

Starting Learning About Your Client’s Style and Organizational Culture

At this point, your client might be a little confused as to why you are seeking the following types of information from them. Stress that it is important for you to understand how your client wants to work with you. One of the most powerful ways to discern the style of your client is to ask them. You can learn a lot by asking your client the following questions.

1. **How would you describe your leadership and management style?**
How do you set direction? How do you ensure that that direction is being followed? What if it is not being followed? Whom do you admire as leaders? What is it about them that you admire? What should be your role in this project?
2. **How do you like to make decisions and solve problems?**
Do you like to carefully lay out a variety of options or make more of an intuitive decision? Do you like to involve others a lot or depend primarily on your own judgment? If it depends, what does it depend on?
3. **What kind of people do you get along with best, talkative or quiet?**
For example, people who are more outgoing and share their thoughts out loud? Or, people who think a lot on their own and then share their conclusions?
4. **Do you prefer having a lot of fun in your work or “getting down to business”?**
Your client might report that they want you to focus on the business of the project – on achieving results. However, you might find, after further discussion, that they highly value sharing information about their family and friends, as well.
5. **Do you prefer to get information in spoken or written form?**
The answer indicates if you should share project information primarily in written reports or in spoken contact. Spoken communications might be either in person or by phone. Written reports might be shared through email or faxes in addition to postal mail. Ask what their preferred methods are. Even if your client prefers written, encourage them to meet with you, as well. You can learn a great deal and enhance communications in a face-to-face, rather than written format.
6. **Do you prefer reference to “problems” or “opportunities”?**
Explain how some people believe that problems exist primarily because people see certain situations as problems, rather than as opportunities. Ask your client if they have any preference as to how you refer to situations in your project. (If they prefer the term “opportunities,” then you can replace the term “problems” with “opportunities” when using information from this Field Guide.)
7. **What do you know about change management? What would you like to know?**
How have they managed change in the past? What did they learn? There seems to be an explosion of literature about change management lately. It is not unlikely that your client has encountered some of it. Offer to share information with them.



See “Requirements for Successful Organizational Change” on page 186 as a purchaser of this Field Guide, you are authorized to provide your client a copy that 3-page subsection.

8. **Do you view organizations as structures and processes or relationships of people?**
Mention that different people can see the same organization quite differently, depending on their “lens” on organizations. Add that, as a consultant, you can communicate more successfully with your client if you talk in the same terms they do. (Often, you can detect their view by listening to the words that they use, for example, “plans and policies” versus “Tom, Jack and Sally.”)
9. **Are there any cultural considerations that should be made?**
Usually, if your client views the culture of their organization as being highly unique and as having clear values for how people should interact, your client already has strong preferences about how you should work within their organization.



See “How to Work in Multicultural Environments” on page 63 to review how to learn about the culture of your client’s organization.

10. **What else would you like to discuss regarding a working relationship?**
You want to understand as much as possible about what your client desires in an effective working relationship. In case there is anything else that you should know, but have not asked so far, now is the time to ask this “bottom line” question.