

Help Them Amp Up Business Development with Style

by Anne Collier

By helping lawyers understand that they can flex their own styles, you help them understand that whether they are able to woo a client is not just happenstance.

Has this ever happened to you: You're talking with someone and it feels like you're from a different planet? Or perhaps it's the other person who is from Neptune. Here's what happens: you raise concerns, you provide options, you are ready to engage in a productive dialogue to identify the best strategy, and this other person dismisses your ideas as if you are from another reality — Neptune that is. You've just experienced *cognitive diversity*. It's not just that you have a different perspective — you and this other person truly do think differently.

Now imagine that you're the director of professional development and you're trying to help lawyers at your firm develop business. You sense their frustrations, understand their challenges of fitting business development in when they have time, and worry that if they don't see success soon they will be completely disheartened. Business development is not magic. While you know there aren't cookie-cutter solutions, you also recognize that an understanding of cognitive diversity would help just about every lawyer increase personal effectiveness, which would lead to business development.

Your challenge is to help three newly minted partners amp up their business development efforts and results. Meet Amanda, Michelle, and Isabelle.

- *Amanda* is a tax lawyer with a specialty in tax accounting and public utilities. While she is a rising star, she complains that she doesn't know what she's supposed to do to develop business. Not only that, but she often turns off or confuses prospective clients with her intense focus and solemnity about her work.

- *Michelle* represents employers in dealing with executive compensation issues such as non-competes, trade secrets, contracts, and the like. She's involved in many organizations and is known in the community but thinks she could more effectively leverage her many contacts.
- *Isabelle* is a litigator who focuses on criminal and civil defense and regulatory advocacy, including challenges to administrative rulemaking. She is passionate about her work — about everything actually — but is known to overwhelm others with her enthusiasm. This seems to cost her opportunities with prospective clients who often look at her like she's got two heads.

Successful business development is a numbers game. It requires a lawyer to have “eyes on,” credibility, and connection. “Eyes on” means that the lawyer gets in front of enough prospective clients — the right people. Credibility means that prospective clients believe the lawyer is an expert and can get results. Finally, the lawyer must be able to connect with a prospective client. In other words, to be truly successful in developing business, a lawyer must be able to flex his or her style to connect with prospective clients of different styles.

Now that you've got a sense of your challenges and charges, let's explore cognitive diversity through the lens of Adaption-Innovation Theory (“A-I Theory”) and the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (“KAI”), which measures problem-solving style on what's called the Adaption-Innovation Continuum. The goal is for you to use the A-I framework to coach and help the lawyers you work with be more effective.

The **Adaption-Innovation Theory** (“A-I Theory”) devised by Michael Kirton is founded on the assumption that all people have the capacity for creative problem solving but that people are different in their cognitive styles of problem solving — and that these style differences lie on a normally distributed continuum. On one end of the continuum are those with an **adaptive** style who prefer their problems to be associated with more structure. On the other end are those with an **innovative** style who are comfortable solving problems with less structure. According to A-I theory, different styles of creativity produce different patterns of behavior, but all styles are absolutely essential to dealing successfully with the wide range of problems faced by individuals and groups over time.

Kirton developed a highly crafted, scientific instrument called the **Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory** (“KAI”) to measure cognitive style. The KAI, which requires respondents to rate themselves against 32 personality traits, not only offers individuals insights into their own cognitive styles but also enables them to collaborate more effectively with others through a better understanding of cognitive diversity. See www.kaicenter.com for additional information.

Cognitive Diversity: The Good, the Bad, and the Challenge

Clients typically hire lawyers for skill sets and creative thinking that the clients don’t possess in their departments; in other words, clients hire lawyers for their cognitive diversity. That’s the good. However, the very differences in hard wiring that make the lawyer attractive, can make it difficult for the lawyer and client to personally connect. That’s the bad. Here’s the challenge: How does a lawyer woo and not turn off the very person who needs the lawyer’s services?

The answer is self-awareness. Well, self-awareness and the ability to listen. Increasing awareness and understanding of the

implications of one’s own style is a necessary step in developing strategies for deliberately using another style — flexing — to more effectively connect with prospective clients. And, understanding one’s own style — including the implicit strengths and blind spots — will allow a lawyer to better devise strategies for getting “eyes on” and developing credibility.

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A final point before digging into cognitive diversity: a lawyer doesn’t need to know another person’s style to be more effective. As long as the lawyer knows his or her own style, the lawyer will be able to listen, make educated guesses, and flex his or her style for more effective and successful interactions. Now let’s explore A-I Theory and the KAI’s theoretical underpinnings.

The Paradox of Structure

At the core of problem solving is creativity, and all people are creative. All people use their creativity to solve problems that arise from an ever-changing environment. All people, however, do not similarly deal with a critical facet of problem solving: the paradox of structure. The paradox of structure is the seemingly incongruous fact that structure both enables and limits one’s ability to solve a problem. The structure, whether it be in the form of rules, norms, or the “way it’s always been done,” enables problem solving by providing the mechanism or rules by which to solve a problem. The structure, however, also limits one’s ability to solve a problem by eliminating options and delineating strategies as not viable because they are outside the paradigm or break the rules.

People have a fixed preference for dealing with the paradox of structure. Some — like Amanda — prefer to use the structure to solve problems and more easily tolerate the structure’s limitations because the structure provides a ready and workable

means to the solution. This is called Adaption.

Others, like Isabelle, prefer to ignore or fail to notice structure when problem solving. That group is generally more focused on flexibility and efficiency and is less attached to the system currently in place. This is called Innovation. Isabelle doesn't let rules or norms get in the way of a good solution, and this style of problem solving annoys those, like Amanda, who view the rules as an essential problem-solving tool.

Most people fall in the midzone as Michelle does. They create and leverage structure to varying degrees depending on the problem at hand. They tend to do well in organizations of varying cultures because they are able to build relationships with a wide range of people, flexing at times, but not as far or as often as the more Adaptive and more Innovative. Because any particular person in the midzone can be more Adaptive than some and more Innovative than others, some will view the person as more Adaptive while others will view the very same person as more Innovative.

A key aspect of A-I Theory and the KAI is that people do not fall into one of two or three distinct styles. Rather, KAI scores are spread across a spectrum. This means that unless a person falls at one end of the spectrum, which is rare, the question is relative: is the other person more Adaptive or more Innovative than oneself? Once one has listened and made an educated guess about the other person, one can flex his or her style accordingly.

The Elements of Problem-Solving Style: Adaption and Innovation Further Defined

The table entitled "Summary of Problem-Solving Styles" briefly summarizes the more Adaptive and more Innovative styles. Remember, it's all relative.

Let's take a deeper dive into the three elements of what it means to be more Adaptive and more Innovative so that you understand how you can help your lawyers be more effective in the face of such cognitive diversity. The three subscales are suffi-

ciency of originality, efficiency, and rule and group conformity. Sufficiency of originality describes idea-generation style — the degree to which a person is free or cautious when brainstorming. Efficiency describes the degree to which one prefers methodology, structure, and process as the person implements ideas and solutions. Rule and group conformity describes the degree to which we feel the need to comply with rules and group norms. The tables summarizing idea generation, methodology, and management of structure styles provide an overview of each component in the context of more Adaptive and more Innovative styles.

Table 1: Summary of Problem-Solving Styles

More Adaptive Style	More Innovative Style
Prefer more structure	Prefer less structure
Sensitive to norms/ people's expectations	Prepared to ruffle groups
Target ideas	Proliferate ideas
Master details	Less constrained by how it's been done
Consistent	Challenge assumptions
More prudent risk takers	More daring risk takers

Table 2: Idea Generation Style (Sufficiency of Originality)

The more Adaptive are likely to —	The more Innovative are likely to —
Produce fewer ideas	Produce many ideas
Have ideas that are manageable, concrete	Produce some ideas seen as exciting
Produce ideas that are relevant, sound, safe, and for immediate use	Produce "Blue sky" or "New dawn" ideas
Expect high success rate	Tolerate high failure rate

Table 3: Methodology Style (Efficiency)

The more Adaptive are likely to —	The more Innovative are likely to —
Be precise, reliable, methodical, thorough	Think tangentially
Pay attention to detail	Approach tasks from unsuspected angles
Welcome change as an improver	Welcome change as a mold breaker
Seek solutions to problems in tried and tested ways	Manipulate the problem, questioning its basic assumptions

Table 4: Management of Structure Style (Rule and Group Conformity)

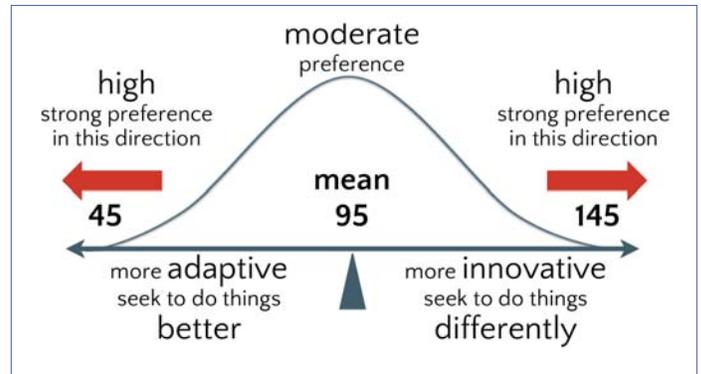
The more Adaptive are likely to —	The more Innovative are likely to —
Be prudent with authority	Be radical
Solve problems by use of rules	Alter rules to solve problems
Challenge rules rarely and usually when supported by consensus	Challenge rules, customs, and consensual views

How Can You Quantify Problem-Solving Style?

The KAI measures a person’s preferred way of managing the paradox of structure and does so by putting creativity and problem-solving style on a continuum from more Adaptive to more Innovative, as shown in the chart entitled “The Adaption-Innovation Continuum.” This aspect of the KAI quantifies gaps in cognitive diversity, providing a framework for understanding the corresponding implications and developing strategies for increasing success. Gaps can occur between two people, a person and a task, a person and a team, and between teams.

KAI scores are normally distributed between 45 and 145, with a mean of approximately 95 and a standard deviation of approximately 18 points. One’s numeric score describes style, not

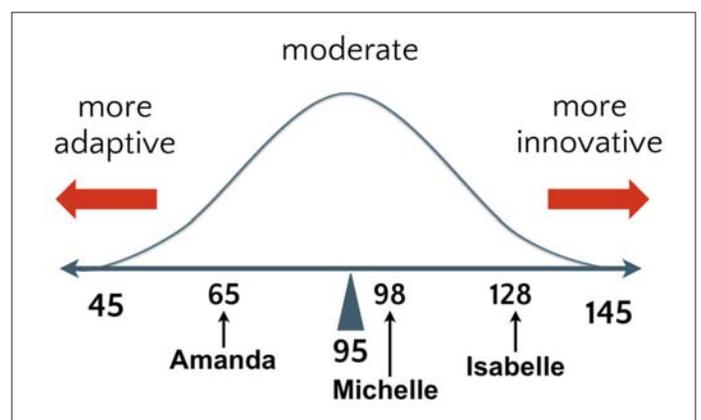
Figure 1: The Adaption-Innovation Continuum



level — that is, one’s score doesn’t say anything about whether one is competent. Thus, a score of 130 is not better than a score of 60. Rather, the number merely identifies whether one is more Adaptive or more Innovative. In considering scores, remember that the scores are relative and not absolute (unless the person is at an end of the continuum). Thus, a person with a score of 80 is more Innovative than a person with a score of 65 even though 80 is more Adaptive than the mean of 95.

Most people are in the midzone, with a style of 77 to 113, as reflected by the normal distribution shown in the chart entitled “The Adaption-Innovation Continuum.” They may use rules to solve certain problems and not others. Their solutions may ignore or, at times, change the rules to solve a particular problem. They may be more comfortable with less detail. That said, all

Figure 2: Scores for Amanda, Michelle, and Isabelle



people are able to solve many types of problems and will use a non-preferred style as appropriate.

Your charges, Amanda, Michelle, and Isabelle, range the continuum, as shown in the chart depicting their scores.

With a score of 65, Amanda is more Adaptive than her colleagues and most people. With a score of 98, Michelle is in the midzone, so her style is similar to more people. And finally, with a score of 128, Isabelle is more Innovative than her colleagues and most people. Remember, it's all relative. Thus, Michelle is more Innovative than Amanda and more Adaptive than Isabelle. Differences in scores — and the sizes of such differences — affect interactions and the ease with which these three women connect with prospective clients.

10-Point Difference. People who are close to each other on the continuum (i.e., within 10 points) will have a very similar problem-solving style and will tend to work well together. Building the relationships necessary for developing business with someone within 10 points of one's own score is relatively easy because the relationship comes easily.

20-Point Difference. People who are more than 20 points from each other on the continuum will approach problem solving differently and likely will experience challenges. If they appreciate and respect each other, such differences are helpful, not hurtful, to the relationship and work at hand. Building a relationship with such a person can, but doesn't have to be, challenging. The lawyer will likely have to pay particular attention to what is important to the prospective client and flex her style accordingly.

40-Point Difference. People with scores 40 points or more apart will approach problem solving in wildly different fashions and likely experience some difficulty building a relationship unless one or both devise strategies for dealing with the difference. When a lawyer notices that the prospective client is very different from herself, she will have to pay close attention

to what is important to the prospective client and flex her style accordingly.

The reason it matters whether someone is more Adaptive or more Innovative and by how much is because such a difference affects not only the ability to connect, but one's credibility.

Remember:

- Style is *how* a person solves problems.
- Level is *how well* a person solves problems.

People — prospective clients in this case — may mistake differences in style for incompetence; that is, they may make the mistake of thinking that others with styles different than their own (perhaps Amanda, Michelle, or Isabelle in this case) are low level. Such a mistake sounds something like:

- “Amanda is in such a rut. In fact, I don't think she's ever even looked outside the box much less had an original idea”; or
- “Isabelle is so impractical. I wish she'd stop wasting our time with her ridiculous ideas. We have work to do!”

Whether one is more likely to dismiss Amanda, who is more Adaptive, or Isabelle, who is more Innovative, depends on one's own style and on the failure to distinguish problem-solving style from lack of ability. Be careful: while Michelle is more likely to connect naturally with more people because she's in the midzone, she will experience some of the same challenges that both Amanda and Isabelle face. In other words, she'll need to use a more Adaptive or more Innovative approach, depending on the prospective client's style.

So, Now What? How Can A-I Theory Help Amanda, Michelle, and Isabelle Build Business?

Help Them Have More Productive Interactions

Let's step away from theory and get back to helping your

lawyers. Remember Amanda? She's a tax lawyer specializing in tax accounting and public utilities. She complains that she doesn't know what she's supposed to do to develop business. Simply put: Amanda needs a plan. People who are more Adaptive like Amanda want structure, process, and methodology in solving any problem. The problem here is business development. Since she's just now putting her toe in the business-development pool, she probably has a number of questions about "the right way" to develop business. A focus on "the right way" to develop business can result in paralysis by analysis. This is because her style is to figure out the answer, including all of the implementation details, before taking actions. The upside is that once Amanda understands the business-development process and has a structure for success, she'll likely follow through methodically and consistently, without letting any opportunity fall through the cracks.

So how do you help Amanda? First, support her development of a plan by asking her the following questions:

- How have others in your specialty developed business?
- Who do you already know who could hire you, refer business to you, or give you a speaking opportunity?
- What are the conferences and meetings that your prospective clients attend?
- Where can you speak on your topic, turn it into an article or client alert, and maybe even present a webinar?
- If you couldn't fail, what would you do?

Now, you are going to have to support Amanda in developing relationships — in connecting with others. Amanda is pretty serious and often turns off or confuses prospective clients with her intense focus on her work. All is not lost — don't worry! Amanda's strength is leveraging structure; so use A-I Theory to help her understand others' behaviors and what they need from conversations. Help her to prepare for networking events. The structure of a typical networking event conversation is to engage in small talk, have a more substantive conversation, exchange cards, talk about getting lunch or coffee together, and then part. You know only too well that Amanda can talk

about her substantive area; she would be more effective if she prepared for small talk by:

- Having her own "news story" so that when someone she knows asks "how's it going?" she will have something interesting to say about a case she won, an article she's publishing, or even something personal.
- Being ready to discuss a few noncontroversial current events.
- Preparing her own personal brand statement so she can answer the question "what do you do?" with something a little more interesting than "I'm a public utility tax lawyer."

Because Amanda's KAI score is almost at the Adaption end of the A-I Continuum, she will undoubtedly have to flex, sometimes quite a bit, to a more Innovative style. Remind her that:

- Others are more likely to suggest seemingly wild ideas — don't analyze every idea or take them all seriously. People who are more Innovative are more likely to throw a lot against the wall and see what sticks. They like to brainstorm just for fun.
- Others are likely not to think quite as linearly and with as much structure as she does. Don't push for structure; listen, ask good questions, but don't be laser-like in your questions. This is about connecting first, problem solving second.
- Others may be more irreverent than she is. Tell her not to let it put her off — it's just a different style and doesn't mean that they don't like or value her. People who are more Innovative enjoy ruffling feathers a bit.

Now let's focus on helping Michelle. Michelle is right in the middle of the continuum. The good news is that she is hard-wired to relate to a greater segment of the population than either Amanda or Isabelle. The bad news is that she needs to be prepared to flex both ways — to people with both more

Adaptive and more Innovative styles. She'll have to listen closely to prospective clients and meet their needs for structure — or not — in both the process and substance of the conversation. The good news is that she's probably been successfully doing this most of her life.

Michelle is also likely to be more of a risk taker than Amanda and more able to create her own structure or process than Isabelle. Thus, with a little guidance and support, Michelle will likely get in a groove and keep going, creating structure and process as she needs it and jumping in when she has to. Your advice to Michelle could include:

- If you hear a prospective client ask questions about process, about principles, or about theory, he or she is likely more Adaptive. Be sure you answer all of the person's questions. Don't give short shrift to details.
- If you hear a prospective client brainstorming outlandishly and "thinking outside the box," skip over some (but not all) of the rules and details; the person is likely more Innovative. Don't panic! This is how the more Innovative sound, and no, they do not expect you to buy into or implement every idea they've had. Be willing to play along. Offer solid opinions, but don't be a buzz kill.

And finally, Isabelle could also use your guidance to help develop her practice. Isabelle is a litigator who focuses on regulatory advocacy, including challenges to administrative rulemaking. Her passion is one of the reasons she's such a great lawyer. The downside is that her passion is also the reason she overwhelms others, which is a serious problem since she's trying to build her practice.

So what do you do to help Isabelle? First, help her understand why others often look at her like she's got two heads. You know she already understands that she isn't like her partners, so it won't be too hard to flesh that out. Once she understands that her passion and her style of enthusiastically brainstorming about almost everything isn't always well received, she'll

understand why and when to dial it back. Remind her to listen and to use her spider senses.

Unlike Amanda, Isabelle gets a lot of "eyes on." She goes to just about every relevant conference — and some not so relevant ones — usually as a presenter. Help her understand that in addition to "dialing it back," she also needs to "amp up" her listening. In particular, she needs to listen for the kinds of questions prospective clients ask. If their questions and comments demonstrate a desire for more structure and concrete understanding of what she does, Isabelle will want to —

- present information by first giving an overview,
- talk about process,
- explain sequentially, and
- give examples.

She's much more likely to connect with those who are more Adaptive in this manner. It also wouldn't hurt Isabelle to, like Amanda, prepare her own personal news story and personal brand.

Help Them Follow Up

Don't forget about follow-up. Each lawyer is going to have strengths and challenges in following up. Amanda will likely excel at and enjoy establishing a system for herself. Assure her that she's doing it "right."

Each lawyer is going to have strengths and challenges in following up.

Michelle is pretty good at following up. She's not overly concerned about doing it the right way or hamstrung by fears of being considered a stalker. She is good at creating reminder systems for herself, but sometimes ignores or forgets to follow them.

Isabelle is most challenged by follow-up — or, more accurately, lack of follow-up. While she meets just about everybody at

an event, she rarely has much to show for it. Because process doesn't come naturally, her style benefits the most from imposing a little process — not a lot, but a little. Remember, Isabelle is less likely to do anything that is overly process oriented — her style is to just dive in.

Each lawyer could benefit from this advice on how to follow up:

- Ask for business cards and, on each card write the name and date of the event and note what you've discussed;
- Suggest and preferably schedule the next meeting or set the expectation that you will initiate scheduling via email;
- Keep track of who you've met and when it is appropriate to follow up via a lunch, a telephone call, or sending the prospect a useful article or information; and
- Always do what you say you are going to do.

Conclusion

Cognitive diversity is everywhere. By helping lawyers understand that they can flex their style to deal with such cognitive diversity, you help them understand that whether they are able to woo a client is not just happenstance. And, they can adjust their style to connect and bolster credibility. You can give them confidence that yes, they can and will build business.

The bonus? Helping a lawyer understand his or her own style will help the lawyer to be more personally effective, which leads to better collaboration, client service, and leadership. This is because in addition to “flexing,” learning about problem-solving style helps people appreciate the cognitive diversity in others. Thus, rather than dismissing another as being too “out there” or “in a deep rut,” the lawyer can appreciate and harness the differences to solve a greater range of problems.

To find out more, including where you are on the Adaption-Innovation Continuum, please contact me at the email address included in my bio.

About the Author



Anne Collier, MPP, JD, PCC, is a catalyst for executives and lawyers stepping into power. She supports clients in creating a fulfilling professional and personal life and gives her clients a competitive edge that gets them to their goals quicker and with more ease. Her areas of expertise include leadership, business development, personal branding and messaging, and personal effectiveness. She can be contacted at anne@arudia.com.