

**A Workshop: Problem-Solving Styles through Adaption-Innovation Theory and Air Force Athletics**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to enhance team collaboration by addressing diversity in problem-solving within Air Force Athletics. To achieve this, I collaborated with a KAI-certified master practitioner to design a workshop based on Adaption-Innovation theory (Kirton, 1976; 2003). Before the workshop, each team member of a certain department within Air Force Athletics completed the KAI inventory to determine their position on the KAI continuum. During the workshop, participants explored the principles of the KAI framework and interpreted their scores. By doing this, they gained insights into their individual problem-solving styles. Using their KAI scores, we created scenarios illustrating how the team collectively approaches challenges. The workshop fostered awareness of team dynamics and encouraged members to leverage their diverse cognitive styles for improved collaboration. By applying KAI theory, the team can enhance creativity and productivity by aligning with the framework's emphasis on effective problem-solving in diverse groups (Kirton, 2003).

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### **Background and Setting**

Leadership is a ubiquitous term in contemporary discourse that plays a pivotal role in shaping team dynamics and effectiveness. Within the context of team leadership, the preferred leadership style influences the functionality of the team (Kirton, 2003). As a professional in college athletics for the last six years, I have been a part of many diverse teams that have been tasked with resolving multifaceted challenges daily. In seeking effective problem-solving strategies, I embarked on a project aimed at integrating Michael Kirton's Adaptation-Innovation theory (1976, 2003) into the operational framework of my current team.

I work in a department at the United States Air Force Academy where we specialize in supporting the thousand cadet-athletes that compete in NCAA Division 1 sports.. "The [Department supports] ... Air Force Athletics and is responsible [for providing] a first-class, transformational experience for 1,000 cadet-athletes across 27 intercollegiate sports" (Falcon Athletic Fund, n.d.).

The department consists of: one Associate Athletic Director (Tom), two Assistant Athletic Directors (Kraig and myself), three Directors (Nate, Pattie, Ericha), one Associate Director (Adam), and one Assistant Director (Mary). Pattie, Mary, Erica, and I identify as females and were born in Florida, Arizona, New York, and Massachusetts. In terms of age, the team ranges from 23 years old to 32 years old with over 25 years of combined work experience within college athletics. In terms of education, while all of us have at least a bachelor's degree, some of the group have master's degrees. Additionally, each person brings unique traditions, perspectives, and experiences enriching our collective team culture. By having our geographical, educational, and career diversification fosters an environment where varied ideas and approaches can thrive, and we can all collaborate collectively.

Problem-solving style is another variable that contributes to the team's diversity. In a general population, "individuals require some understanding of self and of others and a means to communicate" (Kirton, 2003, p. 209). While the Falcon Athletic Fund may be self-aware, are we aware enough to realize each other's differences in problem-solving? Do we have the means to mitigate our differences to be able to solve problems?

### **Review of Literature**

**The literature relevant to this project centers on a few topics. The first includes literature explaining Adaption-Innovation theory. Other additional topics include cognitive gap, coping behavior, preferred style and coping behavior, and style versus behavior. I discuss these topics in the sections that follow.**

#### **Adaption-Innovation Theory**

Using our diverse backgrounds, I decided to use Adaption-Innovation theory and Kirton's Adaptive-Innovative Inventory or the KAI, a psychometric assessment and the associated with A-I theory to better understand how each team member would go about solving problems (Kirton 1976; 2003) developed Adaption-Innovation theory and was the architect behind the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI). This theory provides an understanding of problem-solving and creativity in individuals. Kirton (2003) suggested that problem-solving and creativity are similar, if not the same, as it relates to brain function. He stresses that individuals have a distinct problem-solving style, measured by the KAI, that is either more Adaptive or more Innovative. According to Kirton (2003), "Adaptors are liable to produce solutions which reinforce the paradigm, although it may be modified by refinement or extension; innovators are more likely to produce solutions which threaten the paradigm..." (p. 47). Furthermore, one's overall KAI style is innate, it is highly resistant to, and most likely will not, change (Kirton,

2003). However, individuals may change their behavior based on the context and circumstances they encounter, although operating outside of their preferred style is stressful and costly in terms of energy and motivation. Using what we know about a person's style, depending on the problem at hand, we may lean more on those who are either more adaptive or innovative. Furthermore, this has ramifications for working in teams: "Understanding adaptive and innovative tendencies of team members can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the organization" (Stum, 2009, p. 67).

Adaptors are individuals who prefer working within existing structures and systems (Kirton, 2003). They are more likely to find solutions that are built upon established methods and traditions. Innovators, on the other hand, prefer to challenge and change existing systems. They seek new and unconventional approaches to problem-solving, often pushing the boundaries of established norms. The KAI theory emphasizes that both adaptors and innovators are valuable contributors to a team or organization.

A more adaptive individual prefers incremental change with a preference of working within the existing structure. "Adaptors have more regard for agreed structure because they seem more appreciative of its enabling possibilities than are the more innovative." (Kirton, 2003, p. 47). Kirton also states that more adaptive individuals are more likely to perceive current structures as worthy of their support "not just because they are sanctioned but because they know them to be based on past success therefore likely to prove useful again." (Kirton, 2003, p. 49). Adaptive individuals utilize attention to detail and aim to achieve improvement within the existing structure.

Innovators also need structure; however, they find it limiting (Kirton, 2003). They challenge or change the current structures or established frameworks. The more innovative are more liable to detach the problem from the way it is perceived thus indulging in a wider solution

search that produces solutions readily seen as different. More innovative individuals, with less attention to detail and tangential viewpoints, will make something different by changing the structure facilitating problem solving.

Adaptors perceive innovators as “glamorous, exciting, unsound, impractical, risky and abrasive,” (Kirton, 2003, p. 55) while innovators see adaptors as “sound, conforming, safe, predictable, and inflexible.” (Kirton, 2003, p. 55). In problem defining, adaptors tend to “accept problems as defined by consensus, accepting generally agreed constraints.” (Kirton, 2003, p. 55). Innovators “tend to reject the generally accepted perception of problems and redefine them.” (Kirton, 2003, p. 55). In solution generating, innovators generally produce various ideas that may not be presented as relevant and contain solutions that result in doing things differently. Adaptors prefer to generate fewer, relevant solutions aimed at doing things better.

Conceptualized, more adaptive individuals solve problems by making the existing structure better, whereas more innovative individuals solve problems by making the existing structure different (Kirton, 2003). While homogenous teams may get along better, they are limited in their scope due to a lack of cognitive diversity. While one style is not better than the other, it is important to note that maintaining cognitive diversity is imperative to be able to solve a wide range of problems, even if there is a higher possibility of conflict within the team.

The assessment related to the theory, the Kirton Adaptive-Innovative Inventory or the KAI, produces results that array along a continuum ranging from highly adaptive to highly innovative (Kirton, 2003). Adaptors solve problems within the agreed-upon or established frameworks and procedures by improving them, while Innovators challenge these frameworks by replacing them. Kirton stresses that individuals have a distinct problem-solving style, measured by the KAI, that is either more Adaptive or more Innovative. Kirton states that each individual

person has a measurable problem-solving style which is independent of motivation, intelligence, and skills learned (Kirton, 2003). The A-I continuum ranges from 32 to 160 with a normal distribution centered at the mean of 95. Individuals with KAI results ranging from 32 to 85 are more adaptive. Individuals with KAI results ranging from 96 to 160 are more innovative. People positioned on the continuum further away from the mean, in either direction, have a stronger style preference (Kirton, 2003). “The key to the adaptive-innovative distinction is the way people prefer to manage cognitive structure... Everyone brings about change, including change to the structure they use to do so” (Kirton, 2003, p. 47). The more adaptive problem solvers are more ready to accept modifications to the paradigm due to the results they initiate while the more innovative are likely to see the need for a change of paradigm to solve the problem (Kirton, 2003).

### **Cognitive Gap**

Cognitive gap refers to the difference in cognitive styles between individuals as measured by the KAI, particularly between those who are more adaptive and those who are more innovative (Kirton, 2003). A combination of research and experience suggests that a 10-point KAI difference between two people is “just noticeable” while a 20-point difference tends to present difficulties in mutual understanding and show steep differences hindering collaboration (Kirton, 2003). A significant cognitive gap can create challenges in collaboration, as individuals with different styles may struggle to understand each other’s perspectives and approaches. For instance, adaptors might view innovators as too radical, while innovators might see adaptors as overly rigid (Strum, 2009).

Successful management of cognitive gaps involves recognizing and valuing the diverse cognitive styles within a team (Kirton, 2003). Homogeneous groups will have less conflict



because everyone tends to think in the same style. They may be able to solve problems with less conflict, but the solutions will not be as varied due to lack of cognitive diversity. Heterogenous groups tend to have more conflict but tend to have more variety in solutions. Effective communication and creating an environment that respects different problem-solving approaches are essential to solving a wide range of complex problems. Leaders can play a crucial role in facilitating this understanding and ensuring that both adaptive and innovative contributions are harnessed productively.

### **Coping Behavior**

Conflict can occur between more adaptive and more innovative people, based upon their preferred styles and the magnitude of the gap between them (Kirton, 2003). More innovative individuals prefer less structure with revolutionary change while more adaptive individuals prefer more structure with incremental change.

“When collaborating, people often try to close such gaps, temporarily and with some effort, by behaving differently from the way they prefer (to do) by using coping behavior. If a 10-point difference between individuals is, in psychology terminology, “just noticeable difference”, 20 points are very clearly noticeable and large enough to require care to avoid breakdowns in communications. A 30- or 40-point difference can cause real problems; such a gap needs constant attention to avoid misunderstanding and friction.”

(Kirton, 2003, p.67)

So, when a gap exists between individuals’ problem-solving style, how can they solve problems together? The mechanism that allows individuals of different styles to solve problems is what Kirton calls Coping Behavior.

According to Kirton, Coping Behavior “is a learned technique available from cognitive resource [or one’s learned experience]; it occurs when behavior needs to be in a style not in accord with preferred style.” (Kirton, 2003, p. 41). While the KAI measures one’s preferred style, one may operate outside of the preferred style in order to be effective in solving a specific problem. Motivation is required for one to operate outside of their preferred style but can only be done for a limited amount of time (Bush, et al., 2017). While individuals are capable of coping outside of their preferred style, if there is no motivation to cope, then they will revert to their preferred problem-solving style. The stress resulting from partaking in coping behavior is taxing to the brain (Bush, et al., 2017) and takes a conscious effort to become self-aware enough to solve a problem outside one’s preferred style.

### **Preferred Style and Coping Behavior**

One’s preferred style is the inherent or natural way an individual prefers to approach problem-solving and creativity (Kirton, 2003). It is relatively stable over time and is not easily changed by external factors. People have a consistent preference for either an adaptive or innovative style. However, individuals may change their behavior based on the context and circumstances they encounter. Although operating outside of their preferred style is stressful and costly in terms of energy and motivation, it is possible. Individuals can learn to cope and behave outside their style preference, especially in situations where their preferred style may not be the most effective (Kirton, 2003). This coping mechanism, however, can be mentally and emotionally taxing over time. Understanding one's preferred style, as well as the styles of others, can lead to better team dynamics and more effective problem-solving strategies when team members know when and how to cope with others’ different styles. Using what we know about a person’s style, depending on the problem at hand, we may lean more on those who are either

more adaptive or innovative. Teams that recognize and balance adaptive and innovative tendencies can harness the strengths of both styles to achieve comprehensive and innovative solutions.

### **Style versus Behavior**

Adaption-Innovation theory also addresses coping behaviors in relation to problem-solving styles (Kirton, 2003). Coping behaviors refer to how individuals respond to the demands and constraints of their problem-solving environments. The interaction between coping behaviors and problem-solving styles can influence individuals' approach and navigate different situations. Kirton's theory emphasizes the concept of "preferred style," which refers to an individual's natural inclination or tendency towards a particular way of problem-solving (Kirton, 2003). He also states that behavior refers to the actions individuals take to solve problems. This can vary based on the context and situational demands. Style, on the other hand, is a more stable and inherent characteristic, reflecting how individuals prefer to approach problem-solving, whether through adaptive or innovative means. Kirton emphasizes that understanding this distinction is crucial for managing diversity within teams, as it helps in recognizing and valuing the different approaches individuals bring to problem-solving tasks.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The fundamental and most crucial concept in comprehending KAI's connection to problem-solving is the centrality of the problem within the process. According to A-I theory, every aspect of problem-solving centers around the identified Problem A or B (Kirton, 2003). "[Being] able to discriminate but with no instinct to guide them, individuals have two problems when collaborating: to solve the problem requiring their collaboration (Problem A) and the management of each other (Problem B)" (Kirton, 2003, p. 205). Viewing the problem through this lens can significantly impact the management of cognitive diversity and enhance team

cohesion. Kirton (2003) continues to say that “successful groups spend much more energy on Problem A than Problem B. It is a fundamental issue in understanding the management of diversity that groups face the paradox that diversity (diverse structure) is both enabling and limiting” (p. 205).

The classification of Problem A and Problem B highlights the diverse nature of problem-solving tasks, with adaptors excelling in structured, routine problems, and innovators shining in unstructured, complex issues that require creative solutions (Kirton, 2003). An example of this for my team would be managing Name, Image, Likeness in college athletics (NIL) (Problem A) and differences in problem-solving style that each team member brings to the team (Problem B). Recognizing the differentiation between Problem A and Problem B within the KAI framework enables leaders to customize problem-solving strategies. When more energy is expended on Problem B than on Problem A, effective problem-solving toward achieving Problem A cannot occur (Kirton, 2003). By acknowledging the distinct challenges posed by each problem type and leveraging the varied problem-solving preferences of team members, leaders can cultivate effective problem-solving methodologies and facilitate success.

Specifically, for the Air Force Academy department, I sought to address the problem of cognitive diversity among the staff. Given the diversity in age, educational experience, place of origin, and diversity of assignments, I felt it important to minimize the Problem Bs among the group so that we can focus on the main Problem A: providing philanthropic support for Air Force Athletics. Upon closer reflection, however, I realized that a significant Problem B had not been understood or addressed: managing our problem-solving diversity. By understanding our cognitive diversities, we can better understand each other and attempt to eliminate disagreements amongst each other. Without a deeper understanding of our individual cognitive styles influenced

by our approach to challenges, we risk inefficiencies and conflicts. By fostering awareness of these differences, we aim to create an environment where we can better appreciate each other's perspectives, reduce unnecessary disagreements, and align our efforts more effectively to achieve our team's shared goals.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of my project was to help my team better manage the diversity, especially the problem-solving diversity, within the team. To accomplish this, I worked with a KAI-certified master practitioner to design a KAI workshop. Before the workshop, every member of my team was asked to take the KAI so that they could receive their score and understand their location on the KAI continuum. At the workshop, we dove into what the KAI is and what their scores mean (See Appendix A). Using their scores, we created a scenario or example of how we all work together to solve our collective problems. By doing this workshop, I hoped to provoke thought and understanding of our team dynamics and enhance collaboration. Overall, incorporating the KAI theory into team dynamics can lead to improved problem-solving, enhanced creativity and innovation, and more productivity (Kirton, 2003).

### **Project Objectives**

To achieve the purpose of this project and address the challenges of managing problem-solving diversity within my department within Air Force Athletics, I established several key objectives. These objectives guided the design and implementation of the KAI workshop to make sure it aligned with our goal of fostering better collaboration among team members. These objectives were:

- **Increase Awareness of Problem-Solving Styles**

Facilitate a KAI workshop to help team members understand their individual problem-solving styles and how these styles influence team dynamics.

- **Promote Understanding of KAI Theory**

Educate team members about Michael Kirton's KAI theory, the significance of their KAI scores, and the implications of effective teamwork.

- **Encourage Reflection and Thoughtful Dialogue**

Create an interactive and safe environment during the workshop team members to reflect, share, and engage in constructive discussions about team dynamics.

- **Apply KAI Insights to Real-World Scenarios**

Develop and implement practical exercises and scenarios during the workshop that illustrate how Air Force Athletics can leverage their KAI profiles to address challenges and improve solutions.

- **Support Long-Term Integration of KAI Concepts**

Provide actionable takeaways from the workshop to encourage the continued application of KAI concepts in day-to-day interactions and strategic planning.

These objectives emphasized both the immediate goals of the workshop and the long-term benefits of incorporating KAI into our work in athletic development and the overall collegiate athletics landscape.

### **Workshop Design**

Every member of my Air Force Athletic department was given the option to participate in the KAI Workshop that I presented with the KAI Master Practitioner. Five members of the Air Force Athletic Department opted to participate in the workshop. Those who opted in were given

the KAI, a self-report tool administered by the Practitioner before the workshop took place that measures adaptive-innovative preference to place individuals on the KAI continuum, The KAI, designed for literate, work-experienced adults, has proven its validity and reliability across various studies, samples, and languages (Kirton, 1976, 2003; Prato Previde & Massimini, 1984; Mudd, 1986; Kirton & Kubes, 1992; Clapp, 1993; Murdock et al., 1993). The purpose of the in-person workshop on the KAI is to introduce the overall concept and theory of the KAI to the group to hopefully use within our team problem-solving. By having their scores beforehand, participants would be able to go in to know where they fall on the KAI continuum based on their scores and we can expand on what their scores mean during the workshop.

### **KAI Results**

Table 1 below shows the KAI score of the six Air Force Athletic department members that took the KAI assessment. The scores varied from 63 to 104 with a mean of 86, which is slightly more adaptive. It is important to note that due to the data group being so small, when plotted on the KAI continuum, a bell curve would not be seen like it would in a general population. When talking about the general population and KAI scores, the mean is normally 95 and there is a distinct bell curve (Kirton, 2003). Specifically, with the Falcon Athletic Fund members that took the assessment (see Figure 1), the consensus group—10 points on either side of the mean—ranged from 76 to 96 with the outliers being 63 and 104.

**Table 1**

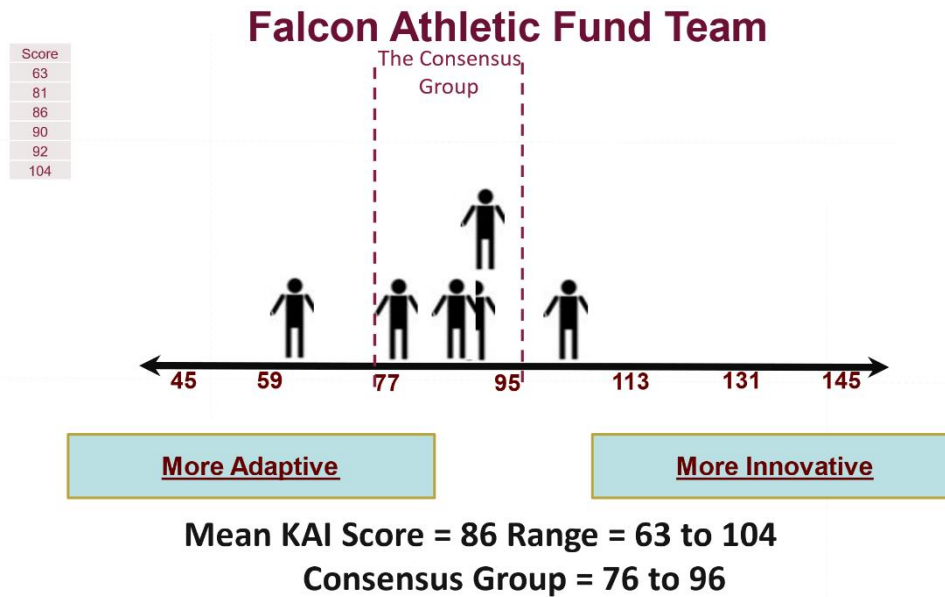
*KAI Scores of Workshop Participants from the Air Force Athletics Department*

<b>NAME (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>KAI SCORE</b>
Erica	63
Pattie	81
Mary	83
Adam	90
Nate	92

Hannah (myself) | 104

**Figure 1.**

*Location of KAI Workshop Participants on KAI Continuum*



*Note.* Source: Walz (2024). Used by permission.

### Workshop Participation

After the participants received their KAI score, they gathered in the Athletics Conference Room at the Falcon Athletic Center for the workshop. The group was then led through a PowerPoint presentation (See Appendix A) I made to educate each member on what the KAI is and what their scores mean. The KAI Practitioner presented briefly on how to interpret individuals' scores. After the presentation, I led a discussion on how we can implement this into my team's day-to-day objectives. After the conclusion of the workshop, all participants were then sent a survey with questions based on their experience through the workshop (See Appendix B).



Nate, Pattie, Adam, Ericha, and Mary opted to take the KAI assessment and participate in the workshop. I took the KAI previously in a class and incorporated that score into the workshop. Unfortunately, on the day of the workshop, one participant was sick so only the other four participated in the workshop portion. We started the workshop off with three questions to get the group to start reflecting on how they like to solve problems. The questions asked were “How do you prefer to be creative?”, “How much structure do you prefer?”, and “How do you react to change?” After we discussed their responses to those questions, we went into a PowerPoint about KAI. With everyone’s permission, we then shared what each other scored on the KAI. This sparked many reactions and conversations. It was shocking how different we all were on the continuum. Then we went into final discussions on how we can use the presented information and our KAI scores to better communicate and solve problems together. Some of the final discussions included how best to use our scores and incorporate them into our day-to-day. We talked about how there was a 41-point difference between Erica and me. We were the outliers, and when we go to solve problems together, conflict may be extremely apparent. We discussed how knowing our KAI scores made us more self-aware by going into collaborative discussions with each other. We also discussed how the whole Falcon Athletic Fund team should have taken the KAI assessment to see if our mean would be skewed or if Erica and I would not be outliers. The Master Practitioner then closed out the workshop summarizing some last-minute questions we had about our scores and emailed everyone the feedback report containing explanations of what their scores meant. We then concluded the workshop.

### **Workshop Evaluation**

After the workshop, Pattie, Adam, Ericha, and Mary were given a survey to answer based on their participation in the workshop. The survey (See Appendix B) consisted of two Likert-

scale questions where the participants could select from five categories, e.g. Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, and Very Dissatisfied. Then we had seven questions that required short answers. The questions that required a written response were related to what the participants learned in the workshop.

All survey participants answered every question. All participants were [very or somewhat] satisfied with the workshop and had their questions answered when the workshop took place. 75% of participants were not shocked by their KAI score while the other 25% were shocked at how adaptive they were on the continuum. All four respondents agreed that the KAI workshop and theory are practical versus theoretical. 50% of participants gave suggestions for improvement for future KAI workshops. These suggestions included giving real-life scenarios for the group to practice and giving tools and recommendations on how to leverage each person's style in order to solve problems effectively. All participants agreed that they could use KAI in their own leadership. They claimed that it would allow them to understand themselves better and in turn better understand their co-workers. 100% of the participants had one concept from the workshop that they learned which included KAI score being innate and won't ever change.

Due to the limited number of participants and the small scope of data points, the dataset lacks robustness needed for more comprehensive analysis. This constraint may limit the generalizability of findings, making it challenging to draw conclusions or identify meaningful patterns.

### **Project Evaluation and Reflections**

When evaluating team performance in relation to our objectives, several secondary challenges (Problem Bs) became evident. First, our structure and how the team relates to it. For example, we are limited by the restrictions of government computers, which block access to

platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook—key tools for prospecting new donors. Second, there is a lack of consistency in how team members communicate and steward with prospects, leading to varied approaches. By not having a streamlined stewardship plan for donors, it consistently leads to donors missing out on opportunities to see the impacts on their gifts. Another Problem B within our team is escalation of problems. Having unresolved conflicts or lack of alignment with each other can escalate over time leaving team members feeling bitter and uncollaborative. When the team is not on the same page, we each get frustrated with each other and do not understand why our counterparts

do things the way that they do. Lastly, frequent staff restructuring poses a significant challenge in the Department. In collegiate athletics, promotions and demotions are common. But by constantly changing the structure of our team, it has led to miscommunications on goals and direction within our team while making it difficult to establish cohesion and rapport. The final structural issue we face stems from our military affiliation. When new government administrations take office, many aspects of operations at the Air Force Academy are subject to change to align with the President's national security priorities. As a result, the Athletics Department often experiences sudden shifts in plans and priorities. This represents a significant Problem B—one that the department frequently has little to no control over resolving. By addressing Problem Bs proactively ensures that the group functions cohesively, enabling them to focus their collective energy on Problem A effectively. It is also important to focus on Problem A—raising funds to support cadet-athletes—so that we can better address and mitigate these secondary challenges that present as Problem Bs.

Reflecting on the objectives outlined earlier in this paper, I believe the team performed well in achieving them. One key objective was to increase awareness of problem-solving styles,

which we addressed by facilitating a KAI workshop. This workshop helped team members identify and understand their unique problem-solving preferences. We know this based on the answers from two of the questions in the post-workshop survey: “Would you say the KAI is more theoretical or practical?” “What are one or two concepts you learned from the Workshop?” All team members listed concepts they learned through the workshop while also establishing that the KAI was more practical to their day-to-day. By administering the KAI to participating team members, we provided a foundation for interpreting their KAI scores and how these align with their problem-solving approaches.

The workshop fostered reflection and dialogue in a safe and interactive environment. Team members were not only able to explore their own styles but also gain an appreciation for the diverse approaches within the group. To make the insights actionable, we applied KAI principles to real-world scenarios, demonstrating how Air Force Athletics could leverage this to understand upcoming challenges more effectively. One of the examples was selling seats to a new athletic facility. We asked team members how they would build the communication plan for this and the approaches they would take on building their pitch. We talked through everyone’s approach and collectively made up a sales plan that we thought was sufficient. Then we talked through how KAI could help us through evaluating the sales plan to maximize revenue. We also talked through an example of what new leadership would look like for the department and how we best would come together to make sure our Problem A – raising money for cadet-athletes – would stay at the forefront and lead us through our decisions. With the military part of the Air Force Academy, movement within the department is always apparent and during our time we will see staff changes. That is why was very important to talk through how each of us could use

the KAI to make sure we all problem-solve together instead of creating more conflict or Problem Bs.

By achieving these objectives and identifying our Problem Bs, we had the opportunity to enhance the team's overall functionality. This progress positions us to continue improving our efforts in raising funds for cadet-athletes at the Air Force Academy. Strengthening team cohesion and problem-solving capabilities will undoubtedly contribute to greater success in supporting the Academy's mission of creating leaders of character in our Air and Space Forces.

As the team moves forward, I have a few recommendations to enhance collaboration and effectiveness. First, I suggest ensuring that every team member who has not yet taken the KAI Assessment does so. Once completed, team members can compare their results to better understand each other's problem-solving styles. Second, given the demands of fundraising for over 27 sports, I recommend scheduling monthly check-ins to ensure alignment across the team. With such a fast-paced environment, it is crucial to stay coordinated within each sport's activities and goals. Miscommunication or lack of alignment often leads to conflicts, so these regular check-ins can help prevent issues before they arise. Finally, the Department should consider contracting a KAI Master Practitioner to provide consulting support. This would be not only for the fundraising team but across all teams within the organization. Regular sessions with the practitioner would ensure that KAI principles are actively applied to address challenges and enhance problem-solving throughout the Department. By implementing these strategies, the team can foster collaboration, and leverage KAI insights for greater success which would ultimately lead to more revenue for cadet-athletes.

### **Workshop Recommendations**

Overall, I feel as though the workshop was successful and allowed the team to engage in conversations about how to better communicate and solve problems with one another. If someone were to replicate this workshop, I have a few recommendations.

The first recommendation would be to make it into a series of two to three workshops. By only doing one workshop, the KAI Practitioner and I were able to cover the basics and each person's KAI score. We barely scratched the surface of how best to use the KAI in our fundraising day-to-day and how to work with other teams within our external department. If someone were to make it into a series, my recommendation would be the first workshop should be the basics of what the KAI is, the second workshop should be how to use the KAI within that specific team, then the last series is how to use the KAI within other teams in their unit and practice with real life scenarios. By breaking the workshops up, it would allow the people in the workshops to go into more detail and allow more productive conversations while being advised by the KAI practitioner.

My second recommendation would be to have both the KAI practitioner and the workshop be in the same room as the workshop. Due to being in different states, the KAI practitioner and I conducted the workshop over Zoom in two different time zones. While I think we did an excellent job hosting the conversations, I feel as though if we were in the same room, it would allow for fewer technological interruptions and more open conversations.

My third recommendation would be to incorporate the workshop into the workday versus doing it after work hours. Due to Air Force Athletics' busy schedule, after-work hours were the only time that everyone was available to meet. I do not think it affected the overall outcome of the workshop, but I do feel as though if we had done it earlier, everyone would have been more fresh and ready for more internal conversations.

While the KAI has been studied and researched for over 50 years, advancement within the theory is bound to happen. While the theory has compared different organizations in various countries, I was not able to find any studies specifically talking about collegiate athletic departments implementing the KAI to solve organizational problems. Future research should consider looking at collegiate athletic departments working towards one common goal.

My last recommendation would be to have a bigger group when completing the workshop and taking the assessment. While the group was a great group to survey, when analyzing the results and overall workshop, I was not left with much to analyze. Out of the nine people on the team, only five took the assessment and four completed the workshop. Also, by having a bigger group, it may or may not replicate the normal standard deviation and/or bell curve that the general population would present on the KAI continuum. By having a bigger group, it would also allow for more diversity in conversations.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Kirton Adaption-Innovation (KAI) theory offers a valuable framework for enhancing team problem-solving by leveraging the diverse cognitive styles of team members. By understanding if individuals are more adaptive or innovative, teams can better anticipate and manage dynamics or conflicts that arise from each person's differences. This awareness allows for more effective collaboration and encourages respect for varied perspectives and problem-solving techniques. It also reduces the risk of interpersonal conflicts (Problem B) that can hinder the group's ability to focus on the primary challenge (Problem A). The KAI Assessment is universal and can be used by teams in every career field. In the ever-changing landscape of college athletics specifically, problems arise every day. Being equipped with tools such as KAI can help teams foster better relationships with each other while improving problem-solving at the

highest level. Ultimately, using KAI in team settings can foster a more inclusive environment where both adaptive and innovative contributions are appreciated. This will lead to more creative, efficient and well-rounded solutions.



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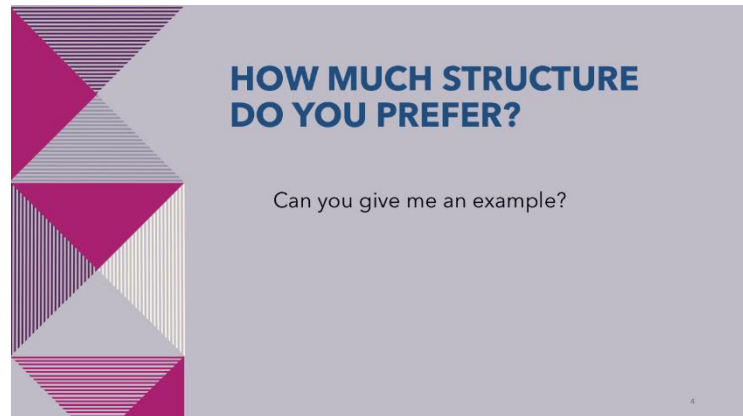
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**Appendix A**

PowerPoint shown during the workshop.



# THE KEY ELEMENTS OF BASIC PROBLEM SOLVING

As stated by Kathryn W. Jabllokow (2005)

Person → Process → Product

Environment

# WHAT IS THE KAI?

Kirton Adaption - Innovation Theory

# THE START

We are all creative.  
 We all solve problems, all the time, everyday.  
 Problem solving is key to life.  
 But we differ in our **LEVEL** and **STYLE**.

# LEVEL & STYLE

**WE ALL DIFFER IN OUR:**

**Level:** How creative we are? How much skill, knowledge, or experience?

**Style:** How we are creative? In what way, with how much structure?

# MORE ADAPTIVE

A PERSON WHO SOLVES PROBLEMS BY MAKING THINGS BETTER

# MORE INNOVATIVE

A PERSON WHO SOLVES PROBLEM BY MAKING THINGS DIFFERENT

# YOUR KAI SCORE:


- is innate
- will not change

## MORE ADAPTIVE

- prefer more structure
- accepts and works within the lines
- more prudent risk takers

**Innovators see Adaptors as:**

- timid
- stuck within their system
- intolerant



## MORE INNOVATIVE

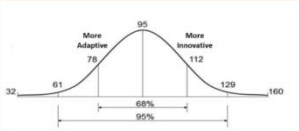
- prefer less structure
- accepts and works outside of the lines
- challenge assumptions
- more daring risk takers

**Adaptors see Innovators as:**

- abrasive
- turbulent
- impractical



## ADAPTATION-INNOVATION CONTINUUM




**Remember:**

Neither is better at using their creativity to problem solve or make decisions.

There is no right or wrong place on the continuum.

Depending on the situation, different degrees of adaption/innovation may be used.

More Adaptive	More Innovative
-works within the problem definition	-sees the definition as part of problem
-likes more structure	-likes less structure



## WHAT DID YOU SCORE?

Let's Discuss!




## STYLE VS. BEHAVIOR

- Style is **STABLE**
- Behavior is **FLEXIBLE**
- These are not the same.
- One can "BEHAVE" out of their preferred style... this is called **COPING BEHAVIOR.**



## PREFERRED STYLE

- Genetically determined
- You did not choose it
- You cannot change it
- Readily apparent in young children
- Can reliably measure by mid-teens
- Does **NOT** alter with age





## COGNITIVE GAP

- Two people with differing style preferences
- A person and their team/group
- Two groups

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## PROBLEM A/B

EVERY TIME THERE IS A PROBLEM, ANOTHER ACQUIRES

- **Problem A:** the task
- **Problem B:** the problems that come from the task and various relations from people you bring in to solve the task
- **Example:** NIL
- **Example:** different state laws pertaining to NIL

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## SO WHAT NOW?

How can we apply this to our day-to-day?

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## THANK YOU!

### Appendix B

Survey given after the conclusion of the KAI Workshop to workshop participants.

## KAI Workshop Evaluation

Thank you for attending the KAI Workshop with Hannah Campbell and Dr. Jerald Walz. We ask that you fill out the survey below and submit before August 5th. If you have any questions, please reach out to Hannah Campbell.

hcampbell@vt.edu [Switch account](#) 

\* Indicates required question

Email \*

Your email \_\_\_\_\_

What is your name? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the KAI workshop?

1      2      3      4      5

Very Satisfied                        Very Dissatisfied

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the engagement and interaction of the workshop?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Satisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Dissatisfied

Would you say the KAI workshop was more theoretical or practical?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What surprised you the most about your KAI score?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

From the KAI workshop, what were one or two concepts that you learned?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_



What questions do you still have about the KAI?

Your answer

---

How do you think the KAI theory could apply to your own leadership or work?

Your answer

---

Are there any improvements you would suggest for future KAI workshops?

Your answer

---

Do you have any comments, questions, or concerns about what was presented to you?

Your answer

---

**Submit**

Clear form