

LEVEL 1: INDIVIDUAL

ALIGN YOURSELF SINGLE PLAYER

Know your personal operating system

NAME _____

DATE _____

Every day, teams experience friction that has nothing to do with competence, commitment, or care. Someone thinks out loud and gets labeled as "dominating the conversation." Another person needs time to process and gets seen as "disengaged." A fast mover is called "reckless," while a careful thinker is accused of "overthinking."

These tensions aren't about right or wrong. They're about different operating systems and different needs. We all have natural patterns in how we process information, make decisions, communicate ideas, and approach our work. Some of these patterns are preferences we can flex. Others are genuine needs that affect our ability to contribute effectively. When these patterns and needs go unnamed, they create misunderstanding. When we make them visible, they become strengths we can leverage and bridges we can build.

This guide helps you identify four common patterns that create workplace friction. For each one, you'll reflect on where you naturally fall on the spectrum, what others might misunderstand about your approach, and whether what you've identified is a true need or a strong preference. Understanding this distinction helps you communicate more clearly and navigate situations where your needs might conflict with someone else's.

THE GOAL

It isn't to change how you work. It's to help others understand how you work best.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

- 1 Work through one dimension at a time. There are four.
- 2 Mark where you fall on each spectrum, then write in your own words.
- 3 Bring 2-3 insights to the people you work with most. That's where it pays off.

01

DIMENSION 1

PROCESSING STYLE

SOLO MODE vs PARTY CHAT

WHERE YOUR THINKING HAPPENS

Some people think by talking, refining ideas out loud. Others think internally first and need quiet space before they share. Neither is better, but when they collide, misunderstanding happens. External processors get labeled “dominating”; internal processors get read as “disengaged.” Both are doing their best thinking, just on different channels.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ When facing a complex problem, do you talk it through or need time alone to think?
- ◆ Do ideas get clearer as you speak, or do they form before you speak?
- ◆ In meetings, do you contribute while still forming thoughts, or after processing?
- ◆ Is silence in a meeting comfortable or uncomfortable for you?

WHERE DO YOU FALL?

INTERNAL PROCESSOR

EXTERNAL PROCESSOR



Mark where you naturally fall.

NAME THE MISREAD

Others might think I’m _____

but actually I’m _____

e.g. Others might think I’m dominating the conversation, but actually I’m working through my thoughts out loud and would welcome others jumping in.

YOUR REFLECTION

WHAT WOULD HELP TEAMMATES

02

DIMENSION 2

DECISION SPEED

SCOUT AHEAD vs RUSH IN

HOW QUICKLY YOU COMMIT

Some people act on incomplete information, trusting they can adjust course. Others gather more data before committing. Both manage risk; they just have different thresholds for what feels safe enough to act. Action-takers get called “reckless”; careful thinkers get called “analysis paralysis.” Both want good decisions, just with different certainty first.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ With incomplete information, do you act quickly and adjust, or gather more data first?
- ◆ Are you more stressed by moving too slowly, or by moving too quickly?
- ◆ When opportunity arises, is your instinct “let’s try it” or “let’s think this through”?
- ◆ How comfortable are you deciding when you can’t predict all the outcomes?

WHERE DO YOU FALL?

CAUTIOUS / DATA-SEEKING

ACTION-ORIENTED / FAST



Mark where you naturally fall.

NAME THE MISREAD

Others might think I’m _____

but actually I’m _____

e.g. Others might think I’m overthinking, but actually I’m spotting problems before they become costly mistakes.

YOUR REFLECTION

WHAT WOULD HELP TEAMMATES

03

DIMENSION 3

EXECUTION APPROACH

EARLY ACCESS vs FULL LAUNCH

WHEN YOU POLISH YOUR WORK

Some optimize for momentum: ship quickly and refine as you go. Others optimize for thoroughness: get it right the first time, even if it takes longer. Both create value; they define “ready to ship” differently. Fast movers get accused of cutting corners; thorough workers get called perfectionists. Both care about quality, with different bars for “done.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Do you prefer to ship something functional quickly, or take time to polish it?
- ◆ How do you feel when the pace is faster than you’d choose? When it’s slower?
- ◆ Would you rather iterate on multiple versions, or get it right on the first attempt?
- ◆ Are you prouder when work is done quickly, or when it’s done thoroughly?

WHERE DO YOU FALL?

REFINE THEN EXECUTE

EXECUTE THEN REFINE



Mark where you naturally fall.

NAME THE MISREAD

Others might think I’m _____

but actually I’m _____

e.g. Others might think I’m too focused on perfection, but actually I’m preventing rework by getting it right the first time.

YOUR REFLECTION

WHAT WOULD HELP TEAMMATES

04

DIMENSION 4

CONTEXT PREFERENCE

FULL LORE vs QUEST OBJECTIVE

HOW MUCH CONTEXT YOU NEED

Some need the full picture before they act: background, history, how the pieces connect. Others want the headline first and will ask for details if they need them. Context-seekers get overwhelmed when meetings jump straight to decisions; bottom-line thinkers get frustrated by long setups. Both want clarity, just structured differently to get there.

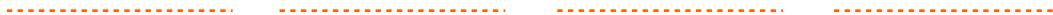
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ When someone brings a request, do you need background first, or the ask up front?
- ◆ In emails and presentations, do you prefer detail and context, or concise summaries?
- ◆ Learning something new, do you want the “why” and history, or to jump to application?
- ◆ Have you been told you give too much detail, or not enough context?

WHERE DO YOU FALL?

BOTTOM LINE FIRST

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND FIRST



Mark where you naturally fall.

NAME THE MISREAD

Others might think I'm _____

but actually I'm _____

e.g. Others might think I'm giving too much detail, but actually I need that context to feel confident in my decisions.

YOUR REFLECTION

WHAT WOULD HELP TEAMMATES

05

GOING DEEPER

DISTINGUISHING NEEDS FROM PREFERENCES

You've reflected on four dimensions of how you work. Before moving forward, consider one more layer: which of these are true needs versus strong preferences?

Needs are non-negotiable for you to do your best work. Without them, your effectiveness suffers significantly. You struggle to contribute fully or maintain your energy over time.

Preferences are important to you and make work more comfortable, but you can flex them when circumstances require it. You might not love adapting, but you can do it without major consequences.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Looking back at your insights across the four dimensions, which feel absolutely essential to how you work?
- ◆ Which could you adapt or compromise on if a situation required it?
- ◆ Are there contexts where something that's usually a need becomes more flexible? Or where a preference becomes more critical?

Understanding this distinction helps you communicate clearly with others and navigate situations where your needs might conflict with someone else's. It also helps you recognize when you're being asked to compromise something that truly matters versus something you can flex on.

YOUR REFLECTION**WHAT WOULD HELP TEAMMATES**

 CLOSING**SHARE YOUR BUILD****MAKE IT ACTIONABLE**

You've mapped where you fall on four dimensions that create friction. Now turn insight into action. A pattern only helps the team once you've shared it.

1 WHO NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND THIS ABOUT YOU?

Think about the people you work with most closely. Who would benefit from knowing your operating system?

2 HOW WILL YOU SHARE IT?

Plan a short conversation. Try: "I've been thinking about how I work best, and I want to share a few things that might help us collaborate..."

3 WHAT WILL YOU ADJUST?

Pick one place your operating system differs from a teammate's. What's one thing you can do to bridge that gap?

WANT TO GO DEEPER WITH YOUR TEAM?

This is one of Mattering Lab's Free DLC tools. Book a discovery call at calendly.com/matteringlab.