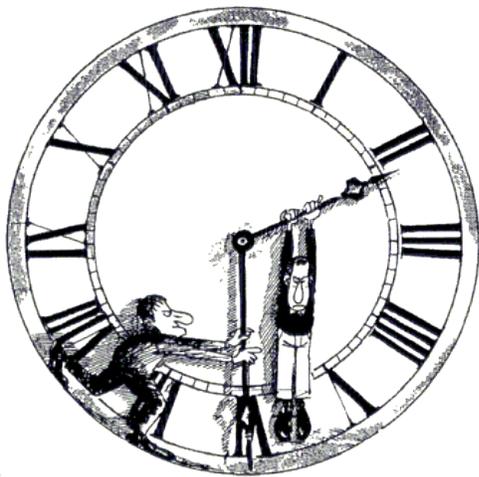


The push/pull of the race against time*

Reducing tensions between personality types leads to better workplace productivity

By DANIELLE GAULT

IN TODAY'S fast-moving workplace, once you fall behind it can feel like you'll never catch up. We live in a cyberhuman society where the requirement for speed, productivity and efficiency can trigger a race against time. Our lives are spinning out of control as we continue to be wired for business and information overload through our pagers, e-mails, faxes, and cell phones. We have no time for our children, our aging parents, our health and well-being.



“How can we take control of our lives so that we can enjoy it?” is the question many are asking as they struggle to walk their professional tightrope.

Yo Katagiri, head of Pioneer Electronic Corp., said, “People can’t work properly when they’re tense.” A good life is, however, worth working hard for — but we can reduce the struggle and tension by understanding our own inner process and how to manage it effectively.

Personal differences

To understand personal differences and how the race against time affects us, we can view ourselves through the eyes of type and temperament theory. For instance, the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) deals with four scales of opposite preferences which are:

1. **Extraversion versus introversion** — where do we prefer to go for our stimulation and energy?
2. **Intuition versus Sensing** — how do we prefer to take in information?
3. **Thinking versus Feeling** — how do we prefer to make decisions about the information we take in?
4. **Perceiving versus Judging** — how do we prefer to structure our world?

The MBTI indicates specific differences in how we would like to behave. The world and people in it, however, impose their own game plan on us and often have counter expectations for our behaviours. These opposite expectations have inherent tensions in them.

According to Carl Jung, the tension of opposites is the very essence of life. Without tension, there would be no energy and consequently no healthy personality development. An optimum amount of tension is necessary, but too much tension can make us snap and too little can make us lethargic.

All personality types experience tension when dealing with time constraints and, therefore,

an understanding of our inner processes when dealing with these constraints can increase our levels of health and happiness. An understanding of our workplace patterns of speed, productivity and efficiency, together with the tools for maintaining optimum levels of health and happiness on the job, can help us deal more effectively with tension when the world doesn't conform to our expectations.

Speed and productivity

When a strong extravert is around a quiet introvert, the tension of opposite preferences in processing information can be experienced quite differently by each. While extroverts process their information by talking and interacting with others, the introverts are producing their results through quiet introspection.

Both people are moving projects along, but the process for speed and productivity looks quite different. Interpretations of differences can affect team synergy: the extravert may interpret the quietness of the introvert as standoffish, while the introvert often sees extroverts as superficial people who fill the air with a lot of talk instead of really producing results.

Similarly, strong Sensing-Judging oriented people want structure and plans when they are involved in implementing activities. Intuitive-Perceiving oriented people, however want to gather additional information to be certain they have covered all the possibilities.

The inherent tension of these opposites can show up in how jobs and tasks get handled. One person is pulling for possibilities while the other is pushing for closure.

Productivity and efficiency

Sensing-dominant people believe that efficiency is centred around the present tense and the specifics of what needs to be done. They sometimes need to be reminded that there's more to productivity than dealing with just the details. Intuitive-dominant people, however, look at productivity and efficiency by focusing on the future and the implications of what else is possible in getting the job done. They sometimes need to be reminded to focus on the details as well as relating activities to the whole picture in the future.

In order to get the best results, teams need to focus on the forest (intuitive, big picture) as well as the trees (sensing, details). In doing this, we can maintain and build positive feelings about each others' styles. The by-product can be increased levels of trust and team morale.

People differences are often evidenced in decision making processes. The dominant Thinker, who tends to make objective decisions, may view the dominant Feeler, who tends to make subjective decisions, as too touchy-feely. Feeling decision makers may see Thinking decision makers as too cold when they interact and make decisions with others.

Thinker-dominant people tend to get along better with other Thinkers. while Feeler-dominant people have an easier time than Thinkers getting along with both types. This may be because they look for and read others' processes more often in their attempts to get along and create harmony.

Both Thinker-dominant and Feeler-dominant people have a challenge around workplace competency. Thinking-dominant people have ever-increasing expectations about workplace competence and want to be viewed by others as very competent. Feeling types, however, take

others into consideration — their growth and personal requirements— when working together. They want to make people feel good about their work. Competency, although also important to Feeling types, is secondary because they are able to delay immediate results for long-term personal developmental results.

When we interpret other peoples' expressions based on our own requirements, we can affect team productivity by diminishing trust and morale. But if the tension of opposites is the essence of life, then the question has to be asked: "How can we use this pull of opposites to create a win-win model for dealing with workplace productivity while under time constraints?" Because when time-based constraints step in, relationship management often goes out the window.

Three sources of workplace tension

When tension, due to time constraints, is high in the workplace, we are often intolerant of work styles that are different from our own. The causes of tension in organizations usually come from one of three sources:

1. Differences in how we do things:

Fast or slow — expressions of speed are a source of workplace confusion. For example, Intuitive-Thinking people can leap into the future and create a new model without worrying about the details. This can throw Sensing-Judging people off because they want to begin building the job and need the details to do this.

Sensing-Judging people have an innate sense of the amount of time it takes to complete a project since they understand the myriad steps required and the reality of the physical world that slows the work down.

Intuitive-Thinking people often misgauge the time projects take because they've already moved on to the next conceptual challenge, leaving the details to others.

A structured approach to work is best expressed with the Sensing-Judgers' need for a time-based detailed work schedule for bringing the project in on time and within budget. Often taken as the critic who poo-poo's ideas, the Sensing-Judging person wants to ensure the job gets done.

I was in the drug store the other day trying to get a cold medication. Not easy. There's an entire wall of products that you need. You stand there going, "Well, this one is quick acting but this is long lasting...which is more important, the present or the future?"

—Jerry Seinfeld

Sensing-Perceiver people can stimulate others and inject energy to move problems forward through their ability to respond quickly and meet the immediate needs of the present situation. They can change direction on a dime as they tend to handle emergencies well.

While the Sensing-Perceiving person is busy moving projects forward, the Intuitive-Feeling person is focusing on people and their needs, believing time is used well when looking for and finding life's purpose.

2. Differences in how we view things:

People focus on different things when trying to accomplish tasks. What they focus on reveal what's important to them and are based on personal values.

Intuitive-Thinkers place great value on the systems within the organization. They enjoy analyzing data, predicting outcomes and explaining why things work the way they do.

Intuitive-Feelers, however, focus on the values of the people within the workplace; how to communicate in meaningful ways, and the effects of decisions on others.

Sensing-judging people will focus on the policies and procedures, the "how to's" of the job; they will collect, categorize and store data.

Sensing-Perceivers tend to focus more on solving immediate problems and moving projects forward with the quickest approach at hand and with the variables at that moment.

3. Differences in how we relate to others:

Interactive versus non-interactive approaches can take many shapes. For example, if you work in an extraverted environment but you prefer introversion, expectations that work should be done with others can cause feelings that your own natural tendencies are not appropriate.

People with a preference toward Intuitive-Feeling often give others all the time they need while neglecting their own time needs.

Intuitive-Thinking people often have no time for others' priorities and can forget to include the commitments of others in their planning.

Sensing-Perceivers often spread themselves out too far and scatter their efforts, leaving others wondering where they are and if they are still on board.

And Sensing-Judging people often dislike waiting for others and can appear rigid around keeping schedules and being hooked to responsibilities.

Although it is easy to see the mistakes and flaws in other peoples' work, when time pressures force us to get really focused, we may want to remember that after projects are completed, many of us can be left with painful thoughts and feelings about being stepped on or over in the name of productivity.

When deciding what to do in getting the job done while under pressure, remember that getting the job done AND building strong relationships should be viewed as equally important.

When tension in completing our jobs is handled with a win-lose approach, team interactions can become destructive. Tension, as a destructive force, creates communication and problem-solving strategies that take a "positional" stance where decisions get made at the expense of another person.

If perpetuated, this approach leads to increased negative attitudes and disliking of the other person. Soon the negativity leads to wanting to reduce any future contact with that person which, of course, leads to more "win-lose" behaviours.

Tension, as a creative force, promotes healthy communication and problem-solving

strategies through constructive “win-win” decision making processes. When constructive approaches are taken, they can lead to positive feelings and a desire to seek out and interact with the other person.

Keeping a check on inner rhythms

Life is about conscious choices that empower us to stay on purpose, keep going, and stay engaged. By incorporating purpose into our day, we can focus on our goals and directions and check our own inner state of balance, pace, time and rhythms.

Fast growth is not a one-person show. Other people play a key role in the process. In fact, your speed and overall success in developing yourself will depend heavily on the ability to make quick and lasting connections with others.

—Price Pritchett

When others impose their priorities and expectations on us we can choose to accommodate or not because we are listening to our own inner voice. By doing this we can ensure we're on purpose, balanced, and taking control of inner processes.

While developing awareness and conviction in validating our own inner processes, we also need to remember that we share our world with other people. After the game is over, who we are and what we achieve is often determined by our relationships with others. A principle of personal growth is, “We have to do it ourselves and we can't do it alone”.

To remain healthy and happy and walk the professional tightrope in this cyberhuman society, have a meaningful life purpose, build good support systems, set interesting goals, and take time out to resource your energies along the way.

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