

How many times have you chosen to join a team, or been asked to join a team, only to find out that some of the personalities on the team make it impossible to get any work done. Have you ever tried to lead a team of co-workers and compared the effort to herding cats? What makes the difference between good team leaders and great team leaders? This workshop will attempt to answer those questions and give participants both the knowledge and tools to use with teams back at the office.

There are two major challenges facing most teams, whether newly formed or pre-existing. The first is communication – communication in a manner that allows everyone on the team to have a clear, unambiguous understanding of the issues and actions. The second one is Leadership and how to form a group of different personalities and cultures into a high performance work team.

What most of us are seeking when we've given a team to lead or participate with is not a committee – remember the old joke that an elephant is a horse designed by a committee – but a like-minded group of people who can accomplish what needs to be done as quickly as possible with no interference and no barriers.

Reality, on the other hand, is that any team is made up of people with different personalities, cultures and values and rarely does anything get accomplished without the team moving through the five stages of team development; forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Of course, we all prefer to get through the first two as quickly as possible and get right into the norming and performing. However, how long the team spends in the forming and, most critically, the storming stages depends on how well each of us recognize the different types of personalities with which we are working and how we change our style of communication to meet the needs of those personalities.

There are many ways of determining the personalities that make up a team, some formal and some informal. Perhaps the most well known and most used is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This tool is especially useful for teams that will be working together for a longer period of time.

The MBTI is useful in many ways; when the team is forming so everyone knows and understands each other's personality traits, when the team hits the storming stage and seems to stay there and wallow around “in the ditch” for an extended period of time, and, any time a new team member or leader is introduced into the team. MBTI also offers a “team personality” report which can help a team leader determine what personality types may be missing from the team, i.e., a risk taker – someone who will push the rest of the team out of their comfort zone. This type of report will ensure you have/select the right people on the team and that every personality type and strength is present.

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator sorts people based on basic preferences or dichotomies as follows:

- Extraversion – Introversion (attitudes or orientations of energy)
- Sensing – Intuition (functions or processes of perception)
- Thinking – Feeling (functions or processes of judging)
- Judging – Perceiving (attitudes or orientations for dealing with the outside world)

These four preferences result in 16 distinct personality types, each with their own way of participating and sending/receiving information.

One of the best ways to kick off a team is to give them some training on the different personalities and the traits of that personality, ask them to try to figure out what their type might be, and then have them take the Instrument. Most people tend to get at least 3 out of their 4 basic types the same as the Instrument reveals, but sometimes there is one trait that is a total surprise. That can be due to many factors such as the particular situation they are now

facing at work/home, stress over some major event in their life, the way “management” expects them to behave, etc. The bottom line is that these four basic dichotomies are preferences and we all can adapt our personality to fit the mode expected or needed at any particular time.

Any team or team leader that decides to use the MBTI needs to be aware of some potential dilemmas:

- The 4 basic preferences are preferences rather than competencies. They are not measured on a scale, where more or less of one trait is either better or worse. The further along the scale you are with the MBTI just means the greater degree of confidence you can have in the accuracy of the placement.
- Too many times facilitators who administer the MBTI are not well enough trained, which can lead to many problems such as:
  - o The MBTI is a personal instrument, and as such, the scores should be kept confidential. However, I have seen participants coerced into sharing their scores – even though they were clearly uncomfortable doing so.
  - o Facilitators should never judge or make statements such as, “I would have thought you’d be more of an extrovert, given your job”. I heard that one in my first MBTI session.

Another good tool to use for understanding team member communication differences and how to deal with those differences is the Wilson Social Styles. This is a tool that works well for both long and/or short term teams. According to the Wilson Learning Corporation, people are divided across four communication styles, called “social styles”. People connect fairly well with others who share their style, but need to understand all four styles and how each communicates in order to become a truly performing team.

The four styles are as follows:

- Analytical – need lots of detail communicated in order to make accurate decisions
- Driver – dislike structure (except their own) and want to be efficient and save time
- Expressive – need to be inspired and need acknowledgement of their efforts
- Amiable – most value relationships and a climate that not only gives them the problem, but also some suggestions for solutions

When dealing with each of these styles, a team member or team leader must answer different questions with the communication.

- Analyticals need to know “how” and in order to make a decision one must provide evidence and service
- Drivers need to know “what” and need options and possibilities in order to make a decision
- Expressives need to know “who” and need testimonies and incentives to reach a decision
- Amiables need to know “why” and in order to make a decision need guarantees and assurances

One other aspect that might be important to the discerning team member or leader is what each style uses to measure their personal value:

- Analyticals use activity
- Drivers use results
- Expressives use applause
- Amiables use attention

The Wilson Social Styles tools can be extremely useful when kicking off the team to articulate the goals and objectives – remember to use goals and objectives that will reach each style. It is also necessary when driving for consensus among all team members – you must answer the who, what, why and how.

One of the most useful ways to use this tool is in a training session at the kickoff of the team formation. With a little training in the different styles it becomes both a great ice breaker and a chance for team members to learn about each other and how to ensure good communication.

Both of the above are wonderful tools, but what about a tool for a short term team that is only together for the day or week? Is there a less formal way to learn something about the other team members and enhance communication and

cooperation? In fact, one of the tools I use most often is another type of ice breaker called “Lions, Owls, Foxes and St. Bernard’s”. This tool is really a quick look at both personalities and communication styles.

Team members are asked to compare themselves to one of the animals mentioned, and describe both their personality traits and what that animal might bring to a team atmosphere.

So far, all I’ve discussed is the personalities and communication styles of teams. What about turning that team into a high performing work team? What does it take to turn an average team into a world class team capable of tackling any problem or issue and reaching optimal solutions?

The most important aspects of developing a High Performance Work Team are:

- **Focus**  
The hallmark of a High Performance Work Team is a clear focus on specific goals and objectives and what the team is doing at all times. The fastest way to fail is to try to be everything to everybody. By learning how to clarify and specify clear and unambiguous goals and objectives, you can increase your ability to achieve those goals and significantly improve your chances of success.
- **Accountability**  
A major aspect of a High Performance Work Team is developing the understanding that objectives have to be delivered and actions have to be completed when promised. Failure to meet these expectations has consequences for the individual and the organization. Raising the level of understanding and “buy-in” to this concept is critical in order to truly perform to your best potential.
- **Discipline**  
Discipline means many things to many people. In this context, it represents the understanding that your membership in the Team carries with it the expectation that you will meet your obligations and commitments. We develop within the Team the expectation that they have to sometimes work harder, change faster, learn a different approach, or learn to be persistent. A great example is an Olympic athlete. While we may run for fun or for our health, we “accept” many excuses for why we must skip a day or not train on a certain day. An Olympic athlete is an Olympic athlete because he/she trains no matter what. They have the discipline to train no matter the weather, no matter the situation, or no matter that doing something else would be more fun. They have the discipline to be committed to their decision to be the Best-of-the Best. That is also the hallmark of a High Performance Work Team: the discipline to meet goals and objectives without excuse or delay.
- **A Clear, Unambiguous Understanding of What Constitutes Success**  
A major failure mode for most organizations is that almost anything can be submitted to meet a goal or objective and be called successful because there are no clear and unambiguous definitions of what constitutes acceptable success. “Wiggle Room” is the kiss of death for a High Performance Work Team because nothing is more frustrating than working extremely hard and not knowing whether you actually succeeded or not. Making the effort to clearly define success before one even begins is critical in order to know how you are doing, whether you are ahead or behind schedule, and what you have to do or change to make your goal. This effort is needed and it is often very difficult to get a clear definition of a successful outcome. However, failure to achieve this in the beginning guarantees a mediocre outcome that may or may not be acceptable to the organization or the organization’s customers.

## Conclusion

It takes skill and practice as well as a well thought out plan to understand teams and team members and ensure the best possible working atmosphere in order to guarantee a successful outcome. It also takes time. Most companies

are willing to spend thousands of dollars to put employees into teams, but without some additional training and practice in how to communicate and focus, many of those dollars are wasted. The next time you form a team, whether for a day or a long-term problem resolution, give the team members some tools to understand each other and how to communicate in a more productive manner.

*Understanding differences is not the same as valuing them. Valuing differences is hard work and requires a level of interpersonal competence few people seem to have.*

*Roger Pearman*

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