Out of character

In May, IT Opportunities carried an article describing five working styles, and explaining their effect on our management of time and our use of time management systems (TMS). Now Julie Hay and Nick Williams take this a stage further and suggest practical strategies for capitalising on our strengths and side-stepping our weaknesses.

Planning to outsource tasks can be a useful strategy, but you need to find the right partners. The key is to choose a partner who shares your vision and has the necessary expertise and experience. It's also important to ensure that the partnership is mutually beneficial and that both parties have clear expectations and goals.

When we want to make changes to the way we behave, we need to remember that our boss, colleagues and customers may like us just the way we are.

Try Hard people are valued for their enthusiasm. We consider all possibilities and put energy into getting things off the ground. We need to control our tendency towards boredom with the later stages of projects. We, even more than the other styles, can benefit from positive programming into our TMS of all aspects of the task. Once we finish a project, we can usefully spend time enjoying the feeling of success so that we will want to repeat it.

Sometimes we can find creative ways of making mundane tasks more exciting. Sometimes we simply need to get on with them in spite of our boredom. Our TMS can help us maintain a balance between necessary but routine tasks, and enacting new things to do.

Strong is often the hardest working style to identify in ourselves. Because we are so good at staying calm and dealing with all that the job throws at us, we are seen as consistently reliable, steady workers. Our potential weaknesses may be well hidden. We need to recognise that there is nothing wrong with asking for help sometimes. Others may well have relevant skills, knowledge, time or enthusiasm for the tasks we are doing, and will welcome the opportunity to contribute. All we have to do is ask.

Before we take on new tasks, we could sensibly review the potential requirements and check we have access to the appropriate resources — without assuming that we must complete the entire project ourselves. Sensible delegation is a strength and not a reflection of an inability to cope.

Making changes

The above are just some of the strategies for change available to those of us who want to use our time more effectively. What is needed is a conscious choice of options, followed by a period of practice as we become competent with the new techniques.

A word of warning, however. When we want to make changes to the way we behave, we need to remember that our boss, colleagues and customers may not like us just the way we are. And we get lots of recognition for being like that. When we change we can help ourselves by being aware that we may miss some of the recognition we are used to. Others may resist our changes so we need to plan to deal with these barriers. We need to make sure that we get our new behaviour reinforced by ourselves and other people. Here are a few tips:

Try Hard people get praised for being hardworking, so set out to get recognition for accuracy as well. Be Perfects get praised for accuracy, look for recognition for meeting deadlines and appropriate levels of detail.

Everybody thinks Please People are nice, aim for recognition for being assertive.

Try Hard people score points for enthusiasm, get recognition for finishing tasks — successfully.

Be Strong people often get key recognition for not needing help, watch how relationships improve when you let people help you.