Foreword

Relational Thinking Styles (RTS) is a hypothesis developed by Dorothy Davis and first presented in her doctoral thesis in 1972. She once told me that after she finished writing her thesis and received her doctorate degree, she packed all of her books and papers into a cardboard box and stored them in a closet, figuring she would never need them again because no one would ever be interested.

A few years later, however, that changed when Dottie happened to hear a comment by Phyllis Chisson during a faculty meeting. This particular meeting at the high school where they both taught was on the topic of what to do with the 15% of slow learners whose IQ levels are too low to qualify for the learning disabilities program, yet too high to qualify for the educable mentally retarded program. Phyllis commented on the usefulness of the 1963 workbook-text *Creative Analysis* by Upton and Samson. Although Phyllis and I taught at different schools in different districts at that time, we had both been using the text *Creative Analysis* for all of our language arts classes since 1975, including a version I had adapted for slower learners. Our results in terms of student learning had been fantastic! They got smarter (and we did too).

Dottie said she instinctively knew there was some sort of connection between *Creative Analysis* and her own theoretical model because she had encountered some of Upton’s writings during the course work for her doctorate. Back then the connection seemed tenuous because RTS is a model of non-verbal thinking and *Creative Analysis* leads to the development of verbal skills. However, after that first interaction at the faculty meeting, Dottie began meeting with Phyllis every morning for an hour before classes began. Phyllis and I would then go over these discussions, and much more, during phone conversations every day after school.

Because we had no way to assess thinking styles, we developed techniques for identifying some of these patterns. We quickly discovered that Direct thinkers loved repetitive worksheets and hated having to come up with ideas of their own, so we developed techniques for getting them to think for themselves. For example, we designed a book report format for all ability levels with five sets of topic sentences: one set elicited some aspect of plot; one elicited an aspect of character; another elicited a scene (or setting); and another elicited a theme. Students could select any sentence from each set and fill in the blanks. For example, a simple plot sentence was: “The part of this book (story) I liked best was ____ because ____.” Producing their own ideas was uncomfortable for Direct thinkers and we usually ended up with the minimum five sentence book report from them, but they were, nevertheless providing their own thoughts. Analytical and Relational thinkers, however, would often end up writing much more than one sentence for each prompt. We also used various mini-tests when trying to figure out student thinking styles such as various sorting and classifying exercises, and of course the way a student responded to exercises in *Creative Analysis* gave us lots of clues as well.
In between raising children and teaching full time, Phyllis and I talked about Creative Analysis and, much more often, RTS. We were obsessed with these ideas, and once Dottie came up with her simple non-verbal assessment for determining styles, Phyllis and I spent as much time as possible talking through these processes by phone (we lived a good distance apart). Dottie and Phyllis continued to spend mornings and, later, summers working out this information.

When I moved to Madison, WI, in 1980, our daily conversations got very expensive, but we continued them anyway. I began working in a treatment program for delinquent adolescents who had drug and alcohol problems. Around the same time, Phyllis left teaching and began sharing office space with the same sort of program. During this time, we strategized treatment options based upon thinking styles, which the staff would successfully implement.

We discovered a great deal during this time; some were things we had gotten wrong. We discovered other implications and applications we had not even imagined (we are still discovering these). Phyllis and I worked as independent consultants in different parts of the country, giving Dottie’s non-verbal assessment of thinking style, the Davis Non-Verbal Assessment (DNV), and performing the analyses of each session in our heads. The analysis became such a stress for us that we knew we needed some sort of computer program capable of analyzing the raw data from observations during assessment sessions, so that we could teach others how to administer the assessment. Phyllis pulled out of her consulting business to develop that program while I continued providing assessments.

In addition to treating delinquents and other drug and alcohol clients, the agency I worked for decided to develop a company called Profiles dedicated to utilizing the DNV in corporate America with the goal of assisting with hiring and problem solving. I traveled for several years working with manufacturing, sales, advertising, and start-up companies helping them to refine business practices. Rayovac was one of the first companies to utilize the DNV and resulting consultation services. I was able to reconfigure effective work teams, including giving assistance in hiring the right person for the right job, moving personnel in and out of creative positions, and problem-solving sales dilemmas.

In the majority of the corporations where I tested and consulted, the issues of poor performance in sales stemmed from having individuals with complex thinking styles (Analytical or Relational thinkers) in positions where a drive for closure and a focus on short-term goals was essential. Those two factors are characteristic of most sales positions, making Direct thinkers with closure-oriented temperaments the most appropriate candidate. Other times, we found Direct thinkers, who ought to be selling, promoted to management positions, which require an Analytical thinking style pattern. There were a few exceptions to this general rule, such as in complex, long-term sales positions, which we identified by means of our RTS Job/Context Analysis. Occasionally, we found successful Direct managers of franchise type operations for which following rules and protocols was essential to success. In any case, sales teams in corporations we assessed became more productive with access to the DNV. I suspect that this approach could virtually wipe out complexity inversion, or the “Peter Principle,” as well.

I also worked extensively with Stephen and Brady Advertising. Again, getting the right thinking style in the right job was critical to not only the creative process, but to getting the work to the client in a timely manner. With a biotech company, for example, I found that the software engineers kept changing the product, creating “a better mousetrap” and the product was not getting to the market.

Our testing and consulting with a variety of companies for a variety of positions, and seeing the positive effects we were able to facilitate over those many years, gave us confidence that we were on the right track. We were able to help companies increase productivity, put together better teams, and increase bottom line profits; these outcomes verified what we felt instinctively, that the DNV was a powerful and useful consulting tool. We just needed a way to apply it more easily and predictably.
To this end, Phyllis put together a computer program design, and we spent about a year (again on the phone) verbally testing its logic. I would read the items from a given assessment to her; she would follow along with the flow and then give me the results, which were usually the same ones I had come to in my own mind. Once we had corrected as many glitches as we could in that way, Davis-Nelson, Phyllis’s consulting firm, hired a professional programmer to program Phyllis’s logic. Once the computer program was complete, Dottie and I came to Seattle to run multiple tests against it. Dottie never used as many observational items as we did, so we were concerned that the computer program might not be consistent with her analysis (which was the only one that ever counted). However, after running a DNV session and comparing our individual analyses with the computer analysis program, we were relieved to discover that all of our coding agreed. We followed up with many more assessments to establish reliability so that we could begin to teach others how to administer the assessment. That has been my task (among others) over these years. I was naturally very pleased that the DNV study at the University of Oregon found such high inter-rater reliability among coders.

The future applications of RTS are endless. Recently, I was reminded of the effectiveness of RTS, when a former colleague of mine went to work for a new and innovative start-up company. Quite soon, he discovered a high level of tension between the inventive process and the need to move the product to market in a timely and cost effective manner. In a situation that I have seen all too often in the past, the leader of the creative team (a Relational thinker) was determined to hold on to her brilliant design to keep the “integrity of the product.” On the other hand, my former colleague (an Analytical thinker) was responsible for getting the product built in a cost-effective manner and could see that this tension could quickly send the company into bankruptcy. While he was developing charts and diagrams that would allow a pricing system and building processes that would create a profitable business, the inventor was spinning off new ideas.

This situation would be very easy to remedy by utilizing the DNV to assess individuals and provide them with the information they need to change frustrating work environments like this one. Results from the DNV could suggest a new arrangement of job responsibilities and help individuals to understand their thinking style as well as those of other team members. (In this case, the fact that the DNV requires no language would be especially valuable, since individuals on that team do not all speak the same language.)

It is my hope that this new book provides information necessary to assist corporate America and educational systems (and any other organization for which people matter) to realize the value of the RTS system. Armed with this new knowledge, they could make the important (though sometimes simple) decisions necessary to change the ineffective systems and work environments that persist because they lack this knowledge.

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