

Expansive-Restrictive Style: Conceptualizing Knowledge Workers

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Abstract : Various terms such as 'learning style', 'cognitive style', 'conceptual style', 'thinking style', 'intellectual style' are used in literature to refer to an individual's characteristic and consistent approach to organizing and processing information. However, style concepts are criticized for mutually overlapping definitions and confusing classification. This confusion should be addressed at the conceptual as well as empirical level. This paper is an attempt to bridge this gap in literature by proposing a new concept: expansive-restrictive intellectual style based on phenomenological analysis of an auto-ethnography and interview of 26 information technology (IT) professionals working in knowledge intensive organizations (KIOs) in India. Expansive style is an individual's preference to expand his/her horizon of knowledge and understanding by gaining real meaning and structure of his/her work. On the contrary restrictive style is characterized by an individual's preference to take minimalist approach at work reflected in executing a job efficiently without an attempt to understand the real meaning and structure of the work. The analysis suggests that expansive-restrictive style has three dimensions: (1) field dependence-independence (2) cognitive involvement and (3) epistemological beliefs.

Keywords : expansive, knowledge workers, restrictive, style

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