

MBTI® Supplemental Information

Personalities are complex and dynamic, seemingly impossible to quantify. Often we have difficulty understanding our own motives and actions—how much more challenging is it then to understand what drives other individuals or teams? The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is a personality assessment tool that has been used in organizations for many years with important results.

While the concepts around the MBTI® were articulated in the 1920s (see Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's work), the MBTI® assessment tool was developed by Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers in the 1950s. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® has been used in the workplace for many years to:

- Help individuals understand themselves
- Increase understanding and tolerance among the various types
- Improve communication, problem-solving and decision-making processes
- Diagnose leadership styles
- Guide career choice and professional development
- Seek the source of interpersonal conflicts

The instrument measures four sets of personality preferences: Extraversion/Introversion, Sensing/Intuition, Thinking/Feeling and Judging/Perceiving, and depending on the scores in each of these four sets, an individual matches one of 16 types. See Tables 1 and 2.

This is not to say that all members of a preference type are homogenous. While two ENTPs might seem very similar, a third could be very different. Our culture, our families and our experiences continue to shape us throughout our lives; a percentage of people may align themselves with different preference types as they mature.

Where we were born and to whom we were born are powerful shaping forces. For example, American culture supports E (extroverted) behaviors and skills, while I (introverted) behaviors tend to be less valued or understood. Our gender roles impact our preference types as well. F (feeling) males and T (thinking) females are in the minority and may have difficulty finding support for their contributions and behaviors in the workplace.

Changing our behavior can be a long and difficult process...we have the weight of years pulling against any momentum we may gather. However, acknowledging and understanding our behavior (and others' behavior) can occur much more quickly, allowing the team to cope with and compensate for areas of weakness, overcoming interpersonal conflicts while leveraging strengths.

How the MBTI Helps Organizations

First and foremost, the MBTI gives team members a common vocabulary to use when diagnosing interpersonal issues, and providing positive and constructive feedback. If handled correctly, an MBTI workshop can be a safe place to analyze personal strengths, quirks and foibles in an open and sometimes humorous fashion.

For example, a customer service department, found to its amazement, that out of the twelve members, only one was an ENFP, a type most comfortable interacting with people, especially in emotionally-charged situations. The solution, obviously, was not to fire eleven members and hire eleven more ENFPs, but to develop some strategies to help the team compensate for its antipathy to emotional stress. In these and other ways the MBTI can be a useful tool for informed decision-making.



How the MBTI Impacts Organizational Decisions

- A CIO rethinks her strategy of creating an open workspace for her team members, after learning that three quarters of them are Introverts, who like quiet for concentration.
- A Sales manager decides to enroll his team in a conflict resolution workshop after realizing their strong ESFJ tendency to avoid conflict and sweep problems under the rug.
- An ad agency modifies the way they present creative concepts to their client after recognizing his need to ruminate over ideas for several days, resulting in a better relationship between company and client.
- An administrative assistant stops taking umbrage at certain comments by her supervisor, after learning that he (an ESTJ) views socializing as a detriment to completing tasks.

Kaiser Permanente, the largest HMO in the U.S. recently underwent a major reorganization of responsibilities—one that impacted nearly every employee. Proactively, one department held a series of MBTI training sessions that addressed how different type preferences dealt with change. The results showed that while some department members would certainly relish the new opportunities and see limitless horizons, others would experience uncertainty, fear and sadness at leaving the old ways behind. Together the team examined their individual preferences, and developed strategies for helping everyone cope with the upcoming upheaval.

The Ryland Homes Company uses the MBTI as part of their young manager training because they believe that diversity in preference type is important and as such should be a component of their leadership development program.

How the MBTI Impacts Team Decision Making

“As a management team, none of us had been exposed to the MBTI before, so when we received the results of the assessment, we were impressed with the power of the tool in its ability to get to the heart of who we were as individuals. We were somewhat shocked at how accurately it depicted the way in which we interacted with others.

Personally, it gave me a much greater appreciation for my colleagues. In particular, one who was an ENTP (I’m an ISTJ). I’m very data-driven in my decision-making, while he is intuitive. I realized that numbers were not going to be persuasive if the information didn’t correlate with his gut-instinct. So we have a different type of conversation around decisions now. It’s also helped me to be more of a “big-picture” thinker and listen to my own instincts where before I might have gotten bogged down with “evidence.”

It truly changed the way I approach others and I’ve become more flexible in my thinking. As a manager, having this kind of insight into your team is valuable. It certainly doesn’t preclude getting to know people as individuals, but it does allow you to avoid pit-falls and build trust more quickly. It’s also easier to provide the kind of coaching and support most appropriate for each team member’s type.”

Bryan Shogren
Business Operations Director
NCR

How the MBTI Drives Organizational Growth

“I’m convinced that having outside consulting contributes to our success. We’ve grown by 300% in the last fifteen years because these outside influences force us to be accountable for making necessary changes: organizational, cultural, interpersonal. With no profit motive to drive our growth like private enterprise has, associations are at risk for losing momentum and becoming stagnant.

Choosing to have my team participate in the MBTI was a smart economic decision. I didn’t go into it looking for a feel-good exercise. Building rapport is nice and all, but I wanted operational and economic outcomes from this investment of time and money. I have to admit, I initially possessed a degree of skepticism, but the results of the assessment were dead-on, garnering a 95% accuracy score from the participants.

It’s changed the way we approach conflict, communication issues, decision-making...instead of meeting people where we think they should be, we meet them where they are.

For me, the bottom line was personal responsibility. Once you know what your type preferences are, it’s your responsibility to adapt and change and grow to compensate for certain areas and to leverage other areas. Knowledge is power...but it’s also a burden. If you’re unwilling to act on what you learn from this, it’s a waste of time. But if you can look at some truths (some perhaps painful and in conflict with your self-perceptions), you and your team can make great strides.”

Mark Breslin
Director

Engineering and Utility Contractors Association

It’s important to note that in most of these cases, the teams had been significantly exposed to the MBTI instrument in a combination of classroom training and experiential training. The managers’ comfort with the instrument and its results sharply peaked after witnessing the various personality preferences in real and simulated interactive challenges. This was particularly true when the interactive challenges were adventurous in nature: team sailing, ropes courses, team orienteering.

A team with a greater understanding of their attributes can take ownership for them, and a team that is confident and in full possession of their strengths can overcome most weaknesses.

Table 1: An overview of the components of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®

How a person is energized	Extraversion Preference for drawing energy from the outside world of people, activities or things.	Introversion Preference for drawing energy from one’s internal world of ideas, emotions or impressions.
What a person pays attention to	Sensing Preference for taking in information through the five senses and noticing what is actual.	Intuition Preference for taking in information through a “sixth sense” and noticing what might be.
How a person decides	Thinking Preference for organizing and structuring information to decide in a logical objective way.	Feeling Preference for organizing and structuring information to decide in a personal, value-oriented way.
Lifestyle a person adopts	Judging Preference for living a planned and organized life.	Perceiving Preference for living a spontaneous and flexible life.

* Source: Introduction to Type in Organizations by Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jean M. Kummerow, Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

Table 2: Myers-Briggs® Preference Types and total percentage within the population

ISTJ 6% The Trustee Dependable Exacting Factual Logical Organized Practical Realistic	ISFJ 6% The Conservator Accommodating Detailed Devoted Loyal Meticulous Organized Patient	INFJ 1% The Author Compassionate Conceptual Creative Deep Determined Idealistic Intense	INTJ 1% The Scientist Analytical Autonomous Determined Firm Global Independent Logical
ISTP 5% The Artisan Adaptable Adventurous Applied Expedient Factual Independent Logical	ISFP 5% The Artist Adaptable Caring Cooperative Gentle Harmonious Loyal Modest	INFP 1% The Questor Adaptable Committed Curious Deep Devoted Empathetic Gentle	INTP 1% The Architect Autonomous Cognitive Detached Independent Logical Original Precise
ESTP 13% The Promotor Activity-oriented Adaptable Adventurous Alert Easygoing Energetic Outgoing	ESFP 15% The Entertainer Adaptable Casual Cooperative Easygoing Enthusiastic Friendly Outgoing	ENFP 5% The Journalist Creative Curious Energetic Enthusiastic Expressive Friendly Imaginative	ENTP 5% The Inventor Adaptive Analytical Challenging Clever Enterprising Independent Original
ESTJ 13% The Administrator Decisive Direct Efficient Gregarious Logical Objective Organized	ESFJ 13% The Seller Conscientious Cooperative Harmonious Loyal Personable Planful Responsible	ENFJ 5% The Pedagogue Appreciative Congenial Diplomatic Energetic Enthusiastic Expressive Idealistic	ENTJ 5% The Fieldmarshal Challenging Controlled Decisive Energetic Logical Methodical Objective

* Source: Please Understand Me by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, Gnosology Books, Ltd.