Developing Your First Life Theme

Now that you have generated all your data and had a good deal of practice scoring, examining, and drawing inferences from data, it is time to begin developing full-blown themes from all the pools of data. Previously, you have been creating inductive inferences from each data-generating device. These inferences should have been short-leap logical insights based on the raw data you have generated. In your COW, you copied the inferences from each instrument to your INFERENCES page and then sorted that long list according to TOPIC or key word in the right hand column. This sorting assembled for you all of the data related to a particular topic or possible theme essence. Now that you have that sorted list of inferences, we will begin creating Life Theme worksheets.

Remember the critical principles of inductive logic:

1. Staying close to the raw data. Keep your inferential leaps small and conservatively connected to the data. *Let the data do the talking.* Be careful not to make illogical large leaps.
2. Looking for patterns that were more rather than less common.
3. Try to be aware of your own assumptions and potential biases.
4. Using more rather than less data to support an inference.

Develop One Life Theme

In this exercise we will begin in a small way by developing a **single theme** from all of your data. Pick one of the topic themes in the right hand column of the INFERENCES page. Then copy all of the data in the FIRST TWO columns only (source and inference) into the first Life Theme Template. Then type in the *tentative* life theme label, that is, the topic work for that set of data. This will create something that looks like this:

<<Back	*LIFE THEME LABEL:*	SOLITUDE
SOURCE	**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**	**CONTRADICTORY EVIDENCE**
MBTI	26 on Intraversion	
FIRO-B	8 on wInclusion	
LSE	"played by myself"	
SAA	"like work by myself"	
LSRep	Shows me working alone.	
ISI	Others see me as working alone.	
LSE		"spend all weekend with my friends"
Etc.	Etc.	Etc.

You can see from the example above that this part of the process looks like a simple T-account from Accounting 101.

We collect the supporting data on the left and the contradictory data on the right and put the name of the theme on the top. A strong theme will have more supporting data and less contradictory data. A weak theme will have only 2-4 bits of supporting data. Beware of themes with no contradictory data. Have you been open to that? Most people are not perfectly consistent on any particular dimension.

Also, the theme label, "Solitude" at this point, is not finished. At this point it just represents the main idea or theme represented by the data below. We'll refine the label later as we continue to reflect on the links between the data and their summarizing label. In the end, the label will be a short descriptive phrase that contains one main idea. No doubt you will write, erase, rewrite, and rewrite this label many times before you are satisfied with it. Also note that the text in this cell is automatically copied into the related row in your Career Decision Worksheet (page 2).

If you get too much contradictory evidence, you may have two themes that wrestle with each other in your life. A theme that says "I like to work alone" but has lots of data that upon reflection includes spending time with friends, might be divided into two themes one that says, "I like to work alone…" and the other that says, "…but I like to hang out with friends socially." Most of us have some internal contradictory pressures in our lives, like how much alone and social time we like/prefer.

When you are done with this first theme, you can assess its strength by completing the index at the top of the Life Theme template pages. This index shows a) number of bits of supporting data, b) number of contradictory data points, and c) number of different sources used. Themes with more supporting evidence, less contradictory evidence, and which draw from a larger number of sources are likely stronger than themes that don't.

**INDEX
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When do you divide a theme into two themes? How much contradictory evidence is too much to leave inside one theme? Enough that it begins to make you wonder whether you are really identifying a consistent and solid life theme. Some themes may have no contradictory evidence although beware of this outcome; it may mean you are not being sensitive to contradictory evidence. Other themes may have three or four contradictory items, but if you get more than half as many contradictory bits of data as you do supporting data, we would say that the theme is not clearly established.

Okay, charge ahead. Choose one possible topic or theme and then create one theme complete with label from all of the data. And remember, you are developing your inferential skills as you go, so don't shortchange yourself.

When you have finished your theme, complete the strength index as described above and then assign the theme an "index word" and a "cluster." An index word is a one word reminder of

the total theme. If your theme is "I like to work alone," then your index word might be "Workalone." The cluster is the general category that the theme would fit into. You decide what the relevant categories are for you. Carrie Baugh's Self-Assessment Paper shown in the Examples in the Fundamentals Module displays her choices for clusters. "Workalone" might be, for example, in a category "Work Style." You may have other categories like "Life Style," "Interpersonal Style," and "Cognitive Style." Inductively, the categories will emerge from your data and your analysis of your data. There is no perfect external list of categories.