

Using the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory to Strengthen Extension Programs¹

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This EDIS document is the fourth in a series on teaching to different personality types and provides a detailed explanation of the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) and how it can be used to assist in Extension program development. The entire series includes the following EDIS documents:

1. [*Teaching to Different Personality Types*](#)
2. [*Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator to Strengthen Extension Programs*](#)
3. [*Using the True Colors Personality Assessment to Strengthen Extension Programs*](#)
4. [*Using the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory to Strengthen Extension Programs*](#)

Introduction

The Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) uses 32 items to measure how people prefer to solve problems (Kirton, 2011). Based on the responses to the instrument, Kirton (2011) asserts an individual's problem-solving style falls on a continuum between adaption and innovation. This means we are not strictly adaptors or innovators but rather have a tendency towards one or the other when solving problems. In addition, there are strengths and challenges associated with both preferences; extensive research has shown that when working collaboratively, the most effective and efficient teams include people who exhibit both preferences (Lamm, Shoulders, Roberts, Irani, Unruh Snyder, & Brendemuhl, 2012).

Adaptive Learners

Individuals with an adaptive problem-solving style prefer more structure when solving problems. Adaptors "narrowly focus their attention to solving a problem within defined boundaries" (Lamm, Rhoades, Irani, Roberts, Unruh Snyder, & Brendemuhl, 2011, p. 13). Learners exhibiting an adaptive tendency need to be provided with boundaries to work within. They appreciate solving problems, but strive to make simple, direct, small changes within an already established system that over time can lead to larger change. If adaptors are provided with activities that are not defined, they will struggle and get frustrated. When creating educational opportunities for

adaptors, be sure to include definitions of what is expected and allowed throughout the process.



Figure 1. Adaptive learners like to solve problems within prescribed boundaries.

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Innovative Learners

Individuals with an innovative problem-solving style appreciate less structure when solving problems. Innovators approach problems from a 30,000-foot view, stepping outside boundaries and often defying rules to come up with multiple solutions to a single problem (Lamm et al., 2011). Innovators also appreciate solving problems but do not like being restrained by an established set of rules. If a problem is too strongly defined and limited, innovators will feel constrained and become frustrated. When educating innovators, try to create an ambiguous project that does not have a right or wrong answer and allow them to figure out a solution. Be careful, though; innovators often come up with a variety of large scale, creative solutions that may or may not work and often have trouble focusing on selecting one they plan to implement.



Figure 2. Innovative learners like to work outside of the boundaries.

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Using Adaptor/Innovative Teams to Your Advantage

When developing Extension programs that are designed to assist participants in processing complex issues of which there is not a right or wrong solution but rather one that requires consensus, it is best to create teams that include both adaptors and innovators. Varied problem-solving style teams will allow innovative learners to come up with

innovative, creative solutions and then allow the adaptive learners to refine the ideas by creating efficient mechanisms that can be implemented easily.

Summary

Thinking about personality type when developing Extension programs can assist us in producing educational experiences that resonate with all types of audiences and focus on their strengths. If you are interested, please feel free to visit the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources contact page (<https://piecenter.com/contact>) to get in touch with Dr. Telg about administering the KAI and other cognitive assessments to strengthen your Extension programs.

References

- Kirton, M. J. (2011). *Adaption-Innovation in the context of diversity and change*. Routledge, New York, NY.
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