Insights: Publications

7 Key Takeaways | Dynamic Thinking for an Interpersonal Edge Roundtable Discussion Series for Legal and Business Professionals | Sessions 1 & 2

MARCH 12, 2025

On January 9, 2025, **Joe Dowdy** (Raleigh Partner) and **Colleen Bear** (Senior Manager Talent Management and Coach) hosted the first of Kilpatrick's monthly virtual roundtable discussions with in-house counsel to develop strategies for improving advocacy and negotiations through better interpersonal effectiveness.

Below are key takeaways from the first two sessions of the Roundtable about how to identify and work with different intelligences, thinking preferences, and personality styles:

1. Lawyers frequently undervalue the significance of people skills, yet research consistently shows that strong social abilities and meaningful connections are key drivers of individual success, as well as the effectiveness of teams and organizations.

2. Today's advocates and negotiators face heightened challenges as modern technology diminishes focus and attention, accelerates time pressures, and reduces opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interactions with opponents, colleagues, and decision-makers. Consequently, the ability to engage effectively with counterparts during limited interactions has become more critical than ever.

3. The starting point for improved interpersonal dynamics is to survey oneself, one's team, and one's opponents and to develop a deeper understanding of how different people think and communicate. There are many different approaches for identifying and analyzing thinking styles, and our first Roundtable focused on three models.

4. The theory of multiple intelligences or frames of mind, developed by Harvard Professor Dr. Howard Gardner, suggests that there is not a single general intelligence but a collection of different cognitive abilities that can be developed and utilized differently by each individual: (a) verbal, (b) logical, (c) spatial, (d) interpersonal, (e) intrapersonal, (f) existential, (g) kinesthetic, (h) naturalistic, and (i) musical. (Howard E. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* Basic Books, 3rd Ed. 2011). For example, a litigator might present different closing arguments to a judge or arbitrator with high logical intelligence than she would to a jurist with higher existential intelligence.

5. The “Whole Brain Thinking” theory is grounded in well-established research and testing, utilizing a four-quadrant model of the brain to explain distinct thinking styles that influence how individuals approach projects, make decisions, and communicate:

   a. Blue (Analytical Thinking): Emphasizes logic, facts, numbers, and analysis;

b. Green (Structural Thinking): Prioritizes detail, organization, planning, and timing/sequencing;
c. Red (Relational Thinking): Centers on interpersonal connections, emotions, action, and empathy;
d. Yellow (Experimental Thinking): Focuses on creativity, big-picture perspectives, integration, and synthesis.

(Ned Hermann, et al., The Whole Brain Business Book: Unlocking the Power of Whole Brain Thinking in Organizations, Teams, and Individuals. Second Edition; McGraw Hill 2015).

For example, a legal team managing a merger uses the Yellow Quadrant (strategic thinking) to outline the deal's long-term goals, while the Blue Quadrant (analytical thinking) ensures the financial terms are sound and risk-free.

6. DISC theory suggests another method for calibrating our interactions with others based on four different personality types:

a. Dominant or assertive types tend to direct work and be goal-oriented but can be impatient or appear cold;
b. Influential types tend to motivate and inspire others and be creative but can become too emotionally involved or be less data-driven;
c. Steady personalities tend to be team players who get the work done, but they can be over-accommodating and resistant to change; and
d. Conscientiousness personalities review, refine, and perfect; they provide quality control and focus but can be perceived as overly critical.

(Thomas Erikson, Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behavior and How to Effectively Communicate with Each in Business (and in Life) Essentials 2020).

For example, A high “D” (Dominance) litigator may excel at aggressively pushing a deal to close, while a high “C” (Conscientiousness) attorney focuses on meticulously reviewing diligence for compliance and accuracy.

7. Different does not necessarily mean wrong. Incorporating different thinking styles makes us more effective with a broader audience and improves our ability to connect with others based on how they see the world.

The next Roundtable will be held on March 13. For more information visit the Dynamic Thinking Roundtable Information and Registration Page.