Chapter I

The Myers-Briggs Personality Types

OVERVIEW

Just over seven years ago, I was on a flight home from the United States. Seated next to me was an IS professional coming to give training sessions on project management software that had recently been purchased by our local hydro-electric utility. Her training included an undergraduate degree in Business (IS major) and a Master’s degree in Management Science. When I asked her if this educational background was adequate for her current job, she replied, almost immediately, that one area that was never covered in her studies was that she “would have to work with such different personalities.” At that point, she had no idea of my occupation, specific interest in IT personalities, or the fact that three days later I would giving a workshop on personality types in IS work to a convention of IS professionals.

Personality can be defined as “a complex set of relatively stable behavioral and emotional characteristics” of a person (Hohmann, 1997). It refers, essentially, to how a person functions in life. Most of us, even without any training in this area, will recognize that the world consists of people of different types. We notice that people of different types will often react differently to the same situation. But when considering personality awareness as a desirable “soft skill” for the IT profession, many of us may stop to wonder. Yes, we may say, there are different types of airline pilots, athletes, and molecular biologists. But, is this an issue that is closely connected to work? It depends on the factors of which the work consists. Most would agree that personality...
relates to communication, learning style, and to what one finds stressful. Yet ability to learn, to communicate, to reason, and to maintain one’s health are key competencies for which recruiters of new IS graduates are looking. Thus, it is postulated that the IT area, and system development (IS) in particular, can benefit significantly from awareness of particular characteristics of different personality types.

The Myers-Briggs Personality Type approach to classifying personalities has been widely accepted and applied in a diversity of fields such as social work, counseling, career planning, and management. It assesses four different dimensions of a person:

1. **Introversion/Extraversion**: relates to *how a person is oriented*, where he/she focuses more easily; within oneself or on other people and the surrounding environment. This dimension is coded I or E respectively.

2. **Intuition/Sensing**: relates to two different *ways of perceiving*, of taking in information. An intuitive person focuses on new possibilities, hidden meanings, and perceived patterns. A sensing person focuses on the real, tangible, and factual aspects. Thus a sensing person can be described as being more practical, whereas an intuitive is more imaginary. This dimension is coded N for Intuitive and S for Sensing.

3. **Thinking/Feeling**: relates to *how a person comes to conclusions*, how a person normally prefers to make judgments. A thinking person employs logical analysis, using objective and impersonal criteria to make decisions. A feeling person, on the other hand, uses person-centered values and motives to make decisions. This dimension is coded T for Thinking and F for Feeling.

4. **Judging/Perceiving**: relates to two essential attitudes of dealing with one’s environment. A judging person prefers to make judgments, or come to conclusions about what one encounters in one’s outer environment. A perceiving person prefers to notice one’s outer environment, while not coming to conclusions or judgments about it. This dimension is coded J for Judging and P for Perceiving.

Thus, we see that the Myers-Briggs personality classification system identifies personality according to four dimensions. Since there are two possibilities for each dimension, there are 16 different Myers-Briggs personality types. Elaborating on the four dimensions, Extraversion/Introversion refers to where a person gets most psychological energy. Sensing/Intuition points out to what a person pays most attention. Thinking/Feeling shows how a
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