

MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR INFLUENCE IN TEAM BUILDINGS

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Abstract: *Every person we meet or interact with is a unique individual. Each has their own preferences, expressed in different styles, mannerisms and ways of approaching challenges. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is one of the many approaches available to study human interaction. One of the fundamental functioning principles of the military environment is teamwork, which requires comprehensive knowledge in regard to human personality. The research question that prompted this study is whether or not this theory can lead to better team building activities in the military. The present approach should help us improve our understanding of other people's reactions and attitudes, open lines of communication, reduce misunderstandings at the interpersonal level, foster mutual acknowledgment and intellectual openness. The research is based on an experiment involving a multinational group consisting of 33 members from 9 different countries. The group was split in 'same-personality' teams created according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator survey, which had to compete during team building activities.*

Keywords: *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, team building, teamwork, Johari's Window, intercultural team*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung believed that observation of the habitual exercise of individual choice, consistent with certain shared preferences, could be used to help identify fundamental differences in people. According to Jung, each person is born with a specific predisposition toward a particular preference.

In 1962, Katherine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers published a book entitled „The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator” (MBTI), which developed the personality model belonging to Jung. This new model was conceived in a form that made it more accessible to the large public. MBTI didn't capture the attention of the scientists due the fact that the validation tests were not considered solid enough. Personality is a qualitative variable and is thus hard to measure. A validation of an instrument of research is represented by its capacity to successfully measure what it was designed for. These tests find their importance at a specific level, as we succeed in making a difference between our values, skills and behaviours [1]. MBTI is nowadays one of the most widely used personality surveys in the world. It causes individuals to question themselves about how much they know when it comes to their own personality and those around them.

2. MBTI THEORY AND SURVEY DESCRIPTION

MBTI is based on 16 types of personalities and it creates models to approach human personalities without qualitative judgement, all being treated equally.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of such tests during military team-building activities or for the better understanding of our co-workers. For a military leader, this test can also represent a tool for better knowing his subordinates.

Predicting someone’s behaviour is difficult, because a personality is a complex phenomenon and may encompass a large variety of traits. Every one of us has a part of those traits, and what makes us different is the amount at which we are characterised by them, our personal evolution and our preferences when it comes to determining which ones we appreciate the most.

Based on this survey, we can determine whether someone prefers competence and logic, or relationships over other preferences, to be organised or the excitement of spontaneous decisions.

The MBTI reflects our own preferences along four dimensions. Each dimension is expressed as one of two choices or dichotomies, so there are 16 possible MBTI types. Each type is summarized by a combination of 4 letters based on the person’s preferences across the following dichotomies:

- (E) Extraversion vs. (I) Introversion
- (S) Sensing vs. (N) Intuition
- (T) Thinking vs. (F) Feeling
- (J) Judging vs. (P) Perception

A person's MBTI type consists of one letter for each of the dichotomies (e.g., ENTJ, ISFP).

The four MBTI dimensions are characterised by:

1. the way in which we interact with others – from the point of view of the direction in which we manifest our interest in actions, object and humans, from the outside (Extraversion) or from an inner world of concepts and ideas (Introversion);
2. the way in which we obtain our information and ideas – from direct experience of reality based on facts (sensing) or from possibilities, meanings and connecting experiences (intuition);
3. the way we judge and make decisions – analysing facts without personal bias (logic) or putting in a personal balance the importance of a choice (affective);
4. the way we organise ourselves and our activities – through planning and living organised in order to control events (rational) or more flexible, in a spontaneous way with the purpose to understand and adapt to situations (perception).

Table 1. Myers – Briggs Type Indicator

	Sensing (S)	Sensing (S)	Intuition (N)	Intuition (N)	
Introversion (I)	ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	Judging (J)
Introversion (I)	ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP	Perceiving (P)
Extraversion (E)	ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	Perceiving (P)
Extraversion (E)	ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ	Judging (J)
	Thinking (T)	Feeling (F)	Feeling (F)	Thinking (T)	

From the description of each type made by the authors of the theory I extracted the details that are important for a group dynamic:

Extraversion (E). An extraverted person projects their internal psychological tendencies to the world that surrounds them by exteriorizing their feelings, by socializing.

The decision making process of an extravert depends on the information he or she receives from external sources by communication, verbalizing the process.

An extravert needs independence, public acceptance and encouragement for his enthusiasm that has the power to energise the people around them.

Introversion (I). An introvert is focused on his or her inner world and all its complexity.

The decision making process of an introvert happens within his or her thoughts, analysing the process with information provided by themselves and based on their own experience.

An introvert needs intimacy, time and no pressure while making a decision and works best in a group with proactive members.

Sensing (S) and Intuition (N) both refer to the way in which we acknowledge the world around us and receive information from it.

Both are telling us how we observe people, things, situations and how we assimilate what we read and what we are told. These are predispositions we have, our decision processes depend on the way we perceive and observe the world around us.

Someone who relies on sensing will appreciate the facts and will work with them to understand situations and see the bigger picture, words and symbols are less appreciated than experience in order to build trust.

An intuitive person will look for the meaning while reading between the lines, using the bigger picture rather than going to the detailed facts as a basis for their understanding process.

Thinking (T) and Feeling (F) also refers to the predispositions we have to give meaning to the world around us. A Thinking (T) person will look for explanations and solutions to problems that are logical, in a calculated and emotionless way. This is why they may sometimes be judged indifferent to other people, uncaring and orientated towards a task.

Someone with a high Feeling (F) score will appreciate people, their feeling while he or she is drawn into communication, and show a concern for harmony and care about others. For this reason, they may sometimes be perceived as idealists who make decisions based on feelings.

Judging (J) and Perceiving (P) represent the way we function best while dealing with situations, projects and how we manage time. Someone who is Judging (J), while having nothing to do with being judgmental, will be someone who enjoys to be task oriented while planning in advance, having a checklist before starting an action.

Someone that scored high Perceiving (P) will prefer going with the flow, adapting on spot for the best course of action. New circumstances are seen as opportunities that are better to be left open. The tendency is to procrastinate actions and work in bursts of energy, sometimes being perceived as casual.

While personality is not binary, each pair of traits is a spectrum as nobody is purely introverted or extraverted, for example. The resulting trait is the one that a person has a stronger tendency towards.

Distribution in the general population

Type	Frequency in Population	
ISFJ	██████████████████	13.8%
ESFJ	██████████████████	12.3%
ISTJ	██████████████████	11.6%
ISFP	██████████████	8.8%
ESTJ	██████████████	8.7%
ESFP	██████████████	8.5%
ENFP	██████████████	8.1%
ISTP	██████████	5.4%
INFP	██████	4.4%
ESTP	██████	4.3%
INTP	███	3.3%
ENTP	███	3.2%
ENFJ	███	2.5%
INTJ	██	2.1%
ENTJ	██	1.8%
INFJ	██	1.5%

Males

Type	Frequency in Population	
ISTJ	██████████████████	16.4%
ESTJ	██████████████████	11.2%
ISTP	██████████	8.5%
ISFJ	██████████	8.1%
ISFP	██████████	7.6%
ESFJ	██████████	7.5%
ESFP	██████████	6.9%
ENFP	██████	6.4%
ESTP	██████	5.6%
INTP	██████	4.8%
INFP	███	4.1%
ENTP	███	4.0%
INTJ	███	3.3%
ENTJ	███	2.7%
ENFJ	██	1.6%
INFJ	██	1.2%

Females

Type	Frequency in Population	
ISFJ	██████████████████	19.4%
ESFJ	██████████████████	16.9%
ESFP	██████████████	10.1%
ISFP	██████████	9.9%
ENFP	██████████	9.7%
ISTJ	██████	6.9%
ESTJ	██████	6.3%
INFP	██████	4.6%
ENFJ	███	3.3%
ESTP	███	3.0%
ENTP	██	2.4%
ISTP	██	2.3%
INTP	██	1.7%
INFJ	██	1.6%
INTJ	██	0.9%
ENTJ	██	0.9%

FIG. 1. Distribution of personality types

3. APPLYING THE MBTI SURVEY

The MBTI survey is connected with the self-awareness someone has. In 1955, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham [2] have developed a model to illustrate what we are aware of and how others perceive us by creating a matrix with four quadrants. In every quadrant, there are adjectives characterising one from their own point of view or from another's. The authors have thus created a list of adjectives from which characteristics of a subject are chosen.

The “Blind Spot” quadrant refers to an aspect of our personality which is not known to self, but is known to others, and represents something that characterizes it. For example, others may notice that someone lacks eye contact when talking to people. That person, however, may be completely unaware of this. Communication and the process of receiving feedback from the people around us can open the Blind Spot to our own perception and help us address it. Therefore, the Blind Spot can be reduced through identification and learning, moving to the left of Johari's Window into the area of “known to others and known to self”.

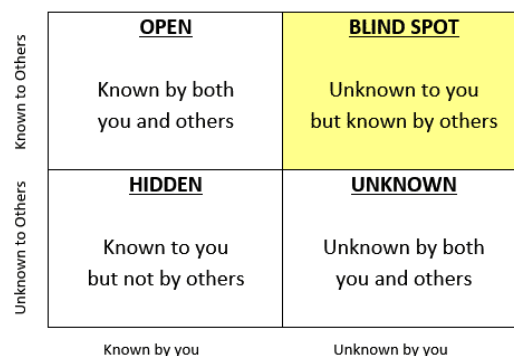


FIG. 2. The Johari Window

During an MBTI assessment, a series of questions indicating people's preferences are asked. If someone scores low in one of the personality types, they might have a Blind Spot in that area. For example, someone who scored high in Thinking (T) type might score lower in Feeling (F), which indicates that the person might be known for preferring structured, disciplined environments, schedules and timelines – for being real task-orientated.

However, he or she may have difficulty expressing emotions or being affectionate to others and sensitive to their feelings. People around such a person may perceive him or her as “insensitive” or “cold”, which may discourage efforts to maintain healthy relationships with this person.

The first step to reducing these Blind Spots is being aware of them. Once we realize they exist, we can then explore ways to reduce our Blind Spots.

Tests have shown that the percentages of each personality style work the same way throughout the world. Every culture has every personality style in much the same proportions as ours does. However, other cultures, ours included, develop stereotypes about foreign cultures. Stereotypes come from our perceptions – not from objective testing. Different cultures might have strong characteristics like being punctual, being expressive or even being relaxed versus formal. Still, some cultures place great value on specific characteristics – which correspond to the characteristics of a certain personality type.

Our perspectives on what we value most, what we feel about our homes and how we view other cultures are all very much influenced by our own cultures, but they are still consistent with our underlying personality types. Just as our perspectives about our environment and life circumstances colour our views, so does our personality type reflect our perspectives on place and culture. Thus, different personalities have different perspectives.

During a multinational activity that took place in the Romanian Air Force Academy, I conducted the formal activities related to team building. At the beginning of the program, I asked the participants to complete the MBTI survey. The purpose was to mix the members from different nationalities and come up with a group.

The group was formed by 33 participants from 9 countries (Romania, USA, France, Belgium, Latvia, Poland, Holland, Italy, Bulgaria). Analysing the data from the surveys, I obtained the following data:

Table 2. Personality types of the study group

ESTJ – 8	ESTP – 1
ISTJ – 7	ESFP – 1
ESFJ – 4	ENFP – 1
ISFJ – 4	INFJ – 1
ENFJ – 2	ENTJ – 1
INTJ – 1	ISFP – 0
ENTP – 1	ISTP – 0
INTP – 1	INFP – 0

4. CONCLUSIONS

One of the caveats of using the MBTI in team building is that at the beginning of the activity, it gives the impression that one personality type is better than the other, especially after presenting the distribution of personality types among the general population. Each personality has a unique set of strengths that the others don't have. Recognising, accepting and validating them is important to the success of any team. The team building participants understood this in the end, but it is necessary to have each team present their strengths as most people have the desire to feel special.

Having the possibility to test this theory in a multinational group brought me to the conclusion that the MBTI approach to develop such teams is highly recommendable because it gives members a different criterion according to which they can organise in groups, other than their nationality. In time, under the influence of a good leader, even this barrier can fall and the group will start working towards a common goal with added knowledge about each other's preference for human interactions.

Everyone is their own unique blend of traits, and a better understanding of this fact while avoiding to stereotype the other or compare, compete when it is not necessary can lead to better relationships among the members of a team.

Understanding the weaknesses of a certain personality type that someone is identified with doesn't mean that it can be transformed into an excuse. It is counterproductive to blame one's personality type for a certain behaviour or non-behaviour. The MBTI identifies our preferences, not our capabilities.

MBTI may not be a scientifically valid personality assessment [3]; however, validity is not an element in a test, but has to do specifically with test score interpretation. Personality assessments can be validated for specific purposes. The purpose of this research was to remove cultural barriers between members of a group coming from 9 different countries and build a team at a specific time (retaking the assessment can bring minor differences in time). For this purpose, the assessment is valid based on the observations I have made while leading the group. There are caveats, but if a leader is ready to invest their experience in the process, they can be overcome.

This research gave me a starting point for further testing of the theory of different groups, especially with military students that will become officers in charge of other people. Officers are expected to lead teams, solve problems and effectively execute missions. In order to do that, they must interact and communicate with others. In an ideal situation, we would have to work with a team made up of as many personalities as possible, which would provide optimal problem solving potential; however, such a team can also have great potential for inner conflict. Officers who understand this strive to use their knowledge of personality (their own as well as others') to help teams focus on the task by tapping into strengths and mitigating conflict in order to get all members to work together toward a common goal.

The MBTY assessment is a way to learn about ourselves. It is the beginning of self-awareness.

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