

Managing conflict situations using the Strength Deployment Inventory®

Jan Brause



The SDI – a unique self-development tool – can be used during coaching to help overcome conflict and build more productive working relationships.

What is the SDI?

The SDI helps us to understand what really makes people tick. It specifically considers what motivates us in two conditions: when things are going well, and when things are going less well. Greater awareness and understanding in these situations helps increase behavioural effectiveness, building positive relationships and overcoming conflict situations.

We all know that conflict in all walks of life can be personally draining. It can also be a real financial drain in a business context. The SDI generates an understanding about what causes conflict between individuals and provides a means to overcome this. It encourages us to celebrate and work with our differences, not against them.

SDI is based on over 30 years of research by Elias H. Porter into Relationship Awareness Theory™.

What is Relationship Awareness Theory?

Relationship Awareness Theory, like many psychological theories,

holds that all people want to feel worthwhile about themselves. From birth, human infants seek positive connections with their care-givers. It is through interactions and relationships with others that we exist, and that these feelings will be confirmed or denied.

Therefore, our behaviours are expressions of our desire to be connected with others. Relationship Awareness Theory looks at how we go about establishing and maintaining relationships in order to have a positive sense of ourselves and of our value as a person.

Relationship Awareness Theory looks at behaviour in the following way:

- 1 Behaviours are tools used to get some result or confirm our sense of self-worth. These tools are also used to ward off things we do not want.
- 2 Motives come from our wish to feel a strong sense of self-worth or self-value.
- 3 Our individual Motivational Value System™ is established at

an early age, is consistent throughout our life, and underpins all of our behaviours.

Motives are often described as something that can be inspired in others. In Relationship Awareness Theory, motives are thought of as already present in every person, and readily available to be tapped into.

Key learning points

- ◆ Using tools and inventories as part of the coaching process can add value for the client and the coach.
- ◆ The Strength Deployment Inventory® (SDI®) is a particularly helpful self-development tool when working with issues around communication, relationships and conflict.
- ◆ Understanding the motivations behind behaviours can lead to greater personal awareness for the client.
- ◆ The SDI can help managers and individuals to be more accountable for their performance.

Ongoing internal development with SDI

Taking all the managers through the initial workshop meant that everyone in the team started from the same level of understanding. Each value system was plotted onto a team graph, which was to form a highly visible part of ongoing management meetings. Figure 2 illustrates this.

As a practising coach, I firmly believe in the long-term sustainable benefits of coaching and enabling the clients I work with to become self-sufficient.

The managers gained lots of ideas about how to work more effectively with others, how to build more productive relationships and how to manage conflict. Their action plans ensured that

they took ownership of addressing issues that were hindering their performance or holding them back.

The visible and dynamic charting of the team profile allowed them to talk openly and honestly about which behaviours were effective, and which ones needed some work.

In addition, because they had a common language and a shared experience with the SDI, they were able to build into their management meetings a review process that kept the SDI at the forefront of their minds, and meant it became a strategic tool for continual performance improvement.

This process took place over six months ago, but I have recently spoken with the MD. His comments were that, despite continued change and leaner times within his business, the team has continued to contribute new ideas, to review how they communicate with each other and to take more responsibility for their actions.

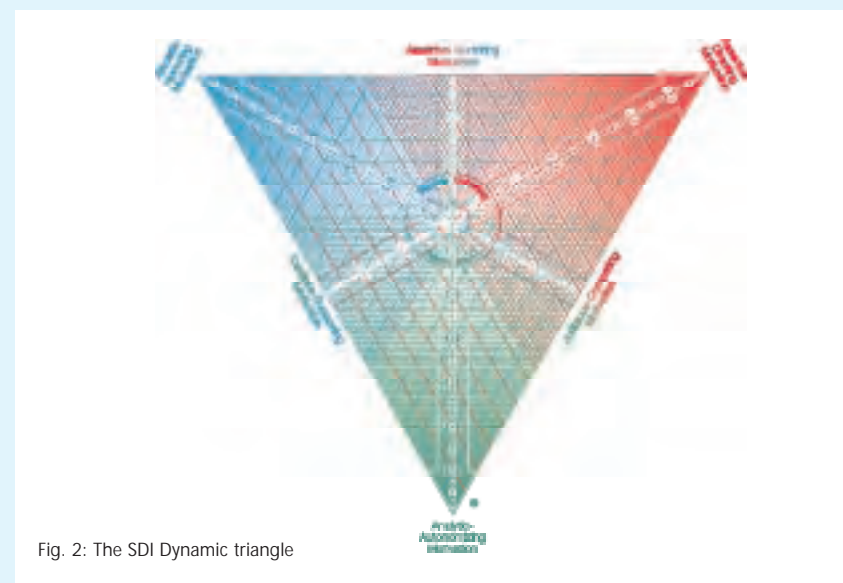


Fig. 2: The SDI Dynamic triangle

Personal reflections on the benefits of coaching with the SDI

As a coach, I use a range of different tools, techniques and processes when working with clients. I particularly like the flexibility of the SDI, as it can be used in group or face-to-face coaching situations.

I have also found the SDI useful because – unlike some psychological tools which ‘type’ individuals and put them in boxes from which I have sometimes found them reluctant to move – the SDI simply raises awareness, and in doing so provides a catalyst for the client to change and improve their personal and professional relationships.

Jan Brause is a freelance professional coach and development consultant. Her focus is on providing creative and flexible development solutions for performance improvement. She has worked with clients in both the public and the private sectors. Jan is a qualified coach, a member of the Association for Coaching, and an INLPTA-trained Neuro Linguistic Programming master practitioner.

- Telephone: +44 (0) 844 779 1461
- E-mail: jan@janbrause.co.uk
- Website: www.janbrause.co.uk

SDI® qualification



There is a qualification process for working with the SDI. Personal Strengths Publishing (UK) Ltd holds regular two-day qualification workshops. Details are available from Simon Gallon, Managing Director, Personal Strengths Publishing, on + 44 (0) 1780 764 762; alternatively visit the website www.personalstrengths.co.uk.

The Strength Deployment Inventory® and SDI® are protected by worldwide copyright and are registered to Personal Strengths Publishing Inc.

Relationship Awareness Theory™ and Motivational Value System™ are trade marks of Personal Strengths Publishing Inc.



Working relationships are critical to success

One of the guiding principles of Relationship Awareness Theory is that each person is seen as the expert on themselves. The inventories are intended to provide learning experiences in which the learner discovers important information about themselves. The position of the effective coach or facilitator is that of the guide in this discovery process.

How is the SDI useful in coaching?

Whatever our job, building successful working relationships is critical to success. The SDI enables everyone to understand the reason why people do things, rather than just observing and reacting to what is being done. In a coaching relationship in which a client is facing clashes of personality, disagreements, frustration with others, poor communication, or internal or external conflict, I have found the SDI an invaluable tool to help the client to move forward.

Case study – using the SDI to manage team and individual conflict

The issue

I was approached by the MD of a high-street printing and PR company. The MD explained that the company had undergone some change, which had resulted in a lack of motivation amongst the management team. In addition, a new member had recently joined the team, and there seemed to be some 'personality issues' between the new manager and other team members.

I asked the MD a few more questions about how the business was run, and what he was looking for in terms of performance improvement. After a while, we came to the conclusion that some executive coaching would be a useful way forward for the business,

and would lead to the performance improvement he was looking for. That was driven by a desire to:

- create more autonomy and ownership amongst the management team;
- build collaborative relationships amongst managers to deliver the business objectives;
- reduce potential areas of conflict.

We had discussed the benefits of the SDI as a tool for building more effective relationships. The MD believed that this would also add value to the coaching process.

Introducing the SDI

The inventory was introduced to the whole of the management team as part of a half-day workshop. The introductory workshop helped managers to understand what drives their behaviour: the motives. It focused on three key colours, RED, GREEN and BLUE, which, when blended, create the seven key motivational value systems. These colours represent the following motivational values:

- RED – assertive – directing
- GREEN – analytic – autonomising
- BLUE – altruistic – nurturing
- HUB (combination) – flexible – cohering
- RED/BLUE – assertive – nurturing
- GREEN/RED – judicious – competing
- GREEN/BLUE – cautious – supporting

Using the colours as a metaphor for motivation gave the managers a helpful language in which they could talk about sensitive issues in an unemotional way and share information with others.

The emphasis of this group session was on values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, which were described in the following way:

Imagine that our behaviour is like a buoy floating on the ocean. This buoy represents our behaviour, which may change depending on the situations we find ourselves in. Our Motivational Value System (MVS) stays firmly anchored at the bottom of the ocean and is hard wired from an early age. Our attitudes, beliefs and values, on the other hand, can change, depending on our life experiences.

It is important to recognise the difference between attitudes, beliefs, values and our MVS. Our motivational values feed our human need for self-worth and ultimately drive our behaviour. The more we understand what drives behaviour, the greater our flexibility in responding to those around us, and the easier it is to avoid the unwarranted conflict that occurs through misunderstanding.

This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Equipped with this greater understanding, the managers completed the inventory to identify their own unique profile. They specifically identified their profile when things

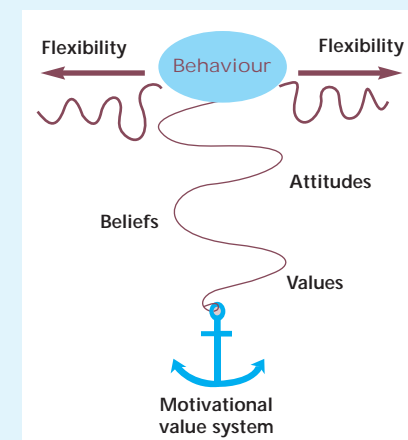


Fig. 1: Our behaviour and our MVS

were going well, and also when things were going less well and they found themselves in conflict. This information was then used in the face-to-face coaching session that followed.

Coaching with the SDI

What followed was a series of face-to-face coaching sessions that explored a range of different issues. The focus was on establishing general areas for performance improvement and specific goals and outcomes for each coaching session, and a range of techniques and methods were used.

What the SDI gave us was a starting point from which to look at individual motives and how this might impact on the behaviour of each manager in the group. This created a non-threatening approach to discussing areas of conflict and how to get over them.

Comments and insights received from managers included these:

Now I understand why I get wound up when X does that.

Now I know that we have the same objective; it's just that we approach it in different ways.

If I adapt my approach and language, then I might get a better response.

I can use this information to help me improve relationships with my clients as well as the team.

Action plans and feedback

Individual coaching sessions with the managers involved gaining commitment from them to a series of actions that would help improve their communications within the peer group, and also help them to

manage areas of potential conflict. For some managers, this meant trying a different response when one of their peers gave them feedback; for others, it meant recognising that some of their colleagues actually needed feedback in order to feel more motivated. The process led to a greater personal understanding, so that their action plans were about identifying what would create conflict for them and doing something about it immediately, rather than letting it build up.

The SDI also gave each manager a simple and common language that they all shared, which helped them to feed back to each other when they noticed particular types of behaviour.

Tips for coaches on using the SDI

- Start by explaining what the MVS is and its impact on behaviour.
- Complete the inventory as part of a coaching session, so questions can be answered and issues dealt with as they arise.
- Help the client connect with their MVS by describing examples of how this might manifest itself in a range of different situations.
- Talk through 'real' personal and professional examples of where things have been going well and not so well for the client.
- Ask the client to think of specific examples of their behaviour in different situations.
- Review the learning this gives the client and help them to take steps that will provide greater flexibility in the future.