

Diagnostic Instruments

MSM 500: Management of People in Society

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review personal results, perceived usefulness, and application of behavioral diagnostic instruments in the workforce. The assessments were completed over the course of a semester as part of the course requirements. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Learning Styles and Brain Dominance, Emotional Intelligence, Tolerance of Ambiguity, and Locus of Control will be reviewed.

Diagnostic Instruments

Diagnostic instruments can be used to assess individual traits, preferences, and behaviors in people. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Learning Styles and Brain Dominance, Emotional Intelligence, Tolerance of Ambiguity, and Locus of Control are common diagnostic instruments used to assess individual personality preferences, the way people learn and approach decision making, and how people tolerate ambiguity. This paper will review these assessments, the perceived usefulness, and application in the workforce.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a psychological assessment developed to measure personality types and preferences based on Jung's theory of behavior (Coe, 1992). There are sixteen psychological types based on combinations of the following: extroversion or introversion, sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. My MBTI is INTJ which means that I gain my energy internally versus externally; I tend think things through versus observing through my senses; I analyze situations for logical solutions; and I make decisions in an orderly way (Myers Briggs Foundation).

The MBTI has been useful to me professionally. As a manager, we used this assessment as a team building activity which gave employees a better perspective of personalities and preferences. This was especially helpful for me and my staff as this gave us the opportunity to better understand each other and to build a cohesive team. According to John Bradley and Frederic Hebert (1997), personality types should be considered when developing teams to ensure a diverse balance of personalities. Too many of one personality type may overtake the group or intimidate other members which leads to less cohesiveness and can impact productivity (Bradley & Hebert, 1997). That being said, the MBTI should not be used solely to select employees or

place people on teams since the assessment is limited in that it only measures preferences for personality traits, not levels of performance (Coe, 1992).

In looking at personality preferences and creating relationships, Anne Russell (2002) explored the use of MBTI in relation to how students address online learning. Russell (2002) found that students taking classes online identify with either a community interactive environment or an independent environment and that different personalities approach online learning in different ways. Students reported that it was easier to express opinions online versus in person because of the anonymous feeling of the asynchronous environment, while other students missed the face to face contact (Russell, 2002). Russell concluded that further research with a wider range of MBTI types is needed and that synchronous as well as asynchronous online environments be included in the study.

Learning Styles and Brain Dominance

Learning styles and brain dominance guide how one learns and thinks. Along with right, left, and whole brain dominance/thinking, there are seven learning styles: verbal, aural, visual, logical, kinesthetic, solitary, and social (Zajac, 2009). Questionnaires based on intelligence theories, such as the KS-TIW in Poland, can be used to analyze and determine individual learning styles (Zajac, 2009). Brain dominance theory suggests that the left and right sides of the brain process information differently, which in turn, may impact how right and left brained thinkers approach tasks (Moore, Snider, & Luchini, 2012). My scores on the learning style and brain dominance assessments indicate that I am an auditory learner, score 17; closely followed by kinesthetic learner, score 16; and visual learner, 10; and that I have a strong right brain dominance with a score of 15 and left brain score of 5. My scores indicate that I learn best by being able to hear directions or conversations along with being able to act and/or physically

apply what I've learned. Hanna, Wagle, and Kizilbash (1999) state that right brain people tend to excel with spatial tasks whereas left brain people tend to treat tasks in a serial manner (as cited in Moore, Snider, and Luchini, 20120). This differentiation is interesting to me as my approach to tasks is more frequently serial in manner versus spatial.

Understanding how individuals learn and think is helpful as a manager. During training, I frequently ask how people learn best and try to accommodate learning styles to achieve the best learning environment for everyone involved. Zajac (2009) took a similar approach to online learning. She administered the KS-TIW to determine learning styles for online students to allow for personalization of the online learning environment (Zajac, 2009). While time consuming and not easily adaptable, this allowed students to experience asynchronous teaching through preferred learning styles.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to control emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth through appraisal, expression, and recognition of emotions both individually, as well as in others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997 as cited in Engle & Nehrt, 2011). My score on the Emotional Intelligence assessment was a 71 which indicates that I'm reasonably skilled with regard to identifying and expressing emotions and perceiving the same in others. As a manager, I have found that it is beneficial to be able to recognize the emotions of my staff, which often determines their motivation. This allows me to relate to and empathize with them, but to also effectively manage situations for the optimal outcome.

Due to interest of EI in human resource management, Dulewicz and Higgs (2004) performed a study to determine whether or not Emotional Intelligence can be developed. In the study, Dulewicz et al. (2004) found that, in broad terms, EI can be developed, but that the extent

to which EI could be developed differed. From a management standpoint, further development and training on EI would be beneficial at all levels of an organization. This would allow for people to learn to better cope with their personal emotions as well as work with and recognize emotions in others.

Tolerance of Ambiguity

Tolerance of ambiguity as described by Stoycheva (2003) is “the way people perceive, interpret, and react to ambiguous situations” (as cited in Kajs & McCollum, 2009). People who are intolerant of ambiguity tend to feel uneasy or threatened because the situations around them are often vague or uncertain (Stoycheva, 2003 as cited in Kajs & McCollum, 2009). The overall results of this assessment show that I have a moderately high intolerance for ambiguity with a score of 71. This didn’t really surprise me as I am easily frustrated when I don’t have all of the information I need and/or want. While I don’t necessarily feel uneasy or threatened in these situations, I have consciously worked to better deal with ambiguity and accept situations over which I may have no control. This approach has been beneficial as a manager as I have been able to work with staff to accept ambiguous situations as they occur with little anxiety or impact on the team.

Since intolerance of ambiguity may leave one feeling unsure or uneasy, ambiguity tolerance is a concept that counselor educators focus on with new students. To do this, counselor educators teach students to view ambiguous situations as “desirable” and introduce them to multiple models of core counseling skills (Levitt & Jacques, 2005). This helps students to become competent in dealing with ambiguity as well as apply other counseling skills depending on the different situations. Levitt & Jacques (2005) also suggest that developmental level be

addressed in teaching methods since students are likely thinking at a transitional level. This will also help counseling students to build ambiguity tolerance.

Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to how people perceive and attribute events in life. People with an internal locus of control believe that they are in control of their environment while people with an external locus of control attribute their behavior to external factors. I have always felt that I am responsible for my actions and I find it frustrating when others do not accept responsibility for themselves. For this reason, my score of 93 on the Locus of Control assessment didn't surprise me. This assessment was one of my favorites as it really helped me to better understand my staff and students, and the individual perspectives behind why people approach situations and outcomes differently.

Cassidy and Eachus (2000) determined that students with an internal locus of control and high academic self-confidence are likely to have higher levels of academic success, while students with an external locus of control and low academic self-confidence are more likely to be associated with lower academic achievement. This same principle can be applied in managing staff in that it is important to recognize behaviors and how internal and external forces may impact overall outcomes.

Conclusion

Behavioral diagnostic instruments provide useful information about people and can be applied in personal and/or professional settings. The results of the assessments can provide helpful information about personality preferences, learning styles, emotions, ambiguity, and preferences for control, all of which play a role in working with and better understanding others.

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