Building Effective Teams Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Types

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Thesis

Conflict doesn't come from difference. It comes from misunderstanding.

Purpose

The Myers-Briggs personality types can help us build more effective teams by promoting understanding, reducing miscommunication, and transforming personality differences from liabilities into assets.

History

The Myers-Briggs personality theory is based on the work of Carl Jung in his book *Psychological Types*, first published in English in 1923. Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment as a means of making Jung's theories accessible to a lay audience. The MBTI assessment was first developed during World War II to help women entering the industrial workforce determine which jobs they were best suited to. Today, the MBTI assessment is used worldwide to match individuals to vocations based on how they *prefer* to receive and process information.

Application

In a workplace setting, knowledge of the Myers-Briggs personality types can help us understand ourselves and others. It cannot be used to predict behavior. The purpose is to foster acceptance, not change; all qualities are equally valuable.

It isn't necessary to know a coworker's personality type in order for the theory to be useful. What matters is understanding that different people take different approaches to gathering information, solving problems, and making decisions. There's no single right way to do things. An approach that works well for you may not work at all for someone else.

Four Elements of Personality

The MBTI measures personality preferences according to the four scales described below. It's important to recognize that these are preferences—the default attitude that a person adopts, all other things being equal. However, balanced individuals are capable of adopting behaviors and skills at both ends of the scale, depending on the requirements of the situation.

Orientation: Extraversion vs. Introversion (E/I scale)
People who prefer **extraversion** get their energy from the outer world of people, objects, and events. They generally like to be in the center of the action. People who prefer **introversion** get their energy from the internal world of thoughts and ideas. They often like to observe from the sidelines.

In this sense, *extraverted* doesn't mean outgoing, and *introverted* doesn't mean shy. A person who prefers introversion can be quite talkative at a social event, but will likely need time alone afterward to recover. Conversely, those who prefer extraversion may be content to spend the afternoon researching at the library, but will probably want to spend the evening with family or friends to recharge.

Information Gathering: Sensation vs. iNtuition (S/N scale)
People who prefer **sensation** are concrete thinkers, trusting the tangible information detected through the five senses. They view information as discrete entries in a mental database. People who prefer **intuition** are abstract thinkers, trusting flashes of insight that come from the unconscious mind. They view information as a web of connections.

People who prefer sensation start with the details—as in a movie scene that opens with a close-up, then pans out to show the context. Conversely, people who prefer intuition start with the big picture, then zoom in on the details. Their *initial focus* is different.

Decision Making: Thinking vs. Feeling (T/F scale)
People who prefer **thinking** favor decisions based on logical considerations. People who prefer **feeling** favor decisions that take human needs and desires into account. For example, when selecting a hotel, a person who prefers thinking may choose the one with free parking and a free breakfast, to save money. A person who prefers feeling may choose the one with a scenic view, for greater enjoyment.

Both thinking and feeling are rational processes. Thinking judgment tends to be better suited to decisions regarding objects, while feeling judgment tends to be better suited to decisions regarding people.

Attitude: Judgment vs. Perception (J/P scale)
People who prefer judgment like to prepare in advance, making decisions as soon as they've gathered sufficient data. People who prefer perception like to be spontaneous, postponing decisions until the last moment in case more information becomes available.

Judging types are not more judgmental, and perceiving types are not more perceptive. Judging types simply prefer to reach conclusions, while perceiving types like to keep their options open. One approach isn't better than the other. They're just *different*.

The combination of these four preferences results in sixteen personality types, each expressed as a four-letter abbreviation such as the following:
ESTJ = Extraversion, Sensation, Thinking, Judgment
INFP = Introversion, iNtuition, Feeling, Perception

Based on personality type, it's possible to generalize about how people prefer to approach life. But since each individual is unique, some tendencies of a type may not apply to a given individual with that type. Moreover, the preferences interact. So someone who prefers introversion + sensation might be *more* attuned to the external world than someone who prefers extraversion + intuition.

Orientation: E/I Scale

Extraversion	**Introversion**
Act, then reflect	Reflect, then act
Embrace the outer world	Resist the outer world
Move at a faster pace	Move in a more considered direction
Broaden their influence over time	Deepen their expertise over time
Expend their emotions	Guard their emotions

Extraverted types may prefer phone calls, while introverted types may prefer email. It's important for technical communicators to adapt to the needs of their subject matter experts. For instance, an extraverted product manager may have difficulty providing written markups, yet may be able to provide all the needed information in a face-to-face meeting.

Information Gathering: S/N Scale

Sensation	**iNtuition**
Live in the moment	Visualize the future
Start with the details	Start with the big picture
Value sound understanding	Value quick understanding
Learn through experience	Learn through innovation
Want to enjoy the world	Want to change the world

Sensing types may tend to write in short paragraphs, viewing all data as discrete. Intuitive types may tend to write in long paragraphs, viewing all data as connected. When performing peer reviews, sensing types can help intuitive types provide sufficient detail, while intuitive types can help sensing types provide context and effective organization.

Decision Making: T/F Scale

Thinking	**Feeling**
Strive to be objective	Consider the effects on people
Remain detached	Express their enthusiasm
Value honesty	Value tact
Seek clarity	Seek harmony
Challenge others' conclusions	Accept others' conclusions

Thinking types tend to begin a meeting by discussing goals, while feeling types tend to begin by discussing common ground. It doesn't matter which you begin with, but it's important to discuss both. Identifying common ground creates a sense of camaraderie, while identifying goals is essential to the meeting's success.

Attitude: J/P Scale

Judgment	**Perception**
Like to be organized	Like to be spontaneous
Offer suggestions	Ask questions
Predict outcomes	Curious about outcomes
Enjoy finishing projects	Enjoy starting projects
Guard against the unexpected	Adapt to circumstances as they arise

Technical communicators who prefer perception may begin a project by asking questions and conducting interviews before they start writing. Those who prefer judgment may begin a project by writing an outline or a rough draft, then consult the document development team to flesh out the details.

Sources: (1) and (5).

Keirsey's Four Temperaments

Psychologist David Keirsey introduced a new perspective on the Myers-Briggs types by grouping the types into four temperaments. He named these temperaments as follows:
- Guardians (Sensation + Judgment)
  — Excel at *logistics*
  — Tend to be reliable, conventional, and vigilant
  — Value duty, commitment, and established hierarchies
  — Seek service, respect, and a sense of community
- Artisans (Sensation + Perception)
  — Excel at *tactics*
  — Tend to be cheerful, spontaneous, and resourceful
  — Value artistry, improvisation, and results
  — Seek mastery, fun, and a competitive advantage
- Idealists (Intuition + Feeling)
  — Excel at *diplomacy*
  — Tend to be kind, encouraging, and impassioned
  — Value empathy, integrity, and self-expression
  — Seek understanding, spiritual knowledge, and personal growth
- Rationals (Intuition + Thinking)
  — Excel at *strategy*
  — Tend to be calm, practical, and skeptical
  — Value technical knowledge, inventiveness, and success
  — Seek expertise, autonomy, and self-sufficiency

Sources: (2) and (3).

Team Roles: Dominant Function

Individuals naturally gravitate toward one of eight team roles, based on their dominant *cognitive function*. The dominant function is either sensation, intuition, thinking, or feeling. Extraverts use their dominant function with the outside world. Introverts use their dominant function with their internal processes.

Executives (extraverted thinking)
ENTJ and ESTJ
- Introduce order, logic, and reason
- Establish systems, plans, and procedures
- Allocate resources
- Define roles and responsibilities
- Align tasks with skill sets
- Make tough decisions and get things done
Blind spots
- Expect people to be logical
- May drive themselves and others too hard
- May fail to give positive feedback

Coaches (extraverted feeling)
ENFJ and ESFJ
- Create harmony and positive team spirit
- Overcome differences and build rapport
- Protect the welfare and develop the roles of others
- Seek cooperation and speak with tact
- Focus on good qualities, overlooking faults
- Develop ideas through conversation
Blind spots
- May discourage disagreement to avoid conflict
- May be impatient or come to decisions too quickly
- Instead of asking for what they want, they may manipulate

Explorers (extraverted intuition)
ENFP and ENTP
- Look for possibilities beyond the current situation
- Challenge the status quo, promoting innovation
- Uncover potentials and break new ground
- Pursue unexplored avenues
- Follow their inspiration but hate routine
Blind spots
- May waste energy on too many projects
- Are unrealistic about how long projects will take
- May express their ideas too freely and overwhelm others

Actors (extraverted sensing)
ESFP and ESTP
- Spur others into action
- Create sense of urgency
- Draw on existing knowledge and tools
- Absorb facts and see things as they are
- Achieve clear goals and obtain tangible results

Blind spots
- May become scattered, dropping old projects for new
- May focus on material things and not on values
- Their desire for excitement and variety may wear people out

Analysts (introverted thinking)
INTP and ISTP
- Gather and organize information; assess theories
- Explore complex issues and underlying principles
- Use logic to explain how and why things happen
- Solve problems systematically and impersonally
- Show precision and focus; notice inconsistency
- Research and implement tools

Blind spots
- May not consider the ideas, desires, and needs of others
- May fail to express insights because they seem obvious
- Focus on disagreements but not areas of agreement

Persuaders (introverted feeling)
INFP and ISFP
- Accommodate the needs of others
- See issues from all sides
- Create unity and focus on values
- Seize on new ideas they consider important
- Advocate priorities based on their convictions
- Work behind the scenes with quiet enthusiasm

Blind spots
- May hesitate to express their ideals and take risks
- May take on too much and leave projects unfinished
- Have difficulty working in a competitive environment

Innovators (introverted intuition)
INFJ and INTJ
- Bring radical solutions to problems
- Observe the world and apply their insights
- Use their imagination to create new perspectives
- Pursue goals quietly and determinedly
- Value their convictions above outside influences
- Develop long-term vision based on intuition

Blind spots
- May fail to solicit the opinions of others
- Demand perfection; can be unrealistic
- Can become obsessed with mundane details

Administrators (introverted sensing)
ISFJ and ISTJ
- Listen and ask questions; pay attention to detail
- Enjoy using their store of facts; tolerate routine
- Envision concrete goals and paths to achieve them
- Perform tasks accurately and thoroughly
- Respect authority and like stability
- Work hard and seek tangible results

Blind spots
- May be rigid, believing there's only one "right" way
- May not take time for fun activities
- May fail to nurture their own feelings and needs

Sources: (1) and (4).

Team Roles: Interaction Styles

Interaction style is determined by whether the type is
- Initiating or Responsive
- Directive or Informative

These interaction styles, as described below, illustrate the four roles that types naturally play on teams. Note that each role includes one type from each of the four temperaments.

Leaders (Directive and Initiating)
ENFJ, ENTJ, ESTJ, ESTP
- Take charge of activities and people
- Direct others toward a common goal
- Energize others to participate
- Focus on controlling the outcome

Motivators (Informative and Initiating)
ENFP, ENTP, ESFJ, ESFP
- Generate ideas and foster cooperation
- Provide information to prompt actions but don't suggest them
- Generate excitement at beginning of a project
- Focus on moving the project forward

Implementers (Directive and Responsive)
INFJ, INTJ, ISTJ, ISTP
- Devise plans and contingencies
- React swiftly to eliminate obstacles
- Solve problems and stay on task
- Focus on moving the project forward (like Motivators)

Facilitators (Informative and Responsive)
INFP, INTP, ISFJ, ISFP
- Clarify and communicate problems
- Smooth over rough spots
- Offer support and keep people connected
- Focus on controlling the outcome (like Leaders)

Source: (4). For more information on interaction styles, visit the following website:
www.interactionstyles.com

Notes and Bibliography

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