What Can the *Instinctive Drive system*™ Offer the Workplace? A Qualitative Exploration

Anneke Fitzgerald, Ann Dadich and John Fitzgerald
University of Western Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Despite the potential benefits afforded by teamwork within the workplace, it can be difficult for employers and senior personnel to establish and maintain teams that gel. It is a juggling act involving the delicate interplay of organisational goals and interpersonal dynamics. In the pursuit of enhancing team performance within the workplace, organisational and psychological literature has concentrated on the personal attributes of individual team members, as well as relevant societal factors. However, one area that is receiving increasing attention is the influence of the innate abilities of individual team members – those natural qualities that are constant and invariable. The Instinctive Drive (I.D.) system™ offers a method for gauging individual instinctive drives, and recent quantitative research affirms that the tool is statistically reliable and valid. However, for the purpose of thoroughness, it is important to triangulate these quantitative findings with qualitative research. It is thus the purpose of this paper to qualitatively investigate the inherent value of the I.D. system™ among some of its users. More specifically, ten senior personnel and ten general employees were interviewed to explore the perceived influence of the I.D. system™ on individual performance, group performance and leadership. This consultative process was guided by a semi-structured open-ended interview schedule. Consequent research material was analysed for emerging themes, using an interpretive and a reflexive approach. Collectively, the interviewees recognised great value in the I.D. system™. It was a catalyst for greater communication between co-workers and with clients; it served as a window, providing users with an improved understanding of themselves and of others; it also initiated personal development as well as team development. These views were juxtaposed by a few unfavourable sentiments. Some for instance, warned that the use of this taxonomy might negatively stereotype individuals. Conversely, its focus on innate abilities may provide individuals with an opportunity to abdicate personal responsibility. Despite these potential shortcomings, the qualitative material presented in this paper complements previous quantitative research on the I.D. system™, and thus affirms its inherent value. This has important repercussions for business and behavioural sciences, particularly those efforts to improve team performance within the workplace. It highlights the need to focus future research endeavours on tools that not only expound individual difference, but also facilitate effective dialogue.

Introduction

Teamwork in the workplace can be particularly advantageous in the pursuit of organisational goals (West, 2004). When a collection of individuals has an identifiable purpose to develop an organisational product, plan, decision or service, extensive interaction facilitates interdependent relationships. Through these relationships, complementary skills are identified and harnessed, and accountability is shared (Aamodt, 2004, Wood et al., 2004). Thus, the synthesis of different yet complementary attributes can further the efforts of individual employees who might otherwise

be limited by those qualities they do not possess. The whole therefore, becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

However, team dynamics are vulnerable to a multitude of factors, including both the personal attributes of individual team members, as well as societal factors. The combination of these determinants places enormous demands on managers who are required to configure productive and collegial teams.

Instability in the employment sector has amplified these demands in recent years. This is partly attributable to the proliferation of globalisation, competition and market insecurity (Wood et al., 2004). Managers are thus compelled to adapt and mould work structures and workplace teams in hope of *best fit*.

Yet, this is not without problem, for there is limited predictability in the principal drives of staff behaviour. It is often difficult for managers to successfully predict the effectiveness of a team of individual employees (McShane and Travaglione, 2003). Evidently, this poses a serious concern, implicating *economic* (Schermerhorn et al., 2005), *social* and *personal* costs (Dewe and Trenberth, 2004). Despite growing research in organisational psychology to understand and improve team dynamics (Aamodt, 2004), definitive practices are still lacking (Fitzgerald et al., 2005a).

In the pursuit of enhancing team performance, much research has concentrated on the personal attributes of individual team members as well as societal causes (Wood et al., 2004). However, one area that is receiving increasing attention is the influence of the *innate* abilities of individual team members – that is, those natural qualities that are constant and invariable.

Link-up International Pty Ltd is one organisation that has brought the importance of innate qualities to the fore. After much exploratory effort, the firm purports that comprehending and appreciating the innate qualities of team members is the essence of understanding and enhancing team performance.

In the attempt to gauge the innate qualities of individual team members, *Link-up International* has devised the *Instinctive Drives™* (*I.D.™*) *system*. Through a 32-question survey, the system is said to identify and assess the instinctive drives of each respondent. These are the *natural* qualities of the individual and are alleged to be the key to achieving and enjoying peak performance, personal fulfilment and optimum health. However, *Link-up International* proposes that it is by understanding the dynamics *between* the instinctive drives of each team member that team performance can be improved.

Using the *I.D. system™*, *Link-up International* has experienced a great degree of success in improving team performance within companies of various sizes. More importantly however, is the fact that empirical research efforts suggest that that tool is statistically valid and reliable (Fitzgerald et al., 2005b).

However, the inherent value of the tool, according to its users, has not yet been investigated. It is thus the purpose of the present paper to explore what the *I.D. system™* can offer the workplace.

Understanding Team Performance

Team composition is a crucial ingredient of team performance. A degree of homogeneity among team members can be advantageous for team dynamics. Individual members have the opportunity to develop relationships promptly, and thus engage in effective interaction to perform.

Conversely, homogenous membership can limit group progress. The development of innovative ideas and viewpoints may be stunted by the blinkers that limit creativity.

Heterogenous teams offer a rich pool of information, talent and varied perspectives. This in turn, can help improve team problem solving and increase creativity, which is especially valuable to those teams that operate in a highly complex environment

Yet, recent research indicates that team diversity is often a source of performance difficulty; this is particularly the case when the team is in its infancy (Schermerhorn et al., 2005). Heterogeneity appears

to contribute to interpersonal stresses and conflicts that impede upon the development of relationships, the sharing of information and the solving of problems. Managing these dynamics can hinder team processes and thus influence both team effectiveness and team efficiency.

However, once such difficulties are resolved, heterogenous teams are well positioned to take full advantage of membership diversity to achieve its objectives and sustain itself over time (McShane and Travaglione, 2003).

Team performance is therefore the extent to which the results of a team are linked with organisational objectives. Admittedly, there are many ways to measure this. However, unlocking the full potential of a team that is rich in diversity is one of the great advantages of high performing organisations (Wood et al., 2004).

Understanding Workplace Teams

Despite their inherent value within the workplace, teams pose particular challenges to those in managerial positions. These include the limited ability of the manager to quickly predict whether a team is likely to succeed in its explicit role. While the technical expertise of individual team members might be explored, other aspects influence team performance, including the idiosyncratic practices of each team member. Consequently, a manager may ponder on whether he/she has assembled the most appropriate mix of individuals; whether the individuals will achieve organisational aims; and the kind of conflict that might arise within the team (Lee-Emery, 1990). Such considerations are particularly important given the likelihood of de-motivation, should individual team members be unable to cooperate effectively. Relevant literature advises that, in modern organisations that rely on teamwork, the "difference between highly effective organisations and less effective ones… lies in the motivations of its members" (Moorehead and Griffin, 2001, p. 113).

There is a wealth of literature pertaining to team building and team dynamics. It generally describes team building as the art of assembling individuals according to complementary skills or expertise for the purpose of task completion (Wood et al., 2004, Fitzpatrick et al., 2001, Wellins et al., 1991, West, 2004). Successful individuals are brought together to optimise the synergistic outcomes associated with teams (French et al., 2000, Lingard and Berry, 2002, Lingard et al., 2002, McShane and Travaglione, 2003, Salas and Fiore, 2004, West, 2004).

However, teams composed on the basis of cognitive abilities alone still often fail to achieve designated tasks. This is said to be because of *attitude* (Wood et al., 2004) – those evaluative assessments, both favourable and unfavourable, concerning witnessed experiences that relate to objects, events and people (Berry and Lingard, 2004, Robbins et al., 2003, Salas and Fiore, 2004, Thomas, 1998). Attitudes influence intention to behave in a specific way and include both cognitive and affective components – while cognition allows for reason, affect incorporates emotion (Sweeney and McFarlin, 2002).

Yet, this understanding of attitude fails to consider the influence of *inherent* drives. Without such knowledge, there is thus a limited appreciation for those factors that contribute to individual and collective behaviours.

There have been a number of efforts to improve team member attitudes. Most attempt to gauge individual learned behaviours that are adopted to understand self and/or others (Barrick et al., 1998, Guzzo and Dickson, 1996, Levine and Mooreland, 1990, Tett and Murphy, 2002). Thus, very few diagnostic tools attempt to measure the inherent drives of individuals and possible impact on team *performance*; this limits their comprehensiveness. Yet, despite this, psychometric assessment in the organisational context remains very popular (Hoffman, 2002, Muchinsky and Monohan, 1987, Tett and Murphy, 2002).

The *Instinctive Drive System™*

Link-up International has attempted to fill the void in current business and behavioural research by exploring individual instinctive drives and their affect on team performance. The efforts of this firm have culminated with the *I.D. system™* – a survey used to gauge the instinctive drives of each respondent.

The survey is comprised of 128 items categorised into 32 questions and four instinct subscales. These include *Verify*, *Complete*, *Improvise* and *Authenticate*, further detail for which is available elsewhere (Fitzgerald et al., 2005a, Fitzgerald et al., 2005b). Within the 32 questions, participants are asked to rank four options. For each of the four options, *1* is placed next to the alternative that the respondent is *most likely* to do, followed by *2*, *3* and finally *4*, indicating the option the respondent is *least likely* to do. Scores are reversed so that higher scores indicate a stronger drive towards the instinct, while lower scores indicate avoidance from that particular instinct. While it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the theoretical foundations of the system, such information is available in other publications (Fitzgerald et al., 2005a, Fitzgerald et al., 2005b).

At an international level, the tool has proven to be effective at improving team performance. Further to this, the tool is supported by recent empirical efforts that suggest it is both valid and reliable (Fitzgerald et al., 2005a).

While such statistical validation is noteworthy, it is also important to explore the perceived value of the tool among its users. By furthering current knowledge on *I.D. system™*, a comprehensive understanding of the tool will be attained. This paper therefore presents a qualitative exploration of the perceived value of the *I.D. system™* among some of its users.

Research Method

Research Tool

A semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule was designed to guide consultation with senior personnel and general employees of firms that had utilised the tool. More specifically, questions clustered around the following themes – the perceived influence of the *I.D. system™* on individual performance; the perceived influence of the *I.D. system™* on group performance; and the perceived influence of the *I.D. system™* on leadership.

Recruitment Process

To recruit interviewees, *Link-up International* issued a return letter of consent to firms that were or had previously utilised the tool, which were randomly selected by the research team. The letter explained the nature and purpose of the study, and invited interested persons to contact the independent research team. Of the eight firms that received this letter, seven responded favourably to this invitation. While this suggests a representative cohort of the random sample, interviews were conducted with those staff members who were available at time of interview. Thus, given that convenience sampling was employed, there is no claim that the participants in this study constitute a representative sample.

Collection and Analysis of Research Material

Approval to conduct the research was gained from the university ethics committee. Each interview commenced with a reiteration of the return letter of consent and the signing of a consent form. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. QSR N-Vivo® software was used to aid detailed coding and analysis of the collected research material, facilitating the interpretation process.

An analysis of the research material allowed for themes to emerge, as the interviewees constructed their own meanings of situations through the interview process. Through the analytic phase of the project, the

research material was found to cluster around a number of core themes. To ensure consistency within each theme, codebooks were developed that included detailed descriptors of each theme, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplars from the research material.

Through a reflective, iterative process, theme content was interrogated to explore relationships between and within the themes. The process enabled the researchers to engage in a systematic method of analysis using an eclectic process, whilst remaining open to alternative explanations for the findings (Creswell, 1998).

Objectivity in qualitative research is problematic. The perceptions of the research team of the issues under investigation cannot claim exclusive privilege in the representation of those issues. However, to ensure that diverse perceptions were reflected in the research material, two interviewers were present at each interview. Furthermore, regular meetings were held to provide the research team with a forum in which to discuss the research material and their interpretations. These meetings provided important opportunities to create, check and recreate meaning from observations and impressions, constantly reflecting on personal biases. Additionally, the research team was careful to ensure that the demographics represented in the study were diverse – this includes the demographics of those who were interviewed.

Research Findings

Research Participants

The research team interviewed 20 interviewees (14 females and 6 males) from seven different companies; while some of these firms were large, others were small to medium enterprises. The average age of the interviewees was 35 years. Ten participants assumed a director or management position, while the remaining were general employees of the company they were affiliated with. Length of service ranged between one and 12 years.

Findings

Reasons for Using the *I.D. System™*

Despite the varied responses offered by the interviewees, the research material suggests that they collectively utilised the *I.D. system™* to ensure the achievement of organisational aims. There was a need to circumvent those issues that may thwart the achievement of these aims. This was demonstrated in numerous ways. As the following excerpts suggest, some of the interviewees were hoping to enhance professional relationships, not only with co-workers, but also with clients:

> *"We wanted to improve team dynamics… Conflict; that particular one was the thing we were most looking to the I.D.™ to help us";*

> *"We have to please these clients."*

It was therefore believed that the *I.D. system™* offered an effective tool to enhance professional interaction at several levels:

> *"That's what it was about. It was to get two-way communication";*

> *"So they'll work more comfortably together… that's how we use it."*

The *I.D. system™* was thought to explicitly demonstrate organisational interest in personnel. To ensure that staff members felt valued by senior management, some of the interviewees considered the tool to be an important way to verify that organisational interest went beyond commercial ambitions:

> *"Even at the outset, it was a part of its goal to me, a facilitator of communication… And part of that of course, is people underneath thinking, 'Yes, there is at least a level of interest*

> *in me and my needs and goals,' as opposed to… the corporate goals… Give them the idea that this was a two-way process. That's what I hoped would be achieved."*

The *I.D. system™* was also recognised for its ability to identify individual traits and illuminate personal practices:

> *"I… decided to try it out as a tool for… team management and teambuilding, and also… from the interest factor of understanding people and what makes them work."*

Further to this, it was identified as a means of detecting problem idiosyncrasies and thus improving these, as appropriate. One interviewee advised that he uses the tool to "to identify strengths and weaknesses." In reference to fellow staff members, another interviewee stated:

> *"We want to help them be successful in what they are doing… Any tool that's going to help you do that more effectively and to help people to survive in their role for the long-term, not just survive and make it through, but actually enjoy it, is going to be a key."*

The potential value of the *I.D. system™*, as perceived by the interviewees, was apparent at various stages of employment. It was of little consequence whether a staff member had recently commenced employment with the organisation, or was soon to terminate his/her role. One relatively new senior staff member, for example, was particularly interested to see if his professional practices were congruous to that of existing personnel. Given his unfamiliarity with the employment milieu, the interviewee wanted to quickly understand his co-workers, which in turn would facilitate strong working alliances:

> *"The way I work towards a project goal is very different, which could put me [at] odds with the rest of the team."*

However, another organisation sought a tool that would help understand the drives of existing staff members for the purpose of placing them in "more effective" teams. The organisation was keen to ease the transition of existing personnel into appropriate positions elsewhere. Senior staff members thus thought that the *I.D. system™* might be of particular value in this situation.

Despite the various paths that led to the *I.D. system™*, it appears that all of the organisations represented in this study were keen to reduce the negative impact of *organisational change*. This includes changes in personnel, employment practices or group dynamics. Circumventing the negative impact of such change was thought to be of benefit, not only for personnel, but ultimately for the clients.

Ironically, despite some interest in enhancing professional communication, the decision to utilise the *I.D. system™* seldom involved both senior and junior personnel. It was typically a decision made by senior management in isolation from others.

The need to circumvent negative impact was often associated with a sense of urgency. A number of interviewees advised that they needed a tool that would not be arduous or time-consuming, but could be used to identify and address key concerns in an expeditious manner:

> *"The best thing is that you do not have to worry about a year of weaning the honeymoon period, getting to know the person… This is a quick way of seeing where the new staff member fits and what makes them tick."*

This is quite an interesting find given the time typically required to understand professional practices and establish effective working alliances.

In summary, the reasons for using the *I.D. system™* surround a need for improved interaction between employees, as perceived by senior staff. An improved understanding of individual differences was thought to facilitate communication. This desire for better communication generally arose from a need to change organisational climate promptly.

What the *I.D. System™* Offered

Collectively, the interviewees spoke very favourably about the *I.D. system™*. They suggested that it offered valuable insights and presented new opportunities for improving relations. A thorough analysis

of the research material suggests that the key benefit offered by the system was *communication*. The catalytic effects of the *I.D. system™* facilitated greater interaction between employees at all levels, and with clients.

Communication with Co-Workers

Most interviewees advised that the *I.D. system™* fostered intra-agency discourse. It became a point of discussion. Employees engaged in dialogue about their own professional practices:

> *"Some talked about [the I.D.™ report] quite enthusiastically… I don't think there was anybody in the group that said, 'No, that's not me'."*

This in turn, allowed staff members to gain insight about the professional practices of fellow co-workers:

> *"We were given charts… we have everyone's colours and we know everyone's number. We had a session where we chattered about it and worked in small groups."*

Further to this, the *I.D. system™* provided co-workers with a shared language to discuss and explore professional practice. When describing personal instincts, terms used within the tool like, *verify*, *authenticate*, *complete* and *improvise* were used with common meaning. Consequently, communication channels were expanded:

> *"I'm use complete, avoid improvise. [My co-worker] is use improvise, avoid complete, and so are the CEO and the General Manager; we basically go bang! And so he thinks about what's happening on Sunday, and about eighteen months from now; I think about every other week in between."*

The research material suggests that communication begets communication. With improved interaction between employees, individuals became relatively more attuned to the communicative practices of fellow colleagues. One interviewee attested:

> *"You noticed others also carrying out that improved communication… [One co-worker said] 'I came in this morning; I thought I was 15 minutes late for a meeting.' [Another co-worker] said, 'No, it's 8.30. Go into your office, regroup… You need the time to regroup.' She's changing the way my diary works, giving me the breaks which I didn't fill up."*

The notion that communication begets communication is affirmed by the suggestion that interaction between personnel needs to be regular and recurring. One instance of intense communication cannot be expected to benefit staff relations thereafter. A number of interviewees recognised this and spoke of attempts to facilitate regular intra-agency communication, particularly when team dynamics were altered:

> *"[One co-worker] presented a workshop to go through people's I.D.™, and how we can gel as [a] team. So we have those on a fairly regular basis, especially when we get our lot of new team members on board. We'll go through it, try… to establish that there is no right or wrong in anyone's I.D.™. It's how we work together as a team, you know. You always get, you know, this change issue; it's a bit of challenge."*

Thus, while the *I.D. system™* serves as a platform for improved communication, this communication needs to be regular and continuous to maintain effective interaction between employees.

Communication with Clients

Recognising the communicative benefits offered by the *I.D. system™*, some of the interviewees advised that the tool was also used to enhance client relations. To ensure that they understand and are aptly prepared to work with individual clients, some of the interviewees requested clients to complete the *I.D.™* survey. Subsequent results provided them with informative depictions, which were then used to shape staff-client relations. The following excerpts allude to this:

"You sit down with a client in the old days and they ask all these questions, and I can give information, and give information, and give information [until] they're happy. But in the olden days, I didn't know why they need [the information]. I would have been offended… It helped me with my clients. I tailor the interview to what they need";

"We know a number of our client I.D.™'s, our key clients… Knowing what their I.D.™ is… helped us deal with them more effectively, especially with communication… It's a great way of tapping into the client and really sort of [making sure]… you're giving what's important to them; otherwise it is a trial and error".

The *I.D. system™* thus has potential as a valuable educative tool. Some of the interviewees expressed that knowing the *I.D.™* profile of key clients had a positive effect on their competitive advantage over other companies.

Understanding of the Self

According to most interviewees, the *I.D. system™* offered greater self-understanding. For some, it served to affirm the perception they had developed of themselves:

"I think the vast majority of the people said, 'Yes, you've obviously been looking over my shoulder for the last 40-odd years'… or however long they've been alive."

For others, it was a window providing a different vista of personal practice – in both the professional and personal domains:

"For me, it has helped me look at the process that I engage in when I'm working… [It helps in] evaluating my own work habits. For example, [my I.D.™ profile]… talks about how I like to be hands-on in everything, which I do";

"Why I get so frustrated with some people and other people I seem to get on with quite well."

Notably, the assessment tool was not always found to be correct in its appraisal. A few interviewees expressed reservation about the way they were depicted in the context of the *I.D.™* profile:

"There is one little thing that I thought, 'No, I don't necessarily agree with it'… [But] I didn't like, read it, thinking that I've got to believe everything it says about me… [It was] more about recognising myself in what it says."

This passage suggests that the interviewee approached the *I.D. system™* with a degree of apprehension. She did not expect the tool to be completely accurate in its descriptions of her instinctive drives. Instead, she thought it might broaden the lens with which she views herself.

Another interviewee also spoke of apprehension around the accuracy of the *I.D.™* profile. However, this individual recognised that this might be consequent to denial, rather than flaws within the *I.D. system™*:

"We've had the occasional people who thought, 'No, it's not me.' I think it is really them, but they're not wanting it to be that, because… when you go through it, 'This is what you are,' and some people might think, 'Well, I don't really want to be that way, even though I am inside.' So yeah, I've seen some resistance in that regard."

It appears that, in some individual cases, the *I.D.™* profile can be quite confronting and can discourage active engagement with the system:

"I made a point of going through it and putting it away for quite awhile, because I don't like to read everything and say, 'That's the truth about me' and see what happens. Later I'll look at it again."

Nevertheless, a number of interviewees appreciated the consistent way in which their instinctive drives were reported. Uniform results offer predictability; they allow individuals to aptly prepare for particular situations and execute their responsibilities:

> *"I've come out in everything I've done fairly consistent. So, you see the picture, formulate the plan, work the plan."*

Improving interactions between people often begins with self-awareness. The interviewees perceived the *I.D. system™* to be of value when they wanted or needed to reflect on their own role and identity when interacting with others.

Understanding of Others

The interviewees offered extensive examples of the insights they had gained of fellow co-workers, consequent to using the *I.D. system™*. The employee profiles offered an informative picture, summarising individual idiosyncrasies in an instant:

> *"[It provides] … an understanding of the dynamics that make up the problem."*

The profiles however, offer far more than a mere numerical depiction of instinctive drives. Individual *I.D.™* profiles are typically quite comprehensive and can serve like a point of direction. The profiles confer an understanding of other personnel, as well as guide effective professional practice:

> *"We all go through this I.D. system™ with him and tell him, 'This is the way we'll be approaching the delivery of work to you, and when you're asking questions of the managers, you've got to be mindful of what their I.D.™ is as well'."*

Such information is of particular value in the workplace. It can help to ensure that personnel are well suited to their assigned role and that they understand the division of labour. It also allows for the prompt and successful completion of tasks, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> *"This guy is a 6781. So he's a bit of a perfectionist to some extent, and doesn't like change that much either. So basically, when giving him a job, we've got to go through steps one to ten with him. Now, some of the other managers here are of the complete opposite I.D.™ to him. I know one particular manager… he's a person who will just throw the job at them, 'You sort it out'… There's all sorts of problems because the jobs are just done in accordance with how he would like it done. But it's not explained how he would like to get it done. So that's how we'll be managing his guy… And we even might try and align him with one of our other managers who's got a similar sort of I.D.™."*

It thus appears that the *I.D. system™* offers a swift method of identifying the individual co-worker who may assist with task completion. Although perhaps an exploitative view, the tool appears to be valued by those who are pressed for time. As one interviewee stated:

> *"I think that it's important that everyone understands each other, and so if I need someone to do something in a hurry, I look for a completer… I couldn't operate without everyone knowing their I.D.™ to be honest, and knowing each other's… [Especially] if you want a whole heap of particular things… done in a hurry. I have to think, 'I need this done. Will this person or that person do it better?' And on the balance of probabilities, the completer will do it better and so I give it to them."*

To maximise mutual understanding among personnel, some organisations made the *I.D.™* profiles of individual staff members readily available to all team members. The following statements demonstrate this:

> *"We've got them all up on a chart, and they're posted up in a couple of locations all round the place, so people can easily see what people's I.D.™'s are";*

> *"It's up on the fridge down the back… both in terms of the do's and don'ts, so people can look at it, and use it."*

Thus, communication begets communication. Increased understanding of fellow co-workers yields greater empathy toward them and a greater commitment to collegial goodwill. As one interviewee noted, this is particularly the case among those in senior staff positions:

> *"In terms of interpersonal interactions, my experience to date has been that I.D.™'s actually have been helpful for us, because, if anything, we are probably easier on the people inside the organisation, than we might otherwise be in a workplace. I might have people here that I would've slapped one or two warning letters on already, because of the nature of employment law. But it's a little bit different here, because we value having relationship capital as opposed to legal capital… We've been given strategies to improve [workplace] frustrations and so… it adds value to us we couldn't get elsewhere."*

This comment suggests that the *I.D. system™* may have an important role in furthering social capital within an organisation. By enhancing empathy between staff, it helps to retain employees and thus minimise disruption to team dynamics.

The *I.D. system™* may offer insight among employees. But according to one interviewee, it fails to adequately resource individuals to work effectively with others:

> *"With most of the personality things, they help you understand yourself, but they don't necessarily equip you to work in a team environment well."*

Another interviewee affirmed this. He advised that improved understanding among co-workers is not, in itself, sufficient to generate professional harmony, for this requires commitment, as well as negotiation and communicative skills. Although improved understanding may help to justify particular behaviours, it does not necessarily guarantee greater collegial empathy, and may, in fact, yield conflict:

> *"[With my co-worker], he is inadvertently driving me up the wall!… I'm talking about X, Y and Z, and the user verify person will tell me why it's not going to happen, because they see the problems, because they need a problem to solve. Then I'm like, 'Oh, talking about raining on the parade!' It's driving me nuts. Constantly being told what the problems are. It's just deflating, and especially deflating for the use improviser, because they need a lot of energy…*
>
> *We got a user verify, user authenticate drive. It's very frustrating; just feels like you have to explain yourself, justify it, come up with the reasons why.*
>
> *It's really painful sometimes… feeling guilty that the person kept on complaining about how much work they had, but kept on taking more on."*

These revealing statements highlight the importance of ongoing skill development among personnel. Although staff may understand the idiosyncrasies of co-workers, they also require the dexterity to engage in appropriate communication that will facilitate workplace relations, and, consequently, task completion.

Opportunities for Personal Development

As stated, the *I.D. system™* was often the catalyst for improved communication – not only between staff members, but also with clients. However, communication did not simply occur for communication's sake. Most of the interviewees recognised the potential value of the *I.D. system™* as a tool to initiate personal change. As one interviewee explained:

> *"From an individual perspective… it's knowing my strengths and weaknesses and trying to play to the strengths and work on my weaknesses."*

Recollecting the way she experienced personal development, another interviewee alluded to a process of meaningful reflection. She deliberated on her professional practices and considered appropriate courses for action:

"I didn't go out and go, 'Okay, I need to do this.' I think I watched how I operated over a period of time and I've gone, 'Okay, this is where I need to adapt the way I operate to be more effective long term.'"

Through enhanced insight of self and others, personnel were able to further working alliances. This in turn, advanced the organisation as a whole. As exemplified in the following passage, individuals became better able to identify and implement ways to improve workplace practices:

"The most important thing in an organisation [is] communication, and it seems to me, in my experience, that communication problems come up more frequently [between] an authenticator and non-authenticators… and they cannot resolve it because they don't know what to do about it!...

I find I have a lot of problems with authenticators. They all seem just so straight. But whatever they say, I'm hearing something else. [My partner] often describes it as if he's speaking Chinese, and I'm speaking Swedish and we both call it English. And that [mis]communication in an organisation can slow things down and [cause] so many problems… To me, that's one of the great strengths of the I.D.™, because I know that when I say something… I know exactly what I mean… and the authenticator may hear something different… So I make sure that I ask that the person; just confirm what I've asked them to do. And similarly, if someone says something and I'm not clear on what they mean, I'll go actually ask them."

Another interviewee also stated that diversity in *I.D.™* profile may explain some communication difficulties within the workplace. In turn, this awareness may enhance understanding between organisational members and improve relations:

"That's one of the greatest pluses for I.D.™ in an organisation, in that you can actually get around communication problems… [Most people cannot] honestly admit, 'Look mate, I don't know what you're asking me. What do you want me to do? Why do you want to do that?' [The I.D.™ is] just so fantastic. We are just not brought up to do that because we assume that if someone is speaking English, then we should be able to understand what they say."

This interviewee offers valuable insight into the catalytic potential of the *I.D. system™* in initiating personal development within the workplace. The aforementioned passages acknowledge and confirm the potential of the *I.D. system™* to help understand self and others, and improve communication within a team and an organisation.

Opportunities for Team Improvement

According to a number of interviewees, enhanced communication typically aided team development. An interviewee explained:

"The communication issue is the number one issue. If you can get that going… then, I think you've got a good team."

Consequent to the greater insights individual team members had of themselves and of each other, they seemed to work more collaboratively, and more effectively. Using the *I.D. system™*, they became better able to identify those attributes or strategies that would facilitate the attainment of organisational goals. The following excerpts suggest this:

"It's really helpful when working out how I can be working with him more effectively; but he also knows, as my boss, how to get the best out of me. So, it has worked for both. Doesn't mean it works all the time, but certainly, it has been a very effective tool for us";

"That's helpful with the use verify, use authenticate drive; I'm a lot more frank without being rude, because she can handle it."

Some of the interviewees commented on how improved interpersonal relationships help strengthen working partnerships. This may be due to greater congruence between individual goals and team goals:

"It helps me to align myself with my team."

In addition, opportunities for team improvement were expressed as a result of improved understanding and communication within the team. In most cases, interviewees commented on behavioural change within the team, consequent to the use of the *I.D. system™*; and as a result of behavioural change, interaction between team members was more effective. In particular, there was a clear beneficial effect reciprocated between team members and their leaders, consequent to the *I.D. system™*. One leader commented on the comfort his staff members received from understanding his instinctive drives:

"The joke around the office is, 'Just say it in five words and get out of the office and he'll sort it out,' and all those staff have taken that onboard, you know. 'Don't sit there and tell me the details. Just tell me the bottom-line'... Of course, we have our moments, but they feel comfort in... the fact that, just because I don't want to know the details, doesn't mean that I'm not interested. It means that's the way I am."

Team members appeared to have a better understanding of the most effective way(s) to work with their leaders. This in turn, facilitated greater acknowledgement of individual requirements for improved performance. Commenting on his team leader, one interviewee stated:

"She exercises a leadership role [and] needs lots of information, lots of reassurance and [we] just feed back to her on a more regular basis. The guys have started to do that."

Further to this, team members recognised the importance of *I.D.™* profile diversity within the team to enhance collective performance. Although there was often an appreciation for individual difference prior to completing the *I.D.™* profile, this was not necessarily well understood. The *I.D. system™* provided opportunity to reflect upon the self and others in an effort to create better interactions. Self-reflection was particularly important; consideration of one's own role when working with others reinforced feelings of self-worth within the team context. As one interviewee commented:

"[We found it] was actually essential for the team to have someone like me who is verify authenticate to operate effectively. That sort of person actually is an essential part of a team."

Interviewees also commented on the need to achieve balance among the diverse individual *I.D.™* profiles. Such balance helps team members understand individual effects on working relationships:

"We looked at the balance, different kinds of ideas, why some working relationships were or weren't working."

As a result of balance within a team, team members began to understand the reasons for interactional difficulties, and the most appropriate way to overcome them:

"Working out that maybe we didn't have the right person. [For example] if they are in a job that really requires them to complete things for me, and they were an improvise person, they were never going to finish things. Whatever it is, we could see why maybe we were having problems there and adapt the role or shift the person to a role that [is] more effective."

Interviewees also commented on greater tolerance toward some team members, consequent to the *I.D. system™*. This indicates that, when team members communicate, understanding each other's drives and requirements to achieve optimal performance are essential elements to ensure team performance. As one interviewee stated:

"I have gained an increased tolerance and perhaps appreciation for the distinct skills and abilities each individual contributes to the team."

In contrast, it was noted that increased tolerance of individual instinctive drives can initiate greater clemency. The *I.D. system™* may be used to excuse, rather than rationalise, individual performance within a team:

> *"It maybe a weakness [if] you know what somebody's I.D.™ is… You become tolerant of them… [and] you can maybe tolerate too much… That's why you've got to have good and open communication about the whole process. So take responsibility, don't use it as an excuse."*

This comment aptly demonstrates that awareness of the *I.D.™* profile has the potential to lead to acceptance (subconscious or otherwise) of social loafing, both on the part of the individual and fellow team members. Yet, also noted by some of the interviewees is the notion of team responsibility. The team must ensure that the *I.D.™* profile is not used to exonerate poor individual performance that stifles overall team functioning. As a catalyst for communication, the *I.D. system™* can help to counteract this potential problem. In light of these perspectives, it thus appears that, while the *I.D. system™* can cause a sentiment of tolerance for social loafing, it can simultaneously be used to monitor and manage tolerance among team members.

The *I.D. system™* contains additional opportunities for team development. By tempering strong drives that may be ineffective and/or inefficient, it provides occasions to improve individual and team performance. One interviewee commented on the way *I.D.™* profiles reveal efficiencies within a team, as well as their origins:

> *"We started looking at ways to try and have people realise that they probably didn't need to verify to that extent, and [that] some behavioural issues were probably linked to some of our workflow bottlenecks. And just understanding that and being able to look at people in that light, and look at situations around the office in that light, we [were able to] at least understand the dynamics that make up the problem. Over the years, we have been able to address various situations, and I've tried different things… with that background in mind."*

This excerpt illustrates that the *I.D. system™* uncovers great opportunities for team development. Diagnosis of team balance and associated consequences of *I.D.™* profiles within a team, are integral parts of the *I.D. system™*. However, rather than pragmatically prescribing the dynamics of the ideal team, the *I.D. system™* offers great opportunity to learn from the existing balance and improve its efficiency. Evidently, this requires a level of tolerance, whilst simultaneously being attuned to organisational direction and goals.

However, intra-agency conflict is sometimes difficult to avoid. Despite this, the following section indicates that the *I.D. system™* has an important role in the effective management of team conflict.

Conflict Management

A number of interviewees, particularly those in senior positions, recognised the benefits afforded by the *I.D. system™* in effective conflict management. With enhanced insight into the way in which they and fellow co-workers functioned, they were able to identify possible causes of workplace conflict, rather than attribute blame to particular individuals. This is demonstrated in the following statements:

> *"It really helps me understand why we were having conflict – why we couldn't communicate effectively; because I'm always looking below the surface, and he was always up here, and I'm looking for things that don't exist… although we still have those issues, at least we understand why they happen";*

> *"As for effective working relationships… I would come into conflict with another key staff member. We are a bit at loggerheads; still trying to achieve the same goals, but really not able to do that well together. But we've been able to shift that. Realising that we are going about it differently, in terms of how we communicate and the way we process a problem or work on a project that involved both of us, is much more meaningful because we understand a little bit more of how each other works."*

As the second excerpt suggests, the *I.D. system™* provides more than a method of merely identifying causes of workplace conflict. It also offers opportunity to effectively manage workplace conflict. The detail articulated in individual *I.D.™* profiles enable senior personnel to harness particular strengths for the benefit of organisational aims.

Problem Solving

Given its potential value in the effective management of workplace conflict, it is not surprising to learn that the *I.D. system™* also aided problem solving endeavours. According to a number of interviewees, the system served as a springboard into constructive organisational change. It helped each team member to understand the path to personal peak performance, highlighting both strengths and barriers. While strengths were harnessed for the benefit of organisational aims, shortcomings were managed and restrained appropriately. This in turn, facilitated greater alliance with a team of distinct individuals.

Yet, as one interviewee noted, change at a personal or organisational level is not always a trouble-free process:

> *"It's got its challenges, because knowing what you're I.D.™ is… is just a starting point. It's the tip of the iceberg. I do implement change, not only within myself, but within the whole team, and I suppose that's where my greatest challenge has been… with the team here. It's… implementing that change, because with any change comes a deal of pain."*

Admittedly, the market is awash with various mediums to enhance workplace relations. Some of those consulted in the course of this project told of utilising other tools in the hope of improving problem solving practices within the workplace. However, according to some, these were not always effective. Although they offered insight into individual traits, they did little by way of enhancing problem solving practices:

> *"We would've been easily able to identify everybody else's personality using those other kinds of tools that we'd used in the past, but they didn't necessarily help us problem solve effectively…*
>
> *We enjoy the process of taking the material and discussing it and looking at how we can do things better… I haven't had anyone come back to me and say, 'No.'"*

Hence, in terms of problem solving capabilities, the *I.D. system™* helped to understand that different people have different ways of finding solutions. A greater understanding of how different people are driven to find solutions acted as a catalyst for change. Yet again is the suggestion of achieving goals swiftly, which is claimed to be a paramount aspect of using the *I.D. system™*.

Leadership

Although effective problem solving practices were prized by most of the interviewees, such practices were of particular value to those in senior positions. In their position of leadership, it is important for them to be well-informed and well-resourced; and it appears that the *I.D. system™* has the potential to assist with both.

Some of those interviewed advised that it is important to be well-informed – not only of workplace situations as they arise, but also of the strengths of individual staff members. When dire situations arise, such insight allows senior personnel to channel individual qualities appropriately for the benefit of the team and the organisation as a whole:

> *"Yeah, I suppose it helped me to better deal with people, especially when I know that other person's I.D.™."*

Insight into individual staff qualities also allowed senior personnel to utilise appropriate management techniques and therefore appear well-resourced. Rather than haphazardly select a management strategy that may ease a dire workplace situation, senior personnel made decisions that were more informed, and perhaps more likely to resolve workplace issues. Evidently, this ability to forecast prevented a waste of time and resources:

> *"[The I.D. system™] offers another skill in assessing particular staffing situations, and provides me with additional options as to how to deal with it."*

The *I.D. system™* is likely to influence leadership roles greatly. Literature in the field of organisational studies suggests that leaders are chiefly occupied with two concerns – human resource maintenance (that is, influencing individual competence and willingness to perform) and task performance (Wood et al., 2004). It can be argued that as team members understand the drives of fellow team mates, there is potentially less need for strong leadership in the form of human resource maintenance. Consequently, the role of leaders could shift toward a greater emphasis on task performance. The precise way in which the *I.D. system™* influences leadership is an area for future research.

Critical Aspects of the *I.D.™ System*

Although the interviewees were offered opportunity to critique the *I.D. system™*, there were very few disapproving sentiments. Those noted appeared to cluster around key themes; namely, the potential for stereotyping others and the avoidance of personal responsibility.

Stereotyping

Some of the interviewees warned that users of the *I.D. system™* must be aware of the potential for stereotyping that may be seen to be discriminatory. An *I.D. system™* profile may invite some individuals, particularly senior personnel, to characterise fellow co-workers and perhaps make incorrect assumptions about skills and abilities. One interviewee noted:

> *"I don't think you could use it to identify… I wouldn't be using it as something [to] screen people out. It would be very important not to do that."*

Whilst an *I.D.™* profile may encourage stereotypical perceptions from others, interviewees also highlighted the difficulties of managing their own *I.D.™* profile. In particular, some deemed it an opportunity to avoid, if not abdicate personal responsibility.

Avoidance of Personal Responsibility

Some of those interviewed advised that the *I.D. system™* is sometimes used to rationalise personal apathy and lack of initiative. In reference to a fellow co-worker, one interviewee stated:

> *"They think that's the way I am, and therefore I don't take responsibility for anything else. That's the way I am, so you have to live with me."*

Although another concurred with this view, he recognised a method to minimise the avoidance of personal responsibility – that is, effective interaction:

> *"That's why you've got to have good and open communication about the whole process, so [employees] take responsibility and don't use it as an excuse."*

There thus appears to be some concern around the ability of the *I.D. system™* to influence the identity of the self and of others.

Ethical Considerations

To encourage clients to consider the responsibilities associated with the *I.D. system™*, *Link-up International* provides all clients with *The Principles of Ethics and Protocols for the Proper Use of the I.D.™ system* (Wood and Burgess, 2003). The document reviews the importance of confidentiality, the need to correctly interpret *I.D. system™* results, the danger of assumption, labelling and false judgement, as well as the place of the *I.D. system™* within an extensive organisational system.

Despite the perceptible value of this document, the research material suggests that the operationalisation of ethics within the *I.D. system™* remains somewhat ambiguous. It appears that personal information unearthed by the system can be used for good *and* evil, for the privacy and confidentiality of individual employees were not always respected. In fact, the research material indicates that it would be rather naïve to assume a collective and balanced morality amongst all those involved with the *I.D. system™*.

Although not specifically asked to comment on ethical considerations, some of the interviewees shared their uneasiness about such matters. A particular concern related to the *presumption* of collegial goodwill. Use of the *I.D. system™* was mostly viewed in the spirit of enhancing mutual understanding about instinctive drive among staff. However, it also assumes a degree of munificence among team members. As one interviewee explained, exposing personal vulnerabilities may generate negative repercussions:

> *"If the information is shared… it can expose people to weaknesses and if it's not used in the right spirit, people can actually abuse that knowledge, I think. I am probably looking at an HR [Human Resources'] perspective that if you know things about a particular person, that knowledge can be used for evil, if you like."*

Notwithstanding concerns around collegial goodwill, the availability of personal information also raises questions around confidentiality.

Comparisons with Other Tools

Some of the interviewees commented on other tools they had utilised in the past. One interviewee stated:

> *"I've done a great many of these things, and interestingly it doesn't seem to matter, what I do. I'd always end up high in the top right-hand corner or somewhere like that, always out there."*

For management purposes, another spoke of using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers and McCaulley, 1985) – one of the most popular personality typology tools used by organisations to develop stronger teams (Murray, 1990):

> *"I did [the MBTI] at a management workshop; I was in New Zealand. I think I've done it once in Australia at something I was at, and the results again were not all that dissimilar."*

The two aforementioned excerpts allude to perceived similarities between the *I.D. system™* and other assessment tools used within the workplace. However, most of the interviewees suggested that a marked benefit of the *I.D. system™* is its fundamental ethos – that is, its focus on team development, as well as its extensive scope. Some also indicated that the *I.D. system™* complements other assessment tools, thus offering greater comprehensiveness.

Discussion

Current literature in the field of organisational psychology highlights the potential benefits afforded by teamwork within the workplace (West, 2004). However, it can be difficult for employers and senior personnel to establish and maintain teams that gel. It is a juggling act involving the delicate interplay of organisational goals and interpersonal dynamics.

To improve understanding around interpersonal dynamics, the *I.D. system™* offers a method for gauging individual instinctive drives, and recent quantitative research affirms that the tool is statistically valid and reliable (Fitzgerald et al., 2005b). However, for the purpose of thoroughness, this paper sought to investigate the inherent value of the *I.D. system™* among some of its users, and thereby complement existing quantitative findings with exploratory qualitative research.

Ten senior personnel and ten general employees were interviewed to explore the perceived influence of the *I.D. system™* on individual performance, group performance and leadership. This consultative process was guided by a semi-structured open-ended interview schedule. Consequent research material was analysed for emerging themes, using an interpretive and a reflexive approach.

According to the interviewees, the *I.D. system™* was used by the firms they represented to achieve organisational aims in an expeditious manner. The organisations sought to enhance professional interaction, identify individual strengths and weaknesses, and improve the alignment between employee

and professional role. These collectively allude to a desire to promptly reduce the negative impact of organisational change; and it appears that, for the most part, the *I.D. system™* had the desired effect.

Collectively, the interviewees recognised great value in the *I.D. system™*. They spoke of improved communication with co-workers *and* clients, an improved understanding of the self, as well as an improved understanding of others. Opportunities for personal development were also afforded by the *I.D. system™*. These were particularly appreciated by senior personnel who prized the prospect of developing leadership qualities. Beyond the personal domain, the *I.D. system™* had a positive influence on team development. It facilitated effective conflict management and problem solving efforts.

Despite its many benefits, the interviewees highlighted a number of limitations with the *I.D. system™*. There is the risk that individuals may be stereotyped according to their *I.D.™* profile. There is also potential for individuals to abdicate personal responsibility for their behaviours. Furthermore, it is possible that personal information will be misused, therefore breaching the privacy and confidentiality of employees. Another concern pertains to the *presumption* of collegial goodwill; knowledge about a co-worker's personal shortcomings may not always be used with benevolent intentions.

While potential shortcomings are noteworthy, some of those consulted advised that the *I.D. system™* compares quite favourably to relatively more popular personality typology tools used within organisational settings, like the MBTI (Myers and McCaulley, 1985). The system appears to have a team-focus and an encompassing scope.

Despite the value of the present findings, a number of methodological limitations must be considered. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of this project indicates that the interviewees provide a mere snapshot of opinions around the inherent value of the *I.D. system™* within organisational settings. Secondly, qualitative research is limited by time, context and the nature of individual perspectives. Thirdly, the recruitment practices used in the present study may have biased the present findings. Similarly, the interpretive approach used to analyse the research material should be acknowledged as a source of bias. The findings reflect the interaction between the research team and the interviewees; they also reflect the research team's interpretation of these interactions, and are thus tainted by the frames the team members bring to the project (Eco, 1992). The construction of themes from the interview material may therefore not adequately encapsulate the perceptions voiced by the interviewees. Further to this, given that interpretation is continually evolving, the present findings have a limited lifespan.

Despite potential shortcomings, the qualitative material presented in this paper suggests that the *I.D. system™* serves an important catalyst for organisational change. While most of the firms represented in the study employed the tool to address organisational change, it ironically *spurred* organisational change. More specifically, it facilitated effective communication at various levels, and served as a springboard into constructive modifications in both professional and personal practice.

The inherent value of the *I.D. system™* within the workplace complements previous research that statically validated the tool (Fitzgerald et al., 2005b). This has important repercussions for business and behavioural sciences, particularly those efforts to improve team performance within the workplace. It highlights the need to focus future research endeavours on tools that not only expound individual difference, but also facilitate effective dialogue and organisational change.

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