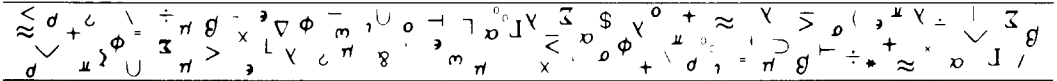


# People Skills: Self-Awareness—A Critical Skill for MS/OR Professionals

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I asked Bob to write a column for *Interfaces* because his experience and background give him a unique perspective on one of the most important issues we face in the practice of management science: understanding and communicating with our customers. In his 20 years as a practitioner he has been director of management sciences and then director of management education for a Fortune 50 company. Currently, he is an organization consultant, educator, writer, and speaker. He knows both the technical side of management science, where we TIMS/ORSA members are strong, and the human relations side, where we are weak. His columns will address ways we can improve upon this weakness.

This column is, for me, an auspicious start. After receiving it but before reading it, I returned home from school with a copy in my briefcase and found my wife reading a book called *Type Talk*. I thought she was reading something on desktop publishing. As I walked over to her, she gave me a sly look and said, "How would you like to take a test?" I agreed, and lo and behold I took an abbreviated version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, described in this column, with my answers repeatedly drawing sidelong glances and the response "interesting." On looking up the results, we found out that I am the classic absent-minded professor who occasionally gets on a high horse. Given my wife's laughter on the precision of this assessment, I know all of us can benefit from Bob's insights.

—Fred Murphy

**W**e all know that to be successful as MS/OR professionals we need the skills to enable us to work effectively with people individually and in groups. Many

of us who were technically trained find it difficult to acquire these skills. Why? First, because such skills are less concrete than our technical skills. Second, because we

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typically don't know where to go to learn them. Third, because—whether we admit it or not—learning them will take us out of our comfort zone. I have 20 years of experience in management and consulting. I offer my perspective in this and future columns on the skills that I have found to be critical to my success and to that of other MS/OR practitioners in dealing with people.

The skills needed to deal effectively with people fall into four general categories: personal, interpersonal, group facilitation, and change management. Personal skills help you to understand yourself better and to bring more of your innate ability to your work. Interpersonal skills help you to interact effectively with other individuals. Group facilitation skills enable you to help collections of individuals, such as management teams and task forces, to work together better. Change management skills help you to understand the nature of change and to facilitate change in individuals, groups, and organizations.

Developing a solid grasp of the behavioral theories and participative processes used in working with people is essential to success. However, I agree with those experts [Phillips 1987] who contend that developing yourself as a person is even more essential. You—not the theory, process, or for that matter, the model, tool, or computer technology—are the principal instrument of change in any intervention, be it at work, in your community, or at home.

### **Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness involves knowing how your values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and preferences affect your behavior. One excellent way to become more self-aware

is to understand the implications of your MBTI type (profile). Kroeger [1987] described the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as a revolutionary human development tool because it “makes easily comprehensible the seemingly random, often baffling behavioral patterns of ourselves and others that contribute to the success or failure of our daily interactions” (p. 165).

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The MBTI type is a composite of an individual's preference for action along four dimensions: (1) extroversion/introversion (E/I), (2) sensing/intuition (S/N), (3) thinking/feeling (T/F), and (4) judging/perceiving (J/P) as measured by the answers to an inventory of questions. For example, the MBTI type of the archetypical scientist is INTJ. That is, scientists score high on introversion (the tendency to focus inwardly); on intuition (the ability to see the big picture and grasp overall patterns); on thinking (the tendency to make decisions based on analysis and logic); and on judging (the desire to plan and to seek closure by making decisions). (In the context of the MBTI, the term *judging* does not mean being judgmental.) In contrast, people whose MBTI type is ESFP prefer to focus on the outer world of things and people; to rely on concrete, sensory data; to make decisions based primarily on their impact on people; and to live life spontaneously. The ESFP person is often the life

of the party. INTJ and ESFP are two of the 16 MBTI types.

According to Keirsey and Bates [1984], about 75 percent of the general population are extroverts; 25 percent are introverts. Likewise, 75 percent prefer sensing to intuition as a means of collecting data for decision making. Fifty percent prefer thinking to feeling, and 50 percent prefer judging to perceiving. Thus, 56 percent of the general population are extroverted sensing types (ESXX), and they outnumber the introverted intuitive types (INXX) nine to one.

A knowledge of personality types is helpful in understanding individuals' behavior, their learning styles, and their leadership styles. MBTI-based research also provides insights into childhood development; the choice of a suitable career and, if appropriate, college major; as well as the choice of a mate [Myers 1980]. Because of their applied focus, I have found the study of these areas of MBTI-based research to be fascinating and valuable.

"The strength and significance of the MBTI lies in its positive, affirming approach to differences among people. The more one becomes aware of differences, the more one can constructively use them"

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[Kroeger 1987, p. 177]. Most people would benefit greatly from understanding the characteristics of their MBTI types and those of people with whom they often disagree. As an example, I will describe the principal differences between people

whose MBTI type is INTJ and those whose MBTI type is ENFP.

Imagine that you are a senior management scientist who has been assigned to a very important cross-organizational task force. You are terse, direct, very bright, technically competent, highly analytical, very comfortable with hard numbers, and able to come to decisions quickly. Your MBTI type is INTJ. At the first group meeting, you learn that a senior human resource consultant is also to play a key role on the task force. Based on your experiences with personnel people, what is your initial reaction? If you have had problems with them in the past, you may fear that the group will be slowed down frequently by someone who talks too much and says very little, pays too much attention to people's feelings and too little to identifying the facts and accomplishing group tasks, and who can't seem to make up his mind even though he asks lots of questions.

The human resource professional is likely to greet your presence on the task force with some apprehension as well. Based on his experience, he may fear that the group will be prevented from identifying a creative solution by someone who often presents ideas or opinions at inappropriate times or in too critical a manner, is impatient with the group process and insensitive to people's feelings, insists on dealing strictly with the facts, and who jumps to conclusions and tries to railroad others into agreeing. The human resource professional has a way with words, is very bright, highly visual, very comfortable with people and soft data, and prefers to explore a problem from all angles before making a decision. In other words, his

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MBTI type is ENFP.

Given this situation, what do you do? Is conflict between you and the human resource person inevitable? Can you find a way to value and use each others' differences constructively in support of team (task force) goals given what you know about your respective MBTI types? I certainly hope so; for, in my experience,

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### Can you find a way to value and use each others' differences constructively?

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groups need the positive contributions of each type of person to operate effectively. Most team members trust people who are ENFP types, appreciate their interpersonal skills, and readily follow their suggestions about processes to increase participation among themselves as a team and among employees in subsequent change efforts. Most team members respect people who are INTJ types and readily adopt their ideas about how to define and solve problems. But this only happens if these two key types of people choose to collaborate rather than to compete.

#### Conclusion

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is widely used by counselors, psychologists, human resource professionals, and organization consultants who have been trained to administer and interpret the scores from the inventory. If you would like to read more about the MBTI, I recommend the excellent books by Keirsey and Bates [1984] and Myers [1980].

I hope that this information on the development of self-awareness proves useful

to you, and I look forward to your feedback and questions. In the next column, I will deal with the critical interpersonal skill of effective communication.

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