

# *The Decision-Making Style Inventory*

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

William Coscarelli



# *The Decision-Making Style Inventory*

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What can you achieve with this inventory?**

The *Decision-Making Style Inventory* (DMSI) provides an understanding of four unique and empirically validated decision-making styles. These styles emerged from hundreds of interviews with adults who were in the process of making career decisions. The styles are easy to understand and can be applied in either a personal and professional setting.

The DMSI is about how we gather information and then process it. It is not about smart or dumb, right or wrong—but about how we are different. Taking the DMSI will give participants a new, unique, and interesting perspective on individual differences in personal and professional relationships. The various styles are typically recognized immediately after scoring and discussion.

### **Why is this topic important?**

Deciding what one must do next is a fundamental issue for each of us—and how we decide what to do next will affect the quality of our personal and professional lives. Flexibility in decision-making styles has been shown to both strengthen personal relationships and serve as a hallmark of successful senior managers. Detailed research shows that success or failure with executive managers is in large part a function of their ability to change their decision-making styles as they progress in their careers. Thus, understanding one's own decision-making style is a precursor to adapting it throughout one's career.

### **What styles are measured by the DMSI?**

When it comes to how people decide to take action, you first must understand how people organize information in their heads and then how they process or make sense

of that information. People will often use two styles to organize their decision-making process:

- A Systematic will firmly establish a goal and will not be easily swayed from reaching the goal or decision. He or she will weigh alternative choices for a decision in a logical manner. Systematics prefer to focus in on the component parts of a decision, and once they have made a choice, they will not easily change their minds.
- A Spontaneous will move quickly from one goal to another depending on how it “feels.” These people use a thought chaining process, in contrast to the logical approach of the Systematic. The Spontaneous will react globally to a situation, rarely focusing on the components of the situation. Goals will change rapidly.

Once either type of person has gathered the information for a decision, then he or she must process it. Here again, there are two styles:

- An Internal will need to “think about it.” Those with this style prefer to turn inward to make a final decision. If pressured to decide before they have enough time, they will become confused or irritated.
- An External will need to think aloud. Externals will not be certain of a decision unless they have had the opportunity to talk about it. In fact, Externals have a need to hear their words in order to make sense of them.

These four characteristics can be combined into four styles: Systematic Internal, Systematic External, Spontaneous Internal, and Spontaneous External.

### **Is this really different from other style measures?**

Yes, the styles are different from those measured by other instruments. Data published in peer-reviewed journals shows very little overlap with many of the most common style measures, such as the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, the *Campbell Leadership Descriptor*, Kolb’s *Learning Style Inventory*, or the *Social Style Profile*.

### **What can you achieve with the DMSI?**

After you complete the DMSI and the workshop, you will have an accurate view of your own style and begin to understand how to manage that style and work effectively with others of similar and different styles, both individually and in task

groups, Once you understand the styles, you can also begin to understand yourself, adjust your own style, and manage interactions with others.

### How are the inventory materials organized?

There are three parts to the materials: *The Decision-Making Style Inventory*, a *Facilitator Guide*, and a *Participant's Workbook*. The DMSI can be used alone for any variety of purposes or can be used as part of a half-day workshop.

- *The Decision-Making Style Inventory* is a twelve-page booklet that also provides scoring instructions, a short summary of the styles, and a reference list. It can be used alone or in conjunction with a workshop. The booklet consists of both a short form (twelve Likert-type items) and the longer form (thirty-six items). It can be administered in less than twenty minutes. The items were created to correspond to hypothesized style differences in six aspects of the decision-making process:
  - How will I make and meet my goals?
  - How will I think when choosing?
  - How will risk level affect my choices?
  - How will I decide which choice is better?
  - After I've made a decision, how will I decide whether it is right for me?
  - If a choice doesn't seem right to me, what will I do?

The *DMSI* is scored using a template provided at the back of the package. The respondent first scores each of the four subscales and then converts the four scores to the final style classification via a Scoring Grid.

The *DMSI* has been continually refined since its inception in 1978 and provides a reliable and valid measure of the styles. The original presentation of the *DMSI's* reliability and validity was published in the *Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance* in 1983. Various studies have since shown the reliability of the instrument as well as factor-analytic stability of the items.

- The *Facilitator Guide* is a 106 page guide that provides a background to the theory, supporting statistical information, scripted text for presenting

a workshop on the styles, and supporting PowerPoint visuals. It has the following objectives:

- Define the four primary decision-making styles
- Describe the four individual styles that blend the primary styles
- Identify the respondent's own style
- State strengths and liabilities of each style
- Share examples of the styles in synergy and conflict
- Develop a personal strategy for working with the styles

The *Facilitator Guide* also describes how to conduct a workshop in as little as ninety minutes.

The *Participant's Workbook* is thirty-two pages long and provides a structure to support the workshop. It provides selected references to support the DMSI and decision-making styles in general.

### **Who is the program designed for?**

The workshop is designed for anyone over the age of eighteen. It will help people to manage their relationships a formal organization or team, as well as in personal relationships. Those in couples counseling or personal growth retreats can benefit from using the material. The DMSI also relates to individual differences during the sales process. In addition, there is some evidence that the *DMSI* will work with participants as young as thirteen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Bill Coscarelli** is currently teaching full time at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the department of Curriculum & Instruction. He is the former co-director of the Hewlett-Packard World Wide Test Development Center. Bill has been elected as president of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology's Division for Instructional Development, appointed as founding editor of *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, and as the President of the International Society for Performance Improvement. His consulting practice has been engaged by many of the world's leading companies including AT&T, Citibank, Dun and Bradstreet, Hewlett Packard, IBM, McDonald's, Microsoft and State Farm.

Experientially-based exercises and activities are a common feature of Pfeiffer's training products. Additionally, Pfeiffer offers a variety of icebreakers, energizers, team games, and simulations to energize your training and enhance the learning experience. For questions about these and other Pfeiffer products, please contact us by:

E-mail: [customer@wiley.com](mailto:customer@wiley.com)

Phone: (U.S.) 800-274-4434; (Outside the U.S.) 317-572-3985

Mail: Customer Care Wiley/Pfeiffer, 10475 Crosspoint Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46256

Fax: (U.S.) 800-569-0443; (Outside the U.S.) 317-572-4002

For Technical Support questions within the U.S., call 800-274-4334. Outside the U.S., call 317-572-3985.