

Work styles:

Understanding how you work

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.

- Tony Robbins

People have different backgrounds and experiences, as well as different personalities and ways of looking at the world. That's a good thing, because those differences give rise to creative solutions and unique perspectives that enable us to understand one another better and accomplish more.

These differences also mean we have different ways we work—and those are called work styles. Work styles describe your work personality: how you work with others, your preferred way to work, and how you manage your work responsibilities.

Most people have one dominant work style and can shift their style when the situation demands it. So individual work styles aren't good or bad, and they each have strengths and weaknesses.

See below for four basic work styles.

Promoter

Spontaneous, optimistic, want action, fun

Promoters are the creative energy behind projects; they often generate the best ideas. They do well in friendly environments and action-oriented activities. They become stressed when others lack enthusiasm, there are minimal opportunities for involvement, and hearing "that's the way we've always done it."

At their best:

- Spend time socializing
- Are interested in ideas and brainstorming
- Focus on the big picture, not so much on details
- Bring the energy

At their worst:

- Lack follow through
- Disorganized
- Unreliable
- Can become overwhelmed

Supporter

Empathetic, seek harmony, nurturer, subjective

Supporters are great at offering reassurance and support to others and work best in a structured environment with friendly co-workers. They become stressed by unfriendly people, lack of guidance, quick decision making, and when others in their workplace lack integrity.

At their best:

- Loyal
- Sensitive to co-worker concerns
- Appreciative of others
- Good listeners

At their worst:

- Hesitate to share opinions
- Are slow to act or think on their own
- Are overly sensitive

(Continued)

Analyzer

Seek structure, dependable, want stability, organized

Analyzers prefer to work alone on routine tasks with low pressure. They are very good at knowing and following the rules. They are stressed by disorganization, making quick decisions, or activities with a high social element.

At their best:

- Objective
- Logical
- Detail-oriented
- Reliable

At their worst:

- Overly cautious
- Indecisive
- Unemotional and lacking imagination
- Nitpicky

Controller

Ideas, like a challenge, accountability, decisive

Controllers excel when they are in charge, and they thrive in fast-paced and challenging situations. They are stressed by the lack of a plan or deadlines, indecision and excuses of others, and working with other controllers.

At their best:

- Quick decisions
- Variety
- Challenges
- Independent

At their worst:

- Can steamroll others on their team
- Overly critical
- Appear unfeeling
- Overly competitive
- Ego driven

How understanding work styles can increase team effectiveness

Plenty of research points to the importance of team diversity in increasing effectiveness and generating creative solutions. In fact, if your team all has one dominant style, it may work against you.

“When members of a team, or leaders of an organization, all have the same style, you’ll quickly run into trouble. For example, if everyone in your group has a big-picture, strategic, intuitive approach to work and chafes against the structure of project plans, you might frequently be over budget and behind schedule. Or, if everyone has a linear, analytical, and planned approach to work and dislikes disruption, innovative new product development would be impossible.” – Carson Tate, author of *WORK SIMPLY: Embracing the Power of Your Personal Productivity Style*.

So, how can you use work styles to create better teams? Well, you can do self-assessments to gain some insight (see a link to one in the activity ideas section), but you can also observe how employees work to see their strengths and their weaknesses.

Remember, weaknesses aren’t bad, we all have them and that’s why working in a team yields better products than anyone working by themselves. When putting a team together, consider the project goals as well as the proposed deliverables or outcome of the project. This will guide you in putting together a team that will tackle an issue with their individual strengths.

Another benefit of understanding work style is maintaining team harmony. If everyone accepts the idea that we all have our own way of working, it’s easier to compromise and communicate. At the end of the day, you end up with better results and team members who respect how their colleagues’ different views contribute to overall mission effectiveness.

Activity ideas

- Complete SAIF’s Work Styles questionnaire (saif.com/S1093). How can knowing your preferred way of working improve the way you work with others?
- In a group, discuss these work styles. What are some creative ways to work with others who have a different preferred style? What is the benefit of having all work styles represented on a work team?
- Look online for other articles describing work styles. Are their suggestions for working with other work styles useful?