RISC 3D:
Socio-Cultural Territories

This section was originally included in the 2nd through 4th editions of *The Art of Voice Acting*.

How Will You Play the Role?

When you are performing a voiceover script as a voice actor, you are playing a role, no different than if you were playing a part in a stage play or movie. That's why this craft is called *voice acting*! Unless you are telling your own personal story, the words and situations are not yours—they are those of a character who may be substantially different from you. To play the role of any character believably requires training and developing the ability to detach personal beliefs and attitudes from those of the character being portrayed. This is the essence of all acting.

There are literally dozens of techniques and processes an actor can use to create the reality of the character being portrayed. When it comes to creating believable, compelling, "real people" characters, the RISC 3-D process of analyzing personality traits can be a very useful tool.

Socio-cultural Awareness and RISC 3-D

You're about to learn a process to help you create a compelling and believable character for virtually any script, based on the same techniques major advertisers use when developing powerfully effective advertising.

The corporate business world uses highly refined methods of personality and social analysis to define the demographics (statistical data) of the marketplace for selling products and services.

These studies define the buying attitudes and purchasing habits of consumers and aid advertisers in reaching their desired market.

There are several companies whose entire business is based on analyzing the buying trends of different types of people. By understanding a buyer's motivations, advertisers can write in specific words, phrases, or style. For TV commercials and print advertising, editing techniques and use of color, font style, and other visual elements are used—all of which are "hot" buttons designed to trigger a buying impulse in the viewer, or reader. In radio commercials, similar hot buttons are triggered through a careful choice of words and phrases, use of appropriate music and various production techniques. In every case, the desired result is to reach the audience on an emotional level and to motivate the audience to take action.

Today, advertisers are faced with a marketplace of "occasional" consumers who are no longer characterized by predictable buying habits and who no longer exhibit strong brand loyalty. The key objective of marketing socio-cultural research is to identify the links between personal motivations and buying behavior in order to understand the consumer and why she is attracted by certain propositions and not by others. Simply studying consumer behavior is not adequate, nor is analyzing buying habits in terms of age or class. To understand modern society, it is necessary to look much deeper at the socio-cultural diversity of society and find the trends and characteristics that can make the difference between commercial success or failure.[1]

The Research Institute on Social Change (RISC), started to monitor social change in Europe in the early 1980s and developed the RISC socio-cultural segmentation system in 1983. The RISC system was extended to the United States in 1989 as RISC Ameriscan. Marshall Marketing, a full-service market research and communications consulting firm based in Pittsburgh, PA, has been working with RISC in the U.S. since 1996. The RISC 3-D program was launched in 2000, which Marshall Marketing utilizes to help local, regional, and national advertisers understand and adjust to the purchasing behaviors of present and future consumers. The RISC 3-D program is quite extensive, but there are some specific elements that, when put to use by a voice actor, can have a powerful effect.

Through a series of studies, on both national and local levels, a probability sample of people is surveyed with a carefully developed questionnaire. The questions don't ask for opinions, but rather register facts and preferences about the individual. The results of the survey, as processed through RISC's proprietary algorithm, capture the person's socio-cultural characteristics.

To more easily view the results, a chart is created that takes on the appearance of a 3-dimensional compass (Figure 1).[2] The vertical

axis is linked to attitudes of change. At the north are people who see change as a positive force in their lives and are open to change (Expansion). To the south are people who prefer stability, structure, and consistency (Stability). The left-to-right horizontal axis of the compass (east-to-west) relates to the balance between the individual and society. To the east are those who are more independent and seek immediate pleasure (Enjoyment); to the west are people with strong ethics who are more community oriented (Responsibility). The front-to-back horizontal axis relates to an individual's attitudes toward Flexibility (front) or Structure (back).

Respondents are scored on each of approximately 40 socio-cultural characteristics. Their scores result in a specific placement within the three dimensions of the compass, and can be represented as an arrangement of 10 "cells" in multidimensional diagrams (Figures 1 and 2).[3] Individuals positioned close to each other tend to have shared values and similar preferences, while those at opposite extremes have little in common.[4]

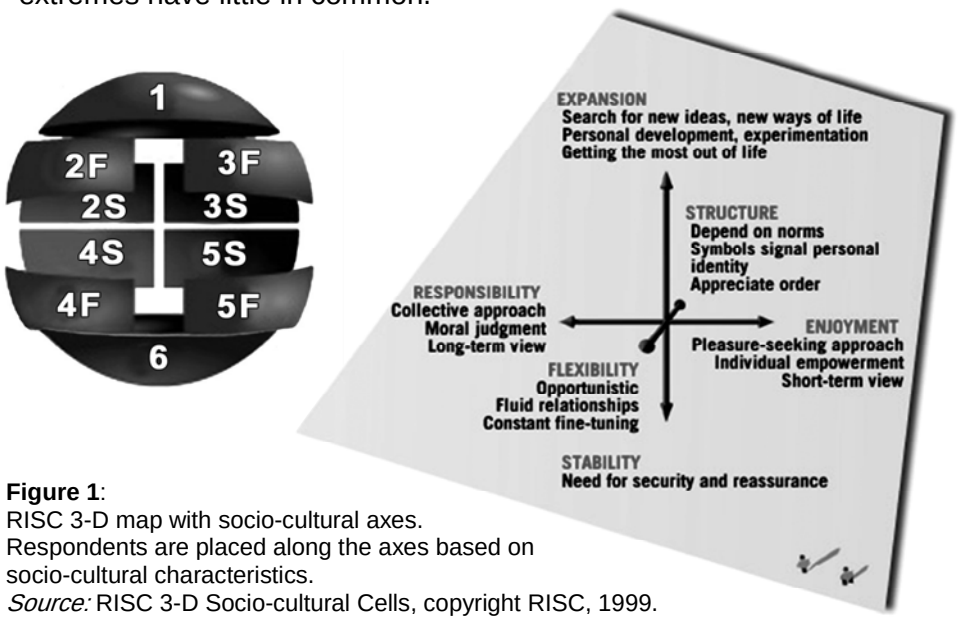


Figure 1:
RISC 3-D map with socio-cultural axes.
Respondents are placed along the axes based on socio-cultural characteristics.
Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing.

A basic understanding of how advertisers target their message will be beneficial to you as a voice actor. Knowing what the cultural and social norms are for any specific demographic group will give you some much-needed information to aid in the development of a believable character. For example, let's say that, based on the copy you are given, you can determine that your audience is a person who is outgoing, youthful, interested in experiencing new things, and likes to live on the edge. You make this determination based on your

analysis and interpretation of the words and phrases in the copy. With this information you can now make reliable choices and adapt your character and performance energy to something your audience can relate to, thus creating a sense of believability.

For the audience described here, you would most likely need to perform with considerable energy and excitement in your voice. A slow, relaxed delivery probably would not be an effective way to reach the audience, unless the script was specifically written for that attitude.

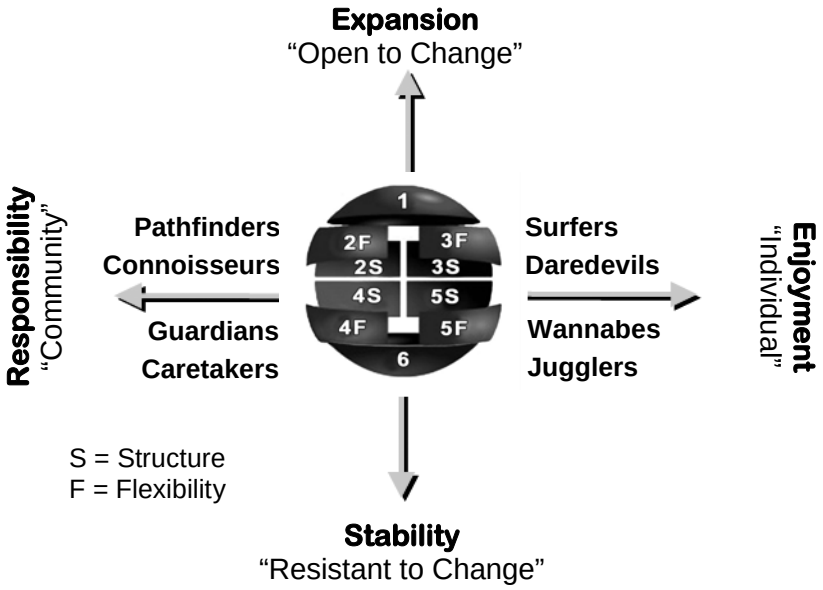


Figure 2: RISC 3-D map with cell names.

The 10 Socio-cultural Cells & Your Character

Each of the 10 cells on the RISC 3-D map (Figure 2) represents a grouping of socio-cultural attitudes, beliefs, preferences, motivations, and buying habits. Advertisers use these socio-cultural "cells" to aid in targeting their advertising and marketing plans. All aspects of a campaign, including words, visuals, colors, music, and sound effects, are carefully chosen to match the targeted cell's characteristics. The closer the match, the more likely it is that the message will reach the target audience.

These 10 RISC 3-D socio-cultural cells can also be useful in developing a believable and compelling character, simply by working the process in reverse. Understanding the motivations, attitudes, and belief system of your audience will enable you to tap into those parts of your own personality and bring them into the character you are

creating. And, if those characteristics are not a predominant part of your personality, this understanding will give you a functional guide you can use to make valid choices that will bring life to your character.

When you create a believable character, an emotional connection can be made with the audience, giving the message a stronger impact. Similarly, by understanding your audience and adapting the traits of the RISC socio-cultural cells, you can develop a unique performing style for every script that will elicit an instinctive response.

The following pages separate the 10 RISC 3-D cells into their socio-cultural profiles, key attributes as defined by RISC, and other useful information to help you understand your audience and create a believable character. As an exercise to develop your acting skills, use the charts that follow as a guide to create a variety of characters with different attitudes. Find a paragraph in a book or newspaper and read the same copy from the attitude of a character in each of the 10 cells. Allow your mind and body to take on the characteristics, body posture, belief system, and attitudes described for each cell and observe how each character you create can be unique.

You can learn more about consumer research, and strategies for advertisers at **www.MarshallMarketingUSA.com**.



Cell 1 “Enthusiasts”

Descriptive traits: Active. Curious, Energetic, Hungry, Independent, Insecure, Instant Gratification, Obsessed, Stressed

Profile: Enthusiasts try everything. They expend their considerable but unfocused energies in an intense pursuit of something different, something else, something that will fill their needs. Their choice of activities is eclectic and non-discriminating. Human contact and constant activity make them feel alive. They are deeply concerned with maintaining and increasing their levels of energy and vitality, in support of their level of activity. Enthusiasts do not like to be controlled or limited in any way; they are individualists, but need connections to others. They are not loners.

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing



Cell 2F "Pathfinders"

Descriptive traits: Activist, Capable, Charismatic, Experts, Intuitive, Practical, "Professors", Responsible, Tolerant

Profile: Pathfinders accept the challenges of creating new approaches in unfamiliar circumstances, seeing the challenges on a grand scale but finding pragmatic solutions. They are mature, capable, experienced, knowledgeable and self-confident. They believe they are best able to figure out the right path to the future and encourage others to follow their strong convictions. They are intuitive, sensitive to the feelings of others and respect differences (even if they don't agree). They prefer to influence rather than to give orders.

© RISC, 1999



Cell 2S "Connoisseurs"

Descriptive traits: Adaptable, Chameleon, Energy, Fast-action, Image, Networking, Opportunist, Overachievers, Situational ethics

Profile: Connoisseurs know what is right and want to help others do the right thing. They operate within a known framework of norms and structures, which they seek to reinforce and strengthen. This framework is their way of dealing with a world in which change is the only constant; their way to manage change is to adapt to the existing rules. They recognize and rely upon links between past, present, and future as a means of understanding and managing that change.

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing



Cell 3F "Surfers"

Descriptive traits: Adaptable, Chameleon, Energy, Fast-action, Image, Networking, Opportunist, Over achievers, Situational ethics

Profile: Surfers "surf the net," "surf the waves," and operate on the surface. They find opportunities in the lack of system they perceive in the world and take control of their surroundings by whatever means are available. They are not loners and can find personal gain in creating good for the group, but never lose sight of their own objectives. They are charismatic, easy to get along with. They are constantly testing the limits, rethinking and reorganizing situations as necessary. They live life in the fast lane.

© RISC, 1999



Cell 3S "Daredevils"

Descriptive traits: Advantage seekers, Appearance, Empowerment, Extreme, Flashy, Image, Pleasure, Recognition, Status, Thrill-seekers

Profile: Daredevils find opportunity within structure, which empowers their individual pursuits and provides the basis of their self-image. Clothing, labels, symbols of rank and status are "uniforms" which help them to define themselves; these badges also announce their position as members of "the club." They live life on the edge, needing to prove themselves through risk-taking and unorthodox behavior. For Daredevils, competition is a core value, and the recognition of their success and status by others is a deeply-felt need.

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing



Cell 4S "Guardians"

Descriptive traits: Conformist, Defensive, Duty, Followers, Loyal, Obedient, Obligation, Trusting

Profile: Guardians see change as a possible source of trouble, and do what they can to avoid it. They worry about things going wrong and like to make plans to prevent mishaps—for themselves and for others. Close personal relationships are important to them. They know the rules, follow orders, and believe in leaders, although they don't want to be the leaders. They are happiest when everything goes according to schedule, with no surprises. Consistency, tradition, and routine are their watchwords.

© RISC, 1999



Cell 4F "Caretakers"

Descriptive traits: Careful, Cooperative, Empathetic, Hands-on, Harmony, Cohesion, Religious, Responsible, Sensible, Teachers

Profile: Caretakers want to preserve what is good in the status quo for the benefit of others, but are tolerant and to not impose their views. They rely on relationships rather than orders. They believe in their own skills and visions, but enlist the support and cooperation of others. They creatively encourage shared success. They know and observe the customs and norms that provide social cohesion and do not seek to stand out or to succeed at the expense of others.

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing



Cell 5S "Wannabes"

Descriptive traits: Consumption, Enjoy Life, Hardworking, Hedonism, Materialistic, Results-Oriented, Security, Survival, Vanity

Profile: Wannabes want to be… either Jugglers who seem to have everything they want, or Daredevils who seem to have all the fun. Wannabes themselves are good at finding what they want and work hard to get these "prizes." They don't really understand the world—but as long as things don't change, their energy and activity let them achieve the entertainment and distractions they seek. They are loners, to some extent, and have no strong sense of connection to others—except as sources of recognition. They dislike plans and schedules, and make them only out of a sense of survival.

© RISC, 1999



Cell 5F "Jugglers"

Descriptive traits: Carefree, Fast track, Happy-go-lucky, Materialist, Practical, Risk takers, Self-confident, Self-indulgent

Profile: Jugglers are the original multi-taskers; they like to try things, to experiment with new sensations. They do not, however, expect any permanent change to result from this experimentation. They desire freedom (but not independence), and avoid all limitations, restraints, and schedules. They enjoy relationships, but focus on having fun rather than on community. They have two goals: money (which brings both possessions and respect), and personal expression—and, they often use technology to achieve them, as well as for entertainment. Their only worry is that something beyond their control may go wrong and limit their free activity.

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing



Cell 6 “Contenteds”

Descriptive traits: Careful, Cooperative, Homebodies, Local, Loyal, Predictable, Religious, Small pleasures, Togetherness

Profile: The Contenteds are quiet, comfortable people, for whom familiarity and consistency are preferable to spontaneity and novelty. They live their lives in small groups—at work, at play, and in the family. Some anxieties exist, usually concerning potential dangers and difficulties. But Contenteds have a strong sense of personal pride and competence, and feel entitled to self-expression and

© RISC, 1999

Source: RISC 3-D Socio-cultural Cells, copyright RISC, 1999.
Reprinted by permission of Marshall Marketing