

Winning Ways with Working Styles

This article celebrates the diversity of the different ways that people approach work. This is especially useful these days with the increased dependence on teamwork in the 21st Century work place. Project management has taken over from traditional hierarchical management now workers are simultaneously members of a variety of different teams. Rapid team building in this climate becomes a necessity.

One of the key factors of any team building sees team members playing to each other's strengths. To do this they need to know what those strengths are and at the same time value difference colleagues bring to working together. One way to understand these differences is to understand Working Styles (1).

In my work with teams I work with three aspects of Working Styles. These are as follows: -

1. What preferences they have or Working Styles they use
2. How this matches the Assessing Cube
3. How team members can use appropriate Channels of Communicate for effective transactions

This paper follows the same process and order of events.

WORKING STYLES

When working with teams I begin by exploring Working Styles using a questionnaire. Completing this can give individuals an indication of their possible Working Styles. The questionnaire will be available to workshop participants.

The concept of Working Styles was developed by Julie Hay (1) from the work of Taibi Kahler (4) on Psychological Drivers. Working Styles are how these Drivers are manifested in our work.

Each Working Style has its strengths, where they are helpful in the work place. However, strengths when over-played have the habit of becoming weaknesses. Perhaps it is one of the great paradoxes of life that our strengths can also be our weaknesses. This would be likened to the eastern concept of Yin and Yang.

Typically we use one or two Working Styles predominantly, although people may also recognise aspects of all of them in their work.

There are five Working Styles. These are: -

- Please Others
- Be Perfect
- Try Hard
- Be Strong
- Hurry Up

Description of these can be found in Appendix 1

THE ASSESSING CUBE

The Assessing Cube was devised by Julie Hay (2) and based on the Process Communication Model of Taibi Kahler (4).

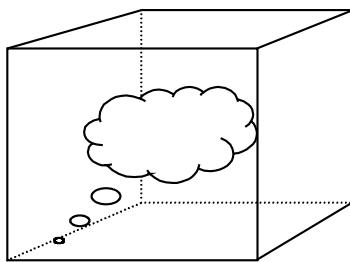


Figure 1 A cloud representing a range of personality

First imagine a cube (figure 1); further imagine that within this cube there are held all the possible manifestations and permutations of personality, represented by the ways that people think, feel and act. And consider that each person has at any one time a range of personality within which they function. This

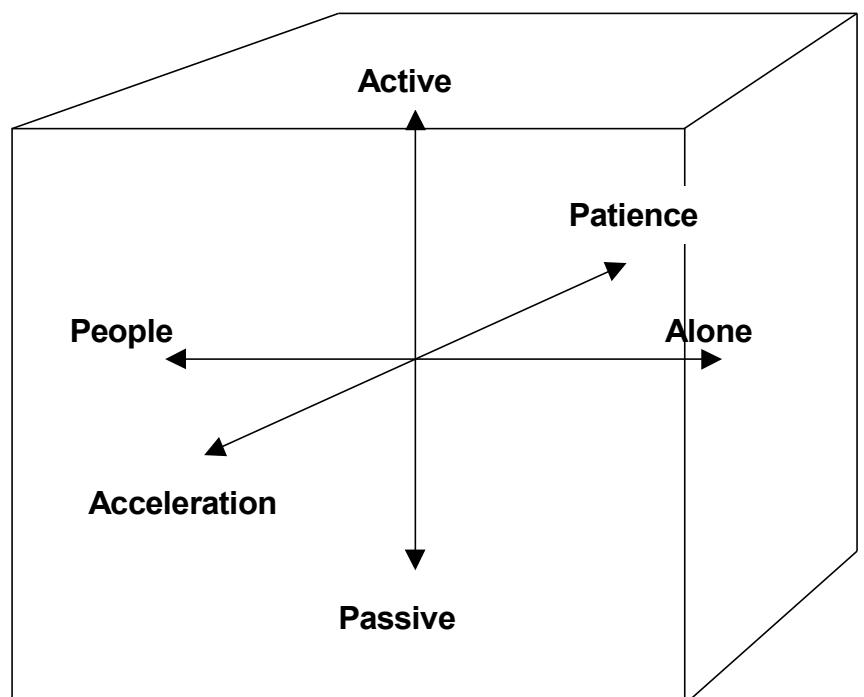


Figure 2. The Assessing Cube

could resemble a cloud of possibility.

Three axes define the position of this cloud. These axes run from each of the six faces. Further suppose that these axes are a continuum between two extremes of behaviour.

Julie Hay describes these continuums as follows:

- Active – Passive
- People - Alone
- Acceleration - Patience

How these fit into the cube can be seen in figure 2.

The axes are defined as follows: -

- **ACTIVE:** The extent to which people invest energy to set their own goals and are self motivated to complete tasks. They are the people that pull or push others. Someone who greets you or initiates conversation is likely to be toward the Active end.
- **PASSIVE:** The degree to which people follow goals and objectives set by others. Waiting for things to happen and reacting to situations. Being pulled and following others.
- **PEOPLE:** Gravitating towards people and preferring to work with people, particularly groups.
- **ALONE:** preferring to work alone or with just one other person.
- **ACCELERATION:** The degree to how quickly things are done. At work this would mean making quick decisions and working at a fast pace.
- **PATIENCE:** This involves people wanting to take a run up to things, it would involve working in a measured, cautious and slow way.

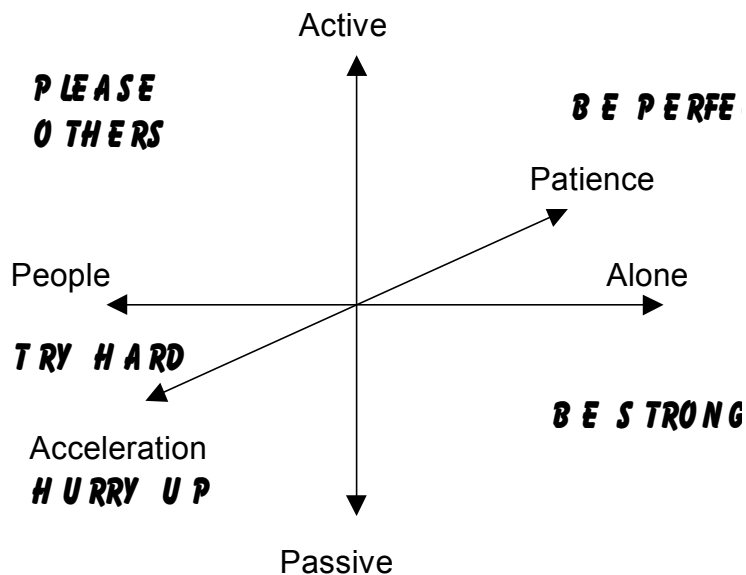


Figure 3. The Assessing Cube with Working Styles Mapped on

A note that I would wish to stress throughout this paper is that there are no right or wrong working styles. I am aware, for instance, that some of the words above may have connotations that place value on them. The point I wish to make clear is that all working styles have their strengths.

Everyone will be at different places on each of the three continuums. This defines the area of the cloud of possible behaviours described earlier. It follows that everyone has a combination of Working Styles. Working Styles can be mapped on to the cube as in figure 3 and described below.

PLEASE OTHERS

This is a combination of the Active/People quadrant. It follows that people in this quadrant will set their own goals and will prefer to work with groups of people. They have an overall approach to others, which can be described as nurturing. They will want to know how other people are feeling about work and life in general. They will want to look after others. "How do you feel about this?" is a phrase associated with this quadrant.

A descriptor for the management style I have coined for people in this quadrant is "Caring Rescuer". They are naturally caring and in this can overdo their caring by working harder than the person they are caring about.

TRY HARD

This is a combination of the People/Passive quadrant, so people here enjoy working as groups and with others but are typically followers, possibly preferring a 'Champion' for their projects, rather than take a leadership role themselves. They are reactive by nature preferring to start by doing things. "Let's get excited" is the phrase that typifies people in this quadrant.

The management style for this group I call "Creative Rebel". They have ideas, particularly when excited. Overdoing their own creativity may lead them to either agree with something and then do the opposite or actively kick against rules, the establishment or organisation.

BE PERFECT

This combination of the Active/Alone quadrant: people here tend to set their own goals and have a tendency to avoid working in groups. They would much prefer to work alone or with one other person. Their focus at work will be much more on the business side of their work than the Please Others or Try Hard working styles. Their approach to others is one of thinking and logic.

The management style for this quadrant I label "Thinking Computer". Thinking because they are logical and computer because sometimes they do not appear to consider themselves or others. They have, for instance, a tendency towards being "workaholic" (Kahler) where they push themselves at work. They would be more prone to taking work home.

BE STRONG

This combination of Alone and Passive suggests that people would rather work alone and be given something to do or tell others to do something. People in this quadrant prefer to give or to receive orders.

Managers in this quadrant could be called "Directing Adapter". They are either able to direct clearly or they fit in perhaps too well. Sometimes becoming inactive unless clear about what needs doing.

HURRY UP

The acceleration/patience axis runs from the front of the cube to the back and as such Hurry Up can accompany any of the other Working Styles. What ever they do the do

quicker with Hurry Up. In the flattened model Hurry Up is deliberately placed in the Try Hard quadrant as people with a Hurry Up working style are more likely to also be Try Hard.

I do not associate a management style to this however the following quote seems to sum up this approach to work quite well; “If everything is under control, you are not going fast enough” (Mario Andretti – F1 racing driver).

CHANNELS AND DOORS OF COMMUNICATION

Kahler identified five channels of communication which are complimentary transactions leading to effective communication. They are: -

- Emotive
- Nurturative
- Informative
- Directive
- Interventive

Paul Ware identified three modes of communication which he termed ‘Doors to Therapy’ (5). Since this paper is for understanding organisational behaviour these are termed ‘doors to communication’. These fall into three categories. These are:

- 1 Open Door. This is the mode of communication that people use to make contact with others
- 2 Target Door. This is the mode of communication that they respond to well and leads to deeper and more meaningful contact.
- 3 Trapdoor. This mode of communication has the tendency to close people down as it indicates areas for their personal development.

These types or methods of communication fall into three broad areas. They are FEELINGS, THINKING, and BEHAVIOUR. The Channels of Communication and the open, target and trap doors for each of the Working Styles and the associated transactions are displayed in figure 4 and described in text as follows:

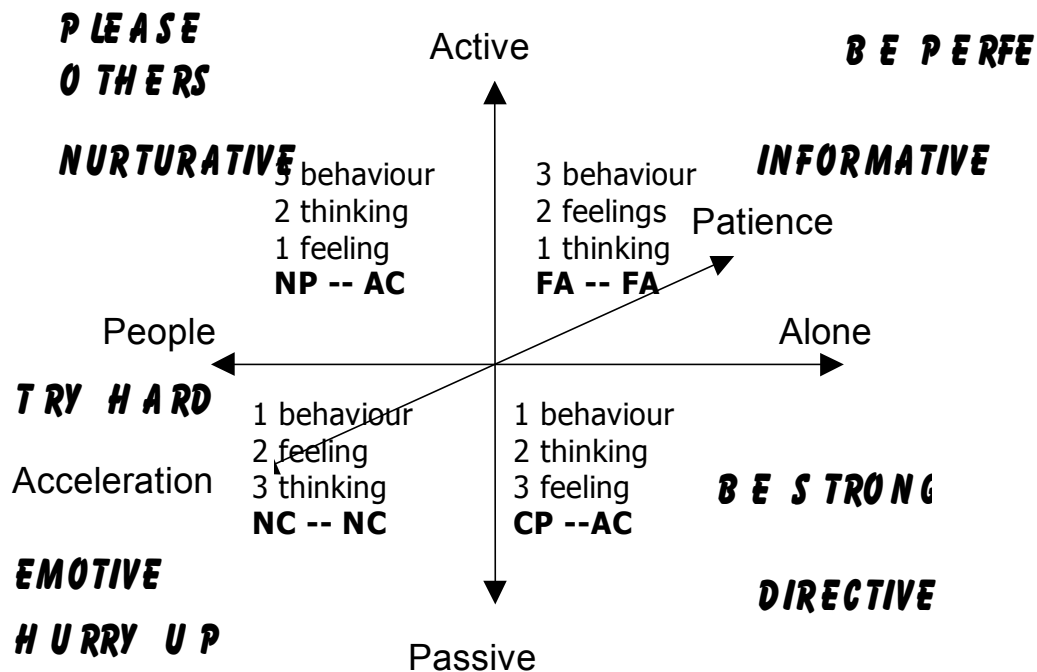


Figure 4. The Assessing Cube with Working Styles doors and channels of communication mapped on

BE PERFECT

Their preferred channel of communication is *Informative* and typical transaction are Functional Adult to Functional Adult (1). The **open door** for someone with a Be Perfect Working Style is 'thinking', responding to being asked questions like "What do you think about ...?" Questions that demand an exchange of information and their clear use of logic and precision.

The **target door** is 'feeling'. Having established rapport with someone with a Be Perfect working style, they respond well to questions about their 'feelings'. This may be about how they feel now, in the past, about their work, and so on.

Their **trapdoor** is to talk about their 'behaviour'. They are already doing all they can to be perfect. Asking them why they did something or telling them to do something will likely have them reaching for their diary to make another appointment or ordering you from their office.

BE STRONG

The preferred channel of communication of someone with a Be Strong working style is *Directive*. Typically their transactions are Controlling Parent to Adapted Child. They like to either give or receive orders. Their **open door** is 'behaviour' although the nature of this behaviour is either inaction or action. They respond well to being told what to do, telling people what to do, or being asked what they have done.

The **target door** for someone with a Be Strong working style is thinking, engaging their ability to rationalise and say what they think in a particular situation will increase your rapport with them.

The **trapdoor** here is to talk about feelings. People with a Be Strong working style have deep feelings and yet find it hard to express them or talk about them. Doing so is tantamount to a weakness that those with this working style do all to hide. They are likely to look at you in a mystified way, perhaps saying "What's that got to do with anything".

TRY HARD

People with a Try Hard working style use the *Emotive* Channel of Communication typified by Natural Child to Natural Child transactions. They like nothing more than to get excited about something, be this work or hobbies or new ideas. Their **open door** is 'behaviour' with a tendency to reaction. Ask them what they did at the weekend or what they are currently working on and you have their immediate attention.

Their **target door** is 'feelings'. Once in rapport with them, you can ask them what they feel about what they have done or are planning to do, and so on. The **trapdoor** for people with a Try Hard working style is 'thinking'. Ask them what they think and you are likely to

be met with a strained expression as if they were thinking very hard; however, the chances are they are thinking of a way to change the subject. They may engage in tricky thinking, which is where the rebellious nature of this style shows itself.

PLEASE OTHERS

The channel of communication here is *Nurturative* and the transactions are Nurturing Parent to Adapted Child. People with a Please Others working style want to nurture and look after people. The **open door** for them is 'feelings'. Ask them how they feel about their work and the people they work with and they will open up to you and talk warmly with emotion and genuine concern.

The **target door** for people with a Please Others working style is 'thinking'. They will readily tell you what their thoughts are once you have engaged them.

The **trapdoor** here is Behaviour. They are already doing all they can to please you. People with a Please Others working style resist being told what to do and they resist being asked what they have done or are doing.

PERSONALITY CLASHES

There is some evidence to suggest that what people often describe as "personality clash" can also be described as people having different working styles. From the descriptions above you could see that people with diagonally opposing working styles on the Assessing Cube are likely to experience conflict. For instance, the Try Hard who is constantly starting new projects by launching into action with a group is likely to clash with the Be Perfect who will typically want to plan meticulously before committing to action and to complete something on their own without interference. The irony is however, that understanding people with a different working style and working together can increase productivity considerably. This can be achieved through understanding and also through knowing the preferred channel of communication that each working style has.

LOOKING, LISTENING AND FEELING FOR CLUES

Few people have a pure working style so the above channels and doors of communication can only be considered broad descriptions of how people may prefer to respond. The clues however are always there as to which channel people are using. People may, for

instance, if asked how they feel, respond by saying, "Well, I think". Likewise in response to the question "What do you think?", they may respond "Well, I feel". This kind of response gives you an indication of what channel of communication to use and if you meet resistance then change the channel until you are "tuned in" to one another.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

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4. Taibi Kahler, Managing with the Process Communication Model. Human Development Associates, 1980
5. Paul Ware, Personality Adaptations (Doors to Therapy), Transactional Analysis Journal, Volume 13, No 1, 1983

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Appendix 1

Descriptions of Working Styles

(Produced in the fonts that appear most apt for the style)

BE PERFECT (Times New Roman)

If you have a Be Perfect Working Style you seek perfection in everything you do. You do not like to make errors and think that things should be 'right first time'.

You may be known for your reliable and accurate work, and with this reputation people may ask you to do work that requires attention to detail. If people know your strengths well they may ask you to proof read or check work for them.

Your written work is laid out well. It will be spaced correctly without spelling mistakes and with the precisely appropriate words used throughout the piece of writing.

It is likely that you are well organised and projects that you manage run smoothly and to plan.

People may ask you for your thoughts, as you are likely to be known for the measured way in which you think and consider things.

Your attention to detail and to getting things right takes time. And in seeking perfection you like to concentrate on one or two pieces of work at a time. Others may become frustrated by what they regard as slow working or low productivity. You, on the other hand, know that no one works harder than you do.

It is likely that you would not wish to let anyone see sub-standard or unfinished work. This means that you are unlikely to ask other people what they think of your drafts, or ask them to comment on ideas you have until you have thoroughly thought them through and can present them properly. In doing this you miss the opportunity to get other people's thoughts and perspectives.

If you are a manager you may not always delegate work to others. This is because you know that at least you will do it in the 'right' way. This could mean you take on too much work ending up working long hours.

BE STRONG (Albertus Medium)

If you are predominantly Be Strong, then you will be calm under pressure. You are energised when you have to cope with a crisis. This means that you are good at dealing with stressful situations.

You are likely to respond well in crisis situations. When other people are panicking you remain calm and collected. You would be able to clearly tell people what to do.

You are consistent in your work and you may be happy to continue to do the same tasks over a long period of time. Even unpleasant tasks do not put you off, as you will work steadily through these.

If you manage staff you will possibly be known as a manager who is firm and controlling. You will give honest feedback and tell people how it is and how they should be.

If your Working Style is Be Strong, then you may prefer to have a clear direction given to you. You like to know what is expected of you. As a manager you, in turn, are likely to be good at giving clear directions, pointing out how work should be done and when it should be done by.

It may be that you enjoy working on your own or with one other person rather than working with a group of people.

Your major strength will be coping under pressure. This means that your major weakness may be not admitting that you cannot cope. Not coping would be seen as a weakness. The danger here is that you become overloaded with work. Some people with a Be Strong Working Style hide their work. They like to have a clear and tidy desk; this gives the impression of coping. Their drawers however are full of unfinished work.

It is because you are so calm that other people could see you as unemotional. Many people with a Be Strong Working Style do not readily show their feelings. This means that some people find it hard to get to know you really well. It may be that you tell jokes and can be sociable but this could just be a front that avoids showing how you really feel.

TRY HARD (Comic Sans)

If Try Hard is your Working Style, then it is likely that you put a lot of effort into what you do. You are likely to be enthusiastic about all sorts of things at work. You are involved in lots of different projects and pieces of work.

You are particularly enthusiastic when you have something different to do like a new piece of work. You quickly see the exciting implications of this work.

It is likely that you enjoy 'thinking aloud' and can do this best when working with a group of people.

You may be known for your high level of motivation and for your tendency to volunteer for new pieces of work.

If people know your strengths well they will ask you for your views on a project or piece of work. This is because you are able to see a whole range of ramifications, often seeing things that other people have overlooked. You are likely to see the big picture rather than be immersed in detail.

One problem you may encounter is that some projects and pieces of work you are involved in do not get finished on time. Perhaps something more exciting has come up for you to do. It may also be that as you work through something, you discover different ramifications. Sometimes this is useful, but at other times straightforward tasks become complicated through a variety of perspectives and ideas.

If you are a manager, staff may feel it is hard to keep up with you and all your new projects and new ideas which you are likely to discuss with them.

HURRY UP (Courier New)

If you have a Hurry Up Working Style then you are likely to get work done quickly. You will work at a fast rate and you are particularly energised when you have a short deadline. You feel good if you do things quickly. You may like to use time saving techniques like 'duelling', where you can do two things, or even more, at the same time.

Other people are likely to respect you for the speed at which you work, and it may be that you are given extra work to do because of this.

You may feel that other people take far too long doing simple tasks or discussing things in meetings. This may irritate you. Sometimes your irritation may become apparent to others, as you appear impatient.

It may be that because you finish things quickly, you end up with spare time and sometimes this spare time means that jobs are put off until they become urgent. This would mean you having to rush in order to do them on time. In this rush you can make mistakes and overlook things. Usually your quickness of thought means you can hide omissions but occasionally these may be important ones.

You wish to cram so much into your day you may make appointments too close together. The result of this may be leaving a meeting early or arriving at your next one late.

PLEASE OTHERS (Lucida handwriting)

If you have a Please Others Working Style then it is likely that you are regarded as a valuable team member because you enjoy being with people.

You are genuinely interested in what other people feel and think. You want to know them personally and take a genuine interest in them and their families.

You wish to please others and can do this without necessarily asking them what they need. You are able to do this because you are understanding and empathetic.

All this encourages harmony within the group that you are in.

It is likely that you mostly enjoy working with others.

It may be, however, that sometimes you do things for other people that they have not asked for. On occasions this may not be appreciated as, by not asking what someone needed, you give them something they either did not need or wanted to do for themselves. If people complain to you about this you may feel: "Well, I was only trying to be helpful."

You are keen not to upset people and in doing this you may not always say what you want. This means that you are not always able to say 'no' to requests, even when you do not have the time or the desire to accede to the request.

You may take some things personally, particularly criticism of the things that you do.

REFERENCES:

(1) Julie Hay - TA For Trainers, 1996 Sherwood

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