

Self Awareness & 5 Elements



The critic and philosopher Walter Pater once said that, “‘To see the object as in itself it really is,’ has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever, and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly” (*The Renaissance*). Whilst here Pater is talking about the difficulty of critiquing something so subjective as art, to frame this in another context: the first step on any journey of self-improvement is “to know one's own impression as it really is”, or in other words, *self-awareness*. Without self-awareness, we cannot address the imbalances in ourselves, or build on our strengths, because we won't be able to correctly identify what either of those are!

However, self-awareness is perhaps not as easy as one might think. We tend to have a blind-spot when it comes to our own biases, habits, and behavioural tics. We might perceive ourselves as “honest”, for example, but one person's honesty is another's rudeness. In addition to false self-perceptions, there are also other deeper, more hidden aspects of our Self that we simply aren't aware of at all.

This is why we need external, unbiased measures and metrics in order to obtain this critical self-awareness or self-insight. The 5 Elements communication diagnostic, a self-perception inventory, is one such tool that can help you to identify not only your preferred communication styles, but also explore where your “style” or “way of doing things” might either grate against certain other styles, or generate blind-spots.

There are 5 styles: Visioning, Planning, Facilitating, Doing, and Checking. Each one represents not only a mode of communication but a step in the “lifecycle” of a project.

1. We start with Checking and the question “What did we do last time and what were the results?”;
2. we then move on to a Vision of what we want to achieve;
3. we create a Plan to achieve that vision;
4. we then need to identify the what resources we require and are available (Facilitating);
5. with resources in place, we need to act! (Doing);
6. lastly, we come back around full-circle to Checking: How did we do? Can we improve?

Notice that Checking appears twice in the lifecycle!

Though there are some extremely rare instances where people have an equal balance between four or even all five styles, most people will favour one or two of the above styles or steps in the lifecycle. Thus, the other styles or steps are more likely to fall outside of our field of vision. This makes 5 Elements particularly useful for assessing the effectiveness of a team. If a team covers all of the five

bases above, then it is likely they will be able to see a project through to completion. But if not, one must find a way to address the shortfall, whether that is by adding new members to the team, outsourcing, or using the power of self-awareness so that one or more people in the team consciously make an effort to address the “blind-spot” or overlooked lifecycle step.

Let’s return to individual, personal development for now. Whilst the best way to find out what your communication style preferences are is by completing a 5 Elements test on our site, looking at the above 5 styles, which ones do you think you lean towards? Here is some more information about each one to help guide you:

Visioning is concerned with the top-level “vision” of “Where do we want to be?”. It is ideas-orientated and the preferred method of communication is via speech, which tends to be fast and to the point. The Visioning-style is imaginative – they are visualising the future before it happens.

Planning is concerned with the question “How do we get there?” and creating a practical step-by-step procedure for getting to where we want to be. Planning is also future-orientated, (you need a plan before you can leap into action!) but the preferred method of communication is speech, slower than V and with an emphasis on facts. They like structure.

Facilitating is about resourcing, and the question “What do we need to get there?”. The Facilitating-style is present-orientated, upbeat and optimistic, and focused on relationships – facilitating others, facilitating the vision. The Facilitator is socially aware and all about dialogue or conversations with others.

Doing is concerned with the question “What actions happen?”. It is present-orientated and focused on the task at hand, as well as the details of the operation in general. Their preferred mode of communication is two-fold: listening and written, which helps create structure. Doing-style communicators often feel that management have no idea about the real “ins and outs” of how things work.

Checking is about “What have we achieved?” and “What could we do better next time?”. It is past-orientated, and the Checking-style tends to be about facts and analysis; their preferred mode of communication is through writing, which is definitive, and asking questions, which helps in their search for more information.

Okay, now that you might have an idea of what your preferred communication style is, consider what is your *least preferred* communication style?

As a final step, if you set your *most preferred* and your *least preferred* side by side, what does this reveal?

For example, if your *most preferred* is Visioning, and your *least preferred* is Checking, then does this suggest you have a tendency to only look at the big picture and never the small print and the important minutiae? Do you find that when people start going into detailed explanations you doze off? On the other hand, if your *most preferred* style is Doing and your *least preferred* is Planning, does this suggest you sometimes have trouble thinking ahead?

No style is “bad” or “good”. All styles have strengths and weaknesses that, with self-awareness, we can harness to improve our relationships with people at work and beyond.

Begin your journey towards seeing the object as it really is, and take the 5 Elements test!