VENTURING MAGAZINE

Know thyself: Social Styles

As leaders, knowing ourselves is an important aspect of leadership that is too often overlooked. Do you have a good understand of what 'type' of person you are? Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Do you like working with people or with things? Are you more a thinker or a doer? Have you put any thought into the fact that the people you often like to work with or be around have similar traits to you, and that the people you don't like to work with have different traits? This is usually all lumped into the broad concept of "personality types" or "interaction styles", of which here are many models. While many people may get the chance to take a personality/interaction test at work or maybe school, not everyone gets the chance.
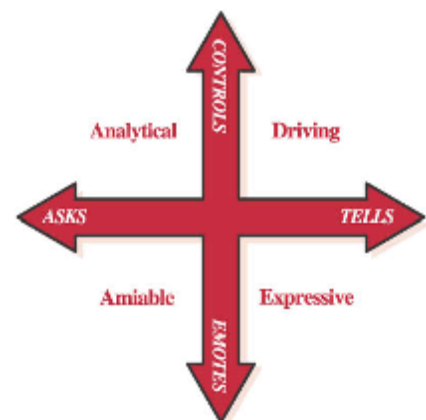
In the next in this series of articles, we look at another assessment tool, Social Styles.

"Social Styles" was first developed by David Merrill in the 1960's, and is also based on Jung's theories (like MBTI), but here the focus is on individual's outer styles or their interactions if you will, similar to DISC. This was later enunciated in "Personal Styles and Effective Performance" (1981) by David Merrill and Roger Reid. Another set of researchers (Robert & Dorothy Bolton) based their own "People Styles" on this work, but with some differences with the addition of what they call 'style flex', which is about how people can modify, or flex, their behavior to be more compatible with people of differing interaction styles. This was covered first in their work "Social Style/Management Style" (1984), but has been more or less replaced by their later and more accessible work: "People Styles at Work and Beyond" (2009, 2nd edition). Training based on Merrill's work is sold thru his company Tracom (www.tracomcorp.com) and the Boltons' thru their company Ridge Associates (www.ridge.com). I would recommend the "People Style" work as a more recent and readable intro to the subject, plus it includes a basic test to determine your style. But check out Tracom for some interesting reports that show how "Social Styles" can work with other leadership methodologies.

In Social Styles, people are put into one of 4 styles:

- Analytical - thinking oriented
- Driving - action oriented
- Amiable - relationship oriented
- Expressive - intuition oriented

They are oriented around 2 axis. An assertiveness axis on the horizontal, that ranges from ASK to TELL. And a (emotional) responsiveness axis on the vertical, that ranges from CONTROL to EMOTE. Keep in mind that these are scales or axis. You can be anywhere along either of those scales! Putting this all together, you have:

As with DISC, we also find that these styles pairing up, again tied into those vertical and horizontal scales. As it relates to the horizontal scale:

- Analytical and Driving are both TASK oriented, they like emotional control. They are typically cool, independent, disciplined and use facts.

- Amiable and Expressive are RELATIONSHIP oriented, they emote. They use opinions, are usually undisciplined, warm, and approachable.

But also, these styles are also paired up along the vertical:

- Driving and Expressive are part of the TELL side of assertiveness, so they like fast action, taking risks, and being competitive.
- Analytical and Amiable are part of the ASK side of assertiveness, so they prefer slow action, avoiding risks, and being cooperative.

You will fall into one of these four areas mainly, but can have aspects of the other 3. Again, this is due to those 2 axes: Assertiveness and Responsiveness.

Of the three personality profiles we've looked at, Social Styles is the one I'm most familiar with, as Alpha Phi Omega has incorporated it into our self-leadership workshop of our LD program. I find it the most useful of the three we've looked at.