

Activity: Indirect communication



Brief description	Participants practise the indirect communication style and decoding indirect formulations by means of some feedbacks and statements.
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants recognise the connection between culture and communication and can assess the impact of their personal communication practices on others• Participants are able to formulate statements and feedback with varying degrees of directness• Participants are able to decode indirectly formulated statements or behaviour
Time	Approx. 45 min.
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Culturally unspecific• Interactive
Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worksheet
Implementation	<p>The trainer divides the participants into small groups and distributes the worksheets. The participants work out new formulations or interpretations for the listed statements, feedbacks and behaviours in their groups. Evaluation in plenary: The participants present their results.</p> <p>The trainer moderates the presentation and collects feedback from the participants on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In your opinion, what are the greatest difficulties in formulating more indirectly and in decoding indirect statements or in formulating direct statements?• What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of more direct communication?• And what do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of more indirect communication?• In which specific contexts would you rather communicate directly or indirectly?
Notes	Instead of using the given statements, you can of course also use your own or ask the participants to name statements themselves that they would like to work on.
Source	IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung (ed.), Andrea Voigt, Erfolgreiche Integration von internationalen Fachkräften in KMU, Munich, 2021



Task

Indirect communication – rewording

What indirect formulations would you suggest for the following direct feedbacks or statements?

1. "The absolute deadline for the completion of the project on your part is 30.03. We must have all the information by then. It is entirely up to you. I hope we can rely on you!"
2. "Mr. Lepadusch, your performance has totally dropped off in all areas in the last few months, I am really very disappointed."
3. "Oh, Mrs. Schmitz, here you are at last, as so often too late! But that's really your problem now: If you're late, life punishes you. The tasks in the team have all been distributed now."
4. "Michael, the pipes are laid totally sloppily. What's wrong with you?"
5. "I sent you my concept for our new offer in advance. In our meeting, I would like to get feedback from everyone and your suggestions for improvement."

Indirect communication – interpretation

How do you interpret these indirect statements or behaviours? Feel free to be creative!

6. "Hello Mr. Müller, the waste bins in the lab are full".
7. A colleague asks a colleague for help with an assignment. She says: "I'm just dealing with this urgent request for Mrs Schmitz. Markus has registered with another order. And I have to leave on time today. If there is still time in between, I will be happy to help you."
8. "I find your presentation extremely successful. There are still minor corrections in chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7. Would you still change them? Chapters 8 and 9 could still be improved in my view. And perhaps you could reconsider your conclusions in the conclusion. Possibly you could argue in a different direction here."
9. An employee to his superior: "A neighbour of mine works in company ABC in the same position as I do. He regularly drives to his customers in the company car. This way his wife can use the private car and he saves the monthly bills for business trips with his car."
10. A department head suggests going out to eat together in the evening at the ABC restaurant. The employees spontaneously agree, except for one who does not say anything.

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Suggested solutions

The formulations listed here are intended as suggestions. They represent a possibility to formulate facts differently. However, there are also numerous other variations.

1. "The absolute deadline for the completion of the project on your part is 30.03. I must have all the information by then. It is entirely up to you. I hope I can rely on you!"
Suggested solution: "I need your project results with all the information by 30.03. I know this means a lot of work and responsibility for you. What do you need so that you can meet the deadline?"
2. "Mr. Lepadusch, your performance has totally dropped in all areas in the last few months, I am really very disappointed."
Suggested solution: "Mr. Lepadusch, I am concerned about your work performance over the last few months."
3. "Oh, Mrs. Schmitz, here you are at last, as so often too late! But that's really your problem now: If you're late, life punishes you. The tasks in the team have all been distributed now."
Suggested solution: "Hello, Mrs Schmitz, ah, there you are. Our meeting has been going on for an hour. Among other things, we have already distributed the tasks in the team. Please look through the list after the meeting and let me know which task you would like to support."
4. "Michael, the pipes are laid in a totally sloppy way. What's wrong with you?"
Suggested solution: "Michael, I notice that the pipes are not laid in the quality that I know from you. I have the impression that something is bothering you. If it has to do with our construction site, you can talk to me or to the foreman."
5. "You all know my concept for our new offer. In our meeting, I want feedback from everyone and your suggestions for improving it."
Suggested solution: "I sent you my concept for our new offer in advance. I would like your feedback on it and I am also interested in suggestions for improvement. You can either comment directly here in the round or write me a personal e-mail. I would like to invite you to contribute your own ideas. We will discuss the results at our next meeting."
6. "Hello Mr Müller, the waste bins in the lab are full."
Suggested solution: "Mr Müller, please empty the waste bins in the lab."
7. A colleague asks a colleague for support with an assignment. She says: "I'm just dealing with this urgent request for Ms Schmitz. Markus has registered with another order. And I have to leave on time today. If there's still time in between, I'll be happy to help you."
Suggested solution: People with a rather indirect communication style do not like to formulate a clear "no". This is only hinted at, paraphrased or avoided altogether.
8. "I find your presentation very successful. There are still minor corrections in chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7. Would you change them? Chapters 8 and 9 could still be improved in my view. And perhaps you could reconsider your conclusions in the conclusion. Possibly you can still argue in a different direction here."
Suggested solution: What at first glance seems like - just - positive feedback could be very critical feedback if it is expressed by someone with a rather indirect communication style. The criticism is diplomatically packaged by, for example, using the subjunctive, putting possibilities in the room or making alternative suggestions. The term "minor" in this context is not meant literally, but as an understatement and thus an indication that the person giving the feedback feels that more extensive corrections are necessary....



9. An employee to his superior: "A neighbour of mine works in company ABC in the same position as I do. He regularly drives to his customers in the company car. This way his wife can use the private car and he saves the monthly bills for business trips with his car".
Suggested solution: This formulation can contain a concern of the employee. People who communicate more indirectly do not formulate feedback as a critical query, but rather as a wish or request, in this case for their own company car.
10. A head of department suggests going out to eat together at the ABC restaurant in the evening. The employees spontaneously agree, except for one who does not say anything.
Suggested solution: People who tend to communicate indirectly prefer a non-verbal reaction to proposals they are sceptical about or reject. In this case, silence could be an indication that the employee does not want to go along and/or feels they have no say.

Source: IQ Fachstelle Interkulturelle Kompetenzentwicklung und Antidiskriminierung (ed.), Andrea Voigt, Erfolgreiche Integration von internationalen Fachkräften in KMU, Munich, 2021