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Interaction Bridges for Customer Commitments

by Lynn Hunsaker

For customer experience management (CEM), it's natural to focus on smoothing interaction difficulties between paying customers and sales and service representatives. Additionally, innumerable interactions for CEM occur **inside** the company, causing daily challenges for program managers — or any employee — in follow-through for timely and quality delivery of commitments to both internal and external customers.



Weak interactions mean weak engagement. Lack of timely, quality follow-through causes delays, poor execution, and missed commitments to customers — a source of disappointment and disillusion, bad word-of-mouth, lost sales and lost share of wallet and lower market share. In fact, most customer experience managers say that lack of agreement and cooperation across functions is the biggest challenge in improving customer experience.

Why do we often face gaps in our interactions with others? It may be due to differences in goals, perspectives and incentives — where people are just 'not on the same page'. Interaction gaps may also occur due to inherent differences in values and styles. In any case, it would be great to have a simple technique to bridge gaps, particularly one you could use on-the-fly in fast-paced environments.

Interaction Bridges

A technique called Interaction Bridges™ cuts through the challenges of differing goals, perspectives, incentives, values and styles. And it allows you to remain sincere and to gain consistent cooperation. You only have to look for 2 things as you interact with others in order to draw on Interaction Bridges to improve cooperation and engagement:

- *Mode of influence* preferred by yourself and the other person (Informing/Directing Communicator)
- *Pace and energy* preferred by each of you (Responding/Initiating Role)

Communication Tendency

We communicate in order to influence others.

- *Informing Communicators* tend to use a more tentative tone, seeking input and buy-in, evoking ideas and inspiring the other party to take action; their subtle statements indicate concentration on process and motivation.

- *Directing Communicators* tend to use a more forceful tone, with a sense of urgency, giving structure and directing the other party to take action; their straightforward statements indicate concentration on task and time.

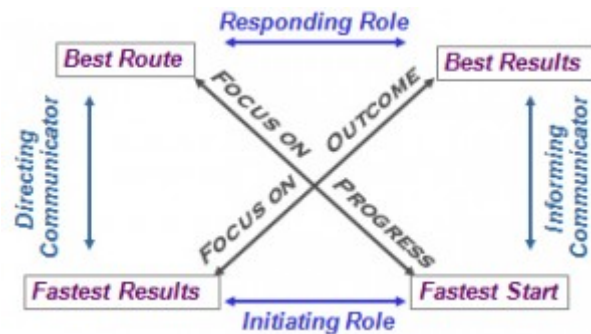
Role Tendency

The pace and energy we prefer determines the role we typically take in interactions.

- *Responding Role* is demonstrated by reflecting before acting, learning best by reading and thinking about a topic, and having a slower speaking pace.
- *Initiating Role* is demonstrated by acting before reflecting, learning best by doing and interacting, and a faster speaking pace.

Focus of Attention

A person's combination of the two styles described above indicates what their attention will be focused on in an interaction: Outcome or Progress.



- *Fastest Results* attention focus (Outcome) = Directing Communicator + Initiating Role: by managing time, tools and tasks. Driven by an urgent need to *accomplish / complete*, they want to lead the group to the goal, make quick decisions, and focus on results.
- *Best Route* attention focus (Progress) = Directing Communicator + Responding Role: by setting milestones or benchmarks and monitoring progress. Driven by a pressing need to *anticipate*, they want to keep the group on track, make deliberated decisions, and focus on defining the process.
- *Fastest Start* attention focus (Progress) = Informing Communicator + Initiating Role: by energizing people to begin. Driven by an urgent need for *involvement*, they want to facilitate the group's process, make enthusiastic decisions, and focus on interactions.
- *Best Results* attention focus (Outcome) = Informing Communicator + Responding Role: by managing inputs and outputs and using a lot of information. Driven by an urgent need to *integrate*, they want to support the group's process, make consultative decisions, and focus on understanding the process.

Make it a Habit

You can sharpen your ability to detect modes of influence and energy/pace through practice. Learning more about Interaction Bridges™ will also help you build habits for interfacing with people when communication gaps occur. The beauty of Interaction Bridges is that you can more readily gain cooperation while remaining sincere to your natural style.

Do this by building from what you have in common. Realize you always have at least one tendency (Communicator / Role / Attention) in common with anyone. You frequently have two tendencies that are foreign to the person with whom you're working. When resistance or misunderstandings occur, soften your reliance on your tendencies that are foreign to the other person, and *emphasize the tendency you have in common*.

For example, if you naturally focus your attention on the Fastest Start, and you need to get cooperation from someone who naturally focuses attention on the Best Route, relax your Initiating Communicator and Informing Role tendencies — and instead, emphasize your shared attention focus on Progress. Acknowledge your common wish to see things move along, and in that spirit, help that person Anticipate. This approach is non-manipulative, as you demonstrate sincere support of the other person's way of looking at the world. Knowing what the natural drivers are for the other's personality can make all the difference in getting timely, quality follow-through to meet customer commitments.

Note: author Lynn Hunsaker is 2010 President of the Bay Area Association for Psychological Type (baapt.org), and a Certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Practitioner. Interaction Bridges™ is a trademark of ClearAction LLC. Lynn teaches Interaction Bridges through workshops and training podcasts. The Interaction Styles model is the property of Dr. Linda V. Berens and cannot be used, duplicated or disclosed without the express permission of Telos Publications.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.