

Notes on person & position



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Context

From the late 1960s until the early 1990s we stressed what might be loosely called the psychological model¹. It focuses on changing the person inside (beliefs, values, identity, mental states) thereby changing the person outside (behaviors, competencies, effectiveness).

By the mid 1990s the pendulum had swung to the other extreme:- the behavioral model. Its premise is, "Increase the person's behaviors and effectiveness and the person's self image is altered." There is no question that the psychological is the more powerful model.

Put another way ... if you ask a group of people does attitude change come before behavior change or the other way around you are likely to receive a variety of responses. The question is really asking in what direction does change occur: does it come from seeing things and thinking about things differently and then we change our behavior or does it come by first changing our behavior and then we develop new perspectives and beliefs. This is question is depicted in Michael Grinder's adaption of Robert Dilts model:-

¹ These notes are built substantially on the work of our colleague Michael Grinder to who we owe a deep professional gratitude.



The question of which comes first **inside-out** or **outside-in** depends on the context and circumstances. In this program you will have the opportunity to do both.

The inside-out model can be called the psychological orientation and outside-in the behavioral orientation.

Psychological

Behavioral

Internal states

External behaviors

Inside-out

Outside-in

Permission

Experience

Articulation

Person

Position

The obvious question is, “Why not always use the psychological approach?”
The best way to understand when to use which model is to think of the vegetable “PEA.”

Permission: Do I have the other's permission?

Experience: How much experience do they have at self-reflection?

Articulation: How adept are they at the use of language to describe their internal states.

If a communicator has high permission from the other, if the other has lots of experiences and can articulate their feelings, then using the psychological model is recommended.

This model requires that the communicator have questioning strategies and does not require the communicator be present to observe. If any of the three items (PEA) are missing, then the behavioral model is suggested. It is essential in the behavioral model that one has the ability to coach.

The psychological model attracts people who are internally oriented; likewise, the behavioral model draws people who are externally oriented.

We could describe this in terms of an orientation to relating to people as a **person** or in role or **position**.

Person versus position

In relationships, an orientation to either

1. an inside-out perspective (psychological) - relating to someone as an actual person, or
2. an orientation that is outside-in (behavioral) – relating to a person as being in a role or position,

is in is played out in national cultural tendencies and in organizational cultures.

If you happen to find yourself as an executive in New Zealand, then using the power of your position to shape the behavior of your subordinates will almost certainly result in you signing your own cultural death warrant: generally speaking if you have a bias towards presenting more as Person and less as role your Kiwi subordinates will not only give you permission they will empower you to be their leader. As a generalization, New Zealanders tend to place more value on Person and less on position.

The reverse tends to be true in the UK and Germany, where presenting from role is more valued than presenting from Person. As much as any generalization can be made about the USA then they tend to find ways to think and behave well in both: they tend to distinguish and be comfortable

with both Person and Position.

Cultural emphasis

Country	Person	Position
NZ	●	
USA	←————— —————→	
UK		●
Germany		●
South Africa (White)		●
South Africa (Black)	●	
Australia	←—————→	
Indonesia		?

In Australia, we tend to be unaware of the difference in the first place, and then being unaware we tend to confuse others, particularly subordinates, with our non-verbal signals as to whether we are operating from Person or Position. For example, holding someone to account for the consequences of their performance is quite confusing if at the same time you are addressing them as “mate”.

These differences are played out in organizations’ cultures or unconscious biases, as they are in occupational groupings, team behaviors and individual personalities.

Corporate cultures - upside

Person

Relationships are effective
Energy is released
Creativity and passion flow

Position

Responsibilities are clear
Work is well organized

Relationship

Relationships provide energy and commitment

Accountability

Accountability provides focus and achievement

An organization with a bias to Person is one that believes productivity and effectiveness will arise when relationships among people are functional, open, and trusting.

Conversely, one with a bias to Position will tend to believe that effectiveness comes from people behaving professionally according to the roles they occupy and whose behavior is shaped by clear accountability and consequences. Each orientation can in fact deliver good results in different ways. But each also has its limitations or downsides if pushed too far and can produce some remarkable levels of dysfunction.

Corporate cultures - downside

Person

Work becomes
confused
Results become
compromised

Position

Person becomes invisible
Motivation becomes
difficult – passive resistance
becomes pervasive

Relationship

Frustration
leads to work
outside the
system

Accountability

Hidden politics become
the norm to adjust things
and get results

Tim Dalmau