

4-Quadrant Personality Models

The Quick Way To Improve Team Communications

By Steve Wille

Seventy-five percent of other people don't think like I do, but that does not mean they are wrong. It does mean that we will have a hard time communicating, which can lead to conflict within our work teams. The quick fix for this problem is to speak in terms that make sense to the other person. If you are speaking to a team of people, you need to make sense to several other groups. We cut through the confusion using one of the popular 4-quadrant personality models such as DISC, Whole Brain Business, or Analytical-Amiable-Driver-Expressive personality assessments.

The objective is to learn to see the other person's behavior from a different set of eyes. Too often we view other people from our own eyes and our own frame of reference. The key to success is to understand there are many ways to approach work and they are all effective. Each of us has a preference for an approach that works best for us individually without regard for what will work best for another person. We tend to invalidate the other person for doing something the wrong way, even when the end result is positive. There is no better way to destroy team performance than to invalidate the performer for doing it the wrong way and no better way to enhance team performance than to validate a positive contribution.

Before talking about specific personality models, let's address personality tests in general. John Putzier, author of *Weirdoes in the Workplace*, says, "Personality testing can be valuable because we often see another person's strength as a weakness. For example, someone who likes to work alone in a detached analytical way may not be seen as a team player when in fact, the team needs someone who can do analytical work well and enjoy doing it, even though it requires hours of lonely work."

On the other hand, personality tests can be inappropriate and harmful. If they stop someone from getting a job for which he or she is fully qualified, not only is a person deprived of a job, but the team is deprived of a qualified person who might add diversity to the team by approaching work from a different perspective. Furthermore, you might be accused of illegal discrimination. Another misuse of a personality profile is to stereotype individuals and put them in boxes they cannot get out of. Many people think that core attributes such as introversion and extroversion don't change. According to a report from the National Research Council, as many as three quarters of Myers-Briggs test takers have a different result upon retaking the test.

The key thing to keep in mind is that the personality assessment is a snapshot at a point in time and humans are creatures who learn and adapt to the situation. The assessment is a useful tool to show where we are now, and provide ideas on how to adapt to future situations. This, of course, takes us directly back to the core question of finding a shortcut to improving team performance quickly. The goal is to assign tasks to people who already do those things well and enjoy doing it, followed by letting them approach the work in a way that works well for them.

Theoretical Background

It is interesting that there are many popular 4-quadrant models and they all get to about the same place, but from different directions. In the second century, Galen, a Roman physician, spoke of four temperaments, based on body humors. While his model is not exactly

like one of the popular categories in use today, you can see the general theme that people are different in predictable ways.

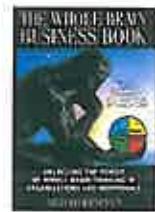
We don't think in terms of fire, water, earth, and air any more, but the idea of trying to make sense out of repeating patterns continues. The patterns are real and

Humor	Physiology	Today's Dictionary Usage	Element
sanguine	blood	cheerfully confident and optimistic	fire
choleric	yellow bile	easily angered, bad tempered	water
melancholic	black bile	depressed, melancholic, unhappy	earth
phlegmatic	phlegm	calm, sluggish, unemotional	air

Source: http://www.theintuitivecoach.com/sanguine_melancholic_choleric_phlegmatic.html

our ways of describing them are imprecise generalizations that are useful for making sense of the things we observe. At one time the popular terminology was right-brain/left-brain. We saw certain patterns and called them right brained and other patterns that we called left brained.

Ned Herman, author of *The Whole Brain Business Book*, discovered four quadrants when he was looking for two based on the right/left brain model. He said right/left was not sufficient to explain or categorize differences but four groupings seemed to work. It hit him one day that we don't just have a left brain and a right brain, but we have multiple thinking brains including left and right logical brains plus left and right emotional brains. While you cannot map behavior directly to



Whole Brain Model - Ned Hermann	
Analyze	Strategize
Organize	Personalize

different brains, it is useful to realize that our behavior is influenced by competing points of view within our own heads. We all have whole brains, but we tend to favor particular thought patterns. It is somewhat like having two hands, but being dominant right handed or left handed.

Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria in their book *Driven, How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices*, spoke of the genetic usefulness for behaviors that would contribute to survival of our species. A drive to acquire goods and riches would contribute to the success of the next generation. A drive for human bonding would get us past reproduction into the next 20 years to nurture the next generation. A drive for defending what we have would contribute to survival of our tribe. The big



Human Nature Model	
Drive to Learn	Drive to Acquire
Drive to Defend	Drive to Bond

leap for the human race was the drive to learn. Compared to all other living organizations, we have a huge thinking brain capable of improving our technology, generation after generation.

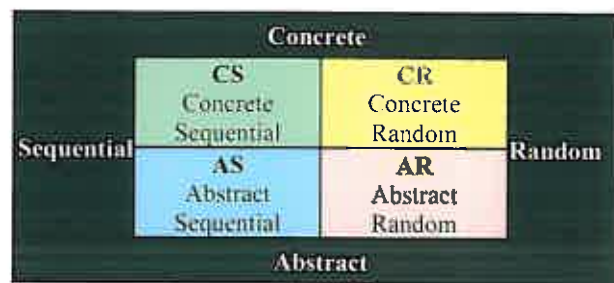
Anthony Gregory in *An Adult's Guide to Style* showed four distinct patterns. This model is less known in business circles, and better known among educators because it has implication on how to adapt teaching to learning styles. Gregorc warns that it is inappropriate to test children because their personalities are not fully developed, but it is still useful to teach everything in four distinct ways so all students can learn. He builds four quadrants base on two continuums:



1. **Concrete vs. Abstract:** Concrete people like to learn through their physical senses, what they can touch, see, hear, taste and smell. They like to deal with things that exist in the physical world. Abstract people prefer the world of ideas and feelings. They use reason or emotion to deal with ideas, concepts, and feelings. Of course we all use concrete and abstract thinking all the time, but we tend to favor one or the other.
2. **Sequential vs. Random:** Sequential people like the step-by-step approach to doing things and prefer a methodical process working in a predetermined order. They express themselves in a precise, progressive and logical manner. Random people deal with information in a nonlinear, galloping and leaping manner. Each piece of information has equal opportunity of receiving attention. This enables them to deal with diverse and independent elements of information with complex patterns.

By combining the two continuums he builds the following four quadrants:

- **CS:** The concrete sequential people are practical and well organized. They like to plan their work and work their plan.
- **CR:** Concrete random people are also practical and live in the physical world, but they like to learn by trial and error. Rather than a plan, they want options.



- **AS:** The abstract sequential people like to develop ideas in a logical way. How someone feels about something does not change reality.
- **AR:** Abstract random people work from the heart, not the head. How someone feels about it makes a great deal of difference.

DISC is four quadrant model that is very popular in business circles. It is quick to learn and easy to apply. There are a numbers of books on this model and multiple publishers of assessments including Inscape Publishing and the American Management Association³. This is the assessment we find most useful for team development and we use the version from AMA. Because there is so much literature published on DISC, we have been able to adapt the model for a team situation based on these multiple sources. We focus on task/people and process/quick:

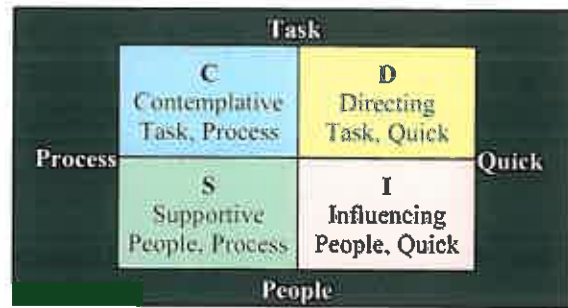


1. **Task vs. People:** Some of us focus on the task at hand and others focus on the people doing it. Both are important but we tend to emphasize one over the other.
2. **Process vs. Quick:** A process oriented person takes a methodical approach to work and takes time up front to get the right results at the end. The quick results people look for shortcuts and often view processes as analysis paralysis.

- **Task/Quick:**

Directing: Get things done by taking on tasks with decisiveness and determination, overcoming barriers. On a team this style is critical for goal accomplishment.

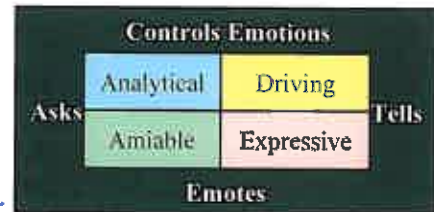
- **People/Quick:**
Influencing: Get things done by communicating with and persuading other people, motivating and inspiring them. On a team this style is critical for moving people in new directions.
- **People/Process:**
Supportive: Get things done by understanding and accepting other people, providing them with encouragement and cooperation. On a team this style is critical for promoting cooperation and teamwork.
- **Task/Process:**
Contemplative: Get things done by approaching tasks with care and attention, applying rationality. On a team this style is critical for completing tasks with precision and accuracy.



Another very popular 4-quadrant model in business circles is *Personal Styles and Effective Performance* by David Merrill and Roger Reid. They emphasize in their book that you should focus on observable behavior. The inner being is interesting, but in a work situation, the thing that really matters is action. The two continuums in this model are *Ask vs. Tell* and *Controls Emotions vs. Emotes*.



- **Driving:** Give the impression that they know what they want, where they are going, and how to get there quickly.
- **Expressive:** Appear communicative, warm approachable and competitive. They involve other people with their feelings and thoughts.
- **Amiable:** Place a high priority on friendships, close relationships, and cooperative behavior. They appear to get involved in feelings and relations between people.
- **Analytical:** Live life according to facts, principles, logic and consistency. Often viewed as cold and detached but appear to be cooperative in their actions as long as they can have some freedom to organize their own efforts.



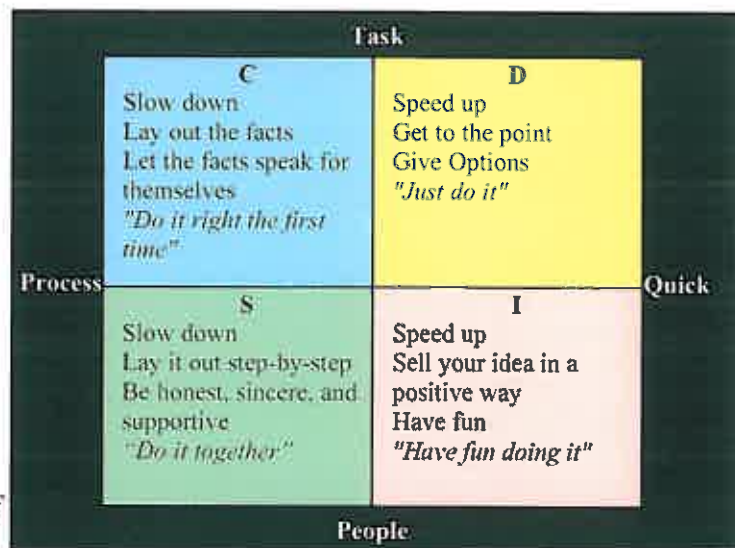
What Do You Do With a 4-Quadrant Model?

There are more 4-quadrant models but by now you get the picture. The fact that so many researchers ended at approximately the same place approaching it from so many different directions, there must be something to the idea that you can categorize behavior into a fairly simple framework, even though each of us are unique in our genetics and experiences. The variations are infinitely complex. The real issue is what do we do with this information and why is it a shortcut to team development?

Regardless of what you call it, every team needs driving, expressive, amiable and analytical behavior. The key is who should do what and how do we encourage them to do it

well? Economists will tell you that a country gains efficiency by specializing in things it does well, trading for goods and services that some other country does well. The same concept holds true for people within a team. If I am good at working with numbers and you are good at dealing with people, maximum efficiency is gained by each of doing what we are good at doing. Ah, but you say "You don't develop people that way. Wouldn't it better to expand people's comfortable zones and capabilities?" The answer to this question lies in what your objectives are. Is your objective to have a more efficient and productive team? Is your objective to create a work environment where people enjoy their work and look forward to doing it? If these are your objectives, work with people the way they are and develop their strengths. Ned Herman in *The Whole Brain Business Book* speaks of turn-on work that energizes vs. turn-off work that drains energy. "By turn-on work, I mean activity that is so interesting, so stimulating, so pleasurable to do that you would select it for these special attributes over another work that was offered to you. It may not be the easiest work to perform, but in all cases, it is more satisfying and fulfilling and, therefore, if given a choice, this is what you would select...the doing of the work is rewarding in itself."

Once you become familiar with a 4-quadrant model, it becomes easier to affirm positive behavior that is different from your own preferred behavior. For example, using the DISC model, if you are a Supportive or Contemplative, your natural tendency is to be turned off by the shortcuts taken by a type D person (directing). You might be inclined to tell the the type D to slow down, write a plan and follow the plan. This would most likely cause the type D to be annoyed and turned off by what you say because the natural



tendency is to jump right in and experiment with several options before committing to one. To be more effective, you need to speed up, get to the point, and give options. Next you need to step away and focus on results rather than process. Initially, this will feel wrong because you would not want to be treated this way. Once you try a different approach that is appropriate for situation, and you increase the team's overall effectiveness, you become more comfortable with other approaches. The following is what to do to increase your effectiveness with each of the four DISC quadrants:

The *golden rule* that we learned as children was, "Do unto others as they would have them do unto you." This is good advice for children who need to learn the basics of human relations skills. As adult workers we need to go beyond the golden rule and *do unto others as they would have us do to them*. This requires some observation skills and thinking, but over time it becomes natural.

What Not To Do

The 4-quadrant models are useful because they are quick to learn, easy to remember,

and straightforward in applying them to the current situation. They help us to appreciate our differences and affirm one another. These are not tools for performance measurement, personal development or employee screening. Performance measurement has to do with measuring results, not personality. Personal development is a much bigger issue involving talents, skills, ethics, rules and other such items.

As people become aware of the model they can use it for their own development as they see fit to help them become more effective on the job. These tools are not validated for selecting particular people for particular jobs. They are just one more piece of information in a complex picture of a whole person.

What About the Non-4-Quadrant Models?

One of the most popular personality assessments is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. It is taken by approximately 2.5 million people a year¹. Obviously, it is useful or it would not be so popular. We use the 4-quadrant models in our organization because they are quick to learn and easy to apply. It takes just a little longer to become proficient with a 16-box model like Myers-Briggs, but it is not that hard to understand and can provide additional data points. Myers-Briggs uses four continuums.

E - Extravert							
S - Sensing				N - Intuition			
T - Thinking		F - Feeling		T - Thinking		F - Feeling	
J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving
ESTJ	ESTP	ESFJ	ESFP	ENTJ	ENTP	ENFJ	ENFP
I - Introvert							
S - Sensing				N - Intuition			
T - Thinking		F - Feeling		T - Thinking		F - Feeling	
J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving	J - Judging	P - Perceiving
ISTJ	ISTP	ISFJ	ISFP	INTJ	INTP	INFJ	INFP

Extraversion–Introversion (describes where people prefer to focus their attention and get their energy—from the outer world of people and activity or their inner world of ideas and experiences) This is known as the E and I in the Myers-Briggs model. Type E people process information on the outside and like to discuss their way through the issues. Type I people prefer to process information on the inside, needing quiet time for thinking.

Sensing–Intuition (describes how people prefer to take in information—focused on what is real and actual or on patterns and meanings in data) This known as the S and N. Type S people see what is going on around them while type N are less aware of their

environment because they are thinking one thing through.

Thinking–Feeling (describes how people prefer to make decisions—based on logical analysis or guided by concern for their impact on others). This is known as the T and F. Type T people make decisions based on logic and type F base decisions on feelings, their own and the people around them.

Judging–Perceiving (describes how people prefer to deal with the outer world—in a planned orderly way, or in a flexible spontaneous way). This is known as the J and P. Type J people like to get decisions made while type P people like to keep decisions open and flexible.

Because there are four dimensions we can not put this into a simple two dimensional or three dimensional model. Here is a way to look at the sixteen boxes in a structured way: One problem with this chart is it is too hard to remember all sixteen boxes and what they mean. This model is an excellent tool for working with people individually. You can focus on one or two boxes and discuss what they mean. Our experience with project teams leads us back to 4 quadrant models that lend themselves to quick observation and appropriate action.

Synthesis of Popular 4-Quadrant Models

If you are viewing this in color you probably noticed the coloring in each of the four quadrants on all the models. Among the models there are consistent patterns showing through and these are reflect in the colors displayed. The top right corner is shown in yellow on all the models and reflects a direct action approach to work and learning. The bottom right are all red and reflect people oriented, feeling expressive people. The left hand quadrants keep flipping based on how the model is built with the variables. In some cases the blue shaded analytic people are on the bottom left and in some cases on the top. Likewise the green process oriented people flip from top to bottom on the various models. Regardless of the model, we seem to get to the same four quadrants that are useful for bringing out the strengths of each group. Please be aware that each model lays out its own graphic presentation and uses its own color scheme. We adapted this so it would be easy to compare the various models.

It is hard to communicate if we speak different languages, each with different words for the same things. In our corporate training we find that most participants have used at least one of these models in the past and want to quickly relate it to the one used in our workshop. The following is a translation table to help us communicate. You might be thinking that a translation table is inappropriate because we compare apples to oranges. You are right, except that if we call apples and oranges fruit and contrast fruit with meat, we can see the general patterns differentiating the two. Each of these models describe generalized patterns of behavior by groups of people rather than precisely describing one particular person. We can generalize the models one level higher so that those of us who are familiar with one model can use another one with equal effectiveness. The following chart is like a Rosetta stone for 4-quadrant models.

Before applying our synthesized model to real situations, there is one other critical topic to address. You cannot put a person in a box. Over the course of a day we need to jump around from box to box, depending what we are doing. If you are paying bills, the numbers matter and how you feel about the numbers really does not matter. If you have enough cash in the bank and

you get it in the mail before bill is due, you win. If not, you lose. Paying bills is a *task/process* activity you must do, regardless of how you feel about it, and regardless of how efficient you are at doing it. If you are paying bills and a neighbor comes to the door with a family emergency asking for your immediate help, you will automatically jump to the random side. The *task/random* activity is to quickly find out what the problem is and take appropriate action. The *people/random* activity is to deal with your neighbor's emotional well being. Can you calm her down and reassure her that everyone is doing everything to help her? If she heads to the hospital with her husband, a *people/process* activity will kick in when you offer to pick up her children after school and care for them until she gets back.

DISC	Gregorc	Whole Brain	Merrill Reid	Synthesized
D Task/Quick	CR Concrete/Random	Strategize	Driver Tell/Control	Task/Random
I People/Quick	AR Abstract/Random	Personalize	Expressive Tell/Emote	People/Random
S People/Process	AS Abstract/Sequential	Organize	Amiable Ask/Emote	People/Process
C Task/Process	CS Concrete/Sequential	Analyze	Analytical Ask/Control	Task/Process

The issue is not if we jump from box to box, but rather how well we perform while in a box and how much we like performing activities associated with that box. Most of us will perform with at least an average level of competency in each box, but we may not be totally comfortable when in that box. This is normal and it is useful to us as social beings. When we find that we are comfortable with an activity and we have a talent for it, we develop the skills for getting even better. When we are less talented, we become uncomfortable and have a hard time developing skills beyond an average level of competency. That is why we need families and organizations with teamwork. I develop my talents in one area, you develop yours in another, and together we are an incredibly effective team.

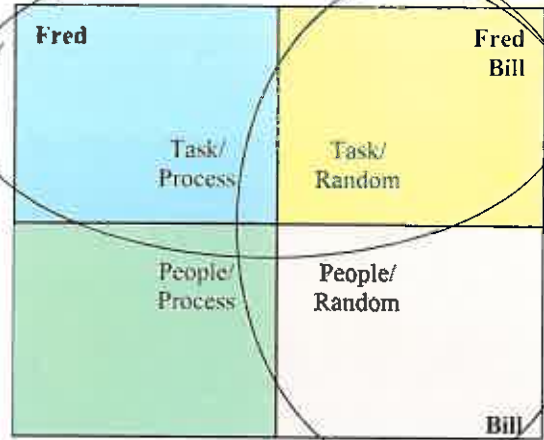
Comfort/Competency Zone

Not only do we jump from box to box, but we have varying comfort and talent in each of the four quadrants. As we administer the 4-quadrant assessment tools in our workshops, we rarely find someone who is extremely high in one box and extremely low in the other three. Instead, we commonly see high rankings in two or three quadrants and lower rankings in the others. The minute you put a particular person in one box you are no longer dealing with the whole person and you will be wrong in classifying this person, regardless of which 4-quadrant model you are using.

If Fred is a double-quadrant *task/process*, *task/random* person and Bill is a double-quadrant *task/random*, *people/random* person, they are fundamentally different from a single-quadrant *task/random* person. You could classify Fred as a *task* person and Bill as a *random* person. Some of the time they will be on the same page in the same box, but at other times they will be quite far apart in their behavior and simply won't make sense to each other. When Fred is in the *task/process* mode and bill is in the *people/random* mode it is likely that

miscommunication and conflict will arise. You would not see this when they are both in the *task/random* mode.

If Fred and Bill were a team, their team would be comfortable and competent in three of the four quadrants, but *people/process* activities might suffer. Translating this back to the Gergorc model, *concrete/sequential* activities like planning their work and working their plan, or applying creativity to improving processes might be outside this team's comfort zone. To be effective at all activities either they have to recruit a third person to do the things they don't like doing or one of them has to increase his comfort zone into the *people/process* quadrant.



Often an organization will outsource activities outside of its comfort/competency zones. That is why professional service firms like accountants, lawyers, and insurance agents thrive in the business world. There is a need for their services.

This takes us to the next point of why too many management consultants and too many personal coaches often give bad advice. Regardless of your industry, regardless of your particular job, you are a unique person and your work group is a unique team. You and your team have an existing comfort/competency zone. You are successful because of how well you perform in your comfort/competency zone and your opportunity for greater success comes from doing more of the stuff you do well and doing it better. The consultant might come in and focus on the areas outside your comfort/competency zone and try to make you better at those things. At best, you will get a little less bad, but you will never be great because you have too far to go. To make matters worse, once you know about a deficiency, it is hard to focus on anything else. If you don't know that you spilled coffee on yourself, the dark stain on your shirt will not inhibit your performance in areas not affected by a dark stain on your shirt. Once you know about it, that is all you can think about and performance in all areas will suffer. There are many things you can do about that stain, such as going out to get a new shirt, putting a sweater over it, or simply telling people that you that you spilled coffee and there is nothing you could do about it this morning. None of these things will undo the stain on your shirt; they simply get it out of your way. If you are deficient in a quadrant, you need a strategy to reduce the negative consequence, and then get on with doing what you do well.

Fortunately, it is rare that we find a work group that is quadrant deficient. Once you get a group of four or more people working together, the odds are that among them, someone is reasonably strong in each quadrant. In our workshops around the country in multiple companies we have consistently found this to be the case, even when everyone in the group has a similar job.

The real problem that we often find in an team is that a particular quadrant is invalidated and unappreciated, causing people who would normally operate in that quadrant go into a different box in order to fit in. In some organizations the misfits are driven out, leaving the team totally naked when they need activity in that quadrant. This behavior works for a while, but when the external environment changes, the team is unable to adapt and it flounders. I saw this first hand at an insurance company in the computer systems department when I joined them as the new executive manger. They had a great team of committed people who did a

fabulous job with existing systems, but when there was a major technology shift from old style mainframes to smaller open systems, they could not adapt and had to go outside for new leadership. As the new leader I was resented for a number of reasons, but the biggest source of irritation was over style, not substance. The existing team was from the left hand side of our synthesized 4-quadrant model, meaning they were *process* oriented. They were happy with the way things were and thought that they could survive by improving existing processes. The future lay in a different direction and some random, experimental behavior was needed to find a new path to the future. When I introduced this randomness it caused great concern because it upset the existing plans. In addition to introducing new technology, I instituted some organization development that included training on the *DISC* 4-quadrant model. This made a world of difference because the group could see that there was need for a little more diversity in approaching the strategic and tactical plans. The company broke new ground and saw some very successful new projects using new technology.

We just gave an example of how a random person was needed to lead the change required. Process oriented people are also needed to take an organization forward. It is not unusual for a dynamic organization to flounder when the dynamic leader leaves. When processes are not in place to sustain the organization, it can experience some wild ups and downs. Similar problems can arise when the organization is not balanced on the *task/people* continuum. Great things can be happening, but people can be unhappy and leaving the organization when they are really needed to sustain the success. When the *task* oriented people at the top of the model are in charge without regard for how people feel about things, some big surprises can hit them suddenly and they have no one to pull them through. When the *people* oriented culture is supreme, everyone might be feeling good while the organization is going down fast. The only sustainable organization is one that has coverage in all four quadrants, accepting the tension and conflict that these different points of view cause. The purpose of team development using a 4-quadrant model is to get people to appreciate and affirm those different points of view.

Summary

While we should never put people in boxes and keep them there, it is useful to classify behavior so we can better understand behavior and leverage strengths. People do change, adapting to situations, and we rarely spend our whole day in just one quadrant. Used in the right way, these quick personality profiles can help us be more effective with each individual, and the net effect is a stronger team. All teams need behavior from all four quadrants and the best way to get the best team is to let natural diversity into the team. The key is to encourage each person do well what he or she does well.

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