ON MESSAGE

BY DAVID COLLINS

DETERMINING SOCIAL STYLES TO REDUCE CONFLICT

A study published in *Leadership Quarterly* showed that managers spend up to 42 per cent of their time resolving interpersonal friction and conflict in the workplace. That's more than two days a week spent dealing with unproductive workplace behaviours, rather than advancing the company's business strategies.

Conflict in the workplace is a reality. However, many HR professionals have found that building interpersonal skills—a person's ability to interact effectively and gain support of co-workers—can reduce the frequency of workplace conflicts and minimize the long-term impact when conflicts do occur.

was created to help companies improve interpersonal skills in the workplace.

In Social Style, there are four distinct behavioural patterns that people exhibit, each with its own likes and dislikes. Being aware of each style is critical to understanding the other person's perspective and your ability to adapt your style or approach—or work with others to do the same—to solve problems.

Driving Style — Action-oriented people who focus on results and outcomes rather than relationships. They can be seen as impersonal, practical and dominating by others.

Expressive Style — Creative and spontaneous people who like to receive personal recognition.

Analytical Style — Information-focused, logical people who consider thinking and analysis critical. They can be seen as reserved and slow-moving by others.

Improved interpersonal skills can help people in any industry, but are critically important in businesses with intensive customer interaction needs, such as professional services, finance or hospitality. Employees not only have to adapt to the personality styles of their colleagues but they have to quickly adapt to the personality styles of their clients and guests.

Applying Social Style concepts can aid during mergers and acquisitions, which are naturally stressful and prone to conflict. Providing people with a common language to share concerns, overcome problems and collaborate in new ways allows employees to separate interpersonal differences from business issues and facilitates culture change.

By understanding the preferences of each style, employees will interact with each other and with clients/guests in a way that makes them feel more comfortable and valued. For example, a Driving Style client/customer with a problem just wants a solution, but an Amiable Style person wants to feel that their concerns are understood and patronage valued.

While style differences may be a direct source of conflict, experience has shown that these differences can cause other conflicts to escalate. Understanding and using style skills can remove behavioural issues from a situation, allowing the parties to focus on the underlying conflict. **HR**

> " In **Social Style**, there are four distinct **behavioural patterns** that people exhibit, each with its own likes and dislikes. "

Behavioural preferences

Most people are familiar with the Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But in the workplace, this doesn't hold true; the most effective managers treat employees the way the employee would like to be treated. Based on this, the Social Style model

Expressive people are casual, big-picture thinkers who prefer not to deal with details.

Amiable Style — Relationship-oriented people who focus on personal interactions, trust and personal comfort. Accordingly, they tend to work slowly, make time for socializing and seek consensus.

David Collins is the vice-president for training products at The TRACOM Group (www.tracomcorp.com), which helps individuals and organizations improve workplace performance by building interpersonal skills, improving teamwork and developing leaders.