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World of Diverse Perspectives

**FACILITATING CREATIVITY WITH STYLE:: UNDERSTANDING AND VALUING**

**DIFFERENCES**

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**Abstract**

Two of the main variables that will affect the performance of people in organizations are the capacity i.e. skills and motivation, and the preferred style of individuals as it relates to their creativity, problem solving and management of change. The mental processes used in all three areas have been proven to be quite similar. The creativity literature, however, historically has concentrated its efforts on capacity and has often confused it with style. So how can we tell the difference? One sure way is by noticing the different questions we put forward when we need to measure either of them: for style the question could be: “In what way does this person prefer to solve problems?” Whereas for capacity the question could be: “How good is this person at solving problems?”

So why learn about styles?



It offers a fresh insight into inter-person conflict (people with widely different styles of problem solving tend to fall out)

1.

### **Adaptor**

- Characterized by precision, reliability, efficiency, methodicalness, prudence, discipline, conformity
- Concerned with resolving problems rather than finding them
- Seeks solutions to problems in tried and understood ways
- Reduces problems by improvement and greater efficiency
- Seen as sound, conforming, safe, dependable
- Liable to make goals of means
- Challenges rules rarely, cautiously, and usually when supported
- Producing a (manageable) few relevant, sound, safe ideas for prompt implementation

When collaborating with Innovators:

- ◇ Supplies stability, order and continuity to the partnership.
- ◇ Sensitive to people, maintains group cohesion and cooperation
- ◇ Provides a safe base for the innovator's riskier operations

### **Innovator**

- Seen as undisciplined, thinking tangentially, approaching tasks from unsuspected angles
- Could be said to discover problems and discover avenues of solution
- Queries problems' basic assumptions; manipulates problems
- Seen as unsound, impractical; often shocks his opposite
- In pursuit of goals treats accepted means with little regard

- Capable of detailed routine (system maintenance) works for only short bursts. Quick to delegate routine tasks.
- Tends to take control in unstructured situations
- Often challenges rules, has little respect for past custom
- Producing many ideas including those seen as irrelevant, unsound, exciting, “blue sky”

When collaborating with Adaptors:

- ◇ Supplies the task orientation, the break with the past and accepted theory.
- ◇ Provides the dynamics to bring about periodic radical change, without which institutions tend to ossify.

(© Kirton, 1976)

Kirton has developed a psychometric instrument for measuring the A-I problem solving style. The KAI is one of the most researched, and best-validated, instruments currently available. The inventory consists of a list of 32 items, which ask respondents to indicate how easy or difficult they would find it over a long period of time to maintain a range of adaptive and innovative behaviours. The KAI gives theoretical scores in the range of 32 - 160 with a theoretical mean score of 96. Practically, the observed scores fall in the range of 45 to 145 with a general population mean of 95. (Kirton 1976). (Note: Successful completion of a certification program is required to administer the KAI)

### Benefits of Understanding Style

For myself...

“He who knows others is learned, he who knows himself is wise” Lao Tse

design interventions, sessions and workshops that will fit with the needs of the situation



## Implications for facilitating sessions and working with teams

### First - understanding the client and the organization

The way people think (cognitive style) affects the way they behave. Different (cognitive) styles of leadership will influence the perception of the need for environmental changes (Rickards, 1980) and produce in the end completely different approaches and practices.

The cognitive profile of leaders will also be reflected in their vision and mission and in the managerial decisions they make. Change is a permanent fact of life: how we manage change is a strategic factor for the future development of organizations.

Not only will the cognitive style of leaders affect their perception of the need for change, but it will also impact on the kind of problem solving and decision making approach they will take.

An adaptive approach aims at using the existing paradigm and attempting to improve it - make things better - in a way that is consensually agreed to, while the innovative approach is likely to challenge the more traditional way of doing things in order to create a radical new way of doing things. Having an appropriate balance of adaptors and innovators in key management positions at the right time will contribute to effectively balance the need for continuity and change.

Understanding your clients' needs is key!

### Second - managing your relationship with the client

Kirton (1980, 1994) has suggested that groups, who either function across boundaries within an organization or have an orientation outside the organization, would have a bias toward innovation. Those groups with a much more inward focus of operation, or internally oriented departments such as production or maintenance, would show significantly more adaptive orientation. Consequently, what could be the implications on the working relationships between

two groups having such a different preference or approach?

A study done by A. Tullett (1995) on project managers indicated that there was an important implication arising from the fact that project managers were likely to co-operate with client managers who had a significantly more adaptive cognitive style. ... In such situations, it is unlikely that the client manager will mediate his/her preferences by modifying behaviour.

Hence, in order to reduce conflict and promote a harmonious working relationship, it is the more innovative project manager, in the role of supplier, who will have to adopt a coping strategy.

This will generally entail managing the project in a more structured manner than s/he would prefer, including paying more attention to detail, de-risking decisions, reporting progress at more frequent intervals and being more aware of consensually agreed rules, procedures and power structures. (Tullett, 1995).

Are those conclusions also relevant to individuals working as facilitators?

If so, in what way can this information be useful?

Since no study, to my knowledge, addressed the world of facilitation, participants to last year IAF session were asked to complete the KAI before the session. The aim was to gather data on a relatively small sample of facilitators to assess whether the hypothesis that people working as consultant to groups would have preferences that were significantly different from the general population, and if so, provide some basis for further study. Since then I have scored the 54 completed inventories and the results are very interesting.

#### The results:

As hypothesized, participants attending the session had a mean score that is more innovative than the general population. Although the sample is relatively small, the results indicated that the



mean score for the group was 112 compared with an average for the general population of 95. Interestingly, a further analysis indicated that the mean score of the Self-employed (122) was higher than the mean score of participants working within a Corporation (109) or for a Government organization (106).

Implications for facilitators:

Of course, the implications will be situation specific. Is your client or the group that you are facilitating more adaptive or more innovative than you are? Regardless of your position on the A-I continuum, you will be called to deal with groups whose mean score could be quite different from yours. The impact on the working relationship between you as facilitator and your clients may be important. As an example, Kirton suggests that a difference of 10 points on the KAI scores is noticeable; 20 points, the differences are evident and communication problems begin; and increasingly thereafter, there will be major differences in approach and efforts will be needed to enable communication.

What are the implications for you as a consultant and on how you might have to manage situations where your style and that of your client are very different? Of course knowing about styles provides a good framework for your analysis of the situation and possible strategies. To help you understand what might be happening when working with groups, I would like to provide you with the following framework:

Whether interventions take an hour or take place over a period of several days, and at the risk of over simplification, the intervention process can be summarized as a three-step model:

1. Understanding, defining the problem or issue or objective at hand
2. Looking for or generating ideas, solutions, options, etc.

3. Coming to a decision and planning its implementation

The process versus the style differences

The following behaviour descriptions will provide you some insight into the differences between groups where the average score of members are either highly adaptive or highly innovative.

1. When understanding, defining the problem, issue or objective,

High Adaptors:           will tend to accept the problem as given  
                                  will prefer being relatively more structured  
                                  will focus on key issues - identify the important data  
                                  will carefully state problems  
                                  may focus more on current reality than on desired future

High Innovators:        will be likely to re-define the problem  
                                  will likely focus more on the desired future instead of the current  
                                  reality

2. When generating ideas, solutions or options

High Adaptors:        will generate a variety of practical and useful ideas

High Innovators:        will readily generate many novel and unusual ideas, some of which  
                                  may be seen as not directly related to the problem statement

3. When planning for action:

High Adaptors:        may generate many criteria to analyze new ideas  
                                  will be thorough and patient in working out details



High Innovators: will try to maintain the presence of novelty when  
generating criteria and preparing to gain acceptance of the solutions

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### **The Presenter**

Diane Houle-Rutherford has over seventeen years experience in Human Resources Management within the Canadian Public Service. She has more than six years consulting to both public and private sectors, in Canada, in Europe and in the United States, on issues such as Creative Problem Solving, Creativity, Change and Transition Management, Team Building, Process Improvement and Group Facilitation. Diane is a licensed practitioner of the Kirton Adaption-Innovation (KAI) Instrument and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI); she is certified by William Bridges to deliver his "Managing Organizational Transition" seminar; and

she is certified by the Center for Creative Leadership to administer the KEYS instrument to assess organizational climate for creativity and the "Benchmarks" 360 process. Diane is an Associate of the Center for Research in Applied Creativity, is a certified facilitator and trainer in the Simplex™ Creative Problem Solving methodology, and is fluent in both English and French. Diane is currently working towards her MA in Human Systems Interventions at Concordia University in Montreal.