

THINK!

Productivity
through effective
business engagement

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Productivity Through Effective Business Engagement

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Preface

The Engagement Skills Workshop (formerly known as Consulting Skills Workshop) has been running since February 2003, and by early 2010 over 2500 participants had attended one of the 200 plus events conducted in Australia, Argentina, China, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Romania, Singapore, UK and USA. Each event has been different as each group brings its own distinct ideas to the discussions, and over time the material evolves and changes. In every workshop that I, and my fellow facilitators have run, we have gained new ideas and insights. These discoveries are often incorporated into future events.

This book is designed to be a resource for the Workshop. As we discuss during the workshop, there are no right and wrong answers. Some approaches are more effective than others but it depends on the audience. Reading this book will stimulate your thinking but it won't replace the interaction and discussion with colleagues. For the attendees of the Workshop, this book provides a useful reminder of the things we should focus on.

The content of the workshop is not brand new or unknown to everyone. It is mostly good common sense, developed over centuries. As one of my co-facilitators often remarks:

“The trouble with common sense is that it is not all that common!”

The beauty of the lessons from the book and the workshop is that we can all improve in the areas of inter-personal interaction, just by thinking about it a bit more. This can have a dramatic impact on our overall performance, in our business and personal lives. Importantly, it can impact on the way in which others perceive us. Unlike many of our technical skills, the lessons of the workshop do not change over time. They are not affected by fashion or technology, so once learnt and practiced; they hold us in good stead for the rest of our lives (with a little refresher as we go).

The diversity of backgrounds and disciplines of participants attests to the broad relevance of the workshop – Information Systems, Finance, Project Management, Risk Management, Sales, Business Consulting, Account Management, Audit, Human Resources, Legal, Portfolio Management, Property Management, Procurement, Marketing, Software Development and Support, Media Production... the list just goes on. Some of these participants worked within the business and some external clients. The interesting thing is that despite the varied subject matter expertise and environments, the challenges facing these practitioners, at the point of client engagement, are remarkably similar.

Acknowledgements

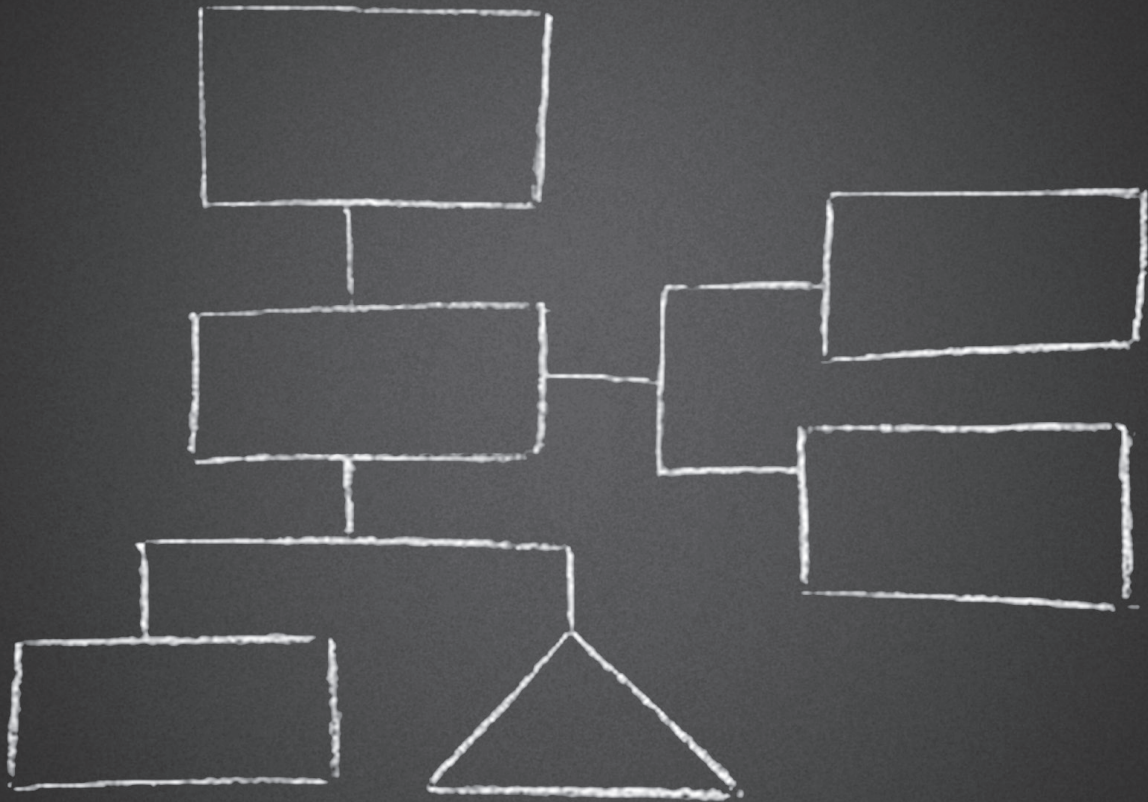
I would like to thank a number of people for their contribution to these chapters. First and foremost are my co-facilitators that have generated ideas and concepts, which have become part of the workshop and text – Ralph Muir-Morris, Bill Westerbeek and Trevor French.

From way back in the early days I would also like to acknowledge the help and input of Paul Chester, Neil Elliot, Glenn Linsley, Roz Rapke, Eric Mudge, David Parker and Tim Danielson in running those pioneer workshops.

Secondly I would like to thank the loyal clients that have helped the workshop prosper. The message has travelled primarily through word of mouth. In particular I would like to thank AGL, ANZ Bank, Australia Communications and Media Authority, Australia Post, Bankwest, BHP Billiton, Bio-Rad, CSIRO, Data Agility, Ernst and Young, Infosys, INVESCO, KPMG, National Australia Bank, Oxygen, QSP, RACV and Maximas, SAP, Telstra, TelstraClear (NZ), UXC, VicTrack, Worley Parsons and WTFN.

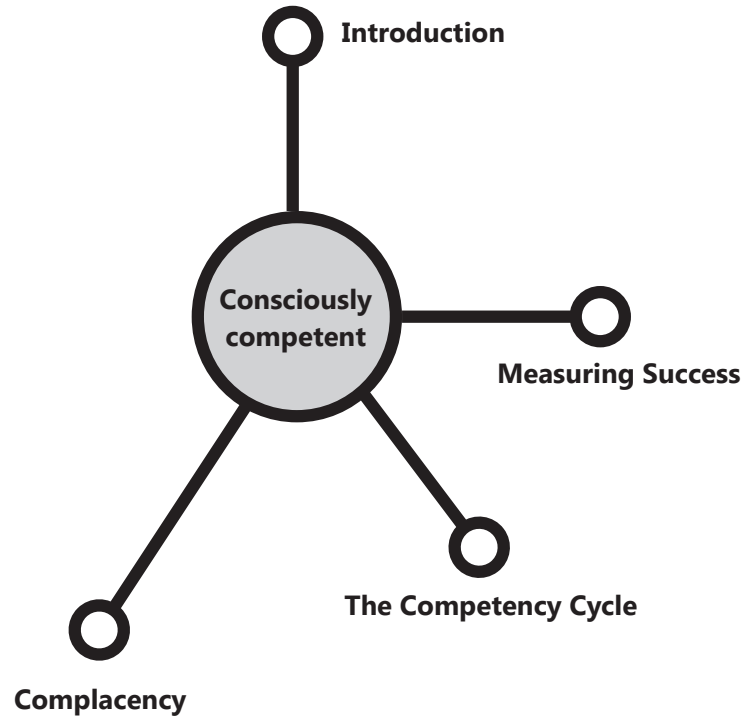
I also want to make mention of the Not for Profit organisations that we have donated workshop places to, including: Able Australia, Brotherhood of St. Lawrence, Canteen, Guide Dogs Victoria, Leukaemia Foundation, Planet Give, Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, The Salvation Army, The Smith Family, Turning Point, Reach, RDNS, Vakabauta, Wildlife Victoria and World Vision.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the participants themselves. The success of every workshop has a lot to do with the standard of facilitation, and the attitude, openness and willingness of participants. I have been overwhelmed by the cooperation and energy of so many of the workshop attendees. I trust they will be happy when they recognise ideas or examples they may have contributed through workshop discussions.



INTRODUCTION

Consciously competent



Introduction

Consciously competent

I would argue that the major difference between the most successful consultants and the rest is not their ability to do things well, but their consistency in doing things well.

The problem for many consultants is that they do not seem to have a repeatable process for the simple things. An appropriate analogy is playing golf. Most ordinary golfers hit one shot every round that they would like to be able to bottle and re-play over and over. That shot was the equal of most professional golfers, but the difference is the professionals can repeat it every time, not just once every 18 holes! Professional golfers go through a set routine for every shot; correct grip, stance, addressing the ball, swings etc. Their goal is consistency and perfection. There should be a lesson here, for those of us in business. What elements should be in our routine of thought and preparation? What will help us be more consistently successful in our outcomes?

Many of us seem to be under too much pressure. Deadlines, e-mail, meetings and reports weigh us down and rob us of adequate time for thinking and preparation. But hang on a minute, when you do things consistently well don't we save ourselves time? Isn't this a case of 'more haste less speed'? Maybe it isn't that we don't have time to do things right, but that we just don't take the time to think about what our priorities should be. E-mail, Voicemail, Blackberry and others, have all helped us become more reactive than ever. We can be in constant contact with whoever wants to delegate or dump their stuff on us! The only way to survive is to clear our tasks as quickly as possible. Surely this reactive, task focus, is part of the issue.

Task focussed behaviour has been ingrained in us through our technical training, whether we are an accountant, IT specialist, lawyer, auditor, architect or whatever. The focus of our training is on the tasks we have to do. After all isn't that what we get paid for? As contentious as it may seem, technical skills and a task orientation will not, by themselves, produce consistently successful outcomes. The good work we do needs to be deployed to a 'client' and I am sure it will not have escaped you that clients are not all the same. That may be inconvenient, but the motto: "let's stick with the tasks, they are much more predictable", wont fix this variability.

When we start to focus on our client's needs, what might have appeared a repetitive task, turns out not to be. This is because the clients are different. Each client has his or her own priorities and needs. This can dramatically change what we should deliver to them.

A proactive client focus rather than a reactive task focus will help us move from; 'Doing things right' to 'Doing the right things.'

Measuring success

Our success as business practitioners can be measured in a number of ways, but the client's perception is possibly the most important and enduring measurement. This perception tends to be based on both objective and subjective criteria.

Objective criteria include; conformance to budget, timeliness and quality. The subjective criteria are more about the overall experience. They do not always concur. I suspect we can all cite projects that were considered successful, even though not all the objectives were achieved. The client might have said, "It turned out to be more challenging than we expected, but we have made considerable progress". There may also be projects that were considered unsuccessful even though the criteria were all met. The client might have said, "They did what they said they would, but it wasn't what we really wanted!"

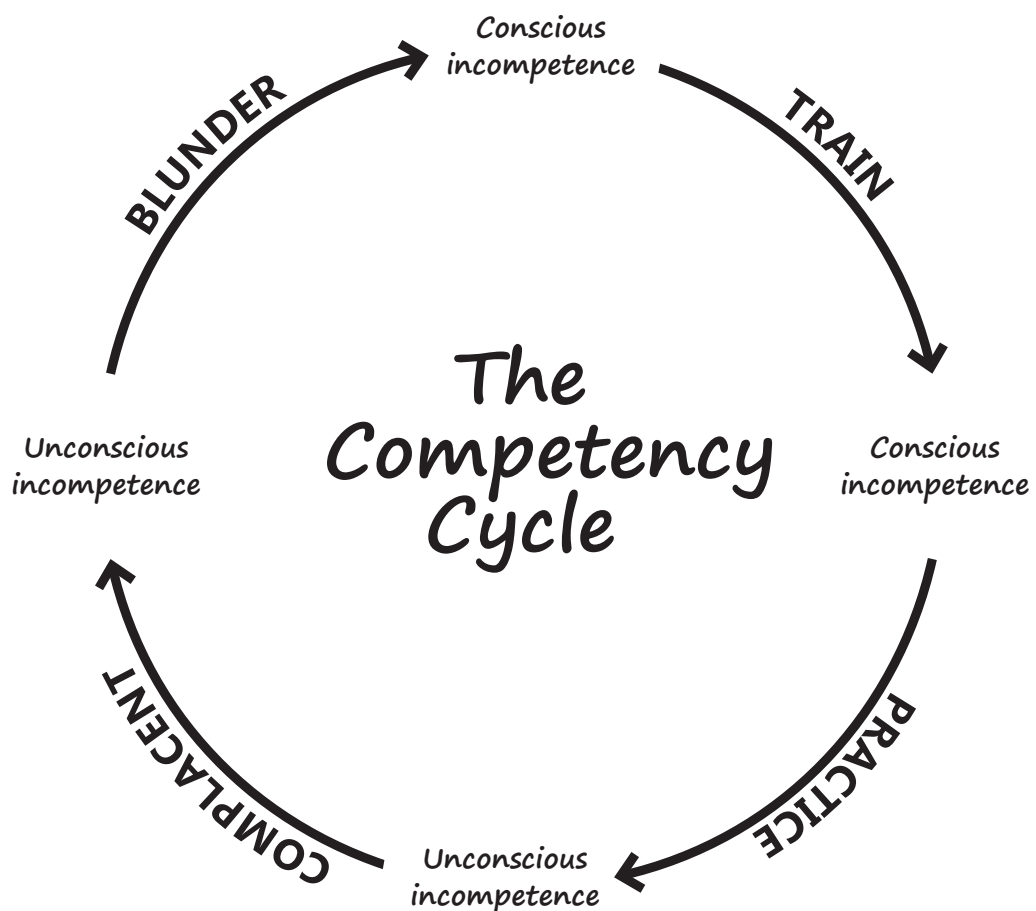
To be consistently successful, in people based environments, we need to be competent in 3 areas:

1. Subject Matter Expertise - For example: you will not be successful in an I.T. project without the appropriate skills in the team.
2. Process/Methodology - Repeatable processes that ensure consistency of result
3. Engagement Skills - Where the participants come together, there needs to be reasonable levels of cooperation, communication, respect, trust and goodwill.

All three are mandatory. An excess of one will not adequately compensate for a lacking in another. Many of us have experienced projects where, despite exceptional subject matter expertise and a sound approach, the end user feedback was under-whelming.

The Competency Cycle

The competency cycle is a simple instrument that describes how we gain skills and competencies over time. We lose them if we fail to use them and keep them fresh. When we decide to learn a new skill we are consciously incompetent, in other words, we know we can't do it. Driving a car is a good example for most of us. As learners we trained and became consciously competent. We could drive, but the concentration was significant. With practice it becomes second nature and we could do it automatically. This is what we call "Unconscious Competence". Most routine things in our life are done this way. Unconscious competence is a good place to be, if we are truly competent. The danger is that complacency creeps in. Without good, behavioural feedback, we move around the curve toward the incompetent zone. The problem here is, that by definition, we are not thinking about what we are doing. We may believe we are operating competently, while in reality, we may not be. Every now and then it is worth setting aside some time to get back to Conscious Competence, to think about what we are doing, and whether there may be better ways. At least then we know we are Competent.

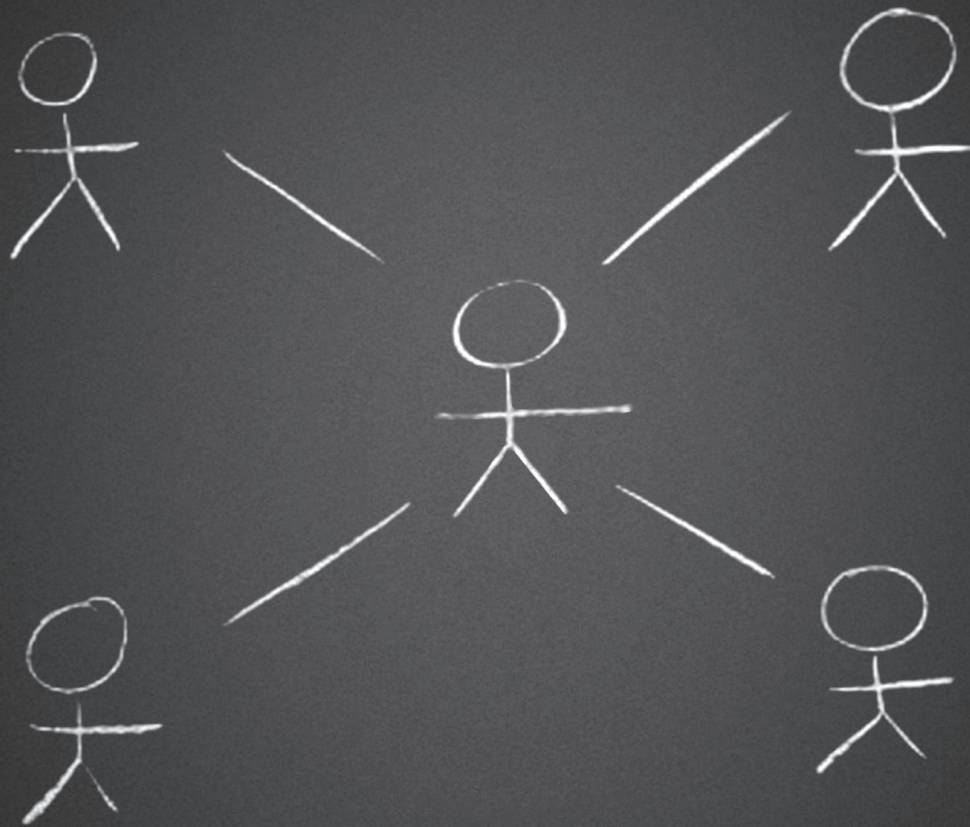


Think!

We are not talking about analysis paralysis. To stop and think, if only for a few seconds, might be the difference between the auto-reaction (unconscious competence) and a considered response. It might be the difference between:

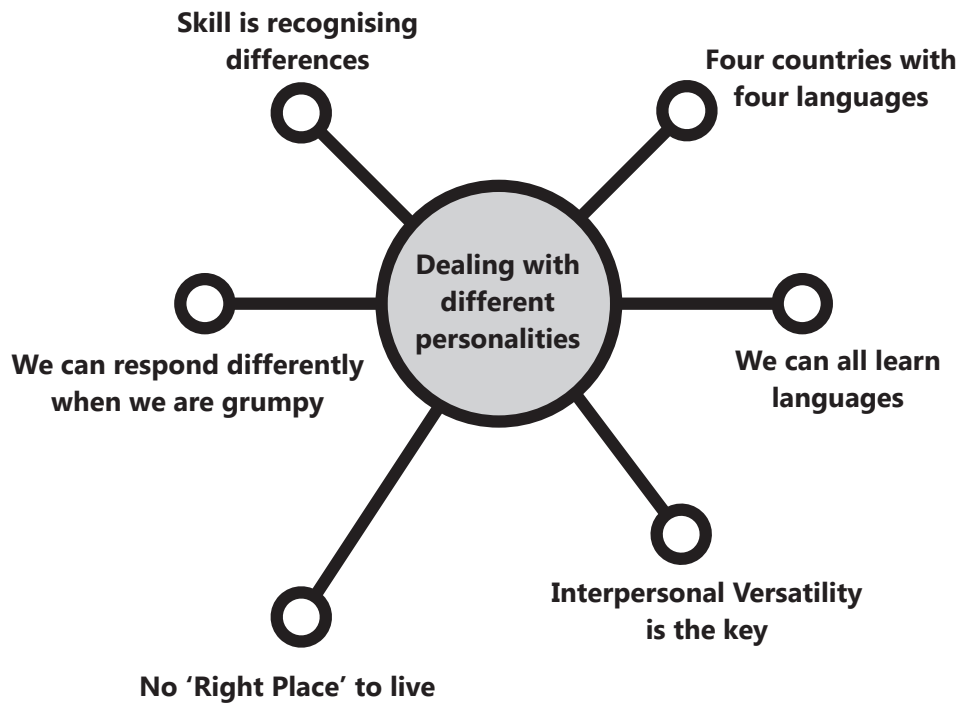
Conscious competence	Or
Having a face to face meeting that seals the agreement required for a successful project,	Sending an e-mail that is misinterpreted and starts an e-mail war;
Using influence and winning the buy-in of staff	Using authority and causing resentment
Thinking through the objectives prior to a meeting. Considering potential objections and how they might be handled, resulting in a good meeting and a major step forward,	Going into the meeting under-prepared, and setting back the project (and your own credibility) by several weeks
Using authority to get a rapid and obvious resolution to an urgent issue,	Being seen as indecisive by canvassing multiple viewpoints on an issue that demands action now!
Declining a meeting invitation because there was no obvious point in you attending, and using that time to work on an important KPI,	Attending yet another boring and fruitless meeting.
Building valuable long term engagement with a key client,	Focusing on the transactional issues that are urgent now, but failing to cement the longer term relationship.

Now before you say to yourself "I do most of those things anyway", remember that we all do, when we consciously think about it. But we can all do that thinking more consistently. Replicate more frequently the good things we do and drive out the lapses that lead to sub-optimal outcomes. In other words Conscious Competence, not Unconscious Chance. Practice makes perfect - but only if its good practice! I have spent so many hours practicing my rotten golf swing that it is now a huge challenge to drive out the ugly bits. The most successful managers and practitioners practice thinking these issues through, so that they form good habits.



CHAPTER ONE

*Dealing with Different
Personalities*



Chapter One

Dealing with Different Personalities

You may have noticed that not everybody is the same. Some people are interested in football, while others turn off as soon as the subject comes up. A joke that wins raucous laughter in one group may crash and burn in another group. Some of our clients and stakeholders are a dream to deal with whilst others, despite our best efforts, are more like a nightmare. Maybe there is something wrong with them! It surely couldn't be our fault? Generally it is not a case of right or wrong, but more a case of being different.

Around 400 B.C. Hippocrates noticed that, while people were different, many of them shared common characteristics. He divided the world into four prominent groups based on characteristics or clusters of behaviour, with each group having a particular way of expressing themselves, or of speaking their own "language". Since that time many prominent behaviourists have noticed something very similar. It would appear that each of us like to communicate predominantly in one of these "languages". This doesn't mean we don't have access to the other "languages" - we just have a preference.

This preferred "language" can often explain why, when we meet some people for the first time, we just seem to "click". There are others however, where we seem to almost go backwards. The third group lies somewhere in the middle. It is quite common to find that many of our close friends often share our preferred "language". It can also be true of our favourite customers or clients.

As we have discussed earlier in this book, strong working relationships enable us to be more efficient and more effective in our lives. When it comes to building rapport, common personality traits can put us "streets ahead" when dealing with people. Where we don't enjoy this advantage, we tend to speak our own "language" and expect to get by. This can mean living with the pain of a strained relationship. Experience would indicate that when we make the effort to adjust to the style of others, we build strong engagement.

Seven Billion Personality Styles in Four Quadrants

There are around 7 billion people on this planet, each with a personality as unique as their fingerprints. To study and adjust to 7 billion different potential options is clearly too complex and time consuming to be useful. We should also bear in mind that this knowledge, of the fundamental differences between people, may be extremely useful and yet it doesn't answer every question. We also have to be aware of the cultural influences that overlay these preferences.

Fortunately it is not necessary to have a Ph.D. in human behaviour to succeed in this area. Instead we can adopt a simple Four Quadrant model where we can become familiar with the "language" of each of the quadrant's.

Behavioural Preferences Not Competencies

It is important to stress that these quadrants are based on behavioural preferences and not on competencies. These preferences are neither good nor bad. Some people are naturally more detail-minded whilst others "see" things in the "bigger picture". Neither "view", nor approach, is right or wrong. Both approaches add value and, whilst each might be better suited to different roles, an ability to communicate with each other, will result in greatly improve productivity.

The research is clear on one aspect of the Quadrants: success in life is not about which Quadrant you start from. Success in life, is about how adaptable you are with others and how many languages you can speak. Because of its simplicity, the Four Quadrant model can be a very effective tool. As long as we focus on the observable behaviour, and not the conclusions we might draw, we will be able to work constructively with all the people we come into contact with.

One obvious conclusion from all of this is that we need to be able to "speak" all Four Quadrant "languages". We also need to consciously, and competently, choose which "language" to speak in front of different audiences.

Four Different Countries

We may appear to speak the same "language" and yet the subtle differences are important. Let's divide mankind up geographically, according to their personalities. The people who live in the "North" will therefore share some common characteristics, as will the people in the "South". Looking at our population from a different perspective, we can see that the people in the "Western" hemispheres seem to understand each other, as do the people in the "East".

The "North"

Observing the people who live in the North, we will see that they like to take action. They are interested in leading and getting things done. The conversations tend to be quicker, and it is quite common for them to interrupt each other. The Northerners are usually higher risk takers than their Southern colleagues. Northerners tend to be more impatient, wanting to know the time, and not where the watch was made. Northerners are more likely to sacrifice quality to ensure deadlines are achieved.

The "South"

The Southerners, on the other hand, want to understand what's going on. They want to have enough information to make fully informed decisions. The process of learning and understanding is as important as the outcome. Southerners are comfortable asking questions and are intent on hearing the answer. They, therefore, tend not to interrupt. If they do, they will generally apologise. They tend to be risk assessing, trying to ensure that they don't make mistakes. Southerners are more likely to sacrifice the deadline in the name of a quality solution.

The "West"

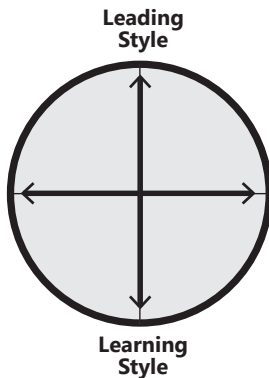
Looking at the population inhabiting the Western hemisphere we will see that they are predominantly task-focussed individuals. They like to work out problems in a logical fashion. Westerners tend to separate "work from "home". They are happy to socialise after they have dealt with the business issues, but not generally before. Westerners endeavour to avoid displaying emotion, although they are often as caring and concerned as any other individual. They will look to give practical help when people are in need. Westerners are more likely to sacrifice the individual's feelings in order to achieve the task.

The "East"

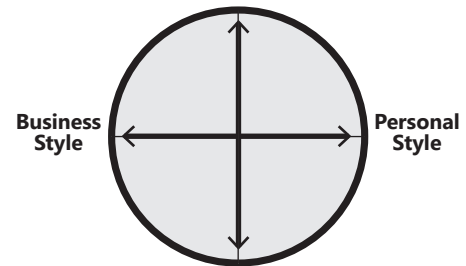
Easterners are concerned with the individual and will show this right from a first meeting. Building positive relationships is an important part of their life. Easterners tend to be naturally empathetic. Easterners are comfortable talking about how they "feel". They don't have to be told that somebody is unhappy, as they are able to sense it. Easterners don't distinguish between home and work to the degree that their Western colleagues do. They often leverage the networks of people they have established. Easterners are more likely to sacrifice the "task" to maintain good relationships.

The “Quadrants”

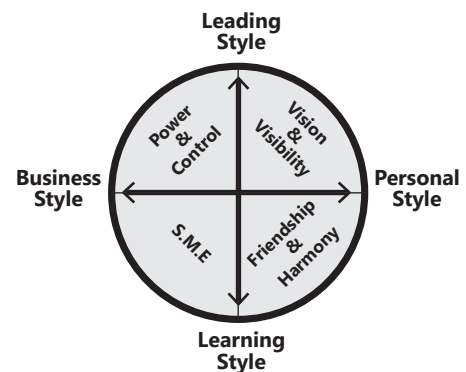
When we establish that somebody is either from:
the North or South,



or from the East or West,



we are able to establish which country or “quadrant” they belong to, as each quadrant has a specific theme to it. The end result is four quadrants of behavioural preference. We have given them titles that refer to an unquenchable thirst that is often found within these groups.



Power & Control

Manner: Serious, decisive, lets one know what is wanted.

Behaviour: Formal posture. Direct approach. Power handshake.

Visual clues: Tends to lean forward to make a point. Intense eyes. Expressions are obvious, gestures restrained. Power dressed.

Verbal clues: Quick, clear, or fast paced. Emphasises ideas by tone change. Makes task focussed statements more often than asks questions.

Attributes: Decisive, efficient, concise, takes charge, results focused.

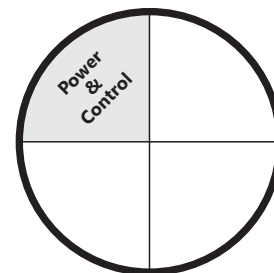
Important to them: Time & timeliness. Getting to the point early. Timely, succinct feedback. Efficiency. What solution will be provided.

Irritating to them: Fuzzy objectives; excuses; going over past history. Inflexibility.

Irritating about them: Can be insensitive and pushy.

Interrupts and talks over others. Can be too impatient.

Can switch off and stop listening to others when it doesn't interest them.



Vision & Visibility

Manner: Animated, uses facial expressions.

Behaviour: Energetic. Enthusiastic. Open or eager.

Visual clues: Friendly gaze/eye contact. Hand gestures, palms up, open.

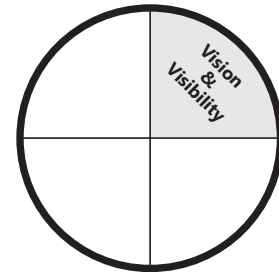
Verbal clues: Variation in voice. Fast paced and leads by "telling". Shares personal feelings. Tells stories, makes small talk. Likes to tell jokes. Limited expressions of facts.

Attributes: Open, enthusiastic, energetic, futuristic, generates excitement.

Important to them: Other people. To receive visibility for the value they bring. To be admired.

Irritating to them: Lack of affirmation from others. Avoidance of eye-contact. Getting less than 50% - 70% of the conversation.

Irritating about them: Can talk too much. Like to be the centre of attention. Can appear superficial. Shoots from the hip. Easily distracted. Often not punctual (their time seems more important than your time).



Subject Matter Expert

Manner: Reserved, withheld, slower to respond.

Behaviour: Actions controlled or careful. Few gestures. Self-contained, Discusses everything logically.

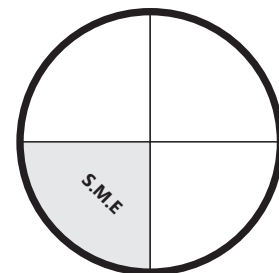
Visual clues: Eyes serious. Few gestures. Functional appearance.

Verbal clues: Proper and slower rate of speech. Tends to look for protagonist to lead and responds with questions. Wants facts and details. Shares information about task. Tends not to display personal feelings, tell stories, or engage in small talk.

Attributes: Practical, orderly, thorough, maintains standards. **Important to them:** Thoroughness and accuracy. Evaluating all options. Being right. How problem will be solved.

Irritating to them: Lack of facts and preparation. Being wrong. Sudden changes in the planned approach or direction.

Irritating about them: Delving into too much detail. Limited eye-contact. Slow pace of dialogue. Length of pauses before responding. Proving they're right.



Friendship & Harmony

Manner: Expressions and posture are quiet and non-intrusive.

Behaviour: Friendly. Seldom raises voice to emphasise ideas. Responds rather than leads.

Visual clues: Tends not to lean forwards when in conversation. Maintains good and friendly or concerned eye contact.

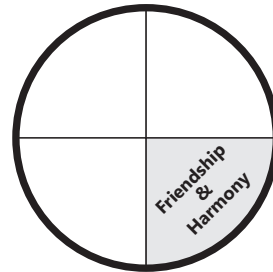
Verbal clues: Quiet, deliberate, studied, slower in speech and response. Asks questions more often than making statements. Does not interrupt or talk over others.

Attributes: Patient, supportive, listener, cooperates, team-worker.

Important to them: Time to establish the relationship. Finding commonality. Obtaining consensus. Why solution is best for the group.

Irritating to them: Being interrupted and talked over. Not given sufficient pause to respond. Lack of manners and courtesy from others

Irritating about them: Can be too compliant. Not driven enough. Not sufficiently task focussed. Not sufficiently time focussed.

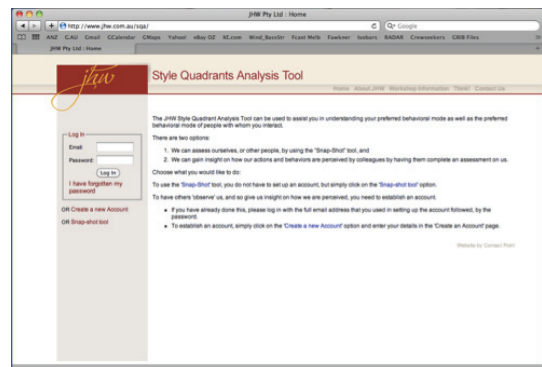


JHW Style Quadrant Tool

If you wish to take a more methodic approach, you can use the JHW Style Quadrant Analysis at <http://www.jhw.com.au/sqa/>

The "Snap-shot tool" on the web-page allows you to select and click words that best describe a person whom you wish to understand. The tool will then display a graph of the Style Preferences you have described. For privacy and security reasons no data is stored in the system, so to keep the results you will need to take a screen print of the information that you wish to keep.

The system allows you to observe yourself, if you wish, but we have found that most people are not the best observers of their own behaviour (we tend to be in danger of believing our own propaganda!) A better option is to get other people to observe you. This is far better done anonymously, so rather than use the snap-shot tool you may wish to use the system's more sophisticated tool that requires you to set up an account from which you can invite multiple observers to submit their view of you. The tool will compile these and provide you with a composite report, preserving both the anonymity of the observers individual comments, and protecting your profile from unauthorised access. Follow the instructions on the web pages to do this assessment. The results will be stored on the account that you create and will allow you to repeat the exercise with different groups of observers (eg. business associates, social acquaintances, clients, peers, subordinates etc).

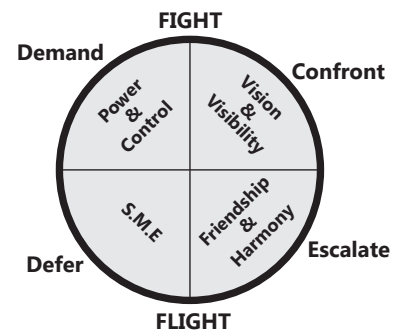


Dealing with Different Styles When they get Grumpy

How people respond to stress is a fairly strong indicator of which quadrant they prefer. We all tend to respond in a predictable fashion, as we get angrier.

If we are from the **North**, our first response tends to be down the "Fight" path. We're comfortable telling people what we think or how we feel about the situation. Our interest is in fixing whatever is broken and moving forward. We are not as interested in the history surrounding the situation.

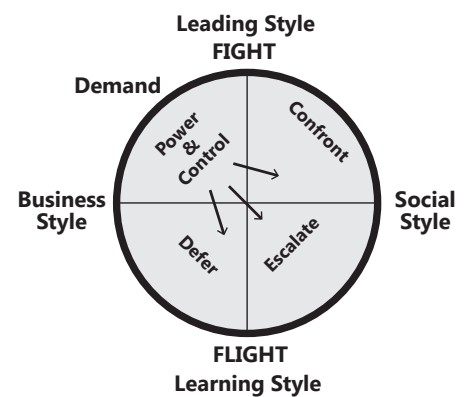
If we're from the **South**, our first response tends to be down the "Flight" path. We tend only to be comfortable when we have all the information at hand. As a result we will often avoid discussing the issue initially. We are just as interested in what can be learned from the mistake or situation, as the solution we eventually arrive at.



Power & Control

The normal first line response from this quadrant is to increase the focus on completing the task. This will normally be interpreted as a demand. While some listeners may interpret the message as aggressive, it is unlikely to be personal in nature. The second line response will be along the North/South continuum. The subject will be avoided in the hope that something will happen.

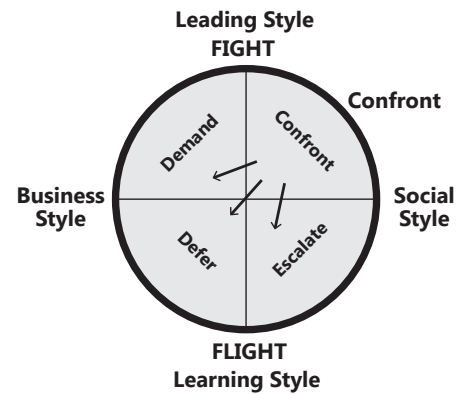
The third line response will be along the West/East continuum. The subject will be confronted in a more personal manner. Blame will often be assigned. The fourth line response will be across the diagonal. Control for the situation will be handed to somebody else. When a Power and Control person gives over their power, it is a strong indication of high stress.



Vision & Visibility

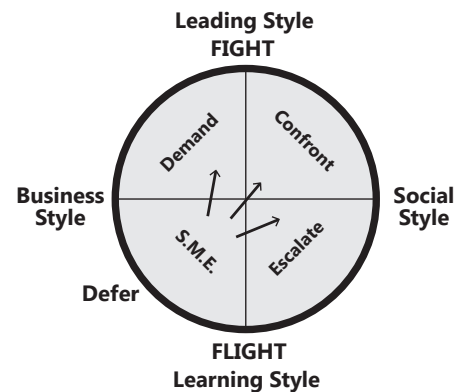
The normal first line response from this quadrant is to increase the focus on individuals involved in the task. This will normally be interpreted as confrontation. While some listeners may interpret the message as irrational, it is likely to be personal in nature. The second line response will be along the North/South continuum. Control for the situation may well be handed to somebody else. Alternatively blame will be attributed somewhere else to avoid direct prolonged discussion.

The third line response will be along the West/East continuum. The focus will be on completing the task. This will normally be interpreted as a demand. The fourth line response will be across the diagonal. The subject will be avoided in the hope that something will happen. When a Vision and Visibility person stops communicating with you, it is a strong indication of high stress



Subject Matter Expert

The normal first line response from this quadrant is to avoid the topic in the hope that something will happen. This will normally be interpreted as vagueness or unwillingness to be involved. The second line response will be along the North/South continuum. The focus will be on completing the task. This will normally be interpreted as a demand. The third line response will be along the West/East continuum. Control for the situation will be handed to somebody else. The fourth line response will be across the diagonal. The subject will be confronted in a more personal manner. Blame will often be assigned. When a Subject Matter Expert appears to be angry and irrational, it is a strong indication of high stress.

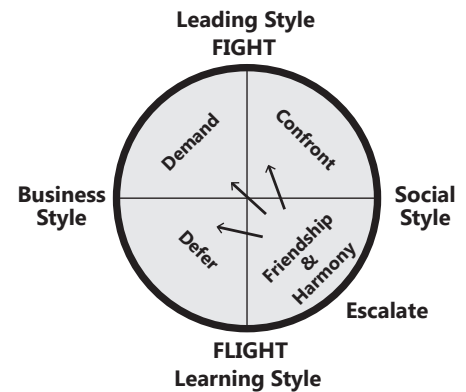


Friendship & Harmony

The normal first line response from this quadrant is to hand control for the situation to somebody else. Alternatively, blame will be attributed somewhere else to avoid direct confrontation. This will normally be interpreted as being escalation. Friendship and Harmony individuals are very interested in maintaining their relationships.

The second line response will be along the North/South continuum. The subject will be confronted in a more personal manner. Blame will often be assigned. The third line response will be along the West/East continuum. The subject will be avoided in the hope that something will happen.

The fourth line response will be across the diagonal. The focus will be on completing the task. This will normally be interpreted as a demand. When a Friendship and Harmony individual communicates impersonally, it is a strong indication of high stress.



Conclusion

Individuals who live in the Eastern quadrants intuitively understand the difference between the quadrants. Those who live in the Western quadrants can often be dismissive of the need for rapport building. The research is quite clear however. People who make an effort to speak to other people, in the appropriate "language", are more successful than those who don't. So it doesn't matter which quadrant you belong to as long as you learn to speak a little of the other three "languages".

There are very few people in the workplace who have no positive business relationships. It is possible for all of us to engage meaningfully with all the people we encounter in life. We have the chance to make every client our supporter and friend. The numbers are fairly compelling. If we only speak our "language", we will productively engage 25% of the possible audience. If we identify when people are different to us, and make the effort to speak their "language", we can engage with 100%.



CHAPTER TWO

*The Professional
Consultant*