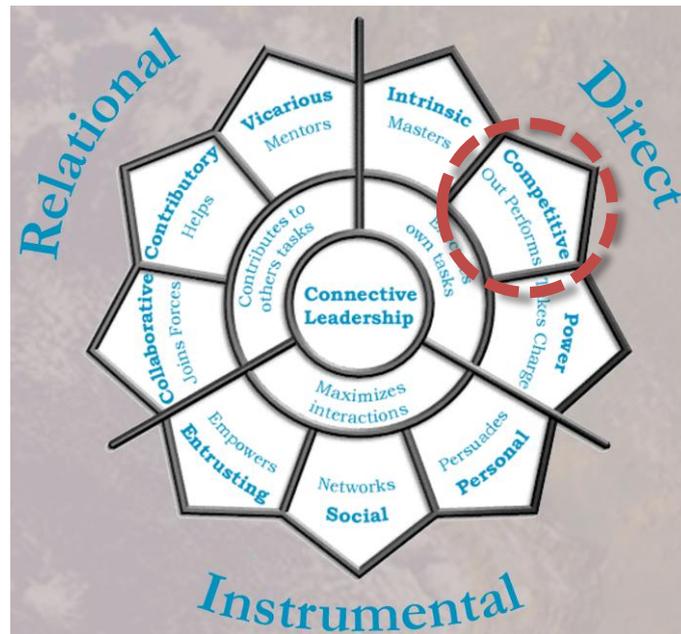


The 9 Achieving Styles Applied by Leaders<sup>1</sup>:

## Competitive Style



## Where Have The Old School Yard Bullies Gone?

<sup>1</sup> Identified by Jean Lipman-Blumen, see [www.achievingstyles.com](http://www.achievingstyles.com)



## Where Have The Old School Yard Bullies Gone?

Most of us remember these guys from our young days. The bullies – boys and girls – who were a true pest for others, especially for the bullied ones. Their socialization was driven by the momentary feeling of success, that a person can get from overly competitive behavior, by the experience of supremacy, at least in their own perceptions, and by the joy of fear seen in the face of others. Maybe, the word “socialization” is already a euphemism for them.

Some of us may still remember outbursts of school yard bullying. The roles have always been the same:

- \* The bad boy who decided to bully another boy.
- \* The bullied boy.
- \* The opportunistic boys, who participate in bullying, in order to make sure, that they are always on the winners’ side.
- \* The aggressive boys who want to even top the bad boy.
- \* The faceless girl who finds the bad boy sexy.
- \* The mass of boys and girls that turn their faces away.
- \* The teachers, who too often get impressed by the bully and his followers and then believe in the accusations against the bullied boy, instead of ending the outburst.



Sometimes, one boy steps into a role of a defender of the bullied boy. He will be the next bullied one.

How is such an outburst ended? When either the bullied boy or the bully, or an unlucky bystander have been removed from school. Or when the bullied boy has committed suicide.

The same mechanism can be found in old time pogroms, in many revolutions, in hooliganism. It was even topic of a movie: “Rebel without a cause”.

There were also bullying girls. Much rarer, and they had no faceless boys at their sides. Maybe, this difference in socialization explains to some degree the different behavior of men and women, when it comes to bullying. Women, if they do it, do it rather in a hidden and selfish way. Men commonly boast about their aggression.

We have grown older, and so have the old-time bullies. What have they evolved into, now that they have matured?

Well, some became criminals, may even spend their life in jail. Others are changing motor oil in petrol stations or sell fast food. No one gave them a chance, because no one believed that they would take it. Most modern organizations require staff with a skill that the bullies do not have: Empathy.

Other bullies became managers, often managers of project managers. They sit in organizations that do not value empathy that high, in positions where their behavior may even be esteemed as powerful and – well – competitive. They insist on their profit-above-all and we-are-at-war-with-everybody mindset and make business by duping customers, contractors, government agencies and others. In a recent case, one of them was quoted saying: “We Call Our Clients Muppets”.

Socialized as bullies, these people may have changed to a seemingly peaceful and collaborative behavior; but in certain situations, their true self inevitably breaks through.

Projects are commonly such situations. Projects can be very abrasive to the thin layer of self-control and collaborative behavior that the old bullies have developed late in their professional life, and while stress and anger reduce every person’s ability for empathy, they may destroy this ability completely for the old bullies.

Project managers should be very good in stakeholder management – actually, this is the art that separates a project manager from a project engineer – but these old bullies can make that very difficult.

Turning to a competitive, confrontational behavior too may be the wrong strategy. It may destroy the project, and in most cases are the bullies better in that game than anyone else – they have learned that already in their youth.

Avoiding the conflict, running away, may be an option. Too often, it is not. So what else can you do when you identify that one of your key stakeholders belongs to this group?

I recommend using two gears: Pride and proficiency. Have your act together, make sure you have a copper bottom methodological base, have your glossary with you, and verify to everybody that you know what you are doing. School yard bullies often run into troubles when they meanly overrate their power and abilities. So patience may also be helpful, sometimes, until they stumble over their own feet.

A standard like the *PMBOK® Guide* is actually quite good for the purpose.

