

Wakefield Ministry Scheme



COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Help for Clergy and Lay
Leaders

4. Patterns of Behaviour

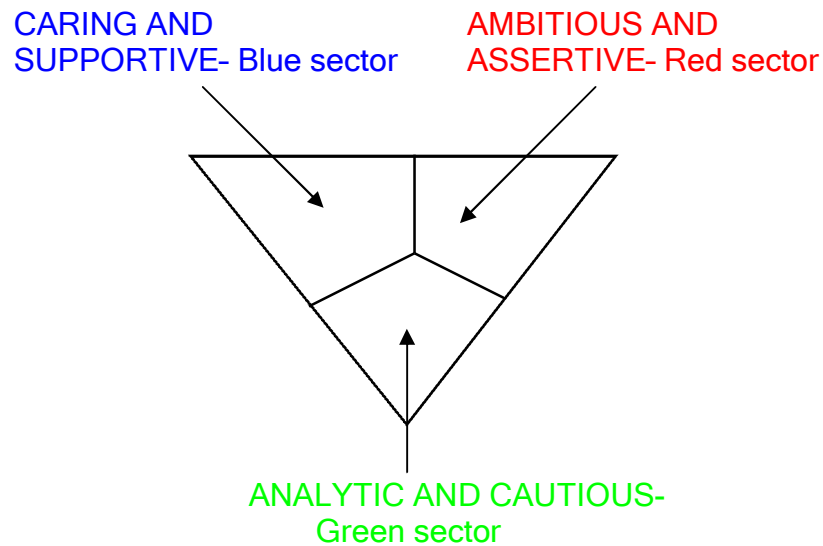
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Collaboration and Behaviour

The more closely together people work, the more their differing patterns of behaviour can come up against each other and cause friction. Leadership for collaborative ministry involves at least a basic awareness of the most common patterns and the ability to handle them in a group situation so that the outcome is constructive. Some churches mistrust 'small groups' because they are perceived as damaging. This is partly because the group dynamics are unlikely to be positive where time and effort have not been invested in building the group. This paper sets out just one simple model (among many that are available) for identifying and understanding the different ways in which people behave with one another.

The Behavioural Triangle



Analytic and cautious behaviour may be:

Positive features

Practical
Independent
Fair
Thorough
Reserved
Methodical
Principled

Negative features

Unimaginative
Self-oriented
Impersonal
Nit-picking
Aloof
Slow
Inflexible

A personal checklist

Use this list to 'audit' your own personality and behaviour and monitor yourself in the group situation. If you can understand yourself better, you will understand others as well, and be better able to manage the process of the group for good rather than ill.

Ambitious and assertive behaviour may be:

Positive features (the good side)

Confident
Dynamic
Risk-taking
Spontaneous
Directing
Entrepreneurial
Resourceful

Negative features (the down side)

Arrogant
Pushy
Reckless
Impulsive
Dictatorial
Unco-operative
Calculating

Caring and supportive behaviour may be:

Positive features

Sensitive
Devoted
Idealistic
Friendly
Tolerant
Patient
Understanding

Negative features

Hyper-sensitive
Servile
Deluded
Naïve
Uncritical
Passive
Submissive

This model divides human behaviour into three basic categories. Each of us is capable of acting according to all of these patterns, but it is likely that one of them will be dominant. You will probably not find it difficult to decide which is your dominant one. Our behaviour is frequently on 'automatic pilot' unless or until someone makes it explicit or we do some exploration and training which equips us to recognise it. For a group or team to function well over time, it becomes important for the members to acknowledge their behaviour patterns so that people can learn how to adapt to one another and promote complementarity and empathy, rather than falling into misunderstanding and frustration with one another.

Ambitious and assertive behaviour is about drive, energy, task focus, achievement and adrenalin. People for whom this is dominant may have more bright ideas than there are hours in the day to achieve them. They are often driven by a need to make an impact. A leader who recognises this pattern in someone will aim to support its fulfilment by organising team tasks in such a way that the individual can rise to the occasion, meet the challenge and 'shine' in the course of achieving team priorities, rather than becoming a 'maverick'. When such a person is motivated to complete a task, nothing can stop them: so better on side than acting as a loose cannon!

Caring and supportive behaviour is about empathy, intimacy, person-focus and mutual giving and receiving. People for whom this is dominant are liable to be warm and friendly, sometimes bound up with a deep desire to be liked and to please others. They gain deep personal fulfilment from helping others, being of service; they have a 'pastoral heart'. The leader needs to give strong affirmation to these gifts while gently encouraging such

people to gain in independence and not to feel rejected when others who are less affective than they are do not seek or accept their help.

Analytic and cautious behaviour is about reflection, judgement, application, task-focus for its own sake rather than for achievement's sake. People for whom this is dominant often enjoy working alone, valuing a sense of independence. The socialising aspect of team-building may not appeal to them. They do not like being bulldozed into quick decisions or risky action. Leaders need to value those who manifest this behaviour by giving them time and space to find their role, and listening to their contribution, before attempting to draw them out into more outgoing or expressive ways of behaving.

Going back to the triangle, it is clear that there are some intermediate positions. Some people tend to be cautious and analytical, but in their quiet way supportive and caring. Some analytical people are nonetheless quite competitive and forceful about what they most believe in. Some people are very up-front, dynamic and assertive but also basically unselfish and caring at heart.

Observing these behaviours in action in a group or team becomes easier with time. The person in assertive / ambitious mode will regularly produce new ideas and push to get things done, sometimes in a combative or impatient manner. The person in analytical / cautious mode will try to put the brakes on, raise all sorts of questions and want more time to think about it. The caring / supportive person will try to pour oil on the troubled waters, keep their own view quiet and instead address a question to the other parties about what would help them to feel happier about the issue!

However, there is a more subtle use of the triangle, which is to find out what happens when people are under a lot of pressure. Someone who is normally in the 'blue' sector (caring and supportive) may go over into the 'red' (assertive and ambitious) if their deep desire for harmony and peace seems thwarted- they become deeply troubled and accuse the group of 'behaving in an un-Christian way', reading the riot act and practically storming out. Or perhaps someone who is usually in the 'green' sector (cautious and analytic) is prompted under pressure to reveal their vulnerable, needy side and move into the 'blue'. Such shifts as these can actually serve to build acceptance and charity within the group, because people are revealed to one another as more than just stereotypes who always behave 'true to form'.