

From “So what?” to “So that.....”

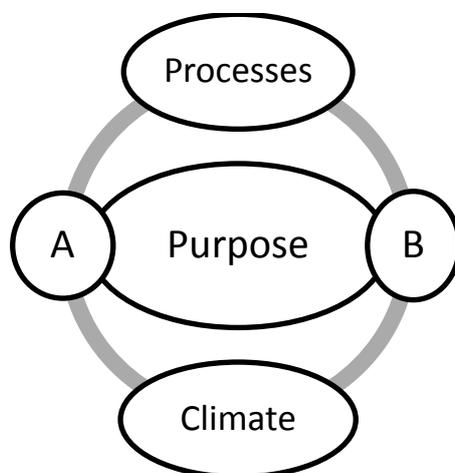
Interacting in High Performance Teams

I love working with teams and type, and in twenty years of working with teams, have had many opportunities to introduce them to type. But teams don't come to me asking me to teach them type, they ask me to help them work together better, so team effectiveness is my starting point. They know that team working is not easy, but expect any intervention to make an immediate practical difference. And they don't want to spend much time doing it.

So I have to get straight to the point, both in the consultancy phase and in the delivery. Two things help: one is a model of team effectiveness which enables them to see the importance of both the “task” side of teamwork and the “relationship” side of team work; the other is interaction styles, which is immediately accessible and maps directly on to the model.

The model (below) shows that to be effective as a team, they need to have a clear, understood and shared purpose; they need to have sound processes in place for how they make decisions, how they share information, how they communicate with each other and run their meetings; and they need to have a positive climate which facilitates high performance through a mix of supportive and challenging behaviours.

Team Effectiveness Model for High Performing Teams



Source: Unknown

When these aspects of team effectiveness are not working well, according to David Clutterbuck, “failures of structure and process, lack of purpose or commitment, internal conflict or poor leadership sap the team’s potential”.

The model fits well with academic studies of teams, both the challenges of team work, such as social loafing and group think, as well as the benefits when the team works well.

When time and budget constraints mean that it is not feasible to introduce a team to personality type and temperament, I use interaction styles instead and have found it to be much more than just

a weak substitute for type. Teams find it easy to recognise the styles in each other and, through further activities, they become aware of the potential impact, both positive and negative, of each style on the team’s effectiveness as well as potential sources of conflict and stress. They also remember the names of the styles over time (unlike the MBTI four letter codes).

Purpose, process and climate

In a typical workshop, as an icebreaker we discuss the “great teams” they know outside work (in the north-west, this is usually football teams!) and what makes them great – usually they identify elements such as achievable goals, clear roles and responsibilities, robust processes, skilled people, inspiring leadership, appropriate tools and equipment, open communications, knowledge sharing.

We start with work on the team’s purpose, then go on to processes and through these activities, many of the relationship and climate issues in the team begin to surface and can be explored in facilitated debriefs of each activity, before going on to interaction styles.

Working with a team on purpose (ie why they need to be a team, what they can only achieve as a team rather than as individuals) often leads to surprising insights: they may say they know what their purpose is, then find they have startlingly different ways of articulating it; teams of managers often find they are working at the wrong level, getting too involved in day to day operations, at the expense of strategy, governance and inspiring their teams; a group of Maths teachers with whom I worked recently, realised that their purpose as a team was not to teach Maths, but to share knowledge, learning and approaches with each other to raise the performance of the whole department.

Clarity of the team’s purpose influences their processes ie what sort of information they need to share, their scope for making decisions, how often they need to meet. Often a team will decide to work on a set of ground rules or values for how they work together and agree on principles for using email, shared drives and running their meetings.

To introduce the team to climate, I may use the support and challenge model (below) and ask them to note down individually on post-its, the behaviours that they see and hear in the team, then I invite them to stick their post-its on to a flip chart in the appropriate box. This can be an indirect way of giving feedback to each other and it leads naturally into interaction styles.

HIGH SUPPORT, LOW CHALLENGE	HIGH SUPPORT, HIGH CHALLENGE
<i>Comfort</i>	<i>Stretch</i>
LOW SUPPORT, LOW CHALLENGE	LOW SUPPORT, HIGH CHALLENGE
<i>Apathy</i>	<i>Stress</i>

Source: Blakey and Day

Interaction Styles

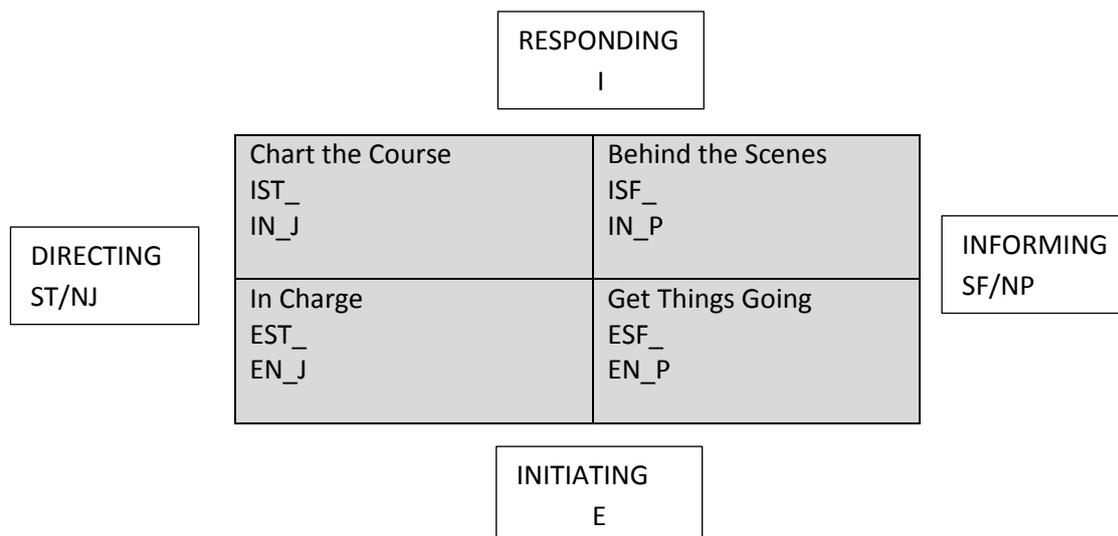
As an introduction to interaction styles, I use Andy Cole’s short film “The Meeting” which shows a team of four people in a retail organisation discussing 24/7 opening. When debriefing, we discuss what impact each person had on the effectiveness of the meeting and in particular the specific behaviours that influenced purpose, process and climate.

“Interaction style is how we interact with others to get our needs met” *Susan Nash*

“a constant internal drive to interact with others in certain ways” *Linda Berens*

The interaction styles model combines three elements: a preference for a directing or informing communication style, a preference for responding or initiating in relationships (similar to introversion and extraversion, though narrower) and a focus on outcome or process.

The chart below shows the four styles with the corresponding types.



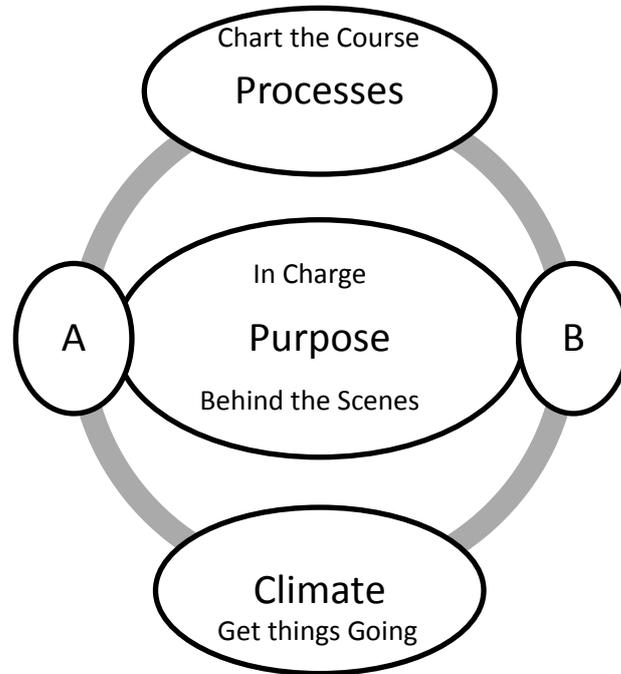
The In-Charge and Behind the Scenes styles share a focus on the outcome, while the Chart the Course and Get things Going styles share a focus on process.

Through self-assessment activities, the team members decide which interaction style fits them best. Once people understand their own natural style, they learn how to adapt it to build rapport with others and to specific situations eg we discuss how they might need to adopt other styles to be more influential in situations such as engaging their teams, coaching individuals and managing conflict.

One of the strengths of the interaction styles model is that it combines observable behaviour with innate drives, and so the discussion of the film can also explore what was driving each person’s behaviour in the meeting – this helps people to understand themselves and to appreciate what is driving their colleagues’ behaviours. They learn how their behaviour influences the processes and climate in the team which in turn determines how effective the team is in achieving its purpose.

People with different styles tend to focus on different elements of effective team work and this is where the team effectiveness model links directly with interaction styles. The diagram below shows the potential contribution of each interaction style to the different aspects of working effectively as a team. The knowledge of what each person can bring to the team helps team members value each other's strengths and be more open to the challenges of working together.

Interaction Styles and Effective Teams



This merged model of team effectiveness and interaction styles enables people to make a clear and direct link between team performance and their own behaviour, and recognise what they need to change to be more effective, both personally and as a team. This is evidenced by comments from the participants in a leadership development programme:

IN CHARGE
Since doing interaction styles, I can now see what people have to offer, given the chance.....now solutions are found by the team, not by me...

BEHIND THE SCENES
I'm learning to say things when I would normally keep quiet... it's easy to spot interaction styles and adjust to them

I hope this article demonstrates the value of interaction styles as an integral part of a team effectiveness intervention and I encourage colleagues in the type community to develop materials and activities to support its wider dissemination – its immediate practical relevance gives it great credibility.

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Susan Nash's website for an overview of the 4 styles:

www.type-academy.co.uk

Linda Berens' website for descriptions of the 4 styles:

http://www.interstrength.com/content/interaction_styles

Susan Nash doing the "walks" for each interaction style

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0hqZMIP7bw>

www.interactionstyles.com

Film: The Meeting – Andy Cole

www.cole-face.com

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