



Continuing our series looking at coaching interventions, *Coaching at Work* road-tests the psychometric tool **Thinking Styles**

MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY

1 The tool What is it?

Thinking Styles is a psychometric tool that measures someone's preferences for 26 different types of thinking. It explains how these preferences affect our subsequent behaviours and relationships in the workplace.

How does it work?

Thinking Styles is an "intelligent report" in that its content is derived from someone's specific responses to the questionnaire, so no two reports will ever be the same.

The report is divided broadly into three sections:

- summary pages;
- 12 mini-profiles – ie, a person's thinking styles "in action";
- the detail of the report, identifying the behaviours that a person is most – and least – likely to adopt at work.

Using it with clients

Understanding our own thinking strategies is a prerequisite to changing them. It is therefore the starting point for all cognitive coaching interventions.

For more information or for a free trial, contact Fiona Beddoes-Jones at fiona.bj@cognitivefitness.co.uk, visit www.thinkingstyles.co.uk or call The Cognitive Fitness Consultancy on 01476 861010.

2 The administrator Using the tool

I first experienced Thinking Styles when I took part in the UK managerial norming process in 2004. When I received my report I was so impressed by it that I booked myself on to the next accreditation course, as I wanted to use it to coach my own team.

Such has been the success of this that I subsequently coached a number of managers and team leaders within Coutts and they are now becoming accredited to use it in their own teams.

Thinking Styles can be an equally effective tool for managers and coaches in deepening their own self-awareness as it can when used with clients. It is particularly helpful in encouraging reflection on building rapport, communicating effectively, influencing others and developing cognitive and behavioural flexibility.

In a coaching feedback session I begin by setting the scene in terms of personal, departmental and organisational objectives. Then, using the report, we review personal preference scores, noting any high and low preferences, particularly where any significant "dislike" scores are indicated. People's highest preferences are often linked to the type of thinking and behaviour they value most at work.

None of the thinking styles operate in isolation and I have found that people are endlessly creative in the

ways they link them together to generate personal strategies for themselves. Some of these strategies work well for them; others may not be so successful. By probing and asking the right questions I can help them to understand their current strategies and perhaps assist them in developing new, more appropriate, strategies.

Next, we review comparative (normed) scores. As colleagues tend to notice particularly high and low preferences, it is likely that higher than average scores will be perceived as cognitive strengths and lower than average scores as potential "weaknesses" of thinking.

The 12 mini profiles are really useful. These link the thinking styles and identify some of the implications that someone's cognitive profile has in certain areas of their working lives. The bullet points are a useful basis for beginning your discussions.

The verdict

It's critical for the coach to understand their own Thinking Style preferences before being able to help the client understand how their preferences manifest themselves in the strategies they use. Developing a cognitively and behaviourally flexible approach as a coach is essential for effective coaching. Thinking Styles has really helped me to do that.

David Kelly is manager of UK investment operations at Coutts Bank

3 The client The experience

Technically it's very quick and straightforward and the online system is user-friendly. I found the questionnaire easy to complete and found it sparked off quite a bit of introspective thinking about what I really do as opposed to what I would like to think I do.

When I first got the feedback I thought, "That can't be me!" but then when you do think about it you realise that, yes, you do actually do that.

The results supported the findings from other models and I've now been able to pull together a personal profile of myself which has really helped me to understand why I think, say and do things the way that I do, and how this might be perceived by those around me.

This is a useful exercise for anybody who wants to understand more about themselves and identify areas that they need to work on. It also supports the theory of "exploiting the magic of difference" by making it easier to understand people's actions and thought

processes. We can then start to lean less towards the "right" and "wrong" way of doing things and more towards appreciating "different" ways of doing things.

The more familiar I've become with the preferences, the easier it has become to deal with people differently: unconsciously you start to think about how you can deal with people "in their way" rather than always "in my way", so the result is much more productive relationships.

I've completed Thinking Styles twice now, a year apart, and it was interesting to see how the main body of it had remained the same, but how other things had changed alongside my job role.

I think that you should do it annually, just as a self-check, because when your scores change you are able to reflect and

understand why that has happened, which is very useful as it gives you more choice about how you might behave in the future.

The verdict

I found it an excellent tool for managers' development as well as for team members at work. In fact, I've been so impressed with Thinking Styles that I've become accredited to use it myself with my own team and other managers in the bank.

Nicola Wiltshire is a manager, investment operations, Coutts Bank

Thinking Styles: pros and cons

UPSIDE

- Provides insights into how thinking affects values and behaviours at work
- Provides a route map for development
- Useful tool for the coach's and manager's development as well as for the client
- Questionnaire is easy to complete

DOWNSIDE

- The client needs to allow 30 minutes of uninterrupted time to complete the questionnaire