

What is SOCIAL STYLE®?

The Alternative to a One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Working with Others

As anyone who's ever worked with others can tell you, people approach their jobs in a variety of ways. Some people think and act quickly, while others like to take more time; some people are more friendly and sociable, while others are more reserved. At times, these differences can create freshness, balance, interesting relationships and innovative solutions. But all too often differences in "work style" lead to misunderstanding, mistrust, and frustration—not to mention lowered productivity and poor results.

The SOCIAL STYLE Model™

The SOCIAL STYLE Model is a simple, practical tool for understanding these differences and for working well with others who are very different from you, so that everyone's strengths are respected and used well.

Like many useful inventions, the SOCIAL STYLE Model was discovered by accident. In the early 1960s, two industrial psychologists named Roger Reid and David Merrill were working with a large insurance company in the northeastern US to find out whether there were simple behavioral markers that could predict leadership potential. They reasoned that if they could screen for these hypothetical behaviors when hiring new managers, they could create a culture of highly effective leaders.

Unfortunately, they were completely unsuccessful in finding a way to predict leadership potential through behavioral assessment. Fortunately, Merrill and Reid discovered something else: When they assessed people relative to three behavioral dimensions—which they called Assertiveness, Responsiveness, and Versatility—they could predict a lot of other useful things.

For example, they could tell how that person would be likely to approach tasks and relationships with others; what parts of a project he or she would tend to focus on and which would be less compelling; what some of that person's key interpersonal strengths and weaknesses would be; how that person would like and need to be managed; and how that person would tend to team and to manage others.



SOCIAL STYLE awareness & adapting skills

- Improve Teamwork
- Reduce Conflict about How to Approach Challenges/Opportunities
- Enable Better Coaching and Influencing
- Leverage Individual Strengths and Insights

Over a period of years, Reid and Merrill tested and validated their model with a wide variety of men and women in many different work situations. The model's predictive value held true, even—with slight modifications—for cultures outside the US and for non-work situations.

And So...

Today the model is used in a variety of ways. For example, it can be taught as a way to help salespeople sell appropriately to customers of various Styles. Teams can use the model to make best use of all team members' strengths. Managers can use the SOCIAL STYLE Model to become more self-aware, to recognize, and build on their style-based strengths and mitigate the impact of their style-based weaknesses, and to better manage employees of any Style. Anyone, in any situation, can use the SOCIAL STYLE concept to begin to see themselves as others see them (a very valuable insight) and to behave in ways that create productive, enjoyable relationships with people of every Style.

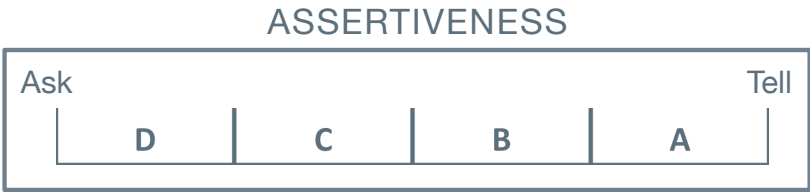
Since you have committed to attending a workshop or coaching session where the SOCIAL STYLE Model will be taught, the rest of this article has been created to give you a brief preview of the model and how it works. That way, you'll come to the session with a basic understanding of what's in store for you.

The Three Dimensions

As we mentioned earlier, the three behavioral dimensions form the core of the SOCIAL STYLE Model. By behavioral dimension, we mean an area of behavior within which people make different choices and have different capabilities. For instance, think of musicality as a behavioral dimension. Some people like to sing, some don't; some have excellent rhythm while some have difficulty keeping time to a simple beat; some people can convey tremendous emotion through music and some focus only on technique. All these behaviors can be ranged along the dimension of "musicality" from more to less.

The three dimensions Merrill and Reid focused on in creating the SOCIAL STYLE Model were—in their words—Assertiveness, Responsiveness, and Versatility. Let's look at each one separately.

Assertiveness means something very specific in this model. Merrill and Reid defined it as "the extent to which other people perceive you as trying to persuade or convince them of your point of view." In this model, people who are highly assertive are those who try to accomplish what's important to them by directly influencing others. People who are less assertive, in this model, accomplish what's important to them through other means; for instance through creating new systems or processes, through gathering supportive data, or through sounding out others on their ideas. Merrill and Reid created a horizontal line, divided into four increments, along which a person's behaviors on this dimension could be placed:



It's important to recognize that this definition is somewhat different than the general definition of Assertiveness that's evolved in the US over the past few decades—we've come to think of high Assertiveness as a good thing; we connect it with high self-esteem and an appropriate level of self-confidence. It's important to understand that in this model, higher and lower levels of Assertiveness *as Merrill and Reid define it* can be equally effective (or ineffective).

There are specific behaviors that go along with these differing levels of Assertiveness: people who are more assertive tend to speak, move and respond quickly; to tell others often their thoughts and opinions; and to be forceful in their gestures and decisions. People who are less assertive tend to speak, move, and respond more slowly; to gather ideas and information from others before expressing their own opinions; and to be more reserved and moderate in their gestures and decisions.

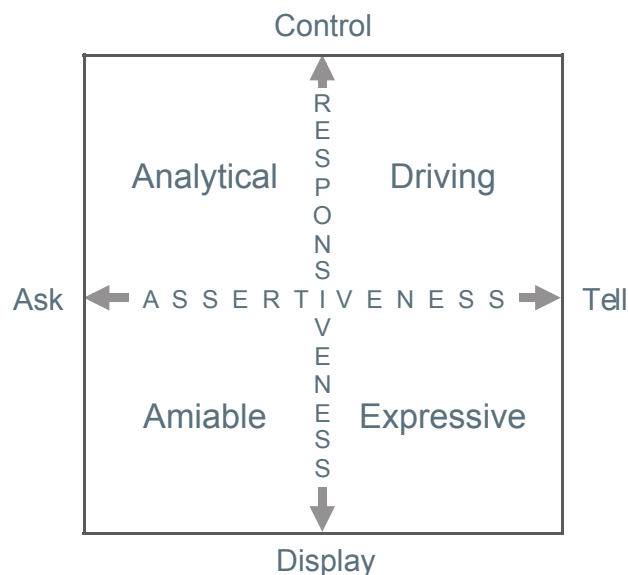
Responsiveness, in this model, means “the level to which you are perceived as controlling or revealing your emotions.” People who are highly responsive are very easy to “read,” their face, voice, body, and words convey how they feel about things. People who are low on the Responsiveness scale are much harder to read; they give few vocal or facial clues, and they don’t talk much about emotions, either, preferring to focus on facts. **Merrill and Reid** created a vertical line, again divided into four increments, along which they placed people’s behaviors on this dimension:

RESPONSIVENESS



As with Assertiveness, there are clusters of predictable behaviors that tend to go along with high and low Responsiveness. People who are highly responsive also tend to be relationship- and people-oriented, fun-loving, intuitive, and holistic in their thinking. People who are low on the Responsiveness scale tend to be more task- and fact-focused, serious-minded, logical, and linear in their thinking.

Reid and Merrill then laid the two dimensions over each other, creating a grid:



They discovered that each quadrant of the grid generally predicted a cluster of preferences, behaviors, and approaches that they termed a “SOCIAL STYLE.” The four Styles defined by the grid are as follows:

Driving (upper right quadrant): High assertive and low responsive. These people are fast-paced and decisive, and they can be impatient with those who don’t keep up with them. Their favored approach is to act quickly, based on the information they consider relevant—and to make course corrections later if needed. They specialize in pragmatism, candidness, coolness under pressure, and completing tasks quickly. Others tend to perceive them as work-oriented, efficient, and demanding.

Expressive (lower right quadrant): High assertive and high responsive. These people are fast-moving and adventuresome. They like to come up with new ideas. Their favored approach is to create a vision of the future and then get others’ support by selling the benefits of their vision. They specialize in energy, enthusiasm, humor, and risk-taking. Others tend to perceive them as persuasive, high-energy, creative, and impulsive.

Amiable (lower left quadrant): Low assertive and high responsive. These people are considerate and supportive. They like to take time to build rapport and to focus on team results. Their favored approach is to get consensus and to mediate—they believe that the best solution is one where everyone involved is “on board.” They specialize in compassion, loyalty, compromise, and building trust. Others tend to perceive them as kind, good with people, and somewhat self-effacing.

Analytical (upper left quadrant): Low assertive and low responsive. These people are cautious and thoughtful. They like to make sure that all the details are in place before moving ahead. Their favored approach is to minimize risk by looking at all the options before making a decision. They specialize in correctness, precision, prudence, and objectivity. Others tend to perceive them as cool, rational and somewhat detached.

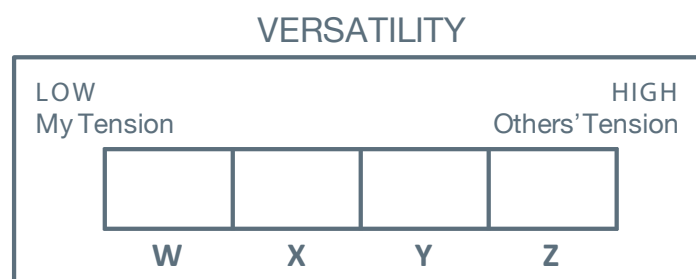
Many other behaviors and preferences can be predicted based on which of the four SOCIAL STYLES is a person’s “home base”; these will be discussed in depth in the workshop or coaching you’ll be attending.

Versatility, the third dimension, was defined by Merrill and Reid as “the level to which you are perceived as being willing to change your preferred behaviors to make others more comfortable in an interaction.” This dimension is by far the most important in a developmental sense. While there is really no better or worse place to be on the dimensions of Assertiveness and Responsiveness—no better or worse Style—it is definitely better to have higher Versatility.

For example, take someone who is an Analytical—low responsive and low assertive. This person is going to prefer to take things at a more conservative pace; to plan and think carefully before making a decision; to look at all the facts. Let’s say this person is working on a project with someone who is an Expressive—high on both Responsiveness and Assertiveness. This Expressive colleague is likely to enjoy brainstorming new approaches, moving quickly, being more informal in his or her interactions.

If our Analytical is highly versatile, he or she is likely to speed up a bit in this interaction and be less formal, and to be more open to entertaining ideas that may not make logical sense to begin with, all in order to help the interaction with the Expressive go more smoothly and be more productive. A low-versatile Analytical, on the other hand, would keep his or her pace and decision-making approach the same as usual, focusing only on meeting his or her own Style needs, and not speeding up or changing his or her approach in response to the Expressive’s Style needs and preferences.

Merrill and Reid visualized Versatility like this, dividing the dimension into four increments:



It's easy to see from the preceding example how a high-Versatility person would be able to build trust and rapport and work more successfully with a wider variety of people. A good part of the session you're scheduled to attend will focus on helping you build the skills necessary to become more versatile and/or to put your Versatility more under your conscious control—so that you can be versatile even in difficult situations or with difficult people.

What's Next

These are the basic elements of the SOCIAL STYLE Model; your training or coaching will focus on expanding and enriching these basic concepts so that you can make them your own. You'll learn how others see you in this model—and what that means in terms of your perceived strengths and weaknesses. You'll learn to read others' Styles, and then, given your own Style, learn how you can use the skills of Versatility to behave in ways that make others comfortable—without giving up what's most important to you.

We recommend that you reflect on what you've read here, and let yourself notice how these ideas relate to the people you work with every day. That way, you'll arrive at the workshop or coaching with some real world observations (of yourself and others) that we can use to deepen your understanding during the training.

Thanks for taking the time out of your schedule to do this pre-reading—we look forward to working with you.

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