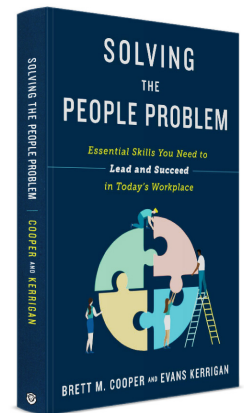


Solving the People Problem

Essential Skills You Need to Lead and Succeed in Today's Workplace

by **Brett M. Cooper and Evans Kerrigan**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Solving the People Problem* Brett M. Cooper and Evans Kerrigan capture well the complexity of work relationships today. The heart of the problem they describe is that the modern work environment is in desperate need of emotional intelligence. If you can learn to harness your emotional intelligence enough to understand how and why you behave as you do—and how and why others behave as they do—you can adjust your actions and reactions to create the space for understanding and success. Using the DISC-EQ tool as both an informative tool in understanding yourself and others, the authors show us the how and why of behavior. They provide concrete steps and examples abundant to show the way to bridge differences and build a highly functioning team.

The authors promise that by using the information and direction in this book, you will become more aware of your own personality preferences and be able to adapt your approach to communicate more effectively with others, allowing you to create the high-quality, efficient, positive work environment your team and organization want and need.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The basics of DISC-EQ to discover your emotional intelligence and personality style.
- Strengths and weaknesses in how you work and relate to others on your team.
- How to take concrete steps toward healthy conflict in the workplace.
- How to incorporate the 5 key practices of a healthy team into your workplace.

Introduction

Leading effectively can be difficult for the experienced manager, as well as the newcomer. Often, those who have spent decades in leadership positions still struggle to communicate effectively and inspire others across their organization.

Before being promoted into a leadership position, many leaders focus on being the best individual contributor they could be. But leadership also requires understanding how others think and feel. Leaders have to be able to encourage everyone to make the most meaningful contributions.

Finding the Framework to Make it Work

There are many complexities woven into work relationships. The solutions to both the simple and the difficult issues, however, often come from a novel place: our emotions. The modern work environment is in desperate need of emotional intelligence, defined as “the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions, as well as the emotions of others.”

Employees go to meetings together, flesh out strategies over the phone, and send updates over email. Their work is the work of compromise, camaraderie, and communication. And yet, the skills that would enhance their ability to communicate and work together are often glossed over by their organization and their leaders. Instead, businesses implement new systems and hardware in the pursuit of increased productivity.

If you can learn to harness your emotional intelligence enough to understand how and why you behave as you do—and how and why others behave as they do—you can adjust your actions and reactions to create the space for understanding and success.

To learn and teach emotional intelligence, you need a framework that explains how people behave and why they behave that way. It has to provide an effective solution to your people problems that works on an emotional and practical level.

Facing the Relationship Crisis in the Workplace

Solving the people problem is rooted in building emotionally authentic interactions. Emotional intelligence is a challenge in today’s world partly because our genuine, trust-filled work relationships are disappearing. Increasingly, we communicate via screens, instead of through person-to-person conversation.

If you want people you work with to succeed, thrive, and produce great results, you’ve got to create an environment where they can contribute and bring their best to the challenges at hand. That means addressing them as individuals, each with their own personality and set of preferences and talents. It is critical to meet their emotional needs as well as their rational ones.

The Solution Starts with You

Emotionally healthy organizations start with, and are driven by, emotionally healthy leaders. So you have to take the lead. You have to become aware of your personality style, comfort zones, and limitations. Then you have to learn to read the needs and preferences of others and consider those differences when making decisions and communicating. You need to understand what’s happening under the surface with people in order to help resolve unproductive, emotionally fueled conflict and inspire people to work together.

Knowing Yourself to Know Others

On your team, you want different perspectives and different styles. That’s what allows you to find the best solutions and implement the best strategies. The trick is learning to see the difference and honor the difference in each person so everyone feels comfortable bringing their best to the team and making their most valuable contributions.

The gap between our biased view of ourselves and how others actually see us goes a long way toward explaining why the people problem is so entrenched in the workplace. It also explains why building healthy relationships in your organization has to start with self-awareness. When we make introspection a priority, we’re stronger, more flexible, and better able to empathize and connect with others.

The Solution, Part I

DISC-EQ is a synthesis of two well-established concepts—“DISC” (the language of personality style) and “EQ,” or emotional intelligence (the understanding of the emotional side of human interaction). EQ is the collection of skills and insights within us that allow us to better manage ourselves and to create strong, positive relationships with others.

In 1996, Daniel Goleman published a book called, fittingly, *Emotional Intelligence*. In it, he took the term “emotional intelligence”—which had been coined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990—fleshed it out, and popularized it.

Knowing your own style is the basic understanding of your thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Self-awareness is an awareness of your internal motivations and your external behavior. By building your awareness of other people's individual styles and by using that knowledge to adapt how you behave, you stand the best chance of navigating difficult situations and building work relationships that are productive and mutually successful.

The Solution, Part II

DISC is the psychological theory developed first by Marston in the 1920s. Throughout this chapter, the authors help you determine your DISC personality style, including primary characteristics, strengths, and stressors.

Any personality type can be an effective leader. And, in truth, we are all a blend of styles to some degree. All people care about relationships, clear thinking, and making progress toward their goals. They just approach these scenarios and goals differently. They place a different priority on them, which drives them to act in different ways. This is where EQ really makes a difference. High emotional intelligence allows us to recognize these different approaches.

Checking Your Gut

One of the most essential benefits of having a higher DISC-EQ has been gaining a better understanding of the decision-making process for different DISC profiles.

The fact that it's natural to grapple with your personality priorities doesn't mean you have to simply accept the limitations your gut puts on your decision-making. You can learn to counter these impulses when they overrun their usefulness so that you are always making your best decisions.

This starts with raising your self-awareness. With DISC, you sharpen your understanding of your personal priorities. Building off that insight, self-awareness can allow you to see whether those priorities are strengthening your decision-making or limiting it.

It's Not Just Words

We have to recognize that how we communicate is not intrinsically better or worse than how others communicate. Clear communication is necessary for productive work, but more than that, when communication becomes miscommunication, the result can lead to unhealthy conflict.

There's no way around having some conflict in a work environment, since at its core, conflict is rooted in people having

different opinions and points of view. Rather than trying to remove all conflict from the workplace, our goal should be to channel those different perspectives in a positive and productive direction.

The Right Kind of Disagreement

The act of conflict—the act of disagreeing—doesn't have to be emotionally distressing or organizationally disruptive. Conflict, done right, can be a healthy part of a positive work experience. In fact, if you think about it, conflict is required to make sense of competing ideas and diverse perspectives. Conflict is the means by which we discuss options and select the best answers.

Productive conflict directly addresses the issues where people have differences of opinion or points of view. Unproductive conflict moves from the substance of the issues at hand to attacking others' personalities and behaviors. In productive conflict, those involved seek to find the right answer, not just to win the argument or gain individual glory. At the end, even if disagreement still exists, people can walk away feeling heard and respected.

On the other hand, a workplace dominated by artificial harmony—where issues are pushed aside or glossed over in an attempt to keep the peace—is almost as bad as one filled with unproductive conflict. You want people to engage in energetic, ideas-focused conflict in your workplace every day. You want to see productive and respectful debates in which everyone feels included and everyone contributes to the ultimate choices made around the office.

In order to transition unhealthy conflict into its productive counterpart, we need to address the root misunderstandings between ourselves and other parties. Because every conflict has at least two sides, we have to begin our introspective process by expanding our self-awareness and considering how we might be making the situation more challenging. Stepping back to review our own actions can give us the space to act more deliberately and choose our next response more wisely.

When you take responsibility for your actions rather than assigning blame to others, you provide yourself the emotional space to see different perspectives and to adapt your style to make sure your perspective is heard in the way you intend it to be.

Step one is to become aware of your own reactions and behaviors during conflict situations.

Then, in step two, armed with the benefit of self-re-

lection, decide how you want to respond in the future. When you are ready, you can take this one step further by sharing your goals with your colleagues and asking them to help hold you accountable.

The best approach for controlling unproductive conflict is naturally a team-based solution. To solve the people problems in today's work environment, then, we have to discover how to apply DISC-EQ to find the best, most productive ways to communicate and interact..

Making the Team Work

When a group works together to target and overcome dysfunctions, they create cohesion. There are five goals for your team:

- Build Vulnerability-Based Trust
- Engage in Productive Conflict
- Commit to Team Decisions
- Hold Each Other Accountable
- Focus on Collective Results

Additionally, work with your team to set ground rules that enable and encourage everyone to participate fully in the conversation. Clearly defined team norms will make it known to all what is fair and acceptable—as well as unacceptable—for your meetings and other team interactions, thus creating a space where everyone can feel comfortable expressing themselves. Stick to an atmosphere of openness and vulnerability through the use of nurturing language.

Working with Those Outside Your Circle

DISC-EQ is a valuable approach to use in interactions with

customers or business partners. The model removes the risk of mimicry while also providing us with the tools we need to read the styles of others and respond in effective and authentic ways, even when we've never met them before.

With clients and new colleagues, we may get only a single, brief window to establish the kind of positive rapport that leads to a fruitful, enduring relationship. You can learn a lot about a person just by making a more conscious effort to pay attention to how they speak and act.

Leadership Is a Relationship Conclusion

There are Five Practices that tell you what a leader needs to do, and DISC shows you how.

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

Conclusion

DISC-EQ is at the heart of successful leadership because it provides a framework through which we can understand one another and address differences through concrete action. It provides us the language to discuss our different perspectives and a path to bridging misunderstanding.



Brett M. Cooper and Evans Kerrigan help professionals like you build work relationships that really work. Over the last twenty years, they've influenced thousands of people in government, non-profits, and corporate America to work together in more productive, more effective, and more human ways. Brett and Evans are frequent speakers on team dynamics, leadership, and operational excellence. To access more great content and resources, and to connect directly with Brett and Evans, visit SolvingThePeopleProblem.com.

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