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JOCM  
15,5

# Applying psychological type and "gifts differing" to organizational change

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Received February 2002

Revised March 2002

Accepted April 2002

**Keywords** Jungian psychology, Myers-Briggs type indicator, Individual behaviour, Organizational change

**Abstract** This paper applies concepts from the Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI) to the context of organizational change. A brief history and explanation of type theory and the MBTI is provided. Psychological type is measured using four bipolar scales, each dealing with individual preferences (extroversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, and judgement-perception). A total of 16 possible type combinations are derived from the results; subsequent arrangement of the type combinations within standard type tables facilitates recognition of patterns. Knowledge related to the four mental functions is specifically linked to organizational change issues, including implications related to both the dominant and inferior functions, and a recommended problem-solving model. Opposite preferences are highlighted as "gifts differing" for their relevance to communication, conflict management, and teambuilding issues. Finally, type concepts are integrated with topics related to organizational change interventions.

## Introduction

This paper discusses Jung's theory of psychological type, which deals with opposite personality preferences, that was further refined by Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers. The overriding insight that knowledge of psychological type yields in a context of organizational change is inherent in recognition of the preferences as "gifts differing". The opposite preferences both inhibit and enable organizational change processes. A description of the eight preferences is provided, with a special focus on the role of the four mental functions, emphasizing applications of the dominant and inferior functions. Relevant type concepts are linked to various change issues, teambuilding initiatives, and interventions.

## History of MBTI

In the early years of the twentieth century, Katharine Briggs undertook the development of a typology instrument that furthered Jung's theoretical formulation of psychological types. This work originated because of her desire to understand the young man that her only daughter, Isabel, had brought home from college who was unlike anyone in her family. During the 1940s, Katharine's work was continued by her daughter, largely because Isabel desired to make sense of the conflict of the Second World War. Isabel desired a means for people to understand rather than destroy one another.

Jung developed his typology to find "some kind of order among the chaotic multiplicity of points of view" (Jung, 1971, xiv). In a letter he wrote in 1960 he acknowledged his disinterest in the classification of individuals:



Journal of Organizational Change Management,  
Vol. 15 No. 5, 2002, pp. 502-511.  
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DOI 10.1108/09534810210440405

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I was always mostly concerned with individuals needing explanation of themselves and knowledge of their fellow beings. My entirely empirical concepts were meant to form a sort of language by which such explanations could be communicated (McCaulley, 1998, p. 18).

The work of the mother-daughter team in implementing Jung's psychological type yielded the Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI). It is a tool with intent not to stereotype, but to allow understanding of individual preferences to facilitate all aspects of life: differences in learning and communication styles, conflict management, and relationships.

Annually three million people in the world take this instrument, using one of its copyrighted versions, available in self-scored or computer formats. While the language shorthand associated with the instrument appears to put people in boxes, the shorthand merely facilitates the kinds of communication Jung acknowledged as important in the above quote. The preferences of the indicator refer to mental processes of human beings. The indicator is intended for mentally healthy adults without pathological symptoms. Value judgements and type biases are inappropriate as none of the eight preferences is perceived as superior to another. Isabel stressed this with continued reference to the preferences as "gifts" and the choice of her book title *Gifts Differing*, which was taken from the words from the book Romans, Chapter 12, verses 4-8:

For as we have many members in one body,  
and all members have not the same office:  
So we, being many, are one body . . .  
and every one members one of another.  
Having then gifts differing. . .(Myers and Myers, 1980, p. v).

### **Theoretical background of psychological type**

The MBTI differs from typical trait approaches to personality that measure variation or strength of traits along a continuum. The MBTI test construction focuses instead on sorting respondents into one or the other of the four theoretical bipolar categories; measurement of the strength of preferences is subordinate to sorting into "true" type categories. It is common practice in the type community to refer to the polarities with a single letter; the letters in standard use are not necessarily the first letter of the polar name. The first dichotomy, extroversion-introversion, pertains to focus of attention, reflecting fundamental attitudes toward internal and external aspects of the world. In extroversion (E), individuals obtain energy from the outer environment; conversely introverts (I) gather energy from their inner world of ideas. The second dichotomy (sensing and intuition) deals with methods of perception or acquisition of information. The sensing (S) process relies on facts obtained from the five senses; intuition (N) is defined as perception beyond the immediate sensory inputs, and instead having a tendency to grasp patterns of a bigger picture. The third dichotomy relates to the judgement process or decision making, with polar opposites of thinking and feeling. Thinking (T) is a method of deciding that uses logic to determine consequences, while feeling (F)

decisions are made on the basis of values; feeling as defined within the type community does not mean emotions.

Jung's work originally posited only the preceding six personality traits. Isabel modified Jung's theory to include a final dichotomy that clarified some prior ambiguity related to interactions among preferences in the mental functions. The final scale (judgement and perception) pertains to an attitude or orientation for dealing with the external world and involves two previous scales. The attitude of judgement (J) relates to the decision making scale of either thinking or feeling. Individuals with a J propensity prefer to live in a planned, organized fashion; for such individuals, decisions are relatively easy to make. The perception process refers back to the second scale of acquiring information (either sensing or intuition). A preference for perception (P) involves a tendency to seek information, rather than control or act on the information. This individual may be more likely to postpone decisions.

By definition, an individual tends to prefer one pole for each of the four dimensions to the other pole, and the intent is to sort individuals into types, rather than to measure traits. Jung and Myers believed that type does not change, although the self-report of it might change, as individuals focus on developing different mental processes at various stages in life. Preferences are viewed as inborn, but one's environment at any point throughout life can change, supporting or negating one's preference. The four preferences combine and interact to yield 16 possible combinations of type, each denoted by the preferred letter of each dichotomy.

Acknowledging the difficulty of remembering 16 types, Isabel Myers developed a "type table" device to view types in relation to one another (see Table I). The table format is a four-by-four matrix of 16 cells; this standard framework is the preferred method of reproducing sample results for groups.

One advantage of a type table is that the arrangement enables viewers to observe predefined patterns. For example, the rows of the type table enable "decisive" (J) introverts and extroverts on the top and bottom rows to be easily distinguished from "adaptable" (P) introverts and extroverts in the middle rows (Myers and McCaulley, 1985). Another interesting pattern is the assemblage of preferences of the four TJ types (the four corners of Table I) and the FP types (the center four cells of Table I) yields instant recognition and implications of the different groups. Juxtapose the "tough minded executives" (TJ) so typically found in business next to "gentle types" (FP) who seek harmony (Myers and McCaulley, 1985). For team initiatives, this contrast suggests these types should purposely be blended in order to create a strong team. The four quadrants of the type table distinguish the innovators (thoughtful - IN and

**Table I.**  
A type table showing  
the customary  
placement of the 16  
MBTI types

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ

action-oriented – EN) from the realists (thoughtful – IS and action-oriented – ES). Identification of patterns using a type table is beneficial for observing group interactions. Temperament is a personality typing structure that yields a psychological type similar to the MBTI, but is only indirectly related to Jung's work (Keirse, 1998). The four temperament patterns are easily recognized groupings on a type table, which allows researchers and trainers to draw insights from the separate stream of temperament literature.

Type theory is so rich with insights that using just parts of the total type results can be a beneficial lens for an organization. The actual four-letter type (example ENTP) is most useful to the individual for the self-knowledge that it can provide. Research over the years has yielded strong evidence that individuals often self-select into certain occupations that correspond with their psychological type. Self-selection is observable in sample distributions when larger than typical percentages are present in a given cell within the matrix, as specified earlier with the dominance of TJ types in business settings. However, type is not deterministic and has no implications for competence or capabilities in a chosen career path, but is useful instead to examine career interest tendencies. It is considered unethical to use MBTI results for hiring an employee or considering an employee for a promotion. For individuals already within established careers, type has job design implications. Individuals with increased awareness of their preferences may choose to restructure schedules, tasks, methods of communication, and work interactions in meaningful ways. For example, if an introverted individual has an upcoming speech before a large audience, the individual knows in advance the energy this will take and can plan accordingly.

### **Relating the four mental functions to organizational change**

The term "function" is used to describe two of the bipolar scales of the MBTI. One scale relates to perception and information gathering (sensing and intuition); the other scale pertains to the subsequent judging process of coming to conclusion (thinking and feeling). Knowledge of the four functions, a small part of the results provided by the MBTI, yields several applications in integrating type with organizational change.

One of the four functions is dominant within an individual profile, revealing the individual's favored process; the dominant function leads and the second preferred function (known as the auxiliary) helps out. Individuals enjoy using their dominant function, becoming experienced and developed in its use. Because of the polarity inherent in each dichotomy and the need for balance, the "helping" auxiliary is always formed in the dichotomy that the dominant is not in. For example, if the dominant process is a judging one (i.e. T or F), the auxiliary will be perceptive (i.e. S or N), as either sensing or intuition can supply sound material for judgement. If the dominant process is perceiving, the judging functions of thinking or feeling "give continuity of aim" (Myers, 1980, p. 13). Consequently, the dominant and auxiliary functions allow perception and judgement to complement one

another. Although Jung specified the role of the auxiliary, he showed the dominant and auxiliary processes only, with a sharp emphasis on extroverted and introverted forms, and he provided eight descriptions of theoretically pure types. Myers clarified that the dominant and auxiliary processes are used differently by introverts and extroverts, with the dominant function being used in the preferred world (for extroverts the preferred world is the outer, for introverts the preferred world is the inner). For extroverts, their dominant process is visible to the outside world; for introverts their dominant process is saved for the inner world. Accordingly, introverts are more likely underestimated in casual contact situations as they are exhibiting primarily their auxiliary function. Myers split each of Jung's eight types into two, which yielded 16 types: instead of Jung's introverted thinker, she proposed an introverted thinker with sensing and an introverted thinker with feeling. The auxiliary function provides the necessary balance enabling the individual to adapt to both inner and outer worlds. The two remaining functions are referred to as tertiary and inferior functions.

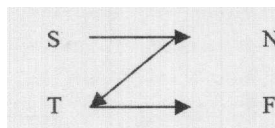
Knowledge about the dominant mental functions has several relevant implications to change efforts. Ideally employees should be allowed to work from their point of strength, or dominant function. In addition, for change efforts relying on teams, composition of team membership should reflect a balance including all four dominant functions, if feasible. Finally, recognition of the special value of the intuitive function in times of change is merited; this is attributable to the intuitive individual's strong preference for vision, orientation to the future, and imagination of endless possibilities. Dominant intuitive types are the individuals who are most likely to enjoy brainstorming sessions.

A second application of knowledge of the mental function to organizational change issues relates to understanding the inferior function or shadow. Jung used the term shadow as an archetype that covered more than the inferior function, although he directly addressed the inferior function as the "Achilles' heel of even the most heroic consciousness" (Jung, 1959, p. 237). The inferior function is the least used and trusted of the functions; it is largely unconscious, and is triggered by fatigue, illness, stress, and alcohol or mind-altering drugs (Quenk, 1996). Each type has a different experience of stress: often stress is associated with lack of balance related to the overuse of the dominant preference (for example a dominant intuitive type so engrossed with possibilities to the detriment of handling their physical needs associated with their inferior sensing function). Because it is not developed, when the inferior function appears, it is typically very childish. It is reported to appear in important transitional periods in life, such as graduation or changes in marital status. With respect to issues relating to organizational change, the inferior is especially relevant as the inexperience and innocence associated with this function, if managed, can hold the key to innovative solutions to work or life problems, when all

the more orthodox solutions have failed (Quenk, 1993). An inferior function experience can generate appreciation for parts of the self previously taken for granted. The inferior function is attached to our less preferred attitude; i.e. for introverts, the inferior function is extroverted and vice versa. The inferior function is sometimes referred to as a blind spot for an individual; the individual is unconscious of being under its influence; now couple this blind spot with the activation of the less preferred attitude. While the experience of being "in the grip" of the inferior function is uncomfortable, it aids the psyche in achieving self-regulation; Jung saw it as a link to unconscious knowledge providing transformative capability (Quenk, 1996). People do not typically understand their own or others' inferior function episodes, and the alarm associated with the strangeness can force reexamination of the self in an attempt to return to equilibrium. An "in the grip" episode ranges from minutes to weeks, but when it has run its course, a process of self-regulation utilizes the other functions in attempting to re-achieve balance. The tertiary function is activated first, and increased energy is provided to the auxiliary function which helps as a bridge to link back to the more centered dominant function (Quenk, 1993, p. 59). As individuals mature and learn from such powerful experiences, they are more likely in daily life to strive for balance of all the functions.

A final integration of the knowledge of mental functions and organizational change relates to the zigzag model originally developed in conjunction with type in educational settings (Lawrence, 1982), that was subsequently adapted to use for general problem solving issues (see Figure 1). The zigzag model uses the four functions, with each bipolar pair arranged in the framework of the letter Z. The information gathering pair (sensing and intuition) is arranged at the top extreme ends of the Z and judging process pair (thinking and feeling) at the bottom.

Each person has a preference for two of these functions, which are used when solving problems or making decisions. The idea is that rather than being limited to only two functions, a focused zigzag process along the Z will force thinking about the problem with a purposeful balance. Each of the functions adds beneficial elements to problem solving. Sensing is about fact gathering, intuition allows the brainstorming of possibilities, thinking weighs the pros and cons, while feeling looks at the impact on individuals involved. Without awareness of the purposeful zigzag, individuals may identify and cope with a problem using only their dominant and auxiliary function. Organizations in the midst of change are advised to instruct members to attempt to use this model consciously to ensure that representation of the four functions is encouraged, not silenced.



**Figure 1.**  
The zig-zag model

### **Implications of opposites for organizational change**

Jung offered his explanation of psychological type primarily for the self-development of individuals. Isabel Myers is said to have "democratized psychological type" by making Jung's work understandable and accessible in the aim of achieving "constructive use of differences" (Myers, 2001). One area that type knowledge can aid in organizations undergoing change is related to individuals' increased needs for communication. Differences inherent in opposite preferences yield insight that all types do not desire communication of a uniform sort. Extroverts, for example, typically prefer to listen and talk about forthcoming changes while introverts prefer written communications that can be studied in privacy. Thinking types prefer logical analysis, while feeling types desire information about the impact on people. Sensing types want the facts and tend to relate to past practicalities; intuitives desire an emphasis on future vision. Judging types have little room for flexibility and desire closure, while perceiving types prefer communication before any final decisions are made.

Isabel's understanding of the use of opposites in managing conflict was expressed in her writing: "When good will is in short supply, the conflict of opposites can be serious" (Myers and Myers, 1980, p. 217). Her continued discussion of acknowledging differences by using an analogy of two characters, Smith and Jones, remains appropriate in today's time of organizational change. "Disagreement suddenly becomes less irritating when Smith recognizes that it would hardly be normal for Jones to agree . . . Smith needs to keep one hard fact in mind. Jones is not merely weak where Smith is strong: Jones is also strong where Smith is weak" (Myers and Myers, 1980, p. 217). This case exhibits her theme of the "constructive use of differences". The following example of tension arising from opposite preferences in organizations pertains to the judging and perceiving preferences. Judging types are seen by perceiving types as rushing too quickly to conclude a decision involving changes within an organization, even before the information has been fully gathered, analyzed, and discussed. In turn, perceiving types are often a source of frustration for judging types during meetings, as judging types resent bringing up issues for further discussion that they had assumed were closed matters. These opposites can benefit from a reminder of Myers' lesson of Smith and Jones.

Type research indicates an educated guess can be made about those individuals who will embrace or be most resistant to change. One lens of type patterns is the four temperaments, which have been identified over 25 centuries: guardians (SJ), idealists (NF), artisans (SP), and rationals (NT) (Keirse, 1998). Temperament theory, measured with a different instrument, builds on theory that recognizes these four patterns; temperament also yields 16 types labeled in the same manner as the MBTI. The temperament that usually resists change is the guardian. Guardians are loyal individuals to organizations, with a strong desire to preserve the status quo. Guardians will work within change processes, but prefer a structured approach. Each

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temperament brings a strength to the change process in the workplace: NF – with promoting and training individuals, NT – with designing and planning, SJ – with administering and servicing, and SP – with producing and performing (Berens, 2000).

Temperament is not the only lens with which to view resistance to change, as any individual is likely to resist change, if not informed and included in the processes. A relevant insight from temperament theory pertains to the four core needs that underlie the 16 types. These needs include the following for each temperament: membership and belonging for guardians (SJ), meaning and significance for idealists (NF), freedom to act on impulse for artisans (SP), and competence and mastery for rationals (NT) (Berens, 2000). Individuals are energized and functioning when these core needs are met, and when the core needs are not met, it is like “psychological death” (Berens, 2000, p. 6). Unattended and unrecognized needs are a source of stress for individuals attempting to respond to changing situations; awareness is a first step toward understanding individuals of another temperament. To combat resistance to change, managers should consider the basic needs inherent in the members represented; type and temperament can lend insight in attempting to meet member needs, and eliminating unnecessary dysfunctional behavior.

### **Type-related organizational change initiatives**

Years ago, a random survey of MBTI practitioners indicated the highest interest among 15 workshop topic areas in applying type concepts to the areas of management training/staff development and organizational development (Sample and Hoffman, 1986). These results indicate a natural extension of existing type knowledge into the area of organizational change as respondents noted their training had previously emphasized communication style, group dynamics and process, learning styles, and career choices.

When asked what each preference needs during organizational change, over 2,000 participants of type workshops indicated their opinions. The responses indicate polarities such as “completion – get the change in place” (J) compared to “an open-ended plan” (P) and “time to talk about what is going on” (E) compared to “time alone to reflect on what is going on” (I) (Kirby *et al.*, 1998). Derived from this work is a useful checklist for leaders in organizations, with at least five categorized responses for each of the eight preferences.

Not only has type knowledge been applied beyond Jung’s intended use for self-discovery to teams, the use of type in organizational development has yielded an instrument to assess an organization’s type in a similar way that the MBTI assesses the individual’s (Bridges, 1992). The personality of an organization is referred to as organizational character, and related interventions make extended use of type jargon and metaphors. Three contributions derived from an understanding of organizational character include understanding what specific help an organization needs to capitalize on and compensate for, looking for development insights in the organization’s



particular point of the life cycle, and understanding the sources of resistance (Bridges, 1992).

No discussion of change in organizations is complete without acknowledging the implications of planned and unplanned change. For unplanned change, the preceding discussion of type concepts relevant to resistance and stress management can be helpful. With planned change, interventions typically use parts of the action research model: preliminary diagnosis, data gathering, data feedback, data exploration, action planning, and action (French and Bell, 1990). One lesson is that individuals well-versed in type will be able to align within the action research process in a way that their strengths can be used. Examples include using the STJ preferences to keep a watch on the clock, relying on thinking types to analyze the data, and benefiting from feeling types' adeptness at building trust in interviews of organizational members. The potential list is endless, with a corresponding flip side of possible type bias inherent in each part of the process (Huszczo, 1997). When working with a change agent, the agent and leaders are advised to be aware of type bias inherent in the leadership and agent, as well as the organization.

Lewin's force-field diagnostic model of dynamic balancing forces (French and Bell, 1990) working in opposite directions is an appropriate vehicle to summarize the "gifts differing" concepts. The opposites inherent in psychological type can be viewed as restraining and driving forces for change, depending on initial conditions of the situation. In change initiatives, linkage of organizational conditions and aforementioned type concepts is appropriate. Type concepts, seen as driving and restraining forces, include the dominant function, inferior function, opposing type preferences, expected resisters, organizational character, communication preferences, members' awareness of type, and distribution of type within teams and throughout the organization.

One prescription related to Jung's legacy of psychological type for change managers in organizations includes two options in the quest for a balance of opposites. "For maximum effectiveness, all types must add to their natural endowment the appropriate use of the opposites, either by using them in other people or by developing a controlled use of them within themselves (Myers and Myers, 1980, p. 120). It is not too late for organizations to undertake either option; Isabel conceded after setting her work aside for years how type development does not proceed according to a timetable as she had previously thought. Instead she acknowledged an ongoing process of type development that "can be achieved at any age by anyone who cares to understand his or her own gifts and the appropriate use of those gifts" (Myers and Myers, 1980, p. 199). The title of her concluding chapter, "Going on from wherever you are" in *Gifts Differing*, while originally directed to individuals, has the following message appropriate for organizations in the face of unparalleled change: "... a clear understanding of the basics of type development will help them go on from there" (Myers and Myers, 1980, p. 199).

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