

FIRO Element B™ and Psychological Type: Part I—Why FIRO Element B?

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In a 1976 survey of seventy-five of the most widely used training instruments, including the MBTI, Pfeiffer and Heslin concluded that “the FIRO-B™ was the most generally usable instrument in training.” The popularity of the FIRO-B began to wane as the MBTI became one of the instruments of choice in business. In the last few years, however, the interest in FIRO has been renewed, especially in the Type community. Roger Pearman, Bob McAlpine, Margaret Hartzler and I created a FIRO-B Qualifying program for Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., in 1997. Geno Schnell and Judy Waterman have written booklets on FIRO-B. Susan Scanlon reviewed FIRO theory in the *Type Reporter*, and Pierre Ferrand did a review of FIRO-B in the year-end issue of the *Bulletin*. With all of these “new” writings, why another one?

The reason is simple. The “new” writings are about the original version of the instrument and theoretical thoughts created in 1958 by Will Schutz. Just as Jung’s theory evolved over his life-span, and numerous versions of the MBTI have preceded Form M, so has FIRO theory and its instrumentation evolved significantly. Dr. Schutz and I have known each other for 16 years and have collaborated extensively for the past three years. Consequently, I am concerned when people talk about FIRO-B as if it *is* FIRO theory and when I see articles and booklets that do not reference Dr. Schutz’ more recent writings. In my view, Schutz has made profound changes and improvements which have been previously overlooked or ignored.

In 1958 Schutz formally introduced a theory of interpersonal relations called FIRO (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation). The theory presented three dimensions of interpersonal relations posited to be necessary and sufficient to explain most human interaction. On the behavioral level, these dimensions were called *Inclusion*, *Control* and *Affection*. Schutz also created a measurement instrument, FIRO-B™, consisting of scales that measure the behavioral aspects of these three dimensions. Over the past 45 years, Schutz has revised and expanded FIRO theory and developed additional instruments (Schutz 1994, 1992) for measuring the new aspects of the theory, including Element B: Behavior (an improved version of FIRO-B); Element F: Feelings; Element S: Self; Element W: Work Relations; Element C: Close Relations; Element P: Parental Relationships; and Element O: Organizational Climate .

The theory was been so extensively revised and strengthened and has generated so many new instruments and important improvements that at the suggestion of Jack Black (founder of CPP and publisher of FIRO-B), the new set of measures was renamed. Since 1984, these instruments have been known collectively as ELEMENTS of AWARENESS and are being used by Schutz, his associates and others in the US and in over a dozen foreign countries (Schutz, 1994).

Schutz created the FIRO-B in 1958 specifically to measure the interaction between two people for research purposes. When he realized the many ways it was being used after it was made available to the public, he created a new generation of the instruments which were more suitable for general usage. FIRO-B provides feedback on six aspects of interpersonal behavior while Element B provides the same information plus twelve additional measures. Element B “fills in” the gaps left by the original instrument, provides a single response scale rather than switching back and forth between two, has simplified wording and greater scale integrity, and identifies not just what a person does or gets, but what they want in each of these areas. It also measures their satisfaction with their behaviors.

FIRO theory focuses on three major levels: *behavior*, *feelings* and *self-concept*. FIRO Element B focuses on behavior (hence the B in the name) in three interpersonal content areas: inclusion, control and openness. Openness was changed from the original Affection which is more appropriate at the feeling level (Schutz, 1992). Inclusion is concerned with achieving the desired amount of contact with people. Sometimes people like a great deal of inclusion; they are outgoing, enjoy doing things with a group, and tend to start conversations with strangers. At other times, people prefer to spend time alone. People differ as to how much they want to be with others and how much they prefer to be alone.

Control is concerned with achieving the desired amount of control over people. Some people are more comfortable when they are in charge of people. They like to be in charge, to give orders and to make decisions for both themselves and others. At other times, they prefer to have no control over people and may in fact prefer to be controlled by others. They may even seek out situations in which others will clearly define their responsibilities for them. Everyone has some desire to control other people and some desire to be controlled.

The third area is concerned with achieving just the desired amount of openness. Some people enjoy relationships in which they talk about their feelings and innermost thoughts. They have one or more people in whom they confide. At other times, they prefer not to share their personal feelings with other people. They like to keep things impersonal and businesslike, and they prefer to have acquaintances rather than close friends. Everyone has some desire for open relationships and some desire to keep their relationships more private.

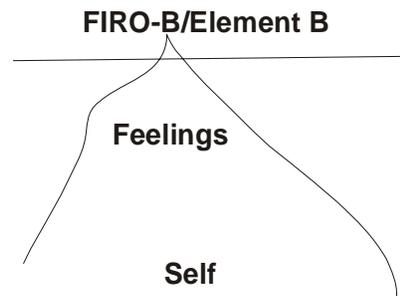
There are twelve primary scales on which one can receive a score ranging from 0 - 9. The differences between what I *do* and what I *want* to do and what I *get* and what I *want* to get provide six additional scales. Figure 1 shows a feedback matrix with hypothetical scores. As a working hypothesis, we might expect this person to have a few select friends, not to socialize extensively, to like being in control and working autonomously and to be a relatively private person. During the feedback session, the practitioner would explore these possibilities. We might also expect to find dissatisfaction around controlling people more than she wants to and being controlled too much by others. Obviously, there is much more information contained in these results than this hypothesis, but space does not permit elaboration here.

Scale (0 - 9)	Score	Difference
*I include people	1	2
I want to include people	3	
People include me	2	0
*I want people to include me	2	
*I control people	8	3
I want to control people	5	
People control me	6	4
*I want people to control me	2	
*I am open with people	2	0
I want to be open with people	2	
People are open with me	1	2
*I want people to be open with me	3	

Figure 1
Hypothetical Scores on Element B
**A similar scale is measured on FIRO-B*

Schutz is emphatic that all FIRO Element scores, including Element B:

§ Are not terminal—they can and do change.



§ Derive their meaning primarily from the person's interpretation, not from statistics.

§ Are meant to be starting points for exploration and growth; they are NOT meant to be definitive.

§ Do not encourage typology

§ Assume you have the capacity to change anything you do not like about your behavior, if you allow yourself to learn how.

Tip of The Iceberg

A major concern of mine is that people are left thinking that FIRO theory is primarily represented by the FIRO-B instrument and “needs” for inclusion, control and affection behaviors. This approach is inaccurate on the semantic level in that the word “need” is no longer part of the theory. It was replaced with “want.” The behavioral aspect of the theory, measured by Element B, is only the tip of the iceberg. Jung said that when he observed someone's behavior he did not know what their type was because it was impossible to know what component of their psyche was actually causing the behaviors he was observing. FIRO theory says the same about behaviors. The largest and most important parts of the theory are the underlying causes of the behaviors. This is where Element F: Feelings and Element S: Self come in to play. To understand a person's behavior one must, at a minimum, understand that person's feelings, self-concept, self-esteem and fears. Just as the four-letter type code does not explain personality, neither do FIRO-B or even Element B explain FIRO theory.

*Figure 2
Iceberg Analogy*

To best interpret FIRO behaviors (inclusion, control and openness) you must first understand yourself. This means experiencing the behavior, feelings, self-concept, self-esteem and fears up close and personal. Schutz' five-day Human Element course can give you a taste of this. If you want to understand FIRO in enough depth to begin writing and researching, you may attend a 14-day course—after having had time to gain sufficient insight about yourself from the five-day session. Little wonder that Ferrand (2000) can't wait to review updated FIRO theory material—there isn't any, unless we look at the work of Schutz and his colleagues.

In Part II, I will present a summary of research on the linkage of FIRO Element B and the MBTI. For anyone interested in doing research on this topic, I maintain an International Human Element Database, that contains FIRO Element B data.

Web Sites about FIRO

Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. (www.cpp-db.com)
High Performing Systems, Inc. (www.hpsys.com)
Type Resources (www.type-resources.com)
Will Schutz Associates® (www.firo.net)

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FIRO Element B™ and Psychological Type:

Part II—FIRO Element B and MBTI Linkage

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Part I of this article looked at the evolution of FIRO theory and of FIRO-B to FIRO Element B. Part II will briefly explore the linkage of FIRO Element B to the MBTI. To understand the relationship of the information provided by the two instruments, one must be aware that the theories have different psychological underpinnings. For example, psychological Type as measured by the MBTI is an adaptation of C. G. Jung’s work and is a type of cognitive, or information processing, model that is presumed to be hardwired. Stimuli are perceived, brought into the psyche, identified, named, valued, acted upon and stored. Additional interaction with the environment may or may not be taken. Other people are not required to be present for Type preferences to develop.

FIRO theory and FIRO Element B come from a psychoanalytic perspective and assume that Inclusion, Control and Openness behaviors manifest out of adaptation to anxiety during childhood—FIRO behaviors are not hardwired. There are numerous ways for the various components to develop and to be modified, if a person so desires. The model is one of interpersonal interaction—it requires another person or persons to be present for the interaction to occur.

One approach for looking at the integration of the two models is to view Type as a mediator between the psyche and the environment and FIRO as psychoanalytic forces that motivate certain types of behavior. For example, an INTJ and an ESFP both might have been ignored during childhood and developed a fear of being *insignificant*. This same interpersonal fear might play out behaviorally in the INTJ in the form of “I will not give you a chance to exclude me. I will exclude you first.” This person then becomes withdrawn and limits interpersonal interaction.

The same fear may play out in the ESFP as “I will not give you a chance to exclude me. I will be so inclusive of you that you can’t exclude me.” This person becomes very outgoing, talkative and invites him/herself readily into your activities.

One of the interesting attributes of FIRO theory is that it helps explain the behavior of the overly inclusive INTJ and under inclusive ESFP. That is, these two Types may adopt the opposite strategy to try and prevent their worst nightmare—being excluded, in this case. The same kinds of over or under levels of behavior can also manifest around Control and Openness with any of the Types.

Keeping this in mind, let’s look at the linkage of the two instruments beginning with correlational data. Table 1 shows the correlations between Element B scales and MBTI continuous scores. The data are consistent with previous correlational studies involving the FIRO-B and MBTI (Schnell & Hammer, 1997), but go beyond these because of the additional Element B scales.

Element B Scales	EI	SN	TF	JP

I include people (11)	-.48*	.18*	.16*	.08
I want to include people (12)	-.33*	.09	.21*	.08
People include me (13)	-.43*	.14*	-.02	.11
I want people to include me (14)	-.28*	.09	-.07	.01
I control people (21)	-.30*	.14	-.13*	.02
I want to control people (22)	-.13*	.04	-.08	.05
People control me (23)	-.11	.00	.17*	.01
I want people to control me (24)	-.06	-.06	.12	.03
I am open with people (31)	-.13*	.19*	.29*	.07
I want to be open with people (32)	-.20*	.22*	.28*	.02
People are open with me (33)	-.23*	.44*	.16*	.12
I want people to be open with me (34)	-.21*	.28*	.22*	.07

Table 1
Element B and MBTI Correlations
 *Indicates statistical significance

You can easily see that extraversion is positively correlated (indicated by the negative correlation with the EI continuous score) with all Element B scales except *People control me* (23) and *I want people to control me* (24). It would appear that extraverts do not want to be controlled. There is a relationship among the Openness scales and iNtuiting. *I include people* (11) and *People include me* (13) scales are also correlated with iNtuiting. Thinking correlates with *I control people* (21); Feeling correlates with *I include people* (11), *I want to include people* (12) and all of the Openness scales. The JP dimension did

not have significant correlations with any of the Element B scales.

At the Step II sub-scale level there are numerous correlations with the Element B scales (Table 2). This article will not go beyond looking at the general pattern of correlations. For example, it is easy to see that Inclusion correlates with all the extraverted scales, as does *I control people* (21), *I am open with people* (31) and *I want to be open with people* (32). The SN sub-scale 4 and JP sub-scale 5 do not correlate with any of the Element B scales. (For more elaboration and detail, see Thompson, 2000.)

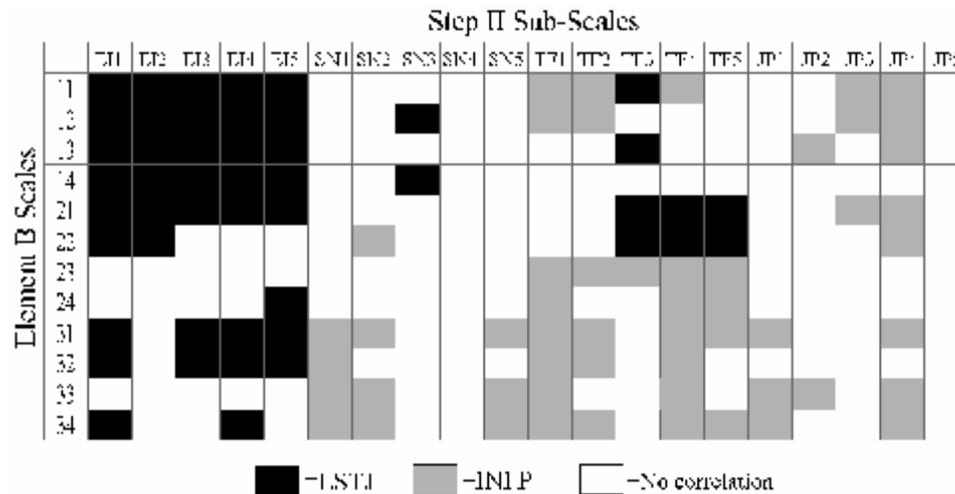


Table 2
Element B and Step II
Sub-Scale Correlations

Implications

It is not uncommon to find that some people are more rigid around

their Type preferences than others. Type rigidity can limit the opportunities for successful interaction across a variety of situations, because some preferences seem to be more fitted for a particular situation than others. For example, extraverts, in general, tend to find a bank teller job more satisfying than most introverts. The more rigid I am around my introverted preference, the more stressful I might find a job requiring me to operate in an extraverted mode most of the time.

Rigidity tends to be a function of *fear* with the greatest interpersonal fear being *uncopability* and its three sub-categories: *insignificant*, *incompetent* and *unlikable*. We all experience each of these fears to some degree. The result of these fears is an unconscious rigidity designed to protect us. An exploration of the deeper levels of FIRO theory may allow us to discover the impetus of *Type rigidity*.

Type development

The data presented above suggest that how a person develops along FIRO dimensions may influence Type development. For example, I worked with an attorney in her 40s who had “validated” ISTJ on two previous occasions. As we explored her Element B results, she discovered her greatest fear was being

unlikable. She was raised in a “very cold, unemotional, Thinking preference family” that rewarded “T” behaviors and punished “F” behaviors. To avoid being rejected by her family, she developed and used her Thinking function to the degree she believed she had a Thinking preference. As we worked with the fear of being unlikable, she validated a preference for Feeling and changed her outlook on life. Each of the FIRO dimensions can influence the development of Type preferences.

Coaching

In a coaching situation, the additional information provided by Element B can significantly aid in providing feedback to the client. Element B was particularly useful with an ESTP CEO who had been *abandoned* by his father as a young child. He would only travel with an entourage from his company—even family vacations included couples from his management/executive team. FIRO provided insight about his fear of being *insignificant*—the fear associated with Inclusion. On those occasions when he did not have someone with him who knew him and made him feel significant, his fear often set the stage for the appearance of his evil twin, Skippy (inferior function).

Compatibility

Workshop participants often ask why some people who share the same Type preference as theirs are easy to get along with while others seem impossible. Element B feedback may provide additional information to help explain why one ESTJ might seem more compatible than another. The roles we play significantly affect how compatible we are. For example, if you want to control people and I want people to control me, then we may be compatible on this dimension. You are giving me what I want and I am giving you what you want—even if we are different Types. The more dimensions we match on in relation to the roles we play with each other, the greater the probability we will be compatible.

The Element B is a multi-use instrument that can have a significant affect on individual and organizational performance. It is widely used in the US and 17 other countries and is continuing to gain in popularity. It is being used more and more in conjunction with other instruments, e.g., the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

The first International FIRO Conference will take place in early 2001 in San Francisco, CA with Will Schutz, Ph.D., creator of FIRO, as the keynote speaker. The latest developments on the theory, instrumentation, software and support materials will be presented.

I have often said, “If I were contracted to do a teambuilding session and told that the team was willing to complete only one instrument, I would choose Element B.” It provides the most accurate information on the behaviors I am likely to see the team exhibit than any other instrument I have used.

Resources

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