



Take on Board Podcast – Episode 346

# Transcript – My tips to increase board effectiveness

Welcome to the Take on Board podcast. Being on a board can be an incredibly valuable, interesting, and exciting experience, yet it can also be lonely, challenging, and let's face it pretty hard. So here at Take on board, I'll bring you weekly tips, tricks and advice to help you navigate your way onto a board, onto your next board, and to build your governance wisdom now on with the show.

Hi folks. This week on the Take on Board podcast, you are hearing from me and I will be telling you about a tool that boards can use to increase their effectiveness. Before we start that conversation today, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we record. For me. I am on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and I pay my respects to elders past and present.

I acknowledge their continuing connection to land. Waters culture and country. I support voice treaty and truth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. And I encourage others in the Take on Board community to do the same. All right folks, let's dive on into this tool. So it's one that I don't think is commonly used with boards, and I think it could be, it's called the, IT'S from the Human Synergistics Suite.

People may have seen some of their tools either done the Lifestyles inventory for. Self, either a self-assessment or a 360. They may have done the organizational cultural inventory to measure the culture of an organization and use that potentially to measure over time. Or the one I'll be talking about today is called the Group Styles Inventory.

Now. For those on video, let me just show you what the Circumplex looks like. This is what Human Synergistics calls their circumplex and they use it for all of their tools. I'll make sure that there is a link to this in the show notes as well, and I'll talk you through it for those that are listening. So the Human Synergistics Circumplex has 12 Well.

Three different clusters. So it's got these blue ones at the top, green and red, the blue styles, and there's, sorry, and there's four in each of those clusters. Four blue, four green, and four red. The blue cluster is our constructive zone. The green cluster, the four behaviours in green, that's defensive and the red as you might expect from red.

I love red. I hope it doesn't say this about me, uh, but the red styles are aggressive. So let me take you through each of them and just give you a bit of an indication how that might show up in a group. because the way this tool is used is you will either. Have a board

meeting and then assess, or you might do a simulation and then assess, see where the group is at, come up with some actions, and then remeasure maybe six months later.

So each of the clusters and the behaviours. So as I said, the blue zone, that's what you're wanting to maximize. That's the constructive zone and the four behaviours that we have there. Firstly, achievement. Which is all about getting things done and getting things done in a really constructive way. Secondly, self-actualizing and for groups, this shows up as being optimistic and interested and innovative, and occasionally a little disorganized, which is interesting in and of itself.

Thirdly. Uh, humanistic, encouraging, and the way this shows up in groups is that they'll be positive and sensitive and supportive. So really building that group together in a humanistic, encouraging way. And the fourth style for the constructive zone is affiliative being friendly, cooperative, and quite relaxed.

So they're the constructive styles. In the green zone, the passive styles, the first one is around approval. Now this is often superficial agreement, you know, groupthink, almost people going along with each other, just agreeing for the sake of it. The second one is around conventional. So these sorts of groups will be quite constrained and predictable and often go back to the rules, you know, what does the Constitution say about that?

Not that I'm saying checking the Constitution is not a good idea. It's an excellent idea. Uh. You want to be able to think broadly within those constraints, or if you're being too constrained by the constitution or whatever it may be, maybe you want to change it rather than just to be constrained. The third one is dependent, so a dependent group.

Oh look, basically there's too many followers, not enough leaders, maybe no leaders, so everyone's feeling a bit aimless and looking for somebody else to depend on and come up with the answer. And then the fourth green style is avoidant. So in this one, there might be a group that's not suggesting ideas, not suggesting solutions, maybe stepping back and not wanting to be involved.

So they're the green styles. And then finally the red cluster. That is the aggressive styles that, again, there's four oppositional, I'm sure you've seen this either in team meetings or in group meetings. Everyone's, or maybe not everyone, maybe just someone's always looking for the flaws and the mistakes and you know, just everything that's wrong with what's coming up.

The second one is. Power, and again, you may have seen this both in groups and individuals, those that are a little, shall we say, over assertive and maybe overconfident. The third one is competitive. This really comes across in a group. It's not about collaboration, a competitive, it's about the individual and the individuals in that group really want to kind of prosecute their own answer rather than potentially as a group coming to the best answer collectively.

And the fourth one in this style is perfectionism. Uh, perfectionistic group will avoid all mistakes, often have a very low risk appetite in absolutely everything, which you would've

heard me say in previous podcasts. No risk appetite is a risk within itself and often are looking for more details, more information.

They're never completely satisfied with things. So that's how it shows up potentially in groups, that constructive style or that passive style or that aggressive style. So Human Synergistics who own this tool have done some research. They've done plenty of research actually, and they've come up with. A profile, I guess, of more effective groups versus less effective groups.

Again, for those watching on video, let me show you, so effective groups look like this and allow me to describe essentially more blue, more of the constructive styles. That's probably not a huge surprise and lower on the defensive and the aggressive styles, but you will have seen here that there is still some of the aggressive defensive styles and.

For almost any organization, any individual, any group, you are going to find some of that happening, but you are aiming for the constructive styles to be the highest. You'll see on the research that they've done for the profile. Let me just show it. For those that are less effective, the red and the green are significantly higher than the constructive styles.

So what that gives you. If you do it with your board is you will do it as a measure. You will maybe, as I say, have a board meeting. You might do a simulation exercise. I'll talk you through how I use this with one board soon, and then it will give you a profile for your group or your board about where you're at in terms of the green, blue, and red, and then either online or in a booklet.

I'm going to show you the booklet because I've got it here. And it's easier to show than online when you're doing a podcast. Um, this booklet kind of takes you through each of the clusters and the individual styles. It will describe what they are, describe what they look like in action in a group, and importantly then give you suggestions for action.

What might be the things you want to do to increase the blue or decrease the green or the red, and then takes you through setting an action plan? So, as I said, I used this recently with a group. Uh, I'm not going to say who they were or give you their profile, but for that group what we did was we used one of the standard simulations and you could either do that or you could.

Have a simulated board meeting or you could have an actual board meeting. We landed on doing a simulation for this one because we wanted it to be not like, um, I guess not like their normal conversations, but enough like it that they could assess. Uh, and what they might do in the future is reassess after a board meeting, now that they know how the tool works.

So for this group, what they found was. They're a little lower in the blue zone and that what they would've liked, and they're a little higher in perfectionistic and power and avoidant than they would've liked. So what we then did as a group, we broke into some smaller groups. We gave them some to work on.

At my encouragement, they kind of immediately wanted to go to the ones that they wanted to do less of. Oh, less power, less competitive, less avoidant. And I really encouraged each

group. To look at the blue as well, what they could do to increase being more constructive and reducing so. Again, without going into too much detail for this group, they focused on increasing their self-actualizing, which again, just to remind you, that's about being optimistic, interested, and innovative, and they wanted to increase being affiliative, so cooperative and relaxed, and they wanted to reduce being avoidant, which well avoidant.

Not leaning into decision making, basically not being a passenger. So, um, you know, suggesting ideas and solutions and so on. And they wanted to reduce power a little bit of over assertiveness, over confidence, which I will say sometimes comes across in the simulations because you've got a short amount of time that you need to do things and you're kind of making it up.

Uh, so the actions, or broadly the actions that this group came up with in terms of, um. Self-actualizing that they would consciously engage all of the board in decision making. In terms of affiliative. They would recognize everyone's contributions. Uh, in terms of reducing avoidance, really building that team and putting in place some mechanisms for that, like team dinners and so on.

And they would review the agenda, making sure it was strategic, making sure, focusing on purpose and making sure the board was checking in that it was at the right level in terms of reducing power. They would look at exploring or bringing into play a mechanism for ensuring, uh, consensus. And checking in with everybody before moving on.

Now, I just need to point out one thing that I particularly loved about the conversation with this group. You would think from some of those actions, you might just go, great board chair off you go, review the agenda, make sure everyone's involved, you know, make sure you review the decision making process and board secretary, can you make sure everybody, um, you know, engages and does these team things.

What I really loved about this board conversation was actually in the end, I don't think the secretary or the chair had any of the actions. Obviously they would be involved in them. But not leadership of them, which is very non avoidant, I must say, which is interesting. So this was shared between the whole board.

It's a group responsibility. It is not just the chair's responsibility, it's definitely not the CEO's responsibility, and it's not just the secretary's responsibility folks. I am laughing for those of you online, uh, it might be my cat's responsibility who has just joined me for the recording, you'll just see his tail wander on by.

Hello, Mr. Mungo. So, yeah, I loved how that board really took it on as a group, not as an individual, which is exactly as boards should be. So I would love to hear folks, if you've used this tool, maybe your organization already uses the organizational cultural inventory. Have you used it as an individual?

Have you used it as a group? Have you, if your organization uses the organizational cultural inventory, have you got the breakout for the board and how the board's culture is

captured? So I would love to hear about it if you've used this tool, if you would like. To use this tool, um, and what other tools you might have used.

To assess the constructiveness of your board. Alright folks, that's it from me this week. That's it from Mango as well. See you next week for another interview conversation. Thanks for being here and see you soon. So that's a wrap for the Take on Board podcast today. Thank you so much for being here and being part of the Take on Board community.

I do this podcast because I love bringing good women and gender diverse people together, so I invite you to join us over in the Take on Board Facebook group, an active group that helps supports and cheer squads each other. Just search, Take on Board in Facebook to find us. I'd also really love it if you could do some of the other well podcast themes, share the podcast with someone you know who might get some value from our discussion.

Subscribe if you haven't already. And well, I also really love it when people rate and review. Thanks again for being part of the Take on Board community. Now go and put these tips, tricks, and advice into action so you can be your best in the boardroom.

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