

# The New Science of Team Chemistry

## Pioneers, Drivers, Integrators, and Guardians

- [Suzanne M. Johnson Vickberg](#)
- [Kim Christfort](#)

Organizations aren't getting the performance they need from their teams. That's the message we hear from many of our clients, who wrestle with complex challenges ranging from strategic planning to change management. But often, the fault doesn't lie with the team members, our research suggests. Rather, it rests with leaders who fail to effectively tap diverse work styles and perspectives—even at the senior-most levels. Some managers just don't recognize how profound the differences between their people are; others don't know how to manage the gaps and tensions or understand the costs of not doing so. As a result, some of the best ideas go unheard or unrealized, and performance suffers.

To help leaders claim this lost value, Deloitte created a system called Business Chemistry that identifies four primary work styles and related strategies for accomplishing shared goals. Existing personality tests didn't do the trick—they weren't tailored to the workplace, and they relied too heavily on personal introspection. So we consulted biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, of Rutgers University, whose research on brain chemistry in romantic relationships sheds light on people's styles and interactions. From there, we developed a list of business-relevant traits and preferences that can be observed or inferred from behavior at work. A survey development company then helped us build an assessment, which we tested and refined with three independent samples of more than 1,000 professionals each. Finally, we collaborated with molecular biologist Lee Silver, of Princeton, to adapt the statistical models he uses for genetic population analysis to look for patterns in our business population data and to mathematically derive four work styles.

Since then, more than 190,000 people have completed our assessment, and we've conducted follow-up studies to determine how each work style responds to stress, the conditions under which the various styles thrive, and other factors that can inform how to manage the styles effectively. We've also engaged leaders and teams in more than 3,000 "labs"—interactive sessions lasting 90 minutes to three days—during which we've gathered more data and explored strategies and techniques for getting the most out of diverse styles.

In this article, we'll lay out the value that each style offers, address the challenges of bringing people with different styles together, and describe how to capitalize on the cognitive diversity in your organization.

## Understanding the Styles

Each of us is a composite of the four work styles, though most people's behavior and thinking are closely aligned with one or two. All the styles bring useful perspectives and distinctive approaches to generating ideas, making decisions, and solving problems. Generally speaking:

**Pioneers** value possibilities, and they spark energy and imagination on their teams. They believe risks are worth taking and that it's fine to go with your gut. Their focus is big-picture. They're drawn to bold new ideas and creative approaches.

**Guardians** value stability, and they bring order and rigor. They're pragmatic, and they hesitate to embrace risk. Data and facts are baseline requirements for them, and details matter. Guardians think it makes sense to learn from the past.

**Drivers** value challenge and generate momentum. Getting results and winning count most. Drivers tend to view issues as black-and-white and tackle problems head on, armed with logic and data.

**Integrators** value connection and draw teams together. Relationships and responsibility to the group are paramount. Integrators tend to believe that most things are relative. They're diplomatic and focused on gaining consensus.

Teams that bring these styles together should, in theory, enjoy the many benefits of cognitive diversity, ranging from increased creativity and innovation to improved decision making. Yet time and again, diverse teams fail to thrive—sometimes stagnating, sometimes buckling under the weight of conflict. A first step for leaders hoping to turn that around is to identify the differing styles of their team members and understand what makes each individual tick.

In our work, we've clustered thousands of groups by style and asked them to list the things that energize and alienate them in the workplace. The lists vary greatly—what motivates one group can suck the life out of another. Some of the differences have to do with how people interact. For instance, Integrators abhor anything that feels like conflict, but Drivers love to debate. This can create tension and misunderstanding. In one of our lab sessions, a CFO and her team were talking about their executive meetings. One participant, an Integrator, confessed that she dreaded bringing topics up because "it always leads to an unpleasant argument." The CFO, a Driver, reacted with surprise, saying, "But that's just how we discuss things!"

Differences in how individuals think and contribute can also create problems. For instance, if a Guardian walks through a detailed plan line by line, that may feel like a forced march to a Pioneer, who wants to skip ahead or whiteboard a completely different idea. Conversely, the Pioneer's riffing about ideas without any agenda or structure may seem like an impractical mess to the organized Guardian.

The four styles give leaders and their teams a common language for discussing similarities and differences in how people experience things and prefer to work. Groups come to appreciate why certain times feel so challenging (that is, which perspectives and approaches are at odds), and they also begin to recognize the potential power in their differences.

One leadership team, for example, was struggling to get everyone aligned with its strategy and was experiencing a great deal of interpersonal conflict in the process. This consumed a lot of the leader's time and energy, since members kept coming to him with complaints about others. Through discussions

with the team, we uncovered some norms that were disagreeable to each style: Guardians felt that they'd been rushed through due diligence processes; Pioneers felt that innovation was being squashed by rigid interpretations of compliance guidelines; Drivers were frustrated by the team's unwillingness to commit to a decision; and Integrators were bothered by dismissive behaviors, such as eye-rolling.

Our discussions highlighted team strengths, such as an openness to sharing perspectives and voicing concerns and a commitment to generating innovative ideas and supporting the business. The team brainstormed strategies for accommodating individuals' differing styles and taking advantage of the value that each brought. A month after we met with them, members indicated they had been actively hypothesizing about one another's styles and were developing a better understanding of the team. Even more important, they reported a greater sense of shared purpose, an environment that better enabled them to contribute at their highest levels, and an improved ability to accomplish goals.

### Managing the Styles

Once you've identified the work styles of your team members and have begun to consider how the differences are beneficial or problematic, you must actively manage them so that you're not left with all frustration and no upside. You can do so in three ways.

#### **Pull your opposites closer.**

Often, the biggest pain points are in one-on-one relationships when opposite styles collide. Each of the styles is different from the others, but they're not different in equal measure. For example, Guardians are generally more reserved than Drivers—but both types are very focused, which can help them find common ground. Guardians and Pioneers, however, are true opposites, as are Integrators and Drivers.

As you'd expect, the interpersonal problems that tend to arise when opposite styles come together can put a damper on collaboration. Indeed, 40% of the people we surveyed on the topic said that their opposites were the most challenging to work with, and 50% said that they were the least enjoyable to work with. Each type cited different reasons for the difficulties.

For example, one Driver explained why she doesn't enjoy working with Integrators:

*"I find it exhausting to do all the small talk to make everyone feel good about working together. I just want to get things done, give honest and direct feedback, and move forward. Having to worry about sensitive feelings slows me down."*

An Integrator who found Drivers challenging to work with said:

*"I need to process things to get the contextual background for the big picture. Drivers often speak in code or thought fragments that we need to translate."*

We were told by a Guardian:

*"I'm always thinking about how I'm going to implement something...and while the Pioneers have great ideas, they typically can't be bothered with discussing how to execute them. But, if the outcome doesn't match their vision, they're frustrated!"*

And a Pioneer admitted:

*“I have a very difficult time adjusting to a Guardian’s style. I am decisive and like to generate ideas without judgment. Guardians can come across as judgmental, and they don’t allow creativity to flow.”*

Despite the havoc such differences can wreak on team performance, opposite styles can balance each other out. Still, that takes time and effort. We worked with one Guardian-Pioneer pair who struggled in the beginning but, by openly discussing their differences, eventually forged a stronger partnership. The Pioneer was quite comfortable speaking in front of groups and doing so on the fly. The Guardian dreaded public speaking even with thorough preparation, which she rarely saw as enough. When getting ready to present something together, the Pioneer often felt impatient, and the Guardian felt alarmed at what she saw as inadequate planning. As their relationship progressed, they began to trust and adjust to each other. The Pioneer learned that her partner’s meticulousness often got them out of a tight spot and that doing a bit more preparation herself helped her to be better in the moment. The Guardian learned that her partner’s more spontaneous approach was engaging and enabled them to be more flexible and responsive to their audience’s needs. She found that when they were working together, she could relax a bit and take more risks herself.

By pulling your opposites closer—having them collaborate on small projects and then take on bigger ones if it’s working out—you can create complementary partnerships on your teams. It’s also important to pull your own opposites closer to you, to balance your tendencies as a leader. This is really about generating productive friction. Think Lennon and McCartney, Serena and Venus, the Steves (Jobs and Wozniak). Differences are what make such collaborations powerful.

### **Elevate the “tokens” on your team.**

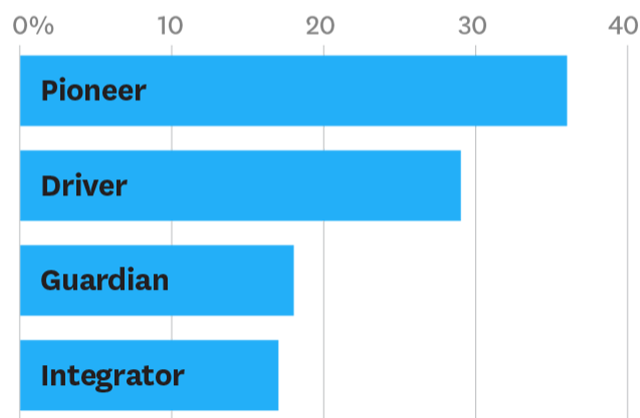
If you’ve got a team of 10 people, seven of whom are Guardians, what leadership approach should you favor? Adopting one that works well for Guardians—seeking the greatest good for the greatest number—might seem like the practical thing to do. But in our experience, it’s often more effective to focus on styles that are represented by just a few team members, since it’s those minority perspectives you need to court to reap the benefits of diversity.

When a team’s makeup is lopsided, cognitive bias can creep in, often leading to “cascades.” Imagine trying to change the direction of a big waterfall. Without a feat of engineering, it would be impossible. That’s how a cascade works on a team: Once ideas, discussion, and decision making start flowing in a particular direction, momentum keeps them moving that way. Even if diverse views exist on the team, they probably won’t change the flow once it’s established, as people often hesitate to voice disagreement with an idea that gets early visible support.

Momentum builds for various reasons: *Reputational* cascades generally result from a fear of looking bad or of being punished for disagreeing, and *informational* cascades can occur when people assume that early speakers know something others don’t. Either way, you end up with self-censoring and groupthink, which means the team doesn’t benefit from its diverse perspectives.

## The Leadership Profile

Most top leaders are Pioneers or Drivers, our survey of 661 C-suite executives suggests. Because these are the most vocal styles, executive teams should look out for “cascades” and evidence of groupthink.



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Of the teams we work with, about half are relatively balanced, and the rest are dominated by one or two styles. We’ve also found that top leaders are most likely to be Pioneers, and then Drivers. In many cases, the majority of executive team members share the leader’s style, which can make the team particularly susceptible to cascades. Pioneers tend to be spontaneous and outgoing. They think quickly and speak energetically, sometimes before thinking much at all. Similarly, Drivers like to take charge in group settings, and with their competitive and direct style, they’re inclined to jump right in and state their point of view rather than hang back to hear what others have to say. Especially if they’re in the majority or supported by a leader with a similar style, there’s a strong chance that Pioneers or Drivers will set the direction of a cascade with early comments.

We were asked by one leader to help uncover why her team, though highly productive, was repeatedly criticized by internal stakeholders for its lack of diplomacy. We analyzed the team’s composition and saw that it was dominated by assertive and outspoken Drivers. When we asked whether this style might be ruffling feathers, those individuals pushed back, saying that they knew what needed to get done and didn’t have time to worry about people’s feelings.

The team also had a small group of Integrators—the style that typically shows the most relationship-building prowess. But those folks were marginalized, rarely spoke, and told us that they felt shut out and devalued. Although they were eager to share their thoughts and ideas with us in private, they were unwilling to stand up to the Drivers dominating the team. As a result, the group seemed to be losing out on the strengths of those who were best equipped to help them improve their relationships with stakeholders.

How can you elevate minority perspectives on your team to avoid cascading and marginalization—without turning others off? Here are some tactics that may help.

If you’re trying to get Guardians to share their perspective, give them the time and the details they need to prepare for a discussion or a decision. Then allow them to contribute in ways that are comfortable for them (for instance, in writing) and that don’t require them to fight for the floor—because chances are, they won’t. Making advance reading and preparation an option rather than a requirement will lessen the burden for those uninterested in spending time this way, such as Pioneers.

To elicit Pioneers’ ideas, allow room for discussions to get expansive. Provide white boards and encourage people to get up and grab the marker. Determining in advance how long you’ll allow such

discussions to go on will help those who prefer more structure—particularly Guardians—to relax into the free-flowing exercise.

As for Integrators, dedicate some energy toward forming real relationships with them—and then ask for their thoughts. Also seek, and empower them to seek, the perspectives of other team members and stakeholders. Explore with them how the discussion or decision affects the greater good. Doing some of this work offline may prevent Drivers from getting antsy with what they may see as time-consuming niceties.

For Drivers, keep the pace of conversations brisk, and show clear connections between the discussion or decision at hand and progress toward the overall goal. Consider introducing an element of experimentation or competition—say, gamifying a training program—to keep them interested and engaged. Some styles, such as Integrators, may be less motivated by competition, so also look for ways to build or strengthen relationships—for instance, by providing opportunities for competing teams to socialize together.

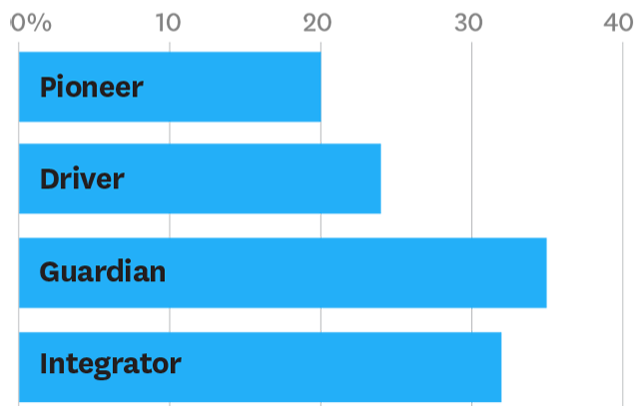
Beyond these type-specific tactics, there are more-general ways to elevate minority perspectives on your team:

Encourage anyone in the minority to speak up early to give them a chance to influence the direction of the conversation before a cascade sets the course. Polish psychologist Solomon Asch's classic experiments on conformity demonstrated that when even one person goes against the majority, the likelihood that others will offer divergent perspectives increases greatly. Take advantage of this phenomenon to promote healthy dissent.

Also ask people to brainstorm on their own ahead of time and then share their ideas in round-robin fashion when the group convenes. Studies have shown that this approach is more effective than **group brainstorming**. Like giving minority styles the floor first, individual brainstorming can get more diverse ideas into the mix before a particular direction gains momentum. It also gives greater voice to those who prefer to process and generate ideas in a quiet atmosphere or at a more deliberate pace.

## Stressed-Out

In our study of more than 23,000 professionals, more Guardians and Integrators reported being stressed-out than anyone else. To benefit from their strengths on your team, look for ways to ease the pressure and help them feel psychologically safe.



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these traits in a subset of Integrators we'll call Quiet Integrators. As with people who don't share their team's dominating style, sensitive introverts are rarely heard unless leaders deliberately reach out to them.

A Pioneer or Driver cascade can feel like Niagara Falls to Guardians, who tend to be reserved, to consider decisions carefully, and to avoid confrontation. Particularly if they're in the minority, they may not speak up when others are clamoring to say their piece. Similarly, Quiet Integrators tend to be particularly nonconfrontational and focused on consensus—so if the team appears to be leaning in a certain direction, they're unlikely to offer a divergent perspective. And because neither Guardians nor Quiet Integrators are inclined to embrace risk, they will probably see little reason to stick their necks out to challenge the prevailing wisdom.

Add to that the ways in which Guardians and Integrators are affected by stress. In a study of more than 20,000 professionals from inside and outside Deloitte, those styles were more likely than Pioneers and Drivers to report feeling stressed. And their stress levels were higher in response to every kind of situation we asked about—face-to-face interactions, conflicts, a sense of urgency, heavy workloads, and errors. In a second sample, this time of more than 17,000 professionals, Guardians and Integrators were also less likely to report that they work effectively under stress. These findings fit right in with author Susan Cain's work on introverts and psychologist Elaine Aron's work on highly sensitive people. Both suggest that today's breakneck, open-space, highly collaborative work environment is particularly challenging for these groups.

Now consider all this in light of the fact that top leaders tend to be Pioneers or Drivers. People who are most introverted, most stressed, and least adaptable are often being led by those who are most

If a team is light on a particular style, try asking others to "think like" that style. Do this early in the conversation, before the majority viewpoint takes hold. Many of us are accustomed to saying, "Just playing devil's advocate"; in this case, one might say, "Just playing Guardian here..." or "If I were to view this issue through the lens of a Driver...." We've found that teams that have learned about the four styles are quite adept at putting themselves in the shoes of others when asked, and that doing so can enrich and round out a discussion that otherwise might be one-dimensional.

Pay close attention to your sensitive introverts.

Although a cascading team may lose out on contributions from any style that's in the minority, members who are highly introverted or sensitive are at greatest risk of being drowned out. We see the most evidence of introversion and sensitivity among Guardians but also find

extroverted, least stressed, and most adaptable. You can probably see how this could pose difficulties for everyone.

You might ask, Why bother catering to sensitive introverts? Shouldn't people be able to adapt and manage their stress? To speak up even when it's difficult? Maybe you simply don't want those who can't.

We think you do. Cain's and Aron's research shows that people who are more introverted or sensitive have particular strengths that can benefit teams and organizations. For example, they tend to be conscientious and thorough—good at spotting errors and potential risks. They can focus intensely for long periods of time. They're good listeners and more likely to highlight others' great ideas than to seek the spotlight for themselves. They often tackle and excel at the detail-oriented work that others can't or simply don't want to do. So while reaching out to sensitive introverts may be labor-intensive, the effort should pay off.

To get the most out of your Guardians and your Quiet Integrators, consider asking how you can help them keep their stress levels manageable. This may involve identifying ways to slow the pace, reduce information overload, provide quieter or more private work environments, or run interference for them so that they can focus without a lot of distraction.

Next, to borrow a suggestion from Susan Cain's popular **TED Talk** about the power of introverts: "Stop the madness for group work! Just stop it!" Engage Guardians and Quiet Integrators by giving them some alone time for more-reflective tasks. Instead of defaulting to teamwork, ask whether some tasks are actually better done in solitude.

Sensitive introverts may not take charge, or compete, or even talk much at all, but don't mistake this for lack of interest. They're almost certainly observing and processing. If you want their perspective, ask them directly, but use a light touch—cold-calling Guardians and Quiet Integrators can backfire if they haven't had a chance to reflect first. If you do give them an opportunity to prepare and then make space for them to speak in a meeting, they'll probably be happy to offer their thoughts. One leader we worked with was particularly skilled at this. Before meetings that included introverted team members, she would tell them what the discussion would focus on, often making specific requests to facilitate their

## What's Your Style?

Identify the traits that generally apply (keeping in mind that you probably behave differently in different groups and situations). Tally up the relevant traits in each category for a rough gauge of which styles you draw on most often.

### PIONEER

Outgoing  
Focused on the big picture  
Spontaneous  
Drawn to risk  
Adaptable  
Imaginative

### INTEGRATOR

Diplomatic  
Empathic  
Traditional  
Relationship-oriented  
Intrinsically motivated  
Nonconfrontational

### DRIVER

Quantitative  
Logical  
Focused  
Competitive  
Experimental  
Deeply curious

### GUARDIAN

Methodical  
Reserved  
Detail-oriented  
Practical  
Structured  
Loyal

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involvement: “Will you say something about X topic or comment on section Y when we get to it in the meeting?”

Guardians and Quiet Integrators spend a lot of time and energy reviewing their own mistakes, so it’s important to create an environment where good faith efforts are celebrated even when they fail. Since teams that feel psychologically safe have been shown to outperform those that do not, this can benefit team members of all styles.

### Practicing What We Preach

We’ve seen the power of this approach in working with executives and teams, and we’ve also experienced it personally, in our own opposing-styles partnership. One of us, Kim, is a Pioneer with a good bit of Driver mixed in. She values expansive thinking and rapid advancement, and she leads a large team dominated by other extroverted, free-wheeling Pioneers. Suzanne is a Guardian and a Quiet Integrator—a double dose of introverted sensitivity—making her a bit different from many of her teammates. She processes things deeply, insists on rigor, and can’t be rushed. Working with Kim and the broader team sometimes feels to Suzanne like trying to thread a needle in the midst of a hurricane. To Kim, working with Suzanne sometimes feels like running in deep water.

Early on, things didn’t always go smoothly for us, but with time we’ve realized how much stronger we are working together. Suzanne knows that Kim’s always got the big picture in mind, and Kim trusts that Suzanne has considered every detail. And as the team’s leader, Kim has created a protective enclave that allows Suzanne to take cover and do what she does best. Our partnership is better for it, and so is our team.

## 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	INTEGRATOR
<b>Energized by:</b> Brainstorming Spontaneity and trying new things Enthusiasm  <b>Alienated by:</b> Rules and structure The word “no” A focus on process	<b>Energized by:</b> Collaboration Communication Trust and respect  <b>Alienated by:</b> Politics Conflict Inflexibility
DRIVER	GUARDIAN
<b>Energized by:</b> Solving problems Directness Winning  <b>Alienated by:</b> Indecision Inefficiency Lack of focus	<b>Energized by:</b> Organization Predictability and consistency A detailed plan  <b>Alienated by:</b> Disorder Time pressure Ambiguity and uncertainty

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# How Work Styles Inform Leadership

- **Alison Beard**



## Strategy

### **Adam Malamut**

Chief Customer Experience Officer, Marriott

Two years ago, when I was chief talent officer for Marriott, I was tasked with streamlining and modernizing our learning and development capabilities. I'd assembled a new team and wanted to make sure we understood one another, our roles and responsibilities, and our strategic objectives before embarking on this journey. We used the personality style framework not only to understand our own strengths and weaknesses and how to work more effectively together but also to identify where we needed to augment the team and what we could realistically accomplish in our first year, and then our second.

As one of the initial steps in the strategic planning process, everyone considered their own profiles and those of their respective teams and started to staff them more appropriately. For example, the groups working on the design and development of our learning content and delivery approaches had a strong Guardian and Driver orientation; they needed to be pushed from a creative standpoint, so we added a Pioneer to lead an arm of that team. And when I staffed the group charged with the detail-oriented and collaborative process of organizing and integrating our learning and delivery offerings, I made sure to include Guardians and Integrators. As a Pioneer and Driver, I need those types around me personally, too.

Now I'm in a new role—chief customer experience officer—and getting ready to launch a series of change initiatives following our merger with Starwood. My peers and I—a group of seven senior leaders—plan to use this approach to improve collaboration as we develop and execute on our strategic plans.



### **Elizabeth Bryant**

Vice President, Southwest Airlines University

When I took the personality style test six months ago—along with about 50 other senior Southwest executives—I had a real “aha” moment. The surprise wasn’t my own results: I’m strong on both the Pioneer and Integrator scales—a strategist and a communicator. It was that I hadn’t been thinking carefully enough about how to temper those tendencies for people with different styles.

For example, my boss—who leads corporate services—is more of a Driver, so I can’t just talk through the vision of a particular initiative with him. I need to make it very clear that we’re hitting our milestones: “Here’s what we’ve accomplished, and here’s where we’re going.”

We’re both paying more attention to the mix of styles on our leadership team, too. It’s the two of us plus three Integrators, so we all need to put our Guardian hats on once in a while to make sure that we’re gathering the data, protecting our history and culture, and moving at the right pace.

I’ve also had my direct reports take the assessment, and I’ve learned that they’re mostly Integrators. That’s great, but I’m conscious that we need some Driver behavior as well: A goal is just a goal until you make it happen. My husband reminded me of this the other day. We’d been house hunting, and I’d found the perfect place for us to buy, so I felt my work was done. But then he said, “You know, Elizabeth, it’s great that you have this vision and go after it, but then everyone around you has to get to work. I’m the one who has to deal with the realtor, the lawyer, the inspector.” I shared this story with my team and asked that they tell me when an idea I suggest sounds challenging—or even impossible. And I’m now more conscientious when thinking out loud. Something I ask about offhandedly could, for an Integrator, Driver, or Guardian, be understood as an important to-do item.



## Hiring and Job Crafting

**Greg Keeley**

Executive Vice President, American Express

I took the assessment as part of an executive evaluation, and I expected my results to show that I’m 100% Driver, because that was my role at American Express. But I was strongest on the Pioneer scale. This showed me that although I was doing what the firm needed me to do, many of the behaviors I’d adopted didn’t reflect who I really am.

I shared the findings with my boss and my team and asked my direct reports to take the test. I was pleasantly surprised by the diversity in our group and soon realized that I could dial down the Driver aspects of my job. Of course, we still had product, process, and revenue goals to hit, but I could use a

scorecard to track those, delegate some duties, and spend more time on new-product development and strategy.

When I did, my job satisfaction shot way up. I'm in the same role, with the same boss and team, but I have so much more passion and energy than I did before. I've even changed the way I introduce myself to new colleagues or vendors. Before a meeting starts, I take a few minutes to say, "Here's how I tend to think and act..." and I ask them to do the same for me. It's a shortcut to better communication and engagement.

And personality now informs how I think about assignments, promotions, and hiring. When I was recently trying to fill a role, I met with a strong candidate who took the assessment and came up as a Driver/Guardian. But the job required vision and coordination with other groups. What I needed was a Pioneer/Integrator. I modified the job description and finally found the right person. The Driver/Guardian took a position in the company more suited to his personality. I'd love to see middle managers adopt this sort of thinking—they oversee an estimated 80% of the workforce—because it's fundamental leadership training. You need to know who you are before you know what you can become.



## Teamwork

### Charles Derosa

U.S. Treasurer, National Grid

I've now led three teams at National Grid, ranging from about 25 people to about 200. I always talk to my staff about personality styles, because I believe it helps people work together more effectively.

I'm a Driver, one of those personalities that can push people hard. I like facts and figures, and goals and objectives. My natural instinct is to skip small talk. One of my bosses is a Pioneer; he enjoys brainstorming. One of my direct reports is an Integrator, who wants to make sure every view is expressed. Other people on my team are Guardians. They're very reliable but not always flexible, and they often play devil's advocate. To function effectively, we need to recognize and appreciate everyone's style and to have open discussions about our differences: What does each of us like? And what really bugs us? This enables us to be more thoughtful in our interactions.

Since we started having these conversations, the people on my team have adapted their styles a bit: The Guardians recognize that their behavior can seem defensive, and they try to avoid ruffling feathers while still conveying important messages. The Drivers now show more patience. When dealing with me, everyone prepares more thoroughly and tries to get to the point more quickly. I have adapted as well; in

the past I'd get frustrated, but now I realize how important each style is in reaching the best decision. And when the group has personality conflicts, I do my best to facilitate progress. In the end, we're all better able to work together toward our goals and those of the department.

It's human nature to gravitate toward people with work styles similar to our own. But there will always be (and we benefit from) personality diversity in the workplace. I believe in providing the right opportunity to all types.



## Decision Making

**Gary Pilnick**

Vice Chairman, Corporate Development and Chief Legal Officer, Kellogg

Executives need to be thinking in all four quadrants of personality when they're making big decisions. For example, I'm a Pioneer/Integrator, which means I need to flex to Driver and Guardian mindsets sometimes. Otherwise all I'm doing is dreaming and talking to people. When I'm working with a fellow Pioneer/Integrator, I need to ask, "Where's your data?" and set firm deadlines. With a Driver, I'll say, "OK, we've clarified objectives and the schedule. What experts should you consult with now? Who needs to be informed?" With a Guardian, it's about focusing on results: "Are we pushing hard enough?"

Because my team has been through the assessment process, we can all talk this way now. In a recent meeting with one of my leaders, we started by "pioneering" together, then I was reminded "OK, it's time to 'drive' and make a decision." And we did it with smiles on our faces.

Of course, it's nice to lean into your dominant style, and most of us do when we're under stress. But we all are able to shift mindsets, or think like the others, when we're reminded to. It's not like trying to write with the wrong hand. It's more like going a little faster or slower than normal on the highway, or taking a new route to work. It feels different and maybe a little uncomfortable, but it's not awkward. I've worked for several Pioneer/Drivers over the years, and I wouldn't have survived without the ability to get things done. I have a strong Pioneer in a key compliance role, but I wouldn't want anyone else because she can flex into Guardian when necessary. And I have a Driver on my team who now recognizes that he can deliver faster results with more-lasting outcomes by slowing down and getting colleagues to collaborate.

I see this framework as one way to move all our departments toward a more agile culture that values quick yet informed decisions. It's a blueprint for touching all the bases.

# “If You Understand How the Brain Works, You Can Reach Anyone”

- **Alison Beard**

The Theory: Helen Fisher’s research on the brain systems that drive human personality, attraction, and love has been featured in academic journals, TED conferences, and the dating website Match.com. It is now finding business-world applications at companies such as Deloitte. Affiliated with the Kinsey Institute and Rutgers University, Fisher also coaches executives, and in 2015 she launched the corporate consultancy NeuroColor in partnership with leadership and innovation adviser David Labno.

## **How did you make the leap from personal relationships to professional ones?**

My work on personality styles had been getting some attention, and Dave Labno, who I didn’t know at the time but who would eventually become my partner, heard me in an interview on National Public Radio. He called me up and said, “You know, Helen, you don’t study love. You study relationships.” And instantly I could see that he was right. The questionnaire I’d developed to help people pair off romantically could be applied to understanding family, friends, colleagues, clients. Dave had worked in business for years and knew all the currently available personality tests, and he felt that mine was a disruptive technology.

## **Why is it better than other assessments such as Myers-Briggs and Big Five personality tests?**

Because it is based on brain chemistry. I looked at neurological research to develop the questionnaire and then, with colleagues, used functional magnetic resonance imaging to validate it.

We all have two parts to our personalities that are in constant interaction: culture (which is what your upbringing teaches you to believe, do, and say) and temperament (which comes from your biology, genes, hormones, and neurotransmitters). I study temperament. Most brain systems keep the eyes blinking, the heart beating, the metabolism running. But when Match.com asked me, “Why does someone fall in love with one person rather than another?” I tried to find a neurological answer. I spent two years studying the literature and found, over and over, that four biological systems—dopamine/norepinephrine, serotonin, testosterone, and estrogen/oxytocin—are each linked to a particular suite of personality traits. I found this in research not only on humans but also on doves, lizards, and monkeys.

## **What links did you find?**

People who express certain genes in the dopamine system tend to be curious, creative, spontaneous, energetic, and mentally flexible. They are risk-takers and seek novelty. People who have high serotonin activity (or who take SSRI antidepressants) are more sociable, more eager to belong. They’re quite traditional in their values and less inclined toward exploration. People expressive of the testosterone system are tough-minded, direct, decisive, skeptical, and assertive. They tend to be good at what we called rule-based systems—engineering, computers, mechanics, math, and music. And people who are expressive of the estrogen/oxytocin system tend to be intuitive, imaginative, trusting, empathetic, and

contextual long-term thinkers. They are sensitive to people's feelings, too, and typically have good verbal and social skills.

Working with a statistician, I created a questionnaire to measure the degree to which a person expresses the traits in each of these four systems. Then we put it on Match.com and Chemistry.com and watched who was naturally drawn to whom.

### **How did you test its accuracy?**

I did two fMRI studies—one with young couples, the other with older couples. The subjects answered my questionnaire and then went into the scanner. It turned out that people who scored high on my scale measuring the traits linked with the dopamine system showed a lot of activity in dopamine pathways of their brains. Those who scored high on my serotonin scale had increased activity in an area linked with “social norm conformity.” In people with high testosterone scores, brain activity was highest in areas related to visual and mathematical perception and in areas built by fetal testosterone. Those who scored highest on my estrogen/oxytocin scale showed more activity in the mirror neurons linked with empathy and other brain regions built by fetal estrogen. That, in itself, is different from any other questionnaire. I was able to validate that mine is measuring what I say it's measuring.

### **So should we throw out those other tests?**

I don't have any problem with other good questionnaires that are based on psychology or linguistic studies or even intuition—but I don't think they're as accurate, because they're not drawn from hard science. Let's look at the Myers-Briggs, which is probably the best known. It's measuring four things: extroversion versus introversion, intuitive versus sensing, thinking versus feeling, and judging versus perceiving behaviors. Well, the feeling/thinking questions are really measuring the estrogen/oxytocin and testosterone system traits. The perceiving/judging scale focuses on dopamine- versus serotonin-linked traits. So in those areas, they've got it right. But the intuitive/sensing scale measures estrogen-linked traits versus serotonin-linked traits; that suggests that those traits oppose each other, which they don't in the brain.

As for extroversion/introversion, Isabel Myers, one of the creators of Myers-Briggs, once said that this scale measures where you get your energy—either from being with others or from being alone. But her questions also measure whether you're outgoing or reserved, which are totally different things. For example, I and many other people are outgoing introverts—we're comfortable chatterboxes in social settings—but we recharge when we're alone.

Another problem with this and most personality tests is that they aim to put those who take them in one category or another. But the brain doesn't work in cubbyholes. My test measures how strongly you express traits in each neural system. Some might be expressed more strongly than others. But the granularity is there.

### **Still, at the end of the day you, Match, and Deloitte are labeling people by dominant style. What's the benefit in that?**

Here's an example from my own life. I was recently working with a man who, like me, is very high on dopamine, but unlike me, very high on serotonin, which is linked with risk aversion. A particular issue cropped up, and although I was convinced that I was absolutely right in my appraisal of it, he was being

very cautious. If I didn't know anything about brain chemistry, I would have thought he was just being stubborn as hell. But instead, I saw that it was what I call a "serotonin gap." His hesitation had nothing to do with me or the project. It's just the way he is. This smoothed over what could have been a big misunderstanding and made us a better team. Now I want his serotonin around me because I see the value of it.

**Is the idea to not just identify and understand differing personalities at work but also to adjust your behavior to better suit your colleagues?**

Absolutely. You can tailor the way you present information, modify your language when responding to questions, and even adjust how you carry your body so that people with other styles are more receptive. Let me give you another example. A senior partner at Deloitte, who'd heard me talk about the styles, was about to give a presentation to an important client. His team had just finished up the slide deck, it was almost midnight, and everyone was on their way to bed. But he suddenly realized that the focus of the pitch—big on theory, few details—wasn't right for his audience of global bank executives, who he suspected were high-serotonin types. So they stayed up most of the night to redo it, and in the morning they closed a million-dollar deal. The point is: If you understand how to size up those around you, you can reach anyone—your clients, bosses, subordinates—far more effectively.

**Is it possible to change your style?**

We're flexible to a certain extent, but not entirely. For example, math is a skill linked to testosterone. I'm terrible at math, and I'm never going to be great at it. If I'd grown up with a physicist mother and an architect father—in a family culture that valued math—I'd be better at it, but I'd never be great. Could someone make me tough-minded? I doubt it. I might act tough when I have to, but it makes me uncomfortable. Some time ago, after I gave a speech at the Smithsonian, a female executive came up to me and said, "At work I'm decisive and authoritative, but I married a man who wanted me to be soft and sweet at home. And I could do it, but I found it exhausting." She told me that she ultimately divorced him. So yes, we can act out of character, but it's tiring. At NeuroColor, we have people take our questionnaire twice. The first time, they describe their thinking and behavior at work; the second time, how they are "outside work." It's a great measure of authenticity: Where are you most yourself?

**Do you see a future in which these tests inform decisions about hiring, promotions, and team building? High-serotonin people in accounting, high-dopamine in business development?**

I don't think you'd want to pigeonhole people that way. But I'd certainly add this information to the mix, because it can help you build more-effective teams. The four styles of thinking and behaving evolved in hunter-gatherer societies over many millennia for a reason. Imagine a group of people in Africa, hundreds of thousands of years ago, walking together to look for a new camp. Suddenly, they find some mushrooms. You can't have only high-dopamine types, because they'd all try the mushrooms and maybe be poisoned. You need some high-serotonin types to say, "We shouldn't do this; it's not in our tradition"; some high-testosterone types to say, "Let's experiment: Feed the mushrooms to the dog and see what happens"; and some high-estrogen types to say, "Let's discuss what we know about these mushrooms." We evolved to think differently so that we could put our heads together and come up with good solutions. Complementary styles of thinking make for a more effective team. Unfortunately, it seems that when organizations think about diversity today, they look at race or gender or cultural



background—but not diversity of mind. So you have your women and minorities represented, and that's great—but they may all share the same temperament, so the group isn't as diverse as you think.

**You've assessed people in many different countries. Have you found more similarities or differences?**

The president of Match asked me a few years ago if my questionnaire would work in other cultures, and I told him that if it didn't, I had failed, because I'm studying the human personality, not the American personality. That version has now been used successfully in 40 countries.

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But we have found some interesting regional differences. For example, more Chinese and Japanese people score high on the serotonin scale. When I mentioned this to a geneticist, Lee Silver from Princeton, he wasn't surprised. He told me that there's a gene for social-norm conformity that occurs more frequently in China and Japan than anywhere else. He also told me that there's a gene linked with dopamine that's most common in the Amazonian basin. You could hypothesize that the exploratory, high-dopamine types walked over the prehistoric land bridge from Africa, carrying those genes with them and passing them down, or that people with those traits were the only ones who could adapt to life in the Amazon and survive. You can begin to see how entire cultures—and organizations—take on certain personality styles.

**Testosterone and estrogen are sex-linked traits. Do you worry that your framework reinforces gender stereotyping?**

It's true that across cultures, many more men score high on the testosterone scale, and many more women score high on the estrogen scale. At the same time, we all are made up of an array of the traits. As I said, I'm high estrogen, and in a group those traits come out: I listen carefully, I try to get along. When I'm alone, at my desk, I'm all dopamine: I'm creative, focused on my work. I'm lower on testosterone: I'm not tough-minded or good at math. But I am logical—certainly in business if not always in love. So in evaluating yourself and others, you have to think about all four biological systems. When you understand where someone lands on each scale, you begin to see the full personality.