PROCESS COMMUNICATIONS -- A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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When a close friend recommended I attend a seminar on something called Process Communications, I responded with a mixture of interest and skepticism. He told me the seminar used a personality model backed by extensive research. NASA and other federal agencies, he said, were using the model with excellent results.

I was interested because I have seen how valuable personality models can be. As a team building consultant, I have used personality models to open communications and build trust at the beginning of team development. The typical response is a burst of energy as the group discovers new ways of understanding their personal dynamics. Using a model enables the group to discuss interpersonal issues in a language that is neutral and descriptive, leading most groups to discuss hot issues without becoming judgmental or indulging in personality attacks. The same thing happens when personality models are used in relationship or personal growth seminars. In one setting after another, I have seen people respond enthusiastically to insights into themselves, partners, children, and fellow workers.

On the other hand, I was skeptical of my friend's enthusiastic recommendation. Using personality models as much as I do, I am aware of limitations and gaps in them. Models, after all, are approximations of reality. They help us understand, but never fully encompass, the richness of human personality. Overstating the benefits of a model is an error I try to avoid, for it can turn initial enthusiasm into disillusionment.

My friend said the Process Communications Model (PCM) was superior to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). I responded with skepticism, for I have used Myers-Briggs extensively. It has short comings, but it is also the most widely used and respected personality model. It has fifty years of research behind its reputation as a tool for career guidance, interpersonal relationships, and team development. A model that takes on the heavyweight in the field, I thought, will have to go a few extra miles to build credibility.

Based on my friend's recommendation, I signed up for the seminar. I was interested in business applications, but the focus of this seminar was on personal relationships. I invited my girlfriend of three and a half years to go with me, hoping to gain insight into her pattern of withdrawing when returning to our relationship. At the time she had been withdrawing yet again for the previous three months. She agreed to attend, but not as a couple to work on our relationship. There was a clear understanding that she would be under no pressure to explore our relationship during or following the seminar. Even so, we discussed the model and significant decisions were made as the result of what we learned.
Comparison of Models.

I discovered that the Process Communications Model has four very significant differences when compared to other models. I found myself comparing PCM to the two models used most often in seminars -- the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Performax Personal Profile. Before describing the four differences, I will digress briefly to describe the two models used for comparison.

**Personal Profile.** This widely used model is most often referred to as the DiSC. An early edition of the profile had a printing error which placed the i in lower case, resulting in an accidental distinctiveness which has been perpetuated. Based on the psychology of William Marston, the DiSC identifies personality type (personal style) by locating behavior preferences on four vertical scales. The scales are: D for dominance; i for influencing others; S for steadiness; and C for compliance/competence.

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<th>Figure 1. DiSC Scales</th>
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The scales are visualized as vertical graphs so that a person is either high or low on each scale. Individuals using this model learn about the components of their personality by discovering what it means to be high or low on each scale. They also learn to describe the composite personal style which results. The result is sixteen routine personality types and three anomalous types. The anomalous types result when the four scales are all high, all low, or tightly clustered around the midline.
Results may often differ from one taking of the instrument to another. In my case, I usually have a very high D, very low i, definitely high S, and a moderately low C. This results in a type called the Achiever pattern. There have been times when my S and C have fallen much lower, resulting in a personality classified as Developer. The official explanation for change is that personal style is sensitive to changes in environment or to internal changes. I have found that my S and C move lower as I become involved in more entrepreneurial business enterprises, so that the explanation of change makes sense to me. Such personality changes are not necessarily permanent. When the environment changes, one can resume a previous pattern.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Building on the work of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, this model uses four horizontal scales to identify the components of personality type. Each scale depicts a pair of opposite tendencies, such as extraversion and introversion. The midpoint of the scale is zero. To the right of the midpoint are numbers representing the strength of introversion and to the left are numbers for extraversion. The four scales and their letter designations are: Extraversion/Introversion (E/I); Sensing/Intuitive (S/N); Thinking/Feeling (T/F); and Judging/Perceptive (J/P). A personality type is described by showing the four letter designations from the scales.

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Each scale is numbered to sixty-five on each side of the midpoint to show the strength of each tendency. Unlike horizontal scales in mathematics, numbers on each side of the midpoint are positive. A score of ten or less means that the tendency could change with the next taking of the instrument, so that I have encouraged people to consider themselves "barely" that particular characteristic. A score of ten to thirty shows a clear behavioral pattern, leading to people who are "definitely" the characteristic. Scores above thirty are so strong that I describe people as "extremely" that characteristic.

My results have been consistent over many years. I am extremely introverted, extremely intuitive, extremely thinking, and definitely
perceptive. This leads to a personality type designated as INTP.

Like the DiSC, the MBTI has sixteen personality types. Unlike the DiSC, the MBTI does not recognize personality change. Official theory maintains that personal development leads to increasing maturity and self-awareness, so that tendencies move from barely to definitely or extremely. Since personality type is set at birth, individuals change within their type but do not change from one type to another. Results which change from one taking of the instrument to another indicate lack of maturity or environmental influences such as tension which lead to error.

PCM Differences. I noticed four significant differences when comparing the two well known models with PCM. The first is a new way of using personality type, leading to a model with a structure different from any other I have encountered.

Personality type, as used by DiSC, MBTI, and most other models, is a composite which can be analyzed into separate components referred to as behavioral tendencies or preferences. I have often found it easier to use the components in workshops, for they are more concrete and people identify with them more immediately. Time and again, groups have been more energetic in discussing introversion versus extraversion, or the merits of high versus low dominance, than when discussing the combination of tendencies into a personality type.

Process Communications begins with six personality types as the basic units from which the model is constructed. Each of us is capable of being all of the six personality types, but we tend to be just one of them most of the time. The first question participants ask is which type they tend to be most of the time. But most significant is the second question answered for participants -- how their personality types are organized.

PCM can be visualized as a six story building. Each floor is one of the personality types. The main floor is the personality type we are originally. The next highest floor is the type we relate to with greatest ease. Imagine riding an elevator to higher floors in your building. It takes more and more energy to get to higher floors. The personality types on the first three floors are the ones most people relate to with greatest ease, for they require less energy. We can relate to the types on our higher floors, but how well we do it depends on how much energy we feel like spending to get the elevator that high.

With PCM, it is not just a question of which personality type is dominant. It is also a question of which type is on which floor of your personal building.

The fact that PCM begins with just six personality types may sound limited. In fact the sixteen types recognized by MBTI and DiSC are often questioned as too few to encompass the variations in human personality. An interesting consequence of the organization of PCM
types into structures is that it leads to far greater variety than other models. If only the first three floors are considered, there are one hundred and twenty possible personality structures. In all, there are seven hundred and twenty possible six-story buildings.

One of the questions that has often emerged in seminars on the DISC or MBTI models is how people who seem very different can be the same personality type. Sixteen choices seemed limiting. An approach that recognizes hundreds of possible variations seems more likely to fit the unusual challenge of human personality.

I learned that the type on my main floor is the Persister, followed by Dreamer, Workaholic, and Reactor. The two highest floors, the ones most difficult for me to relate to, are Promotor and Rebel.

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**Figure 3. My PCM Structure**

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Rebel
|
Promoter
|
Reactor
|
Workaholic

Dreamer -- Phase

Persister -- Base

Basement #1 -- Be strong

Basement #2 -- Withdrawal and passivity

Basement #3 -- Depressed, hopeless, unloved
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The second important difference with PCM is that it provides for personality change. One of the common themes I have heard in seminars is that people are aware of major and enduring personality changes. Participants in the PCM seminar listened to this aspect of the model and overwhelmingly acknowledged that the model was accurate in identifying their shifts in personality.

According to Process Communications, we all begin life with a base personality type. We spend most of our time and energy on that floor of our building. About two-thirds of the population experience what is called a "phase change" by moving to the next highest floor. Although remaining comfortable with the base personality and able to shift from base to phase with low energy use, the individual begins to
spend most time and energy on the higher floor. This also involves less energy use when moving up to the next highest floors from time to time. This results in a significant awareness of personal change without rejecting or feeling alienated from the base personality. Phase changes are usually permanent. There can even be two or three phase changes in adult life.

As mentioned previously, the Myers-Briggs does not recognize personality change that leads to a change of type. All changes happen within one's true type, which is there from birth. The DiSC detects and recognizes changes. For the most part, those changes seem to be cyclical rather than a progression, for patterns tend to change as a reflection of the current environment. There is no way to measure if changes are temporary or permanent. Then there are the three anomalous patterns -- the dread of all seminar leaders. Various editions of the profile have tried to smooth over the ominous implications of the anomalous patterns, for they indicate potential behavioral problems. Only PCM explains personality change in terms of progression.

How do phase changes come about? This question points to the third difference, which is that PCM explains the dynamics of personality change. The key lies in the substructure of our personal buildings. There are three potential basement responses -- responses which indicate progressive distress. The specific behaviors in each basement depend on the dominant personality type. Really severe distress is also indicated if someone shifts from basement one of their phase personality to the basement responses of their base personality.

Prolonged stays in the basement lead to personality change. Changing personality types is not a smooth or easy progression; it is usually traumatic. There is no specific time period in the basement that can be identified as the key to making a phase change. But it is clear that change results from significant time spent in the basement, not just a passing visit.

The stories differed, yet the seminar participants all agreed their personality changes were related to distress of extreme personal significance. Learning this aspect of the model opened people up to begin talking of the impact of their basement experiences. They all said they now felt greater understanding of very painful experiences in their lives.

The fourth, and last, difference was notable throughout the presentation of the model. Descriptions of behaviors and recommendations for responses were very specific. Other models give general statements which I have often heard questioned or contradicted. A statement, for example, that an introvert always prefers quiet will invariably be contradicted by someone in the room. PCM, on the other hand, illustrates personality types with facial expressions usually encountered, facial lines that form, tone of voice used, and even the kind of phrasing most likely to be encountered.
This leads to specific recommendations for facial expression, tone of voice, and even specific phrasing for connecting with a given personality type. This behavioral concreteness brings to life the multiple processes of communication -- a fact which leads to the name Process Communications.

An aspect I found especially useful was the behavioral specificity for diagnosing when someone is in distress. Even though we know people very well, it is possible to miss signs that they are exhibiting basement behavior until they go down to level two. Once again, specific phrasing was identified as a key to detecting basement responses.

Second Generation. The friend who invited me to the seminar described Process Communications as a second generation model. Just as electronic technology can reach new levels of sophistication which will be appreciated by experienced users, he suggested, so it is that Process Communications will be especially appreciated by experienced users of personality models.

Experience leads me to agree with my friend. The differences just described represent advancement to a new generation of sophistication. Experienced users of personality models will be especially excited as they become acquainted with Process Communications. However, exposure to other models is not a prerequisite for getting full benefit from PCM.

Practical Applications.

Like other personality models, Process Communications can be used at home or work to improve relationships and performance. The key to effectiveness is the extent to which models promote understanding, recognition, prediction, and action. In my opinion, PCM has distinct advantage over other models in its tools for recognition, prediction, and action. The cornerstone to understanding the many applications of PCM is how it improves personal effectiveness.

Personal Effectiveness. PCM and Myers-Briggs are backed by research supporting their validity. The most important validation, in the eyes of users, occurs as people recognize and understand themselves better through the model. This combination of understanding and recognition leads to personal insights which people are often eager to share. Experiencing the enthusiasm and openness that happens as these insights are shared leads to the belief that the model certainly is a valid tool.

Any successful model (which certainly includes DiSC and MBTI) produces enthusiasm as people validate the model subjectively. In this respect, I enjoyed the additional insights offered by PCM to complement those I had from other models. It was very enlightening to understand why I have negative feelings toward behaviors associated with Rebels and Promoters -- and why I have difficulty using those behaviors when situations call for them. Those types are on the upper floors of my structure, calling for high energy use to access them.
It's easier to dismiss them as undesirable behaviors than it is to admit that I just lack the energy level to use them or empathize with their view of the world.

A second level of effectiveness comes in as people use the model to recognize and understand people who are not openly sharing their personality model. How easy is it to figure out someone's personality from observation alone? My experience is that people can guess the DiSC components fairly easily, but that it is often more difficult to guess the MBTI type. The increased variety of options in PCM makes it difficult to determine the precise 6 story structure, but there are specific clues to help recognize person's dominant type and the type that is currently in the driver's seat. These clues concern facial expression, gestures, tone of voice, phrasing, and even specific words used in certain situations. The guidelines for recognition in PCM are lead to a greater level of accuracy in diagnosing personality dynamics than is possible with DiSC or MBTI.

Prediction and action are weak areas for many models, including DiSC and MBTI -- but not for PCM. Effectiveness consists in moving from understanding and recognition to action based on the ability to predict likely outcomes. Behavioral tendencies are described in very general terms in DiSC and MBTI, leading to recommendations for action that are general and often vague. There is little capacity for prediction in either model.

The level of specificity of PCM recognition leads to specific words, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice for dealing effectively with people. PCM training predicts results from using different methods with the various personality types, supporting the concrete guidelines for effective action.

Role playing is an essential feature of PCM training. It is possible to learn specific behaviors to follow in establishing rapport with each personality type. Specific actions are rehearsed and responses to those actions can be reliably predicted.

Still another aspect of personal effectiveness is that we routine deal with people who live in the basement. Very often we ignore clear signs that people are in distress. PCM teaches understanding, recognition, prediction, and action elements for relating to people in distress. Since this element is missing from other models, it is especially enlightening to learn how to recognize and understand basement situations. Guidelines for prediction and action are as specific as with non-basement behaviors.

The result is that Process Communications enhances personal effectiveness to a far greater extent than other models. This leads directly to other applications.

Organizational Uses. Employers have often resisted psychological methods or group techniques (T groups, for example) as too personal for the task-centeredness of the workplace. Personality models have been an exception, for they have gained wide acceptance in developing
supervisory skills, improving communications and morale, and in laying the foundation for team building. Employers are eager to use the DiSC and MBTI, for they are psychological tools that don't get too personal.

Many employers may react to Process Communications as too personal for comfort. I believe, however, that the advantages of PCM will shine as employers get past initial reluctance. Increased personal effectiveness in supervisory relationships, interpersonal communications, and team relationships is bound to win managers to PCM as a superior model. Improved ability to predict outcomes of interactions and unprecedented training in dealing with basement behavior are bound to be especially valued in the workplace. The aspects of PCM which may seem too personal make it ideal for use in wellness programs. With the growing attention to the impact of change and its stress on the workplace, employers need a model which recognizes and deals with the personal impact of change. This is the strength of PCM. In fact, no other model recognizes personal change or basement behaviors.

Process Communications has two special uses for organizations -- selection and outplacement. NASA and other federal agencies needing to make very sophisticated judgments in selecting critical people, like astronauts, have used PCM effectively. Employers will have to use it with great care. Research is ongoing on the value of PCM as a selection tool. Outplacement is the other side of the coin. People leaving an organization are usually under stress and need sound career guidance. PCM is effective dealing with the stressful nature of the situation. Research on its value for career guidance is also ongoing. These special uses have great potential for the future.

Intimate Relationships. Seminars to improve communications in family or intimate relationships are a natural use of PCM. Parents can improve effectiveness in dealing with children of all ages. Partners can grow in mutual understanding and in communicating effectively with each other.

This is an area in which models can easily raise expectations that can't be fulfilled. Intimate relationships involve attraction. I know of no model that can predict or explain the attraction between two people. When the attraction exists, people can use personality models to discover just how compatible they are, where areas of difficulty probably exist, and strategies for communicating successfully with each other.

Process Communications tells couples more about compatibility than other models. By comparing personality structures, a couple can see where higher energy use is demanded of each of them. An expectation by one that something needs to be done routinely may call for consistently higher energy use from the other -- an obvious danger point in a relationship. Role playing the behaviors needed to connect with the other's dominant personality can lead to a realization that one can't meet the expectations of the other.
Couples will also learn personal effectiveness in a specific relationship as each tells the other whether the specific guidelines offered by PCM apply to their own personal wishes. Learning to recognize and deal with basement behavior can be especially significant. It's an age old story that divorced partners complain of how the other person ignored or dismissed signs of trouble. Learning to recognize and act on basement behaviors can head off those pitiful words "I never realized it was that important to you."

Couples seminars are a natural use of PCM. Unfortunately, no model can explain attraction or insure success when attraction exists. Even the most compatible of relationships may fail. PCM can't guarantee success, but it will help people understand what patterns in the relationship promoted success and which led to failure.

My Relationship Experience.

Personality models were often discussed with my girl friend. More than once she attended one of my DiSC seminars. Concerns about our differences in that model were discussed early in the relationship, but problem areas anticipated in that model never became significant for us. Later we discussed our results on the Myers-Briggs as I attempted to understand her pattern of withdrawing then returning to the relationship. Attending the PCM seminar together confirmed just how compatible we were. Paradoxically, I decided to end the relationship as the result of what I learned from Process Communications.

Early in our relationship, my girl friend was concerned that we would repeat patterns from her previous marriage. On the DiSC, my dominance trait is extremely high and my interactive trait is correspondingly low. This points to a "hard-driving" dedication to work. Her ex-husband had been work driven to the extent that he was hardly ever home. She had developed a greater sense of independence since the divorce, so that she thought we might have some leader-follower conflicts.

Experience soon proved both fears unfounded. I wanted to be around much more than her ex-husband, but she still had plenty of time for pursuit of independent interests. Leader-follower conflicts often emerge as couples deal with kitchen and housework chores. We found that we naturally complemented each other in those areas. In fact, we found that we complemented each other to such an extent that disagreement or anger hardly ever occurred. I can remember only one argument during the four years of our relationship.

In our case, the DiSC failed to indicate how compatible we were. It also pointed to areas of potential conflict that did not become problems for us.

As can be expected, we did have problems. Family connections were at the heart of situations which developed into a pattern of increasingly long withdrawals. Nothing brings out family differences like graduations.
Within a few weeks, we each had daughters graduating -- hers from college, mine from high school. At the graduation, I met her ex-husband, who came with his second wife and two young children. The graduate spent time with mother and father separately, carefully scheduling time with each side of her family. Relationships when the two sides met were cordial but strained.

It was quite different at my graduation. I have been married and divorced twice. My daughter wanted her step mother and step sister to attend as well as her mother and me. Everyone attended a reception prior to the graduation and then we all sat together at the ceremony. There were awkward moments, but we all felt comfortable and would have thought it unusual to do things differently.

Obviously, my girl friend did not attend. I understood. What I didn't understand was her unwillingness to meet either ex-wife. I also didn't understand her behavior in the weeks after the graduation. She became depressed, withdrawn, and uncommunicative. Efforts to get her to talk about her feelings resulted in tears and pained failure to find the words. She just didn't understand how I could relate to ex-wives as I did. She also seemed to resent that she was involved in a situation which contained ex-wives.

There were other graduations. There were also financial obligations related to child support and college education which placed limits on my resources. Family ties and finances seemed to be the springboard for periods of depression. Eventually this turned into efforts on her part to end the relationship.

I used the Myers-Briggs in an attempt to understand the things she found herself unable to put in words. The MBTI helped explain our compatibility. I am an INTP and she is an INFP. The significant difference in our patterns is on the thinking-feeling scale, a typical male-female divergence. The literature on her type pointed to a likelihood that she would be unable to verbally communicate about matters that stirred up her deepest feelings as to what is acceptable. The conclusion I drew was that the issue of family hit so close to home that she was frozen into silence when she tried to express how deeply our differences troubled her.

The periods of depression and withdrawal seemed to be short interludes in what was otherwise a conflict-free and mutually satisfying relationship. I began to discuss marriage. This led to another period of depression and her decision to end the relationship. In July she said farewell, but in October she was back. Christmas again reminded us of family connections, so in January she again broke it off. In May we were together again. The relationship then continued with short periods of distancing until the next March. This time there was no decision to end, just an obvious withdrawal without explanation. It was during this withdrawal that we attended the PCM seminar.

The seminar led to three insights into our relationship. First was a deeper understanding of how compatible we were. In discussing
the patterns with my girl friend, she agreed that ours was a depth of compatibility that was uncommon. Much of the relationship seemed effortless, we learned, because of the similarity of the first four types in our structure. My base of Persister with Dreamer next highest was matched by her base as a Dreamer with a phase change up to Persister. Reactor was her next highest type, while it was only one higher for me.

Discussions of the detailed interactions involved in these combinations made us aware of how effortless much of our relationship was. Not comprehended in the model was the fact that our religious values were also closely matched.

I was relieved to see the model confirm my belief that we were in fact very compatible. One of the problems that often occurs is that people fall into patterns of choosing the same incompatibilities, failing to learn from failure after failure. Having been married and divorced twice, I was aware of personality conflicts that came out over time. The model showed that I had not repeated patterns that led to problems in the past.

It seemed to me that Process Communications showed that I was in a relationship that could have -- in fact, should have worked.

The second realization was less optimistic. I became aware that our relationship drove her to the basement. I certainly was aware of that during periods of extreme withdrawal and pained silence. What became clear to me was that she was in the basement many times when I failed to realize the importance of what she said. Many times, the only comment I could get from her was that our relationship was not perfect. I tended to discount the statement. After all, who can really expect perfection? I felt very confident the relationship was more than good enough. But PCM identified "It's not perfect" as the specific words for a Persister in the first level basement. On reflection, I can see that she spent far more time in her basement than I realized.

Even worse was what I learned about her extreme withdrawal. Her behavior reflected a drop to basement level two of her base personality, Dreamer. Going another level down in the basement is bad enough, but shifting back to the base personality reflects even a greater level of distress.

The third realization concerned the dynamic leading her to the basement. I learned that every personality type has a dominant fear. With Persisters, the fear of failure lurks ever in the wings. Her fear of failing in yet another marriage was overshadowing all that was going for us.

Early in the relationship, she warned me that she had a pattern of ending a relationship as soon as marriage became a serious topic. Dreamer and Persister that I am, I pushed ahead. After all, the relationship began at a level of intensity beyond otherwise either of us had known.
The sad result was that the forces bringing us together were eventually defeated by the fear that kept pushing her into the basement. Her behavior told me ever more clearly that love had been defeated by fear. But still she was unable to tell the news straight out.

After several weeks of thinking over what I learned as the result of the seminar, I called off the relationship. No sooner did I tell her it was over than the walls of separation came down. Once again she was out of the basement -- and once again pulled toward the relationship. I told her that we could renew the relationship, but she would have to take the lead. Over the next three months she made two efforts to re-establish the relationship. Each time a blissful forty-eight hours was followed by extreme second level basement withdrawal. This led me, once again, to call everything off. This time, I don't expect her to try again.

As I said at the beginning, I have learned to be skeptical of personality models. They can't explain everything. They can't promise to save relationships -- even one as strong as the one I lost. Having used three models to deal with a complex relationship, I believe that PCM gives the clearest understanding of what happened. It guided me in taking action, even though the action was painful.

Understanding what went wrong in a relationship doesn't relieve the pain, but it does make it bearable. From that understanding springs a renewed confidence and realistic hope for future relationships.