

# MAKING THE CONNECTION: IMPROVING VIRTUAL TEAM PERFORMANCE THROUGH BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT PROFILING AND BEHAVIORAL CUES

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## ABSTRACT

*It is evident that academic institutions are embracing virtual delivery methods at an unprecedented rate. Consequently, online instructors are faced with the challenge of developing high performance team dynamics within their virtual courses. It is no longer acceptable for instructors to simply present course material online. Instructors must find ways to actively engage team members and provide an innovative environment for teams to succeed. A behavioral assessment approach to improved virtual team communication allows individuals to “read” behavioral cues in a virtual environment. Understanding and responding to these behavioral cues can help virtual teams to improve communication and enhance overall group dynamics. An awareness of the relationship between individual behavior styles, or cues, and the team performance is critically important in a virtual team, where creating an atmosphere of trust can be difficult to achieve. The purpose of this demonstration is to present a behavioral assessment profiling tool and methodology to be used in virtual classrooms that works to cultivate an energetic and engaged virtual team.*

## INTRODUCTION

The academic classroom is changing. The demand placed on academic institutions to offer high quality online courses is growing at a rapid pace. Virtual teams existing within online courses must find a way to not only survive, but thrive! Communication errors in this environment can be costly. Facilitation and management of virtual teams within these courses has become a high priority for instructors and instructional designers. It is obvious that virtual teams are presented with a multitude of challenges. Virtual teams must learn to work together as if they were in the same room. The inability for virtual teams to “connect” within the context of the course can be detrimental to the entire learning experience and can jeopardize the success of the online program. Therefore, it is imperative for instructors to be proactive in developing strategies so that virtual teams are able to excel in the absence of a traditional classroom.

Behavioral assessment profiling serves as an innovative approach to improving virtual team communication. The assessment information can be translated into behavioral cues to be used by team members in virtual teams. Imagine trying to communicate effectively with people you have never met and whose personalities, or behaviors, you are not familiar with. Virtual teams are not only responsible for basic team communication but also for activities such as problem solving, conflict resolution, leadership, project design, team building and innovation. Now add to this diversity in culture and dependence on communication technology. The challenge is evident. If this obstacle is not overcome, establishing successful virtual teams can be extremely frustrating.

Behavioral assessment profiling examines how we tend to behave and what motivates us in a given situation. Understanding behaviors and behavioral cues will serve as a critical factor in developing and maintaining quality teamwork in virtual settings. Behavioral assessments help to identify behavioral styles of individuals and examine the group dynamics that occur based on the individual styles. As we have seen, this factor is critically important, although extremely challenging, in a virtual setting. During this session I will demonstrate ways in which the DiSC Personal Profile System (PPS) can be completed by students in a virtual setting and how instructors can make the most of this information in their online courses. Reading and understanding behavioral cues associated with the outcomes of this behavioral tool results in improved team productivity. The DiSC model is a four quadrant behavioral model based on the work of William Moulton Marston, PhD. (1893–1947). Marston defined four categories of human behavioral styles which are Dominance, Influence (Marston chose the term inducement), Steadiness or Stability (originally submission) and Compliant, Conscientious, or Cautious, (originally compliance). The PPS not only uncovers unique behavioral traits of those individuals profiled, but teaches how to understand the behaviors, and behavioral cues, of team members in a virtual setting. This methodology has just recently been recognized as a necessary and applicable learning strategy in online environments. In this conference session, I will demonstrate how this tool can be used virtually so that improved team dynamics is achieved.

**DEMONSTRATION: AN APPLICATION OF  
BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT PROFILING  
TO IMPROVE VIRTUAL TEAM  
PRODUCTIVITY**

In addition to more than 10 years experience with this tool in a resident setting, I have over 3 years experience integrating this tool within a virtual team setting. Application of this tool and methodology within an online environment has proven effective in improving team dynamics and increasing team productivity in the online courses that I have taught. The application of behavioral assessment profiling and behavioral cues exemplifies an innovative approach to developing virtual teams. This conference session will provide a demonstration on how to present the PPS tool as part of online curriculum, show how the tool is completed by individuals in a virtual setting, review the reports generated by the individual responses, display how profile results are shared with the team members, identify behavioral cues associated with individual profiles, provide behavioral strategies for team members and provide example exercises on how this information can help to improve team dynamics and team productivity within virtual settings. Details of the session presentation are as follows:

**1. Identify the communication challenges faced by virtual teams**

- Define the virtual classroom
- Define the virtual team
- What are the roles/responsibilities of virtual team members?
- What are the channels of communication used in a virtual classroom?
- What are the challenges of achieving success with virtual teams?

**2. Present a model for introducing behavioral profiling within a virtual setting**

- Define behavioral assessment profiling
- Why are behavioral profiles essential to enhance virtual team development?
- Define and identify behavioral cues
- Identify the challenges involved with implementing a behavioral assessment approach in a virtual setting
- Define and discuss the DiSC PPS system
- Show how behavioral profiling is introduced within the curriculum
- Demonstrate how individuals complete the PPS in a virtual setting
- Discuss the reports generated from the individual responses

- Guidelines for sharing individual profile information in the virtual classroom

**3. Discuss the communication styles and their impact within a virtual classroom**

- Define and discuss the varied behavioral styles in the DiSC model
- Identify ways in which individual styles interact in a virtual team setting
- Identify behavioral cues that may be present for individual behavioral profiles
- Share strategies for communicating more effectively with individual team members
- Discuss strategies for adapting your behavior to others on the team
- Identify ways to respond to conflict management using the DiSC in a virtual setting
- Define a set of behavioral norms (team contract) using the behavioral profile results
- Demonstrate how instructors can use the behavioral assessment information to respond to various learning and cognitive styles of individuals

**4. View course materials used to implement the behavioral assessment strategy in a virtual setting**

- Share introductory materials
- Share team worksheets
- Discuss application exercises
- Discuss a comparison between the DiSC Personal Profile and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as instruments used for teambuilding
- Share student feedback

**IN CONCLUSION**

The need to develop an engaged, high performance virtual team is imperative to a successful online learning experience. The behavioral assessment approach helps team members to identify behavioral cues in a virtual setting and respond to them so that improved team dynamics can be achieved. Identifying and understanding these cues can help to improve the group dynamics of virtual teams and can ultimately improve team productivity. The absence of team synergy is not an option for online learning and can create an environment of frustration and defeat. As instructors we must strive to develop strategies to overcome communication barriers that accompany the online setting.