

The **Canadian** Institute of Marketing

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Just my two bits... visionary - synergists

By Ron (Doc) Halliday, MBA, FCInst.M., RPM, CMC

Strategic Imagineer & Business Improvement Advocate

dochalliday@shaw.ca



As anybody who has been through a team-building exercise would know, what tends to happen is that most attempts to work with teams work on the noticeable signs of team dysfunction. They don't work with the root causes. For example, trust is one of the things that we see teams working on quite a lot, but distrust doesn't just pop up from nowhere. It's got a root cause somewhere or other. It's the same thing with communication problems. A company doesn't have communication problems because people have suddenly become poor communicators. There's a reason why someone is sitting in the corner with his or her arms crossed or refuses to share. At the root of all team dysfunction, is one core dynamic. That dynamic involves the three natural styles in which we all operate.

It comes back to the choreography of how the visionary, operator and processor show up. If you look at any group of two or more people that get together to achieve common goals, what happens is that at the outset, there's typically what I call a visionary. This is someone who works at 30,000 feet. He or she is very strategic and works in the long-term. This person tends, however, not to be great with detail. Very early on in a group process, visionaries will be aware of their own shortcomings, and they will reach out and try to find other people that I call operators.

These are people that are intuitively and innately more directed toward getting things done and finishing things off. Visionaries and operators work really well together. In the early stages of most activities, you get this symbiotic relationship.

What happens is that as the enterprise grows and becomes more complex we need the third style [the processor] to come in and bring systems and processes to master that complexity. The difficulty is that once you introduce the processor style, the triangle becomes unstable.

Essentially what's happening is that the visionary and the operator who are used to working really fast and paying relatively little attention to systems and processes, have to learn to adapt



to the need to have systems and processes in the long term. When you take any artificially constructed team, which is the kind of team we put together every day in business, what we do is that we seed the team almost randomly with visionaries, operators and processors, so we build in an innate gridlock or, at best, compromise on the team to move forward until they learn how to interact.

We've only got to look around at some of our political institutions at the moment to see that compromise really isn't the answer. We've got to a point in business where we've come to accept compromise as almost a cause for celebration.

A compromised solution in business is almost always a sub-optimal one. You think about something like product design. You can reach a compromise on product design, or you can be Apple. You can go beyond compromise and produce outstanding, excellent, world-beating work. You've got to push through gridlock and compromise to be able to do that. What I tell people is that if you're comfortable with mediocre, that's OK. You won't have much time in the marketplace, but you can enjoy it while you're there. If you want to push beyond that, you've really got to learn not just how to get the visionary, processor and operator to put up with each other, but how to really get the best out of each other and produce something that's not compromised but that is world-class.

There are born synergists, but they are very, very rare. This is typically the kind of person who really flourishes only in team environments and is a bit of a wallflower when he or she is not in a team environment. If natural synergists were common, most teams would function perfectly well, but we know that's not the case.

The majority of people on the team were learning how to be a synergist over time. In my experience, it takes about two to four years for team members to organically learn to be synergists.

What happens is that if you try to replace your own style, if you try to subdue the natural style to which you tend, that's what really produces that compromise, because you hold back and you refrain from being all of who you are. A synergist is someone who has learned to transcend, when necessary, the constraints of his or her style.

For example, visionaries are people who can't really abide with being forced to sit down and work through granular details. They'll find a way to absent themselves when the brainstorming part of the session is over. A visionary who has learned how to be a synergist can still be every bit as much a visionary at times when it's necessary, but they also learn to transcend that and go beyond the constrictions of being a visionary. They sit down and work with the other members of their team. It's a version of advanced common sense, really.

Contact:

dochalliday@shaw.ca

<http://ca.linkedin.com/in/dochalliday>

<http://www.professionalmarketer.ca/Home.aspx>

<http://business-improvement-advocate.blogspot.com>

250.681.0454