RQ

Relationship Intelligence
### in the Flow of Work

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Every so often, something **seismic** happens to the way we work.

The global pandemic created a sudden shift and forced the biggest experiment in the history of work – the hybrid revolution.

A 2022 Microsoft Work Trend study found that most organizations say hybrid work is here to stay permanently, and employees have embraced the flexibility of hybrid teams. However, the lack of social capital and trust has compromised connection and relationship-building.
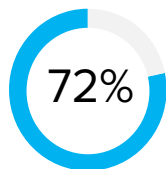
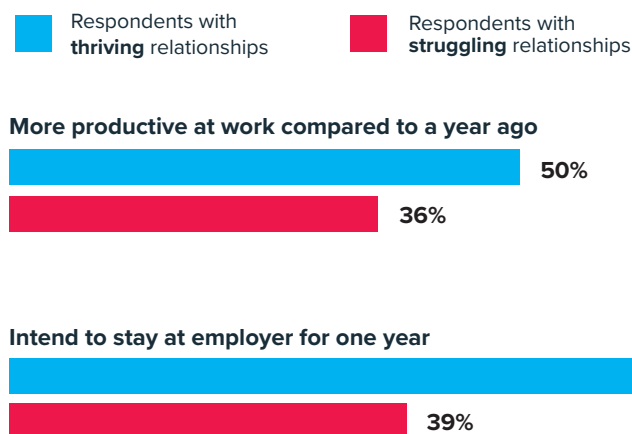**72%** Organizations say hybrid work is here to **stay permanently**
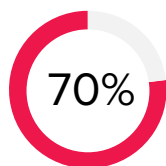
70% Employees say **lack of connection is the #1 challenge** of hybrid teamwork

The same study found that productivity and retention are much higher among employees who have thriving relationships at work. Teams with strong relationships trust each other, commit to their goals, and stay with the organization longer than the rest.

Respondents with **thriving** relationships

Respondents with **struggling** relationships

More productive at work compared to a year ago

50%

36%

Intend to stay at employer for one year

61%

39%

*2022 Microsoft Work Trend Index Research of 31,000 people in 31 countries

The ROI of relationships in a hybrid teams era couldn't be clearer. If organizations are to thrive, they need to help teams foster connection with colleagues — many of whom have never met face to face. That includes managing misunderstandings and inevitable conflicts. A good starting point would be personality assessments oriented toward relationships, replacing the dominant individualist approaches. People can work together productively over time by understanding how their personalities align (or contrast) with their colleagues. With this inter-personalized insight, they can adjust how they approach each other for better results.

We call this Relationship Intelligence (RQ).

"When people trust one another and have social capital, you get a willingness to take risks. **You get more innovation and creativity and less groupthink.**"

NANCY BAYM
Principal Researcher, Microsoft Research

Making collaboration **work**

Plenty has been written on the virtues and challenges of collaborating with people of diverse perspectives. Innovating with colleagues who force you outside your preconceived ideas is easier. But one thing is clear: different perspectives also bring a greater risk of conflict. You can't see what your colleague is talking about because you approach an issue from different starting points. Both of you are likely to be blind to the sensitivities of the other – and inevitably inflame those sensitivities. If collaboration is going to work, people must keep those problems from undermining collaboration. They have to learn to prevent or manage conflict, so it doesn't jeopardize the relationship.

We've learned from psychological research that there's no such thing as a common or objective point of view. Everyone comes with particular concerns and biases that shape their perspective, which are hard to change. It's more productive to work with people's tendencies than to roll over them with your point of view.

Psychologists have also explained that conflict comes when people feel their sources of well-being are under threat. What makes conflict hard to manage is that people have different sources of well-being. We can divide them according to three primary sources.

Performance-oriented colleagues are all about action; they feel best when they're accomplishing tasks and achieving results.

People-oriented colleagues are most concerned with how they're treating those around them; they tend to be supportive and trusting.

Process-oriented colleagues like to think through challenges and keep things orderly; they're systematic and reserved.

Performance-oriented people tend to get stuck in conflict less often with colleagues who are equally action-oriented. They might butt heads in constant competition for authority, but they know where these colleagues are coming from. The process and people-oriented types drive them crazy because those colleagues appear to keep putting up roadblocks to success. And vice versa: performance people look chaotic and appear insensitive to the other types. Everyone struggles to work with people with different personalities.
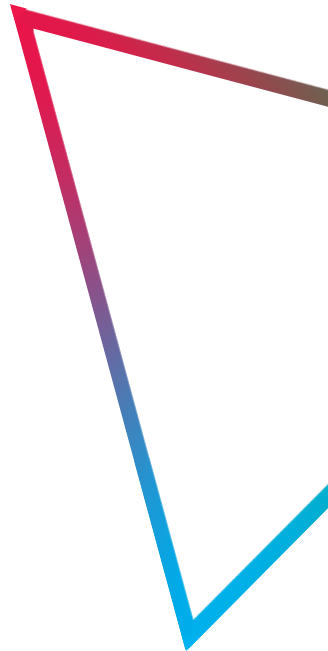
Some people have a mix of all three tendencies, which makes them helpful hubs of collaboration. But effective organizations still need to harness the energies of full-throttle directive, analytical, and supportive people.

What you measure is what you get

I've just sketched out a simplified version of the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI 2.0), a personality assessment geared to relationships. Most companies use assessments geared to individual traits, such as Strengths Finder, Myers-Briggs, and DISC. Those approaches have been around for decades, but they took off in the 1990s with a bold new framing: Instead of helping employees fix or improve their weaknesses, organizations should help employees boost their strengths. With that new approach, HR's talent management took off. After all, most people resist correction but welcome support in getting better at what they already like to do.

The trouble is that by telling people to focus on their strengths, we direct their energies inward toward discovering and developing themselves. That often leaves little energy for the hard work of understanding and adapting to others — which is essential for collaboration. Also, some strengths might work well for individual work but get in the way of a good work relationship.

It's time to **shift the emphasis.**

That doesn't mean going back to the bad old days of correcting people's weaknesses. We still need to value people's strengths because those strengths flow from our underlying motives, what makes us feel good about ourselves. But we need to remind people that their colleagues (or clients) have different strengths, and those strengths are likely to conflict if everyone pushes hard on their favorite capability.

We need something similar to what has happened in the area of intelligence testing. For decades, companies have focused on rational, analytical intelligence measured by classic IQ tests. But in recent years, we've learned that there are several kinds of intelligence. Emotional intelligence – the awareness of one's own emotional state and those of others – has come to the fore, with a strong foundation in scholarship. It lends itself better to relationships than IQ itself.

In theory, an organization could adopt multiple assessments to show various personality characteristics. But that's impractical for all but the most talent-obsessed workplaces. Many HR managers we talk to say they have enough trouble getting people to work with a single assessment.

a relationship-based assessment. Doing so will send a strong message: We want you to develop your strengths, but only in conjunction with your colleagues. As your work shifts from individual production to team-based collaboration, you'll need to adapt to the personalities of your teammates. You can still be the same person – no need to be phony or manipulative – but you'll probably find yourself playing up some secondary strengths rather than your usual go-to traits.

Take the example of a hard-driving sales manager continually butting heads with his regional sales VP. With SDI, the sales manager might realize he is geared toward performance, while his boss is most concerned with process. With knowledge of his strengths and those of his boss, he can adjust his presentations to draw on his secondary strengths that better match his VP's tendencies, especially as conflict is brewing. In doing so, he makes conflict less likely while advancing his agenda.

Relationship-Building
at Scale

Simplicity is one reason that individualist assessment has endured. People can focus on understanding and improving themselves; they don't have to know anyone else's motivations. Calibrating your interactions with colleagues is hard to pull off if you don't know where your colleagues are coming from. After all, people don't wear badges describing their personalities.

Fortunately, we have something better. The Core Strengths Platform (powered by the SDI 2.0) is available on any device and is now integrated into collaboration software like Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Teams, and more – enabling people to see the motives and strengths of their colleagues, at least those who have taken the SDI assessment. Suppose you're about to join a team on a challenging project or go into a tense meeting. You can now get personalized communication tips to help you listen for intent, consider diverse perspectives, or know what to say when emotions run high. Now, all that assessment insight is no longer sitting on a shelf somewhere, it's impacting conversations and helping teams make better decisions in real-time.

As people realize the growing importance of collaboration, they'll be eager to offer even more detail on the assessments. With growing use, the apps – and the people – will get better and better. Instead of being painful for some people, collaboration might even become energizing.

Assessments geared to relationships can give organizations a vital foundation of awareness and tools to help people put RQ into practice. As people see the benefits of calibrating to their colleagues, they'll be more willing to reveal their personalities upfront. And thanks to our latest Core Strengths integrations, Relationship Intelligence is no longer a concept. It's a skill that can be improved with support tools to help teams connect, communicate, and conquer anything together.

Victoria is motivated by **Performance**

Do This

✔ Be quick and clear. Focus on action.

Amy is motivated by **People**

Do This

✔ Take the time to ask how they feel about things.

Mark is motivated by **Process**

Avoid This

✖ Trivializing the need for structure and plans.

WHAT'S NEXT

Visit **CoreStrengths.com** to learn more, or call **760.602.0086** to speak with one of our Client Partners about your unique needs.

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