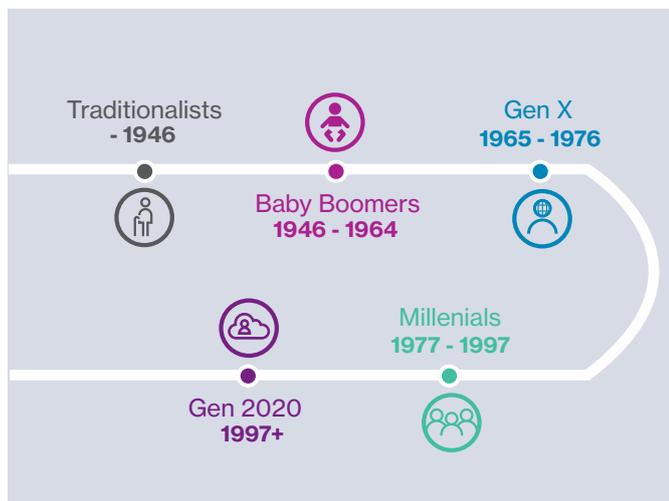


The Future of Work and The Diverse Workforce

Today's realities are shaped by a growing digital revolution. Technologies are fusing, blurring lines between the physical, digital and biological worlds. These changes are having a significant impact on work. Where we work, when we work and how we work are becoming increasingly flexible. Many organisations are trying to break away from the outdated silo-style of working, looking for ways to facilitate and promote cross-departmental collaboration. Alongside this, more businesses are operating globally which is leading to the rise of the virtual team. The need to work broadly, remotely and globally means that we are required to work with a more diverse range of people than ever before.

Organisations are investing heavily in promoting demographic diversity; with this topic featuring in many organisational '2020' visions. This drive towards a demographically diverse workforce makes great business sense, a 2015 McKinsey report on 366 public companies found that the companies within the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity were 35% more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean.

When we think about diversity at work most will think about the obvious categories; gender, culture and ethnicity. But what about age? This is the first time in history where five generations are working side by side. Outside demographic diversity we are seeing diversity in knowledge, some of this is driven through generational diversity for example, 'millennial' population are seen as the most tech-savvy, but diversity is also the result of one's own experience and specialisms.



So why should we be promoting diverse working?

Different backgrounds mean different perspectives and job knowledge, and working with people who are different challenges us to think differently and re-examine our ideas. In fact, research conducted by Van Dijk et al considering the effect of demographic and job-related diversity on job performance has shown that having a diverse range of perspectives and skills is directly related to high performing, innovative teams. This is even more important in organisations that require a great degree of information processing, problem-solving and decision making, such as within the professional services industry.

But why it's not quite that simple...

However, assembling diverse teams of highly capable individuals doesn't necessarily lead to high performance – as discovered by Google in their Project Aristotle internal research into high functioning teams. They applied a meticulous, data-driven approach into gathering information on teams with vastly different demographic factors. They found that the only common attribute across successful teams was a feeling of Psychological Safety.

Psychological safety?

A shared belief held by members of a group that the group is safe for interpersonal risk taking. A culture where there is no embarrassment or punishment for speaking up.

This finding is matched in the influential management text 'The Five Dysfunctions of a Team' by Patrick Lencioni. In this, Lencioni identifies Absence of Trust as the first dysfunction of a team. When people fear being vulnerable with each other, they do not open up to one another. This means that they do not share concerns about their weaknesses and equally do not feel confident enough to suggest ideas or solutions.

So why might this disconnect in trust emerge? Social Identity Theory, a well-known psychological principle, explains that as humans we tend to sort information into categories to help social identification. This desire to put things into groups provides us with an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging in the social world.

However, a recent topic of organisational research has described how these social groupings can be disruptive. As we identify with these categories, such as being a certain level within the business or reporting into a particular department we are less likely to empathise with others and take on their perspective. These tendencies are known as faultlines.

Although demographic factors are often more visible, faultlines occur whenever there is a perceived difference between two people. For example, organisational tenure is a very common faultline, a theme which will only become more common with the ageing workforce.

The Shift from Print to Digital

A relevant example of a modern day faultline can be seen when we consider the media industry. A huge shift has occurred with the decline of print media and the rise of online, short-form journalism, necessitating a change in mentality, as well as business practices.

Employees across the business may have different perspectives on how that shift should play out. Whilst some may champion the ability of printed newspapers to connect with their loyal readership who may be less familiar with digital devices, others may emphasise the benefits of promoting through social media and being able to instantly connect with stories.

So how can we embrace diversity whilst managing the risks?

These faultlines are inevitable, as it is human nature to identify differences between ourselves and others. However, these differences do not need to turn into active group divisions. If you can harness group identification from within the team and across the organisation it is possible to prevent conflict, promote cohesion and harness the potential of diversity. Patrick Lencioni identifies personality and behaviour preference profiles as excellent and lasting tools for building trust in a team. If individuals are aware of what they are contributing and see their diversity as a positive, they will be more inclined to contribute. Equally, if it is possible to facilitate more open communication and interaction between a group, there will be a greater willingness to cooperate.



Why Work Roles?

In order to facilitate group trust and cohesion you must first give the group a common language to help them understand how each other works. The Work Roles report identifies an individual's preferences based on the way they interact with other and approach their work. There are eight roles.

Acknowledging your own style

The Work Roles Report highlights an individual's most preferred roles. The report explains the characteristics and behavioural output associated with each type. For example, an Innovator is likely to take a creative approach to problem solving, often developing long term strategies. This role type is associated with a number of strengths:

- Innovators typically provide original solutions
- Innovators tend to offer unconventional and valuable insights
- Innovators are likely to have a vision for the future

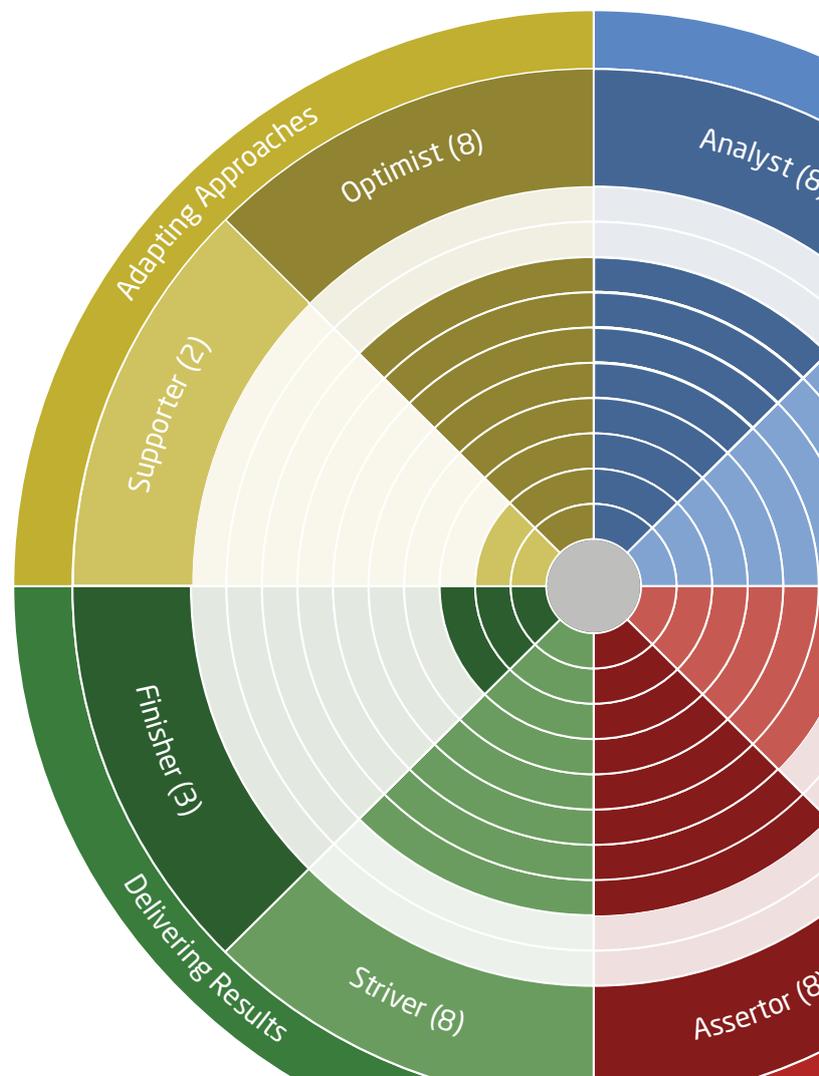
And what happens when the top two roles are combined? The report highlights the unique associated strengths of an individual's 'dual' role. For example, an Innovator with a secondary preference as a Striver is likely to be someone who is able to drive vigorously towards their vision.

This self-awareness can be invaluable in the workplace. It allows individuals to acknowledge and embrace their working preference. For example, if we consider a graduate, or someone who is new to the business there may be a tendency to feel as though they cannot contribute as fully as other, more established employees. By inviting the employee to acknowledge their strengths and what they can contribute over and above others, can actively encourage the exhibition of these behaviours.

Being aware of your how your styles can interact

Whilst acknowledging the preferred role is crucial, attention must also be paid to those styles which are less likely to be adopted. For example, if the Innovator has a least preferred role of a Supporter then whilst they might be generating lots of new ideas, they may be less inclined to take the time to consider how their new ideas will impact upon others.

Again, increasing this self-awareness can encourage employees to embrace both their strengths and development areas. In doing so, individuals can feel more confident when asking for support from a colleague, or getting a second opinion.



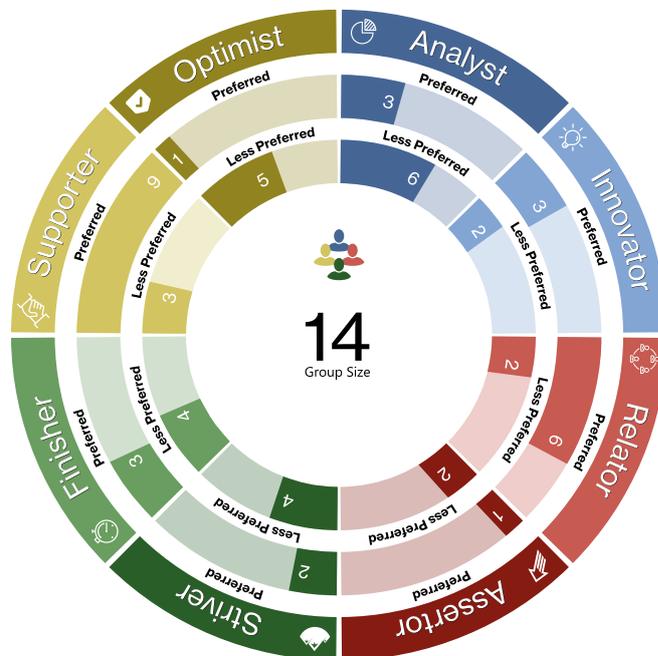
Understanding how you can work better with others

Let's take two group members. Sam is an Innovator and Ashley is a Finisher. Sam could use his creative nature to work with Ashley to find the most efficient and effective ways of doing things. Ashley can help Sam define his ideas into concrete tasks which are doable.

Typically, the interpersonal problems that can come about when people with different working styles work together can limit collaboration. By encouraging and facilitating open communication around one another's style can help improve productivity. Rather than seeing other role types as a blocker, employees can be encouraged to work more closely with their opposites, and use one another's strengths.

Acknowledging the groups profile

The insight gained at an individual level can then be combined to provide a group overview profile. In doing so a team can clearly see where they have strengths, and where there might be some gaps. For example, a team with many Analysts are likely to be very skilled at evaluating various sources of information. The group will take a logical approach to problem solving and will be inclined to explore all the available opportunities. However, the flip-side of this strength is to consider where this preference has the potential to be 'over-played'. For example, there is a likely preference towards conducting thorough analysis but it will be important not to over-analyse at the expense of reaching an outcome. Here, the team should draw upon the skills of the Finishers within the group to help keep them on track.



Creating a shared sense of purpose

As highlighted, Lencioni states that when a group feels vulnerable around one another they are less likely to feel comfortable sharing ideas and stepping out of their comfort zone. By facilitating conversations around strengths and development areas; both at a group and individual level, will promote group cohesion. Teams should be comfortable tapping into one another's skills and experiences, harnessing skills from one another. If you can align the team around a common objective and create a shared sense of purpose (for example, success on a project), the team is more likely to perform highly.

In summary

The world of work is changing. The way we work is becoming ever-more fluid and traditional ways of working are being broken down. It's natural when forming working relationships with others that we focus on what makes us similar and what makes us different. These differences can be a powerful force for innovation through the sharing of varied experiences and knowledge. To maximise this innovation and group productivity, research tells us that we need to ensure a culture of trust and mutual safety, and this can be easier said than done. It is all too easy to categorise each other and identify with our differences rather than what we have in common.

Whilst we can't escape these differences, we can reframe them. Finding a collective identity means harnessing the benefits of diversity while mitigating its risks. The Work Roles report creates a common language of workplace preferences and bridges the differences inherent within diverse teams. The

Work Roles report can promote an identity focused on working style. It enables individuals to work more closely with others and understand how individual styles complement one another. It can help team members understand how they can best support each other and understand the group's collective strengths and tendencies.

The Work Roles report is designed to change how you think about diversity and your role at work - use it to foster the feelings of trust and safety endemic to innovative, successful performance at work.

References: Van Dijk et al., 2012, Cronin et al., 2007, Google – Project Aristotle

Saville Assessment
WillisTowersWatson

www.savilleassessment.com