

Copy

of recently published paper

on using the

**Reiss Motivation Profile
in leadership coaching and development**

By

Thomas Mengel, PhD

Professor of Leadership Studies, UNB
Founder, CEO and Executive Coach, Reiss Profile Canada Corp.

'High Potential' Can Be Deceiving - Utilizing the Reiss Motivational Profile® in HR and Leadership Development

Thomas Mengel, PhD

Good leaders appear to always be in demand in our organizations. It is no wonder that whenever emerging leaders perform very well in their first management and leadership assignments (for example as team or project leaders,) their superiors and HR professionals earmark and prepare them for further promotion up the corporate ladder. However, high performance on the job does not equal high excitement about the job. Professionals can have and demonstrate above average skills and abilities even in areas outside of their core interests. This outstanding 'potential' can be translated into high performance at the mid-managerial level for some time even if the excitement, for the tasks at hand, is limited.

If, however, the candidate is lacking the level of personal motivation and energy required to get the work done, s/he will – in the long run – not be very effective at creating a shared vision and inspiring others at the next level of leadership responsibility. Hence, concepts of 'high potential' that do not account for personal motivation, values, and goals fall short of being true indicators of future success in professional roles in organizations. This article explores how the Reiss Motivational Profile® (RMP) can and has been used as an accurate and comprehensive tool in the context of HR and leadership development.

1. Introduction

Building on previous work in the field of motivational psychology, Steven Reiss has identified a set of 16 universal human desires and values that motivate and underlie our actions. Reiss discovered that the Freudian 'pleasure principle'

does not suffice to describe human behaviour. Along with Viktor Frankl and others, he claims that pleasure and happiness are rather by-products of experiencing life in general and our behaviour in particular as meaningful:

"By embracing the 16 basic desires, we experience a general feeling that life has purpose. The more passionately we embrace the 16 desires, the more purposeful our lives become, and the more we desire to live. Desire, purpose, and goals are the main differences between life as a biological mass and life as a human being." (Reiss, 2000, p. 132).

Starting in 1995, Reiss engaged in a thorough and extensive scientific research project with thousands of participants from various nations resulting in a list of 16 significant and distinctive life motives (16 basic desires, values or goals) that motivate human behaviour; a questionnaire of 128 questions analyzes the individual Reiss Motivational Profile® (RMP) in regard to these 16 desires. As tested and validated by several independent and peer reviewed research studies, the resulting 16 scores provide a very detailed and accurate description of what individuals really want and how they go about pursuing it. This can be of tremendous value to individuals and to HR professionals, leadership coaches and other professionals in the field of personal and professional development.

2. 16 "basic desires that make our life meaningful" (Reiss, 2000)

While all humans strive for the satisfaction of all of these desires to some extent, the level at which a feeling of satisfaction and happiness settles in

is different for all individuals. For some desires, an individual may have a strong need; for others, the need may be weak or average. While the desires we only feel an average need for, normally can be satisfied without special care in our daily lives; the weaker and stronger than average motives need to be 'managed' on an individual basis. A person will likely have developed particular behaviours and personal traits that will help her or him to avoid 'too much' satisfaction of a particular desire – in the case of weak desires; or to get more of it – in the case of strong desires. For example, a person with a higher than average need for 'order' tends to put extra effort into structuring their work and scheduling their activities while somebody with a lower than average need for 'order' likely puts more value on 'improvisation' and 'flexibility'. Therefore, it is important to understand the individual scores for each of a person's desires in order to 'predict' how comfortable and effective they might be in a given professional context.

The following table (Table 1) lists the 16 basic desires (strivings) with the respective values for a weak and strong desire. Individual profile scores within the yellow range indicate an average (and less significant) desire and respective value; the individual will sometimes value the one, and sometimes the other, depending on their context and individual state of satisfaction regarding this particular desire.

3. Motivational Analysis with the Reiss Motivational Profile® – The Case of Sam Someone

In this section the application of the Motivational Analysis based on Reiss'

Table 1: 16 basic desires of the Reiss Motivational Profile® (after Reiss, 2000)

Striving	Values in case of weak strivings	Values in case of strong strivings
Acceptance	Self-confidence	Acceptance
Beauty	Plainness	Beauty
Curiosity	Application/Practical knowledge	Theory/Intellectual knowledge
Eating	Nutritional basics	Variety of food
Expediency	Principles/Honour	Expediency/Purpose
Family	Freedom from family/Laissez-faire	Closeness to children & siblings
Idealism	Realism/Justice for self	Altruism/Humanitarianism
Interdependence	Self-reliance	Oneness/Team orientation
Order	Flexibility/Improvisation	Methodology/Structure
Physical Exercise	Relaxation/Lackadaisical lifestyle	Physical Activity/Active Lifestyle
Power	Non-directiveness/Service	Influence/Control
Saving	Extravagance/Generosity/Spending	Collection/Frugality
Social Contract	Loneness/Reservedness/Introversion	Extroversion/Fun with others
Status	Informality/Egalitarianity	Formality/Social rank
Tranquility	Bravery/Risk-taking	Cautiousness/Risk-avoidance
Vengeance	Harmony/cooperation/peacemaking	Winning/Competition/Revenge

His main motivators (scores of above +0.8 or below -0.8) are curiosity, power, family, idealism and social contact; correspondingly, he may particularly value thinking/intellect, service/non-directiveness, children/siblings, altruism/humanitarianism, and extroversion/fun. He has no motivators in the very strong range of 1.7+. As a consequence, there appear to be no strivings that tend to strongly dominate Sam's behaviour, to the degree he is able to satisfy his main desires; he is rather flexible in balancing his life around various values.

Yet, when analyzing the requirements of his professional context as perceived by Sam and comparing it to his profile the following areas of potential tensions were identified by Sam (Table 2).

However, Sam also realized that his professional context was conducive to satisfying the following desires and living the respective values of:

approach is described in the context of personal and professional development using the case of Sam Someone. Sam came into a self-leadership seminar trying to better understand his current frustrations about life and leadership and to identify what to do about them. Sam is a 35-year-old manager of a sales team in a major insurance company. He is married and has two children, ages 5 and 7. He has a degree in social work and

a teacher certificate. Because he could not find work in his trained profession, he started selling insurance and worked his way up to his current position. While he is quite successful and earmarked by his superiors as a 'high potential', he does not feel he is 'at the right spot'. He completed the Reiss Motivational Profile® which resulted in the following graphical representations of desires and corresponding values (Figure 1).

- enjoying meaningful relationships with colleagues and customers;
- helping customers and team members to achieve financial security;
- figuring out innovative solutions for customers and his sales team members; and
- securing a livelihood for himself and his family.

Figure 1: Strivings and values of Sam Someone (Based on Reiss, 2000)

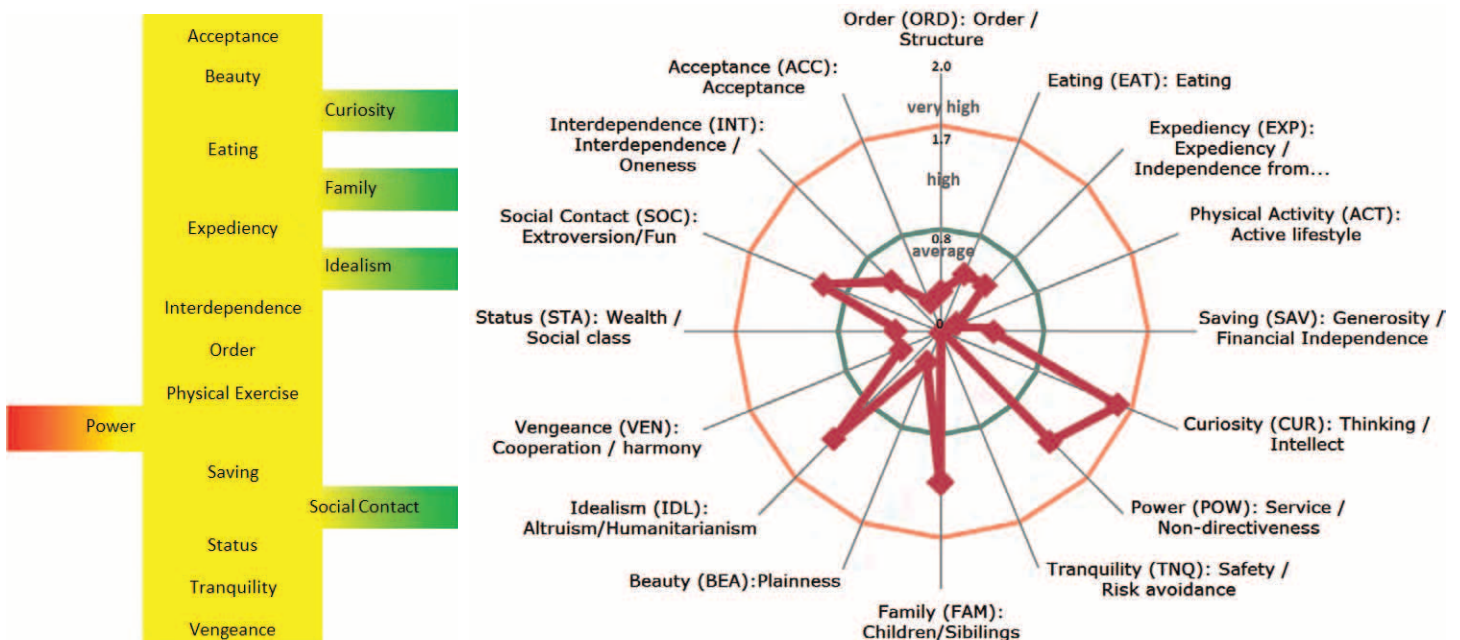


Table 2: Areas of potential tension for *Sam Someone*

Sam's desires and values	Requirements of Sam's professional context
Thinking, theory, learning about many things	Practical knowledge, focused on financial management
Service orientation, participative leadership	Directive leadership, goal and achievement orientation
Time for family, work-life balance	Long hours, extensive travelling, career-orientation
Engagement in community projects (church and village)	Long hours, extensive travelling, career-orientation

Sam started to better understand what his personal values and desires were and how they might interact with the requirements and expectations in his current personal and professional roles. He realized that the trajectory of his current career path might not be the best choice given his personal values and strivings. The subsequent dialogue focused on two main options of self and leadership development:

- Transitioning into a corporate training department.
- Exploring leadership opportunities in community based non-profit organizations.

The resulting short-term path chosen by *Sam* was to discuss opportunities with his superior and with human resource personnel of transitioning into a training role within the insurance company. Depending on how this approach might play out, *Sam* intended to delay exploring other opportunities in the non-profit sector until later.

4. Conclusion

An approach to leadership development that includes considering individual motivation, a person's goals and values underlying their behaviour and personality traits, can effectively guide individuals, their superiors and HR

professionals in their decision-making and actions. Steven Reiss' Motivational Analysis, in detail, identifies an individual's motivational structure. The resulting Reiss (Motivational) Profile® allows predicting, at a reasonable level of accuracy, how the person will behave in a particular professional context. The case-study of *Sam Someone* demonstrates how this approach can be applied in a coaching or leadership development practice. In particular, it shows how this motivation-based approach can help leadership and HR development and decision-making become more effective. As a consequence, 'high potential' can truly be translated into 'high performance'.

Further Readings:

Reiss, S.; Haverkamp, S. M. (1998): Towards a Comprehensive Assessment of Fundamental Motivation: Factor Structure of the Reiss Profiles, *Psychological Assessment*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 97-106.

Reiss, S. (2000). *Who am I? -The 16 basic desires that motivate our behavior and define our personality*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Reiss, S. (2008). *The normal personality - A new way of thinking about people*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mengel, T. (2012). Leading with 'emotional' intelligence – Existential and Motivational Analysis in leadership and leadership development. *Journal on Educational Psychology* 5(4):17-25.

About the Author:

Thomas Mengel, Ph.D., is professor of leadership studies at the University of New Brunswick. He has substantial experience in personal and leadership development utilizing a variety of tools (e.g., DISC, Insights, MBTI, Enneagram, etc.). In 2010 he was exposed to the Reiss Profile and immediately recognized its significant potential for accurate prediction and effective development of personal and leadership behaviour. He was particularly intrigued by its focus on personal values and goals as a basis of personal traits and behaviour. Dr. Mengel has gathered significant experience with the Reiss Profile before founding Reiss Profile Canada Corp. to develop and market personal, career, team and leadership development solutions and systems based on the Reiss Profile. He has been awarded the Reiss Profile Master certification by IDS Publishing Corporation. Thomas Mengel, Ph.D. now serves as CEO of Reiss Profile Canada Corp., The Glades, New Brunswick.