Bridging the Communication Gap Using DISC Theory of Leadership in the Hybrid Work Environment

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ABSTRACT

The recent changes in work environment owing to the COVID 19 pandemic has made us rethink the utility of office space at a time when an exponential growth in the use of online platforms has been observed. With the flexibility of working space and timing, employees and the organizational heads have redefined work culture and the old adage of strict 9 to 5 job seems to have been completed changed. The current paper attempts to understand the four behavioral patterns of DISC exhibited by leaders in any work environment. It explains what are the four behavioral traits and how they influence communication. And in a hybrid work environment, with lot of flexibility in time and space, what steps are to be taken in order to make communication effective and avert miscommunication as half of the employees work offline while the other half works online.

Keywords-- DISC, Behavioral Patterns, Leaders, Subordinates and Communication Styles

I. INTRODUCTION

In an ever-changing world that is prompted by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the ways of communication have also changed tremendously. Now messages are passed in a fraction of a second proving the old ways of waiting for responses or waiting for a letter are long gone. With the outbreak of Information Technology and the rising numbers of messaging applications like Facebook Chats, WhatsApp, Google hangout, Google Meet, Zoom, Telegram, Signal, Tox Price, etc. geographical barrier of communication has been overcome to a large extent and the current pandemic has borne the testimony. With the hybrid working style of working from home, or from the office, the employees' style of communication has also changed. The lockdowns and social distancing protocols have ushered in the need of understanding the nuances of communication in order to make it as effective as it would have been in a face-to-face board meetings or outdoor client meets. In order to understand these intricate elements of a successful communication process, an understanding of the DISC theory of leadership will be helpful.

The DISC Theory of Communication model is formulated by the versatile American Psychologist William Moulton Marston. He is also known as an academic, a lawyer, an advocate of women's rights and a writer. Besides the DISC theory of Behaviour model, Marston is credited with the invention of the earlier version of polygraph machine (also known as lie detector) in 1915. Not only that, but he is also the creator of the famous comic character, Wonder woman for DC Comics that was first launched in 1941. Marston's DISC theory was first published in a book entitled, *Emotions of Normal People* in 1928 in which he had elaborately explained how people behave in different situations. In explaining this, Marston emphasised that while his contemporaries emphasised on the extreme emotions of "fear" and "rage" and "emotional shock" as "major emotions" essential to normal emotions, to him these emotions were abnormal emotions. He explains "Your emotional responses are "normal" when they produce pleasantness and harmony." He further elaborates in these words, "Survival of the fittest means survival of those members of a species whose organisms most successfully resist the encroachments of environmental antagonists, and continue to function with greatest internal harmony." (*Emotions of Normal People*, p.8). By environmental antagonists, Marston means those emotions like fear, aggression, deception that has a chance to produce turmoil and conflict among people. Here Marston instead takes into account those emotions that brings pleasantness in people and gives a harmonious social environment. He states that normal people are not normal when they are afraid, or enraged, or deceptive." (10). He specifies how people's behaviour and effectiveness change with changing environment.

Marston shows how the four behavorial patterns of people create a certain environment with different effects on people. He explains the acronym, DISC as Dominance, Inducement, Submissive and Compliant as behavorial patterns in which people act either actively or passively. These four behavorial patterns are responses of the motor self and they are described as such:

D- Dominance is characterised by the victory of the motor-self over the opponent of inferior intensity. The person with high dominance factor is aggressive, task-

oriented, competitive, self-centered and selfish. They like to instruct and be listened to rather than being told to. These types of people are well-suited for managerial roles. They go by facts and statistics and not by explanations. They reinforce their power with dictatorial tactics. The people with high Dominance exercise dominance in order to bring obstacles under control. They seek challenges, take risks, are authoritative by nature and love to work in an environment where they are in control and bring about changes. D's are often CEOs, entrepreneurs, political leaders etc. The positive aspect of this behaviour type is that they take any individual task as their own personal responsibility and act accordingly. On the shadow side, people with high D-trait overpower others when they feel stressed or threatened. Then they become restless and at times insensitive and try to get things done through force rather than persuasion.

I-Inducement on the other hand is characterised by the motor-self making way for other weaker stimulus. While making passage for the weaker stimulus, the motor-self influences by facilitating to act, thereby leading it to the final common path. Inducement is an act that refers to persuasion and friendly suggestions to act in a certain way. Marston emphasised that "'friendliness' of the persuasion is very significant in making clear the nature of inducement. The nature of integrative relationship would necessitate perfect alliance between the interests of the inducer and the induced throughout the entire response." (181). However, it must be borne in mind that the extent of the inducer in which the induced is made to act according to the former's desire depends upon how much the inducer is able to serve the induced person's purpose. So, the relationship between the two is based on equal ground and hence, the initial weakness in the person induced necessitates the increase in the strength of the inducer's persuasion. The inducers in common parlance are also known as Influencers. These types of people are very attractive, friendly and approachable. They make the other person comfortable and then persuade with their ideas or their intentions. They are generally outgoing and very expressive by nature. They love to be surrounded by people, and are mostly concerned about their image and value in front of the others. Their main fear is rejection from others. They mostly find it hard to work under pressure and judge situations based on emotions. They have the tendency to spend more time in conversing with people rather than their task. These high I- type people are good for Public Relation jobs. However, their drawbacks must be taken into consideration

S- Submissiveness as understood is docile, yielding, obedient and humble. In the social situations the motor-self decreases to balance the strength of motor-stimulus. Persons with high Submissiveness tend to be indecisive, introvert and have very close group of social circles. They cannot reject requests, instead they voluntarily try to fulfill them. They like to yield to the authority or power of their stronger partners. Marston clearly points out the behavioral pattern of these types of people whose body movements are "characterised as that of an obedient child toward a loving mother." (183) They are mostly patient, thorough and persistent in whatever task they are assigned to or whatever they start. Marston also points out the "voluntary obedience to the commands of the person in authority. With women subjects, the additional meaning of mutual warmth of feeling between the subject and the person submitted to is introspectively present when the submission is thought of as rendered to a loved mother, or a lover of the same or opposite sex" (184). In a social situation, the person with high Submissive behavioral pattern works actively in a mutually pleasant environment. However, it must also be taken into consideration that in a hostile or unpleasant working environment, the submissive pattern might become compliant. In such a case, performance of the individual with submissive trait will be withdrawn and he will act when instructed. In an organisation such individuals are passive workers who remain quiet during brain-storming session and need external push to act.

C- Compliance is a behavioral pattern in which a person acts out of fear for superior force. Marston explains this with an analogy of the river which "may be turned from one channel to another by a wall of rock which chances to crop out across its former course. The stream doesn't continue to attack an opponent stronger than itself, but complies with such an antagonist by letting the opponent have its own way, and by turning its own energies to another direction." (235) Here, "turning energies to another direction" is significant as the strength is instead hemmed to a different course. However, it is also seen that the rock wall that puts pressure upon the flow of water impacts the volume of the water that flows in the new course. Likewise, people with Compliant pattern of behaviour often adjust themselves to the changed situation for fear of the antagonist environmental stimulus. At first, they try to resist but when their reaction is not taken into account and are not paid attention, they begin to comply. This kind of people like to work in a hierarchical structure. They are often quiet and distanced, and are mostly silent observers who follow the "wait and watch policy." Such individuals are cynics and keep their dislike to themselves and act out in an irascible manner whenever they find someone inferior or weaker than them.

II. DISC BEHAVIOUR THEORY AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PROCESS IN THE HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

In every sphere of life, people are engaged in different communicative activities like casual conversation, meetings, interviews, sales presentation, idea generation, brain-storming, writing letters, memos, video conferencing, e-mails, etc. regardless of one's position in life. Communication acts like a fulcrum that holds the string of the social activities like community services, business deals, business proposals, business network with clients and vendors, etc. Effective communication depends on the four important skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and added with the fifth-dimension of non-verbal communication. An effective communicator is someone who understands the unspoken meanings of the spoken words.

In a hybrid work environment with people from multiple cultural backgrounds, it becomes essential for an individual to understand these nuances of communication. It is imperative to understand the cultural diversity in a diverse work environment. While communicating with the co-workers or clients/vendors, attention must be paid to differences of cultures, cultural beliefs and behaviour. In the hybrid work environment, with social distancing protocols, colleagues seldom meet as large part of the work is done online, it becomes more important to understand these small yet very impactful differences. In a work environment with a smaller number of people coming together for work, it becomes extremely necessary to understand their behavioral patterns. And by applying DISC theory of human behaviour one can carry out the communication process in a successful manner. It is observed that different people with different behavioral pattern respond to a message in different ways. Thus, attention must be paid to the personality types of the people with whom one carries the communication process in a blended work environment. The following recommendations can be adopted to carry out a seamless communication process that can avert possible chances of miscommunication to a large extent. They are:

D-Dominance: *Characteristic Behaviorial Patterns*
- Domineering
- Self-centered
- Manipulative
- Power hungry (could go to any extent to ensure one's power and position)
- View co-workers either as allies or foes
- Exert power and coerce people through rewards or punishments

In a blended work environment with a leader with high Dominance, employees must take care of certain measures to ensure a pleasant work environment.
Communication with high Dominance leader:
- Precise and to the point: as these types of leaders are goal-oriented, care must be taken to keep the facts ready, irrespective of the space where an individual is working from.
- As hybrid work environment provides flexibility of work style, the workstation should be systematically arranged, the employee must be presentable and should be ready with data.
- Clarify doubts whenever there is a need.
- Present result, and do not indulge in the method. As the high Dominance personality leaders are goal oriented and want things get done by any means, they focus only on the result.
- As they are outspoken, one must be candid and focus on the facts and results.
- It is recommended not to engage in personal conversations.
- Focus must be given to good of the team, rather than on the personal individuals.

I-Inducement: *Characteristic Behavioral Patterns*:
- Democratic
- Approachable
- Attention-seeker
- Good conversationalists
- Detail-oriented

Communication with high Inducement leader:
- The high Inducement leaders are amiable and approachable. They are also known as influencers. They make the work environment highly pleasant and harmonious. They place importance to their subordinates and delegate responsibilities. They ask for opinions before handing over responsibilities. It is recommended that with the high I (inducement) leadership, one must have open-ended communication style. They do not only expect results, but they also want to understand the methods involved in the process. These influencers liked to be spoken to. So, one can start a conversation and elaborate details about an issue and discuss steps to be taken.
- While communicating with high Inducement leaders, one must exhibit sincere interest in them and in their personal goals.
- Though they are friendly, they expect facts elaborated in logical manner without being threatened. Therefore, it's advisable to be amiable in approach and present facts in a coherent manner.
- As they believe in the dictum of democratic mode of working style, they delegate responsibilities to their subordinates. They also expect the subordinates to be accountable to the responsibilities and maintain deadlines.

- However, as they are good conversationalists, most of the time is spent on other topics and deviate from the main issue at hand. Therefore, care must be taken that the subordinate must get back to the topic when the conversation is deviating from the required attention.

S-Submission: *Characteristic Behavioral Pattern:*
- Easy-going in appearance
- Cannot work under pressure
- Patient
- Lone-worker
- Introverted and need external stimuli to act

Communication with high Submission behavioral trait:
- The leaders usually delegate the responsibilities to the subordinates and let them take the call. But they do keep strong opinions which they may not express at once. They will listen and then put across their views. Therefore, the information must be presented and discussed. One must never ask for immediate decision.
- Instead of rushing in on to the agenda, it is recommended to engage in conversation and put across the agenda or the issue on the table.
- They should be asked specific questions, instead of asking questions in a round-about manner.
- They are good listeners and they expect others to listen to them patiently without interruptions. Therefore, while communicating with these personality types attention must be paid to active listening skills.

C-Compliant: *Characteristic Behavioral Patterns*:
- Sticklers of rules
- Reserved
- Good at documentation and records
- Fact-oriented and asks specific questions
- Complicated and overtly diplomatic

Communication with high Compliant Behavioral Leaders:
- Point out the key issues and discuss
- While communicating with such leaders one must be careful in explaining issues and methods. No amount of extra information must be passed on.
- As they document everything, one must also keep files and facts ready while communicating with them.

- One must be thorough with facts and figures when communicating with such leaders.
- One must not rush into things with such leaders as then they would respond at a slower pace owing to discomfort and uncertainty.
- As they value precision and have an inquisitive trait, they tend to ask lot of questions. One must therefore be prepared with answers to their questions or the leaders will form a poor impression about him or her.

III. CONCLUSION

Human relationships are dynamic and they change over time- either towards building a strong bond or towards weakening bonds. It is the culture and the experience of a person that shape his/her perspective towards himself/herself and the people around him and their relationships. The context and the style of corresponding behavior leaves a lasting mark in the mind of people. In the blended work environment chances of misrepresentation and misunderstanding are high as workers meet less frequently than they would in a face-to-face work environment. In such situations, application of DISC theory of behavioral pattern is highly recommended as it will help in bridging the communication gap and make way for a pleasant work environment that is conducive for the healthy growth of the organisation.

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