THE DILEMMA OF SELF-PERCEPTION

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The admonition to "know thyself" has existed for a long time and yet most findings reveal that the majority are very poor self-evaluators. A person of relatively high status may decline to admit a weakness for fear that change will undermine his position. An "unsuccessful person" may be threatened still more by a full realization of his inadequacies. Conversely, the "successful person" may feel so secure that further change and development are not a threat but a challenge. Thus, there are many pros and cons to the questions of whether an adult can, or should, change. Further, we should recognize that the self concept is one of the important and critical factors.

How much behavioral change is usually needed by adequately functioning people? Fortunately, most adults are not in mental and correctional institutions. Even most troubled persons who go to a psychiatrist are given the assurance that he need not concern himself and undergo complete change. Adults, in the main, have been moderately successful in family life, at work and in community affairs - some remarkably so. We live in a country which tolerates -- and hopefully encourages -- individuality and therefore we should <u>expect</u> to see a rather wide range of behavior.

In recent years, attention has shifted from <u>traits</u> (characteristics) of successful leaders or managers to the roles and <u>performance</u> of those leaders. I view this as a very healthy change. More recently, increasing attention is being given to the creative efforts and <u>variety</u> of contributions that individuals can make to a group effort.

Not only is little change usually needed, but generally not very much (at a time) is possible, although each person is capable of some. The psychiatrist and psychologist realizes that adults are not entirely rigid, but they are rather firmly put together. We usually say that this individual has a "well- integrated" personality. What a person is has developed over many years as a result of unique needs plus a series of individual experiences.

Suppose we make an effort to perceive ourselves via set of questions. Then, having done that, try to compare our pattern or profile with the group's profile. We can, additionally, consider the question: "Am I displaying (is the <u>group</u> displaying) a "normal" pattern? If not, what does this mean -- should something be done about seeking a change in one's behavior. [1]

A SELF-PERCEPTION EXERCISE

Instructions: Each paragraph below gives a description of personal characteristics which might or might not be true of you. For each statement try to determine the degree to which the statement is typical of you. Try to be as objective as you can. Rate each statement according to the following scale:

    7   The statement is very much characteristic of me.
    6   The statement is somewhat characteristic of me.
    5   The statement is slightly characteristic of me.
    4   The statement is neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic of me.
    3   The statement is slightly uncharacteristic of me.
    2   The statement is somewhat uncharacteristic of me.
    1   The statement is very much uncharacteristic of me.

_____1.   I resent suggestions, hold to my present ways and tend to resist pressures to change.

_____2.   I am orderly, and tend to systematize things and people.

_____3.   I am disorganized, and live in a state of "clutter."

_____4.   I do each days work well but resist and resent evaluation. I am inclined to get involved in busy work and avoid tasks which call for a lot of future planning and preparation.

_____5.   I tend to do a lot of dreaming, and have been sometimes referred to as an "idea" man but accused of having lost a sense of proportion of perspective.

_____6.   I spend much of my time and energy in criticizing political parties, school, work, other people and so on.

_____7.   I am a "worrier". Often I worry about things that have not happened or about things that are already over.

_____8.   I am sarcastic, sometimes towards others in my presence and sometimes toward others who are not present.

_____9.   I am likely to "nag" if things aren't going well.

_____10.   I am a procrastinator, putting off decisions until I have sought out and questioned others; often it is then too late to take the best action.
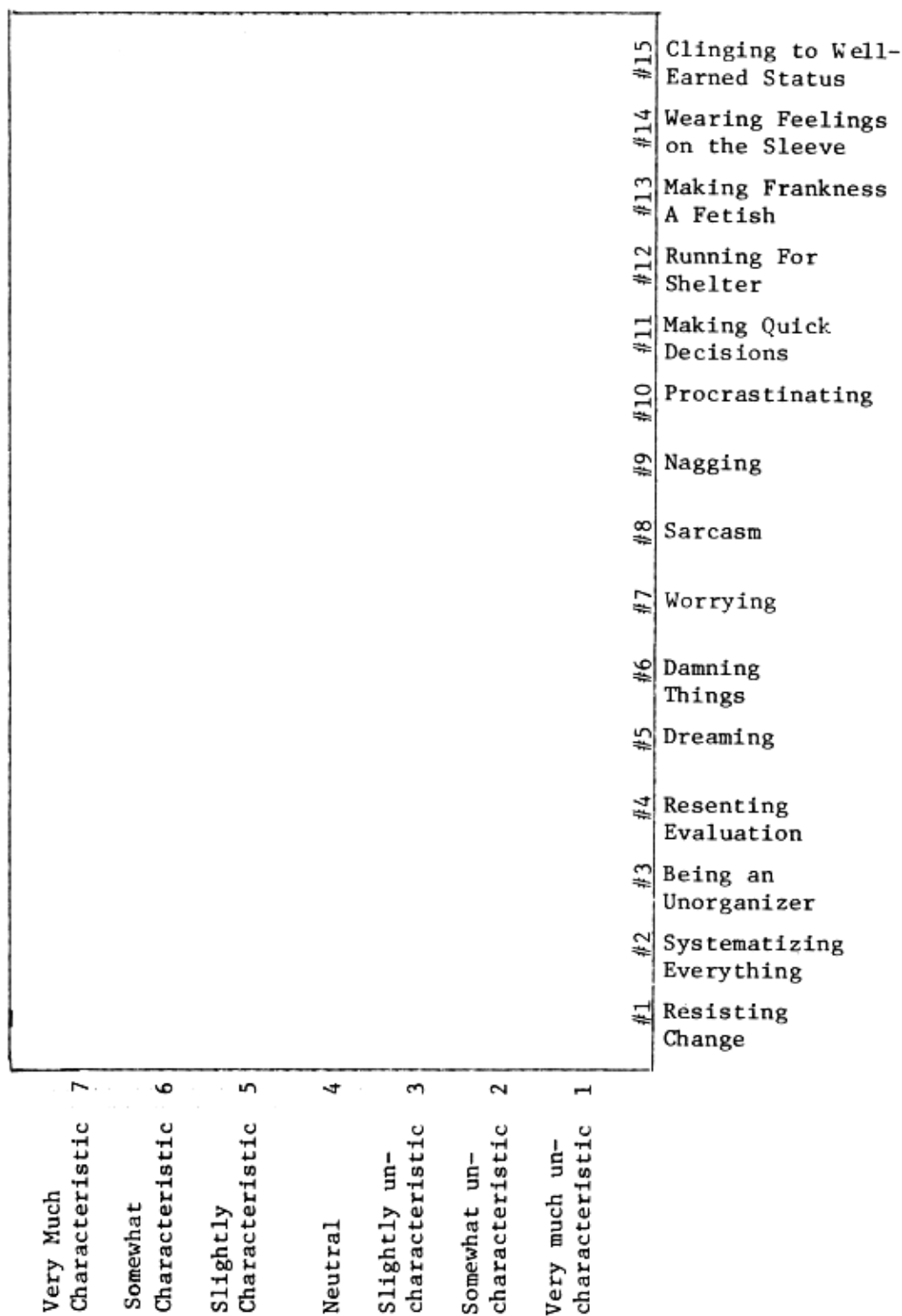
_____11.   I am what people could call "decisive". I am efficient, size things up quickly and act so as to get results right away.

_____12.   I avoid becoming entangled in other people's emotional problems and usually find some excuse to get away from people who are about to "unload" on me.

_____13.   I consider myself an honest person. I am often quite frank even if the truth is painful to others.

_____14.   I am quite sensitive and often take things said very personally. I am likely to "fly off the handle" with little provocation.

_____15.   I find it very difficult to "step down in responsibility" to make room for others. Once I have gained a position with status I find it difficult to give it up.

Self Perception Rating Tally

Instructions: After completing the questionnaire copy your ratings of each statement below. Keep the original questionnaire and turn in this sheet <u>unsigned</u> to the instructor.

1.   _____   14.   _____

2.   _____   15.   _____

3.   _____

4.   _____

5.   _____

6.   _____

7.   _____

8.   _____

9.   _____

10.   _____

11.   _____

12.   _____

13.   _____

Self Perception
Feedback Chart
Individual and Group Profiles

#15	Clinging to Well-Earned Status
#14	Wearing Feelings on the Sleeve
#13	Making Frankness A Fetish
#12	Running For Shelter
#11	Making Quick Decisions
#10	Procrastinating
#9	Nagging
#8	Sarcasm
#7	Worrying
#6	Damning Things
#5	Dreaming
#4	Resenting Evaluation
#3	Being an Unorganizer
#2	Systematizing Everything
#1	Resisting Change

7 — Very Much Characteristic
6 — Somewhat Characteristic
5 — Slightly Characteristic
4 — Neutral
3 — Slightly un-characteristic
2 — Somewhat un-characteristic
1 — Very much un-characteristic

Procedure: For Leaders

The participants should follow the procedures set out in the exercise without any discussion or debate on personality characteristics. This compliance will help to make this a "cleaner" exercise since they should be registering their current self-perceptions without being influence by other material.

Just a very few words by the instructor prior to completing the self-perception rating scale are in order. Basically, the instructor should mention such concepts as:
critical nature of the self-concept, sources of esteem (self, others), and the need for self evaluation,

Next, direct all participants' attention to the exercise and the Self-Perception Rating Scale. Ask all to read the instructions and the 7-point scale. Check to see if there are any questions as to meanings and try to clear these up if any exist.

Second, have everyone complete the rating scale and then also record their responses on the rating tally sheet provided. Only this tally sheet will be turned in to the instructor; and it should be without names. The instructor, therefore, is seeking group data, and not trying to identify what individual self-views are.

Third, ask everyone to plot his own personal profile on the Feedback Chark (Diagram) and then read the Summary section, while the averages are being calculated for the group on each of 15 items (via the tally sheets). It is very helpful if the instructor has an assistant to handle these calculations for him, but it is still possible for the instructor to do it alone.

Fourth, the instructor should write the averages on the chalkboard or flip chart for the 15 items so that all participants can see them. The participants should then plot these class averages on their feedback charts so they will have two profiles on their chart when through with the data.

Fifth, a discussion should take place to deal with some questions which generally arise, such as:

1.   Why is my individual profile so different from the group's? (It is not unusual, in a class of 20 to 24, to have no exact matches of individual with group data.)

2.   What is the effect of calculating an average with data such as these?

3.   Does extreme disagreement between individual data and group averages mean that the individual is in poor shape, psychologically? (Here, a discussion of normal and functional vs. dysfunctional can arise in a natural way.)

4.   What do other groups look like in terms of their profiles? (This can be quite comforting to the group when they find that the general shape of the group profiles is not <u>very</u> different. However, it does not satisfy questions 1 and 3, above.)

        NOTE: For plotting and comparison purposes, it is very helpful to draw a straight horizontal line at the neutral (4) value.

        The author suggests that the instructor duplicate the feedback chart and accumulate group data profiles over several terms. It seems useful too, to label these as to term, class, number of participants, and any unusual events. These charts always seem to be of great interest to current participants and may be of use to the instructor in analyzing variations or trends in student self-profiles.

        There does seem to be an appreciable difference when comparing Master's students with undergraduates. Master's students tend to produce a profile (group mean) which is generally more positive (values larger than 4), and also more closely clustered around the mid-value of 4. (This observation is based on a limited number of cases - far less than 100.)

        Some of the tentative conclusions that the author has reached are.:

1.   Students are quite cautious about making judgments about themselves.

2.   The conservative nature of typical responses covers scale value that are stated as "characteristic" as well as those stated as an "uncharacteristic,"

3.   Participants were quite conservative even when the general tone of the item was flattering to the self-image (in terms of the traditional U.S. cultural definition).

4.   Participants were visibly concerned when they discovered that the class average profile did not match their individual pattern of values. This concern was reduced considerably by a discussion which centered on the pragmatic issue of how well the individual's profile <u>functioned</u> for him.

REFERENCES

1.   Dutton, Richard E., <u>The Behavior Laboratory: A Manual</u> (Pacific Palisades, California: Goodyear Publishing, 1975), pp. 11-23.