

An Overview of Element B: Behavior

A FIRO-Based Instrument

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In a 1976 survey of 75 of the most widely used training instruments, including the MBTI, Pfeiffer and Heslin concluded that “the FIRO-B® was the most generally usable instrument in training.” The popularity of the FIRO-B began to wane as the MBTI became one of the instruments of choice in business. In the last few years, however, the interest in FIRO has been renewed, especially in the Type community. Roger Pearman, Bob McAlpine, Margaret Hartzler and I created a FIRO-B Qualifying program for Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., in 1997. Geno Schnell and Judy Waterman have written booklets on FIRO-B. Susan Scanlon reviewed FIRO theory in the *Type Reporter*, and Pierre Ferrand did a review of FIRO-B in the year-end issue of the *Bulletin*. With all of these “new” writings, why another one?

The reason is simple. The “new” writings are about the original version of the instrument and theoretical thoughts created in 1958 by Will Schutz. Just as Jung’s theory evolved over his lifespan, and numerous versions of the MBTI have preceded Form M, so has FIRO theory and its instrumentation evolved significantly. Dr. Schutz and I have known each other for 16 years and have collaborated extensively for the past three years. Consequently, I am concerned when people talk about FIRO-B as if it is FIRO theory and when I see articles and booklets that do not reference Dr. Schutz’ more recent writings. In my view, Schutz has made profound changes and improvements which have been previously overlooked or ignored.

In 1958 Schutz formally introduced a theory of interpersonal relations called FIRO (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation). The theory presented three dimensions of interpersonal relations posited to be necessary and sufficient to explain most human interaction. On the behavioral level, these dimensions were called *Inclusion*, *Control* and *Affection*. Schutz also created a measurement instrument, FIRO-B¹, consisting of scales that measure the behavioral aspects of these three dimensions. Over the past 45 years, Schutz has revised and expanded FIRO theory and developed additional instruments (Schutz 1994, 1992) for measuring the new aspects of the theory, including Element B: Behavior™ (an improved version of FIRO-B); Element F: Feelings™; Element S: Self™; Element W: Work Relations™; Element C: Close Relations™; Element P: Parental Relationships™; and Element O: Organizational Climate™.

The theory had been so extensively revised and strengthened and had generated so many new instruments and important improvements that at the suggestion of Jack Black (founder of CPP and publisher of FIRO-B), the new set of measures was renamed.



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Since 1984, these instruments have been known collectively as **Elements of Awareness** and are being used by Schutz, his associates and others in the US and in over a dozen foreign countries (Schutz, 1994).

Schutz created the FIRO-B in 1958 specifically to measure the interaction between two people for research purposes. When he realized the many ways it was being used after it was made available to the public, he created a new generation of the instruments which were more suitable for general usage. FIRO-B provides feedback on six aspects of interpersonal behavior while Element B provides the same information plus twelve additional measures. Element B “fills in” the gaps left by the original instrument, provides a single response scale rather than switching back and forth between two, has simplified wording and greater scale integrity, and identifies not just what a person does or gets, but what they want in each of these areas. It also measures their satisfaction with their behaviors.

FIRO theory focuses on three major levels: *behavior*, *feelings* and *self-concept*. FIRO Element B focuses on behavior (hence the B in the name) in three interpersonal content areas: inclusion, control and openness. Openness was changed from the original “Affection” which is more appropriate at the feeling level (Schutz, 1992). Inclusion is concerned with achieving the desired amount of contact with people. Sometimes people like a great deal of inclusion; they are outgoing, enjoy doing things with a group, and tend to start conversations with strangers. At other times, people prefer to spend time alone. People differ as to how much they want to be with others and how much they prefer to be alone.

Control is concerned with achieving the desired amount of control over people. Some people are more comfortable when they are in charge of people. They like to be in charge, to give orders and to make decisions for both themselves and others. At other times, they prefer to have no control over people and may in fact prefer to be controlled by others. They may even seek out situations in which others will clearly define their responsibilities for them. Everyone has some desire to control other people and some desire to be controlled.

The third area is concerned with achieving just the desired amount of openness. Some people enjoy relationships in which they talk about their feelings and innermost thoughts. They have one or more people in whom they confide. At other times, they prefer not to share their personal feelings with other people. They like to keep things impersonal and businesslike, and they prefer to have acquaintances rather than close friends. Everyone has some desire for open relationships and some desire to keep their relationships more private.

There are 12 primary scales on which one can receive a score ranging from 0 – 9. The differences between what I do and what I want to do and what I get and what I want to get provide six additional scales. Figure 1 shows a feedback matrix with hypothetical scores. As a working hypothesis, we might expect this person to have a few select friends, not to socialize extensively, to like being in control and working autonomously and to be a relatively private person. During the feedback session, the practitioner would explore these possibilities. We might also expect to find dissatisfaction around controlling



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people more than she wants to and being controlled too much by others. Obviously, there is much more information contained in these results than this hypothesis, but space does not permit elaboration here.

Scale (0 - 9)	Score	Difference
*I include people	1	2
I want to include people	3	
People include me	2	0
*I want people to include me	2	
*I control people	8	3
I want to control people	5	
People control me	6	4
*I want people to control me	2	
*I am open with people	2	0
I want to be open with people	2	
People are open with me	1	2
*I want people to be open with me	3	

Figure 1
Hypothetical Scores on Element B
* A similar scale is measured on FIRO-B

Schutz is emphatic that all FIRO Element scores, including Element B:

- Are not terminal—they can and do change.
- Derive their meaning primarily from the person's interpretation, not from statistics.
- Are meant to be starting points for exploration and growth; they are NOT meant to be definitive.
- Do not encourage typology
- Assume you have the capacity to change anything you do not like about your behavior, if you allow yourself to learn how.



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Tip of The Iceberg

A major concern of mine is that people are left thinking that FIRO theory is primarily represented by the FIRO-B instrument and “needs” for inclusion, control and affection behaviors. This approach is inaccurate on the semantic level in that the word “need” is no longer part of the theory. It was replaced with “want.” The behavioral aspect of the theory, measured by Element B, is only the tip of the iceberg. Jung said that when he observed someone’s behavior he did not know what their type was because it was impossible to know what component of their psyche was actually causing the behaviors he was observing. FIRO theory says the same about behaviors. The largest and most important parts of the theory are the underlying causes of the behaviors. This is where Element F: Feelings and Element S: Self come into play. To understand a person’s behavior one must, at a minimum, understand that person’s feelings, self-concept, self-esteem and fears. Just as the four-letter type code does not explain personality, neither does FIRO-B or even Element B explain FIRO theory.

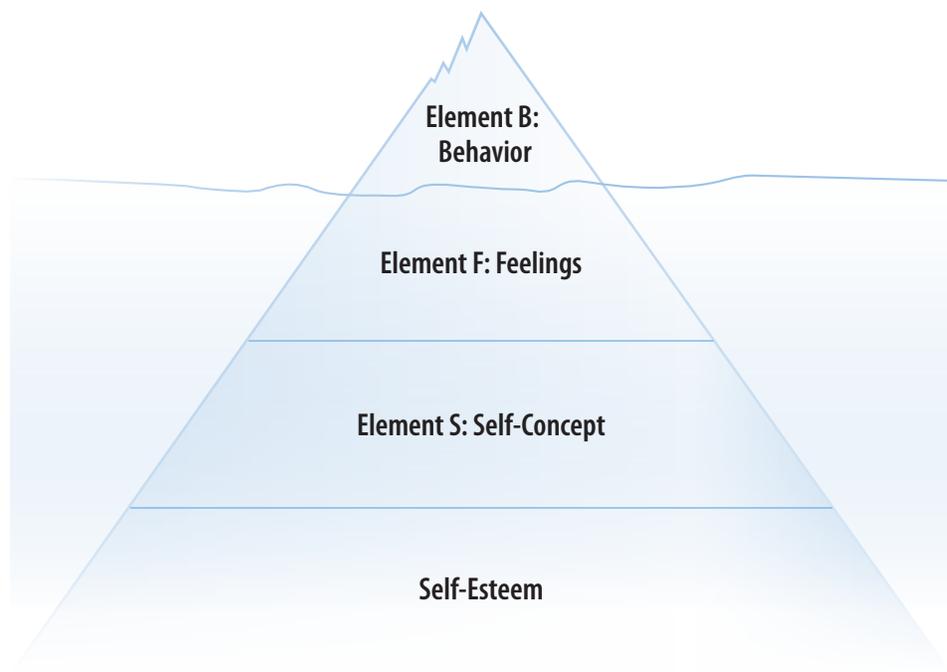


Figure 2
Iceberg Analogy

To best interpret FIRO behaviors (inclusion, control and openness) you must first understand yourself. This means experiencing the behavior, feelings, self-concept, self-esteem and fears up close and personal. Schutz, five-day Human Element course can give you a taste of this. If you want to understand FIRO in enough depth to begin writing and researching, you may attend a 14-day course, after having had time to gain sufficient insight about yourself from the five-day session. Little wonder that Ferrand (2000) can't wait to review updated FIRO theory material—there isn't any, unless we look at the work of Schutz and his colleagues.

For anyone interested in doing research on this topic, I maintain an International Human Element Database that contains Element B data. 



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