

Achieving long-term



In assessing how a work role should be undertaken, rather than just what needs to be done, **Neil Middleton** explains the concept of WorkStyle Patterns™ and uses two case studies to underline its application in context.

organisational success:

a concept that works

Many organisations today face a common challenge: how to achieve long-term organisational success from an energised workforce, free from the disillusionment that can frequently stifle morale, productivity and innovation.

Disillusionment with the world of work often stems from differences in expectations of work roles and the underlying and frequently unspoken assumptions about those roles. Mutual agreement about roles and outcomes must be a key ingredient in creating a foundation of sustainable productivity through satisfying work environments and experiences. If divergent expectations remain un-addressed, performance issues arise over time damaging morale, innovation and confidence, and thus the results of individuals, teams and organisations.

To generate long-term organisational success we must develop and sustain compelling work environments that excite, energise and satisfy our broad ranging and ever-changing human needs. Talents and interests need to be aligned with clear organisational purpose, coherent goals and meaningful work roles that provide a sense of purpose. Expectations and assumptions about what we do and how we do it must be made explicit, creating a space for open dialogue about performance, development and opportunity.

Making visible that which is invisible can, of course, be achieved in many ways. Where such discussions are concerned, the efficacy of the outcome is dependent on the process and the ability and willingness of those involved to thoroughly explore the relevant issues through a constructive dialogue. At the simplest level an informal discussion can start the exploration of individual perceptions. A framework of relevant questions can be introduced to guide and develop an exploration, hopefully opening areas where perceptions of a role differ. Add a job description, a competency framework or other descriptive information and the conversation can become more meaningful.

But do any of these approaches really help to reveal underlying assumptions regarding how a work role is to be undertaken, rather than just what is to be done?

UNDERSTANDING WORK STYLES

One approach to resolving these organisational dilemmas has been developed in the USA by Donna and Thomas McIntosh-Fletcher of the McFletcher Corporation. Working since 1974 they have created and refined a concept that helps people to understand how they prefer to work, enabling individuals to compare their preferred styles of working with the requirements of the positions they actually occupy. The basic premise of the WorkStyle Patterns™ (WSP™) framework is simple: most organisation positions require a mix of activities that range across planning and influencing work, co-ordinating work and doing the work. These activities are described under four role groupings referred to as orientations (see Table 1).

Each of us prefers some activities in each of these orientations. The extent to which we exercise each of these activities determines our 'preferred' WorkStyle. The extent to which our current position requires each of these activities determines the 'actual' WorkStyle of the role as we experience it. The work environment ►

Table 1: Activities and roles

Roles	Examples of activities
Task	Working directly with the product or service, such as writing reports, designing, measuring own results, teaching, dealing face to face with customers.
Project	Co-ordinating projects and people, such as allocating resource, assigning and scheduling tasks, measuring group results, coaching and training others.
Organisation	Influencing goals and results, such as developing strategies, establishing goals and measurements, budgeting.
Adapting	Balancing a combination of activities from the other orientations, such as dealing face to face with customers, planning a strategy, co-ordinating a plan.



that recognises individual work preferences can benefit from improved organisational productivity – a result of increased work satisfaction and shared understanding that bridges perceived differences (see Table 2).

Measuring the activities in the four orientations is achieved through a self-scored inventory called WorkStyle Patterns™ (WSP™). The inventory analyses 72 specific work activities, providing 29 profiles. The WSP™ is a measurement tool, not a behavioural questionnaire or test and no better or worse WSP™ scores result. The inventory yields rich information, providing an effective way to create shared understanding of work roles and work performance (see Table 3). To illustrate how the WSP™ concepts works, let's take a look at two case studies.

CASE STUDY 1: ROBERT'S STORY

Robert is a 30-something designer. Due to his outstanding creative ability, he has been promoted to leader of a five-strong project team. While he was initially motivated by the recognition, he is now feeling disenchanted with his new post. His frustration arises from the conflicting functions of the role. As he confides to a friend: 'I'm being hassled by my team. I am having to co-ordinating budgets and project plans, and I can't get on with my own work. And the original enthusiasm of my new boss seems to be fading. I keep thinking of ways to avoid her. Maybe I m just not cut out to lead people. I'm a designer. Perhaps I should stick to what I know.'

How can WSP™ help Robert?

The first step is for Robert to complete, score and interpret the WSP™ inventory to discover personal (preferred) work style and job role (position actual) profiles. Robert finds that his 'preferred' profile is independent worker and that his 'position actual'

profile is supervisor. He explores the 'preferred' profile description and finds he largely agrees with what he finds. The independent worker wants to manage his/her own work, offering new and innovative approaches without necessarily conforming to the norms, expectations or limitations imposed by others, wanting to be recognised as 'different' because of personal contributions.

The statement 'If the organisation does not provide work with which this individual can closely identify, he or she is likely to leave and seek an autonomous position which offers more personal incentive' causes Robert to reflect on his recent thoughts and feelings.

Finally, Robert notes that people with an independent worker preference can be skilled at planning projects and forecasting variables, being able to view a whole project in the broadest context, perhaps erroneously suggesting an overall ability to manage or supervise.

Robert's next step is to review the 'position actual' profile. Again he agrees with what he finds; the supervisor approach requires working through others, being involved with procedures, services and products, personally determining what needs to be done and who is best suited to each task. Co-ordinating and scheduling are key activities, and communication is principally through direct conversation with individuals or in meetings to interpret organisational directions, relating them to specific tasks to be carried out by others.

In comparing the two WSP™ profiles it becomes clear quickly that there is a mismatch. Robert's preference is to work independently on complex design issues. The position needs him to co-ordinate the work of others, coaching and scheduling activities. The clear scoring on the inventory quantifies the discrepancies, making clear gaps that can be addressed with his manager (see Figure 1). Robert's manager also completes a similar exercise using a WSP™ employer

Table 2: The WorkStyle Patterns™ Suite

The WorkStyle Patterns™ Suite is a comprehensive suite that can help organisations to address issues of training needs analysis, personal and career development, team development, organisational change, workplace stress, recruitment and selection.

Personal and work alignment

Enables individuals to compare personal preferred WorkStyle with the requirements of the position they actually occupy.

Stress

Highlights mismatches between personal preferred WorkStyle and the requirements of the position they occupy. Areas of personal and organisational stress are identified with options for productive WorkStyle choices for increased productivity and satisfaction.

Transition

Creates an individual plan to achieve closer alignment between 'preferred' and 'actual' work styles to meet current or future position requirements.

Dialogue

Identifies and clarifies employer and employee perceptions and expectations, and determines the appropriate WorkStyle profile to accomplish the work.

Team

Provides work teams with a process to define team purpose, WorkStyle Profile, team assignments and helps to align team members to the purpose and goals.

actual inventory to reflect the work requirements from the organisation's perspective. Thus a third profile is produced as input to a conversation between manager and direct report. During the meeting information about personal preferences, actual requirements of the work and the employer's actual expectation profile description is shared. Profiles, scores and perceptions are explored, and possible reasons for differences are considered, as outlined below.

- Does the employee have the resources to handle the role?
- Does the employer understand the real experience of working in the role?
- Is the employee failing to recognise organisational or work changes?
- Are other pressures forcing the employee to adapt to temporary conditions – eg. developing new or untrained colleagues or employees?
- Is the employee changing the position to meet his/her own preferences rather than responding to the actual needs of the organisation?

Through an open dialogue real issues, underlying assumptions and development needs are uncovered, and appropriate action plans put in place.

CASE STUDY 2: EMMA'S STORY

Like Robert, Emma has recently been promoted to lead a project team on the use of e-commerce within her organisation. The project has been named 'E-future'. However, Emma is less than happy with the way the team is performing. She feels the team lacks direction and has no clear roles, with meetings being plagued by argument or sullen withdrawal. The way the team is functioning at the moment means it is making no progress at all.

How can the WSP™ help Emma and the 'E-future' team?

The key to success is the ability and willingness of the team continually to address and balance three inter-related areas:

- the results desired and produced
- the working processes employed, and
- the behaviours within the team.

In reality, teams often fail to achieve a productive balance, with no genuine agreement on fundamental issues such as purpose, goals and how the work is to be performed. In such cases a WSP™ approach can be exclusively applied or the WSP™ techniques can work in conjunction with other methods like the Myers-Briggs type indicator,² FIRO Elements³ or others to ensure a team pays attention to the balance between results, processes and behaviours.

My experience of using the WSP™ with teams suggests taking several linked steps:

- initial knowledge sharing
- clarifying team mission

- goals
- WorkStyles, and, finally
- agreeing individual roles in the team.

The starting point is to ensure all team members are familiar with the WSP™ concept, the orientations and profiles. Team members share their profiles and explore the implications implicit in the information, this being an excellent way for team members to increase self-awareness and enhance their understanding of others. This is also a starting point for questioning the possible strengths and weaknesses of the team, and how the working style of the team

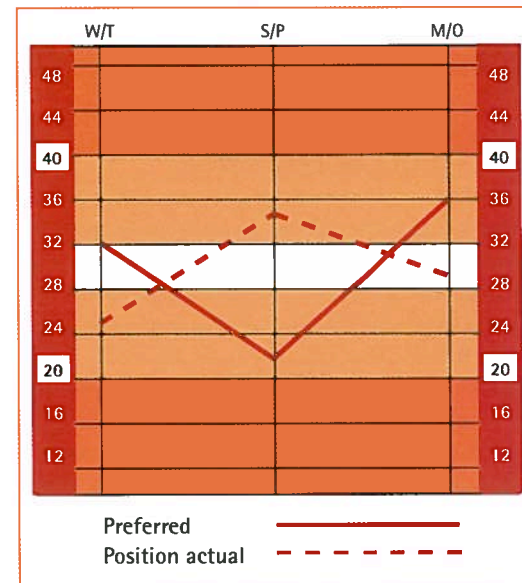


Figure 1: A comparison of preferred working style with position actual

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could impact inter-team and intra-team dynamics – for example, leadership, research, information sharing, problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution and influencing.


Step two concentrates on clarifying the team mission, goals and the WorkStyle needed to achieve the mission. When this is clear and agreed each team member completes a Team Role Assessment Inventory, a further WSP™ inventory that specifically indicates the WorkStyle approach the organisation needs from the team as a whole. Team members share their scoring and discuss differences in the scores to understand the diverse outlooks present. Individual assumptions about the role of the team quickly become evident, prompting discussions to resolve matters that could otherwise reduce the effectiveness and productivity of the team.

The final step is that team members align themselves to the task requirements of the work. Team member assignments are clarified through a process similar to that described above. In this case each team member completes a Team Member Assignment Inventory, a WSP™ inventory that indicates the WorkStyle approach that reflects each individual team member's view about a team assignment or position. ►



Again team members share and discuss their scoring to understand the opinions present. Points at issue are resolved to achieve clarity and agreement. This enables alignment of the talents and styles of team members with the specific work role needed in the team. Team members can also recognise gaps and weaknesses that could impact team performance. Through this rigorous process and open dialogue, underlying assumptions and potential team performance issues are identified, enabling appropriate actions to be taken.

WSP™ UK?

As a training and organisation development professional I welcome concepts and processes that help individuals, teams and organisations successfully move through growth and change. WorkStyle Patterns™ is such a concept, supporting work that aims to build long-term organisational success through people, their ideas and energies. 

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References

1. *The WSP™ Inventory* is a publication of W Thomas McIntosh-Fletcher and Donna McIntosh-Fletcher and The McFletcher Corporation. It is protected by United States copyright laws and international treaty provisions. WSP™ and WorkStyle Patterns™ are trademarks of The McFletcher Corporation.
2. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is an indicator of personality type, developed by Isabel Myers and Katherine C Briggs. ©MBTI and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are registered UK and US trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press Inc. Oxford Psychologists Press Ltd is the exclusive licensee of the trade marks in the UK.
3. FIRO Elements is a trade mark of Will Schutz Associates.
4. The Belbin® team-role theory enables an individual or a team to benefit from self-knowledge and adjust accordingly to the demands made by external factors. © BELBIN ASSOCIATES 2000.
5. Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), who developed theories on analytical psychology. See Jung website at www.cgjungpage.org

Table 3: The positioning of the WSP™ inventory

	WorkStyle Patterns™ Inventory	The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®)	BELBIN® Team Roles'
Design	A suite of self and organisational reporting inventories. Compares personal preferences for work activity with activities required by a work role or team position.	Self-report personality inventory. Based on Jungian ^s psychology.	Self-reporting inventory. Measures behaviours useful to team performance.
Evaluates	72 specific work activities across four scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • task activities • project activities • organisation activities • adapting activities. 	Respondent's preferences across four dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extroversion/introversion • sensing/intuition • thinking/feeling • judging/perceiving. 	Team roles, providing explanations that draw attention to positive and difficult aspects of team working.
Results	Provides an understanding of job or team-working requirements describing and quantifying how people prefer to perform work activities, how they experience their role and the organisational expectations of a role.	Describes differences in the way people prefer to use their minds to take in information, organise that information, draw conclusions and the degree to which they are attracted to an inner world of reflection or an outer world of action.	Help respondents to understand contributions and inter-relationships in working groups, enabling teams to examine gaps and the potential impact on the team.

WorkStyle Patterns™

- Over 25 years of success in the USA, Canada and Mexico
- Used in many Fortune 500 companies and in organisations such as 3M, Motorola, Cray Research, Proctor & Gamble, the US Postal Service, Marriott International.
- Comprehensive scope applicable to:
 - Management and leadership development
 - Change processes
 - Team development
 - Career development
 - Training and work design.

WorkStyle Patterns™ practitioners must be trained and certified to apply the technology. Neil Middleton, through his business Contour Consulting, is the only WSP™ certified practitioner in the UK and has worked with cross-cultural teams in Europe and South Africa, successfully applying the WSP™.

Neil Middleton

An independent consultant who works with UK and international clients, helping shape organisational conditions to advance business performance.



- Senior European management experience in organisation development and human resource positions with *Levi Strauss & Co.*, a company widely respected for progressive and highly successful development activities.
- International experience throughout Europe, in South Africa and North America.
- Broad experience from the automotive and consulting sectors.

Expertise

- Change and Transition
- Team development
- Leadership and Management development
- Diversity and Culture
- Coaching

Qualified and experienced user of:

- Myers Briggs Type Indicator® (Levels 1 and 2)
- FIRO Elements™ (Will Schutz latest development of the FIRO theory, superceding the earlier FIRO B)
- WorkStyle Patterns™
- Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument™

Neil now applies leading edge OD thinking and techniques with those wishing to release potential, achieve positive change and enhance the performance of individuals, teams and organisations.