

Using the AMSP to support transitional career change.

Many organisations will recognise the dilemma of a senior manager who appears unable to adapt their own workplace behaviour through a transformational change; eventually presenting as an obstruction to the future prosperity and success of the very organisation they grew up in and helped to grow.

This case study suggests how the Apter Motivational Style Profile supported an organisation in confronting this particular challenge and finding a solution that may never have been considered without the insight offered by this specific profiling tool.

John¹ was a senior manager in a contracting business with responsibility for his own business unit, associated workforce, customer base and commercial performance. He had joined the business in its infancy and had, through acquired knowledge and 'know how', been promoted through a series of job changes until it started to become evident that he was unable to cope with the breadth and complexity of his role. The business had, in its early years, expanded cautiously through organic growth. Then, in preparation for the owners exit strategy, growth accelerated through small acquisitions and greater confidence in bidding for larger contracts. The company was ultimately purchased by a much larger corporation.

John's line manager had over time become increasingly anxious about John's impact. He deliberated upon options with his colleagues on a number of occasions, only to revert back to the status quo for lack of any realistic solution. The problems were eventually put down to incompetence, with a belief that this individual had been 'able to get us where we wanted to go, but not capable of taking us to where we want to be.'

John's dialogue and climate with his peers and his line manager had palpably changed as he was unable to adapt to new and challenging responsibilities of corporate governance and more transparent management processes.

I was fortunate to have the benefit of first hand observation of John's performance and was acutely aware of and could easily understand the management concerns. He had become the stereotypical 'round peg in square hole' and whilst the preference was to be rid of the

¹ The events in this case study are real and took place during 2007. For the purpose of this article, the senior manager in question will be known as John.



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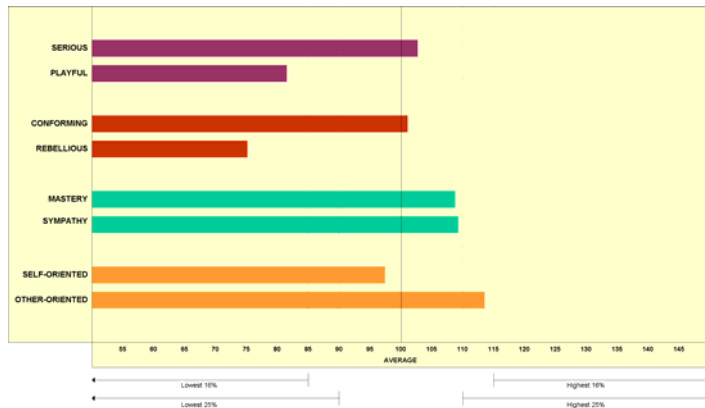
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problem, the directors were persuaded to give him the benefit of psychometric profiling. Firstly, to test whether some of his visible behaviours and characteristics were reflected in his profile; and secondly to see whether they could be of more value in another role or part of the organisation.

We decided to use AMSP as we were curious to understand his preferred motivational states. This could give us insight into the type of role in which he would be more comfortable; and him the insight into behaviours resulting from becoming 'stuck' in particular states.

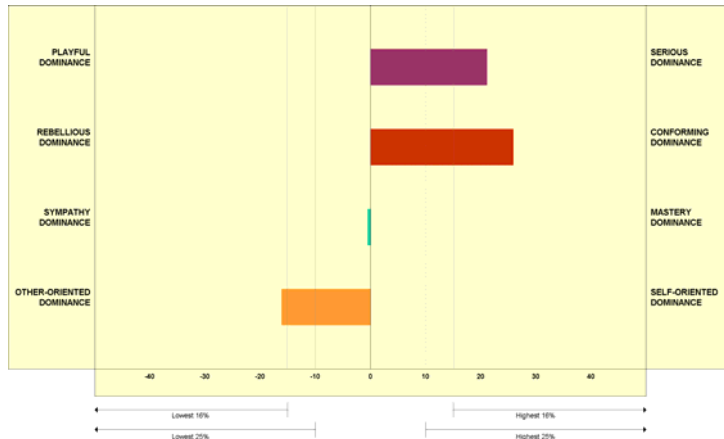
John's AMSP

Individual Subscale Profile:



It is all too easy to suggest that an individual has not grown with an organisation Exposure in a small business to different management styles and behaviours can be extremely limited. John had developed his own management skills without much guidance, coaching or training. He made it up as he went along and continued to do what worked for him.

The Dominance Scale:



The Eight Motivational States



Reversal Theory:

Reversal Theory is a distinctive theory of personality, motivation and emotion that focuses on the way people change during the course of everyday life. Researched at over 30 Universities worldwide, it has been employed in many different fields of human activity including sport, health, market research and performance at work.

The key insight is the idea that our experience is shaped by a set of alternative ways of seeing the world. According to this theory, people are driven by eight core motivational states - organised into four pairs of opposite states – and are constantly moving through a dynamic pattern of reversals within each pair. Psychological health and effectiveness is maximised when people are able to experience all eight states, and match their state to the demands of the situation.

The manifestation of the *serious* motivational state was clear. John was very keen to stick to a plan and had become very anxious at meetings where a necessary departure was permitted. He could deal with what was before him in terms of information, and was extremely methodical; however, he would maintain focus on his agenda regardless of the dynamics of a situation or team; often drawing negative attention to himself. This was compounded by his dominance in the *conforming* state where he would find the entrepreneurial environment which others found exciting too uncontrollable and reverted back continually to what he knew and what he thought he should achieve. The business at this time went through exponential growth and as it did so, took on and acquired other managers who became John's peers. He was distinctly uncomfortable at meetings where considerable latitude was given to the agenda for exploration of new ideas. John confided his discomfort at not fitting in at the 'top table' and he was beginning to demonstrate subversive behaviours.

John was well known and liked in his local community partly because he had offered employment and help to his large social network. This was reflected in his mild *sympathy* and more marked *other* dominance where his team and the local sporting and pub activities almost became synonymous. This ultimately created an interwoven mesh of complex relationships, which at times called into question his own integrity when family members and friends who had enjoyed his altruism, subsequently breached standards which, when became known created embarrassment. John outwardly expressed his emotions and in situations such as this would lose his stature as he felt compromised by the need to provide emotional support and behave consistently in the adoption of management process.

John had over identified with his team to the extent that he offered self sacrifice on a regular basis. His tendency to become the 'victim' and to display martyrdom became part of his armoury. This, coupled with the characteristics associated with the other dominances was making him feel unstable.

What the AMSP did was enable us to pull together a whole array of observations and mixed analysis of John's behaviour and put it into a framework that made sense. It gave us the opportunity to articulate the various themes within the profile in relation to his work behaviour and characteristics and more importantly their outcomes for his team, himself and the business.

We then concentrated on John's strengths. His dominance in serious and conforming have their value. The management of term contracts and ad hoc projects has to be very tight and commercial acumen is key. John had already proven his ability in this respect. Out of our

SERIOUS

The Means-Ends Domain
Basic Motive: **Achievement**
The feeling of making progress towards a goal.

CONFORMING

The Rules Domain
Basic Motive: **Fitting in**
Doing the right thing at the right time.

SYMPATHY

The Interaction Domain
Basic Motive: **Affection and Caring**
Our interactions are about building and maintaining relationships.

OTHER

The Orientation Domain
Basic Motive: **Collectivism**
Doing the best that on can for others.

“The AMSP provided an explanation to his behaviours and characteristics and more importantly their outcomes for his team, himself and the business.”

deliberations came the concept of a contract trouble-shooter. John would work better as part of a team and would be more comfortable dealing with known and established checks and balances rather than having to invent them himself. He would be motivated by collectivism and would try to reduce conflict in a situation where he had to bring people in line. John could hammer home the compliance issues as hard as he needed to, but would do it with some sensitivity to others.

The transition took several months and was successful. John did get results through not just achieving compliance but identifying inefficiencies, improving manpower organisation and utilisation. He was able to bring his experience and strengths to this role and the outcome for him was not just greater job satisfaction, but an enhanced personal profile within the larger organisation. His options for the future were opened up as a result of the transition and the strain of the discomfort in his old role was removed.

We were interested in the question of whether John's dominant motivation states arose from the impact of his discomfort in the changing world or whether they inherently preventing him from adapting to the new regime? The impact of the transition on John's behaviour may well alter his dominant motivational states and it will be interesting to re do the profile again in the near future.

“The tool can provide managers with more options than they had considered originally, involves the individual in the process and creates a healthier climate by raising self awareness and working with motivational states rather than trying to change them.”

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