



Management Assistance Program

MANAGING PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES:

Getting the Best Results

GOALS:

To help managers and organizations:

- Understand the benefits and techniques involved in effectively managing the personalities of their employees
- Gain appreciation for the diverse personalities of their staff
- Enable all employees to excel and prosper in a supportive work environment
- Develop support systems and opportunities that encourage employees with diverse skills and personalities in order to derive the greatest benefit to the organization.

OVERVIEW:

Many managers assume that their employees think, reason, perceive alike and, therefore, will act alike. They are often surprised to discover their employees have unique personalities which affect their ability to hear, relate to and understand each other or their manager. As a manager then, how do you distinguish between your employees and determine which ones are best suited for the various tasks? What tools do you use to make those determinations? More importantly, how do you know whether you are getting maximum productivity regarding the tasks you assign? Knowing and responding to the strengths of the personalities of your staff members can greatly enhance both the quality and quantity of the work performed. The goal is not to psychoanalyze, but rather to gather enough information to learn what is most effective for the people who work for and with you.

Effectively managing these workplace personality variables can greatly decrease time spent on ongoing supervisory interventions, increase efficiency of the tasks performed, and create growth opportunities for your workforce, which in turn can motivate your employees to perform at their peak levels.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Define the Specific Benefits of Managing Personality Differences

- *Gaining multiple perspectives on plans, strategies, and issues.*
Each workforce contains multiple ways of looking at things, and those perspectives come largely from the personalities of the individuals. Understanding these personalities gives managers the option of seeking those with particular skills in specific areas and eliciting input that can be used as data for making management decisions.
- *Maximization of employee creativity*
When staff members know that they are understood by their supervisors a feedback loop is formed in which both sides develop innate abilities to anticipate needs and problem solve. Such an atmosphere fosters creativity.
- *Recognition and inclusion of all staff*
 - Each person feels like an important member of the work team
 - Each member needs to feel empowered
 - Members perform better when they realize they are integral to the whole of the organization
- *Fostering appropriate management/employee relationships*
When managers are familiar with employee personalities, they acquire an understanding of the best approaches to use for each staff member when problems arise. Some are best approached directly and concisely, while others may respond better to a more tactful style. Knowing how to engage members can facilitate healthy exchanges that center around resolution of the job performance issue(s), as opposed to (the perception of) management's approach. This knowledge can keep employee relations professional, rather than contentious.

2. Delineate the Major Components Involved in Managing Personal Differences

- *Identifying personalities and recognizing them as resources*
It would be unfair and next to impossible to ask managers to take the role of psychologists with their employees. In fact even psychologists who are managers should not act as therapists with employees, regardless of their clinical skills, degree of affection for their workers, or requests by staff member with clinical situations. Please keep the lines between yourself and your staff clean and clear at all times. That does not eliminate care, concern, empathy, understanding, or

friendliness with employees, as these are all important to healthy relationships, but the basis for interaction must be job performance.

Learning personalities is as simple as talking to employees. Ask them what works and does not work for them. Ask them about personal preferences and proficiencies regarding job tasks (to the extent that work flow is not compromised). It is important that where there are discrepancies between what staff members have said about themselves and their performance results, these differences must be pointed out and corrected. Such honesty builds relationships and trust. Ignoring these discrepancies or basing the interactions on friendships engenders disrespect toward management and fosters distrust.

Conversations with employees yield helpful information about who they are. Talk to them about their strengths and weaknesses, observe how they react to situations and challenges, and then manage them accordingly. If the information is accurate and they do well, then an area of strength has been identified. When they struggle with issues, perhaps some coaching from you will assist. When the employee completely flounders and fails then maybe that particular task (where possible) should go to others.

Observation is a powerful tool in learning and understanding personalities. Look at how employees react, interact, rise to the occasion, shrink away, under/over perform. Patterns of these behaviors are workplace personality indicators. Take good note of them and use them to the advantage of all – the employee, yourself, the unit, and the company.

- *Generating Universal Buy-In From Staff For Managing Personality Differences*

It is important that managers are honest about their desire to use the best of what each employee has to offer and to put them in positions where they have the greatest opportunity for success. This sets the tone for the interactions and informs workers that:

1. The manager has a strong sense of how to manage
2. The organization respects individual differences
3. There is likelihood that exemplary performance will be recognized

- *Utilizing The Power Dynamics Of Managing Personality Differences*
Workplace personality differences can be difficult or can engender creativity and ingenuity within the organization. When ignored or

Management Resources

aggressively extinguished, they can result in workplace conflict. When utilized effectively they can result in employee retention and motivation. It's all about the manager's dedication and commitment to utilize all of the employee resources. The "smart" supervisor who manages personality differences generally has a staff that:

- has full understanding of what they are doing as a unit and as a company
- will extend themselves beyond the "basic" work task
- will be creative and highly motivated
- has a high problem-solving desire and aptitude
- is dependable and predictable in performance

In other words, this style of management generates an empowered workforce that produces potentially powerful results.

SUMMARY: Tips for Managing Personality Differences

- Talk openly to employees about the organizational needs and realities.
- Talk openly to employees about their style and how it enhances or complicates the current workplace dynamics.
- Talk openly with employees about their preferences and proficiencies.
- Actively listen to your employees and engage them in dialogue regarding their views, concerns, or ideas.
- Consciously observe employee behaviors in a variety of situations for the purpose of gathering information about their capabilities or weaknesses.
- Consider the information you have collected about your employees as important management data to help you to interact, predict, and manage future dynamics.
- Use the “data” to assist your employees and assign them tasks they can achieve.
- Continually evaluate employee positions and assignments and provide ongoing coaching, confrontation, re-assignment, training, and encouragement as needed.
- Provide and elicit ongoing feedback to keep the flow of information active and the data current about each employee and their personality differences.
- Communicate concerns early and clearly to facilitate productivity and growth.