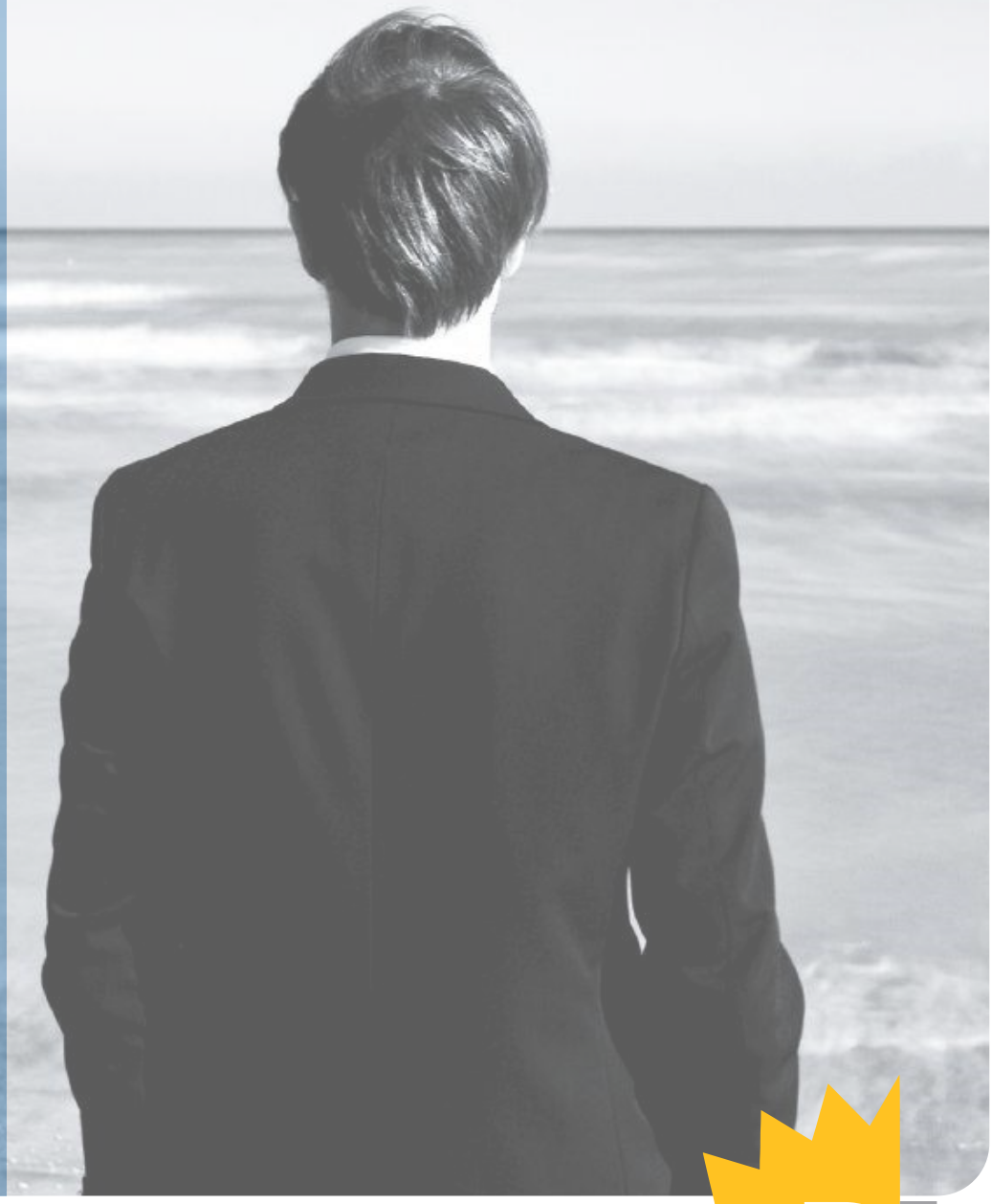
Getting Your Way

Personal Style and Influence

To influence effectively, you must be adept at getting your opinions and ideas heard, recognized and considered by others. Influence inherently means that you are able to impact the ideas, opinions and actions of others. What are some strategies for increasing your influence? What does effective influencing look like? What happens when you influence ineffectively? In 2009 and 2010, Discovery Learning, Inc. and Innovative Pathways conducted extensive research on influence that explores these questions and provides valuable insight into this key leadership skill for a new generation of leaders.



White Paper

Introduction

In 2009 and 2010, Discovery Learning, Inc. and Innovative Pathways conducted research to identify and measure influence preferences. This research clearly identified five influence styles and resulted in an assessment tool, Influence Style Indicator (ISI), which effectively and efficiently measures an individual's preferred influence style or styles. The complete Influence Style Indicator Research and Development Report is available from Discovery Learning, Inc. Since 2010, considerable data has been collected using ISI that allows us to identify and better understand how influencing preferences are impacted by variables such as gender, nationality and personality preferences.

Why Influence Matters

Today's workplace is characterized by levels of change and complexity that are unprecedented. Workplace realities such as identifying shared goals, leading complex and often dispersed teams, boundary spanning, coordinating matrixed projects and integrating diverse people and interests require the capacity to influence others. Good leadership involves leadership that has a positive and unifying impact. Whether you are leading, following and/or colaborating, chances are you need to influence others to be successful. The ability to influence others is emerging as a key leadership skill for a new generation of leaders.

Effective vs. Ineffective Influence

Influence strategies can range from reliance on position and power to education, encouragement and collaboration. When you influence effectively you increase trust, support and ownership for your priorities. When you influence ineffectively you increase mistrust, intimidation and resentment. A key behavior of effective leaders is the ability to influence those around them towards acceptance of beneficial outcomes.

Five Influence Preferences

We are all aware of the distinctive influence styles that people demonstrate. Some of these styles we instinctively understand and appreciate and others we may find confusing, unclear and frustrating. Our research has definitively identified five styles of influence. These five distinctive styles are Rationalizing, Asserting, Negotiating, Inspiring and Bridging. You can improve your leadership effectiveness if you know when to modify your style, understand what situations your style works best in, and when it may prove ineffective.

Asserting

You insist that your ideas are heard and considered and you challenge the ideas of others.

Rationalizing

You put forward your ideas and offer facts and logical, rational reasons to convince others of your viewpoint.

Negotiating

You look for compromises and make concessions to reach outcomes that satisfy your greater interest.

Inspiring

You advocate your position and encourage others with a sense of shared purpose and exciting possibilities.

Bridging

You build relationships and connect with others through listening, understanding and building mutually beneficial coalitions.

Five Influence Preferences cont'd.

To most effectively utilize each of these styles, leaders need to understand:

The value of each style
The most appropriate time to use each style
How each style can be used effectively, and
How each style can be used ineffectively

Workplace Implications

Influence Style differences suggest interesting implications for the workplace, both locally and globally. We explore some of those differences focusing on gender, nationality, age, and personality preferences.

Gender Differences

Preference	Male Average	Female Average
Asserting	6.4	6.0
Rationalizing	10.1	8.8
Negotiating	5.5	6.0
Inspiring	7.1	7.7
Bridging	11.0	11.5

Significantly Higher

Significantly Lower

Most people might guess that there are gender differences in how people attempt to influence and persuade others. Awareness of these differences and the capacity to modify one's influence preference might create a significant advantage in the workplace. Our data on nearly 2000 females and 2500 males confirms differences that are significant but not surprising. Men show a significant preference for using the advocating or pushing styles of Rationalizing and Asserting. Women show a significant preference for using the uniting or pulling styles of Inspiring and Bridging. Women also show a significant preference for using the more neutral style of Negotiating. Differences in these preferences create the opportunity for miscommunication and misunderstanding. As an example, when the boss has an Asserting influence preference and the direct report has a Bridging preference there is a strong likelihood that the boss will interpret the Bridging communication style of the direct report as soft and lacking in opinion or substance.

Nationality Differences

ISI Preference	Assert	Ration-alize	Nego-tiate	Inspire	Bridge
Canada	5.86	8.87	5.58	8.83	11.36
India	5.84	9.75	4.29	8.58	11.54
Singapore	5.54	11.12	6.32*	6.43	10.58
United States	6.40	9.60	5.49	7.22	11.29

*** Significantly higher than U.S.**

Significantly Lower | No Difference | Significantly Higher

One of the greatest opportunities of understanding influence and persuasion style differences is in the international arena. We know that there are personality differences in influencing styles, but how about cultural/regional differences? Currently, we have sufficient data to assess influence differences across four countries: Canada, United States, India and Singapore. Not only are some of the differences stastically significant but they are also very interesting.

Nationality Differences cont'd

Singaporeans are morely likely to use a Rationalizing influence style than Americans, Canadians and Indians.

Americans are more likely to use an Asserting influence style than Canadians and Singaporeans.

Indians are much less likely to use a Negotiating influence style than Americans, Canadians and Singaporeans. Singaporeans are more likely to use a Negotiating influence style than Americans.

Canadians and Indians are more likely to use an Inspiring influence style than Americans or Singaporeans, while Americans are also more likely than Singaporeans to use the Inspiring influence style.

Among these four countries there are not significant differences in use of the Bridging influence style.

The implications for communicating, bargaining and leading can be significant. We know that the most effective leaders have the ability to be reflective, assess what is working or not working and then to make adjustments in behavior to become more effective.

Age Differences

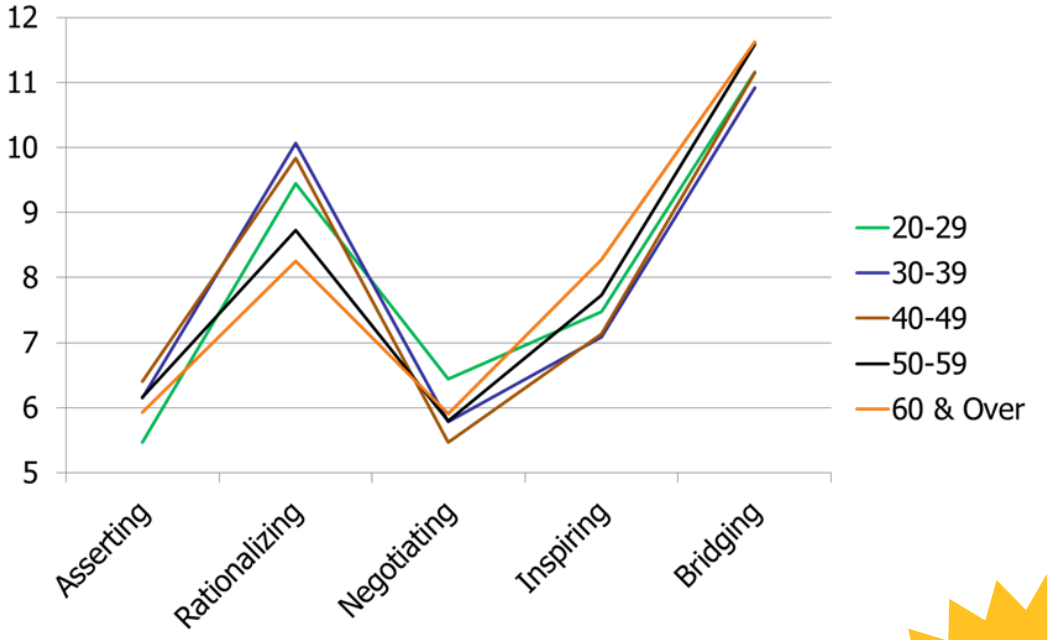
Much is written about generational differences in the workplace. Many people have their pet theories about these differences but there is little solid data that confirms or disavows generational differences. Our data on over 4300 people between the ages of 20 and 80 was divided into five age groups: 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's and 60 and over. The younger age groups (20, 30 and 40) score significantly higher on using the advocating style of Rationalizing than the older age groups (50 and 60 and over). However, the older age groups score significantly higher on using both uniting styles, Bridging and Inspiring, than the middle age groups of 30 and 40, but not significantly higher than the youngest age group (20). The youngest age group scored significantly lower on Asserting and higher on Negotiating than the middle age group of 40's, but not significantly different than any other age group on these two styles. An interesting conclusion from this data is that the 50's and 60 and over groups show the least difference, but the next most significant similarity is between the 60 and over and the 20's groups. The bigger differences exist between the 30 and 40 age groups and all other age groups. This challenges speculation that the biggest age differences and challenges exist between the younger and older workers, at least as they relate to influence preferences.

Age Differences cont'd

Age Range	Assert	Ration-alize	Nego-tiate	Inspire	Bridge
20-29	5.47	9.45	6.44	7.47	11.16
30-39	6.15	10.07	5.78	7.08	10.92
40-49	6.40	9.83	5.47	7.14	11.15
50-59	6.16	8.73*	5.80	7.73	11.59
60 and over	5.93	8.25	5.91	8.28	11.62

Significantly Higher	
No Significant Difference	
Significantly Lower	

*Significantly lower than 30's and 40's but not 20's



Personality Differences

MBTI

Is influence preference an indicator of personality preferences or learned/acquired behaviors? The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator is one of the most researched and referenced personality differentiator. To attempt to answer this question we analyzed the relationship between individuals for whom we know MBTI preference and Influence Style Indicator preference. The comparison was between the MBTI preferences of introversion/extroversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling and judging/perceiving. For two influence styles, Negotiating and Bridging, there is not a significant relationship to the MBTI preferences.

For Inspiring there is one significant difference. Intuitive preferences are more likely to use Inspiring. This relationship is understandable given that Inspirers tend to tell us stories and metaphors to reinforce their position.

With the Asserting influence preference two significant differences are found. Extroverts and perceivers are more likely to use the Asserting style.

The strongest relationship with MBTI occurs around Rationalizing. Sensors, thinkers and judgers are significantly more likely to prefer Rationalizing than intuitives, feelers and perceivers.

Personality Differences

MBTI Preference	Assert	Ration-alize	Nego-tiate	Inspire	Bridge
Introvert Extrovert	4.94 6.70	9.92 8.33	6.49 6.28	7.33 8.61	11.35 9.94
Intuitive Sensor	5.96 5.80	7.75 10.49	6.45 6.29	8.85 7.12	10.82 10.12
Thinker Feeler	5.79 6.05	10.30 7.03	5.85 7.25	7.61 8.70	10.20 10.95
Judger Perceiver	5.29 6.93	9.86 7.75	7.74 5.78	7.62 8.68	10.52 10.43

Significantly Lower | Significantly Higher

The significant relationships between three of the influencing styles, Rationalizing, Asserting and Inspiring, indicate some relationship between ISI styles and personality. The conclusion is that people with the Rationalizing style preference are more likely to prefer details and facts, think logically and rationally, and decide quickly after considering fewer options. Those with an Asserting preference are more likely to talk and interact more, and take more time and consider more options before making decisions. People with the Inspiring preference are more likely to focus on the big picture and prefer stories to detailed, factual examples.

Influence and Change Style

Another self–assessment that correlates strongly with MBTI is Change Style Indicator (CSI). CSI measures three preferences for dealing with or creating change. These three differences are defined as:

Conservers

prefer current circumstances over the unknown. The goal of a conserver is to better utilize resources – people, technology, knowledge, capital – while preserving the existing structure. Conservers prefer change that is gradual and incremental. They represent a total quality management approach to enhancing organizational effectiveness. At its best the conserver style is characterized by gradual and continuous improvement.

Pragmatists

prefer to explore the existing paradigm in an open and objective manner. They are likely to advocate for change that is more reflective of the demands of the current circumstance, regardless of the impact on the existing structure. Pragmatists prefer change that is functional. They are most interested in what will work in a given situation. However, even within the pragmatist range, the more scores move toward either the conserver or originator end of the continuum, the more an individual will express a change style consistent with that preference.

Influence and Change Style cont'd

Originators

prefer a faster and more radical approach to change. The preference of originators is significant and expansive change which occurs quickly. Originators are representative of the reegineering approach to change. The goal of an originator is to challenge existing structure, resulting in fast, fundamentally different, even systemic changes.

Conservers and Pragmatists are much more likely to prefer Rationalizing as an influence style than Originators, with Conservers having the strongest relationship with Rationalizing.

Pragmatists and Originators are much more likely to prefer Asserting as an influence style than are Conservers, with Originators having the strongest relationship with Asserting.

Originators are much more likely to prefer Inspiring as an influence style than are Pragmatists and Conservers, with Pragmatists having the weakest relationship with Inspiring.

Conservers, Pragmatists and Originators show no significant differences when it comes to Negotiating and Bridging.

Influence and Change Style cont'd

CSI Preference	Assert	Ration-alize	Nego-tiate	Inspire	Bridge
Conservers	4.62	10.49	6.62	7.72	10.44
Pragmatists	6.67	9.28	6.01	7.31	10.59
Originators	7.78	7.04	5.83	10.09	8.74

Significantly Lower	No Difference	Significantly Higher

References

2011 Musselwhite, W.C., Penny, J. & Plouffe, T. Influence Style Indicator Research & Development Report. Discovery Learning Press, Greensboro, NC.

2011 Musselwhite, W.C. & Plouffe, T. Influence Style Indicator Style Guide. Discovery Learning Press, Greensboro, NC.