

Social Styles: how different people see the same thing, but differently.

An introduction to the **Social Styles Inventory**, and the work of David Merrill and Roger Reid.

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How ‘Social Style’ profiling can help

Psychometric profiling will be familiar territory for many managers and executives. The Social Styles Inventory is based on the psychology that underpins many sophisticated psychometric tests, but Social Styles profiling is deliberately more simple and straightforward.

Its main quality, as a light approach, is that it is easy to use in the field. It doesn’t need questionnaires and trained psychologists to apply. With sufficient emotional intelligence, an understanding of social styles can help a practitioner connect more ably with another person, to the benefit of the project they are working on.

The social styles approach encourages the practitioner to be sensitive to two factors – the degree to which a person is assertive and the degree to which the she or he demonstrates emotional control. These are different constructs and when related to each other, create a four-quadrant grid with a different persona in each of the four areas. These four personas are usually labelled ‘driver’, ‘expressive’, ‘analyser’ and ‘amiable’.

The diagnostic: find out what your own Social Style is.

You can determine your own Social Style preference by completing the short diagnostic (see separate sheet). It takes you about ten minutes to complete.

Social Styles Inventory results

People who have high emotional control tend to be influenced by facts and specific data, whereas those who have less emotional control, more demonstrative with their feelings, tend to value personal relationships and interaction.

People who are more assertive tend to be bolder in their decision making, taking larger steps forward more readily. People who are less assertive will still make a decision, but will usually do so with smaller steps, often more tentatively.

The Social Styles Inventory doesn’t infer superior and inferior positions (there is no ‘best place’ for a person to be on the grid), it draws attention to the differences in natural style. A person is likely to be more effective when he or she can present information in a way that accords with natural style of another person.

Driver (high assertiveness/high emotional control – ‘it’s about achievement’)

A ‘driver’ makes decisions independently, with calculated risks and pretty much objectively. A consultant dealing with a driver is pacy and direct, keeps conversation on objectives and facts and is not afraid to challenge the driver. The conversation is likely to be ‘big picture’ rather than ‘detail’. Drivers don’t like their time being wasted or having to engage in needless small talk.

Expressive (high assertiveness/low emotional control – ‘it’s about recognition’)

An ‘expressive’ makes decisions boldly, but with the involvement of others, and usually quickly. A consultant dealing with an expressive usually finds work matters are inter-laced with a social element. Boundaries between work and play are blurred. Expressives are often charismatic, engaging leaders and enjoy being centre stage. Expressive don’t like not holding a prominent role in what’s going on

Analyser (low assertiveness/high emotional control – ‘it’s about security’)

An ‘analyser’ makes decisions logically, carefully and often reluctantly. A consultant working with an analyser will become accustomed to more deliberate decision-making process, slower pace and needing to sate the analyser’s appetite for detail and tendency towards procrastination due to uncertainty. Analysers don’t like to have bullshit fed to them – it’s a mark of strength for a consultant to say to analyser “I don’t know”, instead making an off the cuff guesstimate.

Amiable (low assertiveness/low emotional control – ‘it’s about affiliation’)

An ‘amiable’ makes decisions usually in terms of people, with the involvement of others and reluctantly. A consultant dealing with an amiable will understand the amiable’s concern for the impact of their decision on other people and become used to the gentler approach that is helpful in encouraging a decision. Amiables treat the relationship with the consultant as an important part of the decision making process. Betrayals of trust hit amiables hard, as does pressure to make a decision.

Being authentic

One of the most prized qualities in leadership and citizenship is authenticity. So how can a person be authentic when their communication style and behaviour is subject to change. The answer is straightforward. Authenticity is about principles, ethics and values, and these sit at the core of a person’s actions. When a person adapts their social style in order to be more helpful, they can do so in the confidence that what isn’t subject to change is their principles, ethics and values. Adapting style need not be disingenuous, but blowing with the breeze in ethics and values is.

Social Style diagnosis

Which social style? Test your grasp of the Social Styles Inventory by identifying the most likely social style that fits each of these four phrases,

1. *"Why don't you go with your instinct and..."*.

The question suggests the person's confidence in her/his decision-making conviction, so a more assertive persona. 'Instinct' perhaps suggests and 'expressive'.

2. *"The prevailing message from the data appears to be..."*

Analyser – rational logic in support of a decision and no direct pressure.

3. *"There's a lot of support for XXX course of action, out there."*

Amiable – this is a 'feelings'/relationship play in support of a decision. And there's no direct pressure and social proof is being used to help convey confidence.

4. *"I think you're wrong and here's why".*

Direct, to the point and backed up offered evidence. The depth and nature of the evidence would have a bearing but the opening confrontation suggests the person is talking to a Driver