



Do you have a needy heart, a needy will or a needy mind?

Chances are that you can readily identify someone in your workplace with a needy heart, a needy will and a needy mind. By the time you've read the descriptions below you will probably also be able to identify which of them best fits you. But you'll need to understand the styles a little first so you can apply them to yourself and others. And, of course, to understand why it matters.

German psychoanalyst Karen Horney described a series of natural human needs that underpin how we relate to others. They fall into three broad categories: movement towards others, movement against others and movement away from others.

Her theory is based on the way our needs were, or were not, met as young children and how this impacted our view of ourselves as we matured. Each of the three categories (towards, against, away) is designed to keep us 'safe' by ensuring our needs are met. Broadly speaking, we conclude that our needs will most likely be met if we use one of these approaches. Most of us use a mixture of all three styles, though we typically have a dominant or preferred one.

Those who move 'towards' have concluded that they are most likely to get their needs met by being the 'good girl' or 'good boy'. As children, they were likely to be afraid of getting into trouble and done their best to avoid conflict.

That would usually mean following most of the rules, or at least doing what they could to avoid being caught if they broke them. They crave the goodwill of those around them and will do what is needed to get it. As adults, those who favour this style can be very valuable employees. They rarely say no when asked to do extra work, they will often start early and finish late and do whatever is needed to gain the approval of their co-workers, and particularly their boss. These people can be thought of as having a 'needy heart'.

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Those who move 'against' have concluded that they are most likely to get their needs met by being the one with the most power. As children, they were likely to fight their peers physically or find other ways to exert control, dominance and power over them. They typically admire what they perceived to be strength in all its forms and have contempt for what they would consider weakness in themselves and others. This contempt appears to grow the more power they amass. As adults, those who favour this style can be enormously valuable employees in the right roles. They are often aggressive deal-makers, determined to win and doggedly persistent in their pursuit of superiority. These people can be thought of as having a 'needy will'.

Those who move 'against' have concluded that they are most likely to get their needs met by being the one with the most power. These people can be thought of as having a 'needy will'.

Those who move 'away' have concluded that they are most likely to get their needs met by being the smartest or most perfect person in the room. As children, they were fiercely independent and self-sufficient and determined to be masters of their own destiny. They may well have concluded that other people are simply too problematic and rejected them from parts of their life. They often fear becoming too attached in case of abandonment so ensure that they never rely too heavily on anyone else. They typically strive for perfection and like to feel superior to others. They hate criticism and will avoid making mistakes at all costs. As adults, those who favour this style can be particularly successful in specialist roles such as scientists, data analysts, academics, researchers, physicians - where accuracy is often valued more than congeniality and being the smartest person in the room is the coin of the realm. These people can be thought of as having a 'needy mind'.

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Now that you know the three styles a little, think about the people in your workplace. Who's the one who always needs to please others (needy heart)? Who's the one who always needs to win (needy will)? Who's the one who always needs to be the smartest person in the room (needy mind)? My guess is you'll be able to identify at least one of each style pretty easily. And, whilst I imagine you apply a mixture of all three styles in your own work and life, I suspect you have also figured out which is your own dominant style.

And now for the so what - how does all this relate to organisational culture?

The most basic need of human beings is belonging. You read that correctly, Maslow was wrong, it's not food, water or shelter. Our brains are designed for a time when belonging to a group was necessary to get our basic needs met for food, water and shelter. This being the case, each of the styles (moving towards/needy heart; moving against/needy will; moving away/needy mind) has developed a different way of trying to earn and keep belonging. The needy heart folks try to earn it through approval, the needy mind folks try to earn it through respect and the needy will folks try to earn it through power. In my experience, although there is always a blend of the three styles in any organisation, larger

groups - even whole organisations, often have their own dominant style, their own preferred way to earn belonging.

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If you understand how important belonging is to humans and the main ways we try to earn it, and you understand what will most make your organisation successful, you can combine that knowledge to shift the rules of belonging in your organisation to the ones that will give you the best results. Organisational cultures can and do change, though rarely quickly or easily, and changing the rules of belonging is one of the most effective tools at our disposal.

What earns belonging in your organisation?



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