

# Rapport building – matching the client style

Philip Atkinson

A perception of shared values and ideals aids rapport building.

The effectiveness of a coaching relationship is founded upon the degree of rapport that can be built between coach and client. A match is essential in forming a strong psychological bond. Although we use other personality-type and trait approaches to identify personality types with more precision – for instance, Myers Briggs, Firo-B, OPQ and 16PF – to understand the personality dynamics in the coaching relationship we find the simple model presented here is easily understood and applied. This is a dynamic model that assumes that one's personality and communication style changes depending on the context of any debate or discussion. For this reason, the model follows the client's thinking and communication process, and enables the coach to understand the client's thoughts, motivations and communication from the client's own perspective.

## Coaching coaches

We use this RVFA<sup>1</sup> interpersonal skills model to train coaches to understand better the dynamics between coach and client.

Provided below is an outline of the process. We train coaches in advanced forms of interpersonal influence, including Neuro-Linguistic Programming. One of the most powerful tools we use is a dynamic model of personality and communication which focuses upon the differences which exist between different personality types in the coaching-client relationship. If there is a large discrepancy between how coach and client communicate, there is more likelihood of misunderstanding – even conflict, in extreme situations. The model is simple to understand. It is based upon just two personality characteristics, related to how people use power and how they use emotion when communicating with others.

The model is founded on a compilation of Jungian psychology as well as on thoughts gained from the Wilson Learning Model and variants of DISC and so on. It can be used in a variety of contexts, from internal consulting to sales staff working with potential prospects, as well as in learning and development. Bearing in mind that the ideal coaching relationship is

based on mutual trust, the more able the coach is to influence and persuade the client to think differently and in new ways, the more that increases choice for the client.

Fundamental to this approach is the belief that 'people like people like themselves'. Like-minded individuals tend to find and share a deeper level of rapport with each other than others. Those who experience wide differences in their coaching style and that of their clients will find it much more difficult to establish rapport, because what the client personally values most in how they communicate will apparently be lacking in their coach.

### Key learning points

- ◆ Positive rapport-building strategies that offer the client more choice.
- ◆ Using the communication model builds a closer relationship faster.
- ◆ Applying the model to a variety of clients will impact on the coach's expertise and skill.

The Facilitator can become too focused on harmony and fail to recognise the importance of results. They have to be convinced that new proposals will not harm people or lead to morale problems in their team. They are usually strongly affiliation driven, and their popularity with others is the source of their strength and power. Getting Facilitators to take ownership of proposals is tantamount to having them implemented. Although it is possible to coach and require the Facilitator to take a stronger leadership role, with a pure Facilitator progress will be slow. A Facilitator with a strong affiliation drive will find it easiest to accept proposals from someone to whom they feel close. Being intuitive, they tend to trust their instincts.

## Client as Visionary

A client projecting a Visionary style of communication is both assertive and responsive to new ideas. They like to tackle new problems and seek innovative and fresh solutions. They are enthusiastic and lively, and they promote changes that reflect their concept of how things should be. When coaching a Visionary, they should be asked to explain their ideas, their concepts and their rationale. Do not formally oppose or challenge their vision as their ideas are sometimes synonymous with their identity. They are imaginative, and their creative approach may make them appear to be too ambitious. As coach, you have to ensure that their dreams are based in reality, and to bring them down to earth to consider how those who are less imaginative may judge their ideas.

A Visionary seeks praise and recognition for their ideas. They are often driven by ego. When

coaching a Visionary, you have to be careful not to tread on their toes. They often need some help to make their ideas a reality. A Visionary is often an extrovert who seeks attention and approval from others. Visionaries display a high profile and have a desire to get their ideas noticed and praised. Effective Visionaries are leaders in their fields, where they have the balance to put their ideas into practice. Because they are assertive, responsive and extrovert in nature, they often become confused when confronted by too many ideas, and have difficulty turning them into reality. A Visionary does not enjoy dotting the i's and crossing the t's. They would rather concentrate on the global perspective and the wider issues than get involved with detail.

## Summary: coaching using the four-types approach

Any clients we work with on a one-to-one basis may prove to be challenging. The model outlined helps us understand how the client views the world. The important point to note is that the client will move around the matrix of the four pure types each and every day as context and situations change.

### Reference

- 1 RVFA: Personality and Objection Handling Inventory © Philip Atkinson 1990. Developed from a variety of earlier models, including Myers Briggs, Wilson Learning Models, Thomas International PPA Profile, DISC and others.

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As coach, you need to be aware and observant of the changes in the client as they move from one type to another.

In summary, the model presented is only a structure to help understand social interaction. It forces the influencer, the coach, to think through their discussions before entering into them. This preparation enables the coach to think through core objections to strategies, and helps them build a stronger bond with the client in this symbiotic relationship.

Finally, here is a word for those of you who think this approach smacks of manipulation. Of course this model gives the coach a strong, possibly influential, position in terms of being able to have more leverage with clients. It would be relatively easy to use the model to manipulate clients into situations, but our purpose in understanding and using the model is to exercise influence with integrity. As long as our purpose is accepted by others as being just and well intentioned, then we may feel free to use the approach to help us progress personal and organisational change in a direction that will benefit all.



We work most effectively with those who share our values

People tend to be attracted to, and work more effectively with, people who share and value similar mindsets and ways of working, learning, motivating and coaching for improved performance.

### Using the RVFA model

**Step 1.** Identify your own style, explore and understand your strengths and limitations when communicating. Look critically at times and occasions when displaying our coaching style will lead to conflict with others who portray a different style.

**Step 2.** Identify the client's style and the objections they may have to our strategies before communicating with them. This requires a high degree of conscious competence in being able to pick up quickly the preferences of others – using our recommended model. In coaching and training, the skill of assessing the preferences of others can be quickly discerned to a high degree of accuracy by using a mixture of scanning for and listening

to the phrases, words, tonality and body language of clients. Most importantly, there is a requirement for a high degree of sensory acuity which is focused on seeking out and promoting congruent communication.

**Step 3.** Reappraise the purpose and context of the communication in terms of the client's desired outcomes.

**Step 4.** Rethink – amend and adjust your message to suit the client's preferences and their world. Deliver the message in the manner and the context in which clients prefer to receive it, and listen to their response.

There follows a pen picture that describes four basic types of client: Regulator, Analyst, Facilitator and Visionary. It will help you gain an understanding of how the coach can use the model to develop rapport with their client. Knowing communication preferences in advance, coaches will be able to structure events to appeal to a variety of clients.

### Client as Regulator

The pure Regulator client is assertive and reserved in outlook. Their communication is logical and well structured. Conversation is not usually punctuated by emotion. Tangential conversation is not displayed or encouraged. The coach must be persistent, working from the perspective of their Regulator client and adhering to a structure with focus.

Those on the extreme of the scale may be perceived as lacking warmth, and may be wrongly defined as authoritarian. This is probably a reflection of their desire to present

and debate topics in an analytic and objective manner. Clients as Regulators do not wish emotion to cloud either the facts or their judgement. They also like to be, and to be seen to be, in control of the situation.

The Regulator could be classed as emphasising achievement, and as wishing to be recognised for bottom-line results, rather than for getting on well with people or coming up with good ideas. Although governed and measured by results, the Regulator is not drawn into the minutiae of problems. Like the Visionary, they prefer to have a global perspective and tend to delegate the detailed work to others. A reserved person, the Regulator will not be a natural team player but will readily take the role of leader. They will tend to issue instructions rather than to sell ideas.

### Client as Analyst

The pure Analyst is reserved and does not project much emotion while communicating. They can mean hard

work for the more extrovert coach. They are introverted and tend to build their reputation around technical expertise. Their approach to examining and solving problems is rational, structured and logical. The typical Analyst is immersed in their technical expertise, whether they are a lawyer, an accountant or a technical specialist. The client as Analyst is formal in their dealings with others and – unlike their opposites, the Visionary and the Facilitator – they are not outgoing. They are rather private and cautious, directive, focused on implementation and technical purity. They concentrate on detail. Consequently, when trying to coach them one has to focus, firstly, upon the technical feasibility of the suggestions; and, secondly, on the practical aspects of ensuring the proposals will work.

As well as being reserved in their dealings with others, the Analyst is receptive to what others are saying. They will not dominate the conversation and will listen carefully and assess in detail the validity of what is being said. They are thoughtful and reflective rather than responsive, and will not make too many assumptions. They will listen and then ask questions to test their understanding. They are steadfast and steady and prefer not to confront people. They do not like making decisions based on what they see as insufficient information, preferring situations where risk is calculable and measurable. They do not get involved in speculative ventures.

Unlike the Visionary, they have difficulty in working with ideas and making them reality. The pure Analyst prefers to work with quantifiable alternatives. The Analyst sets goals which are achievable, and may have a tendency to focus on short-term

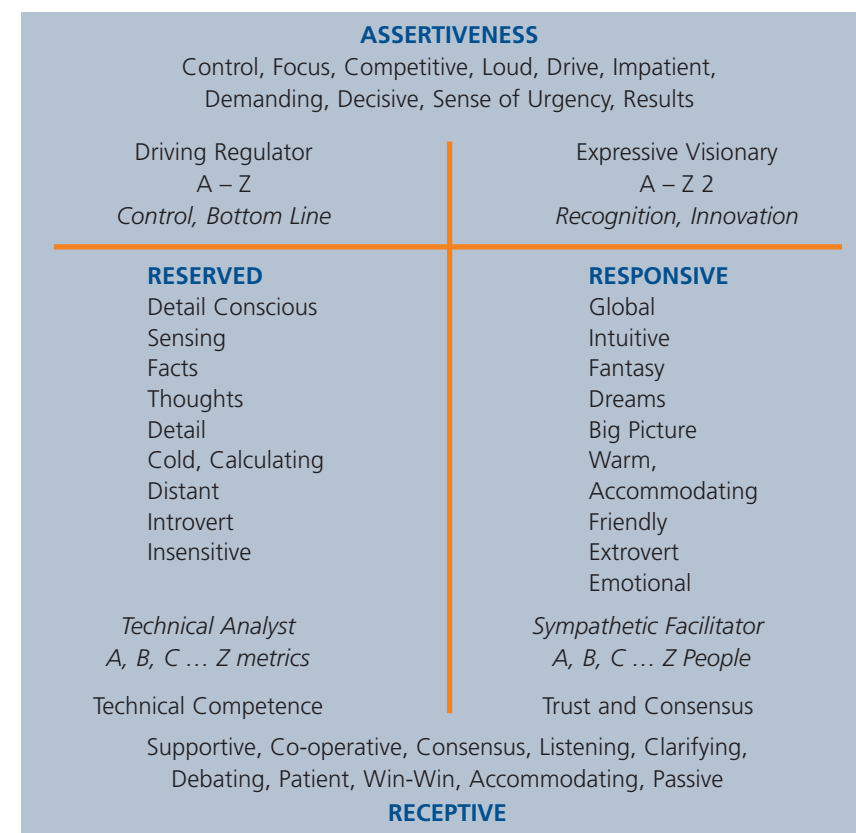


Fig. 1: RVFA Model

objectives. They may have difficulty in relating to the Visionary as coach because the traits of the two types are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. The Analyst client shares the reflective nature of the Facilitator, but does not share the Facilitator's willingness to be expressive, illustrative, open and trusting in communication.

### Client as Facilitator

The pure Facilitator is receptive in communication. Like the Analyst they listen to what others say. Unlike the Analyst, they initiate and involve others in decisions and discuss proposals at length. They are keen to understand fully the implications of new or innovative suggestions. When coaching the client as Facilitator, they are steady, patient and will listen fully. They work well as a member of a team. The pure Facilitator

facilitates the introduction of change and new ideas, but only after they have thought through all the key issues from a people perspective.

By nature, the Facilitator is a team player and a people person, who likes harmony. They want to know how a proposal will affect their staff. Will they require retraining? What impact will changes have on job satisfaction, motivation, team spirit and morale? Facilitators tend towards extroversion and are generally outgoing. Others seek their help, and they are approachable. The Facilitator tends to be unstructured, and in them the logic of the Analyst is replaced by intuitive and creative skills. Creativity and intuition bind together Facilitators and Visionaries, and they find it relatively easy to work with each other.