

# Concrete - Abstract - Sequential - Random

## Applying the Gregorc 4-Quadrant Model to Teamwork

Ron and Sam work together on the same team. Ron is the experimenter in the group and often comes up with new ideas that are practical and easy to implement. Sam is a great planner and organizer. His favorite slogan is, "Plan your work and work your plan." Most of the time they work well together, but every once in a while they get irritated with each other. Sam sees Ron as too random because he jumps from one thing to another without regard for following company processes. Ron sees Sam as too sequential. If things are not done in the right sequence, Sam won't trust the results. When Ron is successful doing things his way, Sam says, "He got lucky this time. If Ron would do things the right way, we would all be better off in the long run." Because Ron and Sam have a good working relationship they get past their conflict.

Anthony Gregorc, author of *An Adult's Guide To Style*, gives us a theoretical model that is useful for understanding a difference between Ron and Sam. Some people like to follow a sequential process. They start at the beginning and end at the end. Others tend to be more random, taking short cuts, skipping steps along the way. They often like to start with the end in mind and work backwards. If Sam were to write a paper, he would gather all the relevant information, develop an outline, and then write. When Ron writes, he just starts writing and when he needs more information he gets it. When he is done, he builds an outline and then goes back to make sure everything within the paper is consistent with the facts. Both approaches get the work done and both approaches can work well.



Ron - Random



Sam - Sequential



### Sequential:

Like clockwork, a process followed step by step, over a period of time

### Random:

Like a stop watch, starting and stopping at will, subject to what is important at the moment.



Gregorc adds another dimension to his theory by focusing on how we like to learn. Some of us depend primarily on our physical senses, what we can touch, see, feel, smell, and hear. Others prefer to work with ideas to get a better understanding of the world. He calls the first group concrete learners and the second group abstract learners. Sam and Ron are both concrete learners. Sam's goal is to get things done in a predictable way and he depends on improving the process to do it. Ron likes to experiment with things, trying to figure out how they work. Both of them like concrete examples when people are presenting new ideas.

**Concrete Learners:** Like to learn through their physical senses, what they can touch, see, hear, taste and smell. They like to deal with things that exist in the physical world.



**Abstract Learners:** Prefer the world of ideas and feelings. They use reason and intuition to deal with ideas, concepts, and feelings.



When Amanda finds a topic that interests her, she likes to dig deeper and learn more about it. She pulls in all the information she can find to see if she can make it fit together in a cohesive way, thereby developing an abstract, theoretical understanding of the topic.

Ann cares a great deal about how people feel and she is happy when everyone is working together. When there is conflict within the team, Ann is the first to tell a joke and lighten it up. Ann reminds the team that perception is reality.

Amanda and Ann usually work well with everyone on the team, but there are times they simply don't make sense to each other. Ann has a hard time with Amanda's habit of working alone and not including the team. She is especially bothered when Amanda takes a position that is contrary to what others on the team feel. It seems that Amanda has a one track mind and Ann can never get her off that track. Both Ann and Amanda live in the abstract world of thoughts, ideas, and feelings but Ann says she that she works from the heart while Amanda works from the head. Amanda agrees that she works from the head, not the heart because how she feels about something does not change it. She once told Ann, "I care about your opinion and if you give me the data I will tell you if you are right."

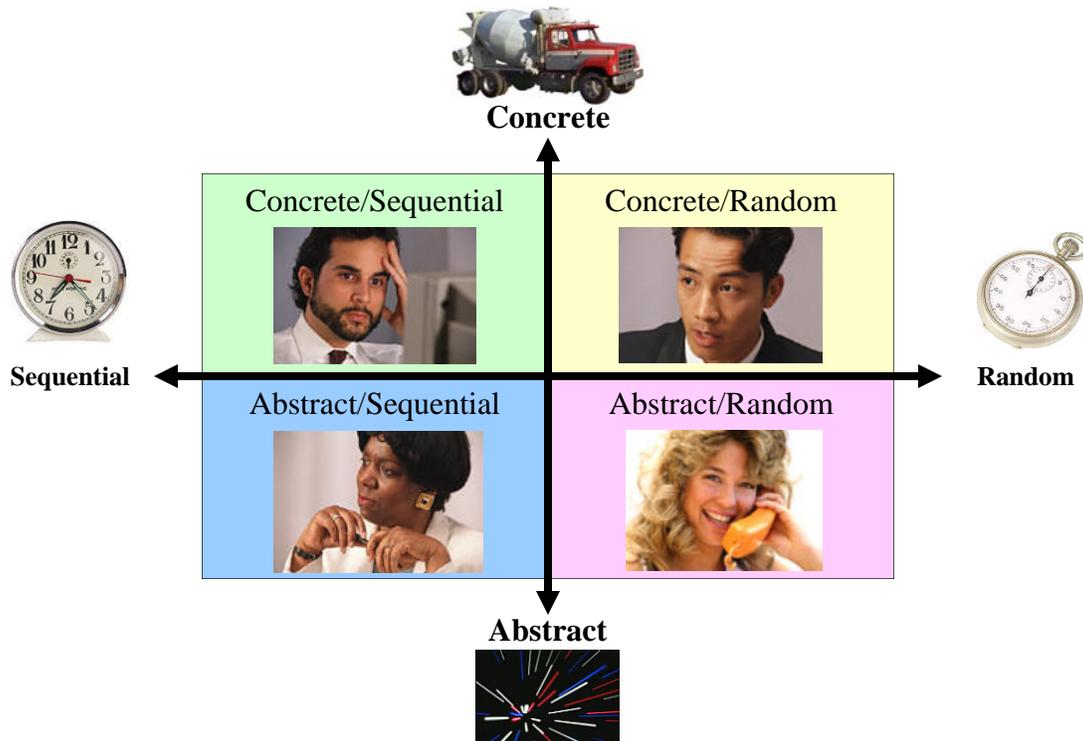
Together, the four of them make a fantastic team because Ron is often experimenting and developing innovative products that are practical. Sam applies his creativity to improving the process so that over time quality improves and cost goes down. Amanda does the necessary research so their products have a strong theoretical foundation. Ann, of course, keeps the team working together and she networks effectively with people outside the team to grease the way for dealing with other departments in the organization.



Amanda  
*Abstract/Sequential*



Ann  
*Abstract/Random*



By combining the two ideas, Gregorc builds the following four quadrants:

**Concrete-Sequential:** Practical and well organized. They like to plan their work and work their plan.

- Thinking processes are logical, instinctive and deliberate.
- Strive for perfection and have an eye for detail.
- Focus on material reality and physical objects.
- Creativity lies not with originality but with making it more effective than the original.
- Prefer an environment that is ordered, practical, quiet, and stable.

**Concrete-Random:** Practical and live in the physical world, but they like to learn by trial and error. Rather than a plan, they want options.

- Thinking processes are instinctive, intuitive, and impulsive.
- Events affected by outside variables.
- Focus on practical applications, methods, and processes.
- Creativity is original, inventive, and unique.
- Prefer an environment that is stimulus rich and competitive.

**Abstract-Sequential:** Like to develop ideas in a logical way. How someone feels about something does not change reality.

- Thinking processes are intellectual, analytical, correlative, fluid, and quick.
- Loves books.
- Focus attention on knowledge, concepts, and ideas.
- Creativity lies within models, theories, and synthesizing.
- Prefer an environment that is ordered, quiet, independent, and mentally stimulating.

**Abstract-Random:** Work from the heart, not the head. How someone feels about it makes a great deal of difference.

- Thinking processes are based in feelings, which makes this type of person good at establishing a rapport with people.
- Make sense of the world using feelings and emotions.
- Focus on emotional attachments, relationships, and memories.
- Creativity is imaginative and often expressed through music and art.
- Prefer an environment of emotional experiences, active and colorful, and physical freedom.

Common sense tells us that an ideal team would have all four behaviors and it is unlikely that one person can do all four behaviors well. That is why organizations form. On the positive side, we each bring something different to the table. On the negative side some of things one person likes another dislikes. Something that makes sense to one person makes no sense to another person. Compounding this, we all work in all four quadrants over the course of a typical day, even though we may find our selves most comfortable in one or two quadrants and somewhat uncomfortable in other quadrants. In other words we have internal and external discomfort. No wonder teams sometimes become dysfunctional. Take a close look at the likes and dislikes with each of the quadrants and predict areas of conflict.

<i>Concrete/Sequential</i>	<i>Concrete/Random</i>
<p><b>Likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Order, predictability</li> <li>- Logical sequence</li> <li>- Following directions</li> </ul> <p><b>Learns best with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structured environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Dislikes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incomplete or unorganized</li> <li>- Questions without right/wrong</li> </ul> <p><b>Makes sense</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Step-by-step</li> <li>- A schedule to follow</li> </ul>	<p><b>Likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experimenting</li> <li>- Take risks</li> <li>- Independent problem solving</li> </ul> <p><b>Learns best with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trial-and-error approaches</li> </ul> <p><b>Dislikes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restrictions and limitations</li> <li>- No options</li> </ul> <p><b>Makes sense:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Try it</li> <li>- Concrete examples</li> </ul>
<i>Abstract/Sequential</i>	<i>Abstract/Random</i>
<p><b>Likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Their points to be heard</li> <li>- Analyzing before deciding</li> <li>- Applying logic</li> </ul> <p><b>Learns best with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to work alone</li> </ul> <p><b>Dislikes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expressing their emotions</li> <li>- Too little time to be thorough</li> </ul> <p><b>Makes sense:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Well researched information</li> <li>- Work through ideas thoroughly</li> </ul>	<p><b>Likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen to others</li> <li>- Group harmony</li> <li>- Healthy relationships with others</li> </ul> <p><b>Learns best with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Dislikes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criticism</li> <li>- Focusing on one thing at a time</li> </ul> <p><b>Makes sense:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From the heart not the head</li> <li>- Personal examples</li> </ul>

To get a better understanding of this work group, let's go back in time to their school and talk to their 4th grade teacher:

- **AR:** Ann loved recess. Her teachers would always that she was the friendliest girl in the room and if she would just stop talking, she would accomplish wonderful things. Her teacher noticed that with group projects she got the group to work well together and make it fun.
- **CR:** Some considered Sam to be unorganized, but that was because he had his own way of doing things. Her really came to life when he had the freedom to complete a project his way rather than having to use the standard method that the teacher expected him to follow. He enjoyed doing hands-on science projects and he especially enjoyed doing things that others said would be impossible to do.
- **CS:** Sam was considered a model student. His desk was organized. He had the nicest handwriting and the holes were never torn out of his paper. He liked it when the teacher told him what he needed to do and then gave him time to work on it. He consistently

followed the proper procedure and was not afraid to ask questions to find out how to do it right.

- **AS:** Amanda barely made it through 4th grade even though she was really smart. She just could not understand why she had to do the homework. However, when her teacher let her write a report about the book she had just read about horses, she easily wrote over 10 pages of information and did an outstanding job.

Gregorc warns that we should not administer his profile to children because of the danger of putting children in boxes. Their personalities are not fully developed and they need to develop skills in each of these quadrants.

A teacher will not be effective with all students if he or she works from just one quadrant such concrete/sequential, wanting all the children to do everything the right way, and invalidating those who deviate. Thomas Edison, one of the greatest inventors of all times did poorly in school and fortunately for him and the rest of the world, his mother gave him learning opportunities at home using methods that worked for him. He was ill-suited to rote learning; he could reach understanding only by doing and making. At age nine, she gave him a book that illustrated home experiments in chemistry and electricity, and he attempted everyone of them.<sup>1</sup> The best teaching strategy is to teach in all four quadrants. Not only does this help the children who think differently from the teacher, it also develops all four styles within each child.

<b>Major Intolerances</b>	
<i>Concrete/Sequential</i>	<i>Concrete/Random</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Things not conventionally correct</li> <li>- People too emotional</li> <li>- People too academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fuzzy headed thinking</li> <li>- Being told to seek hard data</li> <li>- People unwilling to consider options</li> </ul>
<i>Abstract/Sequential</i>	<i>Abstract/Random</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anything that fails a logic test</li> <li>- Hazy or sentimental thinking</li> <li>- Excessive rules, regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being told to be realistic</li> <li>- Restrictive environments</li> <li>- Non-caring unemotional people</li> </ul>

Another use of this model is anticipate each quadrant's *major intolerance*. If you want to press their hot buttons and get them to stop listening to you, phrase your comments and suggestions in terms of what annoys them. Take special note that each of these intolerances fit within another quadrant's comfort zone, meaning it will be natural and easy to irritate other people depending on our respective comfort zones.

### Summary

In a work team we need to validate all four styles. It is not enough to have a great process if you don't feed the organization new, random ideas. It is not enough to be theoretically correct;

perception and feelings are important, too. A great team has diversity of style and supports each person on the team.

## Sources

1. US News & World Report October 11, 2004, *The Spark of Genius*
2. *An Adult's Guide to Style*, Anthony Gregorc Ph.D.
3. *The Way They Learn*, Cynthia Ulrich Tobias



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Tough Teams is a training company that focuses on project teams. After many years working in many corporations, Tough Teams facilitators still report that the 4-quadrant models add a fresh new perspective to teamwork. Even though it is common sense that a team needs diversity, too many people push for conformity, instead. After teams participates in a workshop, we frequently see diversity of work style affirmed and valued.