# Decision Style Basics

## A Primer on Styles of Decision-Making

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## Introduction

The importance of understanding human information processing has greatly accelerated, as the focus of world society becomes information itself. The enormous strides in the technology of communication, the rise of globe spanning computer systems and the complexity of the very fabric of human endeavor has made human information processing a central issue for our times.

Yet, our understanding of how humans process information is still in a formative stage. Previously, the most common framework for analyzing intellectual processes was that of the intelligence or IQ field. The intent of this approach to human information is to assess the maximum capacity of individuals to retain information and to use information to draw accurate conclusions. While the intelligence assessment field is still very active, there are several problems that limit the utility of this field as a means of studying human information processing. In particular, most models of human intelligence assume that IQ remains fixed after individuals reach adulthood. Further, it also is commonly assumed that greater intelligence is always associated with better performance regardless of the situation in which decisions are made. In addition to making the intelligence field rather unpopular and threatening because of their elitist overtones, they also make it difficult to apply intelligence assessment techniques for training and development purposes.

More recently, an alternative approach to the study of human information processing has focused on cognitive styles. Cognitive styles are defined as acquired patterns or habits of information processing. Since styles are learned, they can change in response to varying circumstances. Furthermore, no one style is considered to be best. Research has shown that styles are effective when they meet the particular demands of a situation calling for a decision. So, different styles fit different situations.

Cognitive styles are not strongly related to intelligence. Given a normal level of intelligence, a person's style tells us how the individual's intellectual capacity can best be used. This appears to predict behavior and performance as well as, or better than,

the IQ approach. Only in subnormal intelligence cases would IQ be more crucial than cognitive style.

## Styles of Decision Making

Within the framework of cognitive style, we have developed the decision style model that we present in this paper.  The model describes varied habits of decision-making that people acquire through experience. Making decisions is a complex process involving problem definition, information search, creativity, alternatives generation, cost/benefit analysis and reality testing. People differ markedly in how they go about these activities. Because decision-making activities play a major role in human relationships, particularly in economic and working relationships, style differences among people broadly influence human affairs, from strategy formation in large organizations to individual consumer choice.

Although many factors affect human information processing, the decision style model has proven very predictive of behavior in a wide range of settings. It has been effective in matching individuals to the information demands of work, in determining training needed in information processing methods in different positions, and a guiding framework for people anticipating changing jobs or shifting career directions.

The decision style model has also proven very useful as a sales training tool, and as a framework for designing marketing strategies. The model can be used to identify the type of communication that will be most effective for a given audience. The decision style model is used also in high precision marketing efforts to target both the form and content of messages to fit the styles of specific customers or groups of consumers.

Another important application of the style model is in building, developing, and training multi-function teams. Briefly, the approach here is to profile the style requirements of specific team functions and then to identify the mix of styles needed in the team. Then the style model can be used to staff and train the team in how to use the varied styles of team members to meet the requirements of different tasks and situations the team faces. This sort of application can also be used in designing organizational arrangements, such as units and communication channels. As organizations develop new forms to meet the emerging challenges of today and the

future, such as the virtual organization and enterprise webs, understanding the information-processing needs and styles of people will serve as a critical tool in managing and developing relationships and roles.

## The Dimensions of Style

Our particular framework for identifying decision styles is based upon a conceptual model originally developed by Michael J. Driver and then further defined by Michael Driver and Kenneth Brousseau. The current model, called the Dynamic Decision Style Model, is based on over twenty years of research into the dynamics of decision-making. The model has two basic dimensions. One dimension deals with the amount of information a person typically uses in problem solving and decision-making. The other dimension deals with focus (*i.e.*, whether a person typically narrows decisions down to one course of action, on the one hand, or generates a variety of alternatives and options, on the other).

### Information Use: Maximizers and Satisficers

People differ widely in the amount of information they use in decision-making. Some people reach conclusions on the basis of just a few facts. Others reach conclusions only after gathering and studying large amounts of information.

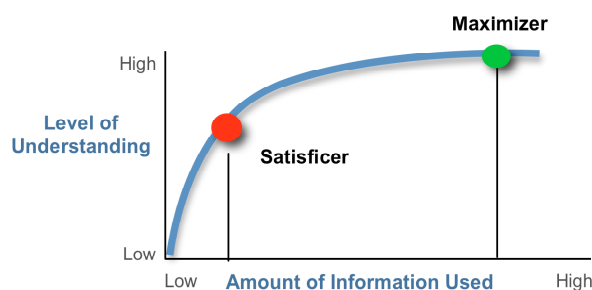**Figure 1**

# Two Styles of Information Use



Figure 1 graphically portrays the difference between the low and high information users. The curve shows that, in general, the first items of information that considered when making a decision contribute more to one's understanding of a situation than do

items of information taken into account later on, after one already knows a lot about the situation. Early on, however, one's knowledge is moving from zero to something greater.

As the fact-finding and evaluation process continues, however, the value of any one item of information begins to decrease. Its marginal utility gradually falls off until additional information produces almost no new learning about the situation

We have found that some people stop evaluating information at the point where they feel that they have a "good enough" understanding of the situation to come up with one or more acceptable solutions. We call this mode of information use the satisficer mode. Satisficers know that there is more information that they could take into consideration, but their tendency is to want to get on with things. They prefer to keep moving, rather than "analyzing things to death."

At the other extreme is the maximizer mode. Maximizers want to be sure that they have considered all of the relevant facts, and that they have missed no important details, no matter how subtle. Their interest is in coming up with a high quality solution or in learning something new and important.

We like to use two individuals, each of whom built gigantic business empires, but who used very different styles, to illustrate the satisficer and maximize styles: J. Paul Getty, founder of Getty Oil, and Howard Hughes, founder of Hughes Aircraft and RKO Pictures. Getty exemplified the satisficer style. He often acted swiftly, seemingly on the basis of intuition, without elaborate analyses and plans. He seemed sure that if problems popped up he would be able to deal with them later. Meanwhile, he often acted on the spur of the moment.

Hughes, as an exemplar of the maximizing style, couldn't have been more different from Getty, planning everything with intricate detail. He seemed bent on being sure that he had left no fact uncovered, no contingency unconsidered. For example, in planning his famous around the world flight, he had a device designed and constructed solely for the purpose of straining oil just in case he was forced down in Siberia where only a particular crude grade of oil was available.

We see neither the satisficer nor the maximizer mode as superior to the other. Each has its place. Satisficers have the edge over maximizers when issues are relatively simple or clear, and when time pressure is high and important deadlines must be met. They fare best when a high amount of sheer activity is needed, when there are demanding productivity and efficiency goals to be met, and in situations where -- for better or worse -- decisions must be made now.

Maximizers, on the other hand, have the edge in situations where time deadlines are relatively few and far between, and when issues are ill-defined and/or complex, with many parts. They also have the edge when decisions will have important and continuing long-term consequences, as for example when laying plans for an expensive new business facility, or when making a major investment in a new product line.

### Uni-Focus and Multi-Focus Decision-Makers

When faced with a situation calling for problem-solving, some people typically come up with one specific solution that they feel is the best or most feasible for the situation. We call this the uni-focus mode.
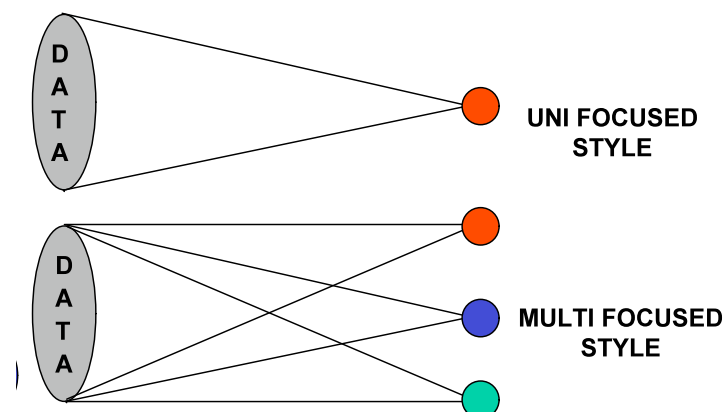
## Solution Focus



**Figure 2**

Other people, faced with the same situation, will quite predictably generate a variety of alternatives or options for dealing with the situation. This is the multi-focus mode.

These two modes of decision making are depicted in Figure 2. Keep in mind that information use and focus are completely independent of each other. Maximizers and satisficers are equally likely to be uni-focus or multi-focus decision-makers.

Uni-focus and multi-focus differences are easy to recognize in business strategies. Multi-focus decision-makers prefer strategies that are marked by diversification, perhaps even across industries. Their inclination is to want a mix of different businesses and activities rather than a strategy strictly focusing on one product or service.

Uni-focus decision-makers prefer a strategy that concentrates in one industry or, perhaps, one product line. Too much diversification they see as distracting and detrimental to effectiveness. They want to have a clear and definite focus.

Focus differences between people are a major source of tension.  Differences in information use affect interpersonal relationships, too. Satisficers tend to feel impatient with maximizers. Maximizers feel that their satisficing co-workers are hasty or impulsive. However, focus differences are more likely to erupt in outright conflict.

As a case in point, some of the very early research on decision styles studied relationships between college or university roommates. The research showed that focus similarities and differences among college roommates had a greater impact on how well they got along with each other than did similarities and differences in social class backgrounds, college majors and any other interests and hobbies. Can you see why?

Uni-focus decision-makers tend to have very strong views about how things ought to be done. Faced with any situation, they usually have a very specific criterion in mind, such as cost, quality, or fairness, by which they will evaluate any potential solution. So, they usually will find a solution that stacks up best according to their criterion or goal.

Multi-focus thinkers, on the other hand, often use many criteria to evaluate potential solutions. They tend to have many goals. So, whereas one solution may fit some criteria very well, another course of action may fit other criteria better. Consequently, they are more open to alternatives and are more conditional in their thinking.

This conditional way of thinking rubs uni-focus decision-makers the wrong way. To them, it appears as though their multi-focus associates are confused, wishy-washy, lacking in values, or simply "flakey."  On the other hand, the strong, highly focused views of the uni-focus people strike the multi-focus thinkers as being rigid, narrow, unyielding, and dogmatic. When the tension escalates, these rather polite descriptors give way to even more colorful adjectives!

But, here again, neither focus mode has an absolute edge on the other. In situations where there literally is a best solution, the uni-focus decision-makers fare better. They do well also in situations where following specific procedures, or decision rules, is required to arrive at conclusions, whereas multi-focus decision-makers are inclined to bend the rules needlessly or to invent new rules of their own. In addition, the uni-focus mode fits better when other people must be able to rely in the future on commitments that are made now. (Imagine a public transportation system managed in the multi-focus mode!) The uni-focus mode works best in functions such as production and auditing.

Multi-focus decision-makers take the lead, however, when new territory must be charted and there are no known guidelines to follow, and also when outcomes that might result from various actions are uncertain. Many research and development situations fit this description. Not surprisingly, we find that multi-focus decision-makers are found in large numbers in design engineering jobs, and in marketing positions as well as in sales.

## Four Basic Styles

By combining the two modes of information use and the two focus modes, several fundamentally different decision styles can be identified. These styles are shown in Figure 3, which also identifies key attributes of each style. Generally speaking, an

individual will tend to use one or two of these styles more frequently than the others, and probably will use the others too, but less frequently.

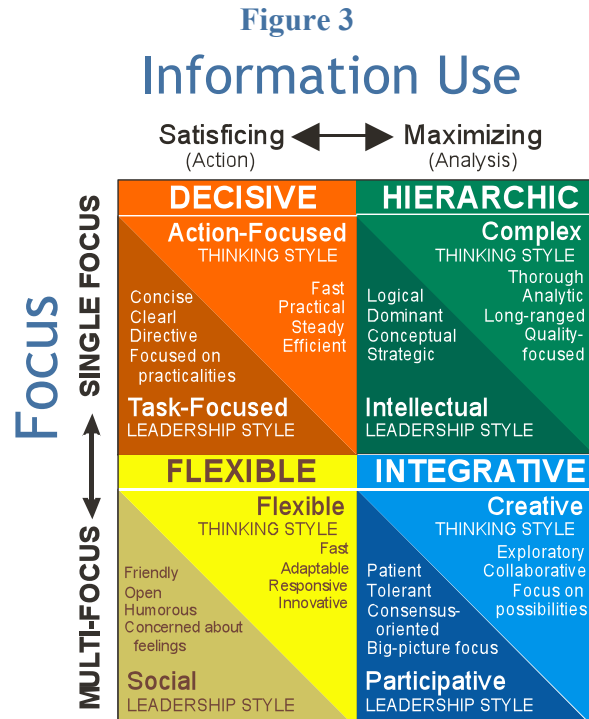Let's take a quick look at each of the styles.

### The Decisive Style

Decisive is a satisficing and uni-focus style. When using the Decisive style, people use a minimum amount of information to rapidly come to a clear decision about a course of action. They value *action*, *speed*, *efficiency* and *consistency*. People who use this style frequently tend *to stick to a particular course of action*. Once a decision is made, they put it into action and move on to the next decision. Re-evaluating

**Figure 3**

## Information Use

decisions and changing one's mind occurs seldom. In dealing with other people, the key characteristics on the Decisive style are honesty, clarity, and loyalty. The Decisive style puts a premium on brevity: one says what one has to say with a minimum of words. Life is too short to beat around the bush. Time is precious! Wasting time is a punishable offense!

### The Flexible Style

Flexible is a satisficing, multi-focus style. Like the Decisive, the Flexible moves fast. But, here the emphasis is on *adaptability*. The Flexible way of thinking is very fluid. Any piece of information is seen as having several interpretations and implications. Faced with a problem requiring action, a person working in the Flexible mode will rapidly identify a line of attack; if it appears not to be working, they quickly will *shift to a different course of action*. At any moment, the Flexible might drop one tactic in

favor of another, often at a moment's notice when the situation appears to be shifting.

Interpersonally, a person whose style is primarily Flexible is likely to be very *engaging* and *supportiv*e. When in the Flexible mode, effort will be made to keep things casual and open and to keep people feeling good, often with a liberal dose of humor. Conflict is something to avoid. There's no point in getting into an argument or debate when so many choices are available and the situation is bound to change anyway.  The motto of the Flexible style is, "Hey – if it doesn't work, we'll just try something else!"

## The Hierarchic Style

The Hierarchic way of thinking is the antithesis of the Flexible style. The Hierarchic is a maximizing and uni-focus mode of thinking and deciding. People whose styles are mainly Hierarchic do not rush to judgment. Their views and decisions are carefully considered and based on lots of information and analysis. In reaching a final decision, a serious effort is made to arrive at the best possible course of action for the situation at hand. Decision-making and planning converge and overlap in the Hierarchic style. So, decisions include logic, rational, and detailed specifications. A good decision is one that will stand the test of time.

Interpersonally, when working in the Hierarchic mode, a person can be counted on to present lots of information, and to expect others to be able to do the same. So, when dealing with someone whose style is mainly Hierarchic, you can have your views, your analysis, and your decisions challenged. One should be able to defend one's decisions. Decision-making is serious business and there isn't much joking around or taking distracting digressions. Because decisions should stand the test of time, there should be no rushing to judgment. It's important to take whatever time and use whatever resources are necessary to arrive at a high quality decision. From the Hierarchic perspective, if something isn't worth doing the right way, then it probably isn't worth doing at all!

## The Integrative Style

Whereas, people whose styles are mainly Hierarchic tend to stick with a course of action or method that produces high quality results, modifying it only to tune it up a

bit, people whose styles are mainly Integrative can be counted on to never do the same thing the same way twice. As a maximizing, multi-focused way of thinking and deciding, the Integrative style involves a lot of thinking and analyzing prior to reaching decisions. However, the effort is not necessarily to reach a "best decision" – there may be many of those! Instead, the inclination is to see any situation as quite unique and as likewise requiring a unique solution. Therefore, it is part and parcel of the Integrative style to prize innovative and creative solutions. After all, off-the-shelf solutions are not likely to fit problems and situations that are themselves unique. Moreover, the tendency is to frame any situation calling for a decision very broadly and to see it as consisting of multiple parts that overlap, perhaps, with other, related situations. Consequently, decisions and courses of action also should be broadly defined and should consist of multiple courses of action.  No one, narrow, course of action will do.

Interpersonally, people working in the Integrative mode appreciate diverse and divergent ideas – even ideas or points of view that differ considerably from those of their own. Diversity makes life interesting! So, when working with others, Integrative-thinking people like lots of input and are quite happy to patiently explore a whole range of points of view before arriving at any conclusion. They encourage input and participation. Decisions that are taken ultimately combine the input of many and are not likely to reflect the input, analyses or preferences of any one person. Digressions that may irritate others are welcomed or, at the very minimum, patiently tolerated – they may yield a new insight or a creative new idea! Viewed from the Integrative perspective, decision-making is not an event; it is a process – a process that should be stimulating, engaging a fun!

Although, Integratives may value efficiency, quality, and adaptability, these considerations tend to pale in significance compared to the importance that they attach to *creativity* and *exploration*. Methods and plans are never fixed or final. Why? Because no two situations are the same, and because situations change, says the Integrative.

## Once Again: No Best Style

None of the styles we just described is better or worse than any of the other styles in an absolute sense. There is no Superman style here, nor is there a Failure style among

the four. Each of the decision styles has its own strengths and weaknesses "built-in," so to speak.

In general, the Decisive and Flexible styles have the edge when things have to be done *now,* particularly when the issues that must be considered are relatively simple and clear.

The Hierarchic, Integrative and Systemic styles excel when problems are complex and decisions will have costly, long-term consequences.

The Decisive and Hierarchic styles have the advantage in highly structured or regulated situations, where experimentation or exploration cannot or will not be tolerated. But, on the other hand, the Flexible and Integrative styles are superior in highly changeable situations where there is a lot of new territory to be covered.

## Primary and Secondary Styles

As you probably already can see, few people use only one style. However, for most of us, there is a particular style that we use more frequently than the others. We call this style a person's primary style. The style toward which a person drifts most frequently when not in primary style we call the person's secondary style. So, although a person may have a primary Decisive style, that same person may have the Integrative style as a secondary. For most people, there are two styles, a primary and a secondary style, that are used quite frequently. For some people, there is more than one secondary style that they use quite frequently when not using their primary style. What this means is that any one person's behavior can shift dramatically as a person moves between primary and secondary styles. This is why we call our decision style framework the dynamic decision style model. A person's styles can change both in the short-run and long-run.

We find that shifts between primary and secondary styles are not random; they follow a predictable pattern related to the amount of pressure that a person is experiencing. Figure 4 shows the relationship between information use and environmental load for two people.  "Environmental load" simply refers to anything in a person's immediate environment that creates a sense of pressure.

Examples of load factors are: time pressure, uncertainty, complexity, and the prospect of important consequences both good and bad.

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As Figure 4 indicates, people use most information, or see more options, under moderate load conditions. In the figure, the curves show this to be true for both Person A and Person B. In both cases, the curve follows an inverted-U pattern. So, when load or pressure is moderate, people are inclined to use their most complex style. Maximizer styles are more complex than satisficer styles; multi-focused styles are more complex than uni-focused styles. So, maximizer/multi-focused styles are most complex. The styles proceed from the least complex to the most complex in this order: Decisive, Flexible, Hierarchic, Integrative, and Systemic.

When pressure is very high, however, people tend to shift toward their less analytic, more focused styles. In high

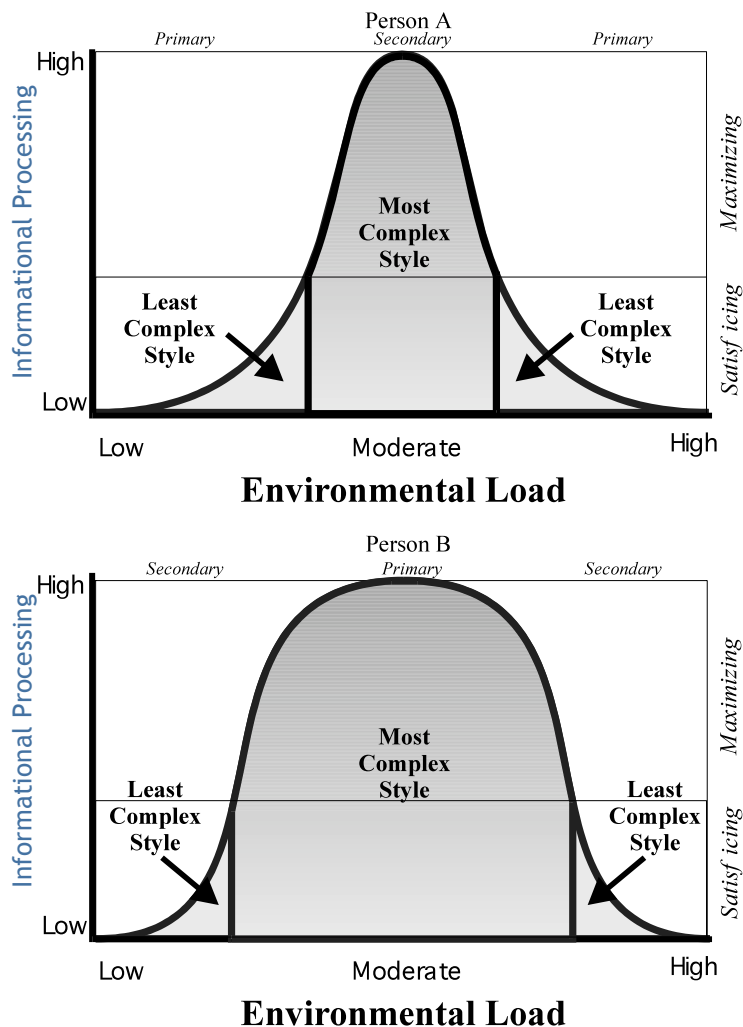## The Dynamics of Environmental Load and Style Use



**Figure 4**

pressure situations, such as crises, emergencies, or just before a critical schedule deadline, people tend to hit overload conditions when the "circuits are jammed." Analytic and multi-focused thinking becomes virtually impossible.

On the other extreme, very low load conditions simply are not stimulating enough to support analytic thinking. Very low load involve relatively simple, routine decisions that have little importance such as routinely ordering supplies, or completing forms.

Moderate load conditions prevail when the issues to be decided are important, but time pressure is low. Many planning or policy making functions have these characteristics, and many corporate staff positions remain relatively constant in moderate load territory, except before board meetings and when quarterly reports become due.

Executive and senior management positions in operating units tend toward high load (high importance, plus time pressure), and this becomes even more the case for positions that are faced with constant crises.

The relationship between style and environmental load provides an important key to understanding how people develop various primary and secondary style combinations. For example, if you work in a highly pressure packed situation where "'fighting fires" is the norm, the chances are that you will develop a simpler style (e.g., Decisive or Flexible) as your primary style. Even so, you might have an analytic secondary style, say Systemic. Your Systemic style will come to the forefront on those days when you are able to step back from the hectic pace to work on some plans for the future. When you return once more to the front lines, however, your plans will tend to fade into the background as the press of events requires you once more to make on-the-spot decisions. At this point, your load curve might resemble that of Person B in Figure 4.

Suppose now that, because of your excellent performance on the front lines, your superiors decide to promote you into a higher management position at corporate headquarters. Now, the pace of events shifts to a somewhat slower speed and you are given responsibility for conducting studies and proposing plans relative to your company's future business strategy. Assuming that you survive this abrupt shift in roles, we would expect that your primary and secondary styles would begin to change. Most

likely, you will find yourself using your Systemic style more often, and your Decisive style less frequently.

In effect, your analytic "window" will gradually open to the point that you may find yourself using the Systemic style in situations where formerly you surely would have been in Decisive mode. This process probably would be noticeable even off the job, as you find yourself giving more and more consideration to factors you would never before have taken into account when, for example, you shop for a new car, or plan a vacation.

Understanding the dynamics that move you between your primary and secondary styles can contribute very significantly to your success in your career. Most of the time, we are unaware of *how* we are making decisions. As we pointed out earlier, styles are habits. Habits are unconscious for the most part. This means that in most situations we will make no judgment about how to go about thinking and deciding. Instead, we will be on automatic pilot. Consequently, we often will walk straight into situations that will push our decision making and thinking one way or another without our realizing what is going on.

However, knowledge of style dynamics can put you in control. If, for example, you realize that you have a critical decision to make that will have long-term effects on you and on others, you now can begin to take steps to assure that pressures will not push you unwittingly into a highly Decisive style.

You can also take advantage of this same knowledge in dealing with others. You will begin to see when others around you shift styles. This will help you anticipate others' behavior. For example, suppose that occasionally, but infrequently, a particular person comes up with ideas that are truly creative and innovative. You would like to see more of these ideas. So, you could begin by taking steps to explore new ideas with the person when you know that he or she is not feeling a lot of stress or pressure.

## Role Styles and Operating Styles

Sizing up a person's decision style often is made difficult by the fact that the style a person uses in more formal situations differs from the style that the person is likely to

use in day-to-day work situations. This is one of the reasons that employment interviewing is such a notoriously inaccurate way to evaluate job applicants.

When people are conscious of the need to present a favorable image, they usually behave in a manner that reflects what we call *role style*. For example, a person will be in role style when making a speech, when making an important formal presentation, or when delivering a briefing in a staff meeting. This is when the person will attempt to behave as he or she believes one *should* behave.

A person's *operating style*, on the other hand, is the style that a person is most likely to fall into naturally when going about a task or when making a decision without being aware of how he or she is thinking or behaving. It is the style that a person uses when least self-aware, when a person's attention is focused on a decision that must be made or on a task immediately at hand.

When people meet other people for the first time, or when they deal with other people in formal circumstances, they quite naturally want to create favorable impressions of themselves. Even though the impression that they project at these times may not be representative of them when they are less aware of the signals that they are sending to other people, you should not conclude that they are consciously forcing a "phony image."

Most people are quite unaware that their behavior often changes markedly as they shift their attention from interpersonal relationships to other issues. All that is required to prompt a shift from role style to operating style is for a person to lose sight of himself or herself, or to feel unconcerned for the moment about how his or her relationship with another person is faring. So, even though a person is thinking and behaving quite differently than a short time earlier, the person probably is completely unaware of that fact.

It's not that people think they are behaving the same way as always when they are in operating style. The fact is simply that they are not thinking about how they are thinking.

So, for example, it isn't unusual to find that a person who comes across as Hierarchic (strong opinions backed up by lots of facts and logic), on a first meeting, will begin to

show a more multi-focused side as your relationship develops over the course of time. Eventually, you may find that the person actually has a Flexible primary operating style.

The same thing may be true for you. You may project a much different image of yourself, when you are conscious of the fact that other people are paying attention to you and your behavior, than you do when attention moves from you to other things, people, or issues. Probably, you are more aware of how you behave when the spotlight is upon you -- when you are in role style -- than when yours and others' attention is focused elsewhere -- when you are in operating mode.  However, people who are familiar with you and work with you often are likely to clearly see your operating style.

The fact that many people misperceive their own styles was made clear to us once again recently when we statistically analyzed the relationships between primary role and operating styles for a sample of people whose styles we had assessed during the preceding two years. As usual we found almost no correlation between role and operating styles. What this means is that if you have identified a person's role style, you still know virtually nothing about that person's operating style.

However, the small correlation that we did find between operating and role styles showed some surprising patterns. When we asked, "What role styles do people with different operating styles have?" here is what we found:

- Individuals with primary Decisive operating styles were most inclined to describe themselves as Integrative;

- Individuals with primary Flexible operating styles were most inclined to describe themselves as Decisive;

- Individuals with primary Hierarchic operating styles were most inclined to describe themselves as Flexible;

- Individuals with primary Integrative operating styles were not quite sure which style best described them, but most often saw themselves as having any but Integrative!

# Dealing With Others' Decision Styles

To deal effectively with other people you ideally should identify both role and operating styles. Role styles are relatively easy to identify, inasmuch as they are the styles that you are likely to see first when meeting a person. To identify a person's operating style, however, may take longer. Nevertheless, even on a first meeting you may see a person's operating style break through as conversation and attention turn to substantive issues and the person becomes less conscious of the interpersonal relations aspects of the meeting. So, it is important to stay alert to subtle changes in the behavior of people you have only seen previously in formal situations.

## Decision Style Characteristics

| | **Decisive** | **Flexible** | **Hierarchic** | **Integrative** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Values** | Efficiency<br>Speed<br>Consistency | Adaptability<br>Speed<br>Variety<br>Openness | Quality<br>Knowledge<br>Logic<br>Precision | Creativity<br>Exploration<br>Information<br>Listening |
| **Planning** | Short-range<br>Clear objective<br>Concise schedule | Short-range<br>Many options<br>Changeable | Long-range<br>Clear objective<br>Logical strategy<br>Backup contingencies to meet key objective | Long-range<br>Multiple goals<br>Multiple actions<br>Subject to modification |
| **Organization** | Short span-of-control<br>Clear rules and policies<br>Concise job descriptions | Loosely defined structure<br>Few rules and policies<br>Overlapping roles | Broad span-of-control<br>Centralized authority<br>Elaborate policies and procedures<br>Automation | Team-based or matrix organization<br>Diversified units, operations, and products<br>Decentralized authority |
| **Communication** | Short and terse<br>Fast-paced<br>Focus on actions needed and actions taken | Short and fast-paced<br>Highly verbal - lots of talking<br>Varied topics<br>Alternative choices<br>Humor | Lengthy messages<br>References to strategic plans and vision<br>Information about progress toward goal<br>Logical explanations | Long and winding<br>Alternative perspectives on issues<br>New ideas<br>Strategic options<br>Varied pros and cons of alternate solutions |

**Figure 5**

To help you size up the styles of other people, Figure 5 shows a number of key behaviors and values that characterize different decision styles. These characteristics can be used as clues that will give you a "best guess" about a person's styles.

The last row in Figure 5, which deals with communicating, shows some of the reasons that communication between people can falter so easily. In many respects, communication between people with different decision styles resembles the proverbial ships passing in the night. The people may be speaking the same language, but more often than not they will remain "out of synch" and out of touch.

By making the effort to identify a person's styles you can significantly increase the probability of communicating and dealing effectively with that person. Figure 6 gives some basic pointers that you can use to adjust to the styles of other people. These pointers can be especially valuable when making presentations, selling, or negotiating. However, you can use them effectively also in everyday communications and dealings with others.

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Figure 6

# Communicating with Other Styles

</div>

| **Decisive** | **Hierarchic** | **Systemic** |
|---|---|---|
| Be on time. Minimize the chit chat. Get to the point. Be assured & positive Be clear & direct. Make clear recommendations Be firm. Be fast. Get to bottom line. | Be prepared. Ask for & use their input. Allow time for discussion. Have facts handy. Listen to them carefully. Show your logic. Don't press for answer. Share credit with them. | Stay in touch. Communicate, communicate, communicate! Get them involved early. Use lots of information. Find connections with their goals. Give lots of time to mull things over Give them credit for their ideas. Let them change your ideas and suggestions. |
| **Flexible** | **Integrative** | |
| Be on time. Allow time to talk. Keep it informal. Don't ask for long commitment Keep an open mind. Use humor. Shift as necessary. | Build the relationship. Have a variety of input. Present problem, not solution & invite input. Avoid absolutes. Stress the people issues Shift topics as necessary | |

As Figure 6 shows, Decisive communications should be short and to the point, without elaborate explanations and analyses. Be sure not to keep a Decisive in suspense: you

could lose the person's attention and confidence easily. Keep your points clear and stress the major benefits (but not too many) of accepting your recommendation.

With Flexibles, you also need to avoid elaborate detail and explanations. Be careful not to "beat an issue to death." If you do, your Flexible associate will begin to see you as plodding and dogmatic. Don't expect or push for long-term commitment. And, don't try to nail things down too specifically. Instead, look for agreement to try out one or two ideas. Then keep in touch with brief and general progress reports. Overall, try not to be too intense (so, watch out if your own style is Hierarchic).

The picture changes dramatically when communicating with Hierarchics. In this case, you will need to carefully construct your logic. Be sure to show that you used a lot of data to arrive at your conclusion or recommendation. Also, make it clear how you used the data on which you are basing your position. At all times, make sure to show your logic. Also, be sure to point out both short-term and long-term benefits you anticipate. Don't win an argument, but don't vacillate or acquiesce too easily either. Also, don't expect immediate acceptance of your point of view. Give your Hierarchic associate some time to mull things over. If possible, "prime the pump" by sending information supporting your point of view in advance. Hierarchics are unlikely to completely go along with an idea until they feel that they have convinced *themselves* of the wisdom of doing so.

With Integratives you can forget about getting a pre-conceived idea accepted without modifications.  Integratives want to participate with you in the analysis of a problem and in the formulation of solutions.  So, be prepared to have an interactive discussion. You must remain open to new ideas and alternatives.  Expect to play give and take. React with interest to criticisms of your analysis or your proposals.  Ask for input and alternative ideas.  Keep some additional alternatives in the back of your mind at all times.  Do not hold rigidly to one point of view.  If you do, your Integrative associates simply will lose interest in your issue and your ideas.  As with Hierarchics, don't expect on-the-spot decisions.  Try to get agreement for several strategies and keep your Integrative associates involved and informed.  As you can see, communications with Integratives are dynamic and evolving; they are not events!

Bear in mind that in dealing with the Systemic style, a combination of techniques for dealing with Hierarchics and with Integratives would be appropriate.  Be even more diligent about keeping your Systemic associates informed and involved.  Send supporting information in advance long before making a presentation or proposal.  Don't get into arguments.  Show your openness, but keep the information and logic flowing.  And, here again, forget about getting a recommendation or proposal accepted in its original form.  If you run into obstinate resistance, table the issue diplomatically and try again another time.

Clearly, there are many applications for these communication guidelines. Whenever people interact, style similarities and differences will importantly determine the outcomes of interactions. In particular, whenever interactions involve influencing decisions, styles play a critical role. For instance, in sales and marketing efforts, very large commitments of money and resources are often invested in attempts to promote sales, but usually without any reference to the actual or probable styles of customers. However, making a sale means influencing a decision. With this in mind, the style model has been used in the past few years in many countries as a basis for sales training. And, currently, organizations are beginning to use the model for purposes of large-scale customer style sensing, as the foundation for high-precision marketing efforts.

We believe that these and many additional, innovative applications of the dynamic decision style model will emerge in the near future as pressure mounts to effectively manage our mounting dependence on information in this Age of Information.

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## About the Authors

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Michael J. Driver was Professor of Organization and Management at the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Southern California until his death in 2004. He received his Masters and Ph.D. degree in industrial-social psychology from Princeton University. Professor Driver also was cofounder of Decision Dynamics LLC, a consulting and publishing firm specializing in behavioral assessment systems.

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Kenneth R. Brousseau is cofounder and chief executive officer of Decision Dynamics LLC, a firm specializing in behavior profiling and human resource systems design.  Dr. Brousseau received his Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Yale University. Prior to forming Decision Dynamics, he was on the faculty in the Management and Organization department at the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Southern California

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