

Place of work

For most of us, technology enables us to work anywhere, anytime. I'm writing this article using my laptop at a training centre in Singapore. I'm connected to the building's guest wi-fi so I can send the finished piece to my colleague back in the UK, who is at this moment probably asleep.

Technology means that we can work anywhere, yes. The question is, where is the best place for you to work?

There is a pattern in the LAB Profile called the Style filter. It identifies the kind of human environment a in which a person does best. Knowing this about your colleagues and team members can make it easy to decide who will do well working from home, who thrives in an open-plan office and who are the best 'team-players'.

To discover a person's preference in this pattern, it helps to know first of all what is important to that person in their work. If we know their criteria for a 'good' job, finding out their preferred working style is relatively easy.

Suppose you ask one of your team, "What do you want in your work?" and she responds, "I want a challenge, recognition for my work and colleagues I enjoy working with".

To discover her preferred working style you then ask, "tell me about a situation at work where you had challenge, recognition for your work and colleagues you enjoyed working with..."

In other words, you're asking, '*when you are having the best experience of work, what is going on?*'

There are three possible ways the person might answer this question.

1. Independent working

A person who prefers independent working will relate a story of doing a task or project completely on their own. They will talk about having the sole responsibility for the job and being able to get on with it without any interference from anyone else. They might mention being somewhere private or quiet and the pleasure of making the decisions alone. The key here is that nobody else was involved in doing the work. There may have been a manager or client who gave the brief and later, the recognition for a job well done, but the actual work was done alone.

Someone with this preference is likely to get impatient with colleagues if they are required to work as part of a team and may find it stressful to be in an environment with a lot of other people to distract them from the task in hand.

2. Proximity working

A person who prefers proximity working is likely to relate a story of doing work where they had very clear personal responsibility but there were other people around or involved. They might talk about contributing something very specific to a large programme, or they may tell you that they were the leader of a team. It could also be that they were doing a stand-alone piece of work but worked in an environment where there were other people around and they were able to chat or offer encouragement to each other. A salesperson's role is usually a 'proximity' style of work because although they have individual responsibility, targets and customers, the salesperson cannot do their job unless other people, namely the customers, are involved.

A management role is also, by definition, a 'proximity' role, because although the manager had clear personal responsibility, they also have interaction with the team they

manage and cannot really be said to be a manager in the absence of people to manage.

The defining factor in a 'proximity' role is that the person has their own tasks and responsibility and their success is judged on an individual basis even though there are other people around or involved and the person is interacting with those others.

A person with this preference might find it hard to work from home, alone and can also find it frustrating to be part of a team where there are no individual targets or rewards.

3. Co-operative working

A person who prefers co-operative working is likely to tell you a story in which they were working as part of a team. Everyone combined their efforts in pursuit of a single common goal. They might talk about the synergy of working as a team or about the benefits of collaboration. It could be a small group of people or a much larger team. The key feature is that the person did not have individual responsibility and the results depended on the work of more than one person. Individuals with this preference thrive in environments where they have lots of interaction with colleagues and are likely to look for opportunities to help others with their work.

If this is their preference, a person will find it difficult to work in isolation and is likely to be very unproductive if they have to work remotely unless they have lots of telephone or email contact with their colleagues. They may find it quite stressful to have total responsibility for a task and will be likely to look for ways to involve others.

When you know a person's preference from these three it can have a variety of benefits:

- You can choose the right person for solo tasks and allow them to work from home or another 'remote' location

- You can avoid having someone in a team who isn't really a 'team player'
- You can tell whether someone is likely to enjoy a leadership role or not
- You can avoid the problems of someone trying to work from home or a remote location when it doesn't suit their style
- You can give space and privacy to someone who needs it to do their best work
- You can tell who will thrive in an open plan office and who will not
- You know which aspects of a task to highlight when assigning a piece of work, in order to make it sound appealing to the person.
- You can identify your own preferred style and play to your strengths
- You can reduce the level of stress in your team.

I suggest that when you're planning a task, event or project you consider the preferred style of the people involved. It's simple to discover and can make a huge difference to how productive your people can be and how much they enjoy working for you.

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