

Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator to Strengthen Extension Programs¹

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This EDIS document, the second in a series on teaching to different personality types, covers the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®). The entire series includes the following EDIS documents:

1. *Teaching to Different Personality Types*
2. *Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator to Strengthen Extension Programs*
3. *Using the True Colors Personality Assessment to Strengthen Extension Programs*
4. *Using the Kirton Adaption Innovation Inventory to Strengthen Extension Programs*

Introduction

The purpose of the MBTI® is to “make the theory of psychological types described by Carl Jung understandable and useful in people’s lives” (Briggs Meyers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 2009, p. 3). Jung’s theory claims that what we perceive to be somewhat random variations in people’s behavior can actually be attributed to basic differences in the way individuals perceive their world and use their judgment. In essence, he found that we are all actually quite orderly and consistent in our approaches to dealing with the world around us. The MBTI® was designed to measure these differences and bring understanding to

a person’s approaches and process by placing a person on four dichotomous continuums: introversion (I) to extroversion (E), sensing (S) to intuition (N), thinking (T) to feeling (F), and judging (J) to perceiving (P). Neither side of each continuum is better or worse than the other, but rather a way of describing how we form attitudes, relate to the world, and perceive and judge experiences. An individual’s preferences are then combined to develop an overall MBTI® type identified as four letters (e.g. ESTJ). More information on the MBTI® instrument can be found at www.myersbriggs.org.

The MBTI® has been used around the globe in a variety of ways including assisting in the development of strong collaborative teams, understanding business relationships, and informing educational practice. Through an understanding and awareness of the MBTI®, the preferences within each dichotomy, and the learning needs of those with different preferences, we can strive to build Extension programs that are appropriate for all personality types.

Extraversion and Introversion

The easiest to implement and most widely understood preference is the dichotomy between extraversion and introversion, which describes where we focus our attention and get energy (Briggs Meyers et al., 2009). Individuals who are **extraverted** like to process information externally and get energy from others. Teaching methods that appeal

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to extraverts include engaging in discussions, presenting information to a group, answering questions out loud and on the fly, and brainstorming ideas as a group to get instant feedback from others. Incorporating these techniques in your program will appeal to the extraverts in the room.



Figure 1. Extroverts love discussion.
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Introverts like to process information internally and derive energy from personal time. This can be encouraged through the use of reflective journaling, pre-session reading assignments that provide time for them to read and process before being asked to discuss pertinent information, time provided in between session activities, and progressive programs that allow introverts to take their time before making decisions on how they will implement new information.



Figure 2. Reflective journaling is one way of teaching introverts.
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Sensing and Intuition

The second dichotomy is represented by a continuum between sensing and intuition, which describes the way we take in information and the kind of information we like and trust (Briggs Meyers et al., 2009). Learners who prefer **sensing** focus on present realities, verifiable facts, and

experiences. These individuals want to receive information in a logical, step-by-step way; therefore, presenting information (and even more specifically, facts) progressively and logically will resonate best. To appeal to those who prefer sensing, ensure you focus on what is real and actual, give the learners an opportunity to observe and remember specifics through experimentation, and provide sequential activities so they can build on their knowledge.



Figure 3. Sensing people focus on facts and experiences.
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Learners who prefer **intuition** like to be presented with the big picture first and then they discover how the smaller pieces fit. They get uninspired if they are presented with too many facts up front without an understanding of why they need to be learning the facts. Learners who prefer intuition are more interested in how the facts fit together than the facts themselves. They are imaginative and abstract in their approach to processing information. In order to appeal to this group, consider incorporating discussions about patterns into your program. For example, rather than diving into details about leaf shape when learning about a new plant, discuss how are certain types of plants are similar and how are they different from one another to allow the learner to explore the patterns associated with plant types rather than going right to specifics. Another example of appealing to intuition would be allowing 4-H youth in a clothing project to take a look at a completed piece of clothing and discussing all the things that go into making the garment—fabric, thread, patterns, leaving enough fabric for seams. Once they can process the big picture, they will be able to look at the detail.



Figure 4. People who prefer intuition like to see how all the facts fit together.

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Thinking and Feeling

The dichotomy between thinking and feeling describes the way we make decisions (Briggs Meyers et al., 2009). Learners who prefer **thinking** make decisions based on impersonal, objective logic. These individuals need opportunities to step back to get an objective view, analyze a situation, discuss cause and effect as it relates to what they are learning, and solve problems with logic. Because of this need, educators need to provide facts and logical explanations that will allow them to make informed decisions. Role playing activities resonate well with learners with this type because they like to solve problems by objectively looking at facts and coming to their own solutions. Learners with a thinking preference also enjoy being presented with a complex task, both individually and as a group. Consider creating scenarios needing to be solved that can be presented before, during, or after your program to entice the thinking personality type.

Learners who prefer **feeling** make their decisions based on personal priorities and relationships. These learners are more empathetic and are largely guided by personal and group values. They are more likely to make decisions based on how the decision impacts people rather than on objective logic. When developing programs, it is important to remember that those with a feeling personality type are not going to be as engaged in solving a problem with logic, but rather want to discuss the social side of a complex issue. By allowing time to discuss or reflect upon the ramifications decision-making in your topic area can have on families,

friends, and communities, you will appeal to the learners exhibiting a feeling type.



Figure 5. Thinking people prefer to solve problems with logic.

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Figure 6. Feeling learners are more empathetic and are largely guided by personal and group values.

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Judging and Perceiving

The fourth MBTI dichotomy uses a continuum between judging and perceiving, which describes our attitude toward the external world and how we orient ourselves to it (Briggs Meyers et al., 2009). Learners who prefer **judging** like the world to be organized and orderly. They tend to look at the world around them and see a series of decisions that need to be made. Someone who prefers judging typically will have a very organized office or home and will always be on time (if not early) to an event. Learners exhibiting a

judging personality type will want a detailed agenda, noting when activities are happening, and an organized reading or resource list, and they will likely ask where to go for more information. You can make your programs appealing to these learners by having that information readily available.



Figure 7. Judging learners prefer to plan and organize in advance.
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Learners who prefer **perceiving** want to experience the world rather than organize it. They look at the world and see options that need to be explored. They like a spontaneous approach to everything they do, and that includes learning. These individuals will often ask questions that will take your program of course to explore new ideas. While you need to be sure you accommodate this need and are flexible in your teaching style, be aware that if you allow your program to dramatically change course and do not reach your established objectives, you will lose the judging type learners in the room in the process. To ensure perceiving learners are engaged, offer them opportunities to be spontaneous. Let them choose from a selection of activities and engage them in complex learning that is not strictly defined. Allow for the discussion of open-ended questions where there may not be a right or wrong answer.



Figure 8. Perceiving learners like to explore the world rather than organize it.
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Summary

Thinking about personality type when developing extension programs can assist us in producing educational experiences that resonate with all types of audiences. If you are interested, please feel free to visit the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources contact page (<http://piecenter.com/contact>) to get in touch with Drs. Lamm or Telg about administering the MBTI® and other cognitive assessments to strengthen your Extension programs.

Reference

Briggs Myers, I., McCaulley, M. H., Quenk, N. L., & Hammer, A. L. (2009). *MBTI manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Instrument* (3rd edition). CPP, Inc.