

VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving StyleSM

Practical Applications

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Applying VIEW to Challenges in Your Setting: Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of many and varied applications of VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving StyleSM. In constructing these examples, we drew on several sources:

- Situations in which we know VIEW has already been used
- Our experiences as consultants and trainers in which we have listened to clients' concerns and wrestled with ways to help individuals and groups respond effectively to their opportunities and challenges.
- Our knowledge of theory and research on learning, development, and group behavior and dynamics.

VIEW can be a powerful and purposeful tool anywhere, and in any situations or settings in which problem solving is present, needed, or important. We also seek in this document to highlight applications of VIEW that cut across "platforms" or the contexts in which it is possible to VIEW, including, for example: large, global organizations; smaller business and professional settings; educational institutions, hospitals, religious organizations, arts organizations, or other non-profits. VIEW can be a valuable tool for individuals who are concerned with understanding their personal style preferences and improving their problem solving effectiveness, for teams or groups who need to work together successfully, and to organizations in their efforts to build a constructive work climate, to recognize and value diversity, and to manage change for long-term success.

Whenever you are considering how to use VIEW effectively in your work:

- Take time to ensure that everyone agrees with the kind of change and creativity the task requires.
- Use the appropriate kind of process that will increase the likelihood of achieving that kind of change.
- Encourage group members of all styles to contribute in their preferred style and limit the amount of coping they need to do when working outside their preference.
- Take some time to set up appropriate norms and guidelines that produce a climate that allows for the effective use of diverse styles.
- Use VIEW as a tool, the results of which inform people about some important factors that influence how they solve problems and manage change and stimulate personal reflection and group discussion. Look beyond literal scores and categorizations that may lead to caricatures and stereotyping.
- Keep in mind that people can, and do, adapt and change in response to changing situations, demands, motives, and consequences.

Improving Problem Solving

It has been said that change is the only constant. With change, with the pressures of daily life (professional, academic, or personal), come problems. Problems are essentially the separation that lies between where we are and where we want to be. Solutions are the bridges we build to cross that separation. In order to survive, living creatures solve problems; as far as we know humans are the most skilled of problem solvers. We also know that those who become proficient in the methods and tools of problem solving, and who understand their own problem solving preferences, strengths, and limitations, are the most effective problem solvers. Each of us approaches problems and challenges in our own way, trying to find effective solutions to enable us to attain the greatest benefit, put the problem behind us, and move on. Each person looks at problems, challenges and change differently. We differ in the ways we define a problem, in our search for solutions, and in preparing to take action on our solutions. Problem solving style influences behavior whether one is working alone, with a partner, or as part of a team or group. VIEW provides individuals insight into their own preferences along three important dimensions. These insights can help build understanding of style, provide group members with a common vocabulary, provide an appreciation of the need for different problem solving approaches, enable us to use tools as effectively and efficiently as possible, and, on the whole, help us to increase our effectiveness as problem solvers.

Example. A leader was working with a group of very able individuals. They identified a problem and began to work on developing a solution. As the meetings progressed several things became apparent: while the problem was defined, different group members were treating that definition differently. Some members who offered many new ideas had their ideas instantly criticized by others. A few members seemed to do most of the talking, but one individual never said a word (except for a few passing comments after the sessions ended). Whenever closure and consensus seemed within reach, one individual continued to add new twists and new ways of viewing the problem. The group completed the VIEW assessment. After the group members received feedback on their scores, they decided to make a fresh start. They organized their problem-solving sessions around the various strengths of individuals. Developers allowed Explorers to take the lead when generating ideas, agreeing to withhold judgment until they presented many and varied possibilities. Explorers also learned how to benefit from the guidance of group members who were concerned about practicality, structure, and making things workable. People learned how to look at ideas objectively and logically, but also consider the impact of possible solutions on people. They structured their work to accommodate the needs of External processors for conversation or discussion, and also to provide time for reflection and to check with those who had a more Internal processing style to insure that their input was not overlooked. In this way, the group found new solutions and put them into action successfully.

Communicating Effectively

We all tend to perceive the world through the lens of our own style. How we interpret our experiences, the things that we see and hear, is influenced by our unique style. As the difference between the styles of two individuals move further apart, the words they use and the interpretation of those words take on different meanings. We each interpret the words and actions of others differently. The potential for misunderstanding increases. What is “cutting edge” and exciting to one person may seem threatening and full of risk to another. An Explorer, trying to sell an idea to a group of Developers by emphasizing the new and unique features of that idea, might do better by showing how the idea builds on tried and true traditions. We enhance communication when dealing with problem solving or change management situations when we understand our own style, and then consider carefully how our audience may receive our natural approach, based on their style preferences. As an audience member, we can increase our understanding of any communication by first considering the style of the messenger and the message in terms of what the person actually said, even when it contrasts with our own preferences and expectations.

Example. Phil has a strong preference for the Developer style. He is also Task focused and prefers to process Internally. His written material tends to be well thought out and carefully crafted to present a logical approach to the topic under consideration. He offers solutions that will minimize risk and maximize the chances of success. Philipa finds it difficult to read any of Phil's reports. Not only does she find them dull, but, she believes he lacks vision and disregards the needs of the individuals involved. Whenever they have a discussion, they both walk away wondering what the other was talking about. It is almost as if they spoke different languages. They have just been assigned to the same team and are dreading the experience. One of the first activities of the team was responding to VIEW. After the debriefing of their results, both Phil and Philipa began to understand each other's points of view. While Philipa still found Phil's writing somewhat dull, she also was able to appreciate the depth of his thinking and the meticulous manner in which he presented material. When assigned to work together she is now willing to give Phil time to process his ideas before meeting. On the other hand, Phil is more receptive to allowing her opportunities to talk things through when their meetings finally get underway. While we might never expect true love (even professionally) to develop between these two colleagues, they have built a strong working relationship based on mutual understanding of each other's style.

Enhancing Personal Productivity

Knowing your own style and how to use your strengths and overcome your limitations will enable you to become more personally productive. People use different styles to solve problems and to deal with change. Every person looks at problems, challenges, and change differently. We differ in the ways we define a problem, in our search for solutions, and in preparing to take action. Understanding our style will enable us to choose a problem solving approach and solutions that are workable and also consistent with our preferences. We are also able to recognize situations that demand coping strategies from us. For instance, under certain conditions we may not have the time for careful, quiet reflection before taking action. At such times Internal processors might be more productive by seeking out the interaction of others to help set the most promising course of action. Developers often find structure and authority enabling. However, without an understanding of their preference, they risk allowing structure and authority to become blocks to productivity.

Example. Randy had worked hard to produce a unique, well-crafted proposal. The result was a highly unorthodox, but logical and efficient solution to an ongoing problem. He was sure that if implemented his organization would benefit. Randy felt stifled. Having shown the proposal to his supervisor he was told that his unorthodox approach was impossible, representing a break from tradition that was just unacceptable. In short, the supervisor considered his efforts a complete waste of time. Without the approval and sanction of an authority figure, Randy was at a loss as to what to do. He felt sure that his proposal was just what was needed to get things moving but before going ahead he needed to know that what he was doing was "allowable." Fortunately another supervisor in the organization had some experience with VIEW theory. She pointed out that, while Randy was strong in terms of generating many promising ideas and proposals, he tended to retreat if his ideas were not readily accepted by the authority structure. Instead of using authority and structure, he was allowing it to become a block. She helped him refine his proposal, and subsequently guided him in presenting his proposal to the Board of Directors. After some modification, they recognized the merit in the proposal and adopted it.

Providing and Receiving Feedback

We usually provide or receive feedback when someone observes a gap, either above or below, our actual performance and the level that is expected. When offering positive feedback, understanding your own style and that of the individual or group with whom you are working will enhance the effectiveness of your comments. We need to understand that our observations are being filtered through the lens of our own style. We need to form our feedback in ways that align with the style of the recipient so that it will be perceived as positive and helpful. Even praise for performance beyond expectations can be misunderstood if offered without consideration of circumstances and style preferences. Explorers often need to know in what ways their work breaks new ground or opens up new possibilities, while Developers appreciate knowing that their work efforts have made things better. Those with a Task focus appreciate feedback that is straightforward and based on the logic of the situation, while those with a People focus might appreciate more feedback that addresses the human aspects of the situation. A People focused individual receiving feedback that is very “cold,” matter of fact, and logic based would be more receptive if he or she were able to understand that a Task focused individual was offering that feedback.

Example. One of Rita’s responsibilities was to observe and evaluate the performance of several employees in her department. She tried to be careful in her preparations for the evaluation sessions. She made sure that she noted instances when the employees worked for consensus and were helpful to the others in the department. She gave praise for efforts that promised to break new ground, even when there was some risk involved. During the feedback session she would try to engage the employee in a dialogue aimed at helping the employee find new opportunities for growth. Rita considered Sue a good and productive individual, but Sue was a problem. Sue would not engage easily in conversation. Through office gossip, Rita learned that Sue felt unappreciated. Rita thought about her VIEW training and decided to try a different approach with Sue. Rita started to note that Sue’s efforts provided stability and efficiency to the department. During the feedback session she made sure to mention Sue’s ability to get to the heart of a problem and keep the department on task. Finally, she let Sue know that an immediate reaction was not necessary. She gave Sue a day or two to think about her feedback and then set up another appointment to discuss areas for growth and improvement. After two such sessions Rita began to observe that Sue seemed more relaxed in her situation.

Facilitating Groups

When you have the responsibility to help a group be as productive as possible by guiding the process, eliminating barriers to group members' effectiveness, and working to create a climate that is conducive to successful problem solving, and keeping the group focused on the task, you are taking on the role of facilitator. If you are familiar with your own style and that of those with whom you are working, you are in the position to apply VIEW to help facilitate the group's performance.

- By considering the nature of the task the group must approach, you can determine if the need is for developmental or exploratory novelty. Based on the need for different kinds of change, you can clarify and focus the kind of problem solving approach that is more likely to result in the appropriate sorts of outcomes. You can invite those with different orientations to change to produce the desired kind of change, rather than the kind they may prefer personally.
- Knowledge of the preferred manner of processing of group members enables you to adjust the process to provide for appropriate levels of reflection. If the group includes mostly people with an Internal processing preference, you will need to allow sufficient time for its members to think through the task, their options, and how they will take action. On the other hand, if the group includes mostly people with an External processing preference, you may need to provide ample opportunity for discussion, and then encourage them to set aside a sufficient block of time for internal reflection.
- You may also experience some differences in group members' preferred manner of deciding. When your group needs to make an important decision, you may need to help them consider both task- and person-oriented criteria and factors

***Example.** The members of a group that was responsible for reviewing and approving applications for internal funding for special projects in an organization had great difficulty in working together effectively. As it turned out, the group included almost all members with Explorer and External style preferences. They did not often agree on clear criteria for selecting the projects to support, and their meetings often resulted in a rambling flurry of discussions and debates. The group leaders asked us to administer VIEW and discuss the group's results with them. As a result, the group recognized the need for tools and procedures that would help them to structure their discussions and reach consensus more effectively. The group's leaders helped them to participate actively in generating and selecting criteria, and enabled them to analyze and discuss options constructively and then make decisions more efficiently. The group became more effective, and the members felt much more positively about the operation and success of the group.*

Managing Change

The need to respond effectively to change is at the forefront of organizational priorities in today's world. Pressure to cope with the increasing pace of change, degree of complexity, and sources of competition create mounting demands on the time and attention of those who lead and manage organizations. At a time when organizations need courageous thought, improved speed and agility, and the ability to be very close to those who make use of their products and services, many of those who are responsible for change efforts focus on obtaining short-term results, cutting costs. They risk losing their focus on the long-term viability of their organizations. One of the most important lessons to be learned from many change efforts is that these endeavors succeed or fail as a result of the people involved. Those who lead and manage change can benefit from an improved understanding and appreciation of the people-oriented dynamics of change. Producing change and implementing new strategies requires proactive and creative kinds of problem solving. Style of problem solving influences how we work as individuals, as a team, and how we approach others in our organization.

- Your orientation to change influences the kind of results or outcomes you seek to achieve. Some prefer to produce more evolutionary change, while others seek revolutionary change, regardless of the requirement for a balance in most situations. Understanding your own preferences, and those of others, can help moderate natural preferences for particular approaches, and enable you to focus on pursuing an appropriate kind of change.
- Knowing that you need to allow for differences in peoples' manner of processing can help you achieve the balance you need between fast action and well-thought out solutions.
- Realizing that people have different ways of deciding can help you choose and apply process tools appropriately to ensure that both the task and people perspectives are carefully considered while making important decisions.

Example. The "continuous improvement" task force of one unit in a large organization worked on a problem relating to setting goals for their unit's operation for the next three years. Several members of the team suggested goals that included eliminating all printed memos, policies, and handbooks, and replacing them with an intranet solution that would be distributed and archived entirely in digital format. Other members reacted to that by dismissing it as impractical and unrealistic. They proposed that the major goal to be addressed should be to develop more specific procedures for controlling use of the unit's library to reduce the number of resources that were frequently missing for extended periods of time without being checked out. The former group dismissed that proposal as trivial and of little consequence for the unit's overall improvement. After obtaining their VIEW results, discussing the differences among the task force members, and considering the value of respecting and building upon their style differences, the group developed new strategies for reviewing, analyzing, and discussing various proposals and suggestions. They also learned ways to use each other's strengths to "tame" some of their more unusual ideas to make them workable, and to expand the scope and originality of some of the narrower options, and to listen to each other's concerns and work to overcome them collaboratively.

Developing Leadership

Leadership is a relationship between those who commit to lead and those who decide to follow; it is not a position or place. Any consideration of leadership must attend to the dynamics of this relationship. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are pointless unless we understand the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and their constituents. If there is no underlying need for the relationship, then there is no need for leaders. Taking full advantage of the insights provided by VIEW, those who lead and manage organizations can increase their capacity to influence and inspire others. This process starts by recognizing the inherent value of diversity. Diversity is any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from each other. VIEW assesses diversity in problem solving styles.

- When you work to transform any kind of organization, you must often challenge the way things are currently being done. Organizations must have the capacity for developing better approaches *and* exploring different approaches for challenging the process.
- When it comes to enabling change, leaders must recognize that people differ in their preferences for processing information and ideas internally and externally. This requires leaders to adjust their communication and interaction to provide for an appropriate balance of reflection and action.
- When you need to deliver results and obtain commitments for taking action, you must make good decisions and consider many options and alternatives. Leaders play a key role in establishing the climate that allows for effective decision-making. Effective leadership requires an effective balance between providing clarity and commitment for accomplishing the tasks and demonstrating concern for people.

Example. An organization's leadership has established, through its traditional practices, a clear preference for developmental change, an internal manner of processing, and a very strong task-orientation for deciding. Members of the key senior leadership are aware of these preferences in style and are working to provide skills and develop structures and systems to allow for greater openness to exploratory styles, an increased focus on improving the level of communication, and on helping the organization become a better balanced and diverse place in which to work. There is an acknowledgement that this will take time, but given their style preferences they have a detailed plan to encourage innovation, have communicated it to all involved, and are working to establish a climate that supports creativity and innovation.

Designing Instruction

Designing instruction for learners of all ages, and in many settings involves a number of important tasks and challenges, including formulating curriculum goals and objectives; planning, preparing and delivering study materials and resources; carrying out the interaction between and among leaders and participants in a learning setting; and, formulating, communicating, and assessing expectations for participation and performance.

If your work involves designing curriculum, instructional resources, or training programs, being aware that people learn in many different ways (and that you can help improve their participation and performance by recognizing and responding to those differences), you will discover that you can apply VIEW in many ways. In projects or assignments that call upon learners to “be creative,” provide explicitly for learners with different preferences on orientation to change to be creative in their own way. When you are developing new resources, look closely at materials to ensure that they challenge learners to use their style preferences to do their best work. Engage learners in formulating and discussing criteria for making decisions or evaluating products.

Examples. Some ways to use VIEW in designing instruction include:

- *Develop activities enabling learners with an external processing preference to work and share in groups as they plan and carry out their tasks, as well as options enabling those with internal preferences to reflect quietly before they are expected to share or present their work. Offer multiple options in projects or assignments.*
- *Encourage learners to consider both person and task criteria when designing strategies for evaluating products or presentations.*
- *When designing and making assignments, develop options that challenge learners with an explorer preference to look at new and different possibilities, as well as for those with a developer preference to seek improvements and creative refinements.*
- *Help learners to understand their own preferences so they will know how to be their best, and so they will know how to appreciate and benefit from the contrasting strengths of others.*
- *Ask colleagues whose style differs from yours to review materials you create to check for unintended bias in language or requirements.*

Building Teams

In today's world, more and more work is being done by teams. Teamwork and team-building are important concerns, whenever you expect small groups of people to work together collaboratively toward a common goal or outcome. Effective teams have mutual and shared accountability for their team's goal; their results may bear on the evaluation of the individuals and the team as a whole. In order to be effective, teams must also be able to sustain their collaboration, effective communication, and positive interactions over a sustained period of time.

When you are responsible for building or guiding teams, you can apply VIEW in several ways. VIEW can provide a common language or vocabulary for exchanging information about the similarities and difference among team members. This will help the team members to recognize and respect differences, rather than viewing others with differing preferences as "odd," "wrong," or "ineffective." Team members need to understand that "differences are not deficits." Group members can also sustain their team's working relationship when they are able to celebrate each other's strengths and use their differences to complement each other. Knowledge of VIEW results will help teams to be aware of shared strengths, of the unique contributions each member can make to the team's performance, and of potential difficulties that might be faced by teams in which there is little or no diversity of style. Using VIEW can help you to give team members constructive ways to understand and respect their differences and put them to good use.

Example. A team working together to implement a new project was working very hard to gain consensus and to build momentum in planning and carrying out specific short-term actions to help their project attain much-needed success. Every so often they would reach a point at which they seemed to split into isolated groups or factions that were moving in opposite directions. The team members all responded to VIEW and reviewed their results. All team members voluntarily shared their individual results with each other, and they noticed that there were two sub-groups whose scores were completely opposite each other's on all three dimensions. This helped them to understand why they were experiencing frustration. Some coaching followed the group feedback exercise, and helped the team members to accept all the members for who they were, how they might collaborate more effectively to their overall success. Their subsequent meetings went much better as a result. The group was able to reach consensus much faster and ended up with plenty of buy-in for short-term actions. They were also able to develop several additional ideas for longer-term actions and initiatives.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring involve powerful relationships among people. We view coaching as an interpersonal working relationship in which an experienced person works with another person (or group) to strengthen or build their skills by sharing his or her expertise with them. We view mentoring as a two-way creative partnership, in which a more experienced person guides, works closely with, and learns from a less-experienced partner. Coaching and mentoring share some important attributes. They are personal, intensive, and sustained. They involve engagement and creative effort, and they seek to add meaning and value to the work in which the participants are engaged. They also involve relationships in which there is mutual respect and caring between or among the participants. Those relationships draw upon shared content expertise or interests, planning and communication skills, and process tools. However, successful coaching and mentoring experiences can also benefit from knowledge and application of style preferences. You can use VIEW as a tool to establish and maintain the effectiveness of these relationships. When coaching or mentoring, be aware that the participants may view and approach problems, processes, and decisions in different ways. Don't make assumptions about peoples' competence or motivation with discussing your strengths and needs. Don't assume that common content interests or expertise also means that you can assume common style preferences. People can be novices— or experts— in very different ways.

Examples. Some examples of ways to use VIEW in coaching and mentoring include:

- *A staff member was responsible for coaching several interns as they worked on a variety of tasks in their work group. Although the staff member was a professional with recognized expertise and experience in the field, he recognized that his way of handling many of the tasks was not “the only way” to approach those tasks effectively and appropriately. The staff member and all the interns completed VIEW at the beginning of the internship experience and discussed the results. When they prepared to deal with a new task, they held a group meeting in which they generated options about how to approach the task. Then, they considered ways that various responses might reflect style differences, and developed procedures for working on the tasks in style-appropriate ways.*
- *A senior scientist served as a mentor for a junior staff member in a research laboratory. The senior scientist, with a strong external and explorer preference, approached her research agenda by seeking novel ways to redefine problems, often in ways that challenged many established principles and procedures in the field. The protégé, who was much more oriented toward an internal and developer preference, initially found the mentor inspiring but incomprehensible. The protégé had difficulty following or accepting the mentor's “leaps” of analysis, and often found her explanations and instructions unclear, rambling, and difficult to follow. The scientist feared that the protégé lacked enthusiasm and had difficulty “seeing the big picture.” After completing VIEW and discussing their results, the scientists discovered ways to communicate more effectively and to work together more productively.*