

The team collaboration card game

The team collaboration game is a game designed to help you and your team work together more effectively.

The “game” actually consists of several simple activities that can be performed in a workshop, team meeting or training course. Each is easy to facilitate and hopefully each can provide a sound basis for a discussion among the participants as to how they can better work together as a team.

Understanding the way you come across to others

Your ability to work with others will have a strong impact on your ability to be successful in your team. But different people have very different ways of working based on their personality, their values, their mood at a point in time and other factors.

So it is no surprise that some pretty smart people have examined the way we interact and the impact that has on our ability to work effectively as a team.

Some examples of different approaches for assessing and improving the way we work together include Myers Briggs, DISC, HBDI, Belbin and ESI. Each of these has its own merits and its own underlying theories based on research and practice.

This game is similar to those more sophisticated approaches but is, unfortunately, not based on sound research or psychology. In fact this game is based on a dodgy “half-baked” understanding of some of those psychological assessment tools.

Based on that understanding, I do not propose that this game will allow you to form a detailed and validated profile of the members of your team, but rather a starting point for a discussion around how we can better work together and how we can make the best use of the skills and passion of everyone in the team.

Each mini game included in this pack is similar in that it involves:

- Using a set of cards to highlight different personality traits or working styles;
- Using a simple model to look at how our working styles complement each other (or clash with each other); and
- An opportunity to debrief the game with a conversation about how we work together.

A quick and dirty model of the way you interact

According to our half-baked model, we can assess people against two scales:

- Whether they are assertive (or even pushy) in dealing with others, or whether they are accommodating and flexible (or even wimpy) in doing so; and
- Whether they are fact focused or people focussed in how they view the world.

Of course most of us are not purely pushy, nor wimpy, nor fact focussed nor people focussed. We can be pushy one day and wimpy the next, or focussed on completing a set of task in the morning and working on relationships with others in the afternoon.

But let's assume you had to choose - would your friends say you were more “assertive” in dealing with others, or more “flexible and open minded” in doing so?

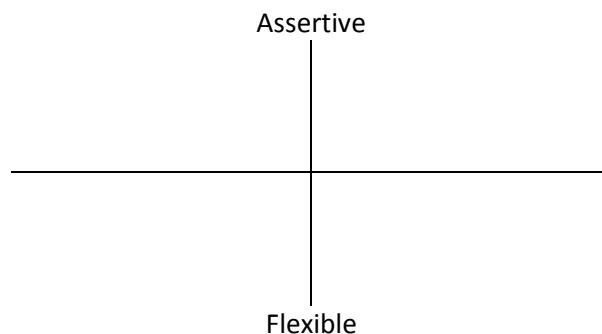
If you are assertive then it means you are good at putting your point of view across and standing up for what you believe in. If you are flexible then it means you are good at adapting your approach to the way others work.

Of course if you are awesome then you are good at both of these.

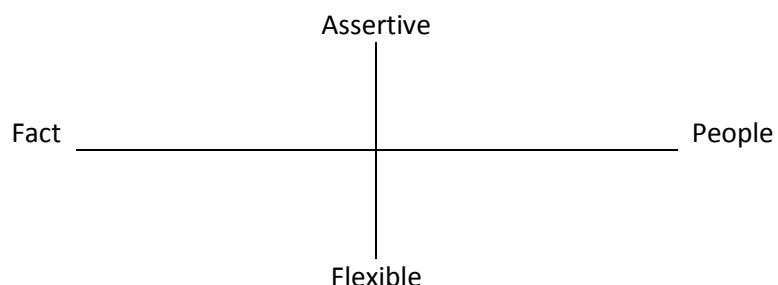
But if you didn't like someone then while they might call themselves "assertive", you might say they were arrogant, demanding, pushy or domineering.

Similarly someone you don't like might call themselves "flexible" when you said they were wimpy, inconsistent, spineless or indecisive.

So let's assume that you are somewhere on a scale from totally assertive all the time to totally flexible all the time. We will put this in a vertical axis in our model.



Now we can add another dimension. Some people are very focussed on the task at hand, but will not be aware of the impact of what they are doing while others will be very people focussed but not so focussed on the completion of tasks or the delivery of a clear business outcome.



So according to our model, people might be:

- Strongly fact focussed and very assertive;
- Strongly people focussed and very assertive;
- Strongly fact focussed and also very flexible in dealing with others;
- Strongly people focussed and also very assertive in dealing with others; or
- Somewhere in between.

Let's use this model to look at a fictional team – the crew in the original Star Trek

		Assertive	
		Kirk (action oriented)	Scotty (An engineer who is a great story teller)
Fact	Assertive	Spock (Highly analytical)	Bones (The doctor who cares about people)
	Flexible		

When faced with a problem, both Bones and Spock will try to analyse it thoroughly before acting and both will expend considerable energy in understanding the details of a problem. They will however find themselves in conflict when Spock comes across as heartless and robotic to Bones and Bones seems simply illogical to Spock.

Meanwhile their analysis will be interrupted by Kirk who is more an act-first-analyse-later kind of guy. Kirk will simply kick the door in and apologise later if he made a bad assumption as he opened fire.

Similarly we can look at famous people from the real world ...

		Assertive	
		General Patton	President Clinton
Fact	Assertive	Jack Welch Einstein	Gandhi
	Flexible		

Again – while Patton and Gandhi were pretty successful, I imagine they would have had some conflicting views on how to approach a problem.

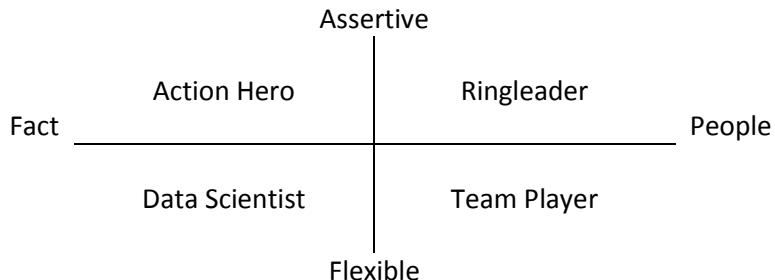
Finally, let's look at the job description for “the perfect leader” if we thought everyone could only fit into one box:

		Assertive	
		Driven, outcome focussed with a bias for action	Able to set and communicate a clear and compelling vision
Fact	Assertive	Detail focussed leader who bases decisions on sound evidence rather than opinion or emotion	Servant leader who understands how to get the most out of everyone in the team
	Flexible		

So we have a model, but what do we call each of our boxes?

In DISC (one approach) I think people use Driver, Expressive, Analyst and Amiable, so you can feel free to do the same.

I am going to use slightly different names to highlight that we are doing a rough and ready assessment and not a detailed one:



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The games

There are a number of games listed on the following pages.

Game 1 – Simulacrum - a team of mini-me's

This game allows a person to consider their preferred way of working on their own and then discuss an extremely limited version of themselves with others – to see how that limited version would add value to a team (and struggle in a team).

The game is designed for 2-4 players although it could be done with one person acting as multiple players.

Instructions

1. Deal out 2 cards to each player
 - a. You might choose to ensure that each player receives cards from 2 different personas (Eg one team player card and one ring leader card) or you can just deal random cards out
2. Ask each player to select the card that is most like them and the one that is least like them
 - a. If they feel that neither card is like them, or that both are very like them – tell them that if they really had to choose ... which card would they pick as most like them.
3. Ask each player to consider then benefits and limitations of that card as a way of working
 - a. What are the benefits of having someone like this on the team?
 - b. What would happen if nobody in the team was like this?
 - c. What would happen if someone relied on being like this too much? What is the down-side of being like this?
 - d. Is there any situation when being the exact opposite would be useful?
4. Deal out another card and ask the players to now rank all three cards from most like them to least like them
5. Have each player repeat the questions in step 3 for one of the other cards
6. Deal out a 4th card and repeat the ranking and questions if time, otherwise simply have them rank the cards
7. Have the players merge into groups of 2 or 3:
 - a. Each player must pick the 3 cards that they said were most like them;
 - b. Pick a name for a fictional character who has only these 3 traits – they are a very limited person I guess;
 - c. Each player introduces their character and explains that persons key traits
8. In the same group of 2 or 3:
 - a. What issues would these characters have working together? Would they be in conflict in some areas? Might they annoy each other in some ways?
 - b. What strengths does the team have as a whole? Are they better off as a team rather than as a group of individuals? If so how?
 - c. What gaps or weaknesses does the team have as a whole?
9. Debrief with the whole group – what did the teams conclude? Do these conclusions have relevance in real teams?
10. Draw our dodgy model up on a white board and discuss the benefits and challenges of having people with different preferred styles working together. Then discuss the idea that nobody is as limited as our pretend characters – we have more flexibility and that flexibility gives us a lot more opportunity to be successful.

Game 2 – Playing for yourself

This game is designed for 3-6 players although you could push it to 2 or 8 players.

The idea is that people will start with a set of 4 cards that may or may not describe them accurately. Then by playing a number of hands they will have a better summary of themselves and we can use this summary to discuss the concepts of team diversity and needing to work with people who have different traits and working styles.

Instructions

1. Deal 4 cards to each person (or have them pick 4 cards from a hat).
2. Place 4 more cards face up in the middle and place the rest face down in a pack
3. Give the team time to read their cards and explain that the idea is to throw away cards that are not like them and replace them with cards that describe them a little better
4. Each person takes a turn where they can
 - a. Hold their hand as it is;
 - b. Throw away one card and then pick up one of the face-up cards to replace it;
 - c. Throw away one card and then pick up one card from the pack
 - d. Pick up one face-up card without throwing any away
5. Repeat step 4 so people have a second chance to update their hand
6. Final round – have everyone place their cards down face up and then swap cards with others if both players agree to the swap
7. Explain the concept of our dodgy model and then let people know that there are initials on each card explaining what quadrant they are from
8. Have people identify which quadrant they are mostly in (they may have one card from each quadrant but it is more likely that they will have 2 or more from one quadrant and none from another).
9. Ask each team to share whether they think this is accurate (it is probably not totally right ☺)
10. Finally – have the teams discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each of the personas (eg action hero gets things done but might leave upset people and poorly thought out solutions).
11. If time then have the team discuss
 - a. What is the benefit in having some with that way of working in the team
 - b. What is the risk or potential downside of having them in a team
 - c. What would really annoy them – what would make them feel like the things are going well

Game 3 – create a boss

This game is the same as game 2, but instead of playing to understand themselves you have each player try to collect the cards that would be the best possible boss from the cards available.

You can substitute other roles for the boss (scrum master, ultimate BA, product owner, movie character, detective etc)

Go through the same playing steps to create the fictional character and then debrief by looking at the strengths (or benefits) of having this boss, the potential issues with having a boss like this etc.

Game 3a – create a monster boss

This is exactly the same as game 3 except we are creating the least amazing boss rather than the best possible boss. Now the team can discuss the benefits and short-comings of this fictional boss.

Game 4 – Broken windows

This is the same as game 2 but players try to create the anti-version of themselves.

This is a different take on things but the concept is that we will all have gaps or areas where we are uncomfortable. These gaps can then create an issue similar to having broken windows in a building (an obscure reference to a book by Malcolm Gladwell). According to this theory, if there are a lot of broken windows in a building then people are more likely to drop litter, break other things or even commit crimes.

So it is better to fix the windows up.

But we will struggle to overcome our own gaps but we can work with others to do this.

So replace steps 9 to 11 with the following steps

9. Share your character with the rest of the group. Try to find someone who has an “anti-me” that is close to being the real you. You could work with this person to mitigate all their gaps.

10. Also try to find a volunteer who matches your anti-me. This person could be an ideal partner for helping you deal with the issues you find the least fun to deal with.

11. Discuss as a team whether you actively try to support each other in this way at work and whether it would lead to better team enjoyment and success.

The cards

Action Heroes	Ring Leaders	Data Scientists	Team Players
Competitive AH	Motivating RL	Detail focussed DS	Collaborative TP
Action-Oriented AH	Visionary RL	Precise DS	Generates Harmony TP
Driven AH	Big Picture RL	Accurate DS	Agreeable TP

Action Heroes	Ring Leaders	Data Scientists	Team Players
Blunt AH	Spontaneous RL	Process driven DS	Understanding TP
Strong-willed AH	Doesn't get bogged down in detail RL	Thinks before acting DS	Patient TP
Determined AH	Knows how to pitch an idea RL	Considers the risks before leaping in DS	Understands the perspective of others TP
Outcome focussed AH	Head in the clouds RL	Knows the value of an agenda DS	Remembers your birthday TP

Action Heroes	Ring Leaders	Data Scientists	Team Players
Always asks what the goal is AH	Always asks what the implications are RL	Always asks how it will work DS	Always asks how someone can use it TP
Acts first and apologises later AH	More concerned with where we are going than where we are today RL	Would not forget to refuel before taking off DS	Allows everyone contribute to the decision TP
Does not compromise AH	May miss a deadline but does not let a friend down RL	Knows why the tortoise beat the hare DS	Believes people matter more than objects TP
Does not lose focus AH	Listens and talks at the same time RL	Will be on time for the meeting DS	Actually does care what you think TP

