



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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### How can MBTI be used?

MBTI can be used by managers to understand themselves and their behaviors. It also helps them appreciate others' individual differences and use them constructively. Running MBTI sessions with project teams or management groups helps employees understand sources of potential conflict. This understanding generally leads to increased flexibility among team members.

MBTI also can be used to resolve conflicts between staff members who have very different preferences. Once the source of conflict is understood, employees are able to find ways to work together effectively.

An employee's Myers-Briggs profile also is a good starting point for creating a career development plan. Employees with strong preferences in one direction can be broadened through assignments that force them

into less comfortable areas. For example, an employee with a strong preference for intuition over sensing might benefit from a stint as a project manager to improve planning and followup skills.

Keep in mind that there is no "best" type. An effective team needs as many different perspectives as it can get. A team whose members have similar outlooks may appear to be more effective initially. In the long run, however,

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## Actuaries learn individual styles

Do you prefer spontaneity in your life, or do you stick to a well-thought-out plan? Do you enjoy working with people or ideas? Is your style to blurt out your thoughts, or do you think before you speak?

Twenty-three actuaries got answers to these and other questions when they participated in the Life Skills Inventory teaching session at the SOA annual meeting in Chicago last October. Led by Mary C. Patrick, Ph.D., an organizational and career psychologist, the session's goal was to help attendees discover their personal management, communication, and interpersonal styles.

Attendees completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) before coming to the session, and they received confidential reports of the test results at the session.

"The MBTI is a powerful and dynamic tool to help you increase your self-awareness, understand your behavior, and value difference," Patrick said. "The power of the MBTI is that it provides a framework for life-long development. The MBTI is not meant to pigeonhole people into categories, but rather to provide valuable information to foster our life-long journey.

"By increasing our self-awareness, the MBTI helps us understand those skills that are more natural to us, as

well as those skills that require more effort to develop. Life-long development requires action to achieve balance in our skills."

David Tovson, assistant vice president and associate actuary with Lafayette (Ind.) Life Insurance was one of the session participants. "The information has given me ideas on how to relate to other people," he said. "When I was in school, and later in my first job, I thought this profession was all about math. I found out there's more to it when I was pursuing my Fellowship. The MBTI results will help me develop these other areas. You can never change who you are, but you can become more comfortable with certain aspects of your personality."

Janice Jones, associate product actuary, General American Life Insurance Co., St. Louis, believes the session helped point out areas that the profession as a whole needs to develop. "Actuaries are getting involved in other areas of business, so we should know where our strengths are," she said.

For retired actuary Robert Hoskins of West Dennis, Mass., Myers-Briggs confirmed how he had already evaluated himself, but he found the session helpful in pointing out "pitfalls" of his personality. For example, Hoskins said he is very organized, so he must be

careful not to become impatient with people who aren't. "I'm very active in community organizations, so I'm still in a position where I want to be careful of what I do and how I do it."

Hoskins recommends Myers-Briggs to other actuaries. "It was a good learning experience. I look at the results from time-to-time to see what else I can learn from it."

Patrick recommends these books on MBTI: *Leadership Equation* by Lee Barr and Norma Barr (Eakin Press, 1989); *Leadership Development: Maturity and Power* by Lee Barr and Norma Barr (Eakin Press, 1994); *Life Types* by Sandra Hirsh and Jean Kummerow (Warner Books, 1989); and *Working Together: A Personality Centered Approach to Management* by Olaf Isachsen and Linda V. Berens (Newworld, 1989).

Patrick is now conducting Phase II of her Actuarial Profile Research project using the MBTI. Results will be published in the American Academy of Actuaries magazine, *Contingencies*, in 1995. The first phase of her research was reported in the May 1994 *Contingencies* in the article, "A Good Look in the Mirror: What the 'Strong Interest Inventory' Reveals about Actuaries." For more information, contact Patrick at 301/530-8750.