

new dimensionsSM

A Quarterly Journal of The Mentoring Institute®

Vol. 7



A published reprint from the Quarterly Journal
of The Mentoring Institute

I-OPT

As professionals working in the field of mentoring, we know that the business of matching mentors to protégés is not always an easy one. There are many different approaches that can be used - everything from matching mentors to protégés based on interests, geographic location, skill level occupation, seniority, to complete and random matching. Sometimes attempts at matching individuals in mentoring relationships are successful and other times not so successful. It seems many of us are looking for that magic formula to tell us how to make the ideal, productive match each time.

Unfortunately, there may not be a magic formula. However, we came across an interesting tool to help take the guesswork out of match making. The tool is called the "I-OPT" (Input - Output Processing Template) Survey. "I-OPT" is a non-evasive survey that measures the information processing strategy a person uses to navigate life.

Information processing strategies determine how a person will make decisions and how life activities are conducted. For example, a person who values detail will usually spend more time processing a task than a similarly skilled non-detailed person. To know this type of information about a person proves to be particularly valuable when placing protégés with potential mentors.

According to the developer of the "I-OPT" Survey, Dr. Gary Salton, it is important to understand what it means to be a mentor. Salton describes a mentor as a person who draws on "thinking resources." It is not necessary for a good mentor to be able to "do" the things he or she talks about. It is only necessary for him or her to understand a situation and be able to offer options and evaluations. The "I-OPT" Survey can help determine if these are the type of people you are targeting as mentors in your program.

How to Use the Survey

The 24-question instrument is very "user friendly" and takes less than 10 minutes to complete. For each question on the survey the participant simply reads a grouping of phrases and then checks the one that best describes him or her as an individual. For example: I complete things I start; I respond fast; I make plans; I imagine things.

As a mentoring program coordinator or coordination team, one way to use this survey is to administer it to pairs of individuals who are being considered as possible mentoring partners. After the surveys have been taken, The coordinator or teams sends them to Dr. Salton to be summarized.

Two types of reports are sent back. One is called the "Individual Analyses Report" in which the participant's responses to the questionnaire are tabulated and his or her own personal strategic styles are identified.

The report contains a description of the behavioral traits and preferences common to those strategic styles. For example, if an individual scores high as a logical processor some characteristics would include: likes short range, specific goals; prefers specific, detailed directions and clear expectations; likes consistency, encouragement and recognition; and likes to complete things in a logical sequence paying attention to detail.

In addition, the report gives tips and suggestions as to how an individual who scored high as a logical processor can learn to work well with those who scored high in other areas.

A "Two Person Analyses Report" is also sent back. This report compares strategic styles of two individuals. According to Salton, by recognizing complementary strengths, it may be possible to arrange relationships so that one person's strengths covers another person's vulnerability. Thus allowing the pair to realize better outcomes than either person could achieve working alone.

The "I-OPT" Survey has been implemented in some leading organizations such as Shell Oil, Sprint, Ford, the FAA and Nextel. It may be just the tool your organization is looking for to help get your mentoring pairs off to a good start.