

What If Most Leadership Problems Are Thinking Mismatches?

One of my former CEOs, Harry Shaughnessy, did me one of the greatest favors of my career. Early on he required every employee to take a personality assessment when they joined the company.

As I read through how people perceived their roles, the work they did, and what motivated them, I realized something important: the job isn't only about marketing strategy. It's also about understanding how the people on your team think about their work.

The results pointed to something that feels obvious once you see it, but that most organizations never really stop to examine: people doing the same job often think about the work in completely different ways.

Some people process ideas by talking them through with others. Others prefer to step away, analyze the problem, and return with a fully formed perspective. Some are energized by solving complex problems, while others are motivated by momentum and visible progress.

None of these approaches are wrong. But they can easily create friction when a team assumes everyone processes work the same way. What often gets labeled as disagreement, hesitation, or lack of alignment is sometimes just people approaching the same problem through different thinking styles.

Once you begin to notice these patterns, leadership starts to look different. Meetings change. Expectations become clearer. People who previously stayed quiet begin contributing more because the environment finally allows them to think the way they naturally do.

Over time it becomes difficult to ignore the pattern.

Many leadership challenges are not strategy failures. They are thinking mismatches.

Once leaders recognize that, they stop trying to make everyone operate the same way. Instead, they begin shaping the environment so different styles of thinking can still move the work forward.

Over time, you start to see leadership differently.