# Bringing Out the Best in Your OD Practice:
## How to Use the Enneagram System for Success
By Ginger Lapid-Bogda, Ph.D.

"There is growing evidence that people who are above average regarding self-awareness are likely to be high performers, particularly with respect to leadership and management. The Enneagram is a sound, tried-and-true technique for enhancing one's self-awareness."
-W. Warner Burke, Ph.D.

The Enneagram is an ancient and profound psycho spiritual system that is theory based and uncannily accurate. Because it integrates easily with organization development theory and practice, the Enneagram can serve as a powerful psychological resource for our organization development work, as it does already for many organizations across the globe.

While the Enneagram can be used in a wide array of OD interventions, this article focuses on the following applications:

❑ Improving communication
❑ Giving effective feedback
❑ Managing conflict constructively
❑ Creating high-performing teams
❑ Developing leadership excellence

The word *enneagram* comes from the Greek words *ennea* ("nine") and *gram* ("something written or drawn") and refers to the nine points on the Enneagram symbol. The nine different Enneagram styles, identified as numbers One through Nine, reflect distinct habits of thinking, feeling, and behaving, with each style connected to a unique path of development.

### The Enneagram Symbol
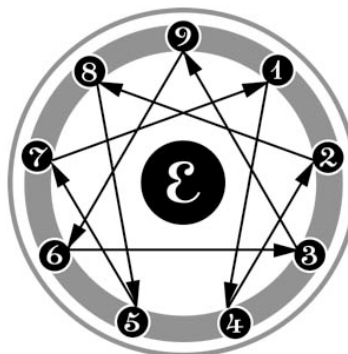


To apply the Enneagram at work, a person must first identify his or her Enneagram style. Some recognize their Enneagram style immediately, while others may need additional time to

consider their patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The most accurate way to identify one's Enneagram style is to learn the Enneagram system in an introductory workshop (about three hours), to read an Enneagram book, and/or to use the results from an Enneagram typing instrument in conjunction with a workshop or book.

## The Nine Enneagram Styles

Accurately identifying your own place on the Enneagram involves thought and self-reflection. However, the following Enneagram style descriptions will help you get started.

**Ones** seek perfection and work diligently to improve everyone and everything, including themselves.

**Twos** want to be liked, needed, and considered indispensable, and they indirectly orchestrate the people and events around them.

**Threes** seek the respect and admiration of others through achieving goals, appearing successful, and avoiding failure.

**Fours** desire deep connections with both their inner worlds and with other people, savor authentic self-expression, and focus on what is missing.

**Fives** thirst for knowledge, use emotional detachment to keep entanglements with others to a minimum, and try to minimize their dependence on others.

**Sixes** search for certainty and support, worry, have incisive minds, and create worst-case scenarios.

**Sevens** crave stimulation, engage in elaborate future planning that preserves all their options, and try to avoid pain.

**Eights** pursue truth, want situations to be under control, exert themselves to make important things happen, and hide their vulnerabilities.

**Nines** yearn for peace, harmony, and positive mutual regard and have an aversion to conflict, tension, and ill will.

Note: For more information about the nine Enneagram styles, go to www.TheEnneagramInBusiness.com.
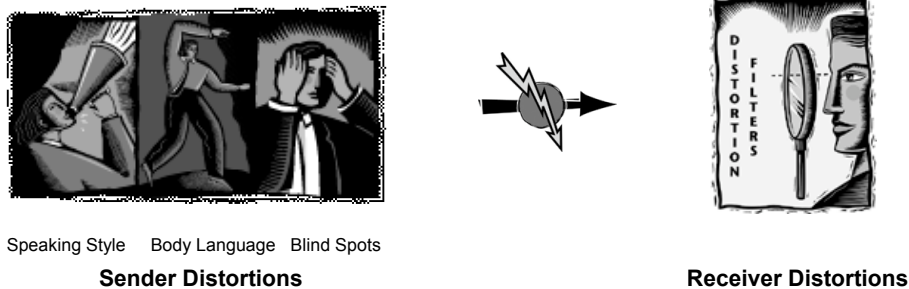
## OD Applications of the Enneagram

Each of the five applications of the Enneagram that follow uses a classic OD model and highlights at least one of the nine Enneagram styles as an example.

## Communication

Because **Ones** seek perfection, they discern, evaluate, and critique. Consequently, Ones communicate using judgmental language, even when they work hard to monitor and control their reactions. Despite their best efforts, Ones often receive feedback that their standards are too high and that they are too critical.

The OD Sender-Receiver Communication Model helps people understand how their Enneagram-based communication patterns interfere when they communicate with others.



Speaking Style    Body Language   Blind Spots
**Sender Distortions**                                          **Receiver Distortions**

The following story shows how Brian, an Enneagram One, unintentionally distorts both what he says and what he hears.

### SENDER DISTORTIONS

**Speaking Style —** *the pattern by which we talk and what we talk about*

Brian works very hard to find exactly the right words to express his thoughts.  Such words as *good*, *should*, and *ought* are interwoven, directly or implicitly, into his speech. Brian reacts quickly to ideas and becomes defensive if he feels criticized. His speaking style is seen in this example:

> Brian and a colleague, Scott, were about to go to a professional meeting. The first thing Brian said
> to Scott was this: "You're not wearing a suit?"
> Scott, surprised by this unsolicited remark, replied, "What? Why are you saying that to me?"
> Brian's response was rapid and sincere: "What you're wearing is too casual for this meeting. You
> need to wear a suit. I'm just trying to help you!"

Brian never used the words *correct* or *must*, but he was clearly correcting Scott when he said, "You're not…" and "You need to…." Brian's quick response and defensive explanation are also characteristic of the One's speaking style.

**Body Language —** *the nonverbal messages we send*

During the interaction with Scott, Brian's body language became increasingly tense; from his point of view, he was trying to help his colleague, not criticize him. As the discussion continued, Brian's jaw tightened, the expression in his eyes became intense, and he stood up straight and moved backward. The importance Brian placed on his own appearance (being well groomed, having coordinating clothing, and wearing the correct attire) was something he wanted to share with his coworker, even though Scott was not in the least bit interested.

**Blind Spots —** *information about us of which we are unaware*

The interaction also reveals one of Brian's blind spots. Not only was Brian unaware that he was criticizing Scott's choice of clothing, but he continued his criticism even after Scott had responded negatively. Ones can appear critical and impatient even when they are trying hard not to do so.

### RECEIVER DISTORTIONS

**Distorting Filters —** *the ways we alter what others communicate to us*

Because Ones work diligently to do the right thing themselves, they often filter and distort what others say for any suggestion of criticism directed toward them. Brian felt criticized by Scott's indignant response. Ones also continue to believe their own ideas so strongly that they may not accurately hear what the other person is saying. Brian was both convinced that Scott was dressed incorrectly and annoyed that he had not taken the time to consider the appropriate attire, and as a result was unable to hear that Scott felt hurt and offended.

## Feedback

While Brian may have thought he was giving Scott feedback, Brian was really offering his own opinion and judgment. Feedback is direct, objective, and non-evaluative observations about another person's behavior. We all have strengths and weaknesses in delivering feedback, and the Enneagram shows how to use our strengths and eliminate style-based errors when giving feedback to others.

**Twos,** for example, want to be liked and needed and are highly attuned to other people's verbal and nonverbal reactions. They can therefore be sensitive, warm, and insightful when giving feedback. However, they may also deliver the feedback in an overly positive way, perhaps doing one of the following:

(1) Sugarcoating language: "Your customer said this, but he wasn't very upset about it. "
(2) Explaining away behavior: "Your customer said this, but I know how busy you are, and you've always had a good relationship with him."
(3) Avoiding giving negative information: "How have things been going with your customer?"

Twos can become judgmental and aggressive when giving feedback when Twos think the following:

(1) The feedback recipient intends to cause harm to someone whom the Two values.
(2) They don't like the feedback recipient.
(3) The feedback recipient is resisting help.

Knowing their Enneagram style-based tendencies can help Twos when delivering a message, for example:

❑ Maintain positive regard for the other person while still providing negative information
❑ Consider the other person's feelings but not avoid issues in order to spare feelings
❑ Pay attention to the recipient's reaction but don't positive or negative responses personally
❑ Maintain perceptiveness but remind themselves that their insights may not be accurate, especially if they are angry

Using the following three-part **Feedback Formula** also increases the likelihood of giving performance feedback that makes a difference.

*Feedback Formula*

| *Observable behavior* | *Impact of the behavior* | *Preferred behavior* |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| *"When you…"* | *"The impact was…"* | *"I would prefer it if you would…"* |
| *Use this three-part method with everyone.* | | |

When the Feedback Formula is tailored to the feedback recipient's Enneagram style, the recipient's defensiveness decreases dramatically and his or her understanding of what to do with the feedback increases markedly.

Take the example of an Enneagram **Three** who is chronically late for meetings. Someone with rudimentary feedback skills might tell this person, "You're chronically late to meetings. This causes frustration and is not respectful of other people's time."

A more sophisticated feedback giver, however, could use the Feedback Formula, and give the information shown in the box:

> **Observable behavior**
> "In the past month, you've been late to three staff meetings"
>
> **Impact of the behavior**
> "The issue is that we either have to start over when you arrive to fill you in or else ignore your lateness, which means you miss important information."
>
> **Preferred behavior**
> "It is important to be there on time."

The most sophisticated feedback, however, occurs when the Feedback Formula is integrated with the Enneagram. When giving feedback to a Three, it is important to keep in mind that Threes desire respect and place a high value on goal achievement and on appearing successful. The following guidelines can be helpful:

> **Observable behavior**
> Threes prefer feedback when they are not overwhelmed with work, and they like to have it framed as something that can help them become more successful. They also like details and listen more closely to feedback from individuals they respect.
>
> **Impact of the behavior**
> Threes respond best when feedback reinforces their desire for goal achievement and highlights the difference between intention and impact.
>
> **Preferred behavior**
> Threes like upbeat, problem-solving approaches that are practical and that demonstrate trust in the Three to take effective action.

Using the same scenario of lateness to meetings, the feedback might go like this:

> **Observable behavior**
> "Do you have some time to talk about something that could improve your impact on the team? You've been late for three staff meetings this month. No one has said anything about it yet -- I just wanted to know if you were aware of being late."
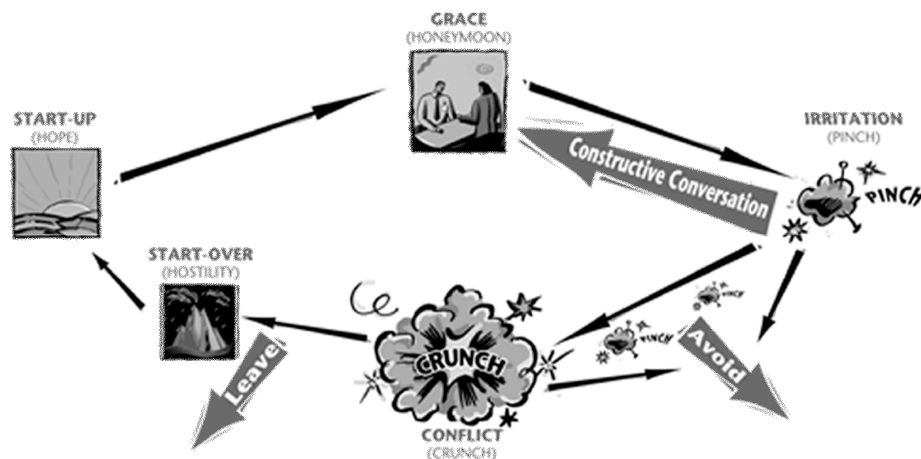
## Conflict

Using the Enneagram integrated with the Feedback Formula can also be helpful when dealing with conflict. Conflict is one of the most common and stressful aspects of organizational life. Because many people don't like conflict or don't know how to deal with it constructively, people often avoid confrontation or to deal with differences only when there is no other choice. Unfortunately, this may mean that conflict usually gets addressed only when the parties are under duress.

Although many organizational factors generate conflict between and among people, personalities are usually a contributing force in the dynamics of a conflict and its resolution. An understanding of the Enneagram enables conflicting parties to do the following:

(1) Take responsibility for their part of the conflict
(2) Engage in self-management during the conflict
(3) Know best how to approach others
(4) Use their angry reactions for their own personal development work

The Pinch-Crunch Conflict Model below (Sherwood and Glidwell, 1973) illustrates the phases of conflict.

**PINCH - CRUNCH CONFLICT**

During the Start-Up phase, a discussion of mutual hopes, expectations and potential Enneagram-based pinches can help prevent conflict; however, people seldom take the time to do this. During the Grace period, people are usually on their best behavior; consequently, conflict rarely occurs. Over time, however, pinches often arise. While most people are uncomfortable saying they feel pinched, it is very important to say something soon after an initial pinch. If nothing is said, pinches can build up and escalate into a major conflict or Crunch. When a crunch occurs, it is vitally important to raise the issues. Failure to do so can have damaging results: people may avoid one another or even leave the organization; the work environment becomes uncomfortable and work suffers; and the conflict, if finally dealt with, must now be addressed under conditions of hostility.

The following story illustrates how the Enneagram can be integrated with the Pinch-Crunch Conflict Model to create a positive outcome for both parties in a conflict situation.

Carl, a **Four**, had contacted Bart, a colleague on a project team, three times by e-mail and twice by voice mail to discuss their joint project. He received nothing back for three weeks; finally, he received the following e-mail:

*Carl,*
*Sorry to have taken so long, but work has been at a frenzied pace here.*
*Will be back in touch with you next week.*
*Bart*

On receiving the e-mail, Carl was furious. Not everyone, however, would have had the same reaction. Some might have felt just mildly irritated by Bart's delayed response, while others may have not even noticed the delay. Still others might have worried that something was wrong with Bart and called a third party to check on his well being.

Carl was more than pinched; he was crunched because his Enneagram Four sensitivities had been ignited. The following three pinches -- all of which are common to Fours -- explain why Carl was so deeply troubled by Bart's behavior and why these pinches morphed so quickly into a crunch.

### Common Pinches for Fours

*Being ignored or slighted*
Carl's perspective: When Bart did not responded to his first communication, Carl felt dismissed and rejected and assumed that Bart's lack of response was both personal and intentional.

*PINCH* *Being asked to do something contrary to personal values*
Carl's perspective: Since Bart had not responded quickly, Carl concluded that Bart was self-centered and self-serving. Because Bart had not demonstrated such values as consideration and respect for others, Carl determined that Bart was not a person of integrity.

*PINCH* *An event that elicits the Four's envy*
Carl's perspective: Carl made the assumption that Bart was competing with him. Bart had recently received organizational recognition; because Bart had not publicly acknowledged others who had helped with the project, Carl decided that Bart was ambitious and arrogant.

Carl, as a Four, desires deep connections, tries to find meaning, focuses on what is missing, and tends to personalize events in his life. Fours imagine that most external events occur in relation to them, and they react very quickly to what they perceive as slights or insults.

### How Fours Behave When Pinched

While Bart will be surprised to find out what has angered Carl so deeply, it will be obvious that Carl is angry about something. When Fours feel pinched, they exhibit one of two behaviors: they say something in a blunt way, or they become extremely quiet. Internally. Carl will be submerged in his internal world of thoughts and feelings, with a multitude of emotions such as sadness, anger, distress, hurt, and fear ricocheting off one another. In an effort to understand what has occurred, Carl will analyze and reanalyze the situation and discuss his feelings with others in order to gain personal support, solicit alternative interpretations, and explore avenues for action.

### How to Approach a Four in a Crunch

When Bart finally discusses the conflict directly with Carl -- and he will because Carl, as a Four, will eventually feel compelled to express his feelings -- Bart would be well advised to follow these guidelines:

- ❑ Allow Carl to express all his feelings
- ❑ Listen until Carl feels completely understood
- ❑ Never suggest that Carl is being overly sensitive
- ❑ Do nothing to make Carl feel blamed
- ❑ Understand that Carl will hold onto his feelings for a long time but will eventually move beyond them

### How Carl Can Manage His Own Reactions

Carl can actually resolve most of his issues without even talking to Bart. For example, Carl can reflect on his need to feel special and on his feelings of envy when others succeed. Carl can also learn to be more objective: rather than interpreting Bart's lack of response as a personal rejection, Carl could ask Bart the reasons for the delay.

To foster self-awareness and self-management, Carl can ask himself this question: *What does my reaction to this situation or to the other person's behavior say about me as a Four and about the areas in which I can develop and grow?* When we react in anger, we can all benefit from asking ourselves a similar question.

## Teams

The ability to manage conflict constructively not only creates less duress, it enables individuals to work more effectively on teams. The Enneagram also provides additional insights into how teams function because the Enneagram styles reflect nine different perspectives with regard to three fundamental aspects of team dynamics: (1) ideal goals and interdependence, (2) task and relationship roles, (3) and behavior during the four stages of team development – *forming, storming, norming,* and *performing.*

### Goals and Interdependence

Teams are groups in which members have common goals and some degree of interdependence. Each of the nine Enneagram styles has different preferences with regard to team goals and interdependence.



**Common Goals**          **Interdependence**
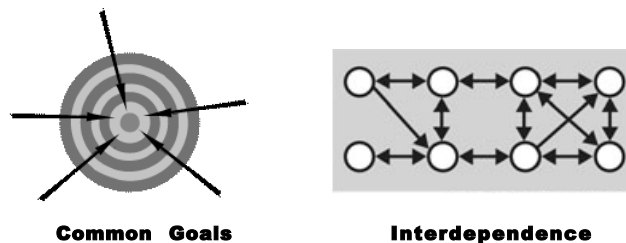
**Fives**, for example, focus on the individual within the team; prefer team goals that are precise, useful, and manageable; like low team interdependence and high individual autonomy; and work best when team members are capable and efficient.

**Sixes**, by contrast, emphasize the team more than the individual and want goals that are substantial and meaningful for both the team and individuals. Sixes also prefer moderate to highly interdependent teams, with team members who are like-minded, capable, and loyal.

**Task and Relationship Team Roles**

Team members usually exhibit predictable role-based behaviors, with these patterns of behavior related to their Enneagram styles.

**RELATIONSHIP ROLES**
Team-based behaviors focused on feelings, relationships, and team processes, such as decision-making and conflict resolution

**TASK ROLES**
Team-based behaviors directed toward the actual work

For example, the *common team-based task role* for **Sevens** is generating and elaborating on ideas, because their minds move quickly from one idea to the next and they thrive on being stimulated by interesting possibilities. Further, because most Sevens avoid situations in which they feel pain or discomfort, the most *common team-based relationship role* for Sevens is relieving tension through humor or stories.

**Eights**, by contrast, tend to focus on the strategic purpose of the team and like to move the action forward. Consequently, their most *common team-based task role* is to help the team define its larger, most compelling purpose. Similarly, the Eight's most *common team-based relationship role* is that of challenging other team members to examine their viewpoints and to move ahead.

**Stages of Team Development**

During each of the four stages of team development -- *forming, storming, norming*, and *performing* -- the behavior of individuals is often related to their Enneagram styles. Following is an example of the Enneagram-based behavior of a team member -- in this case, a **Nine**.
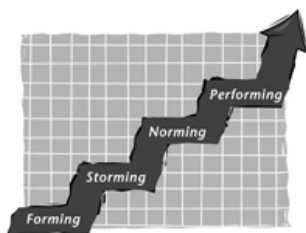
During the *forming* stage, when the team members are becoming oriented to both other team members and the team's work, Nines have difficulty focusing on the team *if* the team's progress is slow because they dislike uncertainty, tension, and ambiguity. However, with clear direction and well-defined tasks, most Nines will move forward with purpose and clarity.

During the *storming* stage, when the team is dealing with team differences or conflict, Nines often feel uncomfortable and look for a way out or they may become active and try to mediate the differences.

When a team is *norming* by developing working agreements, Nines are often ambivalent. On one hand, Nines like consensus, so norms developed consensually work well for Nines. On the other hand, Nines dislike arbitrary rules, so they may balk if the new norms feel arbitrary or are developed in a nonconsensual manner.

Nines usually thrive during the *performing* stage, because they enjoy accomplishment in a harmonious team environment.

## Leadership

Being able to function effectively on teams is increasingly important to the success of the organization, as is the ability to lead teams, and leaders usually operate from a leadership paradigm related to their Enneagram style. The nine leadership paradigms can be seen in the following chart.
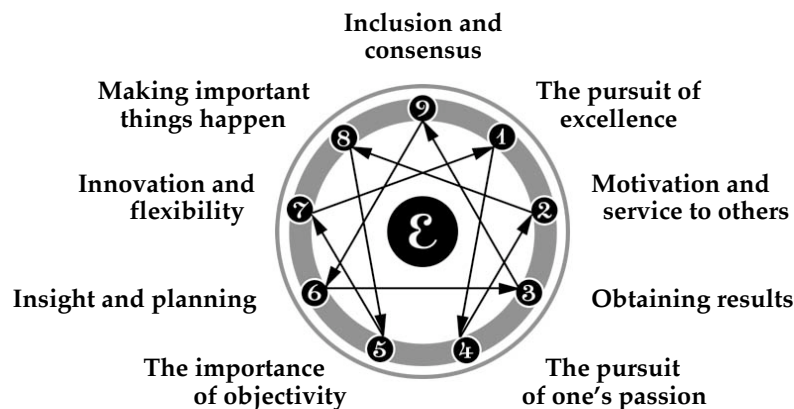
### THE 9 LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS
*A leader's job is to…*

| Enneagram Style | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | set clear goals and inspire others to achieve the highest quality. | |
| 2 | assess the strengths and weaknesses of team members and motivate and facilitate people toward the achievement of organizational goals. | |
| 3 | create an environment that achieves results because people understand the organization's goals and structure. | |
| 4 | create organizations that give people meaning and purpose so that they are inspired to do excellent work. | |
| 5 | develop effective organizations through research, deliberation, and planning, so that all systems fit together and people are working on a common mission. | |
| 6 | solve organizational problems by developing a creative problem-solving environment in which each person feels that he or she is part of the solution. | |
| 7 | get people excited and to create new venues so that the organization can take advantage of new and important business adventures. | |
| 8 | move the organization forward by leading decisively, getting capable and reliable people into the right jobs, and empowering competent people to take action. | |
| 9 | help achieve the collective mission by creating a clearly structured and harmonious work environment. | |

Enneagram leadership paradigms reveal what leaders pay particular attention to and what they neglect, what they value and what they ignore, what skills become highly developed and what skills may lie dormant. For example, One leaders may create high standards and develop organizational excellence, but also become reactive and impatient when followers are not performing up to standard. Similarly, One leaders may develop superstars, but overlook highly dysfunctional behavior in an employee with exemplary talents.

The 9 leadership paradigms also come with the following 9 leadership gifts.

### THE 9 LEADERSHIP GIFTS

Inclusion and consensus

The pursuit of excellence

Making important things happen

Motivation and service to others

Innovation and flexibility

Insight and planning

Obtaining results

The importance of objectivity

The pursuit of one's passion

When leaders appreciate and use their gifts and these talents match the organization's needs, organizations benefit. Imagine a Two leader coming into an organization with chronic low morale or a Seven leader being able to turn around an organization stagnating from inflexibility and inertia. At the same time, when leaders overuse their gifts, leadership strengths soon become leadership weakness.

The Enneagram provides leaders with a road map to help them do the following: (1) understand the value and limitations of their paradigms; (2) identify and make the best use of their leadership strengths; and (3) examine their leadership *derailers* – attributes and behaviors that are likely to hinder their success -- *before* these become an organizational issue.

**More About the Enneagram**

The nine different developmental paths are specific and effective. For example, Threes grow from learning to *not* focus solely on results but to also pay attention to people and to learn to value themselves for who they are, not just what they accomplish. Sixes develop by learning to

trust authority (their own authority and that of others) and to differentiate between their insights and projections (perceptions that reflect the psyche of the Six and not the other person). Sevens grow from learning to focus rather than having their attention diverted from idea-to-idea and person-to- person.

It is also important to remember that human beings are more than numbers on a powerful psychological map. The purpose of the Enneagram is not simply to show you your Enneagram style, but to help you understand who you really are so that you can move beyond your Enneagram style patterns to bring out the best in yourself at work.

**Ginger Lapid-Bogda, Ph.D**., has been an organization development consultant for over thirty years. She is the current president of the International Enneagram Association and an NTL member. Her new book, *Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work: How to Use the Enneagram System for Success* (McGraw-Hill 2004) describes how to integrate organization development theory and practice with the wisdom of the Enneagram. www.TheEnneagramInBusiness.com

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