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BUILDING SHARED UNDERSTANDING

HUMAN DYNAMICS: A FOUNDATION FOR THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

BY SANDRA SEAGAL AND DAVID HORNE

In *The Fifth Discipline,* Peter Senge posed the question, "How can a team of committed managers with individual IQs above 120 have a collective IQ of 63?"

One reason is that each team member brings to the group fundamental differences in his or her way of working and seeing that are usually not recognized and accommodated. These differences can create discomfort or conflict that consumes energy rather than releasing it for creativity and new learning. When the differences are known and understood, however, they can be utilized for superior team functioning.

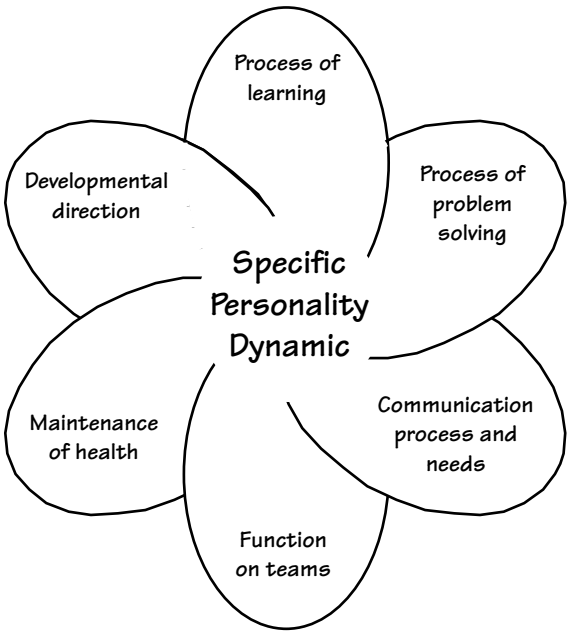
For example, imagine that a four-person team has been assigned the task of creating a human resource development training program for their organization. It becomes clear from the outset that each member has a distinctly different point of view. Even before they get into the assignment, one team member wants definitions—he wants to know precisely what is meant by the terms "human resources" and "development," and what the long-term purpose of the training is.

Another person believes it is more critical to know what has been done in the past—she wants more data to set the context for considering next steps. She asks what has worked in the past and what the measurable results have been.

The third member of the group is most focused on assessing and promoting the comfort level of each team member, including himself. He wants to feel that the group is harmonized before they discuss the task. He is concerned with the individual relevance of the proposed program, and the personal implications for the people who will participate in it.

Finally, the fourth member of the team simply wants to move forward. She can't understand why the team doesn't just begin with something innovative and untested. It is evident to her that human resources requires sustained development, so she thinks, "Why all the discussion? Let's put out some ideas and take some action."

As each team member works to resolve his or her own needs, conflict builds within the group. None of the members can understand why the others are not "hearing" them. The frustration gradually builds until it reaches a point at which the group may not be able to address the task effectively.



Each personality dynamic constitutes a distinct whole system of functioning.

Human Dynamics

Underneath the dynamics described above are some fundamental distinctions in the way people function. The

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study of Human Dynamics, which began in 1979 and has involved more than 40,000 people from over 25 cultures, is devoted to understanding these distinctions. It has resulted in new awareness—both of individuals' unique personality systems and of the interactions of these systems in the larger contexts of the family, the classroom, the workplace, and the community. With such an understanding, we can begin to build on the synergy of different learning processes to enhance our dialogues and to create more effective teams and organizations.

The Core Universal Principles

Human Dynamics focuses on exploring the interaction of three universal principles: the mental, the emotional (or relational), and the physical (or practical). Each of these principles is critical in the development of a complete and balanced person.

The mental principle in the human system is related to the mind—to thinking, values, structure, focus, objectivity, and perspective. The emotional principle is more subjective. It is concerned with relationships—with communication, organization, feelings, and putting things together in new ways (creativity). The physical principle is pragmatic. It is the making, doing, and operationalizing part of ourselves.

These three principles combine in nine possible variations to form distinct ways of functioning, which we term "personality dynamics." Five of these personality dynamics predominate in Western cultures, while two of the five predominate in the Far East. Each constitutes a whole way of functioning, characterized by distinctive processes of learning, communicating, problem-solving, relating to others, contributing to teams, maintaining well-being, and responding to stress. Each has distinctive ways of handling change, and each has a characteristic path of development.

The personality dynamics appear in every culture, characterize males and females equally, and can be observed at every age level. One of the many distinguishing features of the Human Dynamics perspective is that it is possible to identify the personality dynamic in childhood, even in infancy, thus providing invaluable information for parents and teachers on the specific educational and developmental needs of their children and students. Part of the research has involved tracking the development of children over the course of many years. The personality dynamic remains consistent over time, but is expressed with increasing maturity.

It is essential to understand that Human Dynamics is a developmental paradigm. Every personality dynamic has an embedded capacity for maturation, though the path of development toward wholeness is distinct for each. A spiritual dimension, termed the Deep Capacity, is also recognized. Maturation involves integration and development of the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of each personality dynamic, and fuller expression of the Deep Capacity.

Another distinctive feature of the Human Dynamics approach is that no testing is required. People identify their own personality dynamic through a process of discovery, and are helped to recognize the personality dynamics of others through sensitive observation and participation.

It is important to note that each personality dynamic is of equal value. Anyone of any personality dynamic may be more or less intelligent, compassionate, skilled, or gifted. It is the *way in* which each dynamic functions that is entirely distinct.

The implications of recognizing these distinctions for the development of learning communities is profound. People really do learn, communicate, relate, and develop in fundamentally different ways. Awareness and understanding of the distinctions offer new opportunities for self-understanding and growth; for improved communication and positive relationships; and for teamwork that utilizes the gifts of each member in conscious synergy. Each whole system potentially complements the others, enhancing the overall functioning of a team or organization.

Personality Dynamics

Below are thumbnail sketches of each of the five predominant personality dynamics, with particular emphasis on their functioning in teams:

Mentally Centered. The mentally centered plan from the top down, from the abstract to the particular, and back again. They usually have a gift for long-range perspective and for logical planning to achieve long-term goals. They ask the essential questions, often beginning with "Why?"

Their sensitivity to basic principles and precepts enables them to offer "course correction" should a group begin to stray from its purpose or vision. Because of their natural objectivity and affinity for perspective, they are often able to articulate the principle or overarching consideration that unifies seemingly disparate views.

However, they may often be silent in a group. One reason for this is that they typically feel no need to articulate a point if someone else is making it. Also, because they process internally, think logically, and like to articulate their point of view precisely, they may have difficulty finding space to contribute in a less orderly group process. Their silence should not be interpreted as aloofness or non-involvement. They can be helped to contribute if asked questions.

Phrases commonly used by mentally centered people include: "What exactly is the purpose?" "What are the long-term implications ?" "What exactly do you mean by...?"

Emotional-Mental (also called Emotional-Objective.) Emotional-objective people are emotional about their ideas, which they often express with great intensity. One of the main functions of this group is to initiate; they light the fires of new endeavors. Movement is their inner directive. They want to establish the direction of a task, its purpose and value, and then move into action as soon as possible, learning as they go. They are usually adept at creating beginning structures that allow a process to take form.

Theirs is a brainstorming, experimental, open-ended "R&D" process in which new possibilities and lines of inquiry are offered and explored, typ-

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ically directed toward the short-term future. It is often assumed that this group wants to "take charge," when in fact they are usually simply living their natural function of breaking new ground.

The processing of emotional-objective people is primarily external—they think on their feet. In teams, this group frequently begins the discussion, facilitates the interplay of ideas, and wants to keep the process moving forward. Phrases you may hear from emotional-objective people include: "Let's put all the ideas on the board and prioritize." "The details can wait–first let's create a general structure." "It's good enough." "Let's go!"

Emotional-Physical (also called Emotional-Subjective). Emotional-subjective people respond to tasks (as to all of life) in a personal way. They *feel* the personal implications of any undertaking, both for themselves and for others who may be involved or affected. In order to explore, understand, and become comfortable with these implications, they need time to engage in extensive intrapersonal and interpersonal processing. They require dialogue that involves exploring their own feelings and those of others, as well as related personal experiences, while at the same time dealing with the problem or assignment itself. They learn most readily through interpersonal exchange.

One of the core motivations of emotional-subjective people is to create and sustain harmony. In a team situation they therefore have a double task—that of maintaining group harmony while simultaneously addressing the team's purposes and issues. Emotional-subjective people are usually highly insightful regarding the "people issues" involved. They are highly intuitive, but are not always able to explain these feelings rationally in the moment. Given time for processing, the emotional-subjective person will usually come to a rational understanding of his/her intuition and be able to recommend an appropriate action. The intuitive capacities and creative skills of emotional-subjective people are natural resources that organizations often waste.

Phrases that are familiar to emotional-subjective people are: "Is that comfortable for you?" "I need time to process before I can take another step." "My gut feeling is...".

Physical-Emotional. Physical-emotional people are natural systems thinkers. In any undertaking, they spend the longest time gathering data, assimilating and synthesizing it—an organic process that mostly takes place internally, and takes its own time. The result, if sufficient time is allowed, is a plan or product that is detailed, comprehensive, and systemically linked.

On teams, physical-emotional members are often people of few words, preferring communication that is factual, down-to-earth, and pragmatic. It is sometimes difficult for them to contribute to a team process if the pace is not sufficiently deliberate, but because they see and think in terms of whole systems, they may have a great deal to say on any particular issue if they are given the opportunity. They absorb enormous amounts of factual information, and their capacity to remember detail is usually prodigious. They are capable of summing up the content of any meeting because they are natural recorders of everything said. However, they may not be ready to give their conclusions regarding the meeting until a later occasion, when they have had time to assimilate all that has occurred.

Phrases you might hear from a physical-emotional person include: "I need some sense of the parameters." "Can you give me more context?" "We need to expose them to the actual experience, not just talk about it."

Physical-Mental. The physical-mental group shares many of the characteristics of the physical-emotional group. They, too, are pragmatic, need a considerable amount of context, and take in a great deal of information. However, they are more selective of the data they take in and begin to structure it more quickly around the purpose, which they want to clearly establish from the beginning. Like the physical-emotional, they think and plan systemically, but

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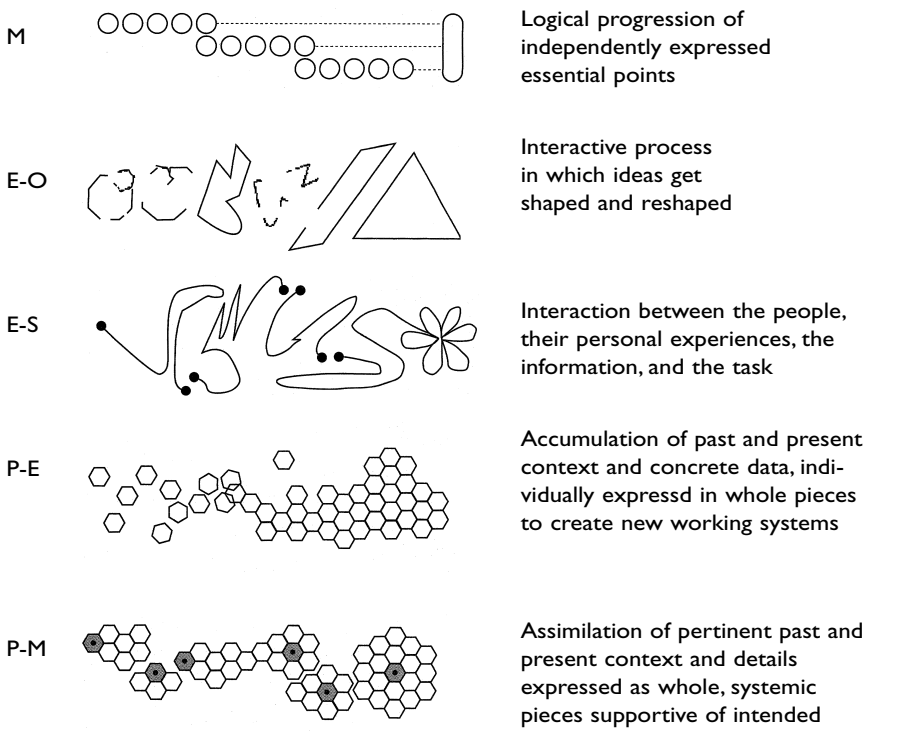
DISCOVERING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CAPABILITIES



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in less detail. They therefore tend to move to action more quickly.

Like the mentally centered, they have natural gifts for objectivity, structure, and long-range strategic planning. Unlike the mentally centered, however, they tend to work from the concrete to the abstract—from current reality to future outcomes—so they gather more factual detail. Phrases you might hear from a physical-mental person include: "What is the purpose?" "What is the current reality?" "Let's make a model to clarify this...".

Human Dynamics and the Five Disciplines

Human Dynamics provides a foundation of human understanding and development that facilitates implementation of each of the five disciplines identified by Peter Senge as crucial in building learning communities.

Systems Thinking. Human Dynamics offers the opportunity for including in any process the most fundamental system of all, the human system. Human Dynamics looks at *people* as distinct learning systems. Each individual is acknowledged as representing a specific whole system of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual interaction and expression. Further, each personality dynamic system is recognized as functioning as an essential component of an interactive system that includes *all* of the personality dynamics. Not only are the needs and gifts and processes of all of the individual personality dynamics taken into account, but so is their dynamic complementarity. Groups on any scale, whether a family unit, project team, organization, or even the human race, can be viewed as a system of interaction of the different personality dynamics.

Mental Models. Human Dynamics demonstrates how each of the personality dynamics operates from a fundamentally distinct experiential base. Therefore, each brings to any discussion or endeavor a specific perspective and set of assumptions that differ from those of the other personality dynamics. One purpose of the Human Dynamics work is to make these distinctions clear, so that an individual's words or actions can be understood in the context of that person's basic "way of being." This helps assure greater mutual understanding and more empathic communication.

Personal Mastery. Every aspect of Human Dynamics is concerned with personal mastery, beginning with the most essential requisite of all—knowledge of oneself. Human Dynamics programs involve a voyage of discovery—about oneself, others, and the different processes of communication, problem-solving, learning, and developing, and about what can be done in light of these discoveries to optimize how we live and learn and work together.

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Shared Vision. The quality of a shared vision depends upon the visionary capacity of the individual participants. From the perspective of Human Dynamics, the capacity for vision is an attribute of the mental principle. However, the vision must also include people's needs (emotional principle) and a way to bring the vision into being (physical principle). Combining exercises for the development of the three principles in a visioning session can produce a much more inclusive and qualitative personal or collective vision, in which head, heart, deep aspiration, and actualizing intent are all represented.

Team Learning. Awareness and understanding of the different personality dynamics is an essential ingredient in qualitative team functioning.

The team developing the human resource training program, for example, would have begun their process at a completely different place of understanding, respect, and empowerment if they had had a framework for understanding each other's ways of learning and operating. This particular team was fortunate to have the diversity of perspective of one mentally centered, one physical-emotional, one emotional-subjective, and one emotional-objective person. However, without a framework for understanding and integrating their distinct gifts so as to achieve a common goal, the group became mired in a frustrating and unproductive process.

Not only can existing teams learn to function more harmoniously and productively, but balanced teams can be consciously assembled in which the various personality dynamics are all represented. As many organizations are currently discovering, such a team can turn its attention to almost anything with success because the results will integrate the natural gifts and way of seeing of each of the personality dynamics.

When teams (or families, groups, or communities) are *conscious* of the distinctions, the differences become assets rather than liabilities, and the performance of the team indeed becomes greater than the sum of its parts. ◘

Human Dynamics programs are currently being disseminated in the fields of business, education, healthcare, and community development.

Sandra Seagal is founder and president of Human Dynamics International (Topanga, CA) and executive director of Human Dynamics Foundation. Both organizations are devoted to the development, empowerment, and sustainment of individual and collective human potential. David Horne has been involved in the development of Human Dynamics since 1983. Together they coauthored *Human Dynamics: A New Framework for Understanding People and Realizing the Potential in Our Organizations* (Pegasus Communications, 1997).

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