

# Background for the *Decision-Making Style Inventory*

There is a continuing quest to understand how we interact in the world. On a day-to-day basis, this quest may begin with personal musings about how we as individuals make our way in the world, how we interact with our significant others, and finally, how we can accomplish the tasks we need to accomplish in our professional lives. Deciding what we must do next is increasingly a fundamental issue for each of us—and how we decide will affect the quality of our lives and our work.

Thus, the area of individual differences in human behavior is one of the most fascinating and long-studied areas of research. Depending on how we define an individual difference, it can be as broad as Freud's notion of human behavior or as discrete as a single way of viewing figure, as with the studies in field dependence and independence. However, somewhere along this continuum is a point at which an individual difference is particularly relevant to learning and human interaction. This point, or perhaps more accurately, this region, has been variously characterized as "cognitive style," "learning style," or "decision-making style." While there are important differences in how people view these characterizations, they reflect an underlying sense that each individual has a preferred way of gathering, organizing, and processing information. Understanding these individual differences is important when it comes to understanding oneself as well as the styles of others. Further, this understanding becomes very important in any interpersonal relationship, private or professional, that must be attended to, nurtured, or managed.

It was against this background that Richard Johnson, who completed his doctorate at the University of Missouri and was working as the director of the Career Counseling Center at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, first proposed his theory of decision-making styles. Based on hundreds of interviews with people trying to choose a career, Rich found that people employed two approaches to gathering information and then two approaches to analyzing this information. He identified four decision-making styles that are more specific than most theories of learning styles, yet not so broad as theories of personality. In filling this middle ground, Johnson proposed an easily understood, unique, and generally applicable theory of individual differences

that has proven valuable in dealing with others. Rich had begun to create a self-report inventory to assess these styles when he passed away. I had begun to work with Rich and have continued the development and refinement of the *Decision-Making Style Inventory (DMSI)* since his death.

The *DMSI* is an important contribution to the world of decision making, as studies have come to show that successful decision making requires flexibility in style.

The *Decision-Making Style Inventory* is a self-report inventory designed to help individuals understand themselves and those around them, for example, the ability to identify one's own style and the style of a co-worker, and then to articulate those differences and respect one another's decision-making styles, can help us to avoid tension and allow us to work together more effectively.