

# Interpersonal Needs and The Human Spectrum

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This essay concerns the personal dimension of life in a group or team—and particularly the interpersonal needs of those who participate in this group or team. The specific premise underlying the concepts presented in this essay is that a group is more likely to become a functioning, productive, collaborating team if the interpersonal needs of all members have been acknowledged and are being met. This specific description of interpersonal needs comes directly from the remarkable work done by Will Schutz (Schutz, 1966; Schutz, 1994).

I frame the exploration of interpersonal needs in a template of three predominate perspectives and practices that guide the way in which each of us engage our world—a template that I call the human spectrum and that is illustrated by the three primary colors: red, blue and yellow. I propose that there is a Ruby Red perspective and practice that is founded on the strong desire to take action and produce results. By contrast, an Azure Blue perspective and practice is founded on the strong desire to inspire and nurture. Golden Yellow, which is the third perspective and practice, is founded on the strong desire to be thoughtful and realistic.

## The Three Domains of Life

From what do these three perspectives and practices arise? How is it that some people embrace Ruby Red, while others embrace Azure Blue, Golden Yellow or some blend of one or more of these three? The source of these three perspectives and practices are the three fundamental domains of life. The first domain is that of **Information**. We live in a world that requires us to be realistic (at least some of the time) and that requires us, in turn, to reach out for and interpret information about our world. A second domain stands at the opposite end of life. This is the domain of **Intentions**. Where do we want to be traveling in our life? What is our purpose and the purpose of the groups and organizations which we have joined? We are likely to wander aimlessly in our world without some sense of desired outcome(s). The third domain is one of **Ideas**. We must continuously engage in problem-solving and decision-making regarding how we get from where we are at the present time (the domain of information) to where we want to be in the near (or distant) future (the domain of intentions). The gap between our current state (as informed by information) and our desired state (as identified by intentions) is reduced (or

eliminated) through the production of ideas and the movement to action based on the review of these ideas.

We call these “domains” because they resemble the nature and dynamics of domains that existed in Europe during the Middle Ages. During this period of time, there were not large political states in Europe; rather, there were many smaller fiefdoms run by kings and queens (living in the legendary castles of Europe). These royal leaders presided over a specific region that was called a “domain.” Each domain operated with its own set of rules, codes of conduct, history, legends and even variations on a language of the broader culture. The same dynamics operate in the domains of information, intentions and ideas. Each of these domains has its own rules, codes of conduct, history, legends and language. As in the case of the domains of Europe, we must shift our perspectives and practices when moving in our life from one domain to another (from information to intentions, from intentions to ideas, and so forth). Furthermore, each of us is likely to feel most at home in one of these three domains. We want to dwell in a world of information and reality, or in a world of intentions and vision. Perhaps, instead, we prefer to reside in a world of ideas and action. These preferences reside at the heart of the human spectrum.

### **The Human Spectrum and Interpersonal Needs**

The perspectives and practices of the three domains penetrate virtually all aspects of our life. These influence the way in which we lead organizations, approach the personal problems we face in our life, and even select the people in our world with whom we wish to work and share our like. In this essay, I specifically wish to focus on how these three domains related to the needs we wish to be met in the groups and teams that we have joined. Specifically, I relate the domain of information to the need for inclusion, the domain of ideas to the need for control and the domain of intentions to the need for openness.

At this point, I also wish to introduce the Human Spectrum template, for it relates directly to the preferences each of us may have for one of the three domains. In the fiefdoms of the Middle Ages, not only did every domain have its own norms, values and narratives, it also had a shield or at least colors that provided this domain with a powerful, visual representation of its norms, values and narratives. While we are not in a place to design a shield for each domain, we can assign it an appropriate color. As I have noted we have chosen to assign each domain one of the three primary colors on the spectrum: red, blue and yellow (acknowledging that there is a competing model concerning the three primary colors).

We are assigning the color of red to the Domain of Ideas. In fact, it is a ruby red-- for this is the domain that is glowing with energy and vitality. The Domain of Intentions has been assigned the color of blue (and more intensely azure blue). This is a color that represents sky and azure blue suggests a quite beautiful sky that inspires us to look upward and outward into the future. Finally, the Domain of Information is represented by yellow. A Golden Yellow represents the intense light emanating from the sun. We must be illuminated by light if we are to find our way forward.

I will describe how each of the three domains and the human spectrum as it relates to one of the interpersonal needs and then turn to the topic of how these domains and needs play out in different cultures. Finally, I turn to the way in which the domains and needs can be engaged effectively in helping a group become an effectively functioning team (relying on the group development model offered many years ago by Bruce Tuchman).

### **The Need for Inclusion**

This interpersonal need can be best defined in spatial terms as **In/Out**. This need is closely affiliated with the Domain of Information and the Golden Yellow dimension of the Human Spectrum. Given the close alignment of Inclusion with the Golden Yellow perspective there is a major challenge facing someone with a strong inclusion need: how do I find out about this group? illumination is of highest priority: a light of some sort must be shined on the group, for it initially resides in the shadows. In making decisions regarding inclusion I need to know about the group. I must illuminate the group to the greatest extent possible, while realizing that it probably will not be fully lite until I have begun to engage in its activities.

As the noted social scientist, Kurt Lewin (Marrow, 1969) noted many years ago, we can't really begin to understand any social system until we engage with it and it kicks back against us. We operate a bit like a piece of litmus paper that is dipped into a solution and is changed (in color) by this solution, thus revealing something about its character (level of acid content). This is what today, in the behavioral sciences, we call "action research" (Argyris, 1985). We are finding out about some institution by seeking to change or at least influence it. This search for understanding resides at the heart of the Golden Yellow perspective—especially when it comes to deciding whether or not to be included in a group.

The two key questions to which a Golden Yellow seeks to find answers are: (1) Do I want to be included in this group/team and (2) How do I get included or stay un-included? The answers to these questions are often not easy to obtain – for the group does truly exist in the dark until such time as we know what

is really happening in the group and what its “real” purposes are for operating at the present time. Clarifying questions usually can’t be asked because the level of group trust is still very low (since it has not yet begun to operate – at least in full view of the person considering inclusion. The Golden Yellow is likely to just observe what is happening in the group—which means that they are often quite when first entering the group.

It is important, first, to appreciate the Golden Yellow focus on the current reality – in this case there is a focus on the reality of the group or team which one might join and to which one might devote attention and energy. Golden Yellow is about sunlight and shedding light on the world in which one is living and the relationship one establishes with other people. It is about being realistic regarding the group/team being considered for inclusion. How is this group/team going to operate and what are its desired outcomes? Does this cluster of people have a real reason for gathering together and working with one another? Is there a compelling purpose?

Having gathered this information, the prospective Golden Yellow member turns to five primary concerns regarding inclusion: (1) Should I just stand here for a bit and see what is happening before committing myself, (2) how do I determine if I really want to be part of this group/team, (3) if I do what to be a member how do I get genuinely included, (4) if I don’t want to be a member, do I still have to join this group/team for some reason and (5) what role should I play in this group/team so that I can be included and remain included, or not be truly included but still show up as a “member” of this group/team?

### **Proactive and Reactive Inclusion**

As I have already noted, it is not simply a matter of joining a group and waiting to be fully welcomed into the group. An important decision must be made as to whether we are going to actively seek inclusion in the group (proactive inclusion) or whether we are looking to other members of the group to invite us in (reactive inclusion). When we are motivated by a proactive need for inclusion than we are “inviting ourself” into the group – and therefore are taking the risk of being rejected by the group (informally or formally). Other group members might directly or indirectly indicate one of the following: “who invited you in!” “Wait a minute, we have to decide if we want you to be a member of this group!” “I’m not sure you will want to be a member of this group.” “I think you should reconsider, since you obviously are not liked by most of us.” While these words are not usually stated directly to someone wanting to join a group, there are many ways that these exclusionary inclinations are expressed through nonverbal

behavior, through communication patterns in the group, or through the assignment of roles and responsibilities in the group.

Of course, there is also the possibility that group members will welcome in the proactive gesture of inclusion. There might be a sigh of relief that the matter of inclusion is being addressed by the person under consideration. There might also be appreciation for this “bold action” being taken (often leading to perspectives on the need for control in the group). Perhaps, most important is potential appreciation among group members of the risk taken in being proactive about inclusion. This often is aligned with being clear and transparent about one’s interpersonal needs and one’s concerns about group operations and dynamics. This, in turn, paves the way for effective transition in the future to addressing the interpersonal need for openness.

What about reactive Inclusion? I wait for other members of the group to invite me in. For many women of a previous era, this might remind them of waiting to be asked to dance at the high school prom. The pain of sitting at the side of the dance floor and hoping to be asked to dance is palpable. It is not just the fear of never being asked; it is also the fear of the wrong boy asking you to dance. Just to be balanced in offering the analogy of dance, it should be noted that the pain was also being suffered by the young men. What if she doesn’t want to dance with me? I will be crushed. It might be better to not ask her. But then I will just be sitting (or standing) here and making a fool of myself.

We are now grown up and are no longer attending high school dances (with an accompanying sigh of relief). Yet, the issue of reactive inclusion is still salient. How do I let members of the group that I would like to be considered for inclusion in the group? However, what if they don’t want me—perhaps it is better to just sit back and hope that I will be included. There are subtle ways to invite inclusion; however, it is also important not to seem too needy (like the tail wagging dog who is saying “pet me, pet me” or even “love me, love me”). There is also fear of being inconsequential. It might not even be a matter of thoughtful inclusion be the group. I simply might not matter. They have forgotten me. I have been left behind, while the other members of the group move forward.

There is also the matter of being the outsider – someone of the wrong gender, wrong race, wrong ethnic group, wrong age. For these people, the group is particularly likely to be in the shadow for them. They are likely to not know how the group is likely to really operate—given that they are on the outside. Yet, ironically, information about the group is particularly important for these people to gain—for when one is somehow in the minority, then the issue of inclusion is often particularly important and a potential

source of major pain if the process of genuine inclusion is flawed. Resmaa Menakem, (2017) describes something called “micro-aggression” in his book, *My Grandmother’s Hands*. These are the small but frequent episodes of harm that are experienced by many marginalized people. Exclusion from a group – either formally or informally—can be one of these micro-aggressions (when informal) or can become a macro-aggression when the exclusion is formal (the “black ball” phenomenon).

I wish to illustrate the way proactive and reactive inclusion has operated recently in my own community (Harpswell) in the State of Maine. Harpswell is a tight-knit community surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, with a long history of fishing (especially the hauling in of lobster) and boatbuilding. Many families in this community can trace their roots back many generations, and it often takes a long time to gain acceptance as a “true” member of the Harpswell community. In other words, one is an “outside” (from “away” as they say here). It is therefore probably smart to be reactive and wait to be invited in – or live with the assumption that you will always be an outsider. In which case, you just hunker down and enjoy the spectacular view of the ocean and savor the fresh (and remarkably inexpensive) lobster meals.

Then, along comes the outlier. I will call her “Sarah.” She and her husband recently moved to Harpswell, having been very successful as a corporate executive in New York City (one of those places that true Mainer’s hate – along with anyone from Massachusetts). Sarah decided to take a proactive stance regarding inclusion. Rather than waiting to be invited in, she hosted a pig roast and invited all of her neighbors to bring a side dish (assigned by first letter of their last name) and join in the consuming of the pig and side dishes brought by other members of the community. More than 70 people showed up from the roast and this event has been held for the four years – and is eagerly awaited. Sarah has met many members of the community and is already a leading figure in the community (which relates to her own high need for control and influence which was honed during her years as a corporate executive).

Sarah was proactive. She said: “here I am and here is how you can get to know me and my husband” “I’m not waiting for you to invite me to your home. I have invited you here along with many of our neighbors. Come and enjoy pig and dialogue.” My own wife and I have come to each of the pig roasts and have found this to be a wonderful way in which to become “included” in the community ourselves. While members of many other closely-knit communities who are thoughtful about the issue of inclusion have established programs to welcome new residents to their community, Sarah took the action herself, and Harpswell now has the pig roast as one way to welcome in newcomers.

The Welcome Wagon initiatives of other communities assume that the new residents will be reactive regarding inclusion, while Sarah offers a daring challenge to this assumption. She illustrated how one can be proactive. She doesn't just sit at the side of the dance floor. Sarah goes out and grabs one of the reticent boys and starts dancing with them. What a radical departure from our established way of being in the world as teenage boys and girls. Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of gender-based relational norms.

## **The Need for Control**

This interpersonal need can be best defined in spatial terms as **Up/Down**. It is fully aligned with the Ruby Red perspective and is focused on action. As the name Ruby Red implies, a group member who embraces this dimension of the Human Spectrum wishes to generate Heat among those gathered to form this group/team. A fire must be built to generate energy. Furthermore, the energy must be directed toward accomplishment of the group's assigned task. This means that authority must be clearly defined and control must be firmly established.

Group/team members may have different ideas about how to move forward, but the Ruby Red perspective and practices calls for moving beyond these differences, so that something gets done. The primary concerns of the Ruby Red center of three issues. This is where the need for interpersonal control comes to the fore. If we are going to move forward then we must figure out who is going to be influential in this group/team and how is this influence going to be engaged (expertise, formal power, active involvement, etc.) Fundamentally, members of the group/team must determine who is in charge and what will be the leadership structure of this group/team (for example, are we going to have a single leader, rotating leadership, leadership assigned to specific tasks/). Then there is the matter of each members assessment of their own desire for control: do I want to have influence and perhaps acquire some authority in this group/team?

Given the Ruby Red perspective held by those with a high need for control, several key questions must be addressed: (1) Do I want to become influential and/or gain control in this group/team and if I do how do I become influential and in control? And (2) Do I instead want other people to be primary sources of influence and provide control? This need is closely affiliated with the Domain of Ideas and the Ruby Red dimension of the Human Spectrum. It is important, first, to appreciate the Ruby Red focus on taking action – in this case there is a focus on the actions being taken in the group or team which one has joined and on the accomplishment of specific goals related to the founding purpose of the group/team.

For someone with a strong need for clarity regarding control in the group/team there are three primary concerns: (1) how am I (and how are we) going to figure out how the power operates in this group/team, (2) how do we assign authority in this group and to whom do we give this authority, and (3) how do I determine where and with whom I want to align myself, given the structure of authority and operation of power in this group/team? If these members of the group are a large and influential major, then the group is likely to lean toward (or even opening embrace) an autocratic mode of leadership (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939). Ruby Red is likely to glow. By contrast, if most of the members of a group wish there to be little formal control (a low need for control) then the group is likely to lean toward a more laissez-faire mode of leadership – in other words not much formal leadership at all. There is likely to be little attention to the fire—left unattended it is likely to soon burn out.

It is interesting to note that in recent years, those social scientists who study complex systems (such as those operating out of the Santa Fe Institute) note that traditional hierarchical rule is often incompatible with dynamic, complex systems (e.g. Kaufman, 1998). Beginning with Ilya Prigogine's (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984) theory of dissipative structures and leading up to more recent descriptions of complex adaptive systems (Miller and Page, 2007), there is now ample evidence that most systems in nature are not hierarchical in nature.

Just as a flock of birds does not have a formal lead bird, so large, complex organizations (especially those that are international in scope and diverse in product or service offerings) are not amenable to traditional modes of authority and control. Rather, these organizations actually operate like the flock of birds in what is called a "self-organizing" manner. When flocking and self-organizing occurs, leadership is quite fluid and Ruby Red finds no home. Rather than labeling groups that are populated by people with a low need for control (often accompanied by suspicion regarding formal authority) as "laissez-faire", we can now label them as dynamically self-organizing. Even with this new label, we are likely to find high levels of frustration among those with a strong Ruby Red perspective.

If we don't fully buy the self-organization premise, then we can expand our identification of group leadership styles by offering a Goldilocks analysis. Organizations need not be too hot (autocratic) or too cold (laissez-faire); rather, they can be a balance between high and low levels of control. While we might want to label this as "luck-warm leadership", we can also identify it as a democratic form of leadership. Or we can use a less politically loaded term and call it collaborative or use a fancier term such as "synergetic". Ruby Reds are still unlikely to fully buy into this Goldilockean "compromise."



## Proactive and Reactive Control

The dynamics of both proactive and reactive control often tend to be just as subtle as those of proactive and reactive inclusion. In both cases, these needs are sometimes explicitly addressed through the formal operations of the group. For instance, in the case of inclusion, there can be an actual vote to determine if someone is admitted into an officially formed group. This can be a vote taken by an external constituency (such as the election of congresspeople) or by those who are members of the group (as in the case of many social associations and fraternal organizations).

As we turn to control, In most cases we find that the role of manager, director, or chair is assigned by someone or some group operating at the higher level of the organization. Even when the leadership of a group is not formally assigned from outside, the decision to be made about leadership is often made in a public manner. The issue of control can sometimes be formally addressed through the selection of officers in an organization (often the case with the boards of nonprofit organizations as well as corporations). The leaders can even be selected by an external constituency (as in the case of elected officials who preside over a legislative body—such as in the case of the American Vice President who is selected by the general population rather than members of the US Senate).

The similarities between the dynamics of inclusion and control soon disappear, however, when it comes to the way in which proactive and reactive behavior is exhibited in the group – and the emotions that often accompany struggle for control in a group. First, proactive seeking for control usually shows up in a manner that everyone can see. While, the person seeking control might not be explicit about their need, the proactive search usually is manifest in a high level of verbal activity (even dominating the air time in their group), a high level (and ratio) of offerings opinions (rather than just sharing information) and generally a high level of energy and activity in the group while it is sorting out the control issues. There might be considerable maneuvering behind the scene, in the choose of a leader, but at some point the move toward identified leadership is explicit. It often moves rapidly if there has been significant work done “in the back room.”

The dynamics of proactive control doesn't stop here. Even with the formal assignment of leadership has been completed, there are often continuing struggles regarding who is “really” in charge and how is authority being distributed in the group. Is this the “real” leader, or is someone else or some other cluster of people actually “pulling the strings”? And what about the “loyal opposition” – those people who do not feel that their perspectives or interests are being represented by those in authority. How are

the divergent perspectives and interests being addressed in the group? Those members with a strong proactive need for control are likely to be quite sensitive to these issues, whether they are “in charge” or not. Finally, there is the matter of alignment with those who are in control. If I have a strong need for control, but am not in control, then I need to consider ways in which to work with those in charge. If I am successful in this alignment, then I have what is often called “referent power.” I have the leader’s ear” and can represent other members of the group in voicing their concerns and requests.

When it comes to reactive need for control, there is typically much less obviously manifestation of this need. As the name implies, members of the group who want other people to step in and take control or at least exert considerable influence usually just sit back and watch the battle for control take place. Typically, they line up with the “Winner” of the control issue and are relieved when the issue of control is finally resolved.

Often, the reactive perspective on control is engaged by those who have been marginalized in the group – and come from a strong tradition of being asked (or forced) to remain quite and inactive while the decision regarding leadership is being decided. As a woman, minority, young person or person with disabilities, the assumption is often made that they are automatically ineligible for a position of leadership---and they are not expected to be very influential. While their opinion might be tolerated (after all “we are all interested in what you have to say . . .”), they often are hesitant to speak up and assume that their opinion and advice will never be taken seriously.

As I did in the case of the need for inclusion, I wish to illustrate the dynamics of proactive and reactive control by offering a couple of brief case studies from my own work as a consultant. First, let me illustrate what happens when there is a predominance of reactive control—which is commonly found in the communes of the 1960s. I had the opportunity work with several of the “hippy” commons during my early years as an organizational consultant. In many cases, these highly visionary and seemingly collaborative communities were struggling with issues about control, authority and leadership. While members of the communes often desperately wanted to be living in a world of openness and trust, they couldn’t get past the issue of control (an important point that I will turn to later). When most members of a group don’t want there to be any control (*laissez-faire*) or look passively for other people to take control, then the group is often dysfunctional. Furthermore, this type of group is also quite vulnerable to being taken over by a highly charismatic leader who offers not just absolute control but also a false paradise of absolute openness (requiring only a comparable absolute allegiance to them as the leader).

I can turn, on the other hand, to an organizational consultation I did with the leaders of a major church in North America. This is a church that has a strong commitment to biblical values and aspirations. The leaders who I was working with were becoming increasingly concerned with the hierarchical nature of their own church. They noted that the early Christian church (as described in the New Testament) was not hierarchical (perhaps an example of what today we would call a “self-organizing system”). Why not restructure their church so that it is less reliant on traditional modes of authority and control. They became architects who purposefully looked at existing models of nonhierarchical organizations (including the self-management systems being deployed in manufacturing firms such as Volvo). They didn’t mind that these were “secular” institutions—they could still provide guidance. Unlike the communes with which I worked, these church leaders were not running away from control, but rather discovering the way to best allocate and manage control in their organization (church). They were trying (with considerable success) to create a “lukewarm” Goldlockian organizational structure that had theological integrity. Quite an ambitious undertaking.

### **The Need for Openness**

This interpersonal need can be best defined in spatial terms as **Near/Far** and it is closely aligned with the Azure Blue perspective on the Human Spectrum. In the case of Azure Blue, there is a focus on the compelling mission and guiding values being embraced by the group or team which one has joined and on the establishment of a caring, supportive environment in which it is safe to express concerns and suggest alternative perspectives on the operations of the group/team.. As the name Azure Blue implies a group member who embraces this dimension of the Human Spectrum wishes to look upward toward the sky to see beyond the current state. We look upward to become inspired and help other members of the group become inspired by the vision of a greater good—for their team, their organization and ultimately their society. We look upward so that we can better see our destination.

The primary concerns of the Azure Blue center of three issues. This is where the need for interpersonal openness comes to the fore. If we are going to move forward, then we must figure out how we are going to conduct ourselves—especially as related to members of the group/team who might differ in important ways from one another.

Here are their concerns: (1) In what ways and at what times are we going to explore the fundamental way in which we are operating and how do we go about changing our operations if they are not supporting safety and the honoring of diversity (to do this the group/team must determine the extent

to which members of this group/team are going to be willing to talk about what is really happening and if we can trust what they say), (2) how do we determine if the actions being taken by members of the group/team align with what they say and what they espouse as their values and vision, (how, in other words, do we assess and openly discuss matters of honesty and integrity), (3) what is the appropriate balance between conversations that are task-based and those that concern personal and interpersonal issues which impact on group/team functioning, and (4) how do we appreciate, learn from and preserve those moments when our group/team seems to be functioning at its most effective level (with full participation by all members, a sense of joy in doing the work together, and a spirit of accomplishment that is energizing and renewing)? It is to this attitude of appreciation that we find the heart strings of the Azure Blue being most finely attuned.

As in the case of the Golden Yellow and Ruby Red perspective, there are several key questions to which the Azure Blues want answers: (1) How open do I want to be in sharing my ideas, experiences, concerns, hopes, and fears, and (2) How open do I want other people to be in sharing their own ideas, experiences, concerns, hopes and fears? This need is closely affiliated with the Domain of Intentions and the Azure Blue dimension of the Human Spectrum. As in the case of Golden Yellow and Ruby Red it is important to appreciate the Azure Blue focus on vision and nurturance.

### **Proactive and Reactive Openness**

As in the case of the need for inclusion and control, some people are quite willing – even eager—to share their feelings, hopes, fears and observations with other people. Taken to the extreme, these are the people who share their entire life history sitting next to an unfortunate stranger on an airplane with too many hours yet to be passed before touching down on foreign soil. In a group setting, this proactive openness can be more appropriate and quite valuable. These are the group members who begin to share their own observations about group functioning and their own hopes for and fears about the group's productivity with other members of the group/team—no life histories, just task and group related feedback.

In some cases (perhaps many cases) an important distinction must be drawn between openness about task-related issues and openness about the operations of the group. Both forms of openness are critical as a group moves to becoming an effectively functioning team. We need honest appraisals of how we are doing on the task and how we are doing in relating to one another. With this feedback in place, we can consider ways (group methods) in which to do a better job on the task or on our relationships.

Hopefully, we can find a way to more effectively blend task and relationship—making the task more enjoyable to do and the relationships more satisfying precisely because we are getting things accomplished.

Reactive Openness is found among those people who are often identified as “good listeners” (or at least patient listeners). These are the folks who will sit there and not only listen to the stranger sitting next to them on the airplane (rather than putting on their ear phones), but will actually ask some questions that produce an even more extended life narrative. In a group setting, those with high reactive openness needs will wait for and even encourage other members of the group/team to share their feelings, hopes and fears, as well as observations about group functioning. While these members of the group are not always given the credit that they deserve, the contributions that they made can play a major role in transforming their group into an effectively functioning team. While many groups would probably only find this role being performed by an outside, high-paid group process consultant, there are those groups that are fortunate to have this role being played by one of their own members.

While the praise I am heaping on these reactive members is deserved, it is also important to note that the reactive member can also create problems in their group. As someone who is participating in this group, their own sharing is critical. We often find that the reactive member of a group ends up feeling abused or ignored. While they will not willingly share their own feelings and observations, they do often expect that someone else in the group will ask them for their perspectives and observations: “thank you for asking, here is what I have observed/what I am feeling.” The output can be quite voluminous and often quite insightful – if perhaps a little late in the life of the group and sometimes offered with a bit of spite.

There is also the matter of group members with a low need for openness. These members will often not only be closed about their own feelings and perspectives, but also uncomfortable about anyone else doing much sharing. On the airplane, they are likely to request a change in seats – or certainly put on their headphones or pretend to fall asleep. As a team member, they often will consider any open sharing of feelings or offering of observations about group functioning to be disruptive of the group’s work on the task: “What’s going on here, we’re not one of those damnable therapy groups. Keep your feelings to yourself—or take them home with one and share them with your [spouse] not with us!” The role played by these closed members of the group often creates a barrier to the transition of the group to team. One of the widely accepted guidelines for group process consultants is that the level of overall

trust and openness in a group is no greater than that of the group member who is least trustful and least open. As this person goes, so goes the group.

It is quite a challenge to bring this closed member of the group to a point where they are sufficiently trusting of the intentions and interpersonal competencies of other group members to become a bit more open. It will get even worse, if they are coerced to be more open (by being repeatedly called on to share their feelings or observations), or are manipulated in an effort by group members to encourage openness (by effusively praising the closed member for sharing a bit of themselves). The best approach is usually to take a disciplined appreciate approach in working with this member of the group. When they do voluntarily offer some observations (usually task-related), one or more members of the group can not only thank them for their observations but also briefly comment on how this observation has actually contributed to group functioning and to movement toward successful completion of the task. Not too much attention and not too little attention. A bit of Goldilocks again.

As I have done regarding inclusion and control, I wish to share a couple of stories from my own consulting career about openness. I turn first to my work with a leadership team in a major American bank. I was called in by one of the Senior Vice Presidents in this bank who was brought in from another corporation to shake things up in this division of the bank. He was to drive the vice presidents working under him to be both more productive and more innovative (his bank losing out to another major bank that had introduced new banking practices and were increasing their share of the banking market).

What our Senior Vice President found was that his reports had become even more conservative and their departments had become even less productive. I was brought in (with my team) to help improve the situation. As part of our contract, my team conducted a series of interviews with all of the vice presidents. Almost uniformly they indicated that their new boss had been unsupportive and threatening. It was either his way or the highway. I was faced with the prospect of reporting these findings to my client. I found him to be surprisingly open to the feedback. He suggested that I (and other members of my team) share these findings with his entire team of vice presidents. I did so.

After I completed my report, one of the vice presidents stood up and declared that our report was fraudulent. The senior vice president is a fine man and is absolutely supportive of our work. "Sir, you should fire these consultants – they had not told you the truth." The room grew quite silent and I was preparing to leave very quickly and consider another line of work! Then suddenly one of the vice presidents (who I later found out was usually quiet in the group) spoke up. He indicated that the report

we had delivered was quite accurate and that these criticisms of the Senior Vice President were often voiced in the backrooms (but never in front of the Senior Vice President).

Our courageous Vice President then said (I remember his words): “This is our one opportunity to make things better. If we can’t be honest in this setting, then when can we be honest. We are all hurting and none of us want things to stay the same.” At this point, several other vice presidents spoke up and supported this very open statement. At this point, the Senior Vice President spoke up and indicated that he appreciated the courage shown by these members of his team. Work began on making this group of vice presidents become a team. Their work over the following six months was very impressive – and this bank is now back in a much better position regarding market share. Miracles were not wrought, but important progress was made by this Senior Vice President and his team as the level of openness rose.

There is one other story of openness that I wish to share. I was working with the faculty members in an academic department located in a major Northwest American university. We were in the midst of a three-day faculty development retreat held at a beautiful setting on a wooded lake. Members of the department were sharing some of their own stories about why and how they got into the teaching business. The stories they were sharing seemed well-rehearsed and had probably been heard by colleagues several times before. Nothing much was occurring, except some important reflections on how the world was changing and therefore the curriculum of their own department needed to be modified. Constructive dialogue, but pretty much stuff about the outside world, not about the hopes, fears and aspirations of the individual faculty members.

Then, as in the case of the bank vice president, there was a moment of openness and honesty. This moment originated from an unlikely source. Much like the bank vice president, there was a member of the faculty who had been quiet through most of the retreat. I had asked the retreat participants to describe the environment in which they feel most productive and most comfortable with their role as a faculty member. The quiet member hesitantly spoke up. He indicated that he most enjoyed sitting in his den at home reading historical volumes that take him far away from the everyday world in which he was living.

Since history is this faculty member’s discipline, it was not surprising that he is aligned with this practice of historical review and scholarship. However, he went on to share his fears about the world in which he is living—and indicated the following: “I am a very closed person. I don’t open up with many people –

even my wife and family.” It was a remarkable moment. Ironically, this statement about being closed was the most open and honest statement being made during this retreat.

His colleagues sat there for a few moments without saying a word—admiring their colleague’s perspective for perhaps the first time in many years. It was not only the curriculum that needed to be changed, but also the ways in which each of these faculty members had to live and work in a changing and challenging world. The retreat became much more productive as a result of this disclosure. The group member who was least trusting took a risk and helped to raise the level of openness and trust among all members of his academic department. They had become a team and made significant progress in now only updating their curriculum, but also becoming closer and more supportive of one another.

## Conclusions

I bring this essay to a close by turning to you as the reader and recommend that you reflect on your own human spectrum preferences and your own dominant (and nondominant) interpersonal needs. First, I suggest that you address the following question: What is your strongest interpersonal need/color? Second, I encourage you to reflect on a complementary question: What is your weakest interpersonal need/color? The perspective and need can shift during the life of one’s participation in a group (especially as it moves to becoming a functioning team). Therefore, the following question is important: When and under what circumstances do your interpersonal need preferences change? Finally, I suggest that you take an appreciative perspective (very Azure Blue) and ask the following question: What are the groups/teams like in which you flourish—and how do you help to create these flourishing conditions in groups/teams of which you are a member?

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