

# How to Debrief a More Defensive Profile



Human Synergistics' tools measure the development of human behavior. This means that a coachee goes through an initial measurement, followed by a coaching and development program and then after six to nine months there should be another measurement. After going through six to nine months of coaching and development, surely the results will show a more Constructive and less Defensive profile. Or will they?

In the majority of cases they will and positive, Constructive change will be created. Having said that, Constructive change will not just happen, it needs to be brought about consciously with the help of an action plan that is put into practice, rigorously, ideally. However, there is a small number of profiles that are more Defensive in the re-measurement than they were in the initial one. This can be a discouraging situation for both the participant as well as the coach or consultant. The disappointment and frustration that this situation can bring about will surely need to be handled with very much care. While a defensive initial measurement can be difficult to coach, a more defensive re-measurement can be a real challenge to the even the most experienced coach.

## REASONS FOR MORE DEFENSIVE PROFILES

One reason for a more defensive profile can be that the tool has not been used appropriately. Our individual level tools are oftentimes used as part of a leadership development program. Sometimes, however, these programs are not aligned with our tools and may be designed to increase aggressive behaviors, which may well show up in the profile. As our tools are developmental in nature, using them in the selection and placement processes also represents an inappropriate use of our tools.

Another source of a more Defensive profile can lie within the timeframe in which the re-measurement is conducted. We recommend six to nine months for individual level tools between the initial test and the re-measurement and the coachee should have been in that particular position or role for at least 6 months. Any change, firstly, will take some time to show in the profile and to increasing insecurities that change inherently brings about may lead to more defensive, mainly more passive behaviors. If someone is getting feedback that has not been in a position long enough this may also show in the profile as more passive/defensive. The expectations of the individuals are often not totally clear and they might test the water rather carefully when they have just started a new job.

Lastly, a reason for a more Defensive profile could be the group that has provided feedback to the participant. The group might not be exactly the same as in the initial measurement; and this is not necessary, as long as the person who provides feedback has worked with the participant long enough and frequently. We typically see in LSI and LWS feedback that, when we separate the feedback of the higher level manager, their peers and their direct reports, there are differences. Generally speaking, the feedback from direct reports tends to show observations of more Constructive behavior, while that from peers tends to show stronger aggressive behavioral styles. Now, we can imagine, that if in the initial measurement more direct reports were included while in the re-measurement they are outnumbered by the participants' peers, the overall feedback may be tipped towards a more aggressive profile.

## COACHING IDEAS FOR DIFFERENT PROFILES

The coach can be in a challenging situation when the results in the re-measurement are more Defensive. The coach may not only be seen as the bearer of bad news, but might even be given some responsibility for the profile that is not showing desired results. However, we have to ensure that the coach can still approach this situation with concern and curiosity. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that the coach is not creating the change, but the coach is providing some context, creating awareness, acceptance and move toward action steps so the coachee can create change.

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What can a coach do when they are confronted with a more Defensive profile? A more defensive profile can mean three different scenarios: the first one is that one specific style could have become more defensive. This is by far the most common pattern, mainly when it comes to Dependence. This can be explained by humans' natural reaction to change, meaning that here the coachee is showing some dependence towards the coach. There may generally be some insecurities such as "if I am not supposed to behave aggressively, then what do I do?" Approval can also be a style that might be more strongly developed. I might be as a leader in this program and might be told that we need to be more inspiring and motivating but we don't quite know how to do that in a Constructive way so they try to get people's approval and be liked by others to measure whether they are showing this behavior. Some organization might run "being Constructive" into a competition which is sure to spark some stronger marks in the Competitive styles. Generally, a good place to start is to ask the individual how their development journey has been progressing, at first, without showing them their profile. Next we would be focusing on the successes that show in the profile in the form of stronger Constructive styles, more in depth and before looking at the style that has become more Defensive which should be reframed as a side effect of other developments.

The second scenario is that we might see a shift from either Passive/Defensive to Aggressive/Defensive behavior or vice versa. I am just being told as a leader that we don't want to the aggressive behaviors anymore, but they are not helped in what they should be doing instead. One starting point here could be to ask how the Circumplex was explained to the participant and whether the Constructive behaviors were appropriately explained. Next the coach should try to understand which action steps the participant has taken as a change in clusters requires some more dramatic change.

The third scenario is that styles have become more Defensive overall which is a bit worrying and the coach should get interested in what is going on in their life and work as this person needs to feel more insecure and at risk than before. We will also want to know what steps have been taken. There might also be a misunderstanding of what the changes and the effect of them actually is. Lastly, it would be important to learn why the individual feels less able to react in Constructive ways and to carefully observe their reaction to the profile.

At the end though, we can sum up that even changing towards more Defensive styles is better than no change at all! People lose perspective that these are developmental tools. We are not measuring stable personality characteristics – it would be inappropriate to say something like "I am a red person". It shows that behavioral change that is also recognized by other people is actually in the realm of the possible. Having said that, change will only happen over time and with some dedication and commitment on the sides of the participant, the coach and the organization.

Do you have questions about any of our tools or would you like to discuss your next measurement? We are looking forward to receiving your message via [info@humansynergistics.de](mailto:info@humansynergistics.de).

*This blog post is based on a webinar done by John van Etten, Managing Director of Human Synergistics InterConnex GmbH.*