



From intention to action

The action control model

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

How can we achieve our goals? How can we make the most of our abilities? And how can we determine our true potential?

The answers to these questions can determine life paths, careers, even the success of an entire organization. They can't be answered in general terms because they are a function of characteristics, abilities, and personality traits which make each of us unique. Before we can begin to develop potential, whether of individuals or of teams, we must first gain an understanding of their personalities. That's where the Action Control Model comes in.

In more than 25 years of both fundamental and applied research, Prof. Dr. Julius Kuhl, founder of the Action Control Model, has achieved ground-breaking advances in the understanding of personality, employing cognitive imaging and other advanced techniques to explore the mechanisms which shape personality by making them both visible and quantifiable.

This white paper is designed as an introduction to the Action Control Model. We will first examine the cognitive processes required to move from intentions to acts, introducing the areas of the brain responsible for an individual's behavior in a variety of life and work situations, as well as the four cognitive systems which determine behavior in a given situation. Because these processes, as research has shown, are subject to change, we will then explore the ways in which cognitive systems can be activated and the implications of these insights for personnel development.

We wish you stimulating reading.

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01

The Action Control Model

01

The Action Control Model

The Action Control Model is the framework underlying the Personality Systems Interaction Theory (PSI Theory) developed by Professor Julius Kuhl. It is a highly comprehensive model that shows how the various psychological systems and levels that make up a person's personality function.

The model distinguishes between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which differ in terms of functionality, and attributes two cognitive systems to each. These four cognitive systems interact continually with each other and are of fundamental importance in terms of how we take in, process, and act on information.

The right hemisphere of the brain

The right hemisphere of the brain is capable of subconsciously processing multiple pieces of complex information at the same time. This enables us to think and act creatively, among other things. Creative thoughts and actions require us to process information quickly and comparatively imprecisely, based on visual impressions and on our own life experience.

The left hemisphere of the brain

The left hemisphere of the brain is where we make concrete plans, analyze, perceive details, and process information via the senses. This hemisphere is responsible for the conscious and precise processing of concrete information such as data, figures and facts. This processing takes place on a consecutive basis and is slow in comparison to the right hemisphere of the brain, with the left hemisphere only able to process a maximum of 40 bits of sensory impressions per second (we receive several thousand bits per second).

The following table highlights the differences between the two brain hemispheres:

left brain hemisphere <i>sequential processing</i>	right brain hemisphere <i>parallel processing</i>
→ Analytical processing of information	→ Intuitive processing of information
→ Consecutive (one step after the other)	→ Comprehensive
→ Intentional, strenuous	→ Automatic, effortless
→ Logical: Focused on causes	→ Affective: Dependent on desire or lack of it
→ Consequential connections	→ Associative connections
→ Processes and stores reality through abstract symbols	→ Processes and stores reality through images
→ Slower processing speed: Delayed action	→ Fast processing speed: Wants immediate action
→ Based on the same principles irrespective of the context	→ Based on context-specific principles
→ The experience is active, conscious and controlled	→ The experience is passive and preconscious
→ It seeks to prove things	→ It seeks to trust in the process

01.1

The four cognitive macrosystems

Each brain hemisphere has two cognitive macrosystems: one perceptive system and one decision-making system. The following image distinguishes these four systems through color and provides a rough breakdown of their various different tasks and functions.

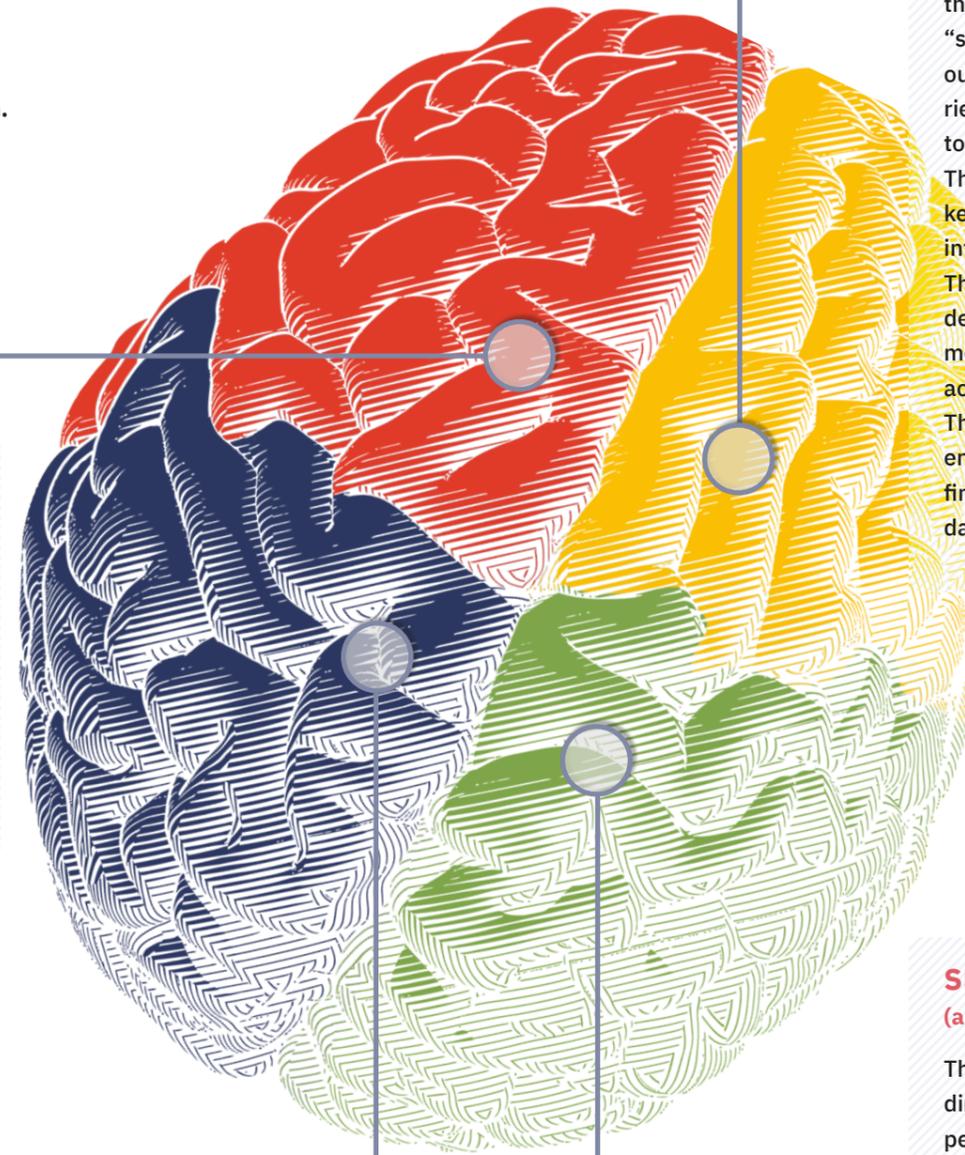
The right hemisphere of the brain contains the system for goal formation (= Managing Director) and the system for carrying out action (= Spontaneous Doer). The left hemisphere of the brain contains the system for action planning (= Logician) and the system for results monitoring (= Controller). The Controller and the Spontaneous Doer are the two perceptive systems, and are located in the back of the cerebrum. The Logician and the Managing Director are the two decision-making systems, and are located at the front of the brain (in the prefrontal cortex).

LOGICIAN (action planning)

This system is responsible for conscious planning and thinking. Before action is taken, it first works out corresponding work and action plans, consciously contemplating the individual steps involved. The Logician is therefore the system that prevents us from forgetting about our intentions, and that logically considers the timing and the scheduling of activities.

CONTROLLER (results monitoring)

The Controller system enables us to perceive things in detail, to analyze and to categorize, and is the system that monitors our actions and the results thereof. It identifies errors, problem areas and failures, and is especially important when it comes to pinpointing and analyzing individual risks within larger contexts. Our ability to focus on problems is attributable to the Controller system.



THE MANAGING DIRECTOR (goal formation)

This system enables us to process information from an overview perspective. The Managing Director contains our life experience as well as our awareness for both our own wishes and needs and those of our environment. A part of this system is what we call a person's sense of "self." This sense of self comprises the parts of our memory that bring all our personal experiences, our desires, our values and our goals together to form one integrated image. The Managing Director system enables us to keep track of multiple processes, pieces of information, goals and tasks at the same time. This form of parallel processing enables us to decide and act quickly, and to do so in alignment with our own goals and needs, and in accordance with our respective environment. The Managing Director puts negative experiences into the context of our life experience and finds creative solutions to problems. In everyday life, it is generally perceived as gut instinct.

SPONTANEOUS DOER (action performance)

This system enables us to act quickly and in direct response to stimuli. It enables us to perform physical movements and actions competently and confidently, without the need to consciously control and monitor every single step. The Spontaneous Doer therefore tends to act spontaneously and intuitively, and is particularly apparent when we perform actions automatically, i.e., actions that have become routine. The Spontaneous Doer is responsible for our ability to put things into practice.

01.2

How affects control the four cognitive systems

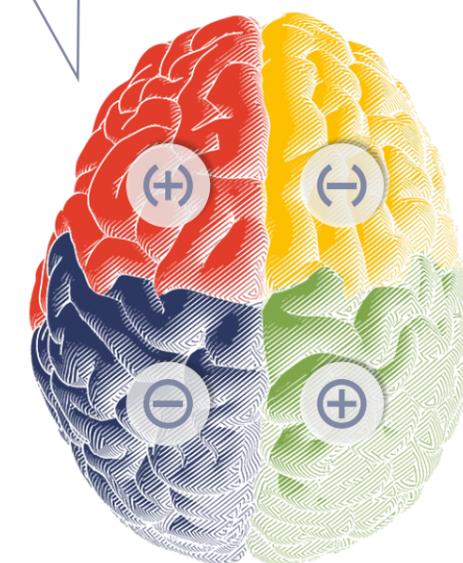
So not only do the two brain hemispheres differ greatly from each other in terms of how they function, the four cognitive systems that they jointly contain also have very different tendencies.

But how do these cognitive systems work? How does the brain decide which system is to be used when? And how do the systems interact with each other? The answer: Through affects. Affects are short, unconscious emotional states that cannot spontaneously be put into words. There are four different types of affect: positive, negative, inhibited positive and inhibited negative affect. Affects, which we colloquially refer to as moods, are essentially indicators of how satisfied our needs are. Positive affect, i.e. a good mood, is a sign that everything is OK; we feel that our goals and our needs are being fulfilled. This state of positive affect manifests itself in a will to take things on. People who are in a great mood and looking forward to an upcoming event, for example, are often buzzing with drive and can hardly wait to get going. Negative affect, in contrast, is a sign that things are not going well. People in a state of negative affect, i.e. in a bad mood, tend to want to implement avoidance strategies, and are often excessively aware of things going wrong or not going to plan.

In its inhibited form, negative affect manifests itself as relief or nonchalance. Here, feelings of worry or fear have given way to a sense of assurance, and an "everything will work out" attitude. Inhibited positive affect manifests itself in curbed enthusiasm. We don't feel the same sense of anticipation and drive that we do when in a state of positive affect, but rather mull over our behaviour or the situation in question and are hesitant and careful in our approach.

The following table shows which affects activate which cognitive systems:

Affect	Expression	Behavior	System
⊕ Positive affect	Anticipation, will to work, good mood, "everything is OK," etc.	→ Encourages us to realize our intentions → Ensures that we put things into action	Activates the Spontaneous Doer
⊖ Negative affect	Anger, fear, hurt, sadness, insecurity, etc.	→ Improves our eye for detail → Enables us to pick up on mistakes and discrepancies	Activates the Controller
⊖ Inhibited negative affect	Relief, hope, nonchalance, "everything will work out," "It's not all that bad," etc.	→ Promotes our ability to perceive things comprehensively (from an overview) and to form goals → Compares the tasks at hand with our own needs and goals → Uses our life experience → Is necessary for learning, personal growth and the process of maturing	Activates the Managing Director
⊕ Inhibited positive affect	Sobriety, objectivity, restraint, etc.	→ Enables us to analyze and plan our actions → Inhibits spontaneous action	Activates the Logician



01.3

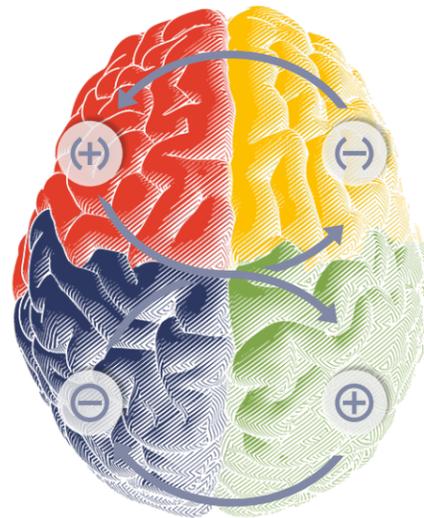
“The Figure Eight” – from defining our goals to implementing them

LOGICIAN (action planning)

Consciously examines, analyzes, develops and plans the steps to implement

CONTROLLER (results monitoring)

Is detail-focused, analyzes and categorizes the results of actions, examines for failure



THE MANAGING DIRECTOR (goal formation)

Acts from an overview perspective, comes up with creative ideas, makes decisions, processes feedback

SPONTANEOUS DOER (action performance)

Implements actions, exhibits intuition

The way in which the cognitive systems should ideally interact with each other (driven by the different affects) is effectively depicted by a figure-eight symbol.

Goal formation via the Managing Director

To know what we have to do, we first need a goal. And defining a goal generally involves selecting, from a variety of possible options, the goals and tasks that we consider most important or most urgent. This in turn first requires us to get an overview of the relevant information available, and to then make decisions based on this. The goal we then ultimately opt for needs to be as realistic as possible, and ideally in line with our own personal needs and desires. Goal-defining processes therefore take place within the Managing Director cognitive system. And as described above, equanimity (inhibited negative affect) is the mood best-suited to such decision-making.

Action planning via the Logician

Once we have set ourselves a goal, we need to think about the best approach to achieving it and to plan corresponding concrete steps. This process is essential to keeping track of the tasks involved and not overlooking anything. It involves contemplating how to categorize general goals and tasks, planning concrete and logical work processes and steps, storing as yet unachieved goals and tasks as intentions, and possibly also defining the right point in time to carry out the tasks. The mood best-suited to action planning is sobriety (inhibited positive affect).

Action performance via the Spontaneous Doer

Once all preparatory measures have been taken and all steps considered, we can start putting our plans into action. So after having spent the analysis phase in a sober, objective mood, (= inhibited positive affect), we can now release our sense of excitement and drive (= positive affect) vis-à-vis the plans to be implemented and goals to be achieved. Within PSI theory, the transfer from the Logician system to the Spontaneous Doer system is described as “action facilitation”.

It gives us the drive to actively implement the planned steps. It stops us from giving up on things or getting caught up in our plans, and spurs our ability to remain focused and resolute, even when the going gets tough.

Results monitoring via the Controller

If we encounter unforeseen difficulties in our efforts to implement our plans, the Controller comes into play. The main aim of the Controller is to analyze individual details within the larger context, to recognize errors and discrepancies, and to take steps to counter these. The Controller is therefore where our problem focus, our critical eye, lies. It identifies details that may impede the proper functioning of a system. It is the area in which the excitement and drive that we felt during action facilitation turns into skepticism, anger or disappointment (negative affect). This negative affect causes us to focus on errors or want to examine results.

Once we have recognized the error, monitored the results and examined all the details, however, we need to free ourselves from this problem focus and return to a solution-oriented mindset. To do this, we have to regulate our state of negative affect accordingly. PSI theory refers to this process as selfcalming. It involves a switch from the left brain to the right brain: from the Controller system to the Managing Director system. This switch might also require us to adjust our original goals based on the Controller’s findings and experiences. And this process of learning from experience is extremely important for our personal development.

And so the Figure Eight begins again

To summarize, the Managing Director is responsible for defining our goals, the Logician for planning our actions, the Spontaneous Doer for putting those plans into practice, and the Controller for monitoring the results of those actions.

The above pattern depicting the activation and deactivation of these cognitive systems constitutes an ideal, and is by no means standard in us all. After all, we don’t always clarify what our goals are and plan the individual steps before acting. And we don’t always retrospectively analyze and evaluate our behavior. For instance, a good mood can inspire our Spontaneous Doer system to get started on something straight away, without having undertaken any planning. In such a situation, the other three systems are hardly activated.

While we all have the ability to activate and deactivate the four cognitive systems according to the above ideal, we tend to act according to how strong these inner systems are in us. And this is something that varies greatly from person to person. In fact, the strength of our different cognitive systems are and how they interact with each other is essentially what gives us our unique personality, dictating whether we like coming up with creative ideas and broad goals, or prefer to plan things in detail; whether we tend to feel the urge to get started on things straight away, or like to focus on discrepancies and missing information.

This is not to say that we shouldn’t change and develop our cognitive systems. On the contrary, training certain systems and strengthening certain connections can very beneficial to our development. By fortifying the connections between the Logician and the Spontaneous Doer, and between the Controller and the Managing Director, for example, we can become a lot more effective at overcoming the sense of resistance that we sometimes feel in the face of challenging tasks, and that can impede us from acting.

Moreover, becoming more aware of our system preferences helps us to establish which task areas and work environments we work best in, and to understand how to work effectively within a heterogeneous team. This in turn is extremely important both for our ability to achieve success and for our emotional well-being.

01.4

Motives as our sources of strength

So far, this paper has explained how we use our cognitive systems to define goals, make plans, take action, and evaluate results. But what factors play a part in our decision to pursue specific tasks and challenges? What is it that motivates us?

Within the field of psychology, the goals and desires that drive us are referred to as our motives. And according to the Action Control Model, we tend to select situations that satisfy our motives. Our motives are therefore our driving force. They give us the energy that we need in order to act. The goals that we pursue, the way in which we interpret experiences, the situations that we choose to get involved in, etc. are all highly influenced by our predominant motive. The three basic human motives are power, performance and relationship. How pronounced the different motives are in us is central to how and when we act.

Power

- A need for independence, discretionary freedom, and influence
- A will to assert one's own interests and visions
- Personal fulfillment, realization of visions and ideas that inspire others
- Assumption of responsibility, leadership

Performance

- Eagerness to take on and solve difficult tasks and challenges
- Pronounced target orientation, manifested in diligence and self-discipline
- A need to discover new things, to continue learning, and to develop

Relationship

- Eagerness to develop social contacts, a strong desire to belong to a group
- Will to maintain and shape relationships
- Harmony, loyalty, trust
- Cordial, understanding and tolerant in dealing with others

The following table describes the motives on the basis of the four cognitive systems:

 The Managing Director is important for all motives, but especially important for the power motive. It enables us to come up with alternative goals and to deal flexibly with mistakes and with the negative feelings that these mistakes trigger. 

 The Logician enables us to make plans and proceed strategically, e.g. when faced with challenges or difficult tasks, and is typically pronounced in performance-oriented people. It is more of a hindrance when it comes to building relationships. 

 The Spontaneous Doer enables us to deal with people spontaneously and intuitively, and to adapt our behavior accordingly. It is therefore especially useful to people with a pronounced relationship motive. 

 The Controller, in contrast, is less useful when it comes to fulfilling our motives. This is because, while it registers discrepancies and errors, it does little to overcome these. This sensitivity to conflict and fear of failure gives rise to a sense of dissatisfaction and of not having fulfilled one's needs.

These three basic motives, as with our so-called primary motives such as hunger and thirst, are the product of an evolutionary process: they ensure our survival by enabling us to adapt our behavior to our environment.

But in contrast to our inherent needs, our needs for power, performance and relationships are learned or acquired. How pronounced these motives are varies from person to person and will depend on the influences to which we were exposed in the first few years after our birth.

The strength of our motives will determine how much time and energy we invest in satisfying them. For example, while more relationship-motivated people will invest more energy in building and maintaining relationships, performance-motivated people will be more focused on the continual improvement and development of processes, expertise, knowledge, etc.

Relationship motivation helps us to enter into contact with other people, and to build, maintain and restore close relations them. It makes us associate contact with others with warmth and security, and to experience it as something positive. It is therefore very important in terms of employee or customer-orientation.

Performance motivation provides us with the energy to develop our competencies, to take on difficult tasks and to pursue ambitious goals. It is therefore

especially important when it comes to tackling challenging objectives.

Power motivation is what provides us with the energy to pursue goals and ideas, and to prevail in the face of resistance. It is therefore particularly important when it comes to exhibiting leadership strength.

Power motivation has many positive manifestations, for example the desire to help and support others, the will to shape things, the ability to act autonomously, quick-wittedness, persuasive power, etc. But it also has negative sides, for instance the tendency to abuse one's power. To assess your own motives, examine your behavior when you enter a meeting or join a new team. Is it important to you to get to know the others and to create a cordial, trusting atmosphere (relationship motive)? Or do you immediately want to find out what the facts are, establish what topics need tackling, and get moving with the corresponding tasks (performance motive)? Or is it perhaps important to you to define your role within the respective context and to secure yourself as much discretionary scope as possible (power motive)?

As with the cognitive systems described above, we don't have either one motive or another, but rather a combination of all three, with some motives more pronounced than others.

Our motive mix can be conducive to fulfilling our needs, but can also hamper us in this respect. For example, a leader with a high degree of power motivation and a high degree of relationship motivation will probably be good at winning employees over and inspiring them for their tasks. However, he will likely find it more difficult to discipline staff properly and to deal with discontent on their part. On the other hand, a leader with a high level of both performance and power motivation may well not notice when his staff are subject to excessive strain, because he makes the same high demands of them that he does of himself.

Knowing what our needs are helps us to select corresponding tasks and environments. And knowing about both our own needs and the needs of our colleagues and employees helps us to achieve greater satisfaction and

productivity all around. After all, having an awareness of team members' needs and preferences enables us to treat them accordingly and to assign the right roles to the right people.

For example, when dealing with a relationship-motivated employee or colleague, it is well worth investing time in asking that person about how he is, listening to him, and showing sincere interest in him. Motivating a performance-oriented employee, in contrast, will involve assigning him challenging tasks, and acknowledging and making use of his accomplishments. A power-motivated employee, in turn, will need tasks that offer discretionary scope and require him to assume responsibility.

01.5

Conscious and unconscious motives

To understand and to sustainably develop our behavior and our sense of drive, we need to analyze the strength of our motives not only on a conscious level, but also on an unconscious level. And these levels can differ considerably.

To distinguish: If we have a strong conscious motive, then we believe that this motive is important to us and act according to this belief. But this belief tends to have been formed as a result of outside influences such as social norms, rewards, expectations (other people's and our own), etc. and is not necessarily connected with our deeper self. If we have a pronounced unconscious motive, then our desire to satisfy it is strong on a level below the threshold of our conscious perception. And the energy we can derive from this level is much more potent and sustainable.

Ideally, our belief as to how important the particular motive is corresponds with our subliminal inclinations, in which case our conscious and unconscious motives are aligned; the level of conscious action energy that we employ in pursuing our goals is supported by our deeper,

stronger unconscious desires.

This is beneficial to both our sense of well-being and our long-term effectiveness. Of course, it is not possible to achieve continuous motive alignment across every area of life, and discrepancies between people's conscious and unconscious motivation sources are common. Moreover, due to the very nature of our unconscious desires, we are often unaware of these discrepancies and consequently can easily underestimate or overestimate the true strength of our various motives. Getting in touch with our basic needs and working towards aligning our conscious and unconscious motives in specific contexts is however very advantageous.

An example: Imagine that a departmental head has a pronounced conscious power motive, resulting from the position he has achieved and the authority entrusted in

him. On the deeper lying, unconscious level, however, his power motive is considerably lower, but his performance motive high. While his conscious motive may well enable him to maintain a boss persona for some time, over the long term, he will find it hard to demonstrate classic leadership behavior, i.e. to motivate his employees, issue instructions, delegate tasks, monitor work results, etc. because his inner personality would much rather that he worked on solving the tasks himself. This situation compromises not only his potential, but also his capacity to feel self-fulfilled.

Working against our unconscious basic motives for longer periods, as in this example, is very draining and can be detrimental to our sense of drive and even to our health. Pursuing tasks that correspond with our unconscious needs

is, in contrast, a source of energy and joy; we are therefore much more likely to do these well and with endurance. Achieving improved motive alignment first requires us to get in better tune with our unconscious motives. To do this yourself, you can monitor your behavior from time to time, especially during periods where you are not subject to stress and therefore have the peace of mind to home in on your inner desires. Think about the things that you yourself choose to do if you have the time and the opportunity, and retrospectively reflect on tasks and activities you have perceived as particularly satisfying. Then compare your thoughts with your conscious motives to try to establish how congruent the two are. The following table recaps how they differ:

Conscious motives	Unconscious motives
→ Are needs that we consciously give thought to and can verbalize, and that trigger willed processes	→ Are needs existing below the threshold of our conscious perception that direct our behavior through subliminal impulses
→ Are manifested when we have clear plans or instructions that put us under external pressure to act	→ Are manifested when we have the time and frame our mind to select our tasks according to our inner urges. Provide us with strong intrinsic drive
→ Are more relevant to short-term success	→ Are conducive to long-term success

However, while this process of contemplation is certainly conducive to improving our self-awareness, in order to clearly establish what are conscious and unconscious motives are and where the discrepancies between them lie, we need to subject them to scientific examination. The scan.up Analysis of Potential is one very effective such process.

As mentioned above, achieving alignment between our conscious and unconscious motives in all areas is unrealistic: we cannot go through life avoiding task areas and work environments that do not correspond with our needs. Moreover, discrepancies between the two motive forms are not always a bad thing, and often enable us to act flexibly. Take for example crisis situations that temporarily require employees to work harder than could

reasonably be expected of them over the longer term. Under such circumstances, employees with a strong conscious performance motive are especially valuable, irrespective of how pronounced their unconscious performance motivation is.

It is important that we work on improving our motive alignment in the areas that impact our life significantly and on a regular, long-term basis. In our jobs, for instance. Here, understanding our motives and investing in satisfying them will enable us to make optimal use of our driving forces, making us not only more productive over the long-term, but also more self-fulfilled.

01.6

A summary of the Action Control Model

Our personality is based on the interplay of our brain's four cognitive systems (Managing Director, Logician, Spontaneous Doer, and Controller). How pronounced these systems are in us determines how easy or difficult we find it to act from an overview perspective (Managing Director), plan our actions and intentions (Logician), act intuitively (Spontaneous Doer), and focus our attention on details and on identifying errors (Controller).

The activation of these systems, i.e. which system we use when and to what degree, is controlled by our affects. Our affects, effectively our moods, therefore play a large part in dictating our actions.

We are all basically capable of using all four systems, and of transferring from one system to the other. Two system transfers that are very important to us in our lives are those responsible for self-motivation and for learning from experience: In order to motivate ourselves to pursue our intentions, we need to switch from the left to the right hemisphere of the brain, from the Logician to the Spontaneous Doer. This process is known as self-motivation or action facilitation. Learning from experience, in contrast, requires us to switch from the Controller to the Managing Director, a process referred as self-calming. These processes are detailed in the following sections.

While the four cognitive systems explain how we act, why we act (i.e., what motivates us to act, is based on the three basic motives described in the previous section (power, performance and relationship). These motives

are our sources of drive; they give us energy and direction. Each of the three motives has a conscious and an unconscious form. And whatever motive is predominant in us will determine for the most part how we interpret situations and what types of situation we choose to get involved in. But all three motives have important roles to play in our lives, and their differing strengths in different contexts are essential to our ability to act effectively on both a personal and professional level. Acting against our motives is very strenuous in the long run, and robs us of our energy. But acting in alignment with our basic motivational sources will most likely have an inspiring effect, and thus increase our productivity.

Our individual personalities, with their unique strengths and areas of potential, result from our brain's four cognitive systems, our motives, and the many interrelations that exist between them.

02

Volition

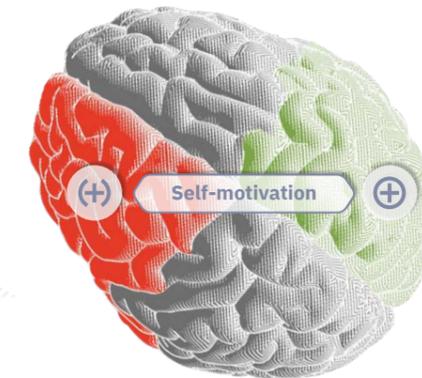
02.1

Where there's a will, there's a way

Having an awareness of our strengths and our motives helps us to live in harmony with our needs. It enables us to draw on our personal sources of potential and to seek out task areas and goals that suit our personality. However, this is not always the way things work in practice. In certain situations, we are often unable to realize our intentions despite being highly motivated to do so.

LOGICIAN (action planning)

Consciously examines, analyzes, develops and plans the steps to implement



SPONTANEOUS DOER (action performance)

Implements actions, exhibits intuition

An example of this is the conscious desire to be physically fit that many people have, but that doesn't necessarily spur them to do regular physical exercise. A failure to act on our intentions and desires in this way results when our brain, faced with difficulties, resistance and stress, spontaneously signals that our goal cannot or cannot easily be achieved. This then inhibits our positive affect and activates our Logician.

The Logician brain mode enables us to contemplate the difficulties involved and to plan concrete ways of overcoming these, or to maintain our enthusiasm for our goal until the time is right to act on it. It enables us to tolerate situations without giving up on our intentions. And this ability, referred to as frustration tolerance, can be very beneficial in certain situations.

Getting stuck in this waiting and planning mode is however problematic, as the example above shows. It is therefore important that we recognize the right moment

to act and, when it comes, that we have the confidence and drive to do so. The ability to motivate ourselves here is essential to overcoming inhibited positive affect and turning it into positive affect, which manifests itself in optimism and in a will to take on and solve the difficulty in question.

A motivated mindset is conducive to action facilitation, enabling us to try out different approaches, carry out our tasks with enthusiasm, and overcome problems with greater ease. The capacity for self-motivation is therefore extremely important to our personal development, allowing us to grow through the challenges we take on.

02.2

Recognizing and exploiting our sources of strength

Strong-willed people are able to independently make this switch from Logician to Spontaneous Doer on a regular basis. Will power in this context is the ability to translate motives and goals into results, and is what we refer to as a practical competence. We need both motivation and will power in order to achieve ambitious goals and to work resolutely on our own personal development.

To differentiate between the two: If motivation is what ignites our engine, then will power is the fuel we need to get moving and persist. It gives us the drive and the stamina to overcome obstacles. It helps us to resist the temptations, distractions and easy ways out that would impede us in pursuing our goals. It helps us control our thoughts, feelings, motives and actions so as to be able to focus on specific objectives. And it decides which motives, goals, behavioral impulses, etc. we should follow and which we shouldn't. The bigger the obstacles we face in pursuit of our goals, the stronger our will power needs to be. Then again, overcoming these obstacles and accomplishing goals sets free an abundance of new energy in us.

The strength of our will power therefore plays a key role in how effectively we translate our motives into results. But it can also work inversely to influence our known as self-regulation. Our ability to self-motivate and self-regulate ourselves is one that we can train, provided we know and understand our sources of action energy.

Becoming more aware in this respect involves understanding our cognitive systems and our motives, as detailed above. Further important aspects in this context are the five different levels on which we tend to manifest our unconscious motives:

LEVEL 1

If we tend to exhibit the first motive level, we are intrinsically motivated. This means that we like to perform tasks out of pure pleasure; tasks that we do not perceive as hard work, but as satisfying and as a way of living out our creativity. We therefore have a strong need to connect with the context and the task in question. While being intrinsically motivated enables us to carry out certain tasks effortlessly, it makes it difficult for us to work on things that do not correspond with our inclinations and interests. To be able to knuckle down in such cases, and not turn our attention to something we perceive as more interesting, we need strong will power.

LEVEL 2

If the second motive level is strongest in us, we are particularly motivated by external factors such as rewards or the acknowledgement of others. Instructions, standards and role requirements can also serve as incentives. Here, our attention is outwardly directed. In situations where there is no external incentive to drive us forward, we need strong will power to get moving on our tasks.

LEVEL 3

If the third motive level applies most to us, then we derive energy from solving problems independently and approaching things strategically. This mindset enables us to tackle problems constructively and creatively, and to be flexible and far-sighted in solving them. It also means that we have no problem motivating ourselves or taking the initiative in the face of complex and challenging situations. On the other hand, we find it difficult to muster up the energy for routine tasks (if we are performance-motivated), to spontaneously use situations to improve our position (if we are power-motivated), or to spontaneously make contact with others (if we are relationship-motivated)

LEVEL 4

If the fourth motive level is predominant in us, then we tend to avoid negative situations. Instead of being driven by hope for success, we are controlled by fear of failure. The way we perform our tasks is characterized by control and conscientiousness.

LEVEL 5

If we tend to exhibit the fifth motive level, our fear of a negative outcome impedes us in exhibiting our respective strongest motive, i.e. power, performance or relationship. To perform our tasks, we signal frustration or helplessness to others, meaning that other people are often involved in fulfilling our tasks and thus in satisfying our basic motive.

On the fourth and fifth motive levels, we are mainly driven by feelings of fears or shame, or by a desire to avoid failure. And while we may well be motivated to act on these levels, the way we act is less sustainable and less fulfilling

than on levels one to three, where we are driven by positive energy. If the fourth and fifth levels are most pronounced within specific motives, then we should reflect on why this is the case.

02.3

Willpower: the fuel, that drives us to success

Willpower enables us to tap into and exploit our sources of energy to achieve the desired results, even under difficult circumstances. But what exactly does will power comprise? Through their research, Prof. Dr. Waldemar Pelz¹ and Prof. Dr. Julius Kuhl² have identified concrete abilities that distinguish people with strong will power, and have examined ways of training these abilities.

Focusing on our attention and what's important

Effectively translating our intentions into actions is a question of using our motivation to channel our knowledge in the right directions. People with strong practical abilities in this context mobilize their energy by focusing consistently on clear goals that are in line with their personal values. Their distinct awareness of what is important to them gives them the strength to overcome difficulties and obstacles. In contrast, people who do not have this sense of focus are more inclined to get bogged down with miscellaneous tasks.

The ability to concentrate on what really matters is especially important for people who like to work on several things at once, and who are continually tempted by the idea of delving into new and interesting areas. People with these inclinations need to learn how to, when it comes down to it, direct their attention at clear goals, the pursuit and accomplishment of which enables them fulfill their basic motives, i.e. to deliver high performance (performance motivation), to define and shape things (power motivation) or to interact with people (relationship motivation). Doing this first requires them to find out what activities and behaviors are most conducive to goal

fulfillment. If for example a person has low self-discipline and tends to act spontaneously, giving little prior thought to whether his behavior promotes his goals, then this person should learn how to consciously put his intentions on hold until the time is right to implement them. A person with excessively high self-discipline, on the other hand, may well focus too intensively on adhering to specifications without considering whether his approach is efficient, and will need to work on training his awareness in this respect.

Goal-oriented self-discipline through a deeper sense of connection with one's tasks

People with strong will power tend to recognize more quickly than others what action a situation requires, and to then act on this awareness. They have a high degree of self-discipline and pursue their goals effectively, without yielding to any inapplicable wishes and distractions that arise. This type of self-discipline is not based on the will to comply with external or self-imposed rules, but results out of a deeper understanding for the respective task, which in turn stems from a sense of identification with the goal in question. If we know why we are working on something, it is much easier to inspire both ourselves and others for our cause.

Setting ourselves goals that we can identify with is therefore key. And discussing our ideas and opinions in his respect with others is a good way of sharpening our awareness for which goals are truly relevant to us personally. So talk to friends, colleagues and superiors about your performance standards (if you are predominantly performance-motivated), about your need for discretionary scope (if you are predominantly power-motivated), and about interacting with others (if you are predominantly relationship-motivated). Verbalizing

your thoughts and feelings in this way will enable you to connect more closely with your values and to convey to others what is important to you. This in turn will make you more successful in seeing your goals through to fruition, because the tasks and goals that you pursue are more likely to be ones that you identify with as opposed to ones that you have assumed out of a sense of duty.

Managing emotions and needs

As described in the section on the Action Control Model, our cognitive systems are activated by our moods. People with strong will power are very good at putting themselves in a positive mood and, because positive moods activate the Spontaneous Doer, find it easier to get started on things. They are also able to control their feelings efficiently and to deal constructively with negative moods and emotional stress.

One method of training our mood management skills, and therefore of strengthening our will power, is to consciously practice putting ourselves in a good mood. The more we practice changing our moods, the easier we will find it to maintain our drive and to not get bogged down by feelings of frustration and anger, even in critical situations. And one way of practicing this is to write down our tasks and the feelings that we associate with them. If we notice that we connect

certain tasks with negative feelings, then we should try to find and emphasize positive aspects. What is the purpose of the task? Can I associate any of my personal values with it? By actively re-evaluating our tasks in this way, we can increase our inclination towards the task and our motivation to take it on.

A further means of managing our moods is to open up more to others about how we feel. Many of us rarely express our feelings in our everyday lives. This might be because we don't think anyone is interested or because we feel it wouldn't change anything anyway. But disclosing our feelings is often the key to solving conflicts or to overcoming obstacles, and thus to improving our mood. People with a more pronounced fifth motive level are often disinclined to express their feelings, and should therefore make a special effort to express their opinions and their positive and negative feelings more often.

External feedback is also important if we want to better assess our own performance and use positive feedback to get into a more positive, confident mood. Regular exchange with others is especially important to people with pronounced second motive levels, and boosts their motivation and their ability to effectively translate intentions into actions.

Self-confidence and assertiveness

Dynamic people are aware of their abilities and trust in these. They see obstacles and problems as challenges to be overcome and, thanks to their self-confidence, are able to find ways and means of surmounting difficulties relatively quickly. This in turn reflects an ability to manage their moods and to get into a positive frame of mind. In keeping with the principle of self-fulfilling prophecies, people with a positive attitude toward themselves and their abilities are more likely to see this attitude confirmed.

To develop a more positive, assertive mindset, we need to have a clear idea of our role and to communicate this idea to others. We need to be clearly aware of what we expect from ourselves and from others in certain situations. A relationship-motivated person, for example, will gain greater will power by contributing significantly to team activities and by feeling that they are a valuable team member. But doing something important for others can be additionally motivating across all motive types.

Forward thinking, planning and creative problem solving

People with strong will power are proactive and forward thinking. They deal with unpleasant and difficult tasks quickly and don't procrastinate. They don't see planning as a means of forecasting the future, but as preparation for an uncertain future. They need to work with long-term perspectives from the outset, and to train their problem solving abilities.

02.4

Developing our practical competence

The following table summarizes approaches for improving our practical competence¹.

Using practical competence	Sources of distraction
+ Focusing on clear goals	— Too many miscellaneous tasks at once
+ Living by your own values	— Wanting to please everyone
+ Concentrating on what's most important	— Not knowing what you want
+ Putting yourself in a good mood	— Procrastinating over obstacles
+ Overcoming emotional problems	— Being sensitive and unforgiving
+ Dispelling fear, envy, anger, and frustration	— Feeling like a victim, blaming others
+ Being a valuable team member	— Continuously comparing yourself with others
+ Doing important things for others	— Following other people's opinions
+ Using strengths and talents	— Waiting for praise and recognition
+ Being prepared for the unexpected	— Actions mainly reactive and short-term
+ Building long-term perspectives	— Living in the past
+ Training problem-solving abilities	— Talking mainly about superficial topics
+ Knowing the purpose of your work	— Inability to develop own initiative
+ Clarify role within a community	— Neglecting friendships
+ Obtaining feedback regularly	— Showing no interest in others

To recap: Will power, together with positive self-motivation, is key to translating intentions into actions. And training our will power in a way that best exploits our inner sources of strength will increase our effectiveness in this respect considerably. Moreover, knowing what our goals are enables us to approach our tasks with focus,

self-assurance and stamina. As a result, we find it much easier to actually accomplish these goals, even the more ambitious ones.

03

Learning

03.1

Developing our personality through learning from experience

“If you make a mistake and do not correct it, this is called a mistake.”

(Konfuzius)

Successful people have invariably been through countless ups and downs over their careers, and will often tell of how these experiences marked them and helped them get to where they are now.

Achieving success is therefore not only a question of will power, but also of learning from one's experiences. After all, our everyday lives continually present us with a multitude of varied challenges, many of which we cannot possibly have contemplated and prepared for in advance. We therefore often need to be able to react intuitively to the situations that come up. And this intuition results from experience.

The ability to act on one's experience in this manner is referred to as potential for learning. People with a high

potential for learning are able to quickly draw conclusions from feedback, successes, failures, etc., and to adapt their current approaches accordingly. Learning from and adapting to situations in this manner is fundamentally important to our development, both personal and private. The cognitive system most active during the process of learning from experience in the Controller, which focuses on recognizing, monitoring and analyzing problems and uncertainties. The decision on what to do with the Controller's conclusions is then made elsewhere in the brain:

If we get stuck in our Controller. i.e., in analyzing the situation, then we cannot solve the problem or overcome feelings of anger, sadness or fear. In extreme cases, this can lead to our fear of failure preventing us from doing anything.

If we transfer to the Spontaneous Doer, we may be able to act quickly, but we do not record and process the problem in our experience memory. Rather, we tend to ignore or repress it. We are therefore at risk of making the same mistake again.

If we transfer to the Logician system, then we adjust our plans for action or the point in time for solving the problem according to the Controller's findings.

Only if we transfer to the Managing Director can we store the findings of our problem analysis as experience, which can then be drawn upon at a later date.

While the Controller dominates when we are in a negative mood, the Managing Director is responsible for inhibiting our negative affect and making us feel relaxed or relieved. Transferring from the Controller to the Managing Director therefore requires a change of affect (of mood). We need to down-regulate any feelings of anger, sadness or grief, and to thus calm ourselves. If we manage to make this switch from a more frustrated state to a more nonchalant state, then we can consider the difficulties and problems at issue in a broader context and integrate them into the Managing Director's experience memory (people who

keep their poise and composure, even when under stress, are generally acting from a strong Managing Director system). This experience can then be used to deal with future problems and challenges.

CONTROLLER
(results monitoring)

Is detail-focused, analyzes and categorizes the results of actions, examines for failure



THE MANAGING DIRECTOR
(goal formation)

Acts from an overview perspective, comes up with creative ideas, makes decisions, processes feedback

In turn, the knowledge that we have managed to overcome negative situations strengthens our deeper self, the place where all our experiences and needs are stored. Our deeper self helps us to define goals and come up with ideas that correspond with our needs, and to maintain an overview when evaluating situations. It therefore enables us to learn from experience, to develop greater self-awareness, to deal with discrepancies, to overcome failures and to maintain our target orientation.

03.2

Different learning strategies and learning types

While learning from experience is very valuable, targeted learning is also of key importance when it comes to acquiring knowledge and developing. And this form of learning, too, is dependent on the strength of our four cognitive systems, with our learning strategies differing according to which systems are more pronounced.

Some people learn best by taking in new information, understanding it and then using it in practice. They attend seminars, read books, etc. and can then transfer the corresponding knowledge into practice. These people are results-oriented in their learning type. However, few people find this form or results-oriented learning alone particularly effective.

Most people learn new things effectively by practicing them continually, gradually increasing the degree of difficulty involved. Moreover, they need to gather these many practical experiences in different contexts, ones that involve different people and different environments for instance. They also need to obtain feedback and discuss the results of their tasks and activities with other people. They are

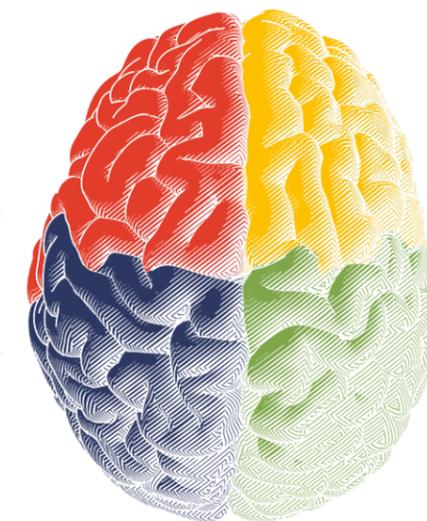
integrative in their learning type. Working out which learning strategy works best for which individuals is therefore of key importance to companies. This knowledge enables them to tailor their learning strategies to the employees' respective needs, instead of simply sending all employees to a seminar or requiring them to read a particular book. By looking again at the brain's cognitive systems, we can better understand how these different learning strategies come about.

LOGICIAN
(action planning)

Consciously examines, analyzes, develops and plans the steps to implement

CONTROLLER
(results monitoring)

Is detail-focused, analyzes and categorizes the results of actions, examines for failure



THE MANAGING DIRECTOR
(goal formation)

Acts from an overview perspective, comes up with creative ideas, makes decisions, processes feedback

SPONTANEOUS DOER
(action performance)

Implements actions, exhibits intuition

THE LOGICIAN

“Sorting and organizing, with a focus on facts”

People who learn mainly in Logician mode tend to acquire knowledge by collecting information in a very objective, sober and prudent manner. They are really only interested in real facts and criteria, and enjoy working with content of a scientific, theoretical or research-based nature.

People with pronounced Logician systems tend to be very disciplined and like to work according to instructions or to a detailed plan. They need a clear direction or purpose, and then plan, implement and accomplish their goals accordingly. If they set out to learn

something, they approach it tenaciously, according to the practice makes perfect principle. If they have to deal with multiple complex or extensive tasks, then they will order these carefully and work through them one by one. Clear direction and structure give them a sense of security. They tend to be very precise, ambitious and persevering in their work approach, and to want to understand cause-and-effect relationships. They prefer to work in a concentrated, autonomous manner and do not like to be disturbed or distracted. They therefore need a quiet work atmosphere conducive to concentration, and favor working alone or in small groups.

THE CONTROLLER

“What is it for, why is it needed, how exactly does it work?”

If the Controller system is pronounced in a person, then that person’s eye for detail is especially strong. People who tend to learn in the Controller mode often gain a sound understating of the theory while remaining open to trying that theory out in practice. Their learning approach is oriented toward the present and based on proven or credible facts and findings. They are inclined to ask questions and to conduct research. People whose Controller is especially pronounced when learning tend only to believe what they see. Before they act, they therefore collect corresponding information. They are, moreover, deliberating and structured in their actions, and therefore slow. They

also like to repeat things a lot and to gradually become better and more assured as a result. Routine is important to them, as is calm.

If the only system active in a person is the Controller, then that person will tend to be too focused on details and “not see the wood for the trees.” He will however quickly pinpoint errors and inconsistencies. Information provided to people with strong Controllers therefore needs to be meaningful, precise, structured, and technically correct.

THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

“Learning from experience”

People who learn mainly in the Managing Director mode tend to learn based on their subjective experiences, needs and values. This means that they decide what and how to learn according to subjective criteria, i.e. their own interests or current needs. These can result from, for instance, their own life experiences, the courses of action open to them, comparisons that they make between their own needs and those of others, self-aspects, etc. Understanding a topic comprehensively is important to them; their learning processes are therefore slower and more all-encompassing. They want to develop a differentiated awareness for the content in question, which in turn means that they need to experience it in both positive and negative contexts. They therefore have to try out different approaches and to work with others actively and creatively on the topic in question.

Their approach to learning is characterized by a continual search for new challenges, and they can tend to quickly switch their focus from one topic to another. Their concentration levels will tend to be higher if information is presented to them in an emotional manner. Indeed, before they delve deeper into a topic, they want to be inspired by interesting, dynamic, varied presentations of the respective content. They perceive repetition as boring. Creative, diverse presentations are much more likely to hold their attention. People with pronounced Managing Director systems tend to process various tasks and topics simultaneously, and like to have a variety of different courses of action at their disposal. To ensure that they don’t lose sight of things, it makes sense for them to divide their tasks up and set themselves milestones on their path to the overall goal. They learn best on the basis of models, ideas, prototypes and patterns.

THE SPONTANEOUS DOER

“Doing things first, then reflecting on them and understanding them.”

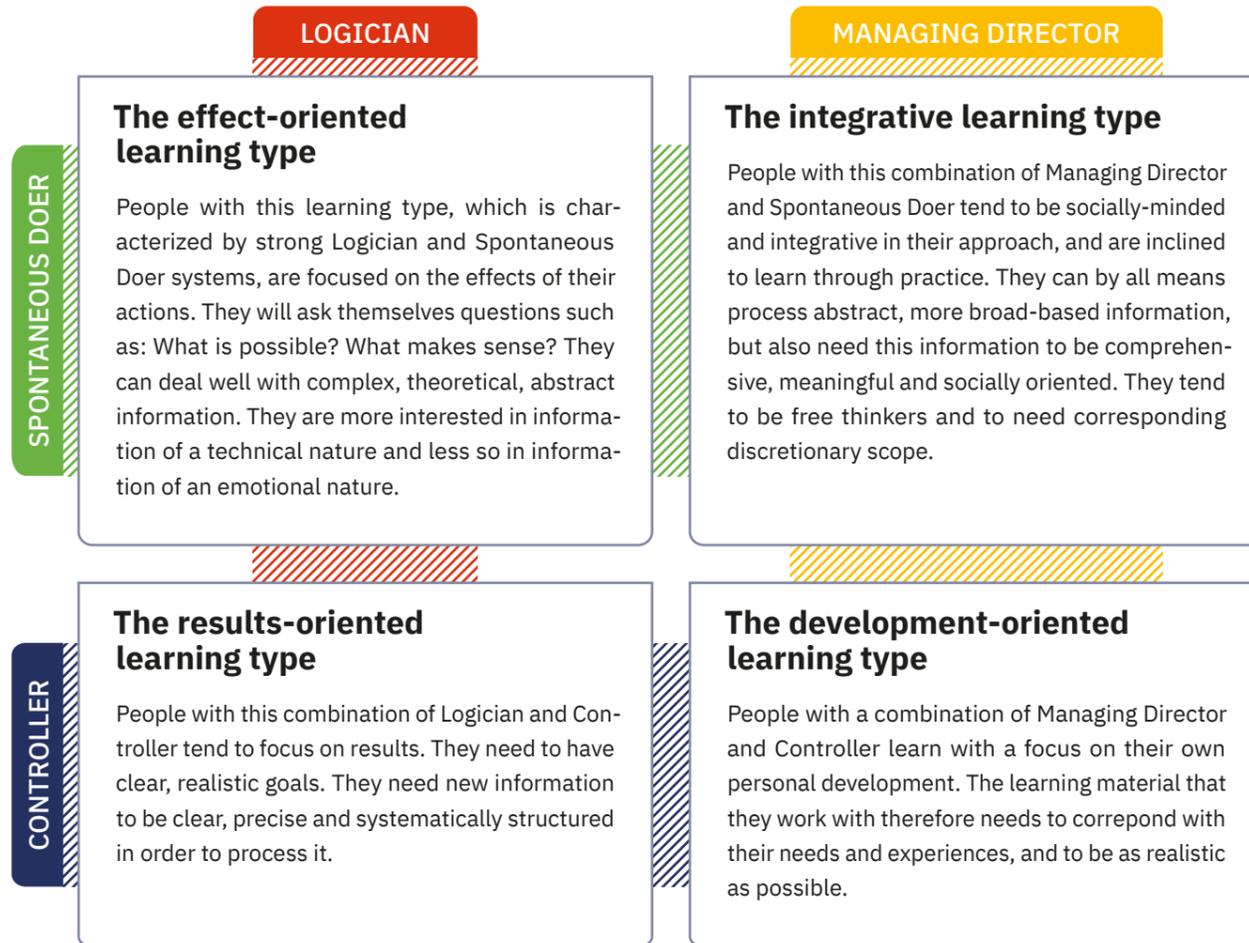
People who learn mainly in Spontaneous Doer mode tend to do so in an automated manner based mainly on experiences, patterns and habits. They are keen to quickly act on new insights and to put new intentions into practice. This can sometimes lead them to act impulsively, out of a will to see what happens, rather than to consider in advance what the consequences might be.

Because their intuition is strong, they can understand complex subject matter and patterns relatively quickly. And their ability to process several stimuli at once means that they quickly develop insights or take the right actions, without necessarily being able

to explain how they arrived at these. They tend to act on superficial information, and to then work towards the details retrospectively. They are therefore initially not interested in the minutia of a task or situation, which can make them more likely to make mistakes (“I seem to have overlooked that!”, “I went about that too quickly!”).

People with pronounced Spontaneous Doer systems are best able to acquire new information via quick, practical, effective repetition, through which they then develop a routine. They ideally need to experience things directly and to work on varying activities. Dynamism is therefore conducive to learning. Sitting still for longer periods is not. Their approach to learning is moreover forward-looking and benefit-oriented, and they have a nose for opportunities. Because they need to feel that their efforts are worthwhile, they tend to weigh up the benefits of learning with the energy investment involved.

The following table associates the four learning types with the four cognitive systems:



Our learning processes too, therefore, are influenced by the many areas of interplay between our cognitive systems, some of which are triggered consciously, some unconsciously. Developing an awareness for how pronounced our systems are in various situations will help us select the type of content and methods best suited to our individual personalities. This in turn helps us increase our potential for learning and, over the longer term, also our work performance.

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We have over 20 years of experience in advising our clients on personnel diagnostics. We use research-based methods to analyze people's competencies and areas of potential. These include classic aptitude diagnostics methods, such as assessment centers and 360° feedback, as well as our unique scan personality assessment procedure, by which we can identify more than 120 personality traits.

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scan.up AG

Astraturm / Zirkusweg 2 / 20359 Hamburg

T +49 40 80 80 388 60 / info@scan-up.de

www.scan-up.com

