

# IMPROVED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF SYSTEMS THINKING TO DEVELOP TEAM CHEMISTRY

A Research Proposal  
presented to IAABR  
2019 Orlando Conference



## ABSTRACT

*Research suggests that high employee engagement has a strong positive impact on organizational performance. When employees work in teams and actively contribute to organizational purpose, employee engagement improves and performance outcomes benefit. To realize an employee's potential in a team, managers must craft deliberate work relationships. The focus on the whole, or systems thinking, allows managers to capitalize on and appreciate differences in work behaviors. This study examines team chemistry, in which Deloitte's preferred work styles known as Pioneers, Drivers, Integrators, and Guardians, are examined for ideal fit to increase organizational performance. Addressing the organization's system, and the team's ideal structure, drives higher rates of employee engagement. This study includes an examination of two different work teams inside one organization. The study compares performance outcomes from one team applying a systems-thinking approach, versus a team void of these considerations. This research adds to the body of work that investigates effective employee engagement strategies for improved organizational performance.*

**Keywords:** employee engagement, team chemistry, systems thinking, organizational performance, work styles

## Hypothesis

The implementation of systems thinking when developing organizational teams, and the consideration of individual work style preferences, will result in stronger team chemistry and improved organizational performance.

## Overview of the Problem

Employee Disengagement

Underperforming Work Teams

Ingenuine Workplace Collaboration

Lack of Thought Diversity

Disenfranchised Organizational Teams

Disharmonious Work Practices

# Review of the Applicable Scientific Theories & Supportive Literature

# Challenges in Managing Groups & Teams

- Communication
- Conflict
- Role Ambiguity
- Clear Expectations
- **Work Style Preferences**

# Workplace Motivators



Improve Job Satisfaction & Effective Organizational Performance

# Maximizing Motivation & Employee Engagement with MAP

Mastery: Utilizing STRENGTHS!

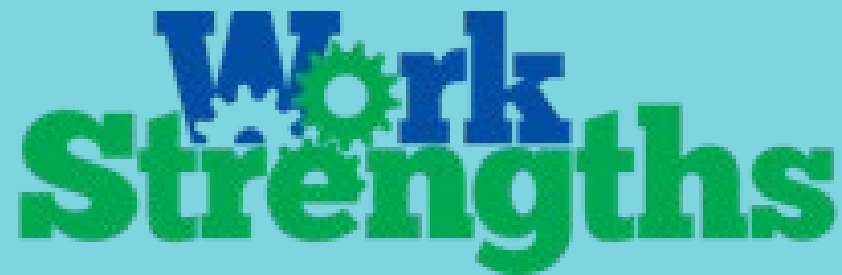
Autonomy: Freedom to be self-directed

Purpose: Aligning values & principles across people, processes, and performance management



Herzberg (1987)

# Mastery: Utilizing STRENGTHS!



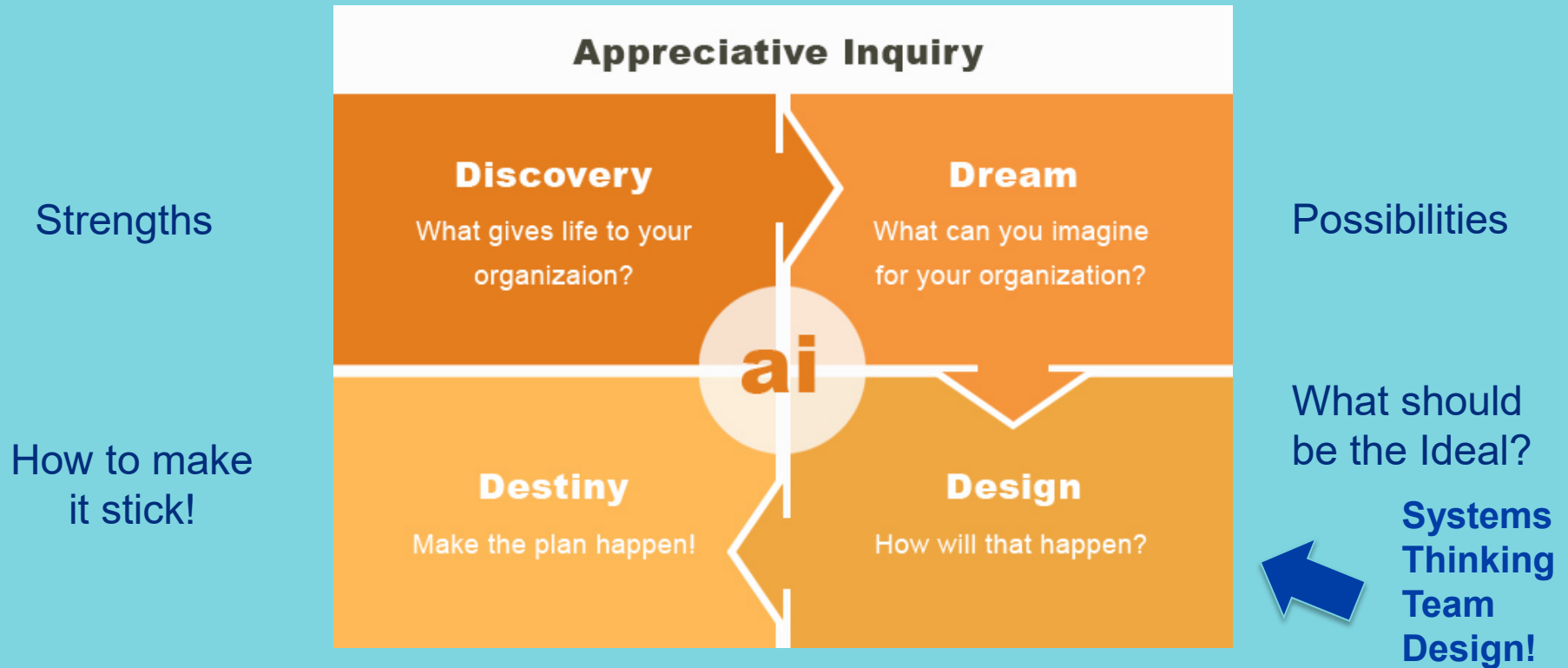
The urge to improve skills and offer competency advantage to an organization

# Strengths-based leadership

- “The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths that make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.”

—Peter Drucker

Cooperrider, D. L., Barrett, F.; & Srivastva, S. (1995)





# A winning formula for lasting high team performance

Talent x Engagement x Tenure = High Performance



Utilize the Skills & Competencies



Engage through Motivation, Purpose & **Relatedness**



Improve Retention & Internal Succession

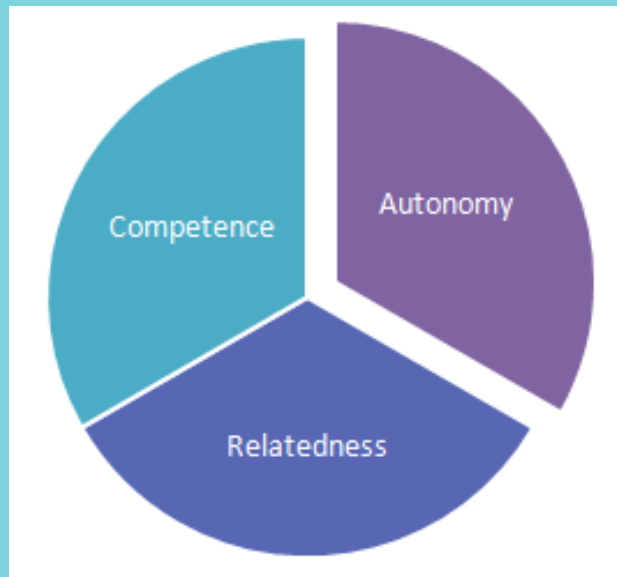


**Relatedness = Systems Thinking**



# Self Determination Theory

Three core needs contribute to self-esteem and psychological well-being



Competence  
(the Mastery)

Autonomy  
(the Freedom)

Relatedness: positive relationships and  
a sense of connection with others.

Deci, E.L. (1971)



# The Case for Optimizing Human Capital

Human Talent can impact outcomes in a direct and tangible way

**Strengths-based cultures see 8% higher revenue per employee compared with the average.**

When individuals leverage their natural talents in their team roles, greater profitability follows

**Workgroups that receive strengths-based development achieve an increase in profit of as much as 29%**

To achieve this optimization, we must change the way people Work!

*Source: Gallup, 2018*

# Hypothetical Solution to the Problem

## Hypothesis

**The implementation of systems thinking when developing organizational teams, and the consideration of individual work style preferences, will result in stronger team chemistry and improved organizational performance.**

## The Application of:

**I. Systems Thinking**

**II. Work Style Preferences**

# I. Overview of Systems Thinking

Characterized by its holistic approach to entities and phenomena

Focuses on the relation between parts, each's objectives

Pursues each part's function in relation to organizational objectives

Parts of the whole are considered for their “Relatedness”

Ackhoff (1974)  
Senge (1990)

# The Modeling Method

Systems thinking can be used as a modeling method to meaningfully and more intersubjectively discuss team performance.

Mooney & Soltanzadeh, 2016

# Operationalizing Systems Thinking

Studies indicate systems thinking principles can become a valuable foundation for managing a high-performing organization.

To operationalize systems thinking: Start treating problems in the organization as the problems of the system and start looking for system-integrated solutions.

Proposed Solution: Construct Work Teams with complementary Work Style Preferences

Diversity in Strengths: Differing Work Styles improve cooperation, team objectives/outcomes, and organizational performance.

Ackhoff, R. (1974)

Senge, P. (1990)

Skarzauskiene, A. (2010)

Tate, C. (2015)

# II. WORK STYLES PREFERENCES: THE SCIENCE OF TEAMS IN ORGANIZATIONS

## Pioneers, Drivers, Integrators & Guardians

Pioneers – Pioneers see the big picture and like to go with their gut

Guardians – Guardians are the protectors of order; they like stability

Drivers – Drivers are results-oriented; comfortable with challenge

Integrators – Integrators prize connection and draw teams together

*Source: Johnson Vickberg, S., & Christfort, K. (2017, Mar-Apr), for HBR "The New Science of Teamwork."*

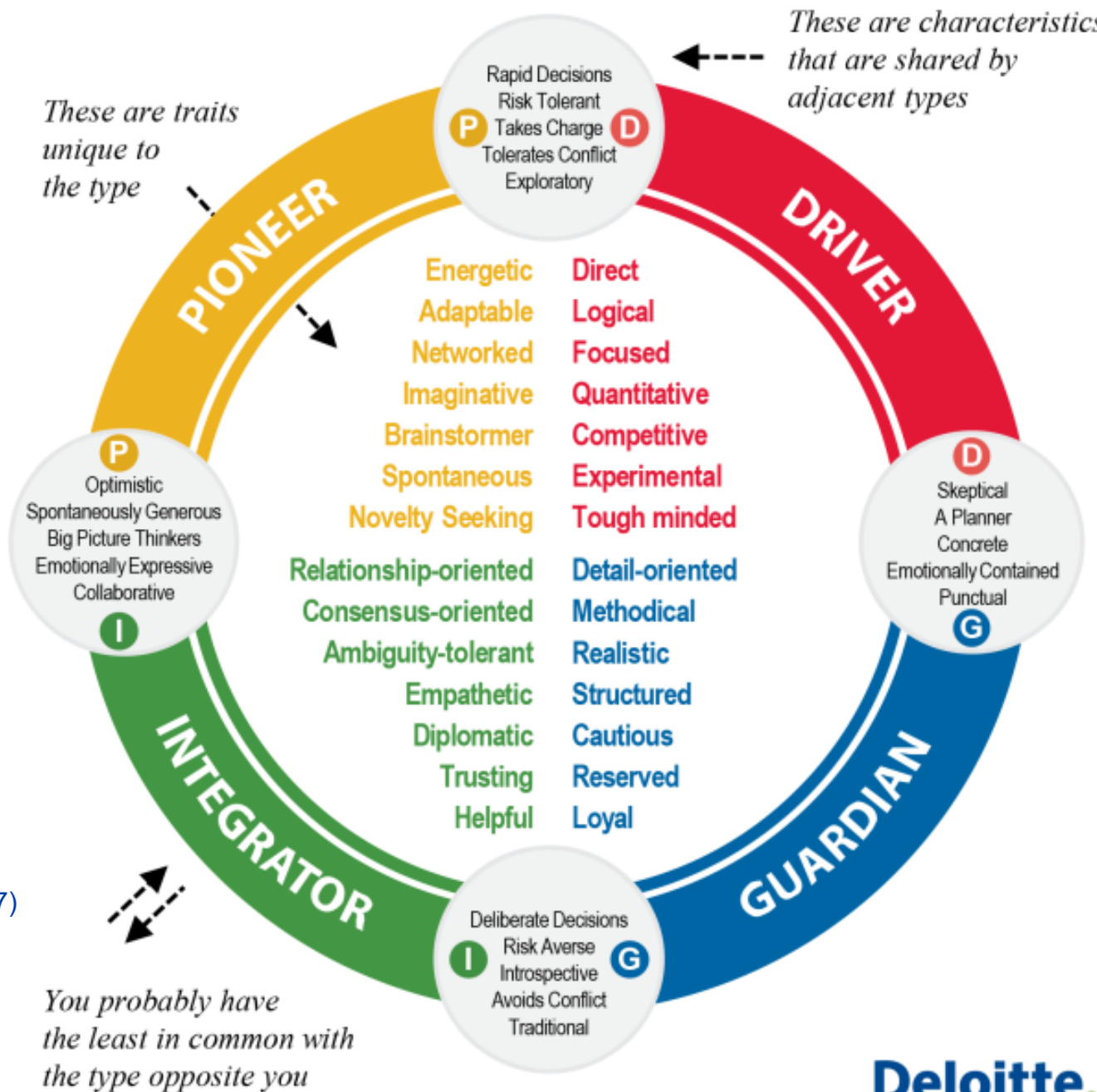


# Understanding Business Chemistry

## WORK STYLE PREFERENCES

Every team is a mix of the 4 Work Style Types.

Getting the best out of any combination.



Johnson-Vickberg, S., & Christfort, K. (2017)

# Delegating to the Work Styles

**PIONEER = have these group members solve the WHY?  
(focus on vision, big picture)**

**DRIVER = have these group members solve the WHAT?  
(focus on results, goals)**

**GUARDIAN = have these group members solve the HOW?  
(focus on planning, details)**

**INTEGRATOR = have these group members solve the WHO?  
(focus on relationship, teamwork)**

**Align: Create synergy by pairing opposites and capitalizing on differences**

Stapper, B. (2018)

# How Work Styles Impact Team Chemistry

Recognizing WHO to delegate team functions to

Identifying WHAT each style is Energized by

Arranging WHEN work styles should collaborate or individually contribute

Supporting HOW teams interact and collaborate & avoiding divisiveness

Providing WHY with collective purpose

## How Can You Get the Most Out of Each Style on Your Team?

Know what gets them excited—and what they find off-putting.

### PIONEER

**Energized by:**

Brainstorming  
Spontaneity and trying new things  
Enthusiasm

**Alienated by:**

Rules and structure  
The word “no”  
A focus on process

### INTEGRATOR

**Energized by:**

Collaboration  
Communication  
Trust and respect

**Alienated by:**

Politics  
Conflict  
Inflexibility

### DRIVER

**Energized by:**

Solving problems  
Directness  
Winning

**Alienated by:**

Indecision  
Inefficiency  
Lack of focus

### GUARDIAN

**Energized by:**

Organization  
Predictability and consistency  
A detailed plan

**Alienated by:**

Disorder  
Time pressure  
Ambiguity and uncertainty



# Research Proposal

## Mixed Methodology

### Population:

6 predetermined groups of graduate students participating in a predetermined group project for the duration of a course during one term

### Hypothesis:

The implementation of systems thinking when developing organizational teams, and the consideration of individual work style preferences, will result in stronger team chemistry and improved organizational performance.

### Data Collection:

Survey all participants in advance of the group project. Questionnaire will ask participants to rate self-perception of valuableness in group work. Questions on a Likert scale. Same questionnaire will be given to participants at the conclusion of the course for data comparison.

### Procedures: All participants complete Deloitte “The Business Chemistry”<sup>®</sup> self-assessment

One half of the class (3 of the 6 groups) will receive team assignments established by pairing opposites and complementary functionality of Work Style Preferences assessment results. The other half of the class will self-organize, with no consideration of Work Style preferences. Researcher Observation and Interviewing will occur.

# Future Research Interests related to this study

Investigating  
the role of  
Social Proof  
in Team  
Chemistry

Implications  
of Second  
Order  
Thinking on  
Team  
Chemistry

The role of  
Positive and  
Negative  
Feedback  
Loops in  
Team  
Chemistry

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# TEAMWORK

coming together is a beginning  
keeping together is progress  
working together is success

- Henry Ford