



RELATIONSHIP INTELLIGENCE

How to Build and Rebuild Relationships at Work



Annie, Daniel, Jose, and Sara had just been assigned to a high-profile project.

The stakes were high. The timeline was aggressive. Leadership had handpicked each of them because they were talented, experienced, and successful. What could go wrong?

When asked what would make the team successful, their answers sounded reasonable enough. Daniel said success would come from slowing down, asking the right questions, and thinking things through. Annie disagreed. Success, she argued, comes from making decisions and taking action. Sara wanted to hear the perspective of every team member. Jose believed success depended on building a system and sticking to it.

Four smart people. Four sincere perspectives. Four completely different ideas about how the team should operate. But if you've ever worked on a team, you probably know what happened next—misunderstanding, bickering, and eventually full-blown conflict on how the project should get done.

The hardest part of working with people is other people. Not because people are always difficult. Not because people are always irrational. But often because each of us care deeply about different things.

One might see a person to be helped. Another sees a system to be optimised. Another sees a problem to be solved. And when we don't understand what matters to one another, differences quickly become frustrations, frustrations become negative stories, and negative stories damage relationships.

The good news is that relationship problems rarely begin with bad people; they happen when good people misunderstand one another. That's where relationship intelligence comes in.

Relationship intelligence is the ability to notice what's happening in interactions so you can build more effective relationships. We often think poor results are an execution problem—a strategy problem, a talent problem, or a process problem. But performance runs in relationships. If results aren't improving, it's often not just an execution problem; it's a relationship problem.

Relationship intelligence helps us see the motives, assumptions, and interactions that either strengthen or weaken our ability to work together.

In this ebook, you'll learn three practical skills to develop a greater ability to understand yourself and others, turn differences into collaboration, and use relationship intelligence insights to be happier, healthier, and more productive at work.

“One of the most robust predictors of job satisfaction, engagement and well-being at work is having strong ties with people.”

ADAM GRANT

Author & Organisational Psychologist



SKILL #1:

Learn What Makes People Tick

Think about the last person at work who frustrated you.

Maybe they kept asking questions when you were ready to move forward. Maybe they pushed for a quick decision when you felt there were still more to discuss. Or perhaps they seemed more concerned about maintaining harmony than solving the problem.

Whatever the situation, chances are you had a story about why they were behaving that way:

- *“They don’t know what they’re doing.”*
- *“They’re naïve.”*
- *“They never think before they act.”*

Most of us are quick to create explanations like these for other people’s behaviour. The problem is that those explanations are often based on *what we can see* rather than what’s actually *driving behaviour*. It doesn’t mean one of us is right and the other is wrong, it only means **we’re focused on different things**.

Dr. Elias Porter, the father of relationship intelligence and the Strength Deployment Inventory® (SDI®) assessment, spent decades studying human behaviour and relationships.



He said, “The more aware we are of what makes us tick, the more aware we are of what makes others tick, the more aware we are of the impact we make on each other’s feelings, the more empowered we become to control the outcomes of our relationships with others.”

Relationship intelligence begins when we stop asking, ‘What’s wrong with this person?’ and start asking, ‘What matters most to this person?’ When we make that shift, we become more curious and less judgmental. We spend less time trying to fix people and more time trying to understand them and work with them productively.

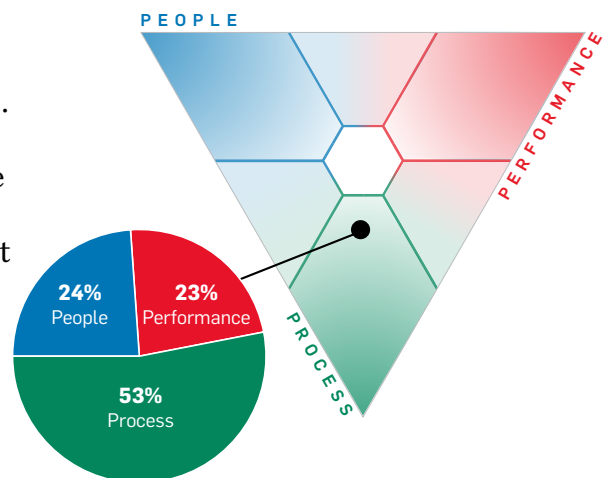
Dr. Porter’s work led to an important insight: behind every behaviour there is a motive. People are usually trying to accomplish something they believe is worthwhile, even when their behaviour isn’t landing well with others.

We all have different motives that drive why we act the way we act. But no matter what those motives are, at the core we are all seeking the same thing: to feel self-worth, to feel valued, to feel worthwhile. Through intensive research and interviews, Dr. Porter and his colleagues discerned three core motives:

Wanting to help others	Wanting to achieve results	Wanting to establish order
PEOPLE	PERFORMANCE	PROCESS

By completing the SDI assessment, each of us can discover our unique blend of these three motives that combine to form our Motivational Value System (MVS). For example, a person with the MVS in the graphic to the right is a fairly strong Green MVS, meaning they are primarily motivated by meaningful order and thinking things through. This doesn’t mean they don’t care about people or performance; it means that process is the primary motivator that drives them.

When we understand the primary motive about ourselves and others, we stop treating differences as evidence that someone is wrong and begin seeing their actions as information about what matters most to them. We choose a generous view of others.



The next time you find yourself frustrated with a coworker, pause before judging their behaviour. Ask yourself:

- What is important to this person right now?
- What motive is driving them?
- What values are they protecting?

SKILL #2:

Mind Your Wake

Nora was known for being decisive. Her colleagues described her as smart, productive, and quick-to-act. But when she received 360 feedback, she was surprised to learn that some teammates experienced those same strengths very differently—they described her as abrupt, dismissive, and rash. Nora learned an important lesson: our intentions don't determine our impact. Other people do.

Most of us know our intentions. We know why we're pushing for a decision, asking another question, offering advice, or challenging an idea. But do your colleagues know your intentions? What we don't always realise is that others don't see what we see—and therefore sometimes resent the actions we're taking.

Every strength can be overdone. Think of strengths like music. At the right volume, music creates energy and connection. Turn the volume up too high and the exact same song becomes distracting or irritating. Strengths work the same way.



Strengths can be overdone. For example:

Loyal	→	BLIND
Self-Confident	→	ARROGANT
Methodical	→	RIGID
Sociable	→	INTRUSIVE



Imagine a teammate who constantly asks questions. If your motives are primarily about moving quickly and achieving results, you might view those questions as unnecessary obstacles. Yes, moving quickly can often be a strength. But in this instance, your teammate may perceive that urgency and decisiveness as recklessness or carelessness.

So, when relationships become strained, it's helpful to ask not only why others may be doing what they're doing, but what impact our actions have on others, too.

We may have the best of intentions, but if our behaviours are perceived to be unhelpful and overdone, that intent becomes less relevant.

The most important way to reduce defensiveness in others is often to eliminate offensiveness in ourselves.

SKILL #3:

Find Value in Conflict



In the interpersonal relationship sense of the word, conflict is defined as “feeling threatened regarding something you care about (e.g. self, goals, values, etc.)”

Whether a passing annoyance or a deep offence, conflict has an effect on our relationships. And if this conflict goes unresolved, we begin to narrow our focus to protect ourselves and our interests:

STAGE 1: FULL FOCUS

You see yourself, others, and the problem clearly.

STAGE 2: THE “FORGET YOU” PHASE

Your focus shrinks to yourself and the problem and you lose sight of others’ perspectives and begin to defend your own.

STAGE 3: DEFENSIVE MODE

Emotions take over. You see only yourself and the original issue becomes clouded by blame, frustration, or fear.

The goal is to resolve conflict in Stage 1 before focus narrows. You can identify conflict when you recognise others’ motives beginning to change. You may notice someone who is usually very people-driven and supportive begin to assert themselves and quickly move to resolution. Or someone who is very logical and analytical becoming very accommodating.

STAGE 1



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS

STAGE 2



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS

STAGE 3



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS

Different MVS types handle this focus in different ways:

AREAS OF FOCUS	BLUE (Accommodate) <i>Moving Toward</i>	RED (Assert) <i>Moving Against</i>	GREEN (Analyse) <i>Moving Away From</i>
STAGE 1: WANTING TO . . .			
Self, Problem, Other	Keep the peace and maintain harmony	Rise to the challenge and take action	Be prudently cautious and collect information
STAGE 2: RELUCTANTLY WILLING TO . . .			
Self, Problem, Other	Give in with conditions	Move quickly and forcefully	Independently reconsider
STAGE 3: FEELING COMPELLED TO . . .			
Self, Problem, Other	Give up or surrender	Take control or confront	Isolate oneself or retreat

Through the insights that come from completing the SDI assessment, you can know yours and others' tendencies in conflict and respond in productive ways. When you can see someone is beginning to feel threatened, that's an opportunity to gain greater insight into them and what they value. What looks like avoidance, defensiveness, resistance, or overreaction may actually be someone's attempt to protect what matters most to them.

Our relationship intelligence is strong when we can notice someone in conflict, understand the value they have that's being threatened, and attend to it before it becomes a bigger problem.



Relationship Intelligence Checklist

Use these questions when someone's behaviour irritates you, disappoints you, slows you down, or makes you defensive. That reaction is a clue: you may be seeing their behaviour through your own MVS instead of theirs. Relationship intelligence helps you pause long enough to ask:

01

What am I assuming about this person's intent? Am I judging their motive, or only noticing the impact of their behaviour?

02

What might be important to them right now? Are they trying to help people, achieve results, establish order, or preserve flexibility?

03

What strength might they be trying to use? Could what I'm experiencing as annoying, rigid, pushy, slow, or emotional actually be their attempt to contribute?

04

How is their MVS different from mine? Am I frustrated because they don't care, or because they care about something different than I do?

05

What value might feel threatened for them? If they're defensive, resistant, or intense, what are they trying to protect—people, performance, process, fairness, autonomy, respect, quality?

06

How might my behaviour be landing with them? Even if my intent is good, could my strength be showing up as overdone?

07

What would a generous view sound like? Instead of "They're being difficult," could I say, "They may be trying to protect quality," "They may be trying to move us forward," or "They may be trying to make sure people are heard"?

08

What small adjustment would honor both of us? How can I stay true to what matters to me while also making room for what matters to them?



Strong relationships are built one interaction at a time.

Every conversation, every disagreement, every misunderstanding presents a choice. We can make assumptions about others, or we can become curious. We can focus exclusively on behaviour, or we can try to understand the motives behind it. We can blame differences for our frustrations, or we can learn how to leverage those differences more effectively.

Relationship intelligence is the ability to look beneath behaviour and understand what is driving it.

When we become curious about what matters most to ourselves and others, judgment gives way to understanding. Understanding creates options. And those options help us build stronger relationships, healthier teams, and better results.





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