



Understanding Behaviour

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Introduction

Behaviour is the result of many aspects, some acquired, some consciously learned, and these are dependent on both internal factors and the external conditions a person finds themselves in.

Internal factors are psychological traits like personality, beliefs, values, cognition and similar. Such factors are a result of a person's upbringing and life experience, whereas, external factors are those conditions such as the work environment, organisational policies, the customer, the economic climate, other people's behaviour and similar.

It is a well known fact that our internal thinking and emotional processes will influence or colour how we view external phenomenon. Each person will respond differently to the same external circumstances, and to a certain extent this can be generalised according to their preferred behavioural style. Being able to recognise and appreciate another's preferred behavioural traits will facilitate better communication and enhanced understanding, because the manager is able to adjust their style to suit the recipient.

When approached from the team point of view, if everyone in your department has undergone some form of behavioural analysis and gained a better understanding about how people behave, they are more likely to accept or at least be open to a different way of doing and being. This invariably leads to greater harmony amongst co-workers. Co-workers will learn that there are many ways to approach the same task and that one way is not necessarily better than any other.

It must be emphasised that the sole purpose of conducting behavioural analysis is to facilitate enhanced communication and understanding, not to change others!

Behavioural change is a complex process as it is interrelated to all other internal and external characteristics discussed above and needs to be addressed on an individual basis.

Further, most managers do not have the knowledge, time or skills to undertake such a serious exercise and if they did, it would be totally wasted unless the person whose behaviour you want to change actually wants to change themselves!

The option that is available to managers is to create a supportive environment which is appropriate to the style and needs of their people. For example, if you know a staff member reacts poorly to sudden demands to change their schedule for the day, then as a manager you would avoid asking them to drop everything and go to a meeting. Instead, you would give this person ample notice, so that they can prepare for it.

Behavioural Styles

Assessment tools will provide insight into people's behavioural preferences, thus giving you pointers on how to get their support, co-operation and approval. This will enable you to become a more effective manager. But you first need to honestly acknowledge your own style and the likely effects you have on your staff.

Clarity = Power

You will find that many of the behavioural assessment tools on the market will categorise tendencies into quadrants.

Each quadrant comprises a set of similar characteristics or behavioural tendencies, and together, these are grouped as a certain "style". The "style" indicates the dominant aspects of behaviour seen in a person.

It is important to understand that each person exhibits, or potentially can exhibit, behaviours which correspond to **all four quadrants**, but they are more likely to show characteristics in keeping with one of the quadrants more often.

Groupings and their descriptive tag are merely for the sake of convenience in understanding. Do not make the mistake of thinking that one style or quadrant is better or worse than another.

All are equally valid, and appropriate in a balanced work team. Further, a successful, highly motivated and high performing individual can fit into any one of these four quadrants. The style does not limit, nor predict, likely performance or motivation!

In fact, a person may behave differently according to the situational circumstances, and this flexibility is a positive skill to have.

It is extremely important that you do not become fixed about the outcome. These are merely behavioural tendencies and preferences.

Use the information as an aid to understanding rather than a straight jacket. Do not "pigeon hole" people!

A practical application of this is demonstrated in the following scenario:

Andrew is a detail oriented manager with a directive, instrumental style. He briefs two employees on different projects.

The first employee, Martin, has low self-confidence and is nervous about his ability to accomplish the end result, unless he is led through it, step by step, with comprehensive instruction.

Andrew's style is therefore a very good match, because it suits the needs of Martin.

The opposite occurs with another employee, Kirsten. Kirsten likes to add her own flavour to the jobs she does. She resents being told how to do the job and feels constrained by Andrew's directive instructional style. She misinterprets this as a lack of appreciation of her talents.

In this instance, Andrew's style is in conflict with Kirsten's needs and the outcome is poor: Kirsten feels disenfranchised and has little interest in the quality of the end result. It damages her feelings towards her manager and potentially, undermines the good that he is doing in other areas. What Andrew needs to realise is that Kirsten needs autonomy and a degree of creative license if she is to be motivated and take ownership of a project.

Behavioural Styles

The **DISC** tool is a good example and as it is commonly used, a brief outline follows.

DISC stands for:

Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness, Conforming, which are descriptive terms for tendencies which we all exhibit, to varying degrees and at different times.

Dominance refers to how a person approaches problems and deals with challenges.

Influencing relates to how a person interacts with and attempts to influence others.

Steadiness refers to how a person responds to change and to levels of activity.

Conforming relates to how a person responds to rules and regulations set by others.

The types of behaviours that are in each group are:

| Dominance | Influencing | Steadiness | Conforming |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| demanding | convincing | unchanging | evasive |
| driving | enthusiastic | passive | worrisome |
| ambitious | demonstrative | patient | careful |
| pioneering | persuasive | possessive | dependent |
| forceful | warm | predictable | cautious |
| determined | polished | consistent | exacting |
| aggressive | poised | loyal | systematic |
| competitive | optimistic | steady | accurate |
| decisive | sociable | stable | tactful |
| responsible | | | |

What the DISC assessment does is to profile each person's preferred mode of behaviour in relation to each of these characteristics.

Whichever method you choose, be sure to include your staff in the process, so that you know their behavioural style in the context of your own. Then it will be much easier to adjust your own way of relating to match theirs.

Psychological Factors

Psychological factors can be categorised into three main approaches: **psychoanalytic model**, **behavioural model** and **cognitive model**.

Freud popularised the psychoanalytic model and he had many ideas on what motivates people, including the role of the ego and the life and death instinct.

The behavioural model, expounded by Skinner and Watson, is founded on the premise of conditioning. This postulates that behaviour is based on stimulus, thus by altering the stimulus, behaviour can be altered.

Incentive and recognition programs use this approach when they try to increase performance (behaviour) by providing incentives (stimulus). This approach is very limited however, as it assumes that we are all the same and will all respond in the same way, given a certain stimulus, and that this will occur again and again, by repeating the stimulus.

Of course, we all know that people are different and respond differently to the same external situation. What accounts for this difference? The cognitive approach improves on the behavioural conditioning approach by explaining that people **react** differently because they **think** differently. This "cognition" or "thinking" encompasses perceptions, attitudes, values, knowledge and similar.

A review of the available literature shows that there are many psychological models available and that each of these takes a slightly different approach. Basically though, they deal with factors that affect how we think and feel (the cognitive approach) such as values, beliefs, expectations, how a person handles adversity, intelligence and self-esteem.

For instance, it has been found that the need for achievement, which is internally driven, will impact on how motivated a person appears and also on how well they perform. The higher the need for achievement, the higher the ultimate performance because these people tend to place a higher personal value on intrinsic motivators such as need for recognition, personal growth and sense of accomplishment. These are the people who tend to comprise the first two quadrants of our Personal Motivation Styles model, the "Internally Driven" and "Committed".

Another important characteristic is how much internal control a person feels they have over the events in their lives. Related psychological attributes are self-esteem, perceived competence and ability to perform job activities (task-specific self-esteem), desire to perform and belief that a certain outcome can be achieved.

It has been demonstrated that expectation of success is often the key factor which explains the difference between mediocre and exceptional performance, because it generates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Other terms for this premise are "Learned Helplessness and Learned Optimism".

Our internal expectation of success can also be influenced by external factors such as past experience and the people who are important to us. In this regard, the manager's role vis-a-vis the Pygmalion principle, is highly influential. If you believe and expect that your employees will perform well, they usually do!

Matching Unlocks Greater Potential

“The most successful managers are those that use their resources appropriately and who know their greatest resource is people.”

The effective matching of people to jobs results in a high payoff with minimal waste. You get better utilisation of your resources and your employees are more likely to derive satisfaction and enjoyment from their work. This is easily achieved if you acknowledge and adjust for the differences amongst the people that comprise your team.

Behavioural analysis is a key tool to begin with. On top of this, an astute manager considers individual differences in:

- *Interests, skills and talents*
- *Desire to utilise full potential*
- *Values, opinions and attitudes*
- *Motivation in working - tangible and intangible benefits derived*
- *Other factors e.g. personal commitment, psychological make-up*

This section outlines a practical application of these principles.

Family Focus

Single Dad Working as a Truck Driver

- *Works shifts as the pay is better, yet this is disruptive to his family life*

- *Likes his work but will not spend any more time than he is paid for, as it intrudes on his family life*
- *Requires flexibility to have time off when his child is sick or special family situations arise*
- *He would prefer family-friendly shift hours, but if he does “midnight” shifts, then he expects to be well compensated*
- *Work attachment level: **Low***

Social Focus

Single Person

- *This salaried single business manager has a busy fulfilling life, for which work is only a component*
- *He has a mortgage to pay but is unwilling to give up his social life and outside interests for the sake of it*
- *He enjoys his job, does it well, is dedicated and has flexibility in working late or attending weekend workshops*
- *He does not mind putting in a bit of unpaid time but only if it doesn't create too much disturbance to his “real life”*
- *When he leaves the office, he leaves the work too - it will be there when he next goes in*
- *Work attachment level: **Medium***

Matching Unlocks Greater Potential

Work Focus

Senior Manager

- *Senior Manager at a large corporation*
- *Lives and breathes work. Demanding, pushes herself and others*
- *Works 80-90 hours a week and calls meetings on Saturdays to get more done*
- *Sets impossible deadlines, causing staff to become disenfranchised and unnecessarily stressed*
- *She is motivated by a need for achievement and her sense of fulfillment is primarily sourced from her work*
- *In fact, her entire sense of self-worth and feeling of personal "aliveness" is based on work. However, this creates problems for her employees, because she expects them to be driven by the same needs and values*
- *Work attachment level: High*

Despite a manager's personal belief system as to whether any of these people's positions are valid, the manager needs to acknowledge that this is the type of person they are dealing with and this will influence how "motivated" a person *appears* to be and how they might respond to a given management initiative or incentive/motivation program.

About Results Plus

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Results Plus Pty Ltd was established in 1989 by Harry Coomans, Neil Southwell and Steve Dunne.

With a unique blend of specialist consulting, creative and communication skills between the three partners, Results Plus has developed considerable expertise in the design, implementation and management of programs which have helped organisations across a wide industry spectrum achieve increased performance.

Our current clients include high profile multinationals, and working with these companies over the years has given us considerable experience with franchised organisations and businesses with large distribution channels ... valuable experience that we can offer you.

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