# Choosing the Team that Really Works: How an Understanding of Personal Style Helps Your Team Succeed

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Today's workplace is changing at a pace that is both exciting and demanding. Markets are expanding globally, into a myriad of different cultures. Staffing patterns are changing as more and more organizations out source key support and administrative functions. Technology is evolving at neck-breaking speed. Businesses are forming project and product alliances with companies who frequently are viewed as competitors. Static work groups within organizations are often disbanding in favor of cross-functional teams assembled for distinct and time limited project teams.

Within this fluid environment, project managers, by necessity, are being charged with assembling and managing teams that are technically competent and interpersonally balanced along the dimensions of personal style and values. (See Verma, 1997, for an excellent discussion of the management of project teams). This focus upon personal style and values, in previous times referred to as creating "good team chemistry," is a required focus for the creation of successful teams. Fortunately, the project manager does not have to leave the creation of "good team chemistry" up to his or her intuitive hunches or the arbitrary assignment of employees to teams. To help in this process, personal assessment tools are available. One of these tools is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

## The Myers Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers Briggs is a personal style assessment tool based upon the psychological writings of Carl Jung. Jung (1971) believed that individuals varied in terms of how they focussed their energy, their manner of attending to the world, the method used to make decsicions, and their preferred mode of organizing the self in the world. Basing their work upon the ideas of Jung, Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers created a personal style instrument, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The MBTI questionnaire is used today in many countries and in many applications, one such application being the creation of balanced work teams ( Hammer, 1997 ).

The Myers-Briggs measures one's preferences on four different scales, which are extraversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, and judging-perceiving. Exhibit 1 presents an overview of the four scales.

There is no "right" or "wrong" style, and in fact, we all exhibit behavior and approaches that are representative of both sides of any of the four scales. What is important is the direction and the extent of the preference? By obtaining a working knowledge and understanding of the ideas behind the scales, the project manager can make deliberate choices regarding the selection and management of team members.

The individual who completes the Myers-Briggs, in addition to receiving information on each of the four individual scales, also receives a global "type," which is a combination of the preference for each of the four scales. There are sixteen possible types, representing the total number of possible combinations of the four scales. For a detailed description of the sixteen MBTI types, with important information regarding the work contributions of each of the types, see Hirsch and Kummerow, 1990.

As a tool and as a conceptual framework for the project manager, the Myers-Briggs (hereafter referred to as the MBTI) offers great flexibility and application to the task of selecting and managing the members of the project team.

## The Style of the Project Manager

In my work as an organizational consultant, I frequently consult with project managers and teams around issues of team composition, problem solving, planning, mentoring, and team building. My work with project managers has demonstrated to me that there can be great diversity in personal style of successful project managers. However, I have found three truths to be present in the makeup of all successful project managers. These truths, with apologies to Ben Franklin, are that the best project managers "know thy self, know thy project tasks and functions, and know thy team members (or who *should* be a team member!)." The MBTI allows the manager to

## Exhibit 1. Myers Briggs Scales

| Scale | Describes |
|-------|-----------|
| 1. **Extraversion or Introversion** | The manner in which a person is *energized* |

*Extraversion:*  One is energized from a strong interaction with the outside world of activities and people contact, or
*Introversion:* Person is energized from a focus on one's internal reflection on ideas and impressions.

| | |
|-------|-----------|
| 2. **Sensing or Intuition** | The manner in which a person *attends* to a task. |

*Sensing:* Person attends to a task and the world through a pragmatic, factual orientation, often with an immediate time perspective, or
*Intuition:* One perceives a task more from the big picture perspective, with an eye towards possibilities and innovation.

| | |
|-------|-----------|
| 3. **Thinking or Feeling** | The method a person uses to make a *choice* or decision. |

*Thinking:* One makes a choice based upon a logical-rational review of the options, or
*Feeling:* Person uses the subjective and personal values to make decisions.

| | |
|-------|-----------|
| 4. **Judging or Perceiving** | How does a person like to live or *approach* a situation? |

*Judging:* Person prefers to go into an event with a plan and an agenda, or
*Perceiving:* One prefers a flexible and spontaneous approach, want to keep options open.

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know him or herself and to use the concepts to know the members of the team. By having a knowledge of the different types, the manager is able to identify talents, skills, and individual "gifts" ( Briggs Myers and Myers, 1995) in a manner that affirms the contributions of all. Conflict between different types of people can be reframed in a manner that illustrates the unique contributions that each has to offer.

In using the ideas behind the MBTI, the project manager must first consider his or her own style. This awareness of one's own style then gives the manager the chance to selectively choose other project members whose style will complement his or her style. Knowing one's own style is also very important because it reduces the risk that the manager will be the victim of personal style "blind spots" that can surface when one is not self-aware. As one would expect, unaddressed "blind spots" of the manager get the project off on the wrong footing, and increases the chances of inefficiencies over the life of the project.

### The Extroverted Project Manager

In considering the first few steps of a project, managers should consider if they are energized by extroversion or introversion. Extroverted managers will find themselves enervated by interaction with others, group activities, and the give-and-take of communicating with others. These people tend to act quickly and seek tasks where they can enjoy a variety of functions, again, frequently involving people contact. Extroverted project managers are good at interacting with other teams, taking a high profile leadership role, and working closely with each team member.

The extroverted manager needs to consider that their energy and enthusiasm when directed outward may be overwhelming to the introverted team members, who may withdraw from such intensity. Such a manager needs to modulate the interpersonal energy. Also, because they enjoy a variety of activities, they are at risk to be perceived by team members (particularly introverts) as being involved with too many things at one time.

### The Introverted Project Manager

The introverted manager prefers to take a less prominent social role on the project team. Since this person is energized by reflection and time with their thoughts, they may appear to be shy and at times not very approachable. Introverts as leaders may prefer to let others on the team take the spotlight while they organize and direct behind the scenes.

The challenge for introverted managers is to make sure that they communicate enough of what is going on in their thoughts and to make certain that they interpersonally seek out the other team members, watching out for being perceived as aloof and distant. The extroverted manager is contrasted with the sensing project manager.

### The Sensing Project Manager

The sensing manager will approach the world in a very pragmatic and tangible manner, working step by step to solve real-world problems and deliver measurable and

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concrete solutions and projects. This type of person is also very good at operationalizing concepts and goals and providing concrete direction. The managerial challenges for this type center around the the risk of not looking to the strategic or future possibilities in a situation, attending too much on "today's" problems and missing the chance to plan for "tomorrow." The sensing manager is contrasted with the intuitive project manager.

### The Intuitive Project Manager

Focussing upon the conceptual or "the big picture" is the hallmark of this approach. Creating a vision for the team and seeing interrelationships among various aspects of the projects come easily to this style. While articulating the vision for the team, this manager needs to be sure to not get too conceptual in thinking or communicating, remembering to translate the ideas to the practical and measurable level.

### The Thinking Project Manager

This form of leadership is based upon making decisions from a rational and logical assessment of the problems and the options. This person is often viewed as a firm but fair manager who leads in an orderly and sequential manner. Thinking managers need to remember to temper the rational with a dose of the personal, and to be extra vigilant about relating to the human factor in the situation at hand. The thinking manager is contrasted with the feeling project manager.

### The Feeling Project Manager

This person will make decisions based upon personal values and has a strong awareness for the personal aspect of work, nurturing, and facilitating the members on the team. This manager is often known as a people-person and can be very effective at helping the team coalesce in an interpersonal sense. As mangers, feeling individuals need to be aware of their risk of trying to please too many people and not focusing enough at the task at hand.

### The Judging Project Manager

Known for bringing an orderly approach to their management of a team, these leaders are good at creating timelines, identifying clear roles and tasks for team members, and bringing projects to closure in a timely and ordered method. Such managers, however, need to be aware that they may be perceived by team members as too structured and limiting creativity. The judging manager is contrasted with the perceiving project manager.

### The Perceiving Project Manager

Flexibility and comfort in an unstructured workplace are the hallmarks of the perceiving manager. This person excels in situations requiring comfort with ambiguity and a lack of structure. In managing the team, a person with this style gives the team members a great deal of latitude and autonomy. The challenge for the perceiving manager, however, is to be sure to bring enough structure to the team process and to not lose site of deadlines and the need to drive a process toward closure.

### The "Ideal" Project Manager

Even though it may be comforting for all of us to consider, there is *no* ideal project manager style when considering the MBTI concepts. However, in western industrial settings, many managers have been, over the years, extroverted, sensing, thinking, and judging (known as the ESTJ type, when taking the first letter from each of the preferences). This type is analytical, decisive, good at organizing systems, and wired to take action that leads to a tangible and measurable conclusion or success. Frequently, the ESTJ leader has been associated with the running of an operation, such as plant manager, vice precedent of operations, and director of manufacturing.

When considering the ideal style for a project manager, one must first consider the nature of the project and the functions required of the leader. Exhibit 2 describes various types of project manager roles and optimal MBTI types for each role.

Recent research (Hammer, 1997) suggests that transformational leadership, defined as helping the organization evolve into new modes of working, new structures, or new marketplaces, may best be realized by leaders who are either NF or NP. The NF leader would be able to visualize the future vision while mentoring the people toward achievement of the future goal. The NP leader would also be able to effectively articulate the vision, and with the perceiving preference (P), would be comfortable operating with flexibility and spontaneity, driving the organization toward paths currently undefined. Such ideas on transformation leadership could also reasonably be applied to project management settings in which visionary leadership is required.

As Exhibit 2 demonstrates, there are many ways to conceptualize the ideal manager for a project or the phases of the project The same concepts apply nicely when considering the role of the members on the project team.

**Exhibit 2. Project Manager Role or Function and MBTI types**

| Project Manager Role | Desired MBTI Styles |
| --- | --- |
| Manage an existing project and deliver a tangible project along at certain deadlines | extroversion, sensing, thinking, judging: ESTJ |
| Conceptualize a new "product" and chart the vision for the team | intuition, thinking: NT |
| Focus strongly on team building and supportive management, interrelationships | intuition, feeling: N F |
| Serve as liaison to other teams and other stakeholders | extroversion, intuition: EN |
| Troubleshoot existing problems while managing a self directed team | intuition, thinking, perceiving: NTP |
| Lead a team whose product or service will be very technical in nature | thinking, judging: TJ |
| Pragmatism, practical needs | sensing, thinking: ST |
| Create a structure or the tangible engineering of processes | judging: J |
| Managing a project via a matrix model or research and development | intuition, thinking: NT |
| Managing a project that is bureaucratic | sensing, judging: SJ |
| Leading through a participatory style | introversion, sensing, feeling: ISF |

## Project Team Composition

Assembling the most functional and productive project team is somewhat similar to Noah's mission with the Ark; get a couple of each species (or MBTI types!) on board and move forward.

While this is certainly a simplistic analogy to the process of creating a good project team, it nevertheless has some merit. And that merit is that it makes sense to have different types of people on your team so that different roles at key time points are covered and so that group synergy has its best chance of taking place.

PMI's A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) identifies five components of a project management group process. These developmental stages in the life of a project (project initiation, project planning, project execution, project control, and project closing) all require different team roles, roles that can be considered in terms of the MBTI concepts. The MBTI illustrations presented below for each of the five stages are only partial examples of how the MBTI can used to select team members and to assign roles. In reality, the MBTI allows for greater depth and subtly of role description than will be presented here.

### Project Initiation Phase

During this phase, tasks that require political savvy, building liaisons, and forming key support relationships are often best handled by the team member who is strong on extroversion/feeling (EF). These individuals, because of their focus on others and the nature of personal relationships, are going to be good at reading between the lines and figuring the best way to approach the people issues facing the project (such as issues of turf, morale, teamwork, and rewards). However, the extroverts on the team, because their energy is directed outward, can stifle the meeting participation of the team's introverts. Consequently, the extroverts may need to be kept "in check" during team staff meetings so as not to dominate the discussions.

Also playing strong roles during the initiation phase can be those teams' members who are strong on intuition/thinking (NT). These people will be good at creating a vision for the team, the "big picture" through which the mission will be defined. The NT person is also good at seeing interrelationships among different variables or factions, and therefore are assets in describing possible affiliations with other teams or organizations. NT individuals also excel at being the devil's advocate, and therefore help keep other team members on their intellectual toes when key decisions are being made in the initiation phase. However, once the project is under way, NT team members are at risk to be constantly fine tuning the concept or adding to the design of the project some new twist or vision that they have discovered.

### Project Planning Phase

The planning phase of the project can successfully call upon the skills of the sensing/judging (SJ) team member. The sensing portion of this combination will help the

team operationalize the previously defined project visions and goals; sensing individuals are very good at defining tasks through a pragmatic focus with clear measurable goals put in place. The "real world" focus of these members will get the project off to a solid start, with strong emphasis on practicality.

The judging aspect of this pair describes the team member who will create clear order and a time line for the project. Structure will be created by this person as well as checkpoints and systems to track the efficient allocation of resources and the timely completion of project tasks.

When the sensing and the judging are present within an individual, the project manager now has a team member who excels in the creation of tangible, measurable goals that can be monitored through a tightly designed organization structure. The SJ person as described by Hirsch and Kummerow (1990) tends to be a very solid employee known for working with a sense of "responsibility, loyalty, and industry."

## Project Execution and Project Control Phases

These phases of project management often highlight the areas of timeliness, accuracy, conflict management, tracking the relationships of the various stakeholders and the level of "customer service" being delivered, the monitoring of resources (financial, capital, and personnel), and the tracking of the original project or mission.

Tasks during this project phase that require skills of timeliness and detailed accuracy are often best handled by the team members who are strong in sensing (S), judging (J), and, to some degree, introversion (I). The sensing focus creates attention to the concrete attention to substance, numbers, and specific detail. The judging focus in a team member will result in a drive toward discharging duties in an orderly manner, the monitoring of schedules and deadlines, and the drive for "closure," which translates to a push to get the task completed. The team member with the introversion style may work well on tasks involving detail, as the introverted team member generally does not mind working alone for extended periods of time.

The people-relationships portion of these project phases is best addressed by the team member with these styles: extroversion (E), feeling (F), and depending upon the nature of the task, sensing (S). The EF team member will be motivated to interact with other teams and other stakeholders, keeping them in the loop and informed about progress. The EF team member with the sensing style will be very good at providing very tangible solutions for the day-to-day people-problems found during projects.

The EF team member can also be very good at resolving conflicts, particularly if some type of accommodation is needed. These people will read the "music behind the words" of key customers, frequently surfacing concerns that have not been openly identified, let alone addressed. On the other hand, if the conflict resolution will require less of an accommodating posture and more of a competitive, hard-nosed approach, the extrovert with thinking (ET) may be the best candidate. This individual will attend more to the objective facts of the matter and will not soften the bargaining position due to concerns for feelings of the others.

Tracking the project vision (and staying focussed on the big picture goals for the project are activities for the team member with the intuition (N) style. This person can serve as the team compass, keeping the project heading in the correct direction. However, because the N person excels at defining future possibilities, they need to be monitored so that they do not keep bringing great new ideas to the in-place project, expanding the scope of work beyond what is desired or reasonable. The NF team member will be good at tracking the project vision as it relates to the people-values portion of the project while the NT person will be good at following the impacts the systems-processes aspects of the project.

## Project Closing Phase

When it becomes time to close the project, the team members with the STJ style will become very important (hopefully, these people all along have been in roles such as chief of field operations, managing on-site engineer, etc.). Left to their natural inclinations, these team members will drive hard for completing tasks in a timely and detailed manner, providing real-world solutions. These individuals frequently have a great sense of urgency and the need to do-it-now; such a team member will excel at bringing the delayed project in on schedule. The price to pay, however, can be the STJ's alienation of other team members who are perceived by the STJ as being too cautious or theoretical, too slow to act, or too bureaucratic in their thinking.

Should people issues need to be resolved at the end of the project, then bring out the EF individual. The team member with EN will be someone to bring to the front at this point if some "business development" work needs to be done before the project is shut down, such as meeting with project sponsors and/or customers to talk about: possible additional work that could be done in the future, natural expansions of the current project, and future business alliances that could be formed.

## Learning Styles of Team Members

In addition to using the MBTI to consider appropriate team member roles during the various stages of a project, as described above, the MBTI can also be used in planning training and learning experiences for team members. This MBTI application has been described in detail by Di Tiberio (1997). The research on this application is extensive, and for the purposes of this paper, only general highlights will be offered.

Team members with extroverted and feeling preferences may learn best in participatory education settings, in which team members learn together in a collaborative fashion, frequently having the training materials in front of them and then "thinking out loud" together about the new material. This interactive style plays to the interpersonal focus of the extroverted feeler. Simulations and role playing also work well for the learning styles of these personality types. Generally, these types do not learn best when isolated from others and asked to walk through detailed technical material.

Conversely, the team member with the introverted style learns best when allowed to study the material in quieter settings, preferably alone where reflection and thoughtfulness are obtainable. Should introverts be placed in group settings for learning or training, these team members may withdraw and appear less participatory.

Other key points can be offered about the learning styles of team members. These points address the style of the sensing person and the learning style of the intuition person. The sensing person, desiring to view the world in tangible and pragmatic terms, prefers learning that can be related to "the real world." Learning that is conceptually and theoretically driven will not appeal to the sensing person and such a team member will quickly lose interest in the learning experience.

The intuition-based person, on the other hand, will be the team member that needs to see "the big picture" behind the training before they can become motivated to get involved. They will look for common threads in the new material and will want to have the instructor be versed in drawing comparisons and in laying a conceptual framework. Training materials that highlight details, pragmatics, and concrete applications will not appeal to this big picture learner.

Finally, comments can be offered about the preferred learning experiences of the individual with a judging style and the individual with the perceiving style. The judging person, as previously described, prefers order and structure in the world. Give these team members a clear course outline, learning that builds upon itself sequentially, and written materials that are well crafted and logically organized.

For the perceiving person, however, such order and structure will not be appealing, as these individuals prefer a more spontaneous and flexible approach to the world. Perceivers may learn best when they can learn on the job, responding to challenges and situations as they arise. Perceivers are most comfortable making it up as they go along, and will not prefer learning that appears to be too structured or ordered. Free flowing seminars and learning on their feet may appeal to the perceivers, those among us who probably program the VCR by trial-and-error versus an orderly march through the manual.

## Multicultural Applications of the MBTI

The MBTI is gaining quite a following internationally, with versions available in a number of different languages. Research in the multicultural application is still in something of an initial phase, but is increasing over time (Kirby and Barger, 1997).

The exciting aspect of the multicultural use of the application can be in giving the team member information regarding his or her MBTI type (through being administered the test), and then leading the individual through a discussion of the implications of his or her style for international assignments. Such information can be extremely helpful in assisting the team member in adjusting to project management challenges in international settings. Cultural adaptation to the new setting can be increased while the normal anxieties and difficulties when working or living in different international cultures can be decreased when one is presented with information about who they are (how "they are wired") and what to expect from the cultural norms of the new society.

I worked a few years ago with a senior manager from the United States who was in the process of accepting a managerial assignment at manufacturing facility located in Latin America. The challenge for him was to enter the culture smoothly and to assume the management of an existing operation. The MBTI was used in our work together. It provided us with a description of his own style and a "vocabulary" we could use as we thought out loud about the cross cultural challenges he faced, particularly in the areas of socializing, motivating his employees, and tailoring his management style to the norms of the local setting. The MBTI seemed to be a very effective tool that could allow a discussion of cultural similarities and dissimilarities without the discussion leading to the creation of biases, simplicities, or generalizations.

## Taking the MBTI: It's User Friendly!

The best way to use the MBTI ideas in team composition and project management is to have the individuals actually complete the questionnaire. The process of completing the survey and scoring the results is simple, and most people during the interpretive stages find the concepts and applica-tions to be straightforward and easy to use. The results are presented in a format in which no one style is viewed as the "right" style, and test takers are able to see the contributions that their style brings to the workplace.

Various organizations throughout the country provide certification training for people interested in becoming competent in MBTI administration and interpretation. Generally, organizational and industrial psychologists are prime candidates for the delivery of the MBTI assessment process, given their background in assessment and personality theory.

As a tool, the MBTI can bring great value to leaders interested in efficiently selecting, and then managing, team members with diverse skills, attitudes, and approaches to the various roles needed over the span of a work project, regardless of the nature of the project, the industry, or the functional team.

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