

Understanding Psychological Styles in Instructional Development Consultation

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Abstract: The thesis of this article is that relationship building is a critical component in any client-designer instructional development project; failure to establish and maintain an effective relationship will reduce the probability of successful project completion. The article outlines Johnson's Decision Making theory as a conceptual framework from which designers can work to facilitate effective relationships. The theory classifies clients into four styles according to discrete, observable criteria. The discussion of the theory is followed by examples of clients of each style and for each client, possible designer responses are indicated.

Introduction

No matter how pert our development and evaluation procedures, no matter how sophisticated and scientifically based our techniques, little will be achieved if the quality of human relationships is overlooked or ignored. . . . Helpful and rewarding relationships, however, rarely occur by chance, they need to be deliberately

entered into and consciously managed as an important resource. (Davies, 1975, p. 352, 372)

Davies makes two important points in the remarks above: a quality relationship between developer and client is a necessary condition for change, and that the relationship must be attended to and managed as carefully as any portion of the instructional development process. In the jargon of the discipline, quality relationships with clients are prerequisite to effective intervention. Just as in the classroom, failure to master prerequisites decreases the probability of subsequent learning taking place.

It is the thesis of this article that an understanding of client psychological types and an ability to differentially respond to various types is a particularly effective designer strategy for relationship building and managing. In specific, if the designer can identify a client's psychological style and respond with behaviors that facilitate change for that style, then a successful relationship is more probable and instructional change more likely.

In the following sections, a theory of client psychological styles is outlined, examples of typical client behaviors for each type are presented, and example designer intervention strategies that facilitate relationship building and managing for each type are discussed. We have chosen to introduce this theory not only because it is drawn from a strong theoretical base, but also because we have found it to be a scheme that is easily understood and used by both designer and client alike.

Theoretical Background

Drawing from Jungian theory (1971), Johnson (1978) theorized that a client's psychological style is defined by how in-

¹Spontaneous external
²Systematic external

dividuals make decisions. His decision-making paradigm includes two dimensions: the way information is gathered (systematic or spontaneous) and the way data is analyzed (internal or external). From these dimensions four psychological or decision-making types emerge: systematic internal, systematic external, spontaneous internal, and spontaneous external.

quickly committed to new ideas, and is flexible in goal orientation. Each of these characteristics is explained below:

1. Reaction to events. In reacting holistically to events, spontaneous clients respond to total experiences, as opposed to breaking experiences into component parts and reacting to each part separately. They either tend to like something or dislike it *in toto*. If asked

and feel that it will help solve many instructional problems. This excitement that leads to acceptance of an idea is the way spontaneous clients have of determining whether or not they like the task analysis technique. However, spontaneous clients can just as quickly change their minds about the value of one technique when presented with a new approach. The person is not being "wishy-washy," but is simply determining feelings about an idea. This quick internal commitment is a characteristic of lifestyle in general, though the spontaneous person is quite capable of being cautious about actions and commitments.

3. Goal orientation. The third characteristic of the spontaneous client is a flexible goal orientation. The spontaneous person will move from goal to goal, thought to thought, idea to idea, barely noticing the movement. The client experiences a thought-chaining process that when carried to its extreme represents a stream-of-consciousness flow of ideas. This person will often begin a conversation on one topic and end up talking about a completely different and unrelated topic. The client will generally be able to gather a great deal of information in a short period of time but will do so in an unstructured fashion. Because of their chaining of thought processes, spontaneous clients are comfortable in sudden changes in work and will often show a need for a high variety of tasks. They can structure goals for themselves but are more likely to move from one goal to another with unnoticed flexibility.

Systematic style. The systematic client reacts to component parts of an event, is cautious in making commitments, and sets goals in a deliberate and methodical manner:

1. Reaction to events. Systematic clients tend to break experiences into component parts and react to each component separately. The systematic client would analyze teaching by listing the troublesome areas: "My lectures are good and hold the students' attention, the assignments are poorly organized, and I need some help there as well as with my test design." (The spontaneous person might say "I need some help with my course—it's not going as well as I'd like.") Only after examining the collective parts of the experience will the systematic person offer a summary of

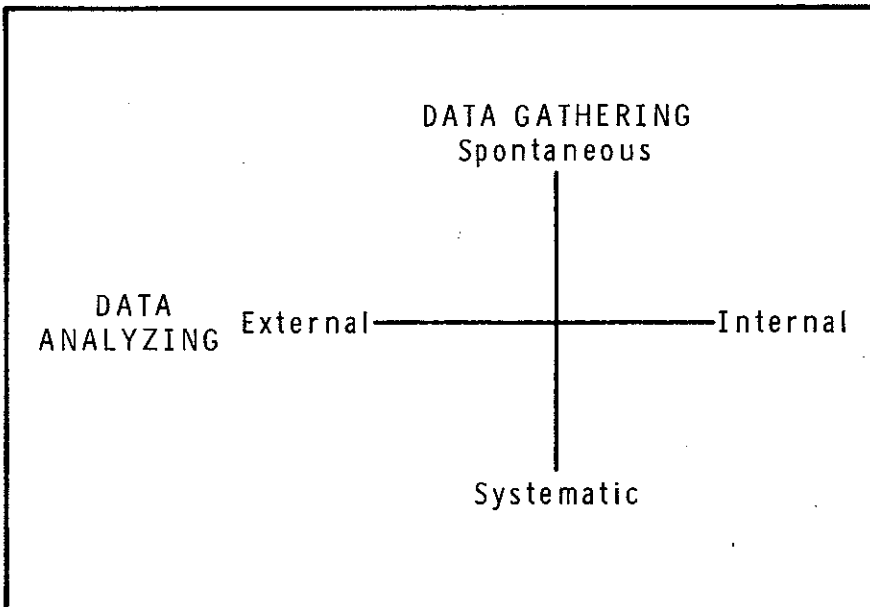


FIGURE 1. The four psychological types.

Information gathering and data analysis are two independent processes. An individual's style of gathering information does not affect the style with which the information is analyzed, for these are independent events. Figure 1 will aid in visualizing the relationship.

Information Gathering

There are two basic styles by which information for decision-making is gathered by the client. These styles have been labeled as spontaneous and systematic and are differentiated by three characteristics: the way individuals react to events, make commitment to new ideas, and orient themselves to goals. These characteristics can be inferred from observing client reactions to new ideas during consultation as well as through classroom observation of teacher-student interactions.

Spontaneous Style. The spontaneous client reacts holistically to events, is

what he or she thought about the instructional design process, the spontaneous client would say "great," "phenomenal," or "useless," rather than react to particular components of the process (objectives, task analysis, etc.). The spontaneous individual is likely to react to the holistic sum of all the parts, rather than to individual parts of the experience. They can react to and analyze component parts of an experience, but are not likely to do so unless asked. Initial reactions will usually be holistic.

2. Commitment to new ideas. The quick psychological commitment of spontaneous individuals is demonstrated by the way they personalize alternatives in order to evaluate them. By internally committing themselves to an alternative, they are best able to determine whether or not they like it. This internal commitment usually results in excitement about new stimuli. For example a spontaneous client who first encounters the application of task analysis might get excited about this technique

the experience. These individuals need detailed information about an idea before they experience it. Before beginning a project they will likely ask the designer many questions about the instructional development process and the tasks they will have to perform. The need for detail is necessary before a systematic individual is comfortable with a project.

2. Commitment to new ideas. The systematic person will also be cautious in making psychological commitments. He or she will evaluate each alternative and only personalize the one selected. They may, for example, ask detailed questions about the difference between an information processing approach to task analysis and a hierarchical one before selecting an approach to use. One approach may seem reasonable or desirable to them, but they will not choose until they have weighed the evidence. Both the spontaneous and systematic client may gather a great deal of information before acting, but the systematic client will not make a psychological commitment until all data are gathered and analyzed, while the spontaneous client will commit to an action very quickly, and then gather more data to further evaluate the approach. Once the systematic person has made a commitment, however, a great deal of data is required to change it.

3. Goal orientation. Finally, the systematic person is very methodical in goal orientation, moving from thought to thought and idea to idea in a very deliberate fashion. He or she will be very aware of the goals he or she set and of movement from one goal to the other. If necessary, he or she can be flexible and change their plans but will want to establish new goals for these new plans. The systematic person tends to establish long-range goals and work deliberately toward them.

Data analysis

Once clients have gathered information about a particular topic, they need to process that information to reach some judgment about its worth. Individuals present two different styles of analyzing the gathered information: internal and external processing.

External style. The external processor is quickly identified by a preference, indeed a need, to think outloud. He or she is never certain how he or she feels about an idea or experience until he or

she talks about it. If asked to do something he or she has not thought about before, an external processor is likely to say "let's talk about it" or just as easily begin a discourse on its pro's and con's to discover how he or she feels. Every complex decision will require a good deal of discussion before it is resolved. External processors need to hear the words to make sense out of them. They tend to think and talk simultaneously. For the external, thinking comes clearly

things they have thought through previously.

Thus, the four types can be differentiated by spontaneous or systematic information gathering—reaction to events, commitment to ideas, and orientation to goals—and by internal or external data analysis. Figure 2 summarizes the defining attributes of the theory.

The above section should help the reader to identify clients in each of the four types. However, the question of

	Spontaneous	Systematic
Reaction to events	Holistic Summary reaction at first	Component parts Summary reaction at end Detailed information needed
Commitment to new ideas	Quick Personalize each, then gather more data Change commitment easily	Cautious Gather all data, then personalize only one selected Reluctant to change commitment
Goal orientation	Flexible Thought-chaining	Deliberate Methodical
	External Talk and think Feelings clarified by talking	Internal Think then talk Feelings clarified by thinking

FIGURE 2. Summary of type attributes.

when they think *and* talk at the same time. Not all externals are high verbalizers however—some are quiet and will talk only when something is important. The best way to determine whether or not someone is an external processor is to listen to what they say and not how much they talk. Invariably, they will be thinking aloud.

Internal style. The internal processor will want to think about things before talking about them. If asked a question he or she has not thought about before, there is likely to be a long pause before he or she answers or the internal processor will want to "think about it first." Internal processors are likely to be confused or irritated about an issue if they have to discuss it before they have thought about it privately. Internals can be high or low verbalizers—again the key is to listen to what they talk about. Internals will generally talk only about

appropriate designer responses that will facilitate the designer-client relationship remains. The following are examples of clients from each style and appropriate designer responses to each³ (Note: At present there are no research data to support these recommendations. The examples we offer are based on our own experiences as designers and should be viewed as speculative until further evidence accrues.)

³While a designer may have a particular decision-making style that fits into one of the four types, it has been our experience that most designers operate from a systematic stance, most likely systematic-internal, during the consultation. This may represent a deviation from the normal operating style of the designer when faced with his or her own decision-making tasks.

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Spontaneous External

The spontaneous external client is likely to arrive in your office with a holistic reaction to a problem: "Boy, is my class falling apart; it's just miserable." This client may have already embraced a solution to the problem: "I think slides will help them learn more," and may well have brought along 150 slides to have shot. This client has made a holistic assessment of the situation and has decided that because slides are the solution to the problem, then slides need to be obtained *right now*. As you talk with the client, you are likely to find that this individual moves from idea to idea very quickly and effortlessly. One minute the client is talking about student evaluations, the next the weather, back to slides, and perhaps to an offering of an opinion about the class. If you suggest that slides may not be the solution to the problem and make an alternative recommendation, the spontaneous individual is likely to switch commitment from the use of slides to the new solution without much consideration of the time and effort already expended.

Therefore, when working with the *spontaneous external* be prepared to: help the client think about the components of the problem and the events that led the client to conclude that one solution is the correct solution. When the client begins to chain a variety of thoughts together that make no apparent sense to you, keep in mind that this person is thinking aloud in a manner that represents most closely the stream-of-consciousness technique. Allow the client freedom to roam, for a startling connection may be made that produces a creative solution to the problem, though the client may not know just how or why that solution was arrived at. At the same time, however, keep in mind that the client can just as easily get off track and lose sight of the project goal. Be prepared for a phrase such as "What was I saying?" and use that opportunity to redirect the client to the problem at hand.

Spontaneous Internal

The spontaneous internal client will exhibit the same holistic reaction to events, the quick personalization of new ideas, and the same stream-of-consciousness approach to thinking as the

spontaneous external, but with a major stylistic difference: the stream-of-consciousness approach will take place internally. The client may be talking about the use of slides in the classroom, pause, and then ask you your opinion of analysis of covariance to solve a particular statistical problem. After a few of these interactions you are likely to conclude that the client is unable to focus upon a problem and logically

you will become more comfortable in dealing with this type of client, perhaps one of the most frustrating types for someone trained to deal with problems in a systematic manner.

Systematic External

The systematic external client is often the type of client that we all wish to have. This person's arrival into your office could begin with a statement that

" . . . if the designer can identify a client's psychological style and respond with behaviors that facilitate change for that style, then a successful relationship is more probable and instructional change more likely."

think it through. Understanding what has happened during these pauses, however, may keep the relationship alive. What the client did during that perplexing pause was to chain a series of events and ideas together silently and then shared only the final outcome with you. For instance, after thinking about evaluating the use of slides the client may have thought about student evaluation scores. This may have stimulated a thought about last night's baseball game, which in turn linked to how a manager evaluates players. Finally, the client is reminded of a recently read article on evaluation using analysis of covariance, which led to the verbalized question on analysis of covariance. In this instance the client verbalized the last thought in the chain, which also happened to be relevant to the discussion. He could just as easily have verbalized a thought in midstream that would seem completely unrelated to the discussion.

Therefore, when dealing with the *spontaneous internal*: be prepared for a series of pauses during the course of the discussion. In the event these produce unrelated responses, begin to probe the client for the reason for a particular response: "Why do you mention that?" which will probably be followed by an explanation of how the client arrived at that response. With practice you will be able to fill in the client's internal leaps and the relationship will often proceed much smoother. It will be facilitated because you will not need as much clarification of responses, but also because

the particular problem at hand can be characterized by "x" number of component parts. The client will be able to define each of the parts of the problem and will make a summary reaction to the problem only after examining and explaining the parts to you: "I find that many of my students don't seem to grasp some of the points I make, that they are bored with my constant lecturing, and that as a result I'm not sure the learning environment is as good as it could be. Because slides seem to provide a different stimulus in the classroom in and of themselves, but also because I think many of my concepts can be illustrated visually, I believe that slides are the solution to my problem." The systematic has probably arrived at this conclusion after much thought and will have, with that conclusion, a commitment to the solution offered. The client feels that the problem has been analyzed well and that the solution is probably the correct one. As a result, systematic externals will be reluctant to change their commitment.

Therefore, when working with the *systematic external*: be prepared for an in-depth analysis of the problem and if a solution has been proposed, it is not likely to be easily modified. Your analysis of the problem, if it varies from that of the systematic external, will need to be well founded on evidence that the client values. You should be prepared to defend your recommendations to a much greater extent than if you are dealing with a spontaneous individual. You can expect this person to request a

good deal of information that will be relevant to the problem and will find that your conversations follow a very logical flow. The client will explore alternatives aloud in a rational manner: "Slides might work because they illustrate these concepts and they do provide stimulus variation in the classroom, but perhaps motion is an important variable for this idea. I know film costs more than slides to produce so I guess cost

the external might. During the pause, he or she will be covering their analysis in a systematic flow that is best left to them alone. Give the client the time to think about the problem. If they come to you with a solution, do not be surprised if they are somewhat irritated when you question their solution: He or she made a commitment to the solution based, the client feels, on a logical analysis of the problem. As is often the case with in-

four styles as well as designer responses for each.

There are many unanswered questions about this theory and its application to instructional development consultation. For example, is change best facilitated by client-designer similarity or dissimilarity? Can we develop more specific categories of designer responses for each psychological style? Do all clients have a unique style or do they develop attributes of different styles and if so to what extent? Similarly, do we "learn" a particular style all at once, or is the acquisition of a style a developmental process? If it is developmental, how do we provide the necessary support for the development to occur in clients, and what is the maximum stage or level of development?

"Information gathering and data analysis are two independent processes."

effectiveness will need to be considered as a relevant variable in the solution." He or she will rarely ask you "What was I saying?" and will probably pay close attention to the information you provide.

Systematic Internal

As with the systematic external, this client will explore problems in a logical, ordered manner. The difference here is that they will often prefer to do their thinking on an internal basis. They are likely to arrive at a solution to the problem, but you will not necessarily know what led them to that end unless you ask for their specific considerations. When you do ask, they will be able to recount in detail the arguments that they have analyzed and the reasons for a particular solution.

Therefore, when working with the *systematic internal*: expect that when faced with data to analyze, the client will respond "Let me think about that first" rather than talking immediately as

ternals in general, they assume that you have followed their logic. What you perceive as a simple question to clarify a position may be interpreted as a criticism of their analysis abilities.

Summary

Johnson's theory of psychological styles provides a framework for instruc-

"Is change best facilitated by client-designer similarity or dissimilarity?"

tional development professionals to use in understanding client behaviors and responding in ways supportive of the client's methods of gathering and analyzing information for decision-making. Hypothetical client interaction situations were presented for each of the

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