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Understanding your management style

by Cindy Forbes

Self knowledge is the first step in developing good management skills. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one tool available to managers to discover their own style or preferred way of operation.

What is MBTI?

MBTI was developed by an American mother and daughter team, Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers, and is based on the work of Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung. It provides a useful measure of personality by looking at eight personality preferences people use at different times.

Your Myers-Briggs type is determined by your answers to more than 100 questions. The questions ask you to choose an answer that closely describes how you usually feel or act or to choose a word in the pair that appeals to you most. For example: Is it harder for you to adapt to (A) routine or (B) constant change. Would you rather work with someone who is always (A) kind or (B) always fair? The purpose of Myers-Briggs is to describe your preferences, not your skills or abilities. All preferences are equally important. Myers-Briggs is not a value system.

Preferences can be thought of as your natural, unconscious style. All of us can learn to exhibit behavior patterns that differ from our basic personality type, but we are most comfortable when operating within our preferences.

MBTI measures preferences on four scales: extroversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, and judgment-perception. The interaction of these four scales results in 16 personality types.

The four scales

Extroversion-Introversion

This scale refers to how you are energized. Extroverts prefer to draw energy from the outside world of people, activities, or things. Introverts prefer to draw energy from their internal world of ideas, emotions, or impressions. The phrases listed below may help you deduce your preference on this scale.

Extroverts

externally focused
blurt it out
involved with people, things
do - think - do

Introverts

internally focused
keep it in
work with ideas, thoughts
think - do - think

About 75% of the North American population are extroverts.

Sensing-Intuition

This scale describes what you pay attention to. Sensing indicates a preference for taking in information through the five senses and noticing what is actual. Intuition indicates a preference for taking in information through a "sixth sense" and noticing what might be.

Sensing

what is real
present orientation
focused on facts
interested in using established skills
utility of idea is important
step-by-step orientation

Intuition

what could be
future possibilities excite
focused on insights
interested in learning new skills
novelty is important
leaps around

Sensing is the dominant preference of about 75% of the North American population.

Thinking-Feeling

This dimension refers to how you make decisions. Thinkers approach decision-making from a logical and objective mindset. Feelers approach decisions from a personal, value-oriented mindset.

Thinking

justice ruling dictate
tendency to critique
adherence to principles
important
reason governs
firm but fair

Feeling

mercy ruling dictate
tendency to compliment
maintaining harmony
important
empathy governs
compassionate

The North American male population is split 60/40 between the thinking and feeling preferences, while the North American female population is split 35/65 between thinking and feeling on this scale.

Judgment-Perception

The final scale describes the lifestyle you prefer. If your preference on this scale is judgment, you will prefer living a planned and organized life. In contrast, if perception describes your preference, you prefer a spontaneous and flexible life.

Judgment

prefer to plan
control oriented
run one's life
set goals
decisive
organized

Perception

prefer spontaneity
adaptive
let life happen
gather information
open
flexible

The North American population is split 55/45 between judgment and perception on this scale.

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.

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they risk picking sub-optimal choices by missing a key piece of information or perspective. The best ideas and solutions come from conflict and the resulting blending of perspectives.

The 16 types

The first letter of each of the preferences (with the exception of "intuition," which is characterized by an "N") is used to construct the 16 personality types. For example, ISTJ denotes someone who has the introversion, sensing, thinking, and judgment preferences as dominant.

A brief description of the 16 types follows:

- I – introversion
- E – extroversion
- S – sensing
- N – intuition
- T – thinking
- F – feeling
- J – judgment
- P – perception

- ISTJ Is thorough, painstaking, systematic, hard-working, and careful with detail.
- ISTP Is adept at managing situations, aware of facts, expedient, realistic, and not likely to be convinced by anything but reasoning.
- ESTP Is an action-oriented, pragmatic, resourceful, and realistic individual who prefers to take the most efficient route.
- ESTJ Is logical, analytical, decisive, and tough-minded and is able to organize facts and operations well in advance.

- ISFJ Is sympathetic, loyal, considerate, kind, and will go to any amount of trouble to help those in need of support.
- ISFP Is gentle, considerate, compassionate toward those less fortunate, and has an open-minded, flexible approach.
- ESFP Is friendly, outgoing, fun-loving, likeable, and naturally drawn towards people.
- ESFJ Is helpful, tactful, compassionate, orderly, and places a high value on harmonious human interaction.
- INFJ Trusts his or her own vision, quietly exerts influence, has deeply felt compassion, is insightful, and seeks harmony.
- INFP Is an open-minded, idealistic, insightful, and flexible individual who wants his or her work to contribute to something that matters.
- ENFP Is enthusiastic, insightful, innovative, versatile, and tireless in pursuit of new possibilities.
- ENFJ Is interpersonally adept, understanding, tolerant, appreciative, and a facilitator of good communication.
- INTJ Is an independent, individualistic, single-minded and determined individual who trusts his or her vision of possibilities, regardless of universal skepticism.
- INTP Is rational, curious, theoretical, abstract and prefers to organize ideas rather than situations or people.

- ENTP Is innovative, individualistic, versatile, analytical, and attracted to entrepreneurial ideas.
- ENTJ Is logical, organized, structured, objective, and decisive about what he or she views as conceptually valid.

The bottom line

MBTI provides a good framework for understanding yourself and others. However, people can learn to go beyond their preferences. As a manager, your job is to stretch your staff's capabilities through job assignments and coaching. MBTI is a tool to better understand others, not to categorize or label them.

For more information on Myers-Briggs, read *Type Talk* (1989 Dell paperback) and *Type Goes to Work* (1993 Dell paperback) both by Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen. For information on introducing Myers-Briggs to your organization, Otto Kroeger and Associates in Fairfax, Virginia, and the Center for Applications of Psychological Type in Gainesville, Florida, are possible contacts, as well as any local career counselor.

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IN MEMORIAM

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