



The Learning Institute

Think Piece #1: Personality types (10-minute read)

Overview

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You know how it is. Sometimes people just seem to get on your nerves. Like when you are an ‘*everything should be in its place*’ person, but your partner just leaves stuff everywhere and anywhere. Or when your boss is going over in minute detail what she wants you to do, but you’ve done it a hundred times before, and you just don’t actually need to have it all explained step-by-step. Or when you’ve had a really full-on day and all you want to do is to chill out on your own, but your friends have different ideas. Or when someone’s just dented your car and you badly need some TLC, but all your mum says is “Well, you’re insured aren’t you? Get it fixed!”

Other people don’t always do what we want them to, and it can be pretty annoying at times, but much less so if we understand what’s driving their behaviour. The great psychologist Carl Jung said that if we understand people’s personalities then we’ll likely get along much better, and with a lot more people. Jung wrote masses about personality, and in this snippet I’m giving **a really brief overview**.

An American mother and daughter called Myers and Briggs took some of Jung’s ideas and turned them into a personality test called the ‘Myers Briggs Type Indicator’ [the MBTI] so that we could identify our own Jungian personality types. [You can easily find some free tests online if you want to know your own personality type].

Jung suggested that our personalities are basically determined by four different sets of **preferences**. The four preferences concern:

- What energises us [he said we can be **E**xtravert or **I**ntrovert – E or I]
- Our view of detail [he said we can be **S**ensing or **iN**tuitive – S or N]
- Whether we are more emotional or logical [**T**hinking or **F**eeling – T or F]
- How organised we like to be [**J**udging or **P**erceiving – J or P]

[It’s important to know that the names of the preferences have specific meanings in psychology which are different from those we use in everyday life].

Here are some examples of the behaviours of each of the types:

Extraverts [**E**’s] are energised by being with and working with others [and are drained when they are alone]. **Introverts** [**I**’s] are the other way around. An **E**’s idea of a great weekend might be a 48-hour party with 20-or-so close friends. An **I** might think the perfect weekend would be to get away from it all with one special person and just relax. [Is an **I** likely to be the star of your local amateur dramatic group show?] **E**’s ‘think out loud’; **I**’s think things through before they tell you what’s on their minds.

Sensing people [**S**’s] like to have all the details laid out, while **Intuitives** [**N**’s] prefer to leave room to experiment. Think of Delia and Jamie: Delia says “Add 200g of butter and put it in the oven at 180 degrees for 35 minutes”. Jamie says “Give it a good glug of olive oil, shove it in the oven and wait until it turns golden”. Delia is an **S** and Jamie is an **N**. [Would you want your surgeon to be an **N** or an **S**?] **S**’s read the instructions before they put their IKEA wardrobes together; **N**’s just get to it straight away.

Thinking people [T's] apply logic to situations. If I'm a **T** and my best friend rings me up at 2am and says she's been burgled I ask if she is ok and if she has called the police and if she is insured [I'm thinking 'all the logical matters have been dealt with']. If my partner is an **F**, they will say "Forget all that, we're going over there, now" [my partner is thinking how bad our friend must be **feeling**]. [Would you want members of a jury to be **T's** or **F's**?]

Judging people [J's] like organisation. When they pack their supermarket shopping they put all of the fruit in one bag and all of the frozen stuff in another. A **perceiving** person [a **P**] will just put everything in bags in the order in which it all comes along the conveyor. [Do you want your electrician to be a **J** or a **P**?] **J's** like to finish their work before they party; **P's** party first, that bit of work can wait until later.

Remember that these are **preferences**. Actually, we can all choose to act from any preference, but we will get tired when it's not our **natural** preference. That's why, when we are tired or stressed or not very well, we '**revert to type**' and become far less flexible. [And probably quite a bit more annoying to others around us at those times].

So actually, a great actor really can be an **I**. We can [and do] all act '**out of type**' and we can be very successful doing that, but it will take a lot more effort than if we are acting from our natural preferences [maybe 10 times more effort].

Once you start observing other people, you can soon begin to guess what their personality types are [children display the types also]. Having four sets of preferences, each with two possible attributes, means that altogether there are 16 different possible types which can be revealed by the MBTI:

| | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| ESTJ | ISTJ | ENTJ | INTJ |
| ESTP | ISTP | ENTP | INTP |
| ESFJ | ISFJ | ENFJ | INFJ |
| ESFP | ISFP | ENFP | INFP |

You can already probably imagine what these types look like in life. So an **ESTJ**, for example, when acting to type will be energised by other people, will like to have all the details to hand, will be a logical rather than an emotional thinker and will want to get things ordered and crossed off her mental [or paper] list. Maybe you know someone like that [or maybe you are one]. Can you see how an **ESTJ's** personality opposite [an **INFP**] will be quite a different person? An **INFP** will like to spend time alone or with just one or two others, will like to have room to try things out and be creative, will be quite in tune with her own and other people's feelings, and will be happy just to take things as they come and see how they turn out [what's a list?]

Can you imagine situations where **ESTJs** and **INFPs** could find each other quite difficult? Probably, but do you see also that if they can accept each other's personalities and see their differences as a benefit, then they really can tick a lot of boxes between them.

Again, it's easy to find more details of each of these types online [sometimes with rather fanciful type 'names' attached]. The **16 types** aren't evenly distributed [there aren't many **INTJ**'s for example]. The eight preferences are fairly consistently distributed, except for the **T/F** pair [**F** is found much more often in females than in males, who are normally **T**'s – you may be able to think of examples of that!]

People who are really into MBTI sometimes even put their personality type in brackets at the end of their emails so the people they are writing to know what to expect when they actually meet up.

Acting out of preference is good for us; it helps us to understand other people and other people's perspectives. It makes us flexible and easier to get along with – we are far more likely to meet other people half way, rather than head on.

So rather than getting frustrated when your boss is giving you all that unnecessary detail, try thinking 'She's a great leader – I wonder if she'd be as good if she wasn't an **SJ**?'

Or, of course, if your relationship allows, you could always try saying "Jane, do you know that it's a really healthy thing to try to accommodate other people's personalities and to act out of type now and again? I'm an **NP**, and I'm actually already really good at this, so how would you feel about letting me go ahead and doing it my way without going through every single step with me first – it will save you loads of time for other things? And, hey, I've just thought – you're **SJ** and I'm an **NP**. No wonder we're such a great team – between us we can do practically everything".

Or when you are an **S** and you're getting ready to go out and you're worrying you'll be late, and you shout downstairs "What's the time?" expect that your **N** partner may reply "There's plenty of time!", when actually what you want to know is that there are [exactly] 19 minutes to go before you need to leave. Maybe surprise your partner by asking an **N** question [!] like "Am I ok for time?" In a perfect world, where everyone understands personality type and accommodates it, your **N** partner will supply you with a lovely **S** answer: "Yeah, relax, we've still got 19 minutes!"

By the way, sometimes people ask 'what are the best preferences to have?' or 'what's the best personality type?' **Jung was clear that all of the preferences and types have their strengths.** As an example, think of an **S** who has a plan, always uses that exact plan, and who is always successful when she uses it. Then something changes in her life or her work, and her plan doesn't work any more. Right now, that **S** is going to have to be able to think and work like an **N** [and get creative] or she is likely to be very unhappy [and very unsuccessful]. Of course, if our **S** has an **N** in her team or her relationship, then that pairing may complement each other really well.

Can you think of a strength and a weakness for each of the other preferences?:

Extravert and **I**ntrovert? **T**hinking and **F**eeling? **J**udging and **P**erceiving?

Here's a question for you: Do you think that everyone in a team should have the same personality type? [Why/Why Not?]

Things you might like to do now:

- Take one of the free online MBTI tests and find out your personality type. [Just type 'free online mbti test' into a search engine]. Write your type in here:
- Ask some other people you know to take the test too, and then see if you think each other's types really represent them. Tick the box when you've done it:
- Find out more about the eight preferences **E**xtravert, **I**ntrovert, **S**ensing, **i**Ntuitive, **T**hinking, **F**eeling, **J**udging and **P**erceiving.
- Try to work out the types of some people you know [can you see them inflexibly reverting to type when they are stressed or tired?]
- Consider if knowing a little more about personality types [and maybe being a bit more flexible] could help you to get on better with other people.

For your notes:

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