

mhca's e-Newsletter

Vol. 2, Issue 2 - Published July 2017

I Finally Understand Why...

A Guest Article from Arudia Founder Anne Collier, MPP, JD, PCC

"I finally understand why one of my managers, Felicia, was so successful starting one program and not the other," said Sam, the Director of Child and Family Services of a community behavioral health organization located on the East Coast.

Sam had just participated in a leadership team-development exercise based on the [Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory](#) (the "KAI"). The KAI is an assessment tool based on a well-regarded model of problem-solving style that was developed by psychologist, Michael Kirton, known as Adaption-Innovation ("A-I") Theory. The theory posits a continuum between two styles – *adaptive* and *innovative*. Where a person falls on the continuum describes how he or she prefers to deal with the paradox of structure, which is the seemingly incongruent notion that structure both enables and limits problem solving.

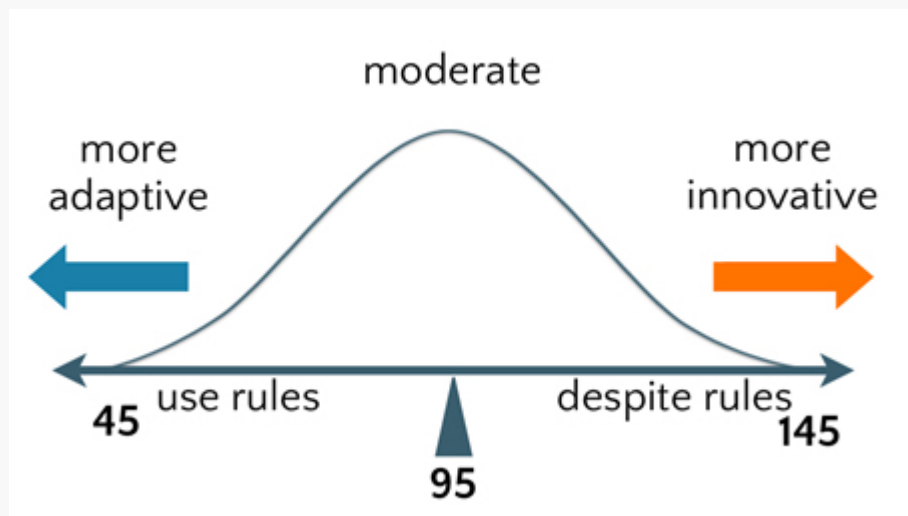
Under [A-I Theory](#), the preferred problem-solving style of people who are more *adaptive* is to leverage the system in place, as-is, to solve problems. People who are more *adaptive* advocate for improvements; they

want to make the *current system* better. They tend to be more risk averse, and they prefer a consensually agreed upon structure within which they solve problems.

People who are more *innovative* prefer the efficiency and flexibility of devising a solution and then modifying or *replacing the current system* or process to accommodate the better solution. They tend to be less risk averse and more interested in trying something different.

The bell curve below illustrates that problem-solving styles occur across a normal distribution, with most people having a preferred style towards the middle of the continuum. This means that most people prefer leveraging and changing the current system to varying degrees depending on where they fall on the continuum. Thus, it's important to remember that a person is not an *adaptor* or *innovator*. Rather, it is the person's position on the continuum relative to that of a team member that determines who is more *adaptive* or *innovative* and by how much.

KAI Continuum



Is Felicia More Innovative or Adaptive than Sam? Felicia excelled at implementing a program that was fraught with State and Federal regulations. On the other hand, Felicia struggled when implementing a program that had very few guidelines. Before learning about A-I Theory, Sam would have thought the dearth of guidelines would have meant that the latter program would have been easier for anyone to implement.

And that's not a surprise, given where Sam falls on the continuum. Sam now understands that his own score of 118 confirms that he prefers working with fewer rules and generally views rules as a hindrance. This doesn't mean that Sam is better than Felicia at solving problems. It means that Sam prefers to solve problems with **less structure** and is less concerned that the structure be consensually agreed upon. Without even knowing Felicia's scores, Sam knows that she prefers to solve problems with more **consensually agreed upon structure**.

Remember, the KAI measures *how* a person solves problems, **not** *how well* a person solves problems.

A person's problem-solving style is made up of three components:

- **Brainstorming Style** describes the degree to which a person is free or cautious in sharing ideas.
- **Problem-Solving Methodology** describes the degree to which a person prefers method, process, and structure in problem solving.
- **Rule/Group Conformity** measures how a person prefers to manage structure, which are rules and group norms.

Why is problem-solving style important? What do similarities and differences in scores mean for collaboration?

If you are registered to attend **mhca's** Summer Conference in Denver next week, we invite you to join us on August 10th at 1:30 pm for a breakout session where you will find out the answers to these questions and more!

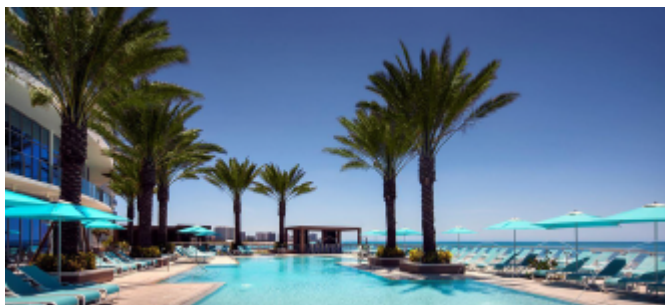
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