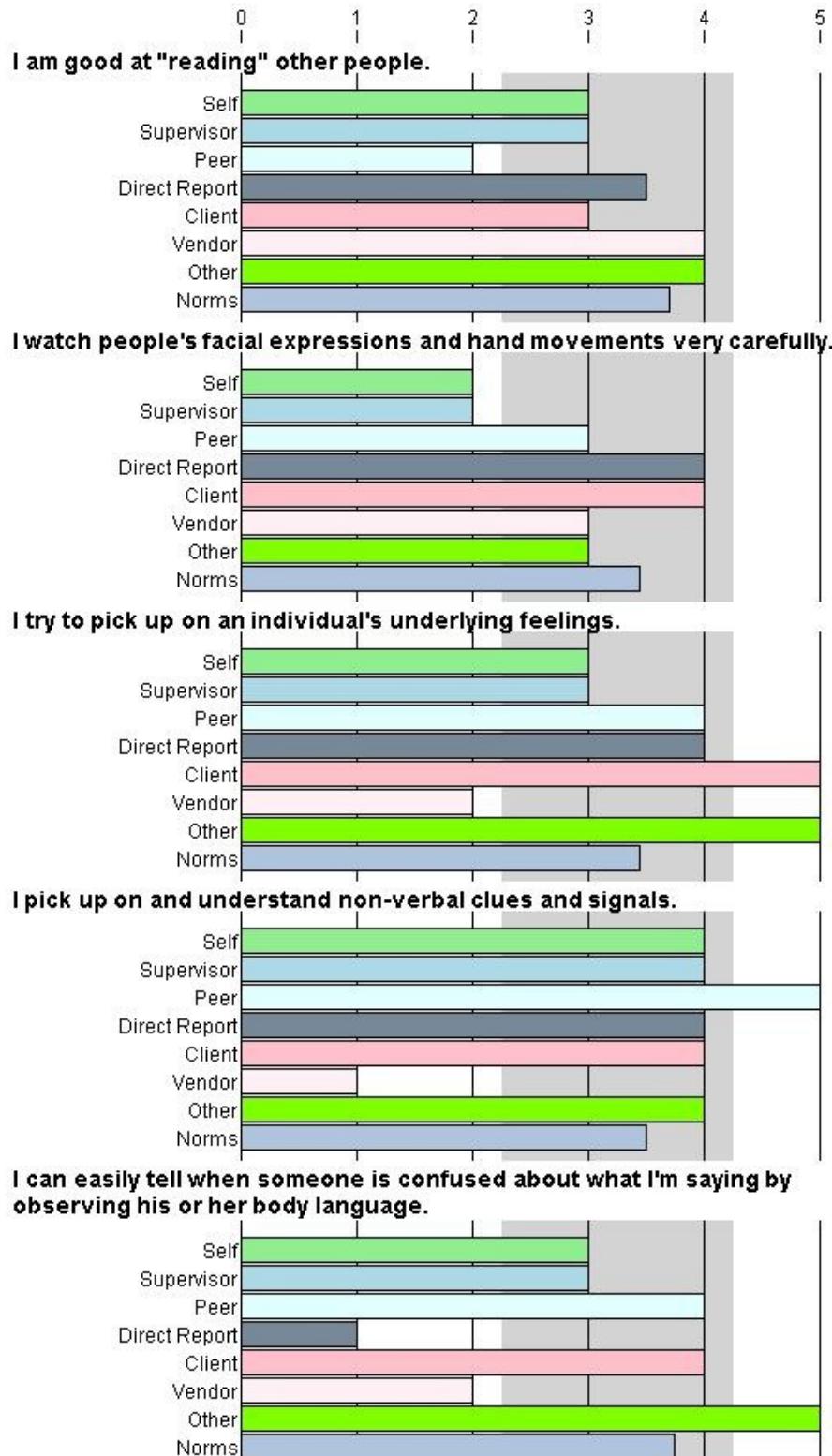


I quickly sense when a person's feelings do not match his or her words.



I can tell when the other party is distracted or their mind is somewhere else.





This section on "Reading Non-Verbal Clues" looks at the extent to which you pick up on body language and tone of voice in order to understand the complete communication message. It asks the question: "How well do you assess the other person's feelings and meaning by looking beyond the spoken words that you hear?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to concentrate much more on observing the other person and listening carefully for changes in voice tone or emotional emphasis. This takes considerable practice, as well as commitment and patience, to learn how to do it and then to correctly interpret what is observed or heard.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Reading Non-verbal Clues

- Quietly watch for the more subtle signals given by the communicator in terms of their physical actions or the tone of their voice.
- Be silent for much longer than you are used to.
- Progressively learn what the different non-verbal signals mean, above and beyond the words.
- On every occasion, assess whether or not the entire communication climate or atmosphere offers any extra clues above and beyond the words alone.

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

This section on Feedback looks at the extent to which you are able to successfully offer constructive feedback to others and accept direct feedback from others. It asks the question: "How open are you to offering candid feedback to others in a constructive or helpful way, and how capable are you in accepting coaching or guiding communication from others?"



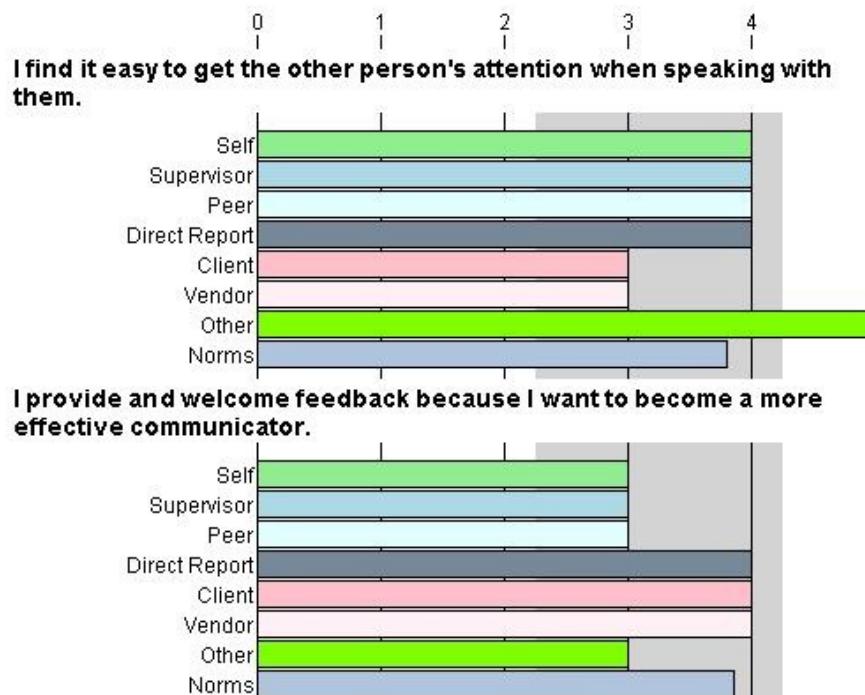
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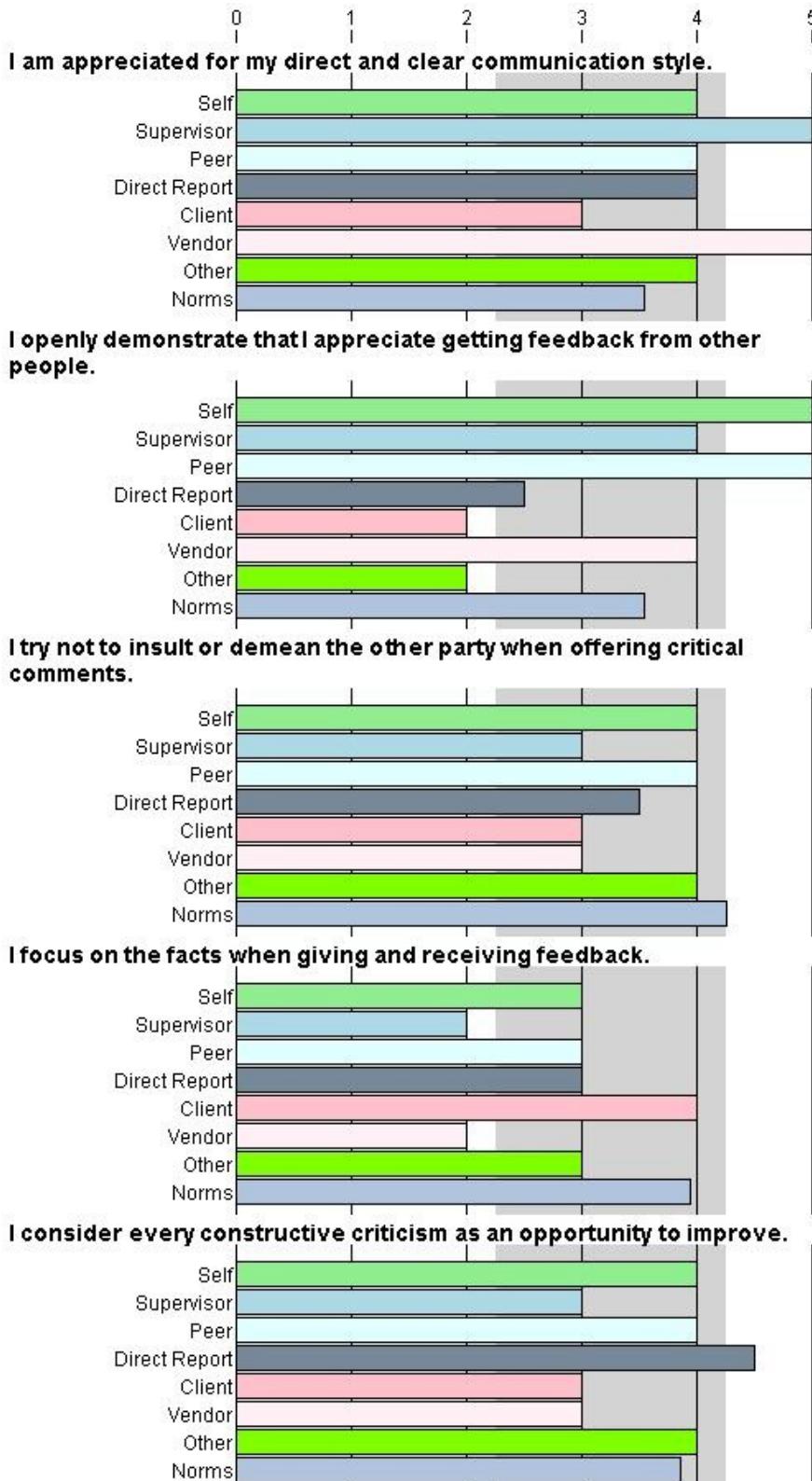
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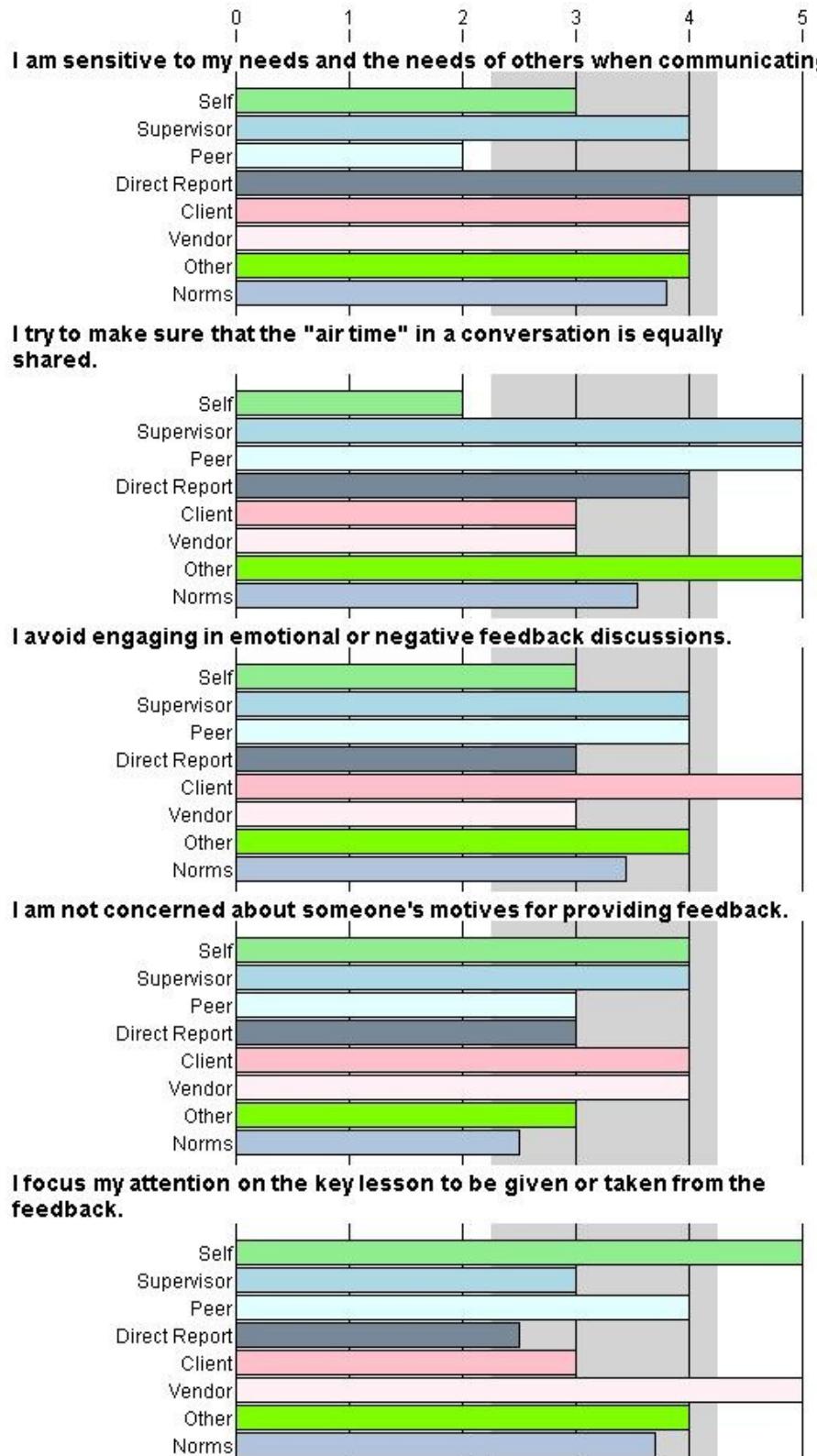
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you are not a frequent giver and receiver of feedback of any sort, and might even go out of your way to avoid making constructive comment to others or letting them offer comment (positive or negative) to you. You are likely at times to adopt a silent approach or become evasive when asked to provide or take feedback. A low scorer is likely to adopt a "closed" communication style in which he or she offers little or no constructive feedback to others, and generally does expect others to provide feedback. Conversations will tend to be somewhat "mechanical" and exchange-orientated, with neither party gaining the benefit of useful guiding or coaching communication.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you are a frequent giver and receiver of feedback, and you see it as a positive way to improve communication and knowledge (for yourself and others). You are more adept at giving feedback to others and in inviting others to give feedback to you (and acting on the valuable advice you receive). An individual whose scores here are high is likely to quickly establish as much conversational rapport as possible with the other person. This is usually done by suggesting that he or she is open to receiving and giving constructive feedback as a means of building strong relationships, as well as engaging in deeper or more genuinely worthwhile discussions with people.







This section on Feedback looks at the extent to which you are able to successfully offer constructive feedback to others and accept direct feedback from others. It asks the question: "How open are you to offering candid feedback to others in a constructive or helpful way, and how capable are you in accepting coaching or guiding communication from others?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to accept two-way feedback as a primary means of improving the quality of communication. This means becoming less "thin-skinned" about feedback and more open to giving people honest but helpful feedback when it is appropriate.

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Giving and Receiving Feedback

- Learn to see the giving and receiving of regular constructive feedback as a primary means by which learning and improvement can occur.
- Make notes on what you hear, and offer structured and specific feedback to others. Encourage other people to offer open feedback on the same basis.
- Always offer constructive feedback comments not negative or destructive remarks.
- Be sensitive to people's feelings when accepting feedback or giving it to others. Avoid destructive comments, personal attacks, and gratuitous insults.

TRANSMITTING YOUR MESSAGE

This section on Transmitting Your Message looks at the extent to which you use a range of communication methods and means to get your message across to others successfully. It asks the question: "How well do you ensure that the transmission of information that is important to you is communicated in language that is clear, concise, and consistent?"



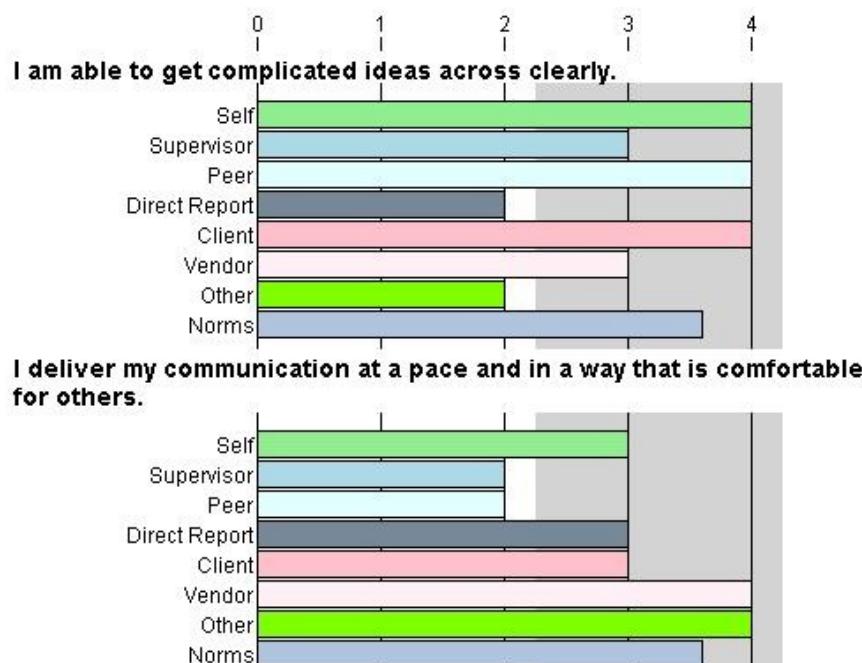
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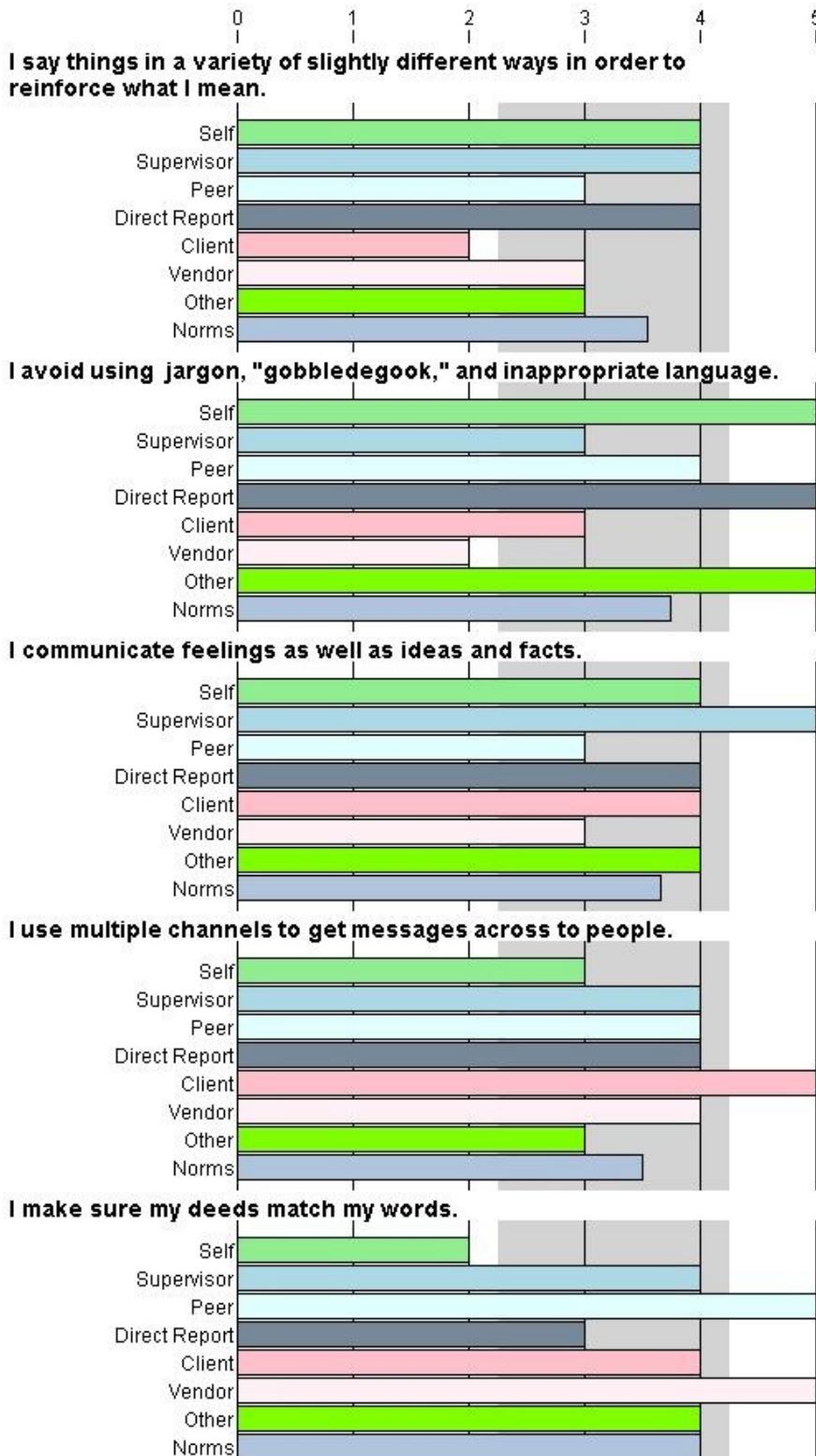
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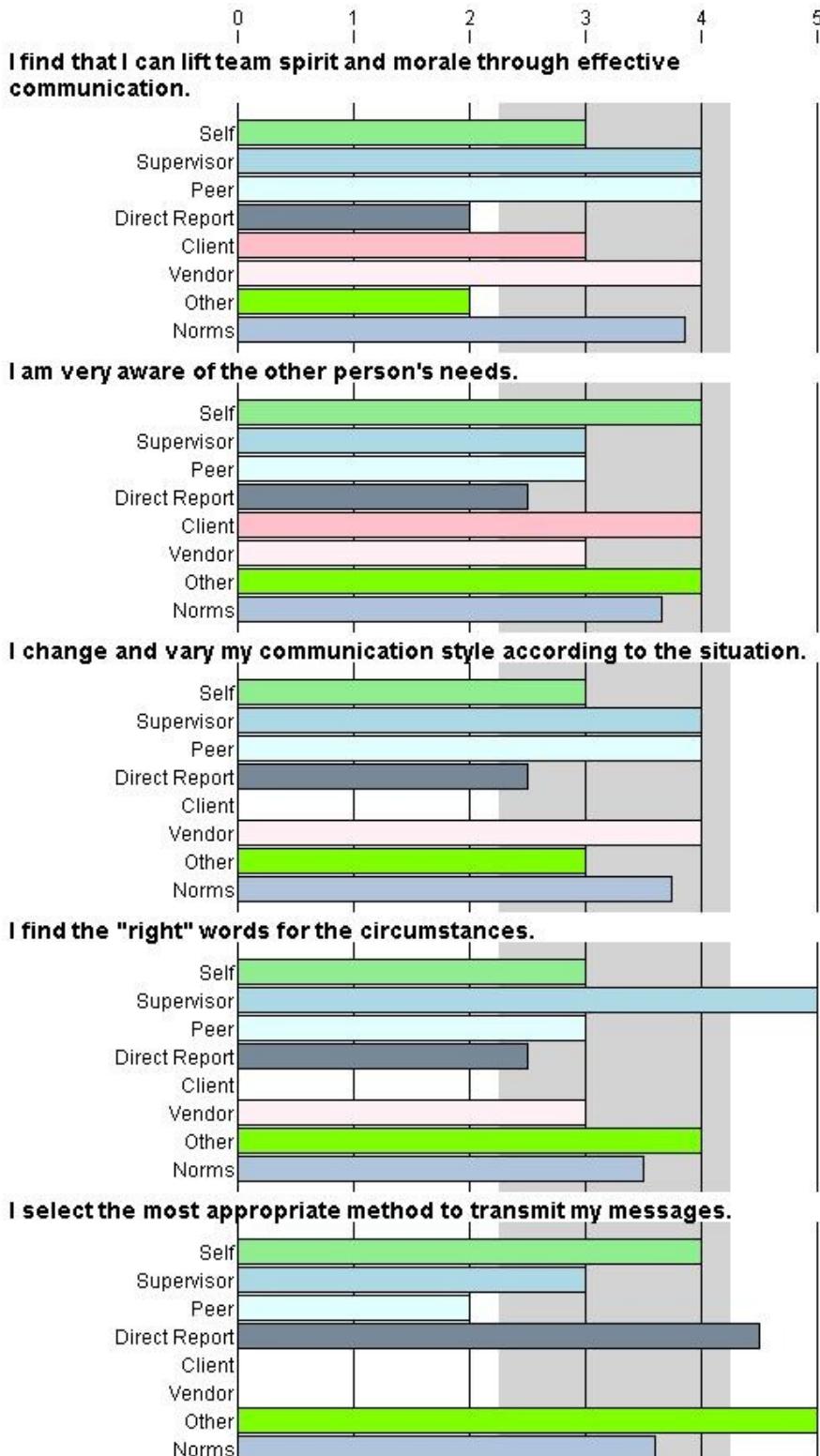
Response ratings predominantly in the ones and twos ("occasionally" and "almost never") suggest that you are prone to forget the needs of different audiences to which you communicate. You also do not always select the most appropriate communication channels but instead use mainly one single communication or delivery style, regardless of the situation. For a low scorer, communication is a challenge and something to get over and done with as quickly as possible. Transmitting your message is regarded as a chore that often yields mixed results in terms of other people listening or understanding and acting appropriately on what they have heard.

HIGH (greater than 3.5)

Response ratings predominantly in the fours and fives ("almost always" and "very frequently") suggest that you think carefully about the way you transmit your message and the communication style that you adopt in order to communicate effectively. To do this, you try hard to always be clear, concise, and consistent in what you say and do. A high scorer is usually acutely aware of the power to communicate and influence people successfully through good preparation, understanding of the audience's needs, and use of a variety of ways to communicate to ensure that every individual is given the best opportunity to understand the message.







This section on Transmitting Your Message looks at the extent to which you use a range of communication methods and means to get your message across to others successfully. It asks the question: "How well do you ensure that the transmission of information that is important to you is communicated in language that is clear, concise, and consistent?"

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Low scorers need to think more about different individual and group preferences in terms of receiving information, and should think about the impact that different channels and styles can make on the ultimate understanding of a message (and, therefore, the success of the entire communication effort).

Ways to Strengthen or Improve Transmitting Your Message

- Recognize that your actions are likely to "speak" most loudly when you are speaking with others.
- Do things to support your verbal messages to help people understand where you are coming from.
- Practice varying your personal communication approach to suit the different situations that you encounter.
- Avoid complex, jargonized, or overly technical words or phrasing to audiences that are not likely to understand or act upon your message.
- Deliver all of your messages in a slow and measured way, taking account of the particular needs of the subject and the audience.

Top 10 Strengths**Empathizing**

1 .I maintain good eye contact and give people my full attention. 4.75

Reading Non-Verbal Clues

51 .I adjust my communication style if I feel that I am losing the other person's attention. 4.38

Clarifying

30 .I summarize what I think I've heard to make sure that I have understood clearly. 4.25

29 .People who know me would say that I ask incisive questions in conversations. 4.25

Giving and Receiving Feedback

63 .I am appreciated for my direct and clear communication style. 4.13

Empathizing

5 .I use a variety of careful questioning approaches to help understand the other person. 4.13

Transmitting Your Message

76 .I avoid using jargon, "gobbledygook," and inappropriate language. 4.00

Understanding

43 .I avoid assuming that the other person's perspective is the same as mine. 4.00

Receiving the Message

15 .I try to find quiet environments in which to talk and listen to people. 4.00

Transmitting Your Message

78 .I use multiple channels to get messages across to people. 3.88

Top 10 Development Needs**Clarifying**

27 .I try to use "word pictures" when clarifying what the speaker seems to be saying. 2.50

26 .I look for the underlying message behind people's words. 2.63

Understanding

38 .I ask the other person to re-phrase their message when I am confused. 2.88

47 .I connect what people say to me with what I already know in order to achieve a better mental understanding. 2.88

Giving and Receiving Feedback

66 .I focus on the facts when giving and receiving feedback. 2.88

Empathizing

7 .I engage in as much "small talk" as necessary to help people feel comfortable. 3.00

Clarifying

34 .I carefully probe when I do not fully understand something. 3.00

35 .I use open questions to get people to explain their ideas. 3.00

36 .I demonstrate that I can be helpful and genuine in conversations. 3.00

Understanding

39 .I suspend judgment about what is being said for as long as necessary. 3.00

COURSE AND READING SUGGESTIONS

Here is a link to a 12 page workbook that can help you further

<http://assessments23x7.com/rsb/RSBtc.pdf>

The following are general reading and course suggestions that may help you to better understand the two categories in which your scores were the lowest and to assist you in writing your development plan.

Clarifying

Clarifying looks at the extent to which you use careful and incisive questioning techniques to successfully "translate" the words and actions of the other party in order to understand their meaning. It asks the question: "How well do you gently question and probe the other person in a conversation or discussion, in order to ensure that you accurately interpret their message?"

Course Suggestion

- Asking Effective Questions/Successful Questioning Techniques
- Paraphrasing/Summarizing Skills
- Listening Skills
- Communication Skills
- Influencing Others

Other Suggestion

- If you feel comfortable doing so, talk to your direct supervisor/manager or a training and development specialist about personal training, coaching, and specific projects, and other possible support they may be able to offer to improve your skills.

Reading Suggestion

- Fire Up Your Communication Skills : Get People to Listen, Understand, and Give You What You Want! Bob Smith
- Making Things Clear : A Guide to Effective Written and Oral Communication, W. Stanton
- The Map to Clear Messages : Conversations With a Wizard and a Warrior, Nadine Udall Fischer, et al
- Consider the Issues: Advanced Listening and Critical Thinking Skills: Carol Numrich
- Consider the Issues: Intermediate Listening and Critical Thinking Skills: Carol Numrich

Understanding

Understanding looks at the extent to which you make sense of what you see and hear in order to engage fully in a conversation and respond intelligently, according to the circumstances. It asks the question: "How well do you reflect and process information while someone is speaking, in order to understand the key aspects of what is being communicated and how you might respond?"

Course Suggestion

- Categorizing Information
- Reflecting the Message Effectively
- Attentive/Empathic Listening Skills
- Communication Skills

Other Suggestion

- If you feel comfortable doing so, talk to your direct supervisor/manager or a training and development specialist about personal training, coaching, and specific projects, and other possible support they may be able to offer to improve your skills.

Reading Suggestion

- Active Listening : Introducing Skills for Understanding. Marc Helgesen and Steven Brown
- Zapp! : The Lightning of Empowerment : How to Improve Quality, Productivity, and Employee Satisfaction. Jeff Cox(Contributor), and William C. Byham (Preface)
- Understanding Conversations. Catherine Tansey, and Charles Blatchford
- New Person to Person : Communicative Speaking and Listening Skills. Jack C. Richards, et al.

- Active Listening : Building Skills for Understanding (Active Listening). Marc Helgesen, et al.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Use the space below to write out your personal development plan for the next 12 months based on your results. Draw upon the general improvement actions in relevant areas of the report, and ideas that are suggested in the attached coaching tips.

I try to use "word pictures" when clarifying what the speaker seems to be saying.
Action to Take:

Score: 2.50

I look for the underlying message behind people's words.

Score: 2.63

Action to Take:

I ask the other person to re-phrase their message when I am confused.

Score: 2.88

Action to Take:

I connect what people say to me with what I already know in order to achieve a better mental understanding.

Score: 2.88

Action to Take:

I focus on the facts when giving and receiving feedback.

Score: 2.88

Action to Take:

Clarifying

Try to help the sender get their message across.

One of the most effective ways of clarifying the sender's message is to rephrase that message and play it back to them. If there has been no significant distortion of the message, the sender can confirm that this is, in fact, a meaningful reformulation of what s/he originally intended. Rephrasing can be done in a number of ways. One of the most effective approaches to rephrasing is to use word "pictures." Here's how to do just that:

- 1.** Use metaphors ("like dynamite") and similes ("as good as Grandma's cooking"). They can be over-used (the advertising industry is famous for that), but in moderation, this approach can bring sterile facts and figures to life.
- 2.** Use layman's terms. Rephrase technical wording so that the person on the street can understand. An oil spill was responsible for a serious amount of oil entering the ocean, but it was generally considered to be a manageable amount. The politician holding the press conference described the amount as being "about two swimming pools' worth of oil." This could have been more precisely put in terms of gallons or liters, but the words chosen were much more understandable. This is an example of effective communication. Recast and reframe the sender's original concept, and test to see if nothing vital has been lost in the translation as you make it generally understandable.
- 3.** Use concrete terms rather than abstract terms, and local terms rather than general terms. If the original sender talked in terms of "accessing the Intranet by dumb terminals," try rephrasing it to something like "opening e-mail through screens like this one on Jo's desk."
- 4.** Describe things in terms of sight ("graceful as a cat"), sound ("purrs like a kitten"), or touch ("as soft as kitten fur"). Sometimes the audience will have a historic preference for one of these "channels" of perceiving; try to determine what that channel is, and then stick with it.
- 5.** Rephrasing by using word pictures might in fact kick in a whole new cycle of learning for the original sender. People might like your "word picture" approach so much, they will adopt it themselves to replace another that is somewhat lacking in descriptive and persuasive power.

Clarifying

Look for the message behind the words.

Words are like icebergs: Most of the substance is beneath the surface. The context, the emotions, the motives, and even the speaker's full knowledge of the subject are not apparent through words alone. Be on the alert for what lies beneath the surface in every communication. Here's how:

1. Watch the speaker's body language. Does it reinforce the words being said, or does it contradict what is being said? If the two don't look consistent, then there might be some internal conflict within the speaker that should be clarified.
2. Listen for what is *not* said. Is the silence deafening in certain areas? For example, if a person is talking about an issue you are well acquainted with and chooses not to mention something quite fundamental, you should ask yourself why they are not mentioning it. And consider asking them, as well.
3. To what extent has the person modified their words because *you* are the audience? For example, would the speaker speak the same way, emphasizing the same things, if s/he was speaking to someone else? If not, why not? There is nothing sinister about changing our message to suit the audience—indeed, this can be a hallmark of a good communicator. Nevertheless, it is a smart idea to speculate on how a message might be delivered in other circumstances. In certain instances, it is wise to speculate on the extreme: Is the speaker deliberately changing the message to deceive you? This might change the way you interact with them in the future and have more-serious implications for the organization.
4. What's the context of the speaker's remarks? Pull back from the close-up view of the details and consider the background or circumstances of the situation. Don't be distracted by the small stuff and miss the wider implication.
5. Speculate on what motives might be behind the speaker's words. What's going on here? How does it affect your interests? Should you be just a little bit paranoid about what is being said? Are the words a preamble to praise or blame? Is the speaker just going through the motions, and not terribly interested in this at all? Is there something fundamental that you missed? You might not be too comfortable thinking these thoughts, but it might be better to think them and feel a little guilty than not to think them and regret it later on. Hindsight, as the saying goes, is 20/20.

Understanding

Give people time, attention, and encouragement to get their message across.

All any of us wants is a fair hearing, and we will get that if we are given time and support so that we can communicate what we think and feel. Here are some ways we can help one another:

1. Slow down. Don't be terrorized by deadlines or pressure. Deadlines and pressure have their uses, but they are not terribly conducive to thoroughness and systematic reflection, analysis, and planning. Then extend the same courtesy to others: Some people take a little longer to express themselves.

2. Don't stampede people or subtly pressure them to keep quiet by saying things like:

- "Everyone's okay on this, right? It's pretty straightforward."
- "No one wants to alter this, right?"
- "Does anyone want to make waves on this, or can I just send it off now and get it over with?"

These things are often said brusquely and rudely to force agreement. Don't do it, and call attention to those who do. There are good reasons why "input" should never be circumvented.

3. Be careful of the non-verbal signals you send out to people. You will do more damage than good if you say you are interested in people's views but your body suggests otherwise. Here are some tips:

- Do not sit in a tense position.
- Do not move your hands, arms, and legs in an agitated, impatient fashion.
- Do not look at a watch or clock.
- Do not shake your head or sigh.
- Make eye contact.

4. Watch for non-verbal signals from others indicating that they might have something to contribute. Such signals include:

- Head-scratching
- Jotting down notes or comments
- Strong nodding or shaking of the head
- Leaning forward
- Raising a hand or finger, as if to get attention

- Alert gaze
 - Expression of strong emotions; obvious concentration on what the speaker is saying
- 5.** Try to shield people from becoming pressured. Create opportunities for them to speak out, and defend them from interruptions, put-downs, and distractions created by others.

Understanding

Try to put what you hear into a reasonable context, based on your experience.

Computers take in data, but before they can do anything with that data, they process it. So do we humans. It's not enough to simply make out the nature of words we hear—we need to make sense of them as well. One of the best ways to do this is to try to find a connection between what we have just learned and what we already know. We move a long way toward understanding others when we can put what we hear into a reasonable context, based on our experience. Here's how to do that:

- 1.** Look for patterns of similarity between what you have just heard and what you have experienced in the recent or distant past. What rings a bell? What triggers a sense of déjà vu? What stirs something in your memory you can't quite put your finger on? What coincidences seem to be occurring? Don't rush this process: Your memory will probably give up its secrets, but take it slowly—memories and associations tend to emerge on their own time, not yours. Sleep on it and turn your attention elsewhere. Your old reliable brain will deliver the goods.
- 2.** Compare the people you have just been interacting with to other people you know. Are there any interesting similarities? Don't stereotype people or put them into pigeonholes, but pick up on certain underlying patterns in human behavior. We sometimes hear people say "She's so like ... it's scary," or "I think ... and ... must have been separated at birth." Let the similarities illuminate you, but remember that these kinds of comparisons are not always accurate.
- 3.** Make connections between seemingly unrelated pieces of information. One of British crime writer Agatha Christie's main characters was Miss Marple, an elderly woman with a gift for detective work. Miss Marple irritated and confused people by making apparently meaningless connections between a violent crime, for example, and the innocent goings on in an obscure British village she knew well. The connections and parallels later proved absolutely vital to the solution of the crime.
- 4.** As you listen to others, continually process the information in the light of what you know. You might have access to certain background pieces of information that the speaker does not have access to and that might trigger associations even as you listen. If appropriate, mention these in conversation so that both sides can help each other's learning. If this is not appropriate, simply make a mental or written note of possible connections that should be checked out.
- 5.** All learning is based on a journey from the known to the unknown. To speed up your own learning, feed in new raw information received and place that data in the background or framework of thousands of previous experiences so that you get new slants on the current situation.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Try not to use emotional language or make negative feedback remarks.

Good two-way communication is vital, but it is essential that the feedback process not become contaminated by cheap shots, carping, and nasty aggression. Here's how to avoid some of these pitfalls:

- 1.** Stick to the facts whenever you provide feedback. Don't speculate on motives, conscious or subconscious, and don't try to be a mind-reader.
- 2.** Keep your voice in a level range. Don't allow it to get out-of-control with loud volume and wildly changing pitch. Maintain a sense of calm at all times.
- 3.** Don't use extreme or "loaded" words. For example, don't say "crisis" when "situation" will do, and don't say "bungling and outrageous incompetence" when "mistake" will do. Don't say "terrible," "pathetic," or "disgusting" when "unacceptable" will do. This is not to say that you should never express justified anger or use extreme language in extreme situations; this kind of expression should be the exception, not the rule. Verbal abuse simply makes people run for cover and lie the next time. It will also diminish your effectiveness if you do it too often.
- 4.** If you do need to express negative feedback, accentuate the positive. Try to find something good to say, along with the bad stuff. With some people, even this is a bit of a challenge, but the trick is to catch them doing something right—then let them know right away. Some leaders call this "the feedback hamburger." The feedback is the "meat" of what you want to say, but it is sandwiched by the bun—the softer stuff you bite into first, before you get to the meat. For example:

Top of the bun: "I thought you did a great job in meeting that tight deadline ..."

Meat: "... but I think a few corners were cut, and quality suffered quite a lot."

Bottom of the bun: "In overall terms, though, the customer was happy. What do *you* think?"

- 5.** If you do need to give the other person negative feedback, try to do it in private, rather than in public. This is good manners, but it also makes sense: The person receiving the negative feedback can then concentrate on solving problems, instead of feeling humiliated or thrown off-balance in front of their peers.