

TACKLING THE BIG CS WITH THE STRENGTH DEPLOYMENT INVENTORY®:



**overcoming communication
and conflict issues
in the workplace**

Jan Brause and **Simon Gallon** explain how the SDI works in terms of communication and conflict in the workplace and use two case histories in order to outline the benefits.

- How often as trainers and consultants do we hear individuals complaining about the lack of effective communication in their business?
- How often do managers bemoan the fact that individuals in their teams are in disagreement and just don't seem to get on?
- Just imagine the amount of time and money that businesses spend on sorting out communications and interpersonal issues rather than focusing on the important issues of achieving business goals and objectives.

This is where the Strength Deployment Inventory® (SDI®) can help both business and individuals.

There are many self-awareness tools in the marketplace that look at behaviour at one point in time as a predictor of future behaviour. What is different about the SDI is that it looks at what motivates a person and how his/her priorities change in the face of opposition or conflict. The SDI is also extremely practical, versatile and easy to understand. It creates a language that cuts through cultural and hierarchical barriers.

WHAT CAUSES BREAKDOWN?

But what causes communication breakdown in the first place? Now this is a really big question. Communication differences occur for a whole range of reasons, including ineffective processes and procedures introduced into the business by people. So it makes sense that if people understand each other and communicate effectively, any procedural and process problem can potentially be ironed out. *Good quality business*

relationships can equal good quality business results.

As individuals, we tend to view the world not as it is but as *we see it*. Our own filters dictate what we perceive and this can be very different from the view that another person has. If we understand why that person holds a particular view then our own perceptions can be altered.

When we communicate we are clear about our own language and intent, and the other person listens and translates what we are saying into his or her own language. This means that the quality of communication is governed by the other person's understanding of our language. If we communicate in the other person's language, then this reduces the likely instance of miscommunication or conflict.

WHY DOES CONFLICT OCCUR?

Conflict typically occurs when we find ourselves faced with a situation that threatens our self-worth or value. It acts like a defence mechanism because our motives or values seem to be threatened in some way. Something that was said or done by an individual triggers a particular response in another.

What we are really talking about is the quality of relationships between individuals, and if we can improve the quality by understanding the values and motives of others then conflict is reduced.

HOW THE SDI WORKS

The SDI is a self-development tool that gives us an indication of what really makes us tick and why we do the things we do. It looks at our motivations when things are going well and when things are going less well.

The underlying assumption of the SDI is that all human beings need to interact with others in a way that makes us feel good about ourselves and at the same time makes the other person feel good about him or herself. The SDI encourages us to think about behaviour not as an end in itself but as a vehicle that is driving us towards a greater feeling of self-worth. By better understanding these motivations we are more able to build effective relationships both personally and professionally.

The SDI is based on more than 30 years of research by psychologist Elias H Porter into self-concept from which he developed his Relationship Awareness Theory™. This theory is based on the premise that individual behaviour traits are consistent with what we find gratifying in interpersonal relations and with concepts or beliefs we hold about how to interact with others to achieve those gratifications. Although many personality theories are

about people, this theory was meant *for* people. It was intended to provide an effective means for understanding ourselves and for understanding others so that interpersonal relationships could be mutually productive and gratifying. The theory was planned to help people organise their concepts of themselves and their concepts of others around three basic motivations:

- wanting to be of genuine help to others,
- wanting to be the leader of others, and
- wanting to be self-dependent.

Porter's work was heavily influenced by the likes of the psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm, and psychologist Carl Rogers.

SDI IN ACTION

To illustrate how the SDI can help to improve communications and reduce conflict let's take the example of John. John is a department manager who is the fount of all knowledge to others. The problem is that when his colleagues go over to his desk to ask for information, John seems to ignore them. He continues working away with his head down, finishing what he is doing before looking up to enquire as to how he can be of help. His colleagues perceive this as being rude. The truth is that his motivational values are driven by the Analytical-Autonomising (green – see Table 1) value system. He

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- There are benefits to both business and individuals of working with the Strength Deployment Inventory.
- It is an effective approach to working with communications.
- Learn how to avoid the misunderstandings that create conflict.
- Understand how motivational values affect behaviour.
- Generate greater flexibility to respond to ever-more demanding working environments.

When something seems obvious or 'right', it is typically because **it has been explained in our language**

➔ actually wants to give his full attention to his colleagues and in order to do this he needs to finish his train of thought.

Once the department became aware of their differences through the SDI, John's colleagues had a better understanding of what was driving his behaviour. John also agreed to acknowledge his colleagues by looking up and saying: 'I will be with you in a moment.' This simple understanding and change of behaviour meant that further communication breakdown and potential conflict could be avoided creating a win-win situation for all involved.

FOCUS ON COMMUNICATIONS

Our motivational value system has a language attached to it. This language is one that is based on what we value, and working with the SDI provides greater flexibility and choice about how we communicate with people around us. It helps us to treat people the way *they* like to be treated rather than treating them how *we* like to be treated. The example that follows illustrates how this works.

Working with SDI to improve communications: a case study

An established engineering company had consistently been granted tenders. However, on one particular project this company was not invited to go to a second stage of bidding. The feedback was that the client did not feel included and there had been a change in the relationship. The client commented that it did not like being told what to do. The project was large and valuable, so the tender was reviewed.

The team leader had been changed for this project and the new team leader's motivation was driven by the Assertive-Directing (red – see Table 1) motivational value system. His motivation was to achieve the task most cost efficiently and get results for the company. The way his

intention was portrayed in the tender was that his written language was very goal focused and directing.

The previous team leader was driven by the Flexible-Cohering (hub – see Table 1) motivational value system and his concern was for generating consensus and harmony. The way this intention had been portrayed in previous tenders was in written language that offered a range of options, and was both focused and inclusive.

With the understanding gained by the engineering company through completion of the SDI profile, the tender was re-written using a different language. This time there were options built in at different stages in the proposal. 'We would review at this point ...', 'Options would be ...', 'We would be guided by you on ...', and so on.

In view of the long-standing nature of the relationship with its client, the engineering company was given the option to re-tender. This time its tender was accepted and the feedback received from the client was that it now felt as though both parties were working together again.

The interesting point about the tender is that the time frame and costs were exactly the same as the previous tender, so the only change was in the language used and this is what had made the difference.

The benefits

When something seems obvious or 'right', it is typically because it has been explained in our language. Our perception of the style of communication and the content of the communication is all filtered through our value system. In the case study above, the client was listening for signals that it would work together with the supplier; it was essential that options were catered for in the project. In the absence of this, the perception was that the client was being told what to do, even as far as thinking the supplier's approach was arrogant.

Table 1: Introducing the SDI

The SDI gives us a unique understanding about relationships. As part of a workshop individuals complete their own motivational styles profile, after which they are encouraged to explore the implications of this on their choice of behaviour in any given situation.

Each unique and individual SDI profile is generated by completing a short inventory that considers how we deploy our strengths when things are going well and when we face conflict or opposition.

What makes the SDI both easy to complete and remember is that it uses three colours – blue, red and green – and their blend represents the seven motivational value systems outlined below. These motivational value systems expand into over a million individual positions where no one is better than the other. It is also important to note that what motivates us does not limit our behaviour; rather, it gives us more choice about the behaviours we can use to be more effective in our interpersonal relationships. By providing a non-threatening and universal language that crosses cultural barriers we are equipped with the understanding that fosters more effective communications and reduces the incidence of unwarranted conflict.

Altruistic-Nurturing (blue)

The protection, growth and welfare of others. Looking for opportunities to support those who may need help.

Assertive-Directing (red)

Task accomplishment, organisation of people, time and money plus any other resources ... to win out against opposition and be seen as an achiever.

Analytical-Autonomising (green)

The assurance that things have been properly thought out, self-dependence, taking time to get things 'right', looking for ways to improve quality.

Flexible-Cohering (hub)

Flexibility, the welfare of the group and for belonging in the group. Keeping options open, consensus and harmony within groups.

Assertive-Nurturing (red-blue)

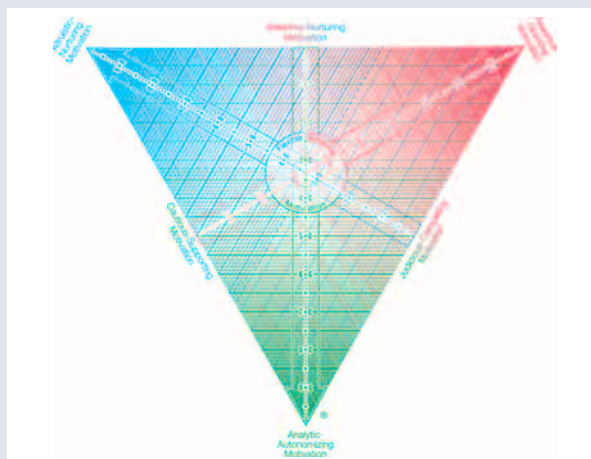
The protection, growth and welfare of others through task accomplishment and leadership. Enthusiasm for the development of others.

Judicious-Competing (red-green)

Intelligent assertiveness, justice, order and fairness in competition. Strategic thinking where all resources are used to achieve goals.

Cautious-Supporting (blue-green)

Affirming and developing self-sufficiency in self and others. Concern for thoughtful helpfulness with regard to justice.



➔ **FOCUS ON CONFLICT**

The SDI works on the premise that there are two kinds of conflict: warranted and unwarranted. Warranted conflict is where the goal or outcome is in question. If two people disagree on what they want to achieve, then inevitably conflict occurs. The area in which the SDI is most effective is when unwarranted conflict occurs. Here, the goal is not in question – both parties want the same thing; their difference of opinion is about *how* the goal or objective is achieved.

Working with SDI to reduce unwarranted conflict: a case study

An MD of a small printing and PR company explained that his business had undergone some change, which had resulted in a lack of motivation among 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. This was leading to considerable internal conflict between key members who needed to collaborate on a range of projects.

After some questioning to clarify the situation, the MD identified that he wanted a way forward for the business that would lead to performance improvement. For him this was driven by a desire to:

- ➔ create more autonomy and ownership among the management team,

- ➔ build collaborative relationships among managers to deliver the business objectives, and
- ➔ reduce potential areas of conflict.

The benefits of using the SDI as a tool for building more effective relationships were discussed and the MD believed that this would also add value for his team and the business.

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.

Using the colours as a metaphor for motivation (see Table 1), gave the managers a helpful language in which to talk about sensitive issues in an unemotional way and to 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

because it is our motivational values that feed our human need for self-worth and ultimately drives 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.

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

The benefits

What the SDI gave the management team was a start point 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 feedback received from managers include the following.

- ➔ ‘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.’

Because the managers were now equipped with a language that would help them to relate more effectively to their peers, they were able to avoid conflict situations more effectively. This simple and common language that they all shared also helped them to feed back to each other when they noticed particular types of behaviour.

For some managers this meant trying a different response when one of their peers gave them feedback; for others it was 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 managers gained lots of ideas about how to work more effectively with others, how to build more productive relationships and how to manage conflict. 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 shared experience with the SDI, they were able to build a review process into their management meetings that kept the SDI at the forefront of their minds and meant it became a strategic tool that not only helped them work around conflict situations but also formed the basis for continual performance improvement.

Many of us ‘know’ our colleagues but to ‘understand’ others is something that is typically reserved for a select few relationships. The SDI gives us not only the understanding of what really makes people ‘tick’ but provides the language to communicate with others in an unemotional non-judgemental way. More than this it goes further to help identify the real priorities people have when faced with opposition or conflict showing how to de-personalise these situations and resolve differences quickly, thoroughly and effectively and most importantly without laying down baggage for the future. 🗨️

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SDI qualification

There is a qualification process to be able to work with the Strength Deployment Inventory. 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 764762 or visit www.personalstrengths.co.uk

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