

I Learn You Learn: Is There a Relationship between our Approach to Learning and Our Interpersonal Style?

Nell T. Hartley, Ph.D.*

Hartley@rmu.edu

School of Business

Robert Morris University

Coraopolis, PA 15108

*denotes primary contact person

Darlene G. Motley, Ph.D.

Motley@rmu.edu

School of Business

Robert Morris University

Coraopolis, PA 15108

Abstract

Researchers and practitioners with increasing frequency turn to the results of personality tests in their efforts to build interpersonal skills. (Berens, 2001; Gardner & Martinko, 1996; Performanceprograms.com, 2004). Does an understanding of personality styles offer insight into other aspects of individual functioning? The proposed paper offers a theoretical presentation which addresses the possible correlation of personality and learning styles. The significance of understanding personality has been well documented. Researchers typically use such Jungian-based instruments as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the five-factor model personality inventories (e.g., Boozer & Forte, 2004; Clinebell & Stecher, 2003; Gardner & Martinko, 1996, Hammer & Huszczo, 1996; Ramsomair, 1994). Organizations have increasingly relied upon personality assessments for purposes such as recruitment selection, person-organization fit, and career development. (Motley, 2005) The best selling What Color is Your Parachute (1997) emphasizes the importance of understanding personality: "I am a person who..." and references Holland's career anchors.

Most recently academicians seem to be turning to an understanding of learning style as a central component in career development. Peter Drucker (1999) states: "Of all of the pieces of self-knowledge, understanding how you learn, is the easiest to acquire." Additional research concludes: "Understanding your learning style can make you an effective problem solver." (Kolb, 2005)

This paper examines the issues of how we learn and use knowledge and compares this with the styles we use to interact with the people in our environment. Theoretically, we investigate the question: Can we hope to gain synergistic results by establishing a personal composite of learning style and personality? If our answer is in the affirmative, our work will be of interest to those pursuing the concepts of: Knowledge Management, Information Literacy, and Learning Organizations.

Specifically, because of some concerns raised about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, we consider the application of another widely used instrument, the DISC Personal Concept. We explore conceptualizations of parallels that appear to exist between self-reported scores on the DISC Personal Concept instrument and the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory.