

Understanding People's Make-up to Manage Working Relationships-including the one with your boss

By Weelan Ho



It takes all kinds of people to make the world go round

We go through our working lives preferring to work with some kinds of people, while at the same time not being too keen to work with certain others. If we reflect on the reasons for these differing reactions, personality clashes come into mind.

It takes all kinds of people to make the world go round; in other words our world is full of people with different personalities, making human interactions complex and interesting.

Factors influencing our make-up

We are all individuals. Each of us is different from one another. And yet, we do have certain things in common. An individual's personality is both a consequence of their basic nature and subsequent development.

Right brain – left brain

People who have a knack (aptitude) for numbers, are analytical, strong in logic, and inclined to be detailed-oriented are more predisposed to using the left hemisphere of the

brain. Right brain people are often creative, able to conceptualize, and are more inclined to view things from a big picture, holistic perspective. Some people are very at home with being creative while at the same time being analytical and detailed oriented, indicating an ability to use and integrate both hemispheres well. The great scientist, Edison, couldn't have invented so many things had he not been creative, analytical and detailed-minded; after all, scientific experiments are detailed and laborious.

While individuals may have a certain predisposed preference, it is important to recognize that latter day developments are equally important in shaping our character.

Extrovert – introvert

The person within you may be an extrovert or an introvert. An extrovert tends to be more open, more willing to communicate and perhaps more sociable. An introvert, on the other hand, is shy, is more reserved and restrained, and is quite happy working on his/her own.



However, an extrovert is not necessarily a good communicator and there's no reason to think that an introvert cannot communicate well. Communication is a learned skill. We learned how to communicate through socialization. Thus, while a person may be more introverted by nature, it is possible for them to learn to be more extroverted through learning socialization and communication skills. One's behaviours do not necessarily reflect one's innate preference, as skills can be learned.

The senses: auditory, visual, kinaesthetic

The senses influence how one absorbs information and this has implications on the way one learns, works and interacts. A person who is visual absorbs and retains information best by using their eyes to look. An audio person learns through listening to the words. People who are kinaesthetically or movement-and-feeling oriented learn and absorb best through a hands-on approach, through doing.

Understanding senses and using the appropriate approach is crucial to working with people.

Thinking - feeling

The thinking person can be more detached, rational, outcome-oriented and sometimes more cautious. The feeling person is more prone to exhibit emotions, can be impulsive, and prefers to talk through issues. For this kind of person, the process of discussions is as important, if not more important, than the outcome.

Implications for managing your boss

Observing and understanding individual preferences help us formulate an appropriate work approach, making our interactions and working life easier; at the very least, it reduces the level of corrections and rework needed. Below are two examples used to demonstrate approaches used to manage a working relationship with a boss.

Example 1

You have a boss who is a "left-brainer": very detailed oriented, not a big picture person, absorbs information better through visual means and is impatient to take time to look through information.

Work approach

The best approach is to prepare a succinct write-up that highlights the issues, complications, questions and answers (solutions) with detail support attached in the appendix as a reference. You should include the relevant visuals for easy reading and understanding. If possible and if required, try to set a time in order to give a 10 minute briefing to the boss to keep him/her updated of the issues and progress. Most bosses like to feel in control, and would not appreciate being left out – or feeling as if they are being left out.

Example 2

You have a boss who is a big picture guy: perhaps creative, but rather disorganized, and who enjoys talking through the subject matter.

Work approach

It is still good discipline to have a short and succinct write-up with the necessary visuals, but this need not be too detailed as your boss would not be interested in details. The short and succinct report serves as a structured note (or reminder) in case the boss loses information along the way, since he is rather disorganized. You will need to discuss it through as this is the way he relates to best.

Compare, contrast and generalization

The boss in example 1 wants to have information in order to feel in control, while the boss in example 2 wants to talk through the details in order to feel in control. The time taken to research and understand the ground work should be similar for both approaches. But it would take more time to prepare a detailed

report for the appendix needed in example 1.

The rationales behind the two approaches above apply to other situations and can be generalized and adapted to working with peers.

In summary, understanding people's personality and preferences, formulating an appropriate work approach, and being skilful in responding to people's needs, are fundamental to managing effective working relationships.

Beware! Holding on to a "That's me – I am born that way" mentality makes life difficult and tiresome for us. We need to learn to work with all kinds of people, particularly our boss. Usually we have to accommodate the boss, rather than the other way around. This is not to say that we "suck up" to the boss, but rather, that our boss has overall accountability and should therefore have the final say in how they want to receive information and ideas from us.

T/D

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