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Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Profile and the Organization

Kent Hendrickson and
Joan R. Giesecke

Picture a typical day where, once again, one of your department chairs has come into your office to complain that the work team just isn't getting along. "They won't stay focused on their task," she complains. "Why can't they just decide how to proceed and get on with it?" As you think about the group, you realize that the department chair's strength is in getting tasks finished on time, while the unit members are very good at exploring all aspects of a problem and seeing the various implications. Unfortunately, that also means that they take a long time to come to a decision and seem to talk the issue to death before moving on to the next topic.

In Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) terms, you may have a judger as a department chair in a unit of perceivers. But, exactly what does this MBTI talk mean? The MBTI is a four-letter personality-type designator created by Katharine C. Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers in the 1940s from the theories of Carl Jung. The MBTI examines four aspects of our personalities and uses these to categorize sixteen possible personality types.¹

The four scales describe how people focus their attention, gather information,

make decisions, and generally deal with the world. Specifically, the MBTI scale contrasts a person's preferences in these areas according to the chart presented on the next page.

As figure 1 indicates, these four scales yield sixteen basic personality types or preferences that describe how a person approaches the world. In the workplace, this information provides clues to how people will likely relate to work groups and decision-making and problem-solving activities. Understanding these relationships can be helpful to managers in deciphering the behavior of their staffs.

One point that seems to get lost as organizations begin working with the MBTI scale is that there are no "good or bad" types. The scale is value-neutral and is a way to describe behavior, rather than as a way to evaluate behaviors. It is important that managers not use MBTI as a way to stereotype people so that they do not have to work with them as individuals.

In this article, we describe how we have used MBTI effectively in our organization as a way to understand the overall "personality" of the organization. We also discuss the implications of this profile for managing the organization to achieve organizational goals.

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University of Nebraska–Lincoln Experience

In 1986, with the change in management at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries, the library administration began a supervisory development program in an effort to upgrade the skills of the Libraries' thirty-three first-line supervisors and managers so that the organization would be better prepared to respond to change. The foundation for the development program for the librarian managers is the Basic Management Skills Workshop, which is presented by the Association of Research Libraries Office of Management Studies. Twelve managers participated when the Libraries brought the program to Lincoln in 1986. Since then, new managers are sent to the Basic Skills Workshop within their first year at the Libraries, so that all managers have a common base of knowledge. For the paraprofessional supervisors, the libraries worked with the university's Department of Human Relations to bring a management training program to the campus. The Libraries served as the test group for the university-wide program, so that all of our supervisors have now had formal basic training in management skills.

With that foundation in place, the Libraries began a program of sponsoring at least one focused training program each year for the supervisors. The sessions are designed to build on the supervisors' skills and to re-enforce the management philosophy of the organization. Training sessions have included work on conflict management, managing change, managing teams, and the MBTI profile. The Libraries decided to use the MBTI as a way to help the supervisors understand one another's strengths and differing management styles.

MBTI Profile

An MBTI portrait of the managers of the library provides us with a way to describe and understand the management style of the organization. Twenty-nine of the thirty-three managers from first-line supervisors through the department heads and deans have taken the MBTI and agreed to share the results with each other. The instrument provided an inter-

Focus Attention

E (extroversion) - relates more to outer world of people
I (introversion) - relates more to the inner world of ideas

Gathering Information

S (sensing) - works with facts
N (intuition) - looks for possibilities and relationships

Decision-making

T (thinking) - decisions based on impersonal analysis and logic
F (feelings) - decisions based on personal values

Lifestyle

J (judging) - prefers a planned, orderly life
P (perceivers) - prefers a flexible, spontaneous, open life

SIXTEEN TEMPERAMENT TYPES

NF (Idealists) (Intuition with Feeling)	NT (Rationals) (Intuition with Thinking)
ENFJ	ENTJ
INFJ	INTJ
ENFJ	ENJP
INFP	INTP
SJ (Guardians) (Sensing with Judging)	SP (Artisans) (Sensing with Perceiving)
ESTJ	ESFP
ISTJ	ISFP
ESFJ	ESTP
ISFJ	ISTP

Olaf Isachsen and Linda Berens, *Working Together: A Personality-Centered Approach to Management* (Coronado, California: New World Management Press, 1988, p. 34).

Otto Kroeger with Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk at Work* (New York: Tilden Press, 1992, p. 53).

Figure 1. Personality types using the MBTI scale

esting and revealing look at the Libraries' management.

In general the managers tend to be introverts (I), who make choices on an objective, impersonal basis, and who prefer to come to decisions rather than leave issues open. There is an equal distribution of those who prefer facts (S) to those who perceive things through intuition (N). Thirteen of the sixteen types are represented in the management group. The most dominant type found in the group was ISTJ, with 31 percent of the managers selecting this grouping.

The next most dominant types are the INTJ and INFP, each with 10 percent of the group. The other members of management are scattered among ten other types. Although this variety of types is important in bringing as wide a range of perspectives to management discussions as possible, the dominance of the ISTJ, INTJ, and INFP members lends a level of predictability to the proceedings. (See figure 2.)

The ISTJ managers bring a practical, orderly, logical approach to any issue. They are dependable and take responsibility. They tend to be conservative, suggesting incremental steps to change through pilot projects, and caution in trying new ideas.² The INTJ managers bring a level of skepticism to the discussions, may push their own ideas to the exclusion of other approaches, and prefer independence to team work.³ The INFP managers work quietly, yet forcefully, for their own firmly held principles. They prefer a people-oriented environment that encourages harmony.⁴

This group of managers will come to a decision fairly quickly, but they are not likely to accept radical departures from current practices as operable within the organization. They are not likely to take major risks, but are willing to consider new ideas if they can see a practical value in making a change.

General Management Styles

In reviewing general management styles, the study revealed that eleven of the twenty-nine managers tended to be SJ

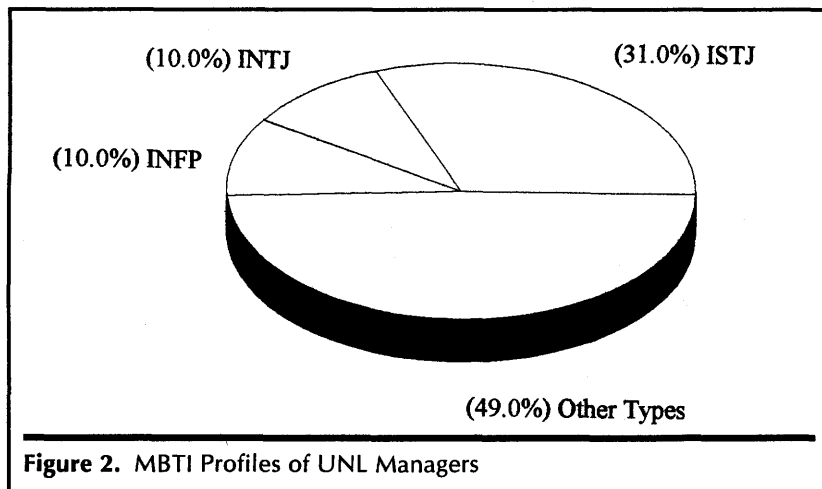


Figure 2. MBTI Profiles of UNL Managers

managers, or Guardians of the organization. Eight of the managers were NT or Rationalists, six were Idealists (NF), and four were Artisans (SP). This combination of management results in an organization that tends to be conservative and does not move quickly to change.

The SJ managers prefer stability, rules, and procedures and are very adept at developing procedures for the various tasks within the organization. They seek to establish and maintain the institution. They look to the past for ideas about how to cope with the future, emphasizing traditions, rituals, and rules. The group provides a solid foundation for monitoring the organization.⁵

The next most dominant group are the NT managers. These supervisors tend to be future- and planning-oriented managers. They want to move into the future in an orderly manner.⁶

A small group of managers are people-oriented idealists, or NFs. This group emphasizes relationships, as they look to the future. They seek a global view of the organization, while emphasizing the potential of the people in the organization.⁷

Finally, there are the SP managers, or Artisans. This group wants freedom to act and can be impulsive, losing sight of the distant goals while concentrating on today's activities. They will do whatever is expedient to get the job done. Everything is negotiable for this group.⁸

Organizational Analysis

This combination of management styles creates a certain level of tension within the organization as the organization copes with a changing environment. Although the library emphasizes planning as the dominant process for making decisions and setting a course of action, a major group of managers seek to create stability by protecting past practices and traditions. Written policies are very important to them; an attempt to implement change without first revising standard operating procedures or policies creates a conflict for this group. Ambiguity makes them uncomfortable, and they try to decrease ambiguity whenever possible.

The planners of the organization, on the other hand, are quite comfortable with ambiguity and will create or encour-

age uncertainty in response to change. This group is comfortable with an uncertain future and can lose sight of their colleagues' needs to have a more concrete approach to organizational change.

Planned change strategies are more effective in this organization than unplanned change strategies. Order and organization are more effective than spontaneity and confusion. Play does not come easily to this group and although innovation can be emphasized, it must be blended with tradition and current practice.

When the groups work together, the organization can respond to change in a positive manner. For example, in implementing an integrated automated system, the library needed these diverse groups to work together to complement each other's strengths. While the NT managers were comfortable planning for a new system and working through the various surprises that are a natural part of change, the SJ managers created a timetable for implementation, devised procedures for each new function, and ensured that documentation was written for each new procedure. Although the change process may move too slowly for some in the organization and too quickly for others, the two groups do provide a balance that ensures the organization will move forward while incorporating past traditions into the new environment.

The organization must work hard, though, to overcome two major tendencies of the managerial group: the tendency to emphasize working alone to working in groups, and the tendency to ignore people's feelings in making decisions. Teamwork does not come easily to an organization of introverts (I). Although the organization has worked to bring about a positive attitude toward teamwork, an expressed goal of the top administration, it is still a struggle to ensure that staff are working together toward a common goal. From the MBTI results, we know that teams will not form naturally in the organization. This means that we have to provide appropriate incentives to the supervisors to encourage this outcome. Furthermore, MBTI helps us understand which processes will come easily to managers and which ones will require more work. For example, some units function well as teams, demonstrating many of the characteristics of

self-managing teams, yet they still have trouble coordinating their activities with other units in the library. The teams enjoy working alone, as is true for individual introverts, and need to be encouraged to work more closely with others.

Managers also tend to be objective and impersonal (T), which results in an organization that some describe as cold and unfeeling. Social activities do not come easily. In such organizations, social niceties may be overlooked and people's feelings can be easily hurt as supervisors forget the human side of the organization.

In this environment, interpersonal relations cannot be left to chance. Structures need to be in place to ensure that staff and managers will remember to consult each other and work together. By capitalizing on the strong preferences of managers for structure, procedures, and traditions, the organization can build on formal and informal ways for staff to work together. For example, setting a regular schedule of meetings between managers who have to cooperate provides a way for them to share information on a regular basis without having to remember that they must consult their colleagues.

Providing agendas in advance of meetings is important, not only as a good practice for running effective meetings, but also as a way to allow the introverts time to consider the issues and to prepare to participate in discussions of library concerns. We have found that unstructured meetings make the managers rather uncomfortable. They usually ask what they are supposed to do to prepare for a meeting or staff development session.

The library has also faced the problem of supervisors who want to use the MBTI as a way to excuse performance issues or as an excuse for why things cannot be done. It is tempting for some to respond to problems by stating that we cannot expect things to go well, given someone's MBTI Type. Some may also hesitate to ask staff to serve on committees or take on projects because of their "type." Some staff have also expressed concern that MBTI will be used to categorize and stereotype staff and that this knowledge will be used in performance evaluations. Top management has had to take a key role in helping supervisors

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make proper use of the MBTI information. Through training programs, informal conversations, and formal discussions, top management has tried to remind supervisors that MBTI is only one tool and only measures certain aspects of a person's approach. The managers are reminded that there is no one "correct type" and that each group has strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusions

The MBTI profile has proved to be a useful tool for describing and understanding the management style of the organization. Understanding the combination of MBTI types and the effects of these approaches on the organization helps us design processes and systems that will be effective for this group. Knowing the characteristics of this group has helped in our planning of staff-development workshops and training sessions. Training can be tailored to help managers understand their counterparts in the organization and develop their nonpreferred characteristics so they can work together more effectively. Through an understanding of the profile of the managers,

it has been possible to design an organizational operating style that brings out the managers' strengths and identifies areas for growth so that we can achieve organizational goals.

References and Notes

1. For more information on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator see: David Keirse and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types* (Del Mar, California: Promethean Nemesis Books, 1984); Otto Kroeger with Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk at Work* (New York: Tilden Press, 1992); Isabel Briggs Myers, *Introduction to Type* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1987); and Barbara Webb, "Type Casting: Life with Myers-Briggs," *Library Journal* 115, no. 11 (June 15, 1990): 32-37.
2. Olaf Isachsen and Linda Berens, *Working Together: A Personality-Centered Approach to Management* (Coronado, California: New World Management Press, 1988), 135-37.
3. *Ibid.*, 171-73.
4. *Ibid.*, 237-40.
5. *Ibid.*, 36.
6. *Ibid.*, 35.
7. *Ibid.*, 35.
8. *Ibid.*, 36.