Personality - We all have one!

This is the fifth 'tool of the month' from the IHR Project's Workforce Development Team. We are sharing our favourite concepts, models, hints, and tips that resonate with us and really helped us out in different work environments. Please come back each month to see what we are sharing. As with any concepts, models, hints and tips – these do not represent a fixed way of doing things, they are not hard and fast rules – if they resonate with you please make use of them – if they don't that's fine too!

Personality – how this helps teams and leaders

Leadership is not an exact science and the role of personality gives us something to think about. We all have different personalities and we use them in lots of ways.

Someone who easily **engages people** can be **persuasive**

A **calm and considered person** can **provide good counsel**

Someone who might appear **domineering** can be great at **organising** an event

We can use this insight at work. For instance, someone who naturally pays attention to detail is likely to be good in roles such as audit, quality control or finance. Someone with great imagination and vision may be well suited to strategic roles.
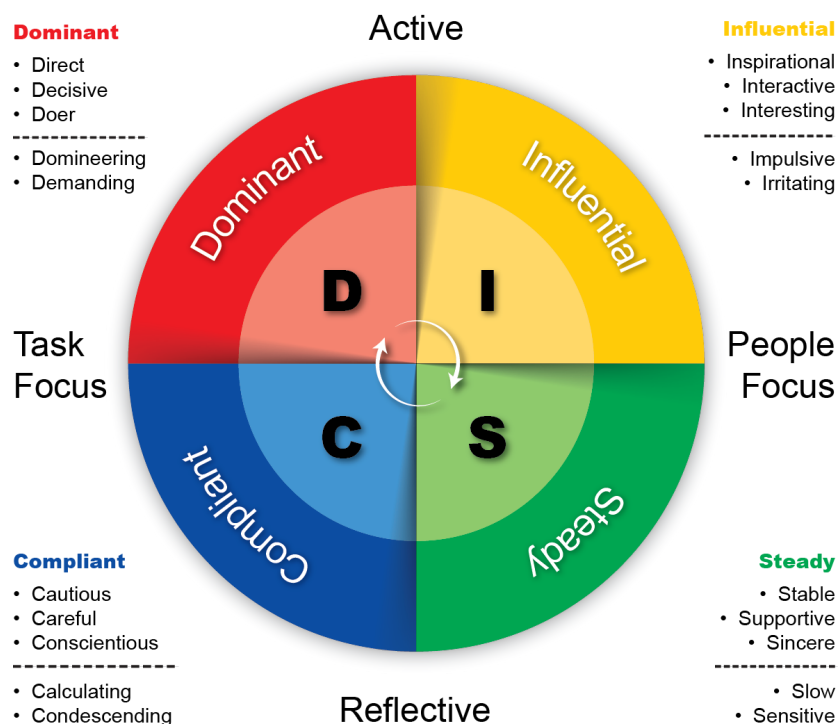
And we can use this as leaders and managers. To do this we need to understand personalities, our own and how to work with other people's personalities.

At this point it is important to stress that it is not a question of good or bad. A better term might be natural style or preferences. We all have strengths and also aspects of our personality that are not always helpful.

There are lots of classifications of personality. We might be familiar with terms such as introverts or extroverts. There are many others. In this article we focus on the DISC personality as a relatively simple model that applies broadly. The DISC personality classification takes pairs of attributes to describe four main types.

Dr William Moulton Marston identified that we can be largely Task Focussed or People Focussed, Active or Reflective. This creates the four quadrants described as **Dominant, Influential, Steady or Compliant.**

Dominant
- Direct
- Decisive
- Doer

- Domineering
- Demanding

Active

Influential
- Inspirational
- Interactive
- Interesting

- Impulsive
- Irritating

All of these are useful.

✔ Driving forward a programme of work? A Dominant personality type will do this

✔ Engaging people to work on a project. An Influential personality will help us

Task Focus

People Focus

Compliant
- Cautious
- Careful
- Conscientious

- Calculating
- Condescending

Reflective

Steady
- Stable
- Supportive
- Sincere

- Slow
- Sensitive

✔ Ensuring tasks are reliably completed? A Steady team member will do this

✔ Checking quality and budget? A Compliant personality type will add value here.

There are strengths to each of these types and also less useful attributes which might hinder great working together. The diagram on the left captures this well.

Determining our Personality type

Ideally, we would run tests to determine personality classification although we can often spot preferences or core features in ourselves and others. It is important not to jump to conclusions and recognise that we might have bias to favour different aspects. There is a very simple test that you can access for free to give some indicators to your own DISC profile. DISC personality test | take this free DISC profile assessment at 123test.com

So how can we use this insight at work?

We might not realise it, but we use our own personality all the time. If we can be aware of our own preferences and be mindful of the preferences of others, we can be effective in our interactions with other people and work independently of hierarchies and formal structures if we need to.
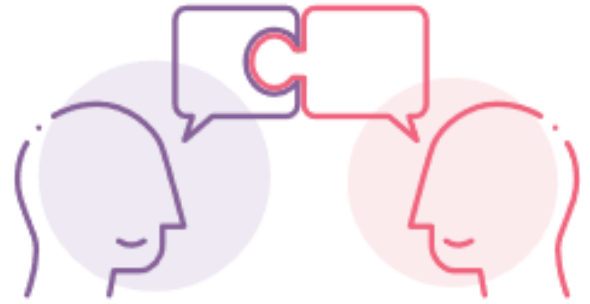
In practical terms this might be experienced in a number of ways:

- **Raising our self-awareness.** Constructive change begins with self-knowledge. Understanding how we respond to conflict, what motivates us or stresses us out, and how we solve problems.
- **Improving how we work in teams.** Teams are where things get done. Understanding preferences, we can improve communication and understanding between team members. We can go further and assign tasks that will use the natural style of team members and build a balanced team for a project.
- **Resolving differences.** When we understand where people are coming from, we can turn conflict into a positive, productive exercise that helps your organization move forward boldly.
- **Better negotiation**. Understanding preferences can help improve effectiveness when looking for solutions. Understanding and adapting to colleagues' styles is essential for connecting on a human level and seeing each other "eye to eye."
- **Managing others.** Managers become more naturally effective when they understand the dispositions and preferred working styles of their colleagues and other team members.
- **Reducing bias.** No one likes to be judged. Suspending assumptions and looking to understand can help avoid making judgements.

Using personality preferences as leaders

A theme to our approach is to continue to develop and deploy our leadership practice. Understanding that personality play a part in the way we operate and how we interact with others can help us be better leaders. Using our emotional intelligence to understand how we cast light and shadow on others and what they need, and value can make us impactful, able to empathise with them and motivate.

As leaders we can use our personalities and appreciation of that of others in several different ways:

How we communicate. We can vary our message and style of delivery to meet the needs of different types. Some people need more reassurance, others may need to have greater detail explained.

How we organise work. Recognising that some tasks are best suited to different personalities, recognising that different personality types will perform the same role differently.

How we make the most of our own strengths and look to use others to balance our own shortcomings. Many good managerial partnerships are successful because each party brings different strengths to the collaboration.

As a coach or mentor. A leader has the opportunity to give advice and insight to others. As we observe others, we can often suggest how personality style might play a part in challenges that others have and offer routes to a solution.

If this subject has made you think a little about the role of personality some questions you might like to ask yourself are:
- How do I want to use my natural style?
- What are the preferences of others I work with? This could be within the team. It could be with people you deal with.
- What attributes are needed to tackle a particular issue
- Are there any challenging relationships where this might help you understand what might be going on?

Things to be careful of

It is easy to slip into **judgement and assumption** around people and their behaviour. There is always a context that we should be mindful of and look to understand. We should also be careful not to judge different preferences. A good example of this is to see extroverts as lively and good fun, but introverts as quiet and withdrawn. There is more to people than this and we should take time to look to understand this. And incidentally, introverts tend to have coped very well with the restrictions of Covid.

Any classification is a **simplification**. Human beings are complex and in truth we will be a mixture of different preferences. This means that if the circumstances require it, we can draw on the attributes of our secondary references.

Our preferences or natural style will include aspects that might be **unhelpful in different circumstances**, especially by other personality types. For example, a Steady personality might be seen as slow in some circumstances, a Compliant person may be seen as pedantic at times, A demanding Dominant personality can be seen as unreasonable. We should be aware of these and be careful to **adjust our style** to reduce any negative impact and not use these as excuses for poor behaviour.

Common Questions

"**Does upbringing and culture shape personality?**"
Almost certainly, we learn that some things are "good" and encouraged and display these from formative years.
Different cultures value different attributes. For instance, the quietness and calm associated with a Steady personality is valued in South East Asia. An old Japanese proverb advises: 'The nail that sticks out gets hammered down.'

"**Can you develop a different personality?**"
I think you can develop different elements and certainly adapt for different circumstances. The different experiences we gain over time can help us to deploy different styles at times. Whilst we talk about preferences, it makes sense that we have secondary preferences that we can draw on, but it might not come naturally, and we have to work harder to be authentic.

Finally...

This is an area where self-reflection can be tremendously encouraging. There is great value in taking time to understand ourselves and how we want to incorporate into the way we work with others.

The role of personality may be an interesting one to talk through with colleagues and teams. Particularly as we start to return to seeing each other again our personalities have a chance to assert themselves. We can use this knowledge thinking about how we best work together. But proceed with a little caution. Not everyone is comfortable about discussing their preference, being wary of being judged. Good luck thinking about yourself!

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Further resources

Applying the DISC model:
- The DISC model - understanding people's personality styles
- Communication in the Workplace: How to Effectively Interact with Differing Personality Types
- DISC Profile - Youtube:

- And for a lighter take Famous People DiSC Types (watch beyond the first 30 seconds!)

Cultural differences
- 5 Cultural Differences between East and West in Thinking and Perception

Applications of personality to Leadership.
- David Pendleton writes very well in Leadership: No More Heroes (2021, 3rd edition) by Professor David Pendleton, Professor Adrian Furnham and Jon Cowell.

Introverts and Extroverts.
- Introvert vs Extrovert Conversation:

- Introverts vs Extroverts:

- Lots of articles about the impact of Covid isolation and the return to mixing again. How Different Personality Types May Adapt to Life After COVID-19 (verywellmind.com)