

Styles of Work

By JOHN D. BIES
and JOEL A. TURETZKY

If you gave three individuals the same job to do, you would probably find that each one had his or her own way of doing it—even though the steps or process involved required a particular sequence.

Individual workers maintain their individuality by doing a job their own way. They develop a work style unique to themselves. They develop such styling, in most cases, informally and unconsciously. The concept of work styling is somewhat new, although numerous studies and instruments have measured and explained other types of styling (e.g., management, cognitive, leadership and learning).

It is an understatement to say that work is a behavior, but it is important to emphasize this when dealing with work styles. A basic scientific premise states that anything observable is also measurable. Originally applied to observing and describing physical science phenomena, this concept has also been applied to human behavior study. As complex as the human being is, behavioral scientists study the causes and effects of various human behaviors—such as work.

As early as the 1880s, management and job-related analyses were conducted on various occupations. Crude and simplistic by today's standards, these studies helped lay the foundations of the many tools and techniques currently used by HRD specialists. One of the first job analyses was conducted before the turn of the century.

John D. Bies and Joel A. Turetzky are partners in Human Resource Development Consultants, Memphis, Tenn.

At that time, because of its apparent complexity, a secretary's work was viewed more as an art than as a science. In the early 1920s, Charters and Whitley conducted a successful analysis of secretarial duties to identify 871 observable duties.

A style of work

Many techniques have been developed to provide valuable information about worker behavior. One such technique is *styling or mapping*. The application of styling instruments and techniques has found an acceptable place in training and personnel development. As mentioned, numerous devices are available to measure different types of behavioral styles, but none were developed to examine the basic human behavior of work.

A "style" can be defined as the way individuals receive, separate and analyze information to carry out a specific type of behavior, or the way a person best applies knowledge, skills and judgments to real-world situations. Before it's possible to measure these styles, it's critical to clearly define the elements that make up the total behavior.

The behavior of work involves several basic observable and measurable elements. Before these elements are identified, we must define "work." Work is an activity and behavior performed by individuals to preserve and improve their quality of life. Specific behavioral elements making up the work process are:

- Work is essentially a human behavior that can be understood and carried out by the individual;
- Work, as a behavior, can be broken down into specific pro-

cedures and techniques;

- Work is seldom accomplished in isolation and is therefore dependent upon interpersonal behaviors;

- Work does not have any rigid parameters regarding length of time required to complete a task, or time of day to accomplish a task;

- Work can be influenced by external forces and conditions.

It is important to note that when talking about the behavior of work, we do not include the technical skills and knowledge required to carry out the task. Emphasis is on those individual behaviors influencing how technical skills and knowledge are applied to the job. By using these five behavioral elements, it becomes possible to generate a model to derive specific measures to identify individual styles of work.

Style of work model

To develop a functional style of work model, the five behavioral elements had to be studied together. Though individually measurable, they directly influence one another (Figure 1). Each behavior must be measured

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independently, but cannot be properly interpreted into a work style profile unless all behaviors are taken into consideration.

The following factors make up the model:

- *Behavioral factors* pertain to those traits making up the individual's "work personality." They are behaviors exhibited on the job. These factors are identifiable by observing: what motivates a person to work, how intent is the person on completing a task, whether or not the individual can handle responsibility and the format required for the worker to plan and to follow directions.

- *Work methodology* attempts to describe how a person best carries out a task or job via psychomotor and physiological behavior. This is identified by observing: use of individual senses, use of different parts of the body and the degree of movement or confinement required to carry out a task or job.

- *Interpersonal relations* describes how one works with others, and whether or not others are needed to carry out and complete a job or task. Three observable behaviors that make up this factor are: one's preference to work alone or with others, how the individual reacts to authority and how one works with individuals of differing cultural backgrounds.

- *Temporal considerations* pertain to the time of day a person best carries out job assignments and responsibilities.

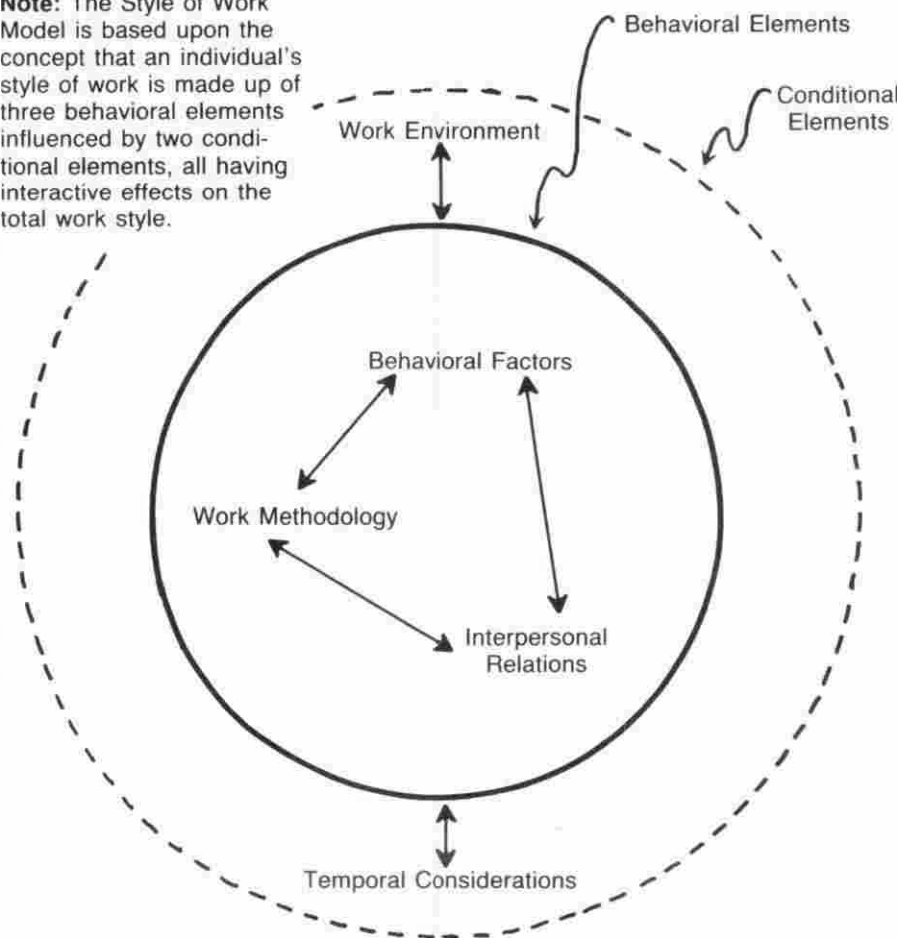
- *Work environment* describes the physical surroundings that influence task and job completion. It is those things making up the physical or external work environment. The six conditions which describe this factor are: degree of sound or quiet required to complete the task or job, light requirements, temperature conditions affecting work, odors influencing work, reactions to different machines and equipment and degree of cleanliness required.

Model applications

By systematically developing a style of work model for person-

Figure 1.
Five Interactive Elements of the Style of Work Model

Note: The Style of Work Model is based upon the concept that an individual's style of work is made up of three behavioral elements influenced by two conditional elements, all having interactive effects on the total work style.



nel analysis, we found three immediate applications for its use. The first was the ability to view each worker in terms of his or her unique work style. Like other behavioral styling, there are two types of work styles: one perceived by the individual to be his or her most productive style, and one that is actually the most productive style. Consequently, we can evaluate both perceived and actual work styles for the improvement of the quality of work and work life.

In addition to job prerequisites, elements of the model can be used to prepare a more precise description of job requirements. Even if no specific profile of the work style is available, every person has an informal and intrinsic concept of his or her individual work style. Based on

this and accurate job specifications and descriptions, a more realistic match is possible between available personnel and job openings.

The actual development of a work process style that identifies individual profiles would provide not only a preferred and perceived work style, but could also generate actual work styles. Obtaining individual profiles would help make better job assignments, improve job performance and enhance the personnel counseling process.

Training implication

When faced with providing high-quality personnel for specific job responsibilities, an examination and analysis of individual work styles provides needed information for the selection and

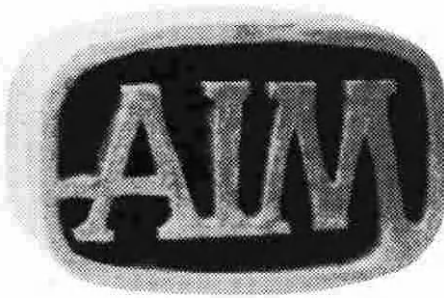
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placement process. Employers should have an established and valid procedure to identify, monitor and interpret the dominant or modal styles of work of their employees. This would enable HRD specialists to assign and to adapt employees to the work environment in a more effective and efficient manner.

The use and acceptance of a style of work model can help provide quantitative measures for identifying those factors affecting the work process, making it possible for management to understand and become aware of factors contributing to and retarding employee productivity. Realizing a style of work is a behavior and is subject to change, various staff-development strategies could be used to mold collective styles to the needs and requirements of the job.

By studying work styles and

research conducted in other behavior styling, training programs could be developed and implemented in a more effective and efficient manner. For example, individuals with poor academic backgrounds tend to learn and work better in situations that emphasize pictorial presentations and manipulative activities. By accepting this situation, training units could focus on pictorial and concrete examples. Furthermore, job assignments could emphasize physical activity.

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