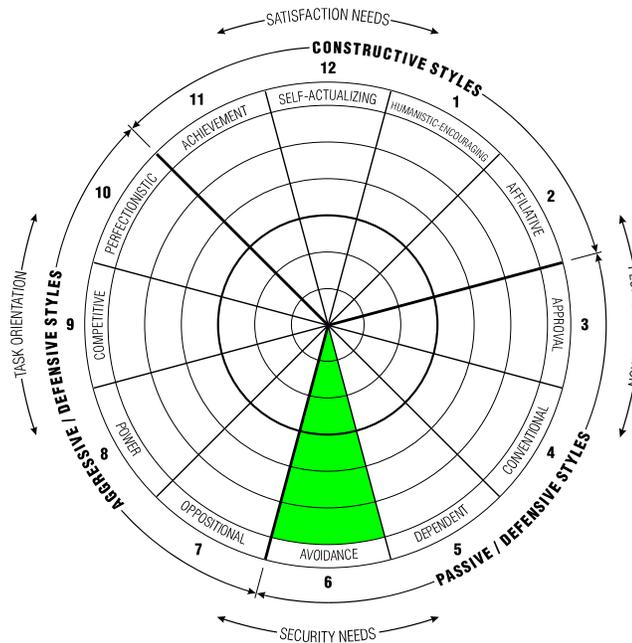


The Avoidance Mindset

Attitudes, Values and Beliefs for Working Effectively with People



Avoidance

Six o'clock position

Style Description: non-committal, withdraw and isolation, leaves decisions to others

Measures our tendency to use the defensive strategy of *withdrawal*. We do this by hiding our feelings, or by shying away from situations we find threatening. We may use this behaviour when we face something different, such as a new environment or a problem we have no experience in solving. Whether or not avoidance behaviour becomes extreme depends upon the nature of what we perceive as threatening. Avoidance-orientated people feel a strong need to protect themselves by steering clear of anything that threatens them. These individuals prefer to stay well within their self-imposed “comfort zones,” and do so by playing it safe and avoiding risks.

Avoidance Mindsets - You Are Feeling Threatened

The way you described yourself on the Avoidance scale suggests that you may not be very happy about the way things are going in your life. Your score indicates that you may be experiencing some negative consequences as a result of these feelings.

The Avoidance scale measures the tendency to use the defensive strategy of withdrawal. Avoidance of contact with others, of feelings or of situations leads to increased self-doubt and reduced self-confidence. Your high score indicates that something may be bothering you: You may be avoiding dealing with your feelings or avoiding a situation you do not wish to face.

Although a very high score on the Avoidance scale is relatively rare, some people do use this behaviour as a way of coping with something particularly stressful. Consequently, dissatisfaction or frustration with some specific aspect of your life could be the cause of your high Avoidance score. Is there something in your current work and home situations that might be encouraging you to use avoidance behaviour?

The Avoidance style produces a strong need to protect your feelings of self worth by avoiding risk, being vulnerable and /or showing your authentic self especially when you are not feeling safe. By avoiding things, you can give the false impression that nothing is threatening you. You are trying to increase your sense of security by playing it safe, not taking risks and misaligning from your values. This approach often gives a feel of initial comfort but the issue never really goes away and you'll have to face it at some point. This approach is likely to cause you to fail to identify the real problem behind your avoidance behaviour.

If you score decently high (50% or higher) you may be overly hard on yourself; severe self-blaming thought patterns often characterize those scoring high in the avoidance style. When you make a mistake, you may find it difficult to forgive yourself, to learn and to move on. This can result in a fear of failure and the feeling that you must avoid situations that carry the risk of personal defeat.

Self-blame and a sense of guilt are very difficult things to see a way out of by yourself; they are usually built upon a set of incorrect assumptions or perceptions. Securing the support of other person to talk things through can be very helpful as it allows you to be curious about your perceptions of the situation and allow you to thinking about a few options for dealing with the situation to move forward.

What Does High Avoidance Look Like?

A strong mindset on the Avoidance scale indicates that these characteristics may describe you:

- A strong tendency to deny responsibility for your own feelings and behaviour.
- Feelings of guilt over real or imagined mistakes.
- A fear of conflict.
- A pronounced fear of personal failure.
- Reduced self-confidence.
- The feeling that your effort makes little difference in the outcome of things.
- A preoccupation with your own perception of events, which is likely to be exaggerated.
- A withdrawal from normal interaction and contact, leading to increased isolation.

Avoidance Thinking:

People scoring higher on this leadership and mindset style are often threatened by responsibilities of their positions and tend to feel overwhelmed much of the time. By choosing to ignore problems in hopes that things will take care of themselves, they often obtain a false, temporary sense of security. Avoidance orientated people frequently struggle with either setting realistic goals to accomplish or focus sense of where their efforts are headed. Those who work with avoidance orientated people typically never know what to expect, and as a result may have difficulty doing their jobs. Because these people prefer to minimize interaction with other staff members they may communicate indirectly, perhaps through email or other means that allow them to avoid face to face interactions.

Avoidance-based Thinking: Low Range Under 35% (Most Effective)

If this is your style, you probably prefer to address or confront things rather than avoid them. You may have many effective qualities, including a healthy sense of self-worth.

You seldom experience significant doubt over your ability to deal with problems, and are usually not afraid to take occasional risks. Rather than always choose the safest route, you are likely to explore different alternatives for accomplishing something. Confidence in yourself contributes to your belief that you can change things for the better. When you do make mistakes, you probably see them as opportunities to learn and grow.

Avoidance-based Thinking: Medium Range 35% - 65% (Less Effective)

If you scored closer to the Low range, you are usually confident, although you may occasionally doubt your abilities. You can be effective on the job, but you may hesitate and have reservations over taking on new responsibilities.

If you scored closer to the High range, you may have difficulty giving yourself credit for your strengths; instead, you tend to focus on your shortcomings. You may choose to criticize yourself when you make mistakes, rather than learning from them and moving forward.

Avoidance-based Thinking: High Range 65% and Above (Least Effective)

You tend to doubt your ability to interact effectively with others, make decisions, or volunteer your own ideas. Your tendency to focus on your own concerns can cause you to ignore what is happening around you. As a result, you may miss important opportunities to stretch yourself and develop your skills.

Dissatisfaction or frustration with some specific aspects of life is often the cause of a high range of avoidance scores. Although a high score on this scale is rare, some people do use this behaviour temporarily as a way of coping with something particularly stressful. If ignored, a prolonged tendency towards avoiding your feelings and your situation only makes things worse, and can cause serious emotional and physical problems.

More About the Avoidance Style

The Avoidance scale measures the tendency to avoid expression of feelings, or situations or people one finds threatening. Some degree of avoidance is fully rational as a response to a perceived threat. Most of us experience this type of behaviour at some point in our lives. We may use it when we face something that is threatening or different, such as a new environment or a problem we have no experience in solving.

Whether or not avoidance behaviour becomes extreme depends on what we perceive as threatening. Severe avoidance behaviour can cause an individual to avoid all people, and to avoid taking advantage of help when it's offered or opportunities to obtain real knowledge about what he or she is facing. This prevents the individual from taking advantage of opportunities for personal growth and development, as well as sources of assistance. Avoidance becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and creates the very condition it seeks to cure; it is very self-defeating.

Your Avoidance Style on the Job

You:

- May have recently experienced something traumatic or disappointing; feel overwhelmed by circumstances.
- Blame yourself and take an unforgiving attitude when things go wrong.
- Experience tension, anxiety and stress.
- Put things off in hopes they will take care of themselves.
- Refrain from examining or expressing your feelings; isolate yourself from others.

Suggestions:

- Determine what is threatening you. You may be experiencing a traumatic event, such as a loss of your job or a close relationship. Talk to a trusted friend.
- Listen to your body sensations, they are working to help you understand the root cause of what you may be avoiding. They provide a key entry point into being curious about something that is negatively impacting you.
- Focus on your feelings. Emotions are always valid and lead to insights about the situation and / or external stimulus you are facing.
- Ask yourself, "What is causing me to doubt myself?"
- Take positive action by confronting and challenging your worries and fears.
- To help reduce loneliness and isolation, try to share your feelings and thoughts.
- Reach out to others for support



Decreasing the Avoidance Style

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/146-avoidance-style/id1371885437?i=1000531541596>

Avoidance Behaviours Defined

Core Thinking Patterns for Individual, Team and Organizational Effectiveness

An Avoidance Culture...

Characterizes organizations that fail to reward success but nevertheless punish mistakes. This negative reward system leads members to shift responsibilities to others and to avoid any possibility of being blamed for a mistake. The survival and /or effectiveness of this type of organization is in question since members are unwilling to make decisions, take action, or accept risks. Avoidance measures our tendency to use the defensive strategy of withdrawal.

We do this by hiding our feelings, or by shying away from situations we find threatening. We may use this behaviour when we face something different, such as a new environment or a problem we have no experience in solving. Whether or not avoidance behaviour becomes extreme depends upon the nature of what we perceive as threatening. Avoidance-orientated people feel a strong need to protect themselves by steering clear of anything that threatens them. These individuals prefer to stay well within their self-imposed "comfort zones," and do so by playing it safe and avoiding risks.

Organizational (OCI) Behaviours of Avoidance-based Thinking

- make "popular" rather than necessary decisions
- lay low when things get tough
- never be the one blamed for problems
- shift responsibilities to others
- not get involved
- put things off
- be non-committal
- wait for others to act first
- push decisions upward
- take few chances

Group (GSI) Behaviours of Avoidance-based Thinking

1. were ideas presented in a hesitant, almost self-doubting way.
2. did the group put off dealing with the more difficult issues.
3. were members evasive when decisiveness was needed.
4. was there a need for greater involvement on the part of certain members.
5. was the group reluctant to commit to a solution.
6. did people stay detached (and never fully come together as a team.)

Individual (LSI) Behaviours of Avoidance-based Thinking

Tense, uneasy	Evasive	Presents safe ideas	Doesn't relate well to others
Self-depreciating	Self-condemning or doubting	Little interest in achievement	Seems to have strong conflicts
Not aggressive	Reserved	Easily embarrassed	Concerned with own problems
Takes few chances	Easily led	Leaves decisions to others	Easily upset in most situations
Lacks self confidence	Narrow interests	Avoids decisions	Has difficulty being accepted
Worries a lot	Often uncertain	Insecure and anxious	Nervous and apprehensive

The Avoidance Mindset - What Can You Change?

You can't always change or influence the people around you, but you can control your reactions to them. These reactions originate in your *thoughts*, or the way you perceive and process information and experiences. Your thoughts are powerful resources; what you think defines who you are and what you do in every aspect of your life. By modifying what you think, you can change how you behave.

Using the LSI to Initiate Change in Your Avoidance Mindset

Completing and reviewing your LSI leadership assessment is the vital first step in the process of changing your avoidance-based beliefs and the associated behaviours. The inventory has undergone over 45 years of extensive research, and has been established as a valid, reliable way to help you take an objective look at yourself.

You can use the LSI to:

- Understand what you were like now, and will cause you to be that way.
- Recognize the consequences of your behaviour and how it affects yourself and others.
- Pinpoint your own unique strengths, as well as any "stumbling blocks" to your effectiveness.
- Identifying more constructive ways of thinking and behaving.
- Decide what aspects of your behaviour you want to change.
- Develop a specific strategy to help bring those changes about.

Moving from Thought to Action

Merely completing the LSI leadership assessment will do little to advance your desire to improve yourself in the Avoidance-based area. To receive the fullest benefit from the inventory, devote some time to interpreting your LSI assessment scores (by reading your customized leadership assessment report), thinking about what you learned, and setting goals around what you want to change.

Below are some helpful change guidelines to assist you, followed by a thorough plan of action you can complete to most effectively direct your efforts.

Avoidance Mindset Change Guidelines

1. Acknowledge and except all aspects of yourself. Remember, the question is not "am I a good or bad person?" but rather "what is preventing me from being more effective in the Avoidance area, and what can I do to improve?"
2. Recognize that your sense of self-worth *is not* connected to your LSI scores or the impressions others have of you on an LSI 360 assessment (if completed). You are worthwhile because you were a human being - tying your self-worth to outside factors can limit your ability to make positive changes in your behaviour.
3. Specifically define what you want to change about being less Avoidance-based and why. Clearly describing an aspect of your behaviour, stating the problems it creates for you, listing why you want to change it, and detailing the actions you plan to take will properly focus the change process.
4. Increase your confidence by concentrating on what you do well. Overcome your preoccupation with failure by focusing on your successes. Make a list of all you do well, and read it when you were feeling under confident.
5. Practice using more effective non-Avoidance behaviours in your mind. These "practice sessions" will gradually begin to affect your real-life performance in 1:1 or group interactions. Picture yourself deliberately changing what you decided to change. Then, imagine yourself as you will be after successfully making the change.

Changing Avoidance Mindsets - Action Planning Worksheet

Step 1: My score for the Avoidance Thinking Style is _____ (percentile)

Step 2: My score on Avoidance means I tend to believe that:

Step 3: Significant Influences

We think and behave as we do because we have been influenced by significant people and situations in our lives. Consider *your* life: try to identify and isolate the influences you've experienced that may be associated with the style.

Significant Person (or situation) _____

Ideas / Behaviours You Might Have Learned _____

Step 4: Consider the consequences of using the style and list them as indicated below.

Personally

Positive Consequences

Self-Defeating Consequences

Professionally

Positive Consequences

Self-Defeating Consequences

Step 5: Consider how your life would be different if you change your behaviour to be less Avoidance-based.

Some Positive Differences

Some Negative Differences

Step 6: Changing your Avoidance behaviours

Changing your Avoidance behaviour involves changing your mind regarding some ideas you hold around how you value and interact with people. Consider what you will have to give up and what you will gain. What cherished ideas or beliefs must you challenge? Go back to your LSI leadership report and review both the words and statements that identify this style and your responses to them.

How would you like things to be different? (Same suggestions below)

Becoming More Effective: Steps to Change

Any long-term tendency to avoid things can result in high stress - related symptoms or even physical illness. Your Avoidance score is a good indicator of your tendency to use avoidance behaviour. Take heart in the knowledge that you can change your avoidance behaviour. These suggestions can help.

- Determine what is threatening you and provoking your avoidance behaviour. Keep a journal or talk to a trusted friend.
- When you are aware you are avoiding something, focus on what you are feeling and think about what you are telling yourself. This will lead you to discover the source of some of your feelings.
- Examine only the current reasoning behind your urge to avoid. Ask yourself: "What is bothering me right now?" Then take positive action to correct the self-talk that is causing the avoidance reaction.
- Recognize that your personal worth is unrelated to your accomplishments, setbacks, relationships or feelings.
- Discover what, where and when you avoid. Become aware, and focus on what you are telling yourself about these situations.
- Set new goals for yourself. Think carefully about how you want things to be in your life.
- Try something new and different. Do something you have always wanted to do - just for the fun of it.
- Accomplish one small task at a time; counter the urge to withdraw. Make it something you usually avoid. Focus on thoroughly completing it, then congratulate yourself on a job well done.
- Learn how to relate more effectively with others. Do anything you can to establish some closer relationships with others.
- Interact more with people you may have been avoiding. Try to let them know what you feel. Do not make judgments about what they should do. Focus on what you feel, what you want and what you are going to do.

Step 7: What barriers now exist to making this change?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

Step 8: How can you overcome these barriers? Try to *challenge your assumptions* about your behaviours.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

Step 9: What will you gain by making this change and becoming less Avoidance-based?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

Step 10: What do you plan to do to bring this change about?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Step 11: Seeking Support

Depth psychologists know that our capacity for growth relates to our ability to internalize and take personal responsibility for the following three parts of our lives –

- a) Insight** (self awareness and internal motivation to grow and transform is essential here - LSI mindset assessment helps by providing a language and framework);
- b) Endurance** (courage and alignment with your core values helps here);
- c) Action** (moral strength and motivation to grow / learn helps here).

Seek support for your change efforts. Ask one or two trusted family members, friends or work members for their help. Solicit feedback from them on your progress.

With whom will you share your intentions and plans to change? _____

How can they best assist you? _____

Step 12: Accountability - By what date do you intend to take action? _____

Action Steps for Change

Now that you have reviewed the Avoidance Style, review the following suggested actions, and rate them in terms of your perceived need for change, where 0 is little or no need and 3 is a strong need.

- | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Stop isolating myself from others. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 2. Learn to recognize when I am avoiding something and confront my feelings. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 3. Set goals to get me out of the rut I seem to be in. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 4. Work at becoming more aware of my thoughts and feelings. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 5. Learn to pursue an activity even when I don't feel like it. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 6. Make a firm commitment to concentrate on my own development. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 7. Stop using certain behaviours and activities as a way to avoid my problems. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 8. Reinforce the positive in my life, rather than the negative. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 9. Accept failure, learn from it and move on. | 0. | 1. | 2. | 3. |

Any statement that you have rated as a two or three you should integrate into your action plan.

Changing Your Behaviour Can Result in These Benefits

- A broken cycle of avoidance behaviour; feelings of empowerment and more control over your life.
- Reduced stress-related symptoms associated with too much self-blame, too little connection / relationships in your life and a lack of trust in others.
- Increased productivity and quality in task accomplishment.
- A higher level of self-confidence.
- A healthier sense of self worth.
- Greater happiness and contentment in life.
- The ability to relax around others.
- A heightened awareness of your feelings and your ability to express them.
- Broader interests and activities.
- The ability to be assertive in appropriate circumstances.
- The ability to accept failure, learn from it and move on.
- Closer and more rewarding friendships.
- The discovery that positive change is possible.
- The confidence to take moderate risks.
- An increased interest in what is happening around you and a reduced preoccupation with your own problems.
- Lower levels of worry, anxiety, concern, and reluctance.