

Case Study

Using the *Team Dimensions Profile* with a Manufacturing Company

The Client:

I had the opportunity to be an ongoing consultant at a large manufacturing company. The learning department of this company wanted to offer training sessions on innovation to the engineering teams. My first exposure to this client came when I offered a three-day public seminar on innovation and creative-thinking techniques. One of the seminar attendees was an engineer at the manufacturing company. This engineer was a member of a grassroots employee team that supported the use of various tools to foster innovation. As a result of the public seminar, the engineer invited me to make an internal presentation at one of the company's project management events. That opportunity eventually led to quarterly offerings of my three-day seminar in the organization.

The Business Need:

The engineering teams focus on new product and process development, and on improving existing products and processes. I've been able to introduce a number of these teams to creative-thinking techniques for generating and analyzing new ideas. As a part of these innovation sessions, we also discuss team roles and individuals' natural talents in the innovation process. A common problem at this company is the diversity of the team members. Although diversity is highly valued in this organization, it can also become an obstacle as team members with mixed levels of experience, knowledge, and education try to work together. A typical team could include high school graduates to someone with a Ph.D. In addition, many of the team members are good at analyzing ideas and finding faults — poking holes in ideas. In contrast, the culture of the organization doesn't typically support public disagreement or criticism. As a result, team meetings don't support disclosure of ideas or comments from team members.

The Solutions:

The sessions primarily focus on material related to creative-thinking techniques. The participants need to practice these techniques as members of their group or department. As a part of this process, we need to focus on individual strengths and talents within the discussion of techniques. To meet this need, I introduce the *Team Dimensions Profile* to help participants bridge the gap between the techniques and their natural tendencies.

The Delivery:

The entire seminar on creative-thinking techniques lasts three days, and I facilitate the section on the *Team Dimensions Profile* in a few hours during the middle of the seminar. First, I have participants complete the profile in the seminar. Then, they map a composite profile for the small group at their table (even though they aren't necessarily sitting with their work teammates). In their small groups, they discuss the implications of their composite as an intact team. Then they devise an action plan to adjust or re-design the process to compensate for their team's weaknesses.

After the map is visually displayed, the participants usually have a positive reaction. Because this is an engineering environment, the participants are interested in the Z-process matrix and how they can use it to create more balance within their teams. Typically, there are very few Advancers (if any) in their groups, and, as a general rule, there are far more Refiners than Creators. The course is intended to train them in specific techniques for creating ideas. Therefore, participants are learning methods to become more creative, which helps them compensate for the imbalance between Refiners and Creators.

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Then we talk about past projects where the teams stumbled in the innovation process. The group discusses how they could have reassigned tasks or roles to meet individuals' natural tendencies and improve the process. As the seminar continues and they are practicing their creative thinking techniques, they truly understand why they tend to default to their natural tendencies during the idea generation process: the Creators want to create even when we are trying to refine, Refiners want to refine even when we are trying to create, Advancers want to advance even though we are trying to create, and Executors want to go back to their office and execute some other important project they are supposed to be working on!

The Results:

The seminar participants are team leaders or project leaders in this organization. After the seminar, they often request more *Team Dimension Profiles* to use with their respective teams. Once they use the profile with their actual workgroups, they find even more value in the information and begin to truly appreciate that it takes all types to have an effective team.