

How behavioural reports helped solve communication issues in a legal firm

Fortunately the world seems to have largely recovered from the 2007 – 2009 recession although some of the memories of that period still remain for many.

Only a few people were immune from the pressures caused by the reduction in commercial activity and some professions encountered serious head-winds. And maybe because of my background, I have never forgotten one specific case.

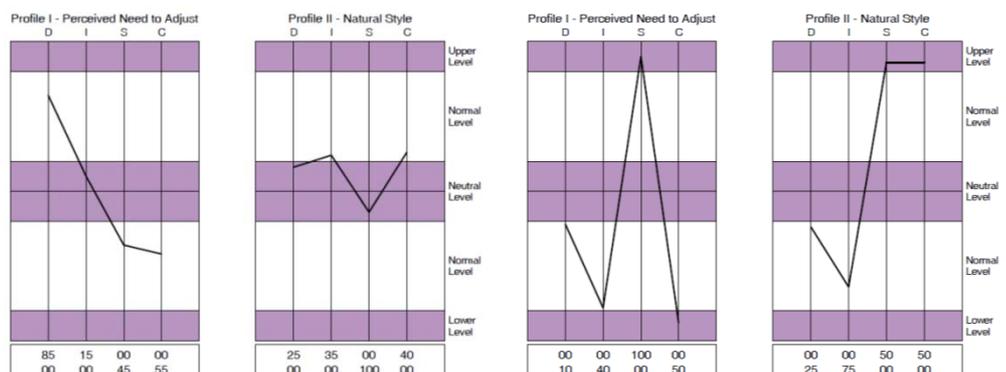
We were approached by the senior partner of an eight partner legal firm during this period as he was concerned about the communication issues that had developed between the partners. He had attended a presentation sponsored by one of the trading banks, which was delivered by a business development consultant who was an advocate of Extended DISC.

The consultant had explained in his presentation how Extended DISC helped organisations better understand their people and this struck a chord with the lawyer as his firm had been experiencing communication difficulties amongst the partners.

The partnership had lost several large clients and the pressure on the principals was causing a breakdown in the relationship between the partners. Our lawyer friend therefore decided that obtaining a behavioural report from each of the partners and sharing their reports between them would help in a better understanding of each other's behavioural styles, thereby improving communication and a better understanding of each other.

It was an interesting exercise and even although the process was completed some six years ago, we have kept copies of the reports. Five of the eight reports produced Profiles that clearly revealed some pressure, but three of them demonstrated other emotional issues.

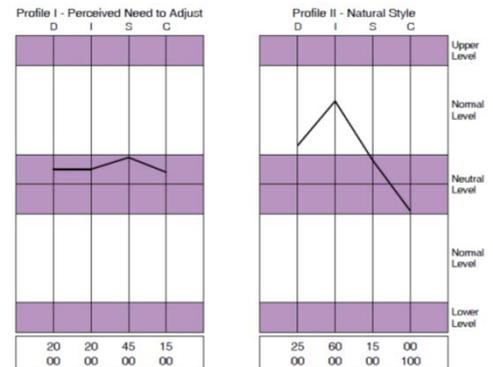
Two of the Profile sets are shown opposite and the third set is shown below. The first (directly opposite) was in fact that of the senior partner who had suggested the exercise.



Each one of these told a story and to their credit the partners did share their reports.

The senior partner agreed that he was feeling very *insecure* and was worried about the future of the firm. Hence the tight Profile II.

The Profiles shown alongside the senior partner's Profiles (above) were that of the newest and youngest partner. The significant suppression of "C" in Profile I reflected his feeling that "*it is better to do nothing than to fail*" and he openly explained that he *felt had lost his freedom to make decisions* and even made the statement that *he felt constrained*.



These emotions had not been conveyed to the other partners until they shared their reports. To them, it explained why he had become very introverted and somewhat ineffective in the partnership. He had been a sole practitioner who joined the firm just prior to the recession and had lost his largest client soon after joining. This, they had assumed, was the reason for his noticeable change in behaviour, but in fact it was in reality that he no longer had the independence he had enjoyed as a sole practitioner.

The third set of Profiles showing a "tight" Profile I was produced in a report for another partner who admitted he was seriously considering leaving the partnership for a role in commerce. This was news to the other partners as he had never discussed this with any of them. Obviously this was the reason the report generated a "tight" Profile I as he openly admitted that he had begun to question his role in the firm.

The process enabled a transparent and open discussion, something that would not have taken place without the production and sharing of the reports. It led to a better understanding of each other's personal feelings and some serious "soul-searching".

We understand that the partner who was considering a change to commerce did in fact leave the partnership and the youngest partner also left and formed a new partnership with a longstanding university friend.

One of the advantages of using behavioural reports in this type of situation is that it creates an opportunity for individuals to talk about themselves. In this case each partner was debriefed by our team at the time and to a degree, it was an exercise in self-discovery, empowering them to be open and frank at the resulting meeting.

Had this meeting taken place without the reports, the outcome may still have been the same, but their personal reports helped provide them with a clearer understanding of their respective feelings and in the case of the two partners who left the firm, helped them understand why they needed to make a change.