Understanding personality type: Introduction

Anita Houghton
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Understanding personality type can be beneficial to medics and their patients. Anita Houghton kicks off our series by explaining what personality testing is all about.

Earlier this year an interesting event took place in London. It was supported by Peter Lees, director of clinical leadership at the NHS Leadership Centre, and organised by a group of people who were keen to improve the NHS and medical education through increased knowledge of psychological type, and brought together 60 influential people from UK medical schools, trusts, deaneries, and other health related organisations. The aim of the event was to explore the various ways in which the Myers Briggs type indicator (MBTI) could be used to help health professionals in their work.

The architect of the event, Carol Parkes, challenged the audience to consider the diversity agenda in the health service. Although most would agree that the NHS has a long way to go in terms of achieving a diverse workforce, few would deny that it is a worthy aim, not only in terms of equity, but also the broader benefits to the service and its users. The United Kingdom now has policies to improve equal opportunities for people of different race, sex, physical ability, and sexual orientation, and in the next couple of years we expect to see legislation against ageism. So what about personality? Do we think that people of different personality are treated equally? Do we guard against recruiting certain types and excluding others? Do we protect different types against discrimination once they are in the workforce? Or are we missing out on huge potential by failing to do these things?

Reasons to be nervous

Mention personality types and people get nervous. Instantly there is a fear that if we start answering questionnaires on what we are like, all the careful work that we have put into our outward appearances will be uncovered. And if it is not a fear of exposure that besets people, it is a fear of being boxed in: I'm an individual, how can I be put into a box with a whole bunch of other people? they cry.

Yet of all the techniques that I use to help people understand the achievements and challenges in their working lives, increasing their awareness of their personal style and preferences is one of the most powerful. If people can realise the importance of understanding and valuing what they are like, it is a short step to understanding and valuing others. The net result is likely to be higher productivity, better working relationships, and happier more fulfilled working lives. Surely that would be good for the NHS, its staff, and the people it serves?

Our series

The purpose of this series of articles is twofold.

- To help you explore your own personal style, and how it can be used to improve your working life
To show how all preferences and types are important and valuable and how any group of people—whether it be an organisation, a team, or a family—can benefit from having a diversity of styles.

An introduction to Jungian typology The MBTI instrument originated from a theory of psychological type developed by the psychiatrist Carl Jung in the early 1900s. Four important ways in which people differ.

The beauty of the MBTI is that it provides a simple framework to describe four important ways in which people differ, while allowing room for great depth and complexity. These four ways are:

- Where we prefer to focus our attention: either in the outside world (extraversion) or in our heads (introversion)
- The way we prefer to take in and process information: either literally and stepwise (sensing) or generally and in patterns (intuition)
- The kinds of information we prefer to prioritise in decision making: either logical and objective (thinking) or value based and people oriented (feeling)
- Our preferred style of living and working: either scheduled and organised (judging) or spontaneous and flexible (perceiving)
**Principles**

The principles behind the MBTI are:

- Only the individual can decide on his/her type
- Type describes preferred styles, not abilities. We can all learn non-preferred behaviours.
- All types are valuable

But is it valid?

Medics are naturally sceptical, trained to trust nothing short of a large randomised controlled trial before accepting any piece of information. Although the MBTI has been validated extensively,1 what convinces more than any well designed study is experiencing the power of type first hand. To take an analogy, is it necessary to have a trial of dominant handedness to be convinced that we write better with one hand than the other?

**Exploring your own type: a taster**

In this series I will be describing each pair of preferences in some detail, including:

- The main characteristics of people with each preference
- Their special contributions in the workplace and their challenges
- The problems that can arise from difference
- How to maximise your contribution at work and minimise your stress

To start thinking about type, though, have a look at the pairs of statements describing how you like to work, and place a cross at the point that best describes how drawn you are to each statement (fig 1).

You will probably relate to both statements to some degree, but be drawn, however slightly, more to one than the other. Analyse your results (fig 2).
Over the next few months you will have the chance to test out your initial assessments and see what it means for you and your career.
Understanding personality type:

Extraversion and introversion

In the second article in our series, Anita Houghton asks you to consider where you focus your attention--inside or out.

I will be examining each of the four pairs of preferences measured by the Myer Briggs type indicator (extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving) in some detail. It is important to remember that in practice these preferences coexist, and any examples given will inevitably include expression of more than one preference.

Picture this

You are arriving early for the first day of a new job. On entering the department, you notice a quiet man collecting a pile of notes and making for one of the rooms off the reception area. His eyes alight on you briefly, as he does so he nods and smiles briefly--long enough to be polite but not to encourage. He vanishes. You look around for someone who might help you, and you notice a woman behind the reception desk. You move towards her, and before you can speak she beams at you and asks if she can help. You explain who you are and she beams another welcome and proceeds to tell you who you should see, when they are likely to arrive, where the toilets are, how to get lunch, who your secretary will be, what the boss is like, and where she went for her holidays.

Introvert and extravert

These are caricatures of the first two preferences measured by the Myer Briggs type indicator, introversion and extraversion, and the behaviours are indications of where these two people like to focus their attention. When you are ambling along deep in thought, not noticing the people you pass, or the noise of the traffic--when nothing short of a cloudburst would draw your attention to what is around you--you are focusing on your internal world (introversion).

When you are chatting with people, watching events, engaging in a group activity, or noticing your environment, you are focusing on your external world (extraversion).

We all focus attention in both places, many times a day, but we have a preference for one or the other, and we tend to be energised by that place, and drained by the other (box 1).

Box 1: Character preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extroversion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Outgoing and sociable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prefer action to contemplation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tend to speak as thoughts are forming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wide circle of friends and contacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• May find it hard to focus
  
  **Introversion**
  • Quiet and reflective
  • Prefer reading and reflection to action
  • Tend to think carefully before speaking
  • Small circle of close friends
  • Work alone contentedly

**Preferences**

People who prefer introversion tend to be reserved reflective people who like to think things through before they speak or act, who prefer to spend time with small numbers of people they know, and who find it easy to concentrate on solitary tasks. Their best work often takes place in their heads, and they feel energised by periods of solitary concentration and drained by meeting new people and multiple activities. After a day of extraverting, which they may well enjoy if it does not happen too frequently, their idea of relaxation is likely to include solitude.

People who prefer extraversion tend to be the outgoing action oriented people in life—the ones who take initiative in groups and at work, who are at ease with new people, and who verbalise their thoughts as they are forming in their minds. Their best work is most often done on the outside, and they are energised by active people filled days and drained by days sitting at a desk, studying, or writing a report. After a day of introverting, their idea of relaxation is likely to involve people or activities.

**Extraversion and introversion at work**

Like any job or profession, medicine requires all preferences, but some jobs will contain more of certain kinds of activities than others, and the balance between these, and how they match with your own preferences, plays a huge part in your effectiveness and happiness at work (box 2).

**Box 2: Activities related to medicine requiring extraversion and introversion**

**Introversion**

• Focusing on individual patients
• Thinking through clinical problems
• Examining data and specimens
• Writing reports, papers, or letters
• Private study, reading

**Extraversion**

• Seeing multiple patients
• Networking with colleagues
• Public speaking or teaching
• Committee work
• Team working

**Where differences cause problems**
We are all different, and although variety is what makes life so interesting and exciting, sometimes differences can cause problems. This is especially so when people do not understand type, and every preference has the potential to bemuse and infuriate someone of a different type. You only have to look at the negative connotations that extraversion and introversion have acquired over the past hundred years to understand that.

An extravert's view of an introvert

To an extravert, introverts may be totally unfathomable. Why on earth do they not speak? Why do I feel like a gabbling idiot when they are around? What are they thinking? In particular, what are they thinking about you? You spend a bit of time with them, and at the end you realise they now know everything about you, and you know as little about them as when you first met.

Perhaps partly because of this discomfort, the word "introverted" has gained all manner of negative connotations over the years, coming to be associated with personality disorders and other forms of mental illness. Psychiatrists, interested in pathology, have tended to measure levels of extraversion and introversion on a scale of "sociability." In other words, being sociable (that is, extravert) is good, while being unsociable (that is, introvert) is bad.

An extravert to an introvert

To an introvert, on the other hand, extraverts can be maddeningly noisy. They come out with half-baked ideas, take up all the airtime, and seem to have difficulty sitting still. If they would only shut up for two seconds, they think, I might have a chance to give them the solution, idea, or insight that I've worked out.
Introverts find it difficult to understand that when an extravert says something, they are sometimes just thinking aloud, and use the same quality criteria as they would to assess something they themselves have taken hours, days, or even months to think through. Similarly, extraverts tend to ascribe the weight to the utterances of an introvert that they would to their own, unaware of how long the thoughts have been incubating. As for introversion, extraversion has suffered from negative associations over the years (probably at the hands of introverts)—with noisiness, brashness, and inability to listen.

**How type can help**

One of the main strengths of the Myer Briggs type indicator is that it is not concerned with pathology but with normality in the most positive sense, and when you understand type some helpful things begin to happen. The first is that you realise that the other person is not difficult, they are just different. They are not being deliberately annoying—they are just like that. Next you realise that you might be just as annoying to them. Finally you realise that their annoying habits may actually be quite useful (box 3). Box 4 gives some tips on how to cope with the things you don't like.

**Box 3: Seeing differences through the lens of type**

**Introverts**
- May be seen as deliberately silent, unnerving
- Could be seen as calm, thoughtful, non-contributory, works out the right things to do

**Extraverts**
- May be seen as annoying, noisy, preventing me from speaking
- Could be seen as open, friendly,. get things moving

**Box 4: How to cope with the bits you do not like**

- Get help from someone who does--If you're an extravert and have done a piece of research with an introvert, they will be only too delighted to analyse the data and write it up, especially if you did all the wheeling and dealing to get it off the ground, and offer to tot it round the journals
- Do your worst tasks at the times of the day you feel strongest--The temptation is to put them off (for example, phone calls for introverts, report writing for extraverts). until you are tired, and the result is that they never get done
- Do the hard things regularly but in small doses--If you put them off--they accumulate, and nothing is more off putting than having to face a mountain of tasks you find hard. If you have a thesis to write, writing for just half an hour a day will result in a huge amount of text over time. If you need to network, making just one contact a day is not too daunting, but can result in astounding numbers of contacts in just a few weeks.
- Think carefully about applying for jobs ill-suited to your preference, and prepare yourself if you do--If you're an extravert, beware of jobs that involve large amounts of time concentrating on solitary tasks, and if you are an introvert, you may want to take five before applying for a job that involves nothing but committees, public speaking, and travelling to conferences. Everyone can do these jobs, and if you do decide to go for it, you need to prepare yourself
- For introverts in extravert jobs, schedule regular "introvert" time at work--Say a period in the library, breaks in clinics, working from home, or a solitary walk at lunchtime
- For extraverts in introvert jobs--Schedule regular periods of extraverting, say meeting colleagues at lunchtime, joining committees and working groups, going walkabout during breaks.
Understanding personality type: How do you like to take in information?
Sensing and intuition

In the third article of her series, Anita Houghton explains the two different ways in which people take in information and how both kinds of information processing can complement each other.

Some years ago I did an MSc, and the course was taught by a variety of lecturers, two of whom stick out in my memory. The reason I remember these two in particular is that they divided the group so sharply into those that liked one and those that liked the other. The first of these, let's call him David, lectured us on the subject of health economics, and his lectures would start with a title and then take that theme excitedly from one topic to another, pulling in one theory here, another theory there, and ending up with, well, a group of theories, and a group of facts, and some haphazard links between the two. At the end of these lectures, most of us would have a piece of paper with the title at the top, a half written sentence, and absolutely nothing else. The other lecturer, Susan, taught medical sociology. She would take a subject, and then deliver a perfect list of what we needed to know. At the end of these lectures we would have an excellent set of notes, easy to read, easy to learn, and easy to reproduce.

Lecturing styles

One group of students loved David's lectures. They were slightly disappointed to have to buy books to supplement them, but that was easily offset by the sheer exhilaration of hearing him talk, the boundless theories, the different ways of looking at them, and the endless potential for new ideas and possibilities. The other group were bewildered and exasperated by David's lectures. They bemoaned the lack of clarity, the chaotic delivery, and, most of all, the lamentable absence of decent notes at the end of them. They liked Susan's lectures—clear, factual, ordered, and eminently reproducible. The first group also appreciated the good notes, but they were bored, and they often had to borrow other people's notes because their attention had wandered halfway through.

Although I didn't know it at the time, this illustrates perfectly the second set of preferences measured by the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): sensing and intuition (see box 1).

Box 1: Characteristics of people preferring sensing or intuition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like facts and details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like information stepwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intuition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like ideas and patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like information as “big picture”
Trust inspiration

These preferences describe how people prefer to take in information, so learning situations are of special relevance. People who prefer sensing (S) prefer to take in information through their five senses in a stepwise, factual way. They tend to be the grounded people in life who live for the present and can be relied on to provide the facts and practicalities needed to support any venture. People who prefer intuition take in the same information, but they tend, almost instantly, to create patterns and meanings out of that information. They are the imaginative, deductive types who come up with meanings and ideas, and new ways of doing things. If you ask the two types to describe the same object, say a piece of crockery, their descriptions can be so different that you might well wonder if they are looking at the same thing. While the sensing types will give you a description that would allow you to picture the object quite precisely, the intuitive group may not even mention the name of the object, so interested are they in the meanings and associations it has triggered in their minds.

**Sensing and intuition at work**

Certain medicine related activities require sensing and intuition.

**Sensing**

- Taking structured histories
- Following care pathways
- Collecting data for research
- Day to day management

**Intuition**

- Drawing meaning out of histories
- Developing new ways of doing things
- Generating ideas for research
- Strategic management

It's impossible to practise medicine without sensing skills, and it's impossible to practise medicine without using intuition. Every doctor, whatever his or her preference, can do both. We are taught at medical school to take clinical histories and perform examinations in a stepwise, sensing way. We then have to use intuition to pull that information together into a pattern and make a diagnosis. A sensing approach is needed for safe prescribing. An intuitive approach is needed for making sense of odd combinations of symptoms that don't appear in textbooks. A sensing approach is needed for learning from experience, and so building and refining the medical knowledge base. An intuitive approach is needed for experimenting and noticing new patterns that push back the boundaries of that knowledge.
If you prefer sensing and you work in a department where intuition dominates, the focus therefore on theory rather than practicality, the abstract rather than the real, and the generality rather than the specific, you may feel frustrated and unvalued. If you prefer intuition and work in a department where sensing dominates, the lack of enthusiasm for your ideas, the focus on today rather than tomorrow, and detail rather than patterns may leave you feeling frustrated and unvalued. If you relate to either of these, and even if you don't, have a look in the tips box (box 3) for how to cope better at work by using your knowledge of type.

**Box 3: Tips on how to cope with the bits you don't like**

*Get help from someone who does*

If you prefer intuition you may think it unfair to leave the implementation of your ideas to someone else, but many sensing types will be only too happy to do this part of the work, especially if you can help them generate ideas for their research, or draw meaning out of their data. Similarly, intuitives will find it helpful to ask sensing types for help with clinical problems where detail and evidence are important, and they in turn will be useful to sensing types in making sense of unusual and complicated clinical histories.

*Do your worst tasks in small doses at the times of the day you feel strongest*

Every job contains bits you don't like, and the best way to deal with them is to do them little and often, and when you are fresh. If you are a sensing type, do those idea generating tasks, for example, in short bursts at your best time of day, and if you are intuitive, make sure you keep up with those detailed administrative tasks on a regular basis. If you put them off they accumulate, and there's nothing more daunting than the prospect of many hours doing things you hate.

*Think carefully about applying for jobs ill suited to your preference*

If you're a sensing type, beware of jobs that require a lot of "big picture" thinking and focusing on long term solutions. If you are an intuitive, you may want to take your time before applying for a job that requires much detailed attention to set processes. That is not to say anyone is incapable of doing these jobs--we can all learn--but if you do decide to go for one, you need to be prepared, using the tips above.

**Where differences cause problems**
All the preferences have the potential to cause difficulties between those of opposing type, but if there is one pair of preferences that causes more difficulties in communication than any of the others it is sensing and intuition. Sensing types may find intuitives hopelessly impractical, lacking evidence, and always coming up with pie in the sky ideas instead of concentrating on the issues at hand. Intuitives may find sensing types infuriatingly nitpicking, constantly interrupting their wonderful ideas with tedious practicalities. Whereas a sensing person likes to receive instructions in clear, stepwise fashion, intuitives may supply instructions in vague, haphazard ways that are totally incomprehensible to sensing types. Because intuitives like finding their own ways of doing things, they may feel oppressed by the detail showered on them by sensing types. In the describing exercise mentioned earlier, often the intuitives just can't believe how literal the sensing descriptions are, and the sensors think the intuitives are plain barking. Once you understand type, though, these differences become useful (see box 2).

**Box 2: Seeing differences through the lens of type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types who prefer sensing:</th>
<th>Types who prefer intuitive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be seen as nitpicking, unimaginative</td>
<td>May be seen as impractical, imprecise, head in the clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could be seen as practical, good at detail and precision, realistic</td>
<td>Could be seen as good at ideas and theories, strategists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I once had a conversation with a community pharmacist, who told me how much she enjoyed working with her colleague. "You see, I'm not an ideas person," she said, "and Anne is. But she doesn't always know how to put her ideas into practice, and I do."
Understanding personality type: How do you make decisions? Thinking and feeling

In the fourth article of her series, Anita Houghton explains how people prefer to make decisions either on the basis of logical analysis (thinking) or what matters to the people involved (feeling), and how both approaches are needed for good decision making.

There is a group exercise that's great for demonstrating differences in people's decision making processes. Divided into the two preferences, the groups are asked to imagine they are a research team that has recently completed a project. So interesting is the project that they have been invited to present its findings at a conference ... in Barbados. All expenses paid. The trouble is, only one person can go, and the task is for each group to decide who it will be. The first time I tried out this exercise was in a research department, and six people were in the "thinking" group and three in the "feeling" group. The thinking group had their decision in about five minutes. "No problem," they said. "We simply chose the person who is best at presentations." The feeling group took much longer. They agonised and agonised, and when eventually I called time, I saw them drawing straws.

This pair of preferences, the third in the series, which relates to the basis on which people like to make their decisions. We can all use both preferences, and do, but some people prefer to stand outside a situation in order to make a decision. They use logical analysis to work out the advantages and disadvantages of different options; they may be seen as hardheaded but fair, firm but reasonable, and they are said to prefer "thinking."

Others prefer to make their decisions on the basis of their values, and the effect that a decision will have on the people concerned. They are less concerned, one might say, with what is logically correct than with what is important to them and others. Said to prefer "feeling," they may be seen as compassionate and tenderhearted. If asked for a preference between the words "justice" and "mercy," a feeling type is more likely to prefer mercy, and a thinking type justice. Box 1 shows some main characteristics of either types.

**Box 1: Characteristics of people preferring thinking and feeling for decision making**

**Thinking deciders**

- Logical and analytical
- Objective
- Seen as tough minded
• Interested in cause and effect

Feeling deciders

• Interested in effect on people
• Seen as compassionate/tender
• Subjective
• Value driven

In the case of the conference exercise, the thinking group had no problem in making a decision, and they did so in double quick time. The right person to go was obviously the one most competent for the job, and they were totally bemused by, and somewhat derisive about, the feeling group. What on earth could be the problem, and why couldn't these half brains make a decision? The feeling group had had a terrible time. They just couldn't bear the thought of putting one person forward for this wonderful trip while others wanted to go. They tried looking at who wanted to go, who deserved to go, who went last time, and so on. Presentation skills didn't come into it. Failing to find a suitably compelling reason for one to be chosen over another, in the end they drew straws.

The results? Well the feeling team were all happy about their choice, but they didn't know how good the presentation was going to be. The thinking group had made a logical decision, but they hadn't asked anyone about how they felt about it, and it turned out that the person selected had a small baby at home whom they didn't want to leave. Arguably the best decision would have been made if the two groups had put their heads together.

It's important to understand that both these ways of making decisions are rational, they are just based on different priorities and different sets of information, and everybody uses both. Thinking deciders will tend to look objectively at a situation, then consider the people aspects, and then return to the objective information for a final decision. Feeling deciders will tend to consider the effect on people first, then look at the logic, and then return to the feeling information for the final decision. Of the four pairs, this is the only one where there is a gender bias, with around 60% of men preferring thinking, and around 60% of women preferring feeling. The jury is still out as to whether this is an inherent or cultural effect.

Thinking and Feeling at work

Box 2 shows some examples of how the type you are affects the way you work in medicine.

Both preferences are important in medicine (see box 2), and all doctors will use both in their decision making. However, the scientific basis of medicine and the fact that it has traditionally been a male profession, mean that medical culture tends to favour thinking over feeling. In a study of surgical senior house officers, 85% were found to prefer thinking, and in a cohort of medical students 64% preferred thinking.

Box 2: Medicine related activities requiring thinking and feeling

Thinking
This will vary with specialty, of course, there being relatively more feeling decision-makers in general practice, for example, but even where there are more feelers, medical training and practice is such that feelers have to learn to put their feeling preferences to one side for much of the time, and develop their thinking skills. It's hard to say if it is because of this, or because feelers are more likely to be upset if they can't help someone, or if medical realities clash with their values, but Clack found that feelers were more likely than any of the other preferences to report low job satisfaction.\(^3\)

It is not plain sailing for thinkers either, now that there is much greater public demand and expectation for empathy and patient-centred approaches to care. Also the tendency of thinking types to focus on what needs fixing in a situation, rather than what is good about it, may leave them open to accusations of insensitive management or feedback to juniors. Once again, both preferences are essential, both for the competent and sensitive delivery of health services, and the management of staff.

**Seeing differences through the lens of type**

**Thinking**

- May be seen as hardhearted, insensitive, cold
- Could be seen as logical, clear-headed, and willing to make difficult decisions

**Feeling**

- May be seen as soppy, illogical, weak
- Could be seen as kind, sensitive, and good with people

**Where differences cause problems**

Thinking types can be exasperated by what they see as the wishy-washy, touchy-feely approach to problems that feelers seem to have. Why can't they be rational for once? Feelers can be appalled by what they see as the thinker's apparent complete disregard for people's perspectives and feelings. Because of the association of thinking with being male and feeling with being female, these are the battlefields of many a relationship.
As with all the preferences, the trick is understanding difference and using it to your advantage. A surgical trainee came to see me once. A feeling type, he was anxious and depressed about his choice of specialty and was feeling undervalued and incompetent. Once he understood that he was working in a highly thinking culture, and realised that his strength in talking empathetically with patients and relatives was not only valuable but rare in his department, he was able to return to work with a new spring in his step.

**Tips on how to cope with the bits you find hard**

- **Develop your non-preferred skills**—Knowing what you find hard, and why, is an essential first step to doing something about it. If you are a feeling type, try consciously standing back from situations in order to consider your options. If you are a thinking type, try putting yourself in someone else’s shoes when making decisions about them.

- **Get help from someone who finds them easy**—If you are a feeler and you are having problems with making a tough decision, then you may benefit from asking a thinking type for help. If you are a thinking type, and have difficulty dealing with, say, social problems in your clinical work, or even in your personal life, why not ask a feeling type for help or advice? Good quality problem-solving includes attention to all the preferences, so when you are about to make an important or difficult decision, try getting a perspective from other preferences first.

- **Do your toughest jobs when you’re at your best**—If you are a thinking type and have need to get into someone else’s shoes to make a good decision, try to do it when you are fresh. Similarly, for feeling types who have some tough objective analysis to do.

- **Think carefully about applying for jobs ill-suited to your preference**—Knowledge of your type will help you identify these in advance, so if you’re a feeling type, think carefully about applying for jobs that work that require a lot of logical decision-making, or where the culture is predominantly thinking. If you are a thinker, you may want to think carefully before applying for a job where the emphasis is more on dealing with patients’ personal perspectives than objective problem solving.
Understanding personality type: How do you like to live your life?
Judging and perceiving

In the fifth article of her series, Anita Houghton sheds light on how we like to live our lives in the external world, whether organised and scheduled, or spontaneous and flexible.

There were once two administrators who were responsible for supporting a large training programme. Now this programme had grown over the years, and it had reached the stage where there was too much work for two staff, but funding was such that additional help was out of the question. The one administrator coped with the situation by drawing a very clear line around his responsibilities: This is what I do, please don’t ask me to do anything else. This person was very efficient in getting his work done, and whatever his managers asked him to do (within the parameters), they knew it would be done quickly and competently. When it came to new or unscheduled tasks, though, he was very reluctant to take them on, and that meant that the managers tended to ask the other administrator to do those jobs.

Because, you see, the other administrator made no such delineation, and said "yes" to any job that came her way. She was always willing to do anything, and was brilliant in an emergency as she was prepared to drop everything to get a big job done in a hurry. Trouble was, jobs piled up on her desk, and when the managers gave her non-urgent jobs, they never knew when, if ever, they would be done.

**Develop your non-preferred skills**
Perceiving types will often have done a lot of this already, and learning to schedule tasks may be helpful when they find themselves overloaded with work, or not reaching deadlines. Perceiving types also need to learn to say no sometimes. Judging types, on the other hand, will find times when it would be useful for them to be more flexible. When someone asks for an urgent, unscheduled task, try saying ✨yes✨ sometimes. Judging types need to schedule fun, or they will end up having none.

**Get help from others**
If you’re having difficulty acting outside your preferences, find someone with a different style and ask them how they do it. Ask a judging type how they tackle their tasks. Ask a perceiving type how they cope with unscheduled demands. You will learn a lot.

**Do your toughest jobs when you are fresh**
Perceiving types need to do their scheduling, and judging types their flexing, when they are at their best.
Think carefully when applying for jobs requiring an opposite preference
Judging types need to think carefully about specialties where the work is largely unpredictable, or jobs where the workload is so high it is impossible to be sure if you will be able to eat lunch without interruption, or get off home on time. Accident and emergency medicine is the classical perceiving specialty, where everything is an emergency and nothing scheduled. On the other hand, the shift systems that predominate here, where you know exactly when you are working and when you are not, will help judging types to cope. Perceiving types need to think carefully when considering specialties where scheduling and deadlines predominate, for example, routine surgery and outpatient based specialties, and think through how they will cope.

This illustrates the final pair of preferences explained in the series, which relates to how we like to live our lives in the external world. If you are someone who likes getting things done, who likes their life to be largely organised, who is more comfortable when a decision is made than when it is yet to be made, and who feels the need to finish work before they can play, then the chances are that you, like the first administrator, prefer judging. (Note that judging does not mean judgemental). If, on the other hand, you like keeping your options open, are flexible, feel constrained by timetables, can happily play when there is work to be done, and feel energised by last minute pressures, then, like the second administrator, you probably prefer perceiving.

Some characteristics of people who prefer judging and perceiving

Judging

- Scheduled and organised
- Like completion
- Meet deadlines in good time
- Hate last minute pressures

Perceiving

- Flexible and spontaneous
- Like to keep options open
- Feel constrained by schedules
- Energised by last minute pressures

Judging and perceiving at work

Both of these preferences are essential at work. Judging is useful for getting jobs done, organising schedules, making sure routine work happens when it is supposed to. Perceiving is essential for adapting to circumstances, dealing with emergencies, handling change. If you want something scheduled, or a big job done in comfortable time, you need judging skills. If you want to deal flexibly with unpredictable demand or want something done in a hurry, you need perceiving skills. We can all do both when the situation demands it, but given a choice we have a preference for one or the other.

Where problems arise
It's not hard to see how these preferences can cause problems when brought together, whether it be in the workplace or at home. A supervisor with a preference for judging may find managing a perceiving employee very stressful, not knowing until the last minute if they are going to meet a deadline. The perceiver, on the other hand, may feel oppressed by the judger's need to have tasks completed ahead of schedule, because they need the last minute pressure to become energised.

**Seeing differences through the lens of type**

- Types who prefer judging: May be seen as rigid, controlling. Could be seen as good at getting things moving and completed, good planners.
- Types who prefer perceiving: May be seen as unreliable, disorganised. Could be seen as flexible, open to change, fun.

A little while ago an article was published in this journal on the subject of procrastination, its ills, and how to overcome it. Now everybody is prone to putting things off, including judging types, but there are some important differences in how this plays out in the two types. Judging types put off tasks because either they don't want to do them, or they are low on their priority list. Perceiving types put off tasks, not necessarily because they don't want to do them or they are not important, but because they need a sense of urgency to give them the energy to do them. Much of Raj Persaud's article is helpful for both types, but there is one area where he makes a statement about procrastination which is typically "judging" in its perspective: "Some procrastinators put work assignments off until the last minute because they have convinced themselves that they work better under pressure--a common myth." He goes on to say, "The chore still gets done much more poorly than if the proper amount of time had been allocated." Judging types like to get everything done in good time and know that last minute rushes damage the quality of their work. Perceiving types have a rush of energy as the deadline (or some other stimulus) approaches, and this is when they do their best work. This is hard for a judging type to believe, and because our culture values the judging preference they have little cause to question their perspective. Perceiving types suffer from this culture, both because they feel stressed and constrained by its rigidity, and because it makes them think they are unusually disorganised. When perceiving types are assessing their preferences they will often look sadly at the characteristics and say "I'd like to be like this (judging)... but I'm afraid I'm more like this (perceiving)."

But while perceiving types have their problems with a judging culture, judging types working with perceiving types can also have problems. A woman I know has a preference for judging, and she once worked for a man whose preference was for perceiving. She likes to be in control of her work and associated deadlines but was dependent on her boss for decisions on both. "He," she told me, "liked to keep his options open for as long as possible, and on the rare occasions that he made a decision about something, he was more than likely to reverse it the next time we met. It drove me nuts. I couldn't plan my work, and I ended up having to do large pieces of work at a few hours' notice."

Once you understand type, these difficulties are easier to deal with (see boxes). Perceiving types can start to value people they can rely on to finish things and to make decisions, and judging types can start to value people who are happy to help out in an emergency, are easygoing about change, and are good at finding the fun in work. Both types can work on developing skills in the other preference.
### Work activities requiring judging and perceiving

**Judging**

- Getting jobs done
- Making decisions
- Organising schedules
- Clinics
- Organising work
- Being reliable

**Perceiving**

- Adapting to change
- Gathering information for decision making
- Filling in at the last minute
- Emergencies
- Making work fun
- Being flexible
In the sixth article of her series, Anita Houghton explains how your overall personality type can dictate what you enjoy and what you are good at in work.

If you have worked through the preceding articles 1-4 you should have an idea of your personal preferences and be ready to look at your overall type.

**Clarifying your type**

Although the different preferences have been laid out separately up to now, in reality they exist as part of a whole type, and their expression depends on how they interact with the other preferences. There are several approaches to clarifying type, the first of which is to look at the type table and read the brief descriptions of the types that contain the preferences you have identified. So if you think you prefer extraversion, intuition, thinking, and perceiving, check ENTP, plus the types that are close to it. If you are not quite sure about extraversion, for example, you might like to check out INTP as well, or if you think you’re borderline between thinking and feeling, then check ENFP.

A second method of clarifying type is to look at the dominant functions for the types you relate to. In each type described in the type table, one of the two central preferences (N/S and T/F) is dominant, and is written in bold. This represents what that type does best, and is always expressed in the extrovert or introvert mode, depending on which of these is preferred. For example, the dominant function of an ISTJ is introverted sensing, and the dominant function of an ENFJ is extroverted feeling.

Preferences express themselves very differently depending on whether the preference is extroverted or introverted. To take the example of a medical department, Extroverted iNtuition (ENFP and ENTP) will tend to express itself in the generation of ideas for new services or projects, whereas Introverted iNtuition (INFJ and INTJ) will tend to express itself as generating new ways for understanding situations and solving problems. If you are unclear about your full type, try looking at the expression of different dominant functions below and ask yourself, which one describes what I do best in life?

**So what does all this mean for your work?**

A popular way of understanding type at work is to take the two middle letters, known as the functional pairs, as these have a huge impact on a person’s strengths in the workplace, and what they enjoy:

Each of the functional pairs has certain strengths and preferences in the workplace:

**ST**: Like facts, are practical and analytical, and like using technical and administrative skills for finding tangible solutions to immediate problems.
SF: Like using facts to provide the right practical and immediate help for people, and to create happy and harmonious environments.

NF: Interested in ideas, possibilities and theories. Like using their insight to understand and develop people, both individuals and more widely.

NT: Interested in possibilities and ideas, like using their analytical skills to solve complex problems and develop theoretical frameworks.

In medicine, one of the important differences between specialties is in time scales and tangibility of results. In both surgery and emergency medicine, for example, results tend to be immediate and tangible (favouring Sensing), whereas in psychiatry and public health, results tend to be longer term and less tangible (favouring iNtuition). In general practice, an SF or ST may find great satisfaction in finding practical solutions for urgent problems, whereas an NF or NT, may be more interested in psychosocial problems and complex conditions. Most medical jobs entail attention to both logical decision making (T) and people (F), but the balance between these may vary enough to make a job either enjoyable or dissatisfying. Laboratory work, for example, may provide too little contact with people for someone with a feeling preference, whereas thinking types may be challenged by the regular need to understand peoples subjective experience in, say, palliative medicine.

The clues to type at work

Have a think about how your preferences affect your working life by pondering the answers to the following questions:

- What are your strengths at work, and how might they relate to your preferences?
- Think of someone whose help you often seek. How might their preferences (and how they reflect or differ from your own) explain what you value them for?
- Think of an aspect of work you find difficult or disagreeable. How might your preferences help explain why that is?
- Think of a colleague you find difficult or disagreeable. Again, see if your preferences and theirs can explain the problems you have relating to them.
- What kinds of attributes do you most admire in others? Are any of these related to preferences?

What to do if you are in the wrong job

Symptoms of poor fit between type and job

If you are in a job that is unsuited to your type the chances are that you will be feeling one or more of these:

- Tired, stressed or depressed,
- Incompetent,
- Unvalued,
- Misunderstood, or
- Unable to use your strengths.
Unchecked, all this may eventually lead to performance problems or ill health, or both.

**Investigation and diagnosis**

- Using the questions above, examine all the different tasks in your job, and the people in it, and work out which parts you enjoy, and which you find difficult
- Estimate what proportion of your time you spend in each kind of activity
- Look around at your work environment, and the people in it. Which of the preferences dominate, and how do they match with yours?

**Expression of dominant functions:**

*Extroverted* Sensing - Experiencing life to the full (ESTP, ESFP) Intuition - Generating ideas for new projects (ENTP, ENFP) Thinking - Creating logical order in your environment (ESTJ, ENTJ) Feeling - Creating harmony in the outside world (ESFJ, ENFJ)

*Introverted* Sensing Storing and using details (ISTJ, ISFJ) Intuition - Finding new ways of understanding (INTJ, INFJ) Thinking - Using logic to solve problems internally (ISTP, INTP) Feeling - Living according to internal values (ISFP, INFP)

**Treatment**

Do more of the things you like...

- Spot the tasks youre good at, and offer to do them
- Find a special niche for yourself that allows you to use your strengths
- Help people to understand what youre best at
- Find jobs that favour your preferences
- Find leisure activities that play to your preferences

... *and cope better with the things you dont like*

If your job is full of tasks you find difficult try the tips for coping with the bits you find difficult, including:

- Getting help from people who find these tasks easy
- Doing your toughest tasks little and often, at the times of the day you feel strongest
- Thinking carefully about applying for jobs ill-suited to your preference
Having a look at different departments to see if a new environment is all that is needed. Dominant preferences do not always reflect the needs of the job, and similar types tend to cluster.

If you are fundamentally unsuited to the work, or the specialty seems consistently to favour a different type, then simply understanding the problem, and how you can make a rare contribution as a result of your scarcity value, can be enough to help you survive or even thrive. Just occasionally, however, type can provide the evidence a person needs to know that a job is just not right for them. In that case, a change in career direction may be the best solution.

Remember:

- We can all do everything--type tells us about our preferences, not our abilities
- None of the preferences exists in isolation. Their expression will be dictated by the other preferences
- People often say they behave differently in different situations. The best guide to your preferences is how you behave in the situations where you feel most at ease, where you can be your shoes off self
- Type is useful for understanding and developing, it should not be used as an excuse for doing or not doing anything, or for criticising or typecasting other
- Type is probably inborn, but its expression is affected by personal circumstances, life stage, culture, upbringing, etc.
Understanding personality type: What do type dynamics tell us about life stages and stress reactions?

In the seventh article of her series, Anita Houghton explains how preferences interact and develop over time.

In the first article of this series it was claimed that the beauty of psychological type is that it provides a simple framework to describe ways in which people differ, while allowing room for great depth and complexity within it. In this article we start to explore the complexity that is type dynamics. The dynamic nature of type means that for each type there is a hierarchy of preferences and these develop at different stages of our lives. Type dynamics are also important in understanding how different types respond to stress.

A beginner’s guide to type dynamics

The two central letters of a type denote the functions, for example, S and T are the functions of the type ESTJ. One of these functions is dominant (in bold), and operates in either the extravert or the introvert mode, depending on that type’s preference, and the other letter denotes the second, auxiliary function. If the dominant function is extraverted, the auxiliary function will be introverted, and vice versa, thus providing balance and support for the dominant. In the type ESTJ, the dominant function is extraverted T, whereas the auxiliary is introverted S. There is then a tertiary function, which is the opposite of the auxiliary function (so if the auxiliary function is sensing, the tertiary function will be intuition), and finally, there is an inferior function, which is the opposite of the dominant function (see box 1 for example).

Box 1: Example of type dynamics • ESTJ

**Dominant function**
Extraverted thinking - What this type does best

**Auxiliary function**
Introverted sensing - Supports and balances dominant

**Tertiary function**
Intuition - Develops from mid-life
Inferior function
Feeling - Least comfortable function

To work out your own hierarchy, you can check the dominant function of your type from the type table in the previous article and work out the others as described in the paragraph above. It takes most people a little while to get to grips with dynamics, so don’t worry if it’s as clear as pea soup just now. The important thing is to realise that these hierarchies exist and that every type uses every function, but we are less comfortable with using each function as we move down the list.

Development through life

One of the common questions posed about type is, If these preferences are inborn, how come I’ve changed as I’ve got older? and the answer is that our original preferences remain the same but we develop skills in using our less preferred preferences as we get older (see box 2 for life stages). In healthy type development, the preferences develop in order, with the dominant function developing during primary school, the auxiliary at secondary school, and the tertiary in mid-life. So, for example, an INTP (dominant thinking, auxiliary intuition, and tertiary sensing) will often become more comfortable at dealing with detail, and living in the here and now (S), as he or she moves through their thirties. Similarly, an ESTP (dominant sensing, auxiliary thinking, tertiary feeling) is likely to become more value driven and empathetic (F) as he or she gets older. Changes can also take place in the other preferences, with extraverts becoming more reserved, introverts becoming more outgoing, judging types learning flexibility, and perceivers getting scheduled.

Box 2: The main stages in life according to Jung

- Accommodation: teens and 20s, when you are responding to cultural expectations in terms of career and love. Dominant and auxiliary functions predominate
- Midlife transition: when you are developing your tertiary function and may therefore want to make some changes in your life. Also, if the accommodation phase has involved substantial subjugation of your dominant or auxiliary preferences, this can be a time of adjustment
- Integration and individuation: when you integrate your less preferred functions and, when it goes well, become a fully integrated and rounded individual, using all the functions in positive ways

What do type dynamics mean for career development?

These changes mean that what people enjoy and value about work may change over time. Midlife transition is the most likely time for the changes to become apparent, and those who have up till then subjugated their preferences in order to pursue a particular career are especially prone to a rocky ride at this time. As Western society has a habit of directing academically able young people into the professions, it could be argued that career type mismatches are especially likely to be found in careers such as medicine. The realisation for someone that their working lives have required them for many
years to concentrate on their least preferred functions at the expense of their strengths can be traumatic and life changing, and it may result in sudden and dramatic changes for example, a surgeon handing in his or her scalpel and rushing off to the country to farm geese. In less extreme mismatches, or people who have had a good match between their type and their work and then start to develop their less preferred functions, you see people modifying their jobs, perhaps to do less clinical work in favour of management, or less research in favour of medical politics, or less work altogether, in favour of gardening, or learning the saxophone.

The inferior function and stress

Type dynamics also explains the different ways in which people experience and exhibit stress (box 3). Although we may gain a modicum of comfort with our inferior function as we grow older, it's never really under our control, and it appears in its most unhelpful form when we're highly stressed. Stress may occur for all kinds of reasons, but it terms of type it is most likely to occur when we are forced into using our less preferred functions for prolonged or intense periods. In the early stages of stress the dominant function becomes exaggerated. So an intuitive, for example, will produce more and more ideas and meanings; a sensing type will become more and more concerned with details.

Box 3: Common sources of stress for different character types

- Extraverts: Too much time alone, solitary tasks
- Introverts: Too many new people, not enough time alone
- Intuitives: Too many details, lack of autonomy
- Sensors: Uncertainty, lack of clarity, too much change, complexity, need to make long term plans
- Thinkers: Emotional situations, disregard of logic, poor results from careful planning, hurting others' feelings while in pursuit of goals
- Feelers: Conflict, giving too much, violation of core values, perception that a problem is their fault, hurting someone despite best intentions
- Judgers: Unexpected events disrupting careful plans, disorganisation, overwork
- Perceivers: Tight deadlines or too much structure, situations where all options are closed

As people become more stressed, they move down their hierarchy of functions until they reach their inferior function, the one they have least control over. And it is when people are in the grip of the inferior function, that they feel out of control and exhibit behaviour which is, quite literally out of character. So the usually objective, analytical thinking type suddenly becomes overcome with emotion, or worried that nobody likes them (F); the live in the-moment sensing type is suddenly overcome with fear of future possibilities (N); the compassionate feeling type becomes hypercritical (T), and the intuitive big picture type becomes obsessed with detail. These are all extreme and dysfunctional versions of the preference.

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