

## **TACKLING TOUGH FACILITATIONS: DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND GOING INTERNATIONAL**

### **Abstract:**

If you improve your ability to read and respond to nonverbal communication accurately and to hear and respond to the hidden meanings in what your teams and clients say, then you can deal with many difficult facilitations. In this workshop and paper, you will learn an easy system for categorizing the behavior that you see, apply your observations to help your groups proceed smoothly through the VE process, brainstorm solutions to specific types of people problems, and develop the confidence you need for dealing with tough facilitations.

## **DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND THEIR IMPACT ON FACILITATIONS**

The VE Process can be thwarted by disruptive individuals who are resistant to change, the process, and/or intervention by individuals outside of their immediate organization. One way to understand how to deal with difficult people is to understand their preferences, fears, and natural tendencies under pressure. Using any of a variety of style preference instruments, VE Specialists can work more effectively with a variety of difficult individuals. This paper will demonstrate such facilitation techniques using one of these instruments, the DISC, a profiling tool developed by Carlson Learning Company.

### **TYPE 1: Dominators**

**Dominant Function: Take Control**

**Focus: Tasks and Dominance**

These individualistic, daring, competitive people like to get immediate results, find solutions to problems, exercise power, judge others according to their internal standards, and take control. They use phrases like "I like challenges, I enjoy taking charge of situations, (and) I want to advance my career." When Dominators are under pressure, they try to take excessive control, use others to meet their personal goals, and can even be belligerent and manipulative. They fear being viewed as too soft and losing social status. At their best, they contribute many solutions to VE sessions. At their worst, they compete for power with the leaders of the VE process.

### **TYPE 2: INFLUENCERS**

**Dominant Function: Persuade People, Create Appeal**

**Focus: Relationships and Influence**

These socially-oriented, confident-looking people crave attention, attraction, and an atmosphere that is party-like. They worry about people's feelings and are persuasive, enthusiastic, open, trusting, and expressive. They like a casual atmosphere. They say things such as "I'm enjoying myself" or "I have loads of friends", and are often laughing and joking. When Influencers are under pressure, they can "oversell" their ideas and be too easily persuaded, disorganized, and worried about what others think of them. They fear lack of change and dislike systems and completing tasks.

### **TYPE 3: STEADINESS-LOVERS**

**Dominant Functions: Avoid Conflict, Execute Tasks**

**Focus: Relationships and Steadiness**

These easy-going, low-keyed team players prefer to know what is expected of them, to do repetitive work, and concentrate on getting tasks done. They prefer to listen rather than talk or direct activities. They like to know clearly what the requirements and procedures are. They like specific information. They are generally quiet, but when they speak they can make profound but unpretentious clear statements and voice their enjoyment of working with others. At their worst, they can become upset by unexpected change, unassertive, silent, and self-sacrificing.

### **TYPE 4: CONSCIENTIOUS SCOUTS**

**Dominant Function: Follow Rules, Create Perfection**

### **Focus: Tasks and Conscientiousness**

These individuals are not easy-going. They are motivated to be thorough and correct. They are often described as cautious and critical. They say phrases such as "I want to be careful, I want this to be up to standards, I don't want to fight about this, (and) I want your support on this." At their worst, they can be intolerant of others' differences, especially for standards in getting work accomplished and measure others by their accomplishments.

There are other ways to determine the type of difficult person you are dealing with. Look at their typical behaviors during everyday activities:

#### **Example 1: On the golf course**

The Type 1 Dominator drives the golf cart and often attempts to play through other groups.  
The Type 2 Influencer spends as much time talking in the clubhouse as golfing on the course.  
The Type 3 Steady Person almost golfs on the same day, at the same time, in the same place.  
The Type 4 Conscientious Scout keeps score and plays strictly by the rules with very clean clubs.

#### **Example 2: At the supermarket**

The Type 1 Dominator is a fast, impulsive shopper. No list.  
The Type 2 Influencer talks to strangers in the store and is attracted to fancy packaging.  
The Type 3 Steady Person is prepared, has a list, and shops efficiently.  
The Type 4 Conscientious Scout brings coupons and a calculator to the store.

#### **Example 3: At a restaurant**

The Type 1 Dominator eats out a lot and tries exotic foods.. At home, Dominators eat over the sink.  
The Type 2 Influencer loves to go to gourmet restaurants. At home, Influencers have the latest kitchen gadgets but don't use them.  
The Type 3 Steady Person eats from the four basic food groups each day. At home, Steady People follow recipes diligently.  
The Type 4 Conscientious Scout knows the amount of fat in each food and will pay reasonable prices for meals. At home, Scouts buy kitchen gadgets that are economical and well-constructed.

#### **Example 4: In a VE study**

The Type 1 Dominator suggest changes to the agenda, break times, and the day's start/stop times.  
The Type 2 Influencer wants to do more fun stuff, warmups, talk more during breaks.  
The Type 3 Steady Person will be quiet during the meeting, and will work diligently by themselves during each phase.  
The Type 4 Conscientious Scout double-checks the FAST diagram logic, and feels uncomfortable refraining from evaluating ideas during the creative phase.

## **KNOW YOURSELF**

Try to determine your natural style or type as a reference point for coping with the types above. First, determine whether you are task or people oriented. For example, task-oriented people are focused on getting things done and making tangible progress on projects. Relationship-oriented people are concerned about who is involved in a project, how they are reacting to the VE process, and how to make them more comfortable.

After you determine your main orientation as task or relationship oriented, decide which of the following traits is most dominant in your operating style:

For task-oriented people, consider whether you are a Dominator or Conscientious. Dominators want to control. Conscientious people want to be accurate and follow the rules.

For relationship-oriented people, consider whether you are an Influencer or a Steady Person. Influencers are talkative, like change, and want to make a great impression and be well-liked. Steady people are quiet and are concerned about keeping the peace and avoiding change.

Knowing your natural tendencies gives you a starting point for evaluating others. It also creates the possibility that you have your own weaknesses and fears that other types and certain situations can provoke in you.

Each type described above has fears that can sabotage the success of your VE sessions. Here are ways to keep your sessions running smoothly, depending on your own typology.

Dominators, Type 1, are afraid of being taken advantage of or losing control. If you are a Dominator type when leading VE sessions, your facilitations may be characterized by lack of concern for others' feelings or views. This tendency can be worsened with pressure or resistance by the participants. To compensate for this tendency, inhibit your desire to lecture them. Restrict your speaking to a few short sentences when your sense of control seems to be challenged. Assess whether your reaction is excessive relative to the participants' attempt to participate and take responsibility for the VE session. Watch for clusters of nonverbal signals of excessive quiet in both their speaking and their facial expressions, the latter becoming 'wooden' or withdrawn.

Influencers, Type 2, are afraid of social rejection. As a facilitator, you might be easily distracted and overly concerned about participants' lack of enthusiasm for VE, which could in turn depress you. Instead of reacting to small nonverbal communication issues such as participants' glances away from you, postpone judgment of their reactions until you perceive a cluster of related negative behaviors. Alleviate your concerns by continuing on to improve the pace or by checking whether or not you have lost your focus and begun to ramble.

Steady People, Type 3, are afraid of change. As a facilitator, a Steady Person might be too rigid about the VE process, not considering variations that would serve the participants better. Consider an occasional suggestion to try something different. Have a way of testing whether small changes really worked. Decide that sometimes group harmony or participation is a higher priority than exactness of the process.

Conscientious Scouts are afraid of criticism of their work. When facilitating, you might be overly suspicious of participants' sidebar conversations and might be intolerant of their suggestions. Leave time to talk and listen with interest to the participants outside of the training session. Get to know them and find something to respect about them before the sessions begin. Be careful about rushing to judgment about individuals' abilities. When participants anger you, avoid speaking and smile instead. Assume lack of knowledge before assuming malice in others' actions.

### **COMPATIBILITY OF DIFFERENT TYPES**

Similar types tend to be compatible socially. However, with work tasks such as VE sessions, different types strengthen the group but can result in conflict. To work together with different types, we need to create an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and a willingness to adapt.

Below is a chart of known compatibilities of different styles:

<b>KEY</b>	
S =	Social Interaction
W =	Work Tasks
1 =	Best Possible

7 = Poorest Possible

Types	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D-D					W		
D-I			S		W		
D-S	W				S		
D-C					W		S
I-I	S						W
I-S	W				S		
I-C			W				S
S-S	S		W				
S-C		S					
C-C	W						
	S		W				

As you can see from this chart, often individuals who are compatible in social situations are not compatible in work situations and vice versa. What this means for your teams is that putting Influencers or Dominators together can create a weak chain in your teams. If a team seems to be malfunctioning, note whether the sources of disruption need to be separated from one another.

### MANAGING DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Interpreting the type of individual who is creating difficulty can help you be more effective. Here are some typical problems VE facilitators face and recommended solutions.

With Dominators, (focus: task), maximize their contribution to the team by being clear, specific, brief, and to-the-point. Stay focused. Present your materials in a well-organized package. Be logical, factual, and specific rather than anecdotal or casual. Provide statistics. Refer frequently to objectives and the results that will be achieved. Use time efficiently, and do not spend time after the business at hand is complete. For Dominators, who are task- and results-oriented:

- Be clear, specific, brief and to the point.
- Be well-organized and focus on business.
- Present the facts logically and concisely.
- Ask specific questions (Best: "What" questions)
- Provide choices to decide among
- Give facts and figures to help with choices
- If you argue, argue about the facts
- To be convincing, refer to objectives and results
- Leave promptly when business is completed

With Influencers, (focus: relationship) you have the opposite situation than with Dominators. Influencers need time to socialize and to express their opinions. Offer them incentives to take risks and to pay attention to details. They need warmth and a casual atmosphere to succeed. For Influencers (relationship-oriented and sociable):

- Talk about ideas, intuitions, and vision statements
- Make your conversations and presentations interactive

- Be sociable yet fast-paced
- Talk about people and their goals
- Don't talk about details; put them in writing later
- Ask for their opinions about relationships
- Ask 'Who' type questions
- Be convincing by using testimonials
- Offer incentives for their risk-taking
- Use a casual style

With Steadiness-Lovers, (focus: relationship), express that you are personally committed to the session. Show interest in them as people. Be patient and responsive with them. Lead them in a soft, non-threatening way. Check for hurt feelings, which are not necessarily apparent. Be organized and minimize their personal risk in the situation. Be clear and specific. For Steady People (relationship-oriented and change-averse):

- Talk about commitment and goals
- Warm up slowly to your main points
- Show interest in them and their personal concerns
- Be patient
- Present your ideas slowly and without pressure
- If you argue, look for hurt feelings and personal concerns
- Show minimal risks and provide assurance
- End with clear, specific solutions and guarantees if possible

With Conscientious types (focus: task), prepare your materials so well that they are accurate, methodical, and practical. Show them how you will proceed step by step. Be specific. Ask for their input. Don't react negatively to their serious attitudes. Validate their high standards. Give them time to think. Do what you say you will do. Set priorities clearly. Conscientious Types (task-oriented and perfectionistic):

- Prepare well and check accuracy
- Be straightforward, direct, logical, and low-key
- Focus on business
- Talk about specific information
- Do not rush them
- Be convincing by presenting a scheduled approach for implementation with a step by step timetable
- Assure them that there will be no surprises
- Ask 'Why' questions
- Give them time to verify what you said
- Be realistic
- Provide solid, tangible, practical evidence

This just about exhausts techniques that can be culled from this approach that focuses on relationship versus task orientation.

## HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Few teams present VE Specialists with crises, but most facilitators recognize that some small problems cause major headaches to both the facilitator and the team. Below are several such problems and solutions. What to say in these situations is in italics.

### **GROUP PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

<b>PROBLEMS</b>	<b>YOUR RESPONSES</b>
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Going too fast or too slowly.	<i>Are we getting anywhere? Is it time to move on to a different topic or try a different point of view?</i>
Group loses energy or momentum.	<i>We've just a little more to do. Let's really push. Walk around the room enthusiastically. Let the group talk 95% of the time. Be shorter or more concise in your speaking. Talk about being bogged down. (It looks as if we're getting bogged down. We were doing fine a while ago, but we got distracted. Some of you look as if you've tuned out. How are you feeling? Let's see how we got off track. I think we can still head back in the right direction.)</i>
Group doesn't participate fully.	<i>Let them be disorganized for a while, if necessary. Start the meeting on a positive note. Get rid of the eyes, butts or put-downs (Not: That'll never work.) Let them know when they're doing a good job. (Good idea. We're really moving along. We're really working together now. Let's keep it up.)</i>
Overtalkers are dominating the meeting.	<i>Move toward the overtalker. Turn your back on them. Leap in when they pause to take a breath. If too many people talk, acknowledge them in the correct sequence. Be gentle but firm. (X, you're doing a lot of the talking. Let's hear from someone else.) Let the quieter people know that you want to hear from them, too.</i>
Repetition	<i>Refer to what the scribe wrote. (See, you already said that. Do you have anything to add?)</i>
Conflict (okay for ideas, not for personalities)	<i>Intervene when personalities are in conflict. Re-focus arguments energy on solving problems, rather than on each other. (That's one idea. Let's not evaluate it yet. How about other ideas? Let's keep this discussion positive and constructive.) Prevent steam-rolling. Prevent bullying. (Hold on! His/her ideas are important.)</i>

## GOING INTERNATIONAL

Leading VE sessions with groups in which there is a language deficit presents other significant complications. If the VE Specialist is speaking in a language that is not native to the team, he or she introduces problems such as lack of comprehension, potential violations of speaking and social rules of another culture, and inhibited speaking by the participants. There are ways that VE Specialists in these situations can improve non-native teams' comprehension:

- (1) Shorten meetings and speak more slowly to increase ease of processing information
- (2) Check comprehension by the challenging listener throughout a discussion rather than at just the end of the discussion, when most people dislike admitting that they did not understand
- (3) Provide agendas for meetings and follow-up documents summarizing meetings to clarify meeting content
- (4) Avoid using jargon or slang
- (5) Observe nonverbal signs of lack of comprehension such as staring, smiling, and excessive laughing by the challenging professional
- (6) Note verbal signs of lack of comprehension such as absence of questions or excessive changing of the subject by the listener
- (7) Allow a longer amount of time for communications and do not rush

call on  
call up  
carry the ball  
catch up on  
catch up with  
come across  
come up with

- (8) Avoid framing statements and questions in the negative, which is difficult to comprehend (Example: not "You don't understand, do you?" but "Do you understand?")
- (9) Rephrase what the listener says and or diplomatically ask the listener to repeat the information (Example: "I told you so much at once that I am getting confused. Do you know what I said about your experiments?")
- (10) In a group meeting, inform the group that they can ask questions in private or in writing
- (11) Share responsibility for good communications
- (12) Listen completely before asking questions
- (13) Ask a series of short questions for good conversational flow
- (14) Refrain from laughing at errors and look interested in what others say
- (15) Use open-ended questions or requests ("Tell me about...") instead of questions answered by yes or no

Business and technical communications are mainly oral, brief, constantly modified, and full of jargon and idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions include not just "slang" but many verb phrases with particles (words such as "up" and "to") that are unclear to people who speak English as a second language. An example is the semantic difference between *pick up* and *pick out*. The following list contains frequently used expressions which do not have obvious meanings:

come in handy  
come out  
come up with  
count on  
day in and day out

††

The following electronic message, which contains seven idiomatic expressions and two internal vocabulary items, is an example of typical business communications:

Let's get together to pick up where we left off on the R & D for Compound SB10776 and to discuss your LADR. Tony dropped the ball on this one. We'll wrap it up by 3 at the latest. †

Here's a idiomatic-free way of communicating this same message.

Let's meet again to continue our discussion on the research and development for Compound SB10776 and to discuss the L A D R . Tony did not do what was planned. We'll finish our meeting before 3.

Foreign-born professionals describe their limited English for social purposes as causing lack of social interaction at work. Fluent, social, and relaxed English is an important aspect of team-building, networking, and asserting oneself in the business and technical community. (If the foreigner is from a culture that is unassertive, then the lack of assertiveness by the individual is even more pronounced.) Writing in the business and technical community, ranging from short, informal electronic mail communications to lengthy annual reviews of research, can be very time-consuming and stressful even for native speakers of English. For foreign-born professionals writing in their second or third language, writing can consume much more time and energy.