



## Research Summary Number 4

### **Personality and Change-**

#### ***How Do People Respond Differently to Change?***

**November 29, 1998**

**Abstract:**

This study explores why people respond to and react to change differently. Three separate change styles and their observable differences are noted. The findings are helpful in understanding interpersonal and organizational dynamics during change and the related conflicts individuals experience arising from their preferences for dealing with change.

# Personality and Change – How Do People Respond Differently to Change?

## Question # 1: Do change style preferences exist?

**Results:** The basic hypothesis held that three distinct change styles exist and that 50% of the population would fall into a middle range change style preference and 25% of the population would fall into the change style preferences at each end of the continuum. Verification of this distribution was sought from three methods of placing individuals into a change style: the score on the Change Style Indicator (CSI), self-selection and placement by a colleague. (See Table 1.) Agreement among these three methods ranged from 56% to 66%.

**Conclusions:** Based on these results, the three different change style preferences were identified. The distributions measured by the CSI and by the colleague’s description both closely matched the hypothesized 25/50/25 distribution. The distribution measured by the subject’s self-identification did not correspond as closely to the hypothesized distribution.

**Table 1. Change Style Preference Distribution, Three Perspectives**

Three Change Style Preference Categories	Left Side of Continuum 1st quartile (Conservers)	Middle Range of Continuum 2nd & 3rd quartile (Pragmatists)	Right Side of Continuum 4th quartile (Originators)
(A) Distribution based on the CSI	23%	53%	24%
(B) Distribution based on self-description	16%	68%	15%
(C) Distribution based on colleague’s description	24%	52%	23%

## The Analytical Process

Phase 1 of the project included 190 subjects; Phase 2 included 300. These subjects represented a diverse group, coming from for-profit, not-for-profit and educational organizations. Some were managers and they represented several levels in their respective organizations.

**Phase 1:** Constructing the assessment tool. The test items were organized around the concept of opposites (i.e., How much do you prefer item A vs. item B). These test items were narrowed to 30 by a Delphi process, and were administered to 190 people. Twenty-two of the 30 items with item-to-total correlation ranging from 0.43 to 0.64 were included in the final assessment tool (i.e., the 22-items survey). These items had a Cron-

bach’s alpha of 0.91. For information regarding internal reliability, test-retest reliability, face validity, factor analysis, and concurrent validity, see the **Change Style Indicator Facilitator Guide**.

**Phase 2:** Looking for change style differences. The 22 final items were administered to 300 people. In addition these people selected one of three change style descriptors they believed best described them and also rated themselves on 13 semantic differential pairs. Additionally, each person also selected someone “who worked closely with them” to complete the same two items.

**Question # 2: What are the observable differences in change style preferences?**

**Results:** Thirteen adjective-pairs on a 7-point semantic differential scale were used to explore observable differences among the three change style preferences. Table 2 displays the adjective pairs, the mean colleague rating for persons placed in Conserver, Pragmatist, Originator styles based on their CSI scores and the difference in the Conserver and Originator means. The largest pair difference was Cautious vs. Risk-Oriented. All means are in the predicted direction following the pattern of Conserver on one end, Originator at the other and Pragmatist in the middle, except for the last two adjective pairs. For both of these pairs, the Pragmatist mean does not lie between the Conserver and the Originator means. The Pragmatist mean is skewed more toward “team-oriented” than is the Conserver mean or the Originator mean. The similarly, Pragmatist mean is skewed slightly more toward “mediating” than are the other two means.

**Conclusions:** Observable characteristics clearly differentiate the three change style

preferences. The Conservers are perceived to be more cautious, detail-focused, past-oriented, disciplined, deliberate and inflexible. The Originators are perceived to be risk-oriented, big picture thinkers, undisciplined and unorganized. The Pragmatist tend to occupy the middle ground. This pattern does not hold with the last two pairs, team-oriented vs. individualistic and mediating vs. divisive. Pragmatists appear more likely to focus on the group and they

also look for common ground and workable solutions that everyone can accept and support. In general, Conservers are more likely than others to support and preserve existing structure (rules, policies, systems, etc.) and Originators are more likely than others to challenge existing structure. Pragmatists appear more likely than Conservers or Originators to seek resolution and to focus on the people involved rather than on the structure.

**Table 2 – Adjective Pair and Change Style Preference Distributions**

Adjective Pairs (on a seven point scale)	Conserver Mean	Pragmatist Mean	Originator Mean	Difference of high/low means		
					1	2
Cautious / Risk-oriented	2.57	3.67	4.58	2.01		
Detailed / Big Picture	2.87	3.75	4.58	1.71		
Conventional / Unconventional	2.80	3.56	4.39	1.59		
Deliberate / Spontaneous	3.11	3.57	4.36	1.25		
Past Oriented / Future Oriented	4.03	4.82	5.27	1.24		
Bureaucratic / Entrepreneurial	3.80	4.28	4.94	1.14		
Disciplined / Undisciplined	2.59	2.85	3.70	1.11		
Organized / Unorganized	2.65	2.88	3.61	0.96		
Sentimental / Unsentimental	3.04	3.09	3.69	0.65		
Practical / Impractical	2.59	2.77	3.18	0.59		
Inflexible / Flexible	4.62	5.02	5.09	0.47		
Team Oriented / Individualistic	3.20	3.02	3.15	0.18		
Mediating / Divisive	4.89	4.86	5.06	0.17		

**Questions raised by this analysis:**

- What is the difference in effective vs. ineffective Conservers, Pragmatists, and Originators?
- How much does change style preference change with environmental circumstances?
- Is change style preference affected by profession and/or workplace or do people choose professions and work places because of change style preference?
- Does change style preference correlate with other personality measures such as MBTI?

## Research Summary Report Series

Discovery Learning publishes a series of research summary reports tailored for busy managers, consultants and trainers interested in new and emerging knowledge in the field of human resources and organizational development. We strive to make these reports informative, useful and concise. The series includes:

Number	Report Title	Number	Report Title
1	<i>Readiness to Learn and Transfer of Learning – Is There a Best Time for Leadership Development Training?</i>	7	<i>Debunking Myths about Decision Makers</i>
2	<i>Selecting Developmental Goals – Manager Priorities</i>	8	<i>Change Style Indicator and MBTI – Is there a connection?</i>
3	<i>Learning and Performing Management Behaviors – Who Are Better – Men or Women?</i>	9	<i>Business Benefits of Team Learning</i>
4	<i>Personality and Change – How Do People Respond Differently to Change?</i>	10	<i>Development of a Simulation Classification System</i>
5	<i>Participation and Decision Making Affect the Bottom-Line</i>	11	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile</i>
6	<i>Organizational Culture and Bottom-Line Performance</i>	12	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health</i>
		13	<i>Discovery Leadership Profile for the Public Sector</i>

### About Discovery Learning, Inc.

#### Our Mission:

Collaborating to build healthy and sustainable organizations through experiential learning and individual, team and organizational assessment.

#### Our Products:

Discovery Learning, Inc. offers a system of well-integrated and highly effective training tools designed to meet the key learning goals of 21<sup>st</sup> Century organizations. Our assessment instruments and performance-driven simulations span individual, team and organizational learning objectives.

#### **Assessments**

Change Style Indicator  
Decision Style Profile  
GoalGetter  
Denison Culture Survey  
Denison Leadership Survey  
Discovery Leadership Profile  
Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health  
Discovery Leadership Profile for the Public Sector  
Discovery Leadership Profile for Educators

#### **Simulations**

Paper Planes. Inc.  
PressTime  
OurTown  
Paper Scrapers  
AWAKA  
EdgeWork  
The Acquisition

#### **Training Modules**

Right Decisions Made Right



**Discovery Learning, Inc.**  
431 Spring Garden Street  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27401 · USA  
(336) 272-9530 Fax : (336) 273-4090  
[www.discoverylearning.com](http://www.discoverylearning.com)