

# Understand Personality Styles

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**T**O BE A TRUE LEADER, YOU MUST BE able to inspire and influence others. This involves knowing how to communicate with coworkers and foster teamwork among individuals with very diverse personalities. Learning how to effectively communicate and interact with different personality types will enable you to create a positive climate conducive to harmony, teamwork and success and minimize potential conflicts.

## Personal profiling tools

Administering some type of personality test will give you an understanding of why people act the way they do. Once you find out what makes people tick, you can play to individuals' strengths and better match people for team compatibility. Many instruments are available that can give you insight into your own personality and behavior patterns and those of others.

One of the most well-known is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Its roots go back to Dr. Carl Jung, who determined that preferences emerge early in life and make behaviors predictable. His protégé, Isabel Myers Briggs, developed the MBTI to characterize individual preferences and promote a constructive use of these differences among people. Briefly, the Myers Briggs model of personality is based on four preferences (*I*):

1. Where, primarily, do you direct your energy — to the outer world of activity and spoken words (which is known as Extroversion, denoted by the letter E), or to the inner world of ideas, thoughts and emotions (known as Introversion, denoted by the letter I)?

2. How do you prefer to process information — in



One key to being a successful leader is understanding yourself and others, and adapting your behavior as the situation warrants.

the form of known facts and familiar terms (described as Sensing [S] because information is taken in primarily by way of the senses), or in the form of possibilities or new potential (described as iNtuition [N], because information is perceived primarily in an intuitive fashion? (N is used rather than I to avoid confusion with Introversion.)

3. How do you prefer to make decisions — on the basis of logic and objective considerations (Thinking, T), or on the basis of personal values (Feeling, F)?

4. How do you prefer to organize your life — in a structured manner, making decisions and knowing where you stand (Judging, J), or in a flexible way, discovering life as you go along (Perceiving, P)?

The combination of these four preferences indicates a general personality type, such as ESTJ (a sensing, thinking, judging extrovert) or INFP (an intuiting, feeling, perceiving introvert).

Another behavioral instrument that is simple and easy to self-administer and interpret is the DISC personal profiling tool. It is based on the work of behaviorist William Moulton Marston, a contemporary of Carl Jung and Isabel Myers Briggs. Marston, however, was interested in how people felt and behaved as they interacted in the world around them.

The DISC system characterizes individuals' behavior patterns as:

- D = Dominant
- I = Influencing
- S = Steady
- C = Conscientious

This article explains the DISC method and how it can help you understand the personality types of the people you encounter in the workplace, and it provides guidance on using that understanding for more effective communications and interactions.

## The Dominator

The *Dominant* personality type tends to make quick decisions and is very results-oriented. These people are direct and straightforward and often display a high level of initiative and energy. In order to motivate dominant people, take advantage of their initiative and give them the freedom to act without interference. If you help to take the obstacles out of their way, they will be able to challenge themselves and create opportunities for advancement. Their key to success is shaping the environment around them by overcoming opposition to accomplish results.

While there are many strengths associated with the dominant personality, there are also limitations. Dominators can create conflict by being too blunt, restless and impatient. Without thinking of the feelings of those around them, dominant people often try to do everything, acting before they have all the facts.

To better understand the dominant personality type and how to deal with this kind of person, let's consider the following incident.

Mike Link asks you to come into his office. You know he's upset about the arrangements for his meeting this morning — the overhead projector's bulb burned out, there weren't enough chairs in the meeting room, the reports copied for the meeting were out of order, and the refreshments arrived an hour late. As you enter, he asks you to sit down and he gets right to the issue at hand, saying: "You've got to do something about improving the quality of your work, your dependability and the way you communicate. So what are you going to do to make these things better?" What is the most effective way to respond and communicate with Mike?

Realizing that this is dominant personality behavior, consider the skills needed to influence a dominant person. Be brief. Get to the point quickly while pointing out the benefits of your approach. This will grab his attention without alienating him. Be specific about the facts and the solution to the problem, and don't dwell on the personalities involved.

## The Influencer

*Influencers* are outgoing, persuasive and gregarious. They also tend to be good at delegating. By influencing and per-

suading others, they create an environment for success. The best way to motivate influencers is to put them in a social environment that includes constant interaction with people. They will feed off healthy relationships and favorable working conditions. In these circumstances, an influencer will show trust in others and spread enthusiasm through a team.

Certain situations can bring out the weaknesses of an influencer. For instance, such people are not very task-oriented and tend not to follow up on jobs they have delegated to others. Also, their strength at building friendships can easily be exploited when they have to make unpleasant decisions. Instead of doing what's best for the job at hand, they procrastinate about making decisions so they won't "rock the boat."

The following situation illustrates the best way to deal with an influencer.

Mary Gerard, one of your coworkers, is known as "the socializer." You arrive early Friday morning to get a head start on a project that's due by 10 am. Mary stops by your desk and starts talking about the party she's throwing that night and who may stop by. What you thought would be a few minutes turns into a half hour. Your supervisor walks by and gives you the "evil eye." The pressure is on and you must finish your project. How do you get Mary to leave without hurting her feelings?

The first step is to recognize that she is an influencer. The best way to communicate with this type of person is to start out by relating and socializing for a few minutes. Mary will quickly become responsive to the conversation. Remember, she has a need to talk, so ask for her opinions and ideas. After you have satisfied her need for interaction, you can involve her in the decision-making process and get her to leave your office by telling her your priorities — *i.e.*, to finish the project by 10 am.

## The Steady One

The *Steady* personality type is dependable and easygoing. Steady individuals are technically competent and have the ability to teach. Their emphasis is on cooperating with others within existing circumstances to carry out a task. The best motivator for steady personalities is security. They like repetitive routine tasks and established work patterns. The status quo is their ideal environment.

One of the weaknesses of a steady personality is resistance to change, especially new directions that challenge their structure. Steady people can also be poor delegators, because they would rather do the job themselves.

With these motivators, strengths and weaknesses in mind, let's examine a situation involving a steady type.

Larry Grace always has a very heavy workload that he can't seem to manage very well, but he doesn't like to delegate work. You are very competent and want more responsibilities; the past few months have not been very fulfilling, and you want more from your job. As you enter his office, you see that Larry is overwhelmed (as usual) with stacks of files covering his desk and spread out all

over the floor. He's pacing back and forth, swearing under his breath. You know his budget report is two months overdue and needs to be completed before the end of the day. Approaching him at this time would be adding more work for Larry. What is the best way of communicating with him?

Start by presenting your case softly and breaking the ice with a positive comment. Don't express blame, or he may feel threatened. Ask "how" questions to get his input — for example, "How can I help with some aspect of the budget report?" Clearly define (preferably in writing) what your skills and contributions to the situation could be so he can see that you are able to handle the extra work. Next, provide clear suggestions to avoid a similar occurrence in the future.

### The Conscientious Individual

The *Conscientious* type is a very thorough and attentive perfectionist who can think ahead and prevent problems. In order to achieve results, the conscientious person works carefully within existing circumstances to ensure quality and accuracy. Unlike influencers, conscientious people are motivated by little or no contact with others. They would rather define their own limits of authority. Detail-oriented jobs with precise instructions give the conscientious personality the clearest road to success.

Predictably, the weakness of this type of person is that they tend to be too rigid and overly detailed. Instead of verbalizing about a problem, they will write long memos while staying to themselves.

The following scenario demonstrates how to interact with conscientious personality types.

Jean Price asks to discuss the problems you found with the current procedures for tracking expenses against the budget. You and two coworkers have put in ten hours a day for the last two weeks trying to straighten out the mess. You are tired and fed up because an excellent software tracking system would solve the problem, but Jean will not sign the requisition for the required hardware upgrade. She doesn't want to spend the money because she's not sure if there's enough money left in the budget. She is very sensitive to errors. As you enter her office, Jean says, "You haven't given me enough details on your reasons for changing the tracking system. You need to be more specific." How should you deal with Jean?

Remembering Jean's strengths and weaknesses as a conscientious type, approach her in a straightforward way and stick to the issues. Take your time and be persistent, but don't criticize her. Next, draw up a scheduled approach for implementing the system of tracking expenses with a step-by-step timetable. Assure her that there won't be any surprises. This plays to her strengths and ensures her that her role will be important.

### Blended personalities

Not all individuals can be characterized by a single personality type. Many people exhibit a combination of behav-

iors and traits, such as the following (the letter codes represent the DISC personality types most likely to have the trait):

*Creativeness (D/C)*: Creative people tend to be logical, critical and incisive in their approach to attaining goals. They are most challenged by problems requiring original thought and analytical effort. They may be blunt and critical.

*Drive (D/S)*: People with a lot of drive respond quickly to a challenge and have mobility and flexibility in their approach to problems. They tend to be versatile self-starters who see projects to completion.

*Goodwill (I/D)*: Individuals who exhibit goodwill tend to behave in a poised, cordial manner. They exude charm and strive to establish rapport at first contact with people.

*Self-Confidence (I/C)*: These people are self-confident in nearly all their dealings with others. Although always striving to win you over, they are reluctant to give up their own point of view. They feel that whatever situations may arise, they will respond as necessary to attain success.

*Patience (S/D)*: Patient people are steady and consistent. They prefer to deal with one assignment at a time. They will usually direct their skills and experience into areas requiring depth and socialization. Steady under most pressures, they strive to stabilize their environment and they react negatively to changes.

*Persistence (S/C)*: These individuals are persevering people who are not easily swayed once they have made up their mind. They will set their own pace and stick with it. They can be rigidly independent when they are forced to change and exasperated with others who want them to adapt.

*Perfectionism (C/I)*: Perfectionists are sticklers for systems and order. They make decisions based on proven precedents and known facts. In virtually all their activities, they try meticulously to meet standards that have been established either by themselves or others.

*Sensitivity (C/S)*: These people are very concerned with avoiding risk or trouble. They tend to look for hidden meanings. Tension may be evident, particularly when they are under stress to produce results. Generally, they are uneasy until they have absolute confirmation that their action or decision is correct.

### Overcoming limitations

Each of us has developed coping skills that fit our personality needs.

The dominant personality has a basic fear of being taken advantage of. The way to cope with this fear is to develop closeness and trust. The degree to which she lets her guard down and instills a supportive social fabric in each area of her life will determine her success as a worker and person. She will respond well to a friend or superior who "tells it like it is," as this gains her trust.

The influencer's basic fear is the loss of social approval. I am an influencer, and I'd like to share a time in my life when I was unable to cope with this fear. Many years ago I suffered from panic attacks that became so crippling that even-

tually I would not even leave my own home. This fear led to a disorder known as agoraphobia (the fear of open spaces). For years, I did not have the coping skills that an influencer needs to be successful. Because of my fear of losing social approval, I kept the fear inside me. Eventually, this led to a very unfulfilling life. But once I learned my personality strengths and weaknesses and why I had trouble coping, I was able to move ahead to the balanced and rewarding life I lead today. I found within myself the ability to deal head-on with difficult situations without the fear of what others thought of me. I found that I worked well with friends and superiors who were democratic and who took a strong personal interest in me both on and off the job. I was able to get back on track with the help of such people.

The steady personality has a fear of sudden change. To combat this, he needs to learn the skill of flexibility. He needs to organize his life so he will become comfortable with situations that lack structure and predictability. Although it is easy to take the steady person for granted, he needs encouragement because he is less vocal. He needs a superior who is amiable and easygoing when under pressure.

The conscientious personality type has a basic fear of criticism. Because of this fear, she does not reach out to fellow team members for help and does not share her true thoughts. She needs to learn the skill of opening up to constructive criticism and promoting her feelings to achieve mutual understanding in difficult circumstances. The conscientious person needs to find reassurance in a superior who is available and willing to listen and discuss.

## Strategies for success

Once you have identified your strengths and behavioral tendencies, you can improve your effectiveness, and that of your organization, by employing the following strategies:

- *Capitalize.* This involves using your predominant behavioral tendency to the maximum extent possible. This is particularly useful when your natural style of behaving is what the situation requires. Process-oriented dimensions, such as dominance and influence, are appropriate for leadership during times of change and growth, whereas product-oriented dimensions, such as steadiness and conscientiousness, provide the supportive foundation and are valuable in times of stability and maintenance.

- *Augment.* When you do not possess the required skills

### Literature Cited

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### Further Reading

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**Table. Compatability of different personality styles.**

Styles	Human Relations	Work Tasks
D-D	Good	Fair
D-I	Good	Fair to Good
D-S	Fair	Excellent
D-C	Poor	Fair to Good
I-I	Excellent	Poor to Fair
I-S	Good to Fair	Excellent
I-C	Poor	Excellent to Good
S-S	Excellent	Excellent to Good
S-C	Excellent	Excellent to Good
C-C	Excellent	Excellent to Good

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for the situation, seek out individuals with those natural skills and add them to your team.

- *Modify or adapt.* You can try to learn or acquire the behavior that is appropriate for the situation, although this may be difficult or impossible to achieve. It can also be time- and energy-consuming, or it can interfere with maximizing the value of your natural behavioral tendencies.

- *Blend.* Often the best approach is to integrate individuals with different behavioral patterns so that each can maximize his or her skills for the good of the group. By taking advantage of natural compatibilities (see table), the organization can increase its overall efficiency and improve its results.

An ideal team will be comprised of all four of the DISC personality types. The dominator's role is to facilitate the group's work and keep it on track. The influencer will serve as a liaison to other departments that the team interacts with to get them involved and gather their input. The steady person will organize the influencer's notes into an outline. The conscientious person will then use the notes and outline to write a preliminary plan for the whole team to review and act upon.

## Final thoughts

To achieve success as the leader of a team (which is increasingly important in today's complex world of accelerated change), it is necessary to identify our individual strengths and those of others. We must develop an appreciation of one another's unique value and consciously and continuously exploit our strengths and minimize the effects of our weaknesses.

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