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AN EXERCISE FOR EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPES AND ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an exercise to help trainees explore the relationship between their psychological type preferences and their experience of organizational politics. Guidelines are presented for administering the exercise and interpreting results.

INTRODUCTION

Jung's (1971) psychological types have long interested management researchers. Thus it is not surprising to find that experiential exercises exist for exploring the relationship between psychological type and management topics (e.g., Ramsomair, 1994). The purpose of this paper is to describe an exercise that builds on this literature, particularly that literature dealing with the relationship between type and organizational ideals.

Type and Organizational Ideals

Prior experience (e.g., Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975) suggests that different psychological types tend to articulate distinctly different ideals about organizational life. These results seem particularly valid for the four mental functions groups: sensing-thinking (ST), sensing-feeling (SF), intuition-feeling (NF) and intuition-thinking (NT).

The ideal organization for each of these groupings can be summarized metaphorically (Boozer & Maddox, 1995). The ideal organization for STs is the *machine*: rational, impersonal, analytical, hierarchical, and so on. For SFs the ideal organization is the *team* wherein the authority or goal of the team is balanced by respect for the individuality of each member. The ideal organization for NFs is one where the expression of the *human spirit* is allowed, reflecting an organization that

provides possibilities (N) for people (F) to grow. For NTs, the ideal organization reflects issues of *power*, particularly those related to articulating the logical (T) possibilities (N) for an organization.

Type, Ideals, and Organizational Politics

Our prior experience with the following exercise suggests that the different groups view organizational politics in terms of their organizational ideals. Simply, each type sees as "good" politics those actions that foster the development of their ideal organization. Conversely, "bad" politics are those actions that frustrate the development of their ideal organization.

THE EXERCISE

Objective

The objective is to help students understand how their psychological type tends to influence their orientation office to politics.

Materials Needed

Three sets of materials generally are needed. First, some form of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®; Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998) will be needed to provide information about trainee type preferences. Second, each group will need a supply of newsprint and colorful markers for drawing. Finally, lecture materials (e.g., overheads) will be needed for the brief lecture portion of the exercise.

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Instructions/Steps

1. Assign trainees to one of the mental functions groups using their MBTI scores. Groups of 3 to 6 people are preferable although "groups" with only 1 person generally provide useful results (assuming they have been correctly typed).
2. Instruct the groups to "Draw something which represents a situation at work you consider political." Give the groups 15-20 minutes. Expect some types (especially SJ) to ask for more details and directions. Simply reinforce the initial instructions.
3. Present a brief lecture. The content of the lecture will vary, depending upon when this exercise is used in an educational program. If participants have not been exposed to type concepts and how they relate to the organizational ideal, then a brief lecture on these topics will be needed (about 20 minutes). We use this exercise later in a program after trainees have completed an exercise and lecture relating psychological type to organizational ideals (Boozer & Maddox, 1995). Thus, we simply review the results of that activity (about 5 minutes).
4. Have the groups present and discuss their drawings. As one group presents, encourage other groups to both *look* at what has been drawn and *listen* to how the presenting group describes their drawing. (Sometimes groups will draw similar images, but discuss the images in radically different ways.) Also, instruct observers to be ready to guess the presenting groups type (ST, SF, etc.) if not already announced.

Processing Tips

A basic tip is to keep in mind our definition of office politics as those actions frustrating (bad politics) or supporting (good politics) the enactment of the ideal organization. Most groups generally seem to have negative connotations for office politics, so we focus here on processing this imagery.

The ST groups draw images reflecting the frustration of the ideal organization as *machine*: structured, impersonal, etc. For example, one group of STs drew a house on fire. The house represented their ideal class (machine-like) and the fire represented the conflict going on in the class that disrupted the class' structure and goal orientation.

The SF groups draw images reflecting frustration of the ideal organization as *team*: a group working harmoniously toward a goal. For example, one group of SFs in a service organization drew a football field, with two teams in "combat," to represent politics in their office. The SFs saw themselves taking on the roles of referee and coach to help restore harmony.

The NF groups draw images reflecting frustration of the ideal organization as an expression of the *human spirit*. In many ways this type appears to experience office politics as suffocating. For example, one group of NFs drew a stick figure in a box to represent how politics limited possibilities for people.

The NT groups draw images reflecting frustration of the ideal organization as power, often expressed as competency at organizational work. For example, a group of female NTs drew a "bimbo" (their words) who had received rewards (unfairly, politically) when it was the NTs in the drawing who themselves had done the work.

Note: Contact the first author for a paper containing more examples.

REFERENCES

(References available upon request)