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AN EXERCISE FOR EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPES AND POLITICAL STYLE IN THE
WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an experiential exercise that helps learners explore how the dynamics of their Jungian psychological type influence their political style in the workplace. Guidelines are presented for conducting the exercise and interpreting results.

INTRODUCTION

Both Jung's (1921) psychological types and organizational politics (e.g., Butcher & Clarke, 2002) are topics encountered in teaching a variety of business and management subjects. Experientially oriented educators particularly have examined the role psychological type plays in total enterprise simulation performance (Patz, 1995) as well as topics relevant to political dynamics such as enhancing negotiation skills (Brown & Chadwick, 1986) and examining how psychological type influences perceptions of organizational politics (Boozer, Forte & Maddox, 2000). The purpose of this session is to present an exercise that builds on this literature and particularly the influence of type dynamics on political style at work (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

Jung's type theory, as extended by Isabel Myers, proposes 16 psychological types resulting from combinations of four sets of preferences. These four sets include one's (1) orientation to the outer and inner world (extraversion or introversion), (2) mental function of perception (sensing or intuition), (3) mental function of judgment (thinking or feeling), and (4) orientation to the outer world (judging or perceiving). An individual's psychological type reflects one of the 16 combinations such as INTP (introversion, intuition, thinking, and perceiving). A complete description of each type can be found in Myers et al. (1998).

Though the individual preferences are of interest, psychological type theorists emphasize that the basic unit of type is the "whole type." This type dynamics perspective suggests, in part, a synergy of preferences in that the "whole is greater than the sum of the parts." Moreover, type dynamics emphasizes that the mental functions (S, N, T, F) are arrayed in a hierarchy of functions in terms of their conscious orientation: dominant, auxiliary, tertiary and inferior. Finally, the type dynamics perspective proposes

that individuals achieve balance in life by using their mental functions in both extraverted and introverted attitudes. Thus, for example, INTPs use their dominant thinking function in their favorite or introverted world, and use their auxiliary intuition function for balance in the outer or extraverted world.

Though the business literature contains numerous references to stylistics such as leadership style and conflict handling style, little literature appears to exist which suggests that people at work may display political styles. Significant research has been devoted to developing and testing various models of organizational politics and taxonomies of political tactics, as well as examining the perceived traits of political actors and various personality factors that may predispose individual's to engage in political behavior at work (e.g., Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter & Ammeter, 2002). None of this research, however, is aimed at developing a construct of political style at work that derives from general models of personality such as that presented by Jung. The basic premise of our presentation is that one's psychological type—and type dynamics particularly—constitute the framework for enacting one's political style at work.

THE EXERCISE

The primary objective of the exercise is to encourage learners to explore the relationship between their Jungian psychological type dynamics and their political style in organizational settings. Subsidiary objectives include encouraging learners to deepen their understanding of psychological type as well as learning more about the politics of organizational life.

Three sets of materials generally are needed. First, some form of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[®] will be needed to help assess learner's type preferences. Second, each group will need a supply of newsprint and markers. Finally, materials on type dynamics as well as political behavior at work will be needed.

The exercise involves four steps. First, assign learners to dominant-alike groups (e.g., Extraverted Intuitive –ENTP and ENFP). Group sizes of 3 people or more are preferable to allow psychological type issues to emerge more so than individual idiosyncrasies, but individual's who are the only representative of their type should be encouraged to work on their own.

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Second, instruct the groups: "Considering that we all sometimes behave politically in social situations, draw something which represents your type behaving politically in a work setting." Give the groups 15-20 minutes. Expect some learners to ask for a definition of "behaving politically." Simply reinforce the instructions. After groups have finished their drawings, present groups with a handout (see Appendix for an example) describing various influence behaviors and ask the groups to discuss (5 minutes) which of the behaviors their drawing best illustrates.

Third, present a brief lecture (5 -10 minutes) reviewing the concept of type dynamics with particular attention to identifying dominant and auxiliary functions, and the attitudes (extraverted or introverted) within which the functions typically are used. Because we are working with advanced type concepts, we generally use this exercise after learners have been exposed to the basics of psychological type concepts including type dynamics concepts. Our target group thus is any group interested in learning more about psychological type and organizational politics that has had an introduction to type dynamics concepts.

Finally, have groups present and discuss their drawings. Discuss each group's drawing as presented using the following processing tips. Time for this step will vary between 30 – 45 minutes depending upon the number of dominant function groups represented. We generally allow about 1 hour and 15 minutes for the total exercise.

When processing the exercise, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that there will be some similar themes across groups. Definitions of organizational politics usually emphasize that such behavior is self-serving and that such behavior often involves interpersonal conflict. Most all group drawings will reflect these themes to some extent. Therefore, a key tip for processing the exercise is to keep in mind these common themes across the groups, and to relate the themes to pedagogical definitions of organizational politics.

Beyond these common themes, however, the drawings demonstrate that different types both define and engage organizational politics in typologically styled ways. A first stylistic difference between groups is that the situations they draw will reflect their typological definition of organizational politics as influenced by their mental functions groupings (ST, SF, NF, NT). Thus, STs will draw something involving a "machine" view of organizations, SFs will draw something involving "teams," NFs will draw something involving "the human spirit," and NTs will draw something involving issues of "power and competency" (Boozler, Forte, & Maddox, 2000). Thus, a second processing tip is to keep in mind this fact about how the different mental functions groups tend to frame the issue of organizational politics.

A third tip is to focus on the role of individual preferences. For example, extroverts are more likely to describe using tactics such as coalition formation or ingratiation whereas as these tactics generally are less appealing to introverts. Sensing types tend to discuss

politics more at the local level of "office politics" whereas intuitive types tend to see the big picture of "organizational politics."

The key focus for this exercise, however, is the role of type dynamics in political style. Thus, a key processing tip is to be sensitive to what mental functions are being extraverted and introverted, and whether these functions are dominant or auxiliary. These type dynamics are what provide a foundation for understanding political style as well as engaging learners to think more deeply about their political style. For example, we had two introverted sensing types (ISFJ and ISTJ) in one workshop. Their drawing portrayed a customer service incident with a problem customer. The ISFJ preferred to use personal appeal (auxiliary extraverted feeling) whereas the ISTJ preferred rational appeal (auxiliary extraverted thinking). However, as is characteristic of their dominant type, both of the participants kept to themselves certain facts about the experience (dominant introverted sensing). When confronted with whether or not this action constitutes the political tactic of withholding information, the participants are challenged to think more about their political style and the nature of organizational politics.

A final tip is to remind learners that we are working with normal expressions of psychological type preferences and not pathological behaviors. This point provides a basis for future discussions about the acceptability of various kinds of political behavior.

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APPENDIX
POLITICAL BEHAVIORS IN THE
WORKPLACE

This list contains a variety of behaviors that occur every day in organizational life. All of the behaviors are political in the sense that they involve getting someone else to act as you wish, or in developing your power to influence others. Please read the entire list and select the behavior(s) that best describes the drawing of your psychological type behaving politically at work.

Rational Appeal. Using impersonal, objective logic and facts to persuade others to act as you wish.

Ingratiation. Using compliments and favors to put others in a good mood so they will act as you wish.

Personal Appeal. Appealing to someone's feelings of friendship and loyalty so they will act as you wish.

Pressure. Using demands, threats, and persistent reminders so someone will act as you wish.

Coalition Formation. Joining with a group of like-minded people to get someone else to act as the group wishes.

Withholding information. Keeping information from others so they will act as you wish.

Backstabbing. Acting cordial or civil towards someone while otherwise attempting to undermine them so that you can accomplish your goals.

Legitimate Appeal. Using policies, procedures, rules or one's own authority to get someone to act as you wish.

Inspirational Appeal. Arousing someone's enthusiasm by appealing to his or her ideals, values, and aspirations.

Exchange. Agreeing to do something for someone in exchange for them doing something for you.