

The MYTH of on-the-job "PERSONALITY CONFLICT"

Executive Summary of a topical paper exploring 30 years of research in workplace dynamics and strength-based management.

January, 2004

This paper is based upon research in a large number of companies and organizations over the past two decades. Conclusions are based on statistical analysis of top performing teams, interviews, and focus groups with those who have excelled in either individual or team efforts. Research that we have conducted both in historical and contemporary contexts has been featured in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, and on national radio and television programs.

Introduction

- "I didn't get along with my manager, it was a 'personality conflict.'"
- "Our team wasn't effective, because there were too many 'personality conflicts.'"
- "I don't believe in personality testing, because I have three people with very different personalities who are all doing very well in their jobs."
- "Of the companies I've talked with, only 30% are happy with their pre-hire personality screening tests."

These are statements that we have all heard throughout our professional careers, statements that are symptoms of underlying issues. One of those issues is the use and understanding of the term 'personality.' The word itself is complex and nebulous, and describes the unique constellation of one's consistent behavioral tendencies.

Personality can be explored in both normal and clinical settings, and because of that we observe a frequent avoidance of the term 'personality' when referring to behavioral instruments used in the workplace. Terms used instead of 'personality' include: *Type; behavioral style; preferences; traits; and temperament*, among others. All of these terms more closely describe work behaviors and attempt to illuminate one or more aspects of **how** one does their job, or goes about their normal day-to-day activities.

The Importance of Understanding Values & Motivators

With research that began in 1979 into on-the-job conflicts in a variety of Information Technology organizations, it was quickly discovered that behavioral style or type was not the principal cause of 'personality conflicts.' Professionals of similar behavioral styles either worked effectively together or not, and those of very different styles either got along or not. The bottom line: Behavioral style didn't seem to be the major predictor of success in working teams. Some other dynamic was at work here. The operative dynamic that clearly emerged as critical to a team's success was the dynamic of **Values**. While behavioral style describes **how** one does their job, Values illuminate **why** one does their job, i.e., their wins, drives, and rushes as they perform their duties.

When Values are understood, appreciated, and respected, we find a substantial reduction in on-the-job conflicts between people and between teams. Interestingly, this process doesn't involve any member of the team necessarily changing what they do, nor does it involve any team changing its methods or direction. This remarkable reduction in perceived conflict is achieved through an awareness of what drives one's behavior. Those behavioral drive factors are one's **values**, and six values clearly emerge as common across a variety of workplace dimensions:

Workplace Value:

Theoretical
Utilitarian
Aesthetic
Social
Individualistic
Traditional

The Drive for:

Knowledge.
Money and materials.
Form, harmony and beauty.
Helping others.
Power, control, and independence.
Structure and order.

Values are sometimes called the 'hidden motivators' not because of hidden agendas, but because one's values may not be readily observed by others unless spending considerable time together. When team members in conflict realize that the conflict may well have emerged because of different *beliefs* about the job or how it should be done, then many of those conflicts dissolve.

Values Driven Teams

Across many professions, successful teams contain a variety of behavioral styles and values drives. However, winning teams will demonstrate at least two (and sometimes three) values drives in common between their members. What this says is that members of winning teams will have certain values that they can at least in part agree upon. Those areas of values differences are usually neutralized upon the identification or understanding of the values position, pending the acceptance of a few points:

- One's values come from deeply held beliefs.
- Behavioral style changes more easily and frequently than one's values.
- All values positions are positions deserving of respect.
- There are no 'right' or 'wrong' values positions (in the six listed above), there are simply different positions.

Values Driven Companies

In a broader dimension, recent studies of successful I.T. and software companies in niche markets have revealed an even greater finding: Those companies who are successful in niche markets are ones that at least in part emulate the values of their corporate clients. For example, those successful companies that market into a manufacturing, distribution, or financial marketplace are typically companies that display similar corporate values as those host industries. Successful companies that market into an educational marketplace are those whose demonstrated corporate values rather closely align with the values espoused in education. That is, successful companies in niche markets tend to believe in the same things as do their host clients or customers.

An Empirical Solution: Obtaining a Values 'pulse'

The **Workplace Motivators** report clearly demonstrates the values drives and strengths offered by each member of the team. In addition, enormous insight within an organization can be obtained by exploring the collective values of specific teams, then rolled upward into company norms by aggregating team data. This information is of critical importance and insight when companies examine their mission, vision, and goal statements in light of their collective values. No one is asked to change their behavioral style or their values, but they are asked to at least in part agree on certain values, and accept that other values positions will differ.

When each individual on the team feels free to amplify their own strengths, and allows enough space for others on the team with different strengths to amplify theirs, therein we find successful people, successful teams and successful companies. It is to that end that the **Workplace Motivators** report was developed. Written between 1979 and 2003, and based upon values research which began in 1930, the **Workplace Motivators** report was introduced in 1988 with continual upgrades and a most recent revision and release in

2004. Background research for this instrument has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, and on national radio and television programs.

The **Workplace Motivators** report is a nearly 20-page report containing the following information on an individual across the six values mentioned above:

- General characteristics
- Primary strengths
- Keys to Managing & Motivating
- Training, professional development, and learning insights
- Areas for continuous quality improvement
- Teamwork dynamics

Each individual's report is compared against a database of tens of thousands of professionals and within specialties when available. End users have discovered swift neutralization of conflicts, and an overall energizing effect on individuals, teams, and entire companies. (This effect is one that is long-lasting because the instrument amplifies one's intrinsic motivation.)

The Initial Situations in Recap

Situation	Outcome
"A personality conflict with my manager."	The manager had a lower Theoretical value and preferred the bottom line. The employee had a higher Theoretical score and misread the manager's need for the 'bottom-line' as disinterest. It wasn't. When both understood the other's values, they realized that they needed each other's strengths.
"An ineffective team with too many personality conflicts."	The team's ineffectiveness was rooted in the fact that there were a variety of different values espoused. This was OK, once they each agreed in part on the values that were important to the functioning of their team.
"I don't use personality testing because I have three very different people who are all doing very well on the job."	The success of the three different styles of people on similar jobs is in part due to the fact that they believe the same things. They share similar values across three of the six values areas, and agree that those are key areas for job success.
"Only 30% of companies I've talked to are happy with their pre-hire testing."	That may be in large part because one's behavioral style or type accounts for only about 30% of one's success on the job. A much larger portion of the success-factor is measured by one's values drives.

For more information about the **Workplace Motivators** report, or for a sample report, please contact the distributor:

DTS International

(02) 9360 5111

info@dtssydney.com

www.dtssydney.com

