

A Type, B Type – What About Your Type?

From the moment I entered school right through to now, some fifty plus years, individuals of influence have been trying to change me or make the suggestion that there is just something about me that does not seem quite right. Perhaps I don't align with their personality, their own lifestyle choices, values or even their cultures.

I have been a rebel my entire life and only now am I understanding why. We are each our own individuals with unique characteristics that frankly I am very grateful for. Can you imagine how boring life would be if we were all the same? But what are these tensions, why do they exist and what can or should we do about them? In the following few paragraphs I will suggest some insights and solutions to these questions.

In the context of “people management”, conformity to please our managers seems to be the general pattern. Maybe perhaps more specifically, trying to fit each of us into the likeness of themselves. This may be because managers often tend to be more comfortable to have us change, rather than embrace our differences or be willing to make adjustments to their own individuality or personal style. Additionally we are clustered into categories or groupings from the moment we enter nursery school. According to David W. Merrill, who studied personal styles and effective performance, we develop certain behaviour due to the social interactions we have been exposed to during our lives. This shapes our individuality and we become used to the idea of conformity. He suggests that there is a comfort zone or “dominant social style” in which we most naturally behave.

We emerge from classrooms, teams and various social interactions and enter the workforce where we often fall prey to being labelled in some way. There is the “A Type, B Type” personality theory, which describes a pattern of behaviour that is either described as (a) impatient, highly energised and aggressive or (b) relaxed, lacking a sense of urgency or sometimes apathetic. Then there is the “AB Type” personality which is a mixed profile of those who are not clearly categorised. There are many of these such theories or models but who out there desires to be categorized. Here it seems clear that one style is generally labelled as having more to contribute to a team or a business. People can be unfairly labelled based on certain responses to situations. This judgement can lead to attitudes of doubt, dislike or perhaps even favouritism that may effect the dynamics of human performance.

Adopting Merrill's model, there are four distinct Social Styles which are labelled as follows; Drive, Expressive, Amiable and Analytical. He does suggest that we very likely have elements of all four, but that generally we have one dominate style. He goes on to suggest that no one style is better than the other, just different. In fact, Merrill suggests that strong teams be formed with complimentary styles. So why then are there such strong suggestions that we must conform? Perhaps it is because it is easier, feels more comfortable and requires less effort by those of us in management roles.

The risk with labels of any kind is that the perceptions of what these mean in the various social settings we live and work in, are often skewed. My experience has been that employees desire managers who understand them as individuals, who will work with their unique differences on an individual basis and within the teams they participate; perhaps it is better said as: “Your Type”.

I believe that managing individuals and their unique styles of behaviour is vital to successful management. In my coaching practice I encourage managers to learn from each individual and adapt across all various styles, by developing

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versatility. This allows the manager to step away from their own individual style and consider other perspectives with less rigidity.

This versatility can only be accomplished by getting to know our employees as individuals. A manager needs to earn the right to develop a relationship that will allow him/her to get to know each employee and the very distinct social and cultural differences that make up their individual character. This takes time and should not be taken for granted. The same can be said for employees, who should try to understand the individual nature of their managers and work at integrating the power of their combined uniqueness. This means that the manager needs to create an environment and allow himself or herself to be vulnerable as to the individual that they might be – That takes a certain courage!

Where I have seen or experienced this versatility, allowing time for adapting individuality, the performance outcomes can become significant. In fact, the foundational characteristics of confidence, conviction and commitment are enhanced and the outcomes are creative thinking, innovation or creativity and empowerment. In my experience, when you have these you have optimal human performance possibilities.

Understanding the perceptions and realities of others and ourselves in social groupings has always interested me but is far more complex than what I have suggested so far. There are even broader social frameworks and by that I mean complex and unique characteristics as well as memberships in various social groups all having multiple layers. There can be differing social dynamics within a country, culture, community or religion. Within a more complex organization additional divisions or business layers exist. The list of differences could be endless. How individuals fit into these frameworks is often based on their unique backgrounds and their life experiences: “Their Type”.

The Merrill Social Style Model, as one example of many, could overlay these multiple social frameworks and layers. The tensions that exist within a company or a team indicates the diversity that managers should come to respect, engage in and enhance. It is our ability to take the time to understand these differences, embrace the uniqueness of individuals and leverage the combined intellect of ourselves and our employees in order to engage in a committed manner. This will allow a greater opportunity to achieve our collective goals and it is my perspective that this is the essence of emotional intelligence.

It is my opinion that these tensions are very real and cut across the differing social frameworks, which then requires a versatile management style or understanding, not conformity. When this is achieved I will stop being the rebel I am known to be.



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