HOW TO LEAD YOUR TEAM TO PREDICTABLE SUCCESS

THE
SYNERGIST

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DEDICATION

To LBJ, who arrived during the writing of this book, and who is proof that Synergists come in all sizes.

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FOREWORD: Why You Should Read This Book

In this book I show how any individual (that's you) can lead any group of people to achieve success - whether or not you're the formal leader of that group.

You'll learn to do this by performing a key role, usually unseen and unrecognized, that exists in every successful group - a role that I've come to call 'The Synergist'.

As you will discover, being the Synergist in any group is a natural, uncomplicated process. It doesn't require you to unlearn anything, or to become someone you are not. There are no lengthy rules to memorize, no complicated exercises to master, and nothing 'artificial' to engage in. Because of this, the learning curve to becoming an effective Synergist is minimal, and most people can grasp the underlying principles and begin applying them immediately.

The secret to being an effective Synergist is simplicity itself: it lies in recognizing a small number of key interactions that every team or group experience, and making unobtrusive but essential interventions at those pivotal moments on your group's path to success. This book will teach you what those key interactions are, how to recognize them, and when and how to intervene appropriately.

If you work regularly with a team or group, you will discover that you have almost certainly been sub-consciously practicing many of the principles of The Synergist already. For you, this book will pull those sub-conscious insights together into a simple but comprehensive methodology, and will equip you with a powerful toolkit to consciously guide your team, group or organization to success - faster and with less stress - by using a structured, accelerated process.

The fundamentals of The Synergist are universal: they apply to any group of two people or more who are trying to achieve common goals. While for the sake of clarity I have chosen to write in the primary context of business, the principles of The Synergist will work for any group, in any situation - so whether you lead or are part of a Fortune 100 company, a division or department, a project team, a not-for-profit, a government agency, a non-governmental organization, a charity, a soccer league, a church committee or a family - any group of people who are trying to achieve something together - then The Synergist is for you, and you will benefit from reading this book.

Note: The case histories found in this book are composites created from the hundreds of businesses and people I've worked with and learned from over the years. Any resemblance to a particular living or deceased individual, or specific business situation is unintended and is purely coincidental.

INTRODUCTION: What a Synergist is, and why you should care

If you're involved with any group of people who are trying to achieve common goals - whether by leading a Fortune 500 company or volunteering part-time at a kid's soccer league, you soon become acutely aware that those goals will be achieved *only through the work of the people in the group*.

Put simply, organizations don't succeed in and of themselves - they succeed only through *individuals,* working in groups and teams.

Groups and teams lie at the heart of every successful enterprise - in fact, they *are* the heart of a successful enterprise. Walk the halls of any organization, large or small, and you'll see huddles of two or more people everywhere, interacting formally and informally, face to face and virtually, meeting in conference rooms and hallways, communicating by email, phone, web conference, social media and text messages, even occasionally by pen and paper.

In the best - and most successful - of organizations, it's these interactions between individuals which together form a vital bridge between the organization's over-arching vision, and the day-to-day actions required to realize that vision. From these multifaceted human interactions spring the ideas, decisions, plans, strategies and tactics necessary to move the organization forward to success.

In the worst - and least successful - of organizations, these same interactions between individuals produce stress, indecision, confusion, uncertainty and distrust, frustrating the organization's goal of realizing its vision, and draining the enthusiasm, commitment and direction of everyone involved.

For many organizations - perhaps even the one you work with - each day brings a mix of each. Some interactions gel and produce a profitable, positive result, while others gridlock or stall, producing little or nothing of actionable value.

Yet for *every* organization, the difference between the two is by far the single most important factor in determining whether the enterprise succeeds or fails. If you can ensure that when your people interact they are effective and deliver the goods - you win. Watch them stutter or fail in those same interactions - you lose.

Pass Me a Paper Clip
This simple fact - that the quality of 'people interaction' is a fundamental requirement for organizational success - seems self-evident, and yet every day in organizations large and small, untold thousands - quite probably millions of group interactions take place, most of which fail to take the organization any closer to its goals. In many cases groups meet, interact, then part - no closer to achieving their objectives than when they started.

This tide of unproductive and ineffective group interactions has a massive cost: it drains the global economy of billions of dollars a year, strangles creativity and initiative, and results in many businesses, divisions, departments, projects, groups and teams stalling out long before they've even begun to realize their full potential.

On an individual level, the cost of group dysfunction is just as high: as we've seen, it generates inordinate levels of stress, demoralizes entire workforces and demotivates otherwise high-performing people who would rather take a paper clip, straighten it out and stab it in their eye than sit through another interminable, ineffectual meeting.

And it's not only formal meetings that are caught in this seeping maw of inter-personal dysfunction. Every type of interaction - one-on-one discussions, phone calls, emails, water-cooler chats, performance reviews, brainstorming sessions - even the annual picnic can become blighted by misperceptions, misunderstandings and outright manipulation.

Most frustratingly of all for CEO's, SVP's, leaders, managers and millions of individuals working in organizations around the globe, all of this - the expense, the personal pain, the lack of progress - repeats over and over again, every single day.

Why can't I break this cycle?
Not surprisingly this frustrating, repeating cycle of dysfunction has produced an avalanche of resources, purportedly designed to help groups and teams be more effective. Books, workshops, conferences, assessments, quizzes, coaching - you name it, there's a tool of some sort designed to make group interactions work harmoniously and effectively.

Here's a newsflash: They almost never work. You'll know this if you've ever been part of a group which has worked through a 'team-improvement' process. The pattern is predictable: a group or team isn't firing on all cylinders, so everyone gets packed off to a workshop or conference, or is given a book and study guide and told to work through it together. Some do so excitedly and with engagement while others comply grimly and in silent (or not-so-silent) protest. The process can be painful and disruptive. The result? After everyone completes the program the team enjoys a short period of brittle improvement before everyone returns to their previous positions and attitudes.

The reason why most group- and team-improvement programs fail to produce permanent long-term change is simple: it's because they address the *symptoms* of group dysfunction (distrust, poor communication, fear of change, to name just a few) rather than the root cause. In fact, in many cases symptoms are incorrectly labelled as root causes. Take 'distrust' as an example - a factor that many team improvement programs concentrate on. Distrust doesn't appear out

of nowhere, it always has a root cause - there's always a reason (valid or not) why one team member distrusts another. Trying to eliminate distrust without dealing with the underlying root cause of that distrust is like filling up your gas tank when the car's tires are punctured: it might be worth doing, but it isn't going to fix your problem.

Making an End Run Around the Symptoms
As I'll show in this book, the single, most basic difference between an ineffective group interaction and a highly productive one lies in the existence of a single component - a natural, uncomplicated, and easily introduced component at that - the role of the Synergist.

Introducing the Synergist role to your people interactions can produce a dramatic, profound and lasting effect precisely because it blows past the lengthy and complex list of all possible symptoms of team and group dysfunction, and instead concentrates on just one thing: the single root cause of team and group dysfunction.

I'll show you clearly what that single root cause is, how and why the role of the Synergist fixes this debilitating dysfunction, and how to incorporate the Synergist role as an integral part of every interaction you're involved in.

The Structure of this Book
I've set out the path to Synergist-driven success for any group or team in three parts:

Part 1 describes the three natural styles that occur in every group or team, and shows how, if left on their own, those three styles lead to unavoidable gridlock.

Part 2 describes the fourth, all-important Synergist style, shows how every effective group sub-consciously develops its own Synergistic mindset, and explains how doing so unblocks the group's path to success.

Part 3 provides a simple, easy-to-learn, yet highly effective toolkit that you can use to ensure that every group or team you manage or work with adopts this model right from the start, thus avoiding gridlock and accelerating your path to success.

Put another way, in Part 1 you'll see the root cause as to why most groups and teams are ineffective and fail to produce their best results, Part 2 will show you how highly effective groups and teams subconsciously and intuitively address that root cause, and Part 3 will give you the tools and techniques to do so consciously and in an accelerated and structured way.

Addendum: *Recently it has become common to encourage readers of business books to 'dip in' to the text wherever they fancy - to cherry pick those parts that*

take their interest and leave the others. This is not such a book. You will be rewarded by working sequentially through the three sections in turn.

Chapter 1: Overview: The failure gene that's baked into the DNA of every group and how to escape it

"He's off again."

I glanced up from the multi-tabbed workbook I'd just been handed and looked across to the doorway. It was true - he *was* off again. 'He' was Andy, the wiry, late-thirties founder-owner of the components manufacturer whose offices I was sitting in. And by 'off' my co-observer meant 'off to anywhere that isn't here.'

We'd been working in this windowless room for just over ninety minutes - the start of what was intended to be a two-day strategic planning session - and we'd already lost Andy three times. Well, twice, in the 'wandering-out-of-the-room' sense - the other time was when he'd simply failed to turn up at 8am when the meeting was supposed to start - a meeting *he* had planned, convened, and insisted everyone else clear their schedules to attend.

While his high-powered team of C-level executives cooled their heels, Andy had wandered in at 8:10 talking casually on his cell-phone, finished up the call in his own good time, and eventually called the meeting to order a good twenty minutes late.

Late or not, the meeting had begun well enough. Andy delivered a superb off-the-cuff tour d'horizon, recapping the company's recent history (its precipitous 5-year growth, 3-year stagnation, and now, this year, a return to growth, if modest), summarized the business's strengths (brand awareness, perceived quality, superb management talent) and weaknesses (spotty distribution, no 'middle-market' product) and finished with a genuinely inspiring call for openness, creativity and full engagement during the next two days.

At that point Andy handed over to the company's CFO, Joanne, for a review of the current year's financial performance. Seven minutes into her presentation, as Joanne was explaining why inventories had risen in the first quarter, Andy stood, stretched, and quietly moved to stand by the side wall of the room. Two minutes later, he'd slipped wordlessly through the door into the corridor outside, off to do who knows what.

I watched as Joanne continued on with her presentation despite Andy's absence, but it was clear that she was doing so with less energy, less enthusiasm, than before. The degree of engagement by everyone else in the room had slipped as well. Ten minutes later, her presentation finished, Joanne simply ground to a halt. I was surprised that no-one had any questions for her - instead, with a barely subdued sense of frustration, the rest of the executive team took restroom breaks and checked email as we all simply waited for Andy to return and for the meeting to re-start.

Oops, He Did it Again...
When he did return 15 minutes later, Andy did so with no explanation or apology - just his usual firm but affable demeanor. Sitting back down at the head of the table, he simply picked up his copy of the agenda for the day, and with a '...Right then, what's next?' moved on to the next item.

For the hour since then Andy had stayed (mostly) focussed on the matters at hand, albeit on his own terms. High-level, 30,000-feet topics got his attention, as did anything 'big' - new ideas, innovative approaches, creative thinking. But when the discussion moved into detail, it was clear that Andy had a strictly limited tolerance for minutia, and it usually wasn't long before he shut that part of the discussion down, often to the obvious dismay of the person most responsible for the matter in hand.

Now, however, there was no avoiding detail. This part of the session involved us critiquing each department's 12-month operating plan: seven reporting departments, each with a 15- to 20-page document and supporting spreadsheets. Plans that everyone around the room had spent massive amount of time and energy putting together. Plans on which they depended for success in the year ahead. Plans that they very much wanted to discuss. In detail. This time, Andy hadn't lasted even five minutes before slipping out of the room.

I looked slowly at the other eleven people seated around the large conference table. We were supposed to be working in teams of three, each group examining a different color-coded section of the workbook we'd all just been handed, but most of the participants had disengaged in frustration at Andy's latest absence; talking desultorily about last night's game, scrolling through emails on their cell phones, some working through paperwork they had brought with them to the session. It was as if the energy of the group, their sense of focus, even the very purpose of the session itself had departed the room with Andy.

I looked over at Joanne, who, with Andy, I'd known since they'd started the business almost a decade previously. She had a wry grimace on her face. "This isn't funny any more," she said. "It used to be amusing, watching Andy squirm when we try to get the detailed stuff done, but now..." - she looked around the room and dropped her voice a little - "...now we have a business to run. A big business. And we have top-class folks here who just aren't going to put up with this."

"I know," I said. "I can see you're at a breaking point here." I looked around one more time. All that talent around the table, all that preparatory work. All that frustration. I could see why Joanne was deeply worried. I looked at her reassuringly. "You have a true visionary in Andy. Remember that tiny workshop where you both started out? Back there, back then, being a visionary worked... you wouldn't - couldn't - have made it without him. We just need to help Andy

understand how a visionary works..." I spread my arms, taking in the whole of the room, "Here, and now..."

Introducing The Visionary
The Visionary is one of three natural 'styles' or roles that all of us default to when we are in a group or team situation (we'll meet the other two, the Processor and the Operator, shortly).

Andy may be an extreme case, but most Visionaries possess similar traits: big-thinkers turned on by ideas, they're easily bored with minutia and are consumed by the need to create and to achieve. Visionaries are often charismatic, engaging communicators, able to motivate people to bring their best in every endeavor. They inspire deep loyalty in others, and frequently a small, tight team or 'posse' will develop around them, a group of committed individuals who share the Visionary's...vision,...and who want to help see it realized.

If you're not a Visionary yourself, you certainly know a few, and meet them at work - they're the folks who are always having more bright ideas than they can implement, the 'glass-half-full' types who believe there's always a way through every problem. You can always recognize a Visionary through a few behavioral traits:

They abhor routine. A Visionary will do anything to avoid having to clock in and out at the same time, in the same place, to do the same things every day. They find ways to make every day different, and much prefer improvising solutions to problems on the spot, rather than getting locked into lengthy diagnostic and problem-solving processes.

They adore discussion and debate. Visionaries love to talk. In fact, it's how they think. Rather than mull an issue at length and come up with a measured response, a Visionary is much more likely to find someone they can debate it with, and use that discussion to work out their opinion on the fly. And as we'll see in a later chapter, the way in which they engage in that discussion can often leave the other person confused and frustrated.

They're comfortable with ambiguity. Unique to all three of the natural styles, the Visionary is not only comfortable with ambiguity, they relish it. Along with uncertainty, the Visionary finds ambiguity a great place to linger while working out a problem or issue. Capable of carrying at least two, if not three or four competing views on the exact same issue, Visionaries will often not settle on a final resolution, or firm up their opinion, until they absolutely have to - not because they're fearful or indecisive (they are resolutely neither of those things) - but simply because they feel no pressure to do so.

They like risk. At the extreme, Visionaries can be risk junkies, actively and persistently seeking ways to push to the very edge of the envelope whenever

possible. At a minimum, a Visionary will always be inclined to take a risk rather than avoid it.

They trust their own judgment - and use it often. Most Visionaries have a high degree of self-confidence in their own intuition and judgment, and draw on both a lot when making decisions. Although they will often listen to others and seek counsel and advice, in the end, their final decision on most matters will be highly visceral and guided by their own instincts.

They Aren't Wedded to Past Decisions. Visionaries can - and do - change direction easily and frequently. Pulled by the need to create and build for the future, they refuse to be trapped by the past. A Visionary will only rarely allow past decisions to constrain their future options, even where there's a large sunk cost in those decisions.

As we'll see, Visionaries are an essential element in any high-performing group or team, but they can be immensely disruptive if not managed correctly - and of course, Visionaries dislike being 'managed'. In later chapters we'll see how the Visionary is best integrated into any group or team, and how to make the most of their undoubted skills without disrupting the group as a whole.

Riya Hits a Wall
Three weeks later, as I stepped out of a cab in mid-town Manhattan, I was still pondering our problem with Andy. He was the epitome of what I had come to call a Visionary - a visionary with a big 'V' - someone so defined by that aspect of their personality that it adversely effects their interactions with everyone else.

Coincidently, I'd been summoned to the sleek, 37-story office block now looming high above me by another Visionary - Riya, the Chief Marketing Officer at a global media company. Riya possessed the same Visionary traits as Andy - love of the big picture, frustration with detail, an ability to motivate and inspire, and an almost inextinguishable need to create, to make a difference in the world.

Although Riya had chosen a career in marketing precisely because it gave her the opportunity to utilize her Visionary talents on a daily basis, because of the constraints of her job (not being a company owner, she didn't have the close-to-absolute freedom Andy had), she learned intuitively over the years how to control the less-helpful extremes of her Visionary characteristics. As a result she'd quickly risen to the CMO position - a job she adored: one where she got to come in every day and inspire her team to think big, to be creative, and to design innovative, even risk-taking ways to expand her company's already ubiquitous brand.

Now, Riya had hit a problem that neither her prodigious work-rate, intellect or considerable charm had managed to overcome. Two years earlier, in a considerable expansion of her role, she'd been given the additional responsibility

of managing the small but politically powerful Investor Relations department at her company. At first, this was something she had enthusiastically embraced, and the transition of the 9-person IR unit into her marketing division was accomplished pretty much seamlessly.

After just a few months, however, things had begun to sour in her relationship with the head of the IR team - a clash of personalities, Riya had explained to me, which had led, regrettably, to him leaving. Riya had personally supervised the search for a replacement, and brought in a bright, successful up-and-comer who was creating quite a stir in the industry. To her utter astonishment, after just six months the new guy, citing buyer's remorse, handed in his resignation and returned to his old job.

For Riya, this was both a personal and a professional blow. She'd never before had two people quit on her from the same position, and with the Investor Relations team occupying such a prominent position in her firm's internal radar, she was attracting the wrong sort of attention from her colleagues in senior management. This time, she delegated most of her other priorities for the three months it took to find a replacement, hired a prominent search firm to advise her (for a six-figure fee), and felt relieved when she landed Brianna, a top-notch player from a competing firm. Riya had known Brianna for years, liked her a lot, and knew how highly she was regarded, not just in her own company, but throughout the entire industry.

The Third Shoe Drops
Relieved, that is, until one morning two weeks ago - now eight months after Brianna's appointment - when, as she told me on the 'phone later the same day, she was forced to admit to herself something about which she knew she'd been in denial: Brianna wasn't working out either. Their relationship had become frayed, even icy, and Riya confessed that she'd got to the point where she recoiled at the thought of interacting with Brianna - which of course, both their jobs required them to do.

As I traveled up in the elevator to Riya's department on the fourteenth floor, I recalled the strain in her voice when we had spoken - a combination of tiredness and apprehension: "Les, I don't have the luxury of this not working," she'd said. "Three people in the same key post in less than two years? It's barely acceptable in itself. But four? That would kill me." From the long pause that followed, I knew she wasn't just referring to her career prospects - it would be a shattering blow to her ego, her self-confidence, her self-belief. "I need a fresh pair of eyes on this. I need you to help me understand what's happening here."

And so here I now was, standing at the reception area leading to Brianna's office - I'd told Riya that I wanted to meet with Brianna first, to come to my own conclusions about her without prejudice, without hearing 'Riya's side' beforehand.

Brianna and I had agreed to meet at 11am, and as it was now four minutes to the hour, her assistant asked me to take a seat.

Precisely at 11am Brianna appeared at her office door and beckoned me in, guiding me to a small circular table with three seats arranged neatly around it. I noticed immediately that the office was spotless - not a thing was out of place. Two massive filing cabinets, each drawer precisely labelled, stood to one side of a credenza, on the surface of which were four impeccably squared-off stacks of what I assumed were current project files awaiting their return to the filing cabinets, once completed. Brianna's own desk was similarly regimented, with precisely positioned tools of her trade laid out for maximum ergonomic effect: a keyboard, two monitors, a phone with the direct-dial numbers neatly labelled, and a universally recognizable print-out - her schedule for the day, with four or five boxes indicating meetings, including this one, each color-coded and annotated with neat handwriting. The boxes indicating the two meetings before mine each had a perfectly straight diagonal line drawn through them, indicating, I assumed, that they had been concluded satisfactorily.

As I asked about her role and responsibilities Brianna responded by sliding across the table a thin three-ring binder she had obviously prepared in advance of our meeting. At the front was a photocopy of our introductory email exchange, the questions I'd posed highlighted in yellow. Behind were labelled tabs with supporting material answering each of those questions in turn: an org chart of her team, her job specification, current operating plan and goals for the next six months.

As we spoke, Brianna made precise, lengthy, impeccably neat notes in a lab book, numbering and dating each new page as she wrote. Over her shoulder, in the bookshelves behind her, I could see a row of identical lab books, each spine labelled with the dates they covered. I felt sure that if I looked, I'd find a stock of those self-same lab books in one of the drawers in her desk, quietly stacked, awaiting future use.

At precisely 11:40 - we'd agreed to meet for 45 minutes - Brianna reminded me that she needed to finish our meeting in the next five minutes, to give her adequate time to prepare for her next meeting at Noon. Did I have anything else I wanted to ask of her? No? Then did I mind if she briefly summarized what we had discussed so that we could both ensure that nothing important had been missed? At 11:45 precisely I was on my way with a firm, courteous handshake from Brianna and a free gift - a squeaky toy version of the company's allegedly cute animal mascot.

A Two-Coffee Problem
Later, over lunch, I gave Riya the good news. "You haven't turned into an ogre, Riya. You're not scaring people away. And I don't think - insofar as I can tell - that Brianna is incompetent, or in any way wrong for the job." Riya frowned as she

picked at her garden salad, and took a minute to mull what I'd said. "Then explain to me what's going on," she said, "If it isn't me that's at fault, and it isn't Brianna, why isn't this working? Why has our relationship broken down - and why am I looking at the third failure in the same position in two years?"

I beckoned our waiter over and ordered a couple of espressos. I knew what I was about to say would raise more questions than it answered, and I wanted a clear head. "It's pretty simple. You're a Visionary..." - I looked at Riya, and got a nod back that confirmed, yes, she remembered the work we'd done together on her management style when she'd first got the CMO position, and yes, she agreed with that assessment - "...Well, Brianna is something very different. At her core, she's what I call a Processor. She works by bringing order - systems and processes, if you will - to all that she does. You can see it in her precision, her attention to detail, her commitment to consistency." Riya snorted and rolled her eyes. "You saw the lab books, then?" she asked.

"Yes, I did. And the files, and the cabinets, and the three-ring binders. It's part of who she is - an important part. In fact, it's why you hired her." I paused for a moment to make sure Riya didn't skim past what I'd just said. She thought for a moment then nodded: "I guess that's right - that *is* why I hired her. Her job in investor relations requires precisely that sort of - what did you call it, 'processor' mentality."

"Well, here's the thing..." The coffees arrived and I took a sip. "Brianna isn't just a processor. She's a Processor, with a capital 'P'. It's an integral part of her personality. And so will it be for anyone you hire for that position - anyone competent at it, anyway." I stopped. I wanted Riya to figure out the next bit for herself.

We each drank our coffee for a while in silence, then Riya looked at me skeptically. "I think I see where you're headed," she said. "You're going to tell me that V's and P's don't get on well together. One of those oil and water things, right? That this is a systemic issue, not a personal one, and if I want the relationship to work, I need to find a way to work with a 'P'."

"Not quite." I said. "You'd be right to be skeptical if I suggested something that simplistic. The relationship between V's and P's is more nuanced than that - for example, I'd be prepared to bet that you like Brianna personally, and get on well with her in social situations - " Riya raised her eyebrows and nodded assent. " - but at certain times, in certain specific interactions, the Visionary and Processor do indeed clash in predictable ways. Painful ways, too, as you've found out."

"Fair point," Riya said. "We *do* get on well when we're not actually working on stuff together. And I've often thought that if only we could get that same type of relationship...I don't know...maybe 'flow' is a better word - if we could get that flow going at work then a lot of this stuff would sort itself out."

"Right on the button." I said. "A 'V' and a 'P' who can get their relationship to work well is a powerful combination. And the good news is, now that you've seen the problem so clearly, fixing it is relatively easy."

"Okay," said Riya. "I'll buy that, but now I see it, I have questions. Lots of them. I'll get us another coffee."

Say Hello to The Processor
The second natural style that people default to in group or team situations is that of the Processor.

Processors have an innate desire to bring order to any situation - they focus not only on what they've been asked to do, but also on the underlying systems and processes that will make doing it more consistent and repeatable - and if those systems and processes don't yet exist, they'll begin by designing and implementing them.

Most at home in what are popularly referred to as 'left brain' activities, Processors are highly rational and analytical by nature, and they think in a logical, sequential way, preferring to arrive at an objective assessment of the facts rather than trusting to emotion and judgment.

Most medium- to large-sized organizations have many Processors dotted around (which, as we'll see in a later chapter, brings its own problems), and if you've ever had dealings with a government agency, then you almost certainly have interacted with a Processor to two. As with the Visionary, you can recognize a Processor by certain behavioral traits:

They value routine. For a Processor, routine is one of the fundamental building blocks of getting things done. With their emphasis on systems and processes, they find a predictable rhythm provides a more effective environment in which to work than one which is constantly changing and varied.

They trust data - and collect a lot of it. Data is the currency of the Processor. They collect it, analyze it, trade it - and most of all, they present it. Whenever a Processor is called upon to explain something, particularly in a group or team environment, they are rarely comfortable doing so without considerable amounts of back-up data - most of which they'd prefer to explain at copious length.

They dislike risk. Processors start from the premise that if the underlying systems and processes are correctly designed, most if not all risk can be reduced to minimal levels. To a Processor, the idea of untrammeled or unexpected risk is abhorrent, and they will go to great lengths to extinguish it as far as possible.

They are wary of intuition and 'hunch'. Unlike the Visionary, Processors have great reservations about using experiential factors such as intuition and judgment when making decisions. And they're not only skeptical about the judgment of others - they equally doubt their own, much preferring the more solid ground of proven data and detailed analysis.

They prefer not to be rushed. It's very hard to get a Processor to short-circuit their preferred way of doing things. Tell a Processor that you need a list of accounts payable over 90 days old, then whether or not you need it by next week or you need it pronto, they'll prepare the list in exactly the same way. Hovering over a Processor in an attempt to speed things up is usually an exercise in futility - they'll complete whatever you've asked them to do just as if you weren't there in the first place.

They tend toward the status quo. The basic rule of thumb for a Processor is 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' - and they often need a lot of convincing that something is in fact broken enough to require fixing. As a result, once a Processor has made a decision - particularly a tough decision, with painful consequences, they find it hard to reverse themselves later, even if the evidence shows that the decision was wrong.

Processors bring a crucial skillset to any group or team - they manage risk, provide consistency and ensure that all the details so cavalierly dismissed by the Visionary are hunted down and recorded appropriately. At times, however, their reluctance to embrace change, steady unvarying pace and dogged attachment to data can frustrate their colleagues. In later chapters we'll see how to work with a Processor to reap the very best from their detailed, analytical approach while ensuring the other team members don't become frustrated or impatient.

Brad Gets Whiplash
"Uh, okay. I understand. I can be there in about twenty minutes, I guess."

I was on the 'phone with Brad, an old colleague and one of the funnest guys I knew to hang out with - if you could ever catch him. As VP of Sales for a highly successful carpet manufacturer, Brad travelled constantly, finding and consummating deals, building relationships with potential clients, and seemingly on call 24/7 for his key customers. Perennially upbeat and naturally gregarious, Brad loved his work, and his hard-charging 'just do it' attitude endeared him to his customers. Not surprisingly, Brad was not only a VP Sales (one of three in the company), he was also consistently the company's highest sales performer.

On this call - the third I'd got from him that afternoon - he seemed intent on proving once more just how hard he could make it for us to meet. A perpetual motion machine, Brad seemed to accomplish more in one day than most people got through in a week, but he did so by burning through meetings, people and places at a dizzying pace. Perpetually arriving late for meetings, then staying

longer than he'd intended, Brad was constantly recalibrating his plans as the day wore on. If his schedule was a GPS device, it would be forever muttering 'Recalculating, recalculating...'.

Consummating a planned meeting with Brad was an exercise in patience and persistence. Ideally, you'd grab a breakfast slot, on the grounds that his day, at that point, wouldn't yet have collapsed into improvised chaos - but that could still be foiled by his early morning gym visit coupled with the ten to twenty phone calls he would fire off every morning.

Today, Brad had already shifted the time for our meeting twice, and its venue once. Now I was driving to what he's assured me was the final location, a Mexican restaurant he and I both liked - all the way across town.

When I arrived, Brad was already in our favorite booth, guacamole and chips to hand (and shirt, I noticed), briefcase open, papers out, phone at his ear, iPad on the table. As I sat down, signaling to the waiter with a circular 'bring me some too' gesture around the guac and chips, two things stood out from the usual cyclone of activity surrounding Brad: a large margarita - unusual for Brad on a weekday - and his resume, printed sharp and crisp on a heavy piece of vellum, and positioned front and center at my place in the booth.

"I'm done." Brad said, slapping his cell phone closed and tossing it into the open briefcase. "I'm finished." Immediately, his phone started to vibrate, as if complaining at the rough treatment. Ignoring the 'phone and sullenly dragging a chip though the guacamole, Brad looked up at me, and I could see his eyes were red and dull. For the first time I could recall in years, Brad looked less than happy. In fact, he looked like a whipped puppy, if you can imagine a 6' 2", 220-pound puppy.

"I'm finished," he repeated. "There's my resume - " Brad gestured with his chip, and green spots rained on the previously pristine document - "Damn. I'll get you another copy. I'd really appreciate it if you'd keep an eye out for anything you think might suit me."

"Hold up there, Brad. Let's back up a bit." I needed a little time to process what I was hearing - I'd rarely seen Brad this deflated "What's the problem?" I asked. "Isn't this a little out of the blue? Last time we talked everything seemed fine. Great, in fact. You've been there 13 years, Brad, and I've never known you to be anything but successful - and happy. We both know you'll be COO this time next year, so why..." I gestured down at Brad's resume, as if the white page with the green dots could finish the sentence.

"The pair of them have me exhausted." Brad said, motioning for another margarita. "You want one?" "Two of these, please. Tony and Carla, I mean. They've beaten me into the ground. I just can't do it any more."

"Can't do what, Brad? Your job? You've got to be kidding me. You're a force of nature. You could do my job and his job" - I stuck a thumb in the direction of the barkeep - "before lunch and still make time to fit in a full day's work. I've never known you to be worn down by hard work, ever."

"Barkeeps don't work before lunch." said Brad, with a faint shadow of his usual grin. "But that isn't the point. It isn't the work that's beaten me. It's this - " I waited while Brad fiddled with his iPad. I assumed he'd intended to dramatically reveal something to me, but it took him three or four minutes of finger sliding and dabbing before he finally slip the screen round so I could see it.

"There's just one month's emails from Carla, my beloved CEO. Take a look."

"Well, yes, I see the item count. Two hundred and twenty-nine emails." I paused to do the math. "About ten a day. That's a lot, I agree, but you've never let administrative stuff stand in the way of your success. You've always found a way to..."

"Read a few - go on, pick a few and read 'em. You're an approved consultant to the firm, you've signed the confidentiality agreement - just read some at random."

I looked at Brad, trying to convey that I felt like a kid being taught how to tie my shoelaces, but the expression coming back at me from across the table didn't leave a lot of room for debate. I stabbed at one of the emails from Carla and read it. Then another. And another. I couldn't help but smile.

"You think what you're reading is funny?"

"Yes." I looked up and grimaced sheepishly at Brad - "But I can definitely see how you wouldn't find it funny at all." I punched open four or five more of Carla's emails, just to make sure I understood what was infuriating Brad so deeply, then swiveled the iPad back to its owner.

"So Carla's gone a bit over the top with expansion plans. And new initiatives. And she's definitely read a bunch too many fad management books in the last while. I can see she's fire-hosing you with all these bright ideas. Nobody in their right mind could possibly keep track of all that stuff, let alone implement them. I get it. Where does Tony come in?"

"Well, you know how our CFO works," Brad was pulling a fat manilla folder out of his briefcase as he spoke "Paper is his preferred method of communication. Something to do with his auditor background I guess. Anyway, take a look." He slid the folder my way, and a dozen or so documents fanned out into my lap. Gathering them up, I guessed there were maybe another hundred pages or so still in the folder.

"So...these appear to be...statements of policy...procedural guides...systems flowcharts..." I was flicking through what were mostly printed memos, reading the titles. "...and a lot of memos with 'NOI' in the subject line." I looked up at Brad. "What's 'NOI' mean?"

"Notice of Infraction." said Brad, making air quotes. "It's Tony's favorite acronym - he uses it to tell us when we've done something wrong." Brad feigned disgust by looking at the menu.

"It's been steadily getting worse. Couple of months ago, Carla would have tossed one or two new ideas at us in a month, worst case. Tony had maybe two or three new policies or processes each quarter. Now it's like an arms race. Carla sends out more and more bright ideas she wants us to implement, Tony responds with twenty systems and processes we all have to adhere to."

Brad paused, absently stirring his drink.

"That just seems to goad Carla into finding even more clever things to keep us occupied...then Tony - well, you get it...the spiral escalates. And now, I've had it."

Brad paused, but I could tell he wanted to say more. I waited silently while he collected his thoughts.

"Look, I love this company. I love my job - and I'm good at it. Three time President's Award winner for highest sales. It doesn't - didn't - get any better than that. But this pair..." Brad motioned vaguely at Tony's files and the iPad, still displaying Carla's emails - "They've pretty much made it impossible for me to *do* my job. I can't take any more of it, and I'm going to resign as soon as I get my head around what I'm going to do next."

We both sat back on the padded banquette at either side of the booth. I slid the manila folder back to Brad and signaled to the waiter. He didn't come over - just mouthed "The usual?". I nodded.

After a long silence, I said gingerly, "So...what if I said that you didn't need to resign?"

"I'd say I agree with you. It doesn't have to be like this and I shouldn't have to resign. But it is what it is, and I'm not going to put up with it any longer."

"That's not what I meant. What I mean is, I think this can be fixed. I can't guarantee it, but knowing all three of you as well as I do, I think I see what's happening here, and I believe I know how you - all three of you - can change it."

Brad shot me his best "I don't think so" expression. "I don't think so." he said. "But let's hear it anyway."

"Well, it's not complicated," I began, "Carla, we know, is a big 'V' - a Visionary who loves to spitball new ideas and think big. Everything she's doing here is right in keeping with that - she's just got a little out of control lately." I could see Brad reacting to my use of the word 'little', but I help my hand up so I could finish. "And Tony's as strong a 'P' as they come. He loves systems and processes - as this" - I pointed at the manilla folder - "demonstrates. Getting those two - a 'V' and a 'P' - to work together smoothly is difficult enough, and right now, it's clearly not working."

I looked at Brad to make sure he was with me so far. "I get it," he said "I remember you giving us a heads-up about that when we hired Tony a couple of years ago."

"Good, I'm glad you remember. Well, the issue has now become more acute for a simple reason: You're an 'O', an Operator. And a highly successful one, at that. For you, happiness is going home at night feeling you've accomplished something definite - that you've taken the items in your to-do list and checked them off - that you've actually got some real work done, as you would see it. In your world, that means signing deals. Lots of them.

"You're not by nature interested in Tony's policies and memos. I'd say that on good days you'd be happy to let him work away on his systems and processes, and on a bad day - when all this is getting between you and your customers - you couldn't see him far enough. As for Carla, well, you know as well as I do that if you hand't had each other for the past few years - her setting the vision, you making it happen, then the business would have gone nowhere. As it is, together you've built a powerhouse in your industry. It's just that now, the interaction between her as a 'V' and Tony as a 'P' is breaking down. And you're the bystander, out there just trying to do your job, and suffering the consequences."

Brad looked at me, still skeptical, but interested enough in what I'd said to ask the question I was hoping for. "Okay, smart guy. I get that as far as it goes. How do we fix it?"

"Well, it isn't necessarily going to be pain-free - for any of you - but it is relatively simple. You're in an unstable triangle - a 'V', 'P' and an 'O' will always end up gridlocking like this. We just have to show you how to break that gridlock, and that means introducing you to some new ways of interacting. You won't get everything you want - you'll still need to deal with some of Carla's 'V' and Tony's 'P', but I think we can get you back to doing what you love most - out there selling."

Brad looked at me, and I saw a trace of the old 'just do it' glint return to his eyes.

"Let's eat," I said, " and I'll tell you some more..."

Say Hello to the Operator
[Insert Fig 1.3] The third and last natural style that people default to in group or team situations is that of the Operator.

Operators are the 'do-ers' in any enterprise - they're the practically-minded folks that get stuff done. Operators work best alongside Visionaries, and in a sense, they're mutually dependent - a Visionary needs an Operator to translate his or her vision into day-to-day tasks - and then to get those tasks completed. An Operator, on the other hand, looks to the Visionary for the big picture, for motivation and inspiration in the tough times, and for the flexibility and lateral thinking to change the enterprise's direction if things aren't working out.

Because of their task-oriented disposition, Operators are often hard to spot in an office environment. Easily bored by meetings and unimpressed with simply putting in 'face time', Operators don't like to sit around in offices and can usually be found in jobs, like sales, that keep them on the move.

 As with the Visionary and the Processor, you can recognize an Operator by certain behavioral traits:

They're action-oriented. Sharks and Operators live by the same principle: they need to keep moving to stay alive. For an Operator to feel fulfilled, it's important that they get the endorphin rush of ticking a task off as 'complete'. For this reason, Operators often have a short fuse when anyone - or any thing, such as an IT breakdown, or shortage of a needed resource - gets between them and finishing a task.

They improvise - and move on. Because of this strong need to keep moving, to complete one task and move on to another, an Operator, when faced with a last-minute hiccup or problem, will often do whatever is necessary to improvise a solution there and then, rather than have to come back and address the matter later. (Going back over old ground is extremely painful for an Operator - it feels like wasted effort.)

They ask forgiveness, rather than permission. As a direct result of this tendency to improvise 'hot-wired' solutions, Operators often find themselves working outside their organization's recommended policies. as a result, most Operators learn to report back *after* the event, and take their lumps, rather than subject themselves to what they would view as a tortuous approval process.

They work prodigious hours. Operators are rather like blinkered racehorses - their eye is on the prize of getting things done, and until they've passed the finish line they're going to run like crazy. Of course, the problem is that in business, the

line never gets crossed - there are always more things to get done. As a result, most Operators works all the hours God sends, plus some for good luck.

They often work alone. Most Operators have a 'give it here' approach - when they see that something needs done, their natural reaction is to 'just do it'. As a result they can sometimes appear brusque and uncaring, and people working for Operators often complain of not receiving much in the way of direction, few assignments of real value and little or no mentoring or coaching.

They don't like being micromanaged. Try to impose on an Operator what a Processor would view as a mild adherence to non-intrusive systems and processes, and the result can look like an enraged bull in an extremely small china shop. Operators value independence of action above all else, and requiring from them even the most basic of consistent systems compliance can often be a prolonged, ongoing battle..

It's obvious that, unless you're working for a full-blown bureaucracy, no group or team, no organization or enterprise can ever achieve its goals without one or more Operators in the mix. The problem is, as we'll see in Chapter 3, that the Operator is the least naturally inclined of our three types to play well in teams - they'd much rather be out on their own getting stuff done.

The trick is to find a way to involve them positively in the group or team's activities, without them feeling over-managed, or that they're being pulled off the front line for too long.

How Teams Work
Now that you've met - through Andy, Brianna and Brad - the three natural personality styles that apply to us all, we can now begin to examine how the three styles interact, and the impact they have on the success (or otherwise) of groups and teams.

The rest of Part 1 will expand in detail on how each style, and each combination of styles (Visionary - Operator, Visionary - Processor, and Operator - Processor) interacts, but for now there are just three key principles to bear in mind:

The first key principle is that all of us have a bias toward acting as a Visionary, an Operator or as a Processor. We may not exhibit tendencies quite as extreme as Andy, Brianna or Brad, but we all have a definite leaning toward one primary style.

Most people will also have a secondary tendency. In other words, very few people are *just* a Visionary, or *just* an Operator, or *just* a Processor - if you were, you'd be a caricature or a monster (I've met some in my time, but mercifully few). Most of us are a combination of two styles - one strong suit and one secondary. I,

for example, am a strong V, and a secondary P (a rare combination, but not uncommon amongst consultants).

You can find out exactly what your style is - both primary and secondary - right now, by taking the free online Predictable Success Management Styles Quiz. Just turn to Appendix XX and follow the instructions there. (**Tip**: Based on what you've read in this chapter, first jot down what you instinctively think your primary and secondary styles are before taking the quiz, then compare the results with your initial guess.)

The second key principle is that the V-O-P triangle is an innately unstable one. This is because Visionaries, Operators and Processors each achieve a sense of fulfillment, or satisfaction, in very different, often competing ways.

A Visionary can feel fulfilled by just the very act of creation - a fresh idea, a new insight, or an innovative concept can be the trigger for them to move on to something new. The Processor, meanwhile, needs to document and categories the new idea or fresh insight - they need to collect data on it, analyze it, test it, and they think the Visionary is flaky for jumping from idea to idea without doing this due diligence.

Finally, the Operator, frustrated at being co-opted on to this team in the first place when all they want to do is go outside and get stuff done, quickly loses patience with both the Visionary and the Processor - the Visionary for not sticking to one game plan that the Operator can see through to completion, and the Processor for slowing everything with their interminable systems and processes.

The unavoidable outcome of this V-O-P instability is that left to itself, every group or team will eventually implode, gridlock or underperform - it's just a question of when. (**Note**: When it does happen, the blame will usually be placed on whatever is the most prominent *symptom* of the V-O-P instability: poor communications, distrust, lack of clarity - choose your reason. The reality is that all of these are just symptoms - the V-O-P instability is the root cause.)

The third key principle is that to avoid this fate, and to produce a high-performing group or team, a fourth, learned style - that of the Synergist - must be be added to the mix. In part 2, we'll see how many high-performing teams do this intuitively and sub-consciously, and in Part 3, you'll learn how you can do it naturally, consciously and effectively.

Chapter Summary

Organizations do not achieve success - people achieve success through working individually and in groups and teams.

Everyone who participates in group or team work tends to act primarily in one of three naturally occurring styles: As a Visionary, an Operator, or a Processor.

Visionaries think big, generate creative ideas and take risks. They also become irritated by detail and can disengage easily when bored.

Operators 'get stuff done'. They take the Visionary's big idea and translate it into actionable tasks. They like to be left to work alone and will do whatever's necessary to complete the task they're given, even if it means breaking a few rules.

Processors devise and monitor the systems and processes necessary to enable an organization or enterprise to deliver consistent results in a complex environment. They think linearly and objectively, and are averse to undue risk.

The 'V-O-P' relationship is not a naturally stable one. The tensions and conflicts caused by often competing desires are the root cause of most group and team dysfunction.

To make the VOP relationship stable, a fourth, learned style needs to be introduced. The Synergist style acts as a buffer between the VOP styles, taking the best from each and enabling them to work effectively together.

Scan this QR code to be taken to a web page containing case studies and examples specific to this chapter, or point your web browser to http:// PredictableSuccess.com/XXX

PART I: The Unstable Triangle: The 3 naturally ocurring group interaction styles

Chapter 2: **The Visionary**: Hold on tight, we're going to Mars

At least I had brought my laptop with me.

I was perched at the edge of a desk in Andy's office, stealing power from the one remaining outlet not already attached one or other of Andy's computers, waiting for him to return. We'd been scheduled for a 10am coaching meeting, but when I'd arrived, Lori, one of his three direct reports, had apologized - Andy had forgotten he was on a team looking at new sourcing options for key components, and they were due to meet from 9.30 until 11. Lori had shown me into this room and brought me coffee, then had returned to her desk right outside where I could now see her and her two colleagues working intently .

Looking around the room, I could see Andy's character reflected in the surroundings: multiple gizmo's (he seemed to have one of every new piece of electronica that had come out that year), a small but impressive business library , and framed photographs on every surface, each showing a different aspect of the growth of his components business over the years. The only thing missing was any evidence of actual work - no files, no folders strewn around. Not even a legal pad. It looked and felt like Andy did any 'real' work somewhere else, outside of this office.

By now it was 11.10, and I sensed from the activity outside that Andy was on his way. Sure enough, Lori stuck her head around the door: "Andy'll be here in 10 minutes or so", she said "Is there anything I can get you while you're waiting?"

"No," I said "But you could answer a question." I smiled, hoping Lori would take a moment or two from the frenetic work she'd been doing. She looked momentarily back at her desk, as if taking a silent inventory of its contents. "Sure," she said, sliding past the door and taking a seat at the desk opposite me. "What can I help you with?"

"Well, I was just wondering what you and your two colleagues do when Andy isn't around. He seems to have a lot of things that take him out of the office, and I've noticed that you're all incredibly busy even though he's not here right now. Is it always like that when Andy's not around?"

"Pretty much, yes." said Lori, after a brief reflection. "Andy has a lot going on, and he delegates a large part of it to us. He's very trusting that way, and it's one of the fun parts of the job. We also each have our own projects, which are a full time job on their own. So we do have a lot to do, yes." She paused. I could tell she was wondering whether or not to say something else, so I stayed quiet, waiting for her to make her own mind up.

"Also...I dunno if it's talking out of school, but you'll see it yourself shortly...it's next to impossible to get anything done when Andy *is* here. It's hard to explain,