



Your PM Personality —and Why It Matters

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Personality type doesn't sound like a topic with much relevance to program management. Most of my DAU students in the program management (PM) career path don't think a lot about the impact of their personality or management style until they begin to have problems on the job. Then it slowly dawns on them that their personality may be part of the problem as well as the way forward to a solution.

Effectiveness in the acquisition workplace requires much more than just knowing what to do. You have to be able to apply your knowledge in a variety of complex situations where "by the book" solutions often fail. This gives rise to the "knowing-doing gap" or the inability to translate subject-matter expertise into workplace results.

As a manager, your results depend much less on what you know and do, and much more on what your team knows and can do. Therein lies the link between personality and results. Your personality impacts your management style, and your management style impacts how you interact with your team to achieve results.

Every manager seeks to provide direction and motivation to his or her team, but management style can often get in the way. Every team member is different. Each one has different experiences, skill levels, motivation and different ways (styles) by which they like to be managed. So, effective managers take time to analyze their style

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and the style of each of their team members, and often adapt their style with different team members to get better results.

One tool that has proven quite useful in analyzing people's styles at work is the Myers-Briggs (personality) Type Indicator (MBTI). This assessment can be done in a few minutes online or with a self-score instrument in class and is quite easy to understand when presented by a trained facilitator. In many of our classes, most students have already taken the MBTI but have not had enough training or practice in how to use it.

Figure 1. MBTI® Type Table of PM Attributes

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| ISTJ responsible structured consistent | ISFJ gracious dependable low-key | INFJ insightful caring inner-drive | INTJ thoughtful independent focused |
| ISTP practical immediate calm in crisis | ISFP easy going supportive quiet action | INFP idealistic value-driven facilitative | INTP conceptual adaptive challenger |
| ESTP action oriented risk taker negotiator | ESFP engaging resourceful spontaneous | ENFP energetic inclusive idea oriented | ENTP freethinker theoretical natural debater |
| ESTJ decisive systematic accountable | ESFJ debonair organized traditional | ENFJ enthusiastic persuasive team builder | ENTJ strategic commanding results focused |

Note: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Trust in the United States and other countries.

MBTI is composed of four basic personality preferences that relate well to workplace activities. The first two preferences, called the core functions, deal with how we gather information and then make decisions based on this information. Sensors (S) prefer to take their information from what they see in the present with their five "senses"—information they often capture in great detail. Those who are iNtuitors (N) look more at how the information fits into a "big picture" or what future possibilities it suggests. With the data gathered, thinkers (T) analyze it logically to make the most objective decision, while feelers (F) include the impact on the people involved to achieve a more harmonious and subjective decision.

The remaining two preferences, the first and last letters in your four-letter personality Type, are called the "attitudes" since they amplify the two core functions discussed above. The first letter of your MBTI Type has to do with where you get your energy. Extroverts (E) get their energy from being in the external world of people and activities, while Introverts (I) are more comfortable reflecting in their inner world of thoughts and ideas. The fourth and last letter of your MBTI Type indicates which of the core functions you display to the outside world. If your last letter is J, your Judging or decision-making function is what you show to the world. You appear to others as structured and decisive. If on the other hand, your last letter is P, your Perceiving or data gathering function is what you show to others. You appear open and flexible since as a perceiver you always are looking for new information.

With MBTI, it is important to understand the concept of preference. While Type theory says we are born with a preference for one letter in each of these pairs (S-N, T-F, E-I & J-P), our day-to-day behavior reflects a balancing act that includes all

eight letters. We choose our behavior, so even the most introverted type still must engage with the outside world and talk to people, and the off-the-wall extrovert still needs some time alone to reflect. The key here is to find the right balance between your individual preferences and the demands created by the situations you face each day.

The other key concept in Type theory is self-validation. The results of your MBTI assessment are really just a working hypothesis, which you must validate. In other words, you decide which of the four-letter Types (see Figure 1 Type Table) is the best fit for you. This is often the Type from your assessment report, but you still must decide and validate ("take ownership" of) your Type.

Many potential insights can come from MBTI, but they all require spending some time reflecting on the Type you validate and how that Type has helped and hindered you in your current and past assignments. For example, as an ENFJ, I was great at putting together a people-centered vision as a DAU department chair, a role I played in two departments for more than 10 years. I wasn't so great at keeping track of the details such as spell checking my slides and following up on action items I had assigned to subordinates. I was very strong on empowering my faculty across the board, until I discovered that many of them didn't want to be empowered ("just tell me what to do"). I was always interested in talking with my team to the point where my two administrative assistants actually asked me to stop coming into their office every 15 minutes with a different task (both were introverts). They took our MBTI team-building off-site session to heart and actually learned how to manage their boss (me). The point here is that MBTI really helped me and my team work more effectively. Reflecting on my MBTI Type eventually convinced me that my best role at DAU was

not as a department chair but back in the classroom interacting with our customers (students).

So, what does MBTI mean to you? You actually can explore that question after you have completed an MBTI assessment and reflect on your four-letter type. Here a few questions which may prove helpful. How does my type play out in my current job environment? What type or behaviors do I need to demonstrate on my current program to maximize our probability of success? What are the implications of my type for future career opportunities? How does my type play out at home with my family and friends? This list of questions can go on from here.

Let's take the type we most frequently find in our DAU PM courses, namely ISTJ. This Type derives from and is ideally suited for the Department of Defense, military, program management, and science and engineering cultures which make up defense acquisition. But this type also has (as do all types) some rather glaring weaknesses, especially as you move up in the organization from doing program management to leading a program or organization. Building on the ISTJ baseline of being responsible, structured and consistent, an ISTJ PM also needs the flexibility to behave at the opposite end of each of these preferences as illustrated in Figure 2 and discussed below.

While the "I" program managers think and reflect carefully (often in the comfort of their closed-door offices) before taking action, they need E behavior to be the visible spokespersons for their program and get out and "manage by walking around" their office environments. While Ss take in and sort

vast amounts of project data, Ns help us see where that data take us in the future. While Ts make clear and well-organized decisions, Fs make sure the people can "buy in" to these decision and are not lost in the process. While Js make sure the program runs on schedule and key deliverable dates are met, Ps stay open to new and possibly better ways of meeting or exceeding these requirements.

Figure 2. Type Development Challenge

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| I think and reflect, then act | → | E visible spokesperson for the team |
| S gather the real-world data | → | N look to the future (plan & vision) |
| T make fact-based decisions | → | F stand up for the people you lead |
| J Be decisive, reach closure | → | P stay open to new ideas |

It has become apparent to me that the more you can integrate across each of the preferences, the better program manager and leader you will be. Instead of someone who is "locked in" to your box on the Type Table, you can be more of a situational leader, not with your preferences but with the behaviors you choose to employ. Your better self-management and adaptive behaviors can end up being a gift to you, your people and your program. 

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