



## The Missing Dimension: Work Type and Role Alignment

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Is a team member more interested in process, projects, strategy, or data? Misaligning team members and their ‘work type’ can result in stress, burnout, and low engagement.

When it comes to knowing personality types, preferences, or work styles, there is no shortage of tools to help you “know thyself.” The DISC Profile, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinder, etc., are all effective tools in helping us figure out who we are and how we can work best with other people.

While these tools are useful for improving individual relationships and team interactions, they

don’t cover the “missing dimension,” which we call “work type,” an attribute of a role within an organization. Taking work type into account is helpful when defining roles. It’s also valuable when placing people into roles as part of a reorganization, when they are first hired, or when they are transferred from a different part of the company.

Most people have a dominant preference and/or aptitude for a

particular work type, and any role in an organization falls more or less into one of these work types. These work types are defined as Process, Project, Architect, and Data.

### PROCESS

Some people thrive when they’re operating a process. They like to focus on efficiency, small improvements, and keeping things running smoothly. They tend to work in an environment with repeating tasks or cycles. When the process breaks, they move quickly into “firefighting” mode to deal with the crisis and get the operation back on track. Some operations are more or less continuous (e.g., monitoring IT operations); some are very short cycle (e.g., reviewing an expense report); and some are longer cycle (e.g., processing a complex insurance claim or running a bi-weekly IT governance process). All of them, though, are cyclical and repetitive and require an operational mind-set. People who thrive in this kind of environment fall into the Process work type category. Most roles in an organization with “operations” in the title fall into this category.

### PROJECT

Others thrive when they’re solving a big problem and implementing something that requires planning, designing, building, and deploying. These people fall into the Project work type. Projects have a clear start and a clear end. When the project is finished, a tangible product, service, or process is the result. Often, when projects are finished, the ongoing maintenance of the resulting asset requires a process mind-set. There is a tendency to keep the people who created an

asset in the role of operating that asset once it's built because they have developed expertise in it. This is often a mistake. The person who is jazzed about building something usually needs to build something new and hand the new creation off to someone more aligned to the Process work type.

#### DATA

Some people thrive on collecting, organizing, and reporting data. These people fall into the Data work type. Data people have the ability to measure a process or a project and dive deep into the data to provide useful insights for operations and projects. They understand how data is created, defined, managed, and used across the enterprise. They generate the reporting, analytics, and insights necessary for decision-making across the enterprise.

#### ARCHITECT

Lastly, some specialists in the organization become deep experts in the structure of businesses, processes, organizations, or technologies. They understand how all of the pieces fit together, making them invaluable across the enterprise. These people fall into the Architect work type. They tend to play across an enterprise's operations, strategic initiatives, and data. They are the go-to people for their particular domains. These experts often play a key role in designing, diagnosing complex problems, and creating a vision for the future of their product or service.

#### USING THE TOOL

Most people can perform well in all four work types, but we have found that people tend to have a dominant category. They perform best when most of the work falls

into that work category. The primary domains of a business — such as sales, information technology, human resources, etc. — have each of these work types operating within that domain. For example, there are sales operations specialists (Process work type), sales people (Project work type), sales reporters (Data work type), and sales strategists (Architect work type).

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## A lack of role alignment to a dominant work type will also take a toll on the workforce.

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Of course, it is rare when a role is exclusively aligned with one work type. Keeping roles closely aligned to one work type does, however, help with role clarity and focus. Balancing equal parts project work and process work, for example, inevitably leaves one work type underserved, resulting in a loss of efficiency and quality. A lack of role alignment to a dominant work type will also take a toll on the workforce. Juggling multiple work types at the same time increases the number of processes, competing priorities, and stakeholders to manage. This inevitably results in stress, burnout, and low engagement, especially for more inexperienced or lower skilled workers. As people move up within the organization, a broad understanding across each of these work types is important, so leaders tend to have skills in all of these areas

and are more adept at balancing across these work types. Even with leaders, they usually approach their role with a clear bias toward a specific work type.

As you are designing your organization, identify the work type for a specific role, then match the skills, interests, and biases of your people as you place them in specific roles. Thinking through the missing dimension of a particular role's "work type" will help you ensure the right fit between the person and the role.



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