

# the Center for Career and Business Development

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## THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR®

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is personality inventory based on a theory of psychological types developed by the pioneering psychiatrist, Carl Jung, in the 1920s.

The MBTI typology covers four spheres of personality, each of which expresses itself in an individual in one of two opposing but complementary ways, called dichotomies.

A dichotomy in the MBTI sense is not an either/or. It is rather a both/and, with one side being more prominent than the other.

Consider as an analogy the fact that some of us are right-handed and some are left-handed. If we are right-handed, this does not mean that we use our right hand to the exclusion of the left. It means we use both, but our right hand predominates.

The same principle applies to MBTI dichotomies. In a particular individual, one pole of a dichotomy does not exclude the other. It is simply more well-developed, capable of being used with greater skill, efficiency and ease.

### **MBTI DICHOTOMIES**

The first dichotomy concerns the flow of mental energy. According to type theory, people whose energy flows outward toward people, things, and action are extraverted. People whose energy flows inward toward concepts and ideas are introverted. No one is purely extraverted, nor is anyone purely introverted. Extraverts are simply people who prefer extraversion over introversion, while introverts prefer introversion over extraversion.

The second dichotomy concerns information-gathering, the way that we receive data. People who have a tendency to focus on facts, details, discrete bits of information, are sensing types. People who look at the big picture, who weave data into a “narrative”, are intuitive types. Again, no one is purely sensing or intuitive. We are all both, yet one of them is stronger in us.

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The third dichotomy concerns decision-making, the way we come to conclusions based on the information we take in. People who tend to make decisions in a linear fashion using logic and objective criteria are thinking types. People who make decisions subjectively based on personally held values are feeling types. We all use both thinking and feeling in our decision-making, but one of them predominates.

The last dichotomy concerns the way that people deal with the world around them. People who prefer information-gathering, either as sensing or intuitive types, in dealing with the outside world are perceiving types. People who prefer decision-making, either as thinking or feeling types, in dealing with the external world are judging types.

## **THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE CODE**

The Myers-Briggs Type is a four-letter code which indicates a person's preferences in each of the four dichotomies sketched above.

For example, a person with extraverted, sensing, thinking, and perceiving preferences would have an MBTI code of ESTP.

## **HOW CAN THE MBTI HELP?**

MBTI type is a framework, a "lens" for looking at yourself and the people around you and the ways that you interact with each other. When its strengths and limitations are properly understood, it can be a very effective and useful tool. It is after all the most widely used personality inventory of its type.

A few examples will help explain ways that MBTI can raise understanding.

1. A husband and wife are facing an important decision and have not yet decided what to do.

They've known about this decision for some time, and the wife has become increasingly frustrated that her husband has not been inclined to talk about the issues surrounding it. One day, her frustration erupts into anger and a fight ensues.

Fortunately, the husband understands the principles of psychological type, and in the middle of the fight, he has a sudden epiphany.

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He raises his hands and says, “Wait a minute, I know what’s happening. You’re an extraverted type, which means you need to talk it out. I’m an introverted type, which means that I need to think it through. I’m driving you crazy because I’m not ready to talk about it, and you’re driving me crazy because you keep trying to get me to talk while I’m still thinking about it. It’s simply our types coming into conflict.”

This helps the wife to understand that she needs to give her husband time to think it through, and the husband to understand that he can make things easier for his wife if he will verbalize his thoughts, even if he doesn’t feel they are complete.

2. You have a great idea for a new project you want to sell your boss on.

You start to make your pitch, and you haven’t gotten very far in sketching out your grand vision before your boss starts to interrupt you with all sorts of questions about costs, logistics, resources, etc.

You’re trying to give him the big picture and he wants to know how many reams of copy paper it’s going to require.

It’s very frustrating, until you remember to apply your understanding of type theory.

You know that as intuitive type, you tend to look at the big picture first and think about the details later.

Your boss is probably a sensing type, which means that he needs to have a grasp of the details before he can move on to looking at the big picture.

The solution is simple—invert the order of your presentation.

Instead of starting with the grand vision and filling in the details as needed, start with the details and work your way back to the grand vision.

Now your boss is with you because you are presenting the material in the manner in which he is most comfortable receiving it.

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3. Two managers are in a room trying to decide who's going to be promoted into an open position.

The first manager, Sarah, says, "It's perfectly clear: John has the qualifications. His performance reviews for the last three years have been excellent. He's the guy."

The second manager, Tom, says, "Wait a minute, not so fast. I think Julie is the person for the job. After all, this is a supervisory position, and it requires people skills that John isn't as good at. I just have the feeling that Julie will do better."

They continue to wrangle about the choice until Sarah, who has an understanding of type theory, sees what is happening.

As a thinking type, she knows that she prefers to make decisions logically, based on objective criteria—John has the qualifications, the experience, therefore he's the guy.

Tom, who seems to be a feeling type, has a different way of making decisions, subjectively, based on personally held values. He believes that, even though Julie's skills are not as easily quantifiable as John's, they will make her a better choice for the position.

Sarah's higher level understanding helps her to see his position better, and to present hers in a way that he is more likely to hear it.