

# [ AN INTERPRETIVE SEQUENCE ] FOR THE FIRO-B® INSTRUMENT

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I remember the first time I took FIRO-B instrument years ago in preparation for helping edit Introduction to *FIRO-B® in Organizations*, written by Geno Schnell and Allen Hammer. Upon responding to the fifty-four items of the hand-scorable edition, I scribbled in my notes that my first impression of it was "...an irritating little test that appears to consist of six basic items asked nine times." My irritation soon turned to wonder as I worked through my results, building a personal interpretation using Schnell and Hammer's manuscript. I came to see how, in pursuing the three interpersonal needs at my own comfort levels, I was likely meeting the important interpersonal needs of some, yet simultaneously missing the mark for others.

Perhaps you've had a similar kind of "rags to riches" experience with the FIRO-B instrument or seen the astonished "Aha!" on the faces of clients who have just experienced a personal understanding of the frequency and intensity of interpersonal needs. When Will Schutz created the FIRO-B instrument in the mid-to-late 1950s, his purpose was to construct a measure that presented an understanding of how an individual acts with other people and to present a model that would lead to a prediction of who would click or clash with whom. Time and again, in many diverse settings, the FIRO-B instrument delivers on these objectives. But how do you ensure that you wring the most information from a set of FIRO-B results?

One way is to rigorously follow a complete interpretive sequence that systematically examines each of the twelve FIRO-B scores. This can help you assemble a collection of assumptions about how clients' needs operate as filters that can shade their interpretation of events as well as shape their behavioral response to others around them.

One such sequence is outlined in Allen Hammer's *FIRO-B® Technical Guide*, which includes a six-step "Feedback Model" in the chapter on interpretation and feedback. The six steps, briefly outlined below, move you from the broad stroke/big picture view of the entire FIRO-B protocol to the interpretation of specific scores from the FIRO-B instrument's six basic scales.

1. **Summative scores.** Look at the Overall Need score: Is it high, medium or low? What does this suggest about the client's level of satisfaction derived from human interaction? How are the Total Expressed and Total Wanted scores related? Which is highest/lowest? How much divergence is there between these two important subtotals?
2. **Expressed versus Wanted scores.** In looking at the scores of the three needs—Inclusion (I), Control (C), Affection (A)—what is the relationship between them? Is there a large discrepancy? Where? Could this represent or explain elevated levels of tension?
3. **Relative sum scores.** Which has the *highest* total need score—I, C, or A? Which has the lowest? FIRO-B theory suggests that these totals represent, respectively, the need one is most to least likely to pursue. How does this play out in the client's day-to-day interpersonal encounters?
4. **Individual cell scores.** Look at each of the six Need scores. Are they high, medium, or low? What does this suggest about client patterns of interpersonal behavior?
5. **Across-need interaction.** How do the six needs affect each other and combine to define and explain a unique interpersonal style?
6. **Base your interpretive points on the business need.** In what setting are you applying the FIRO-B instrument—leadership training? Career management? Team building? FIRO-B needs and the implications of these needs can be framed to help produce "Aha's!" for your clients, relative to their stated reasons for working with you.

Such an interpretive sequence can form the basis of your own preferred series of steps in interpreting a set of FIRO-B results. The sequence can also help you pick out exercises and activities to illustrate key points as you conduct feedback sessions and developmental workshops.