

What is 'Psychological Type'?

The basics

We instinctively recognise that there are patterns in our differences and similarities, and 'psychological type codes' or 'preferences' give a logical framework for understanding why everyone else doesn't see the world the way you do.

In this system, there is no good or bad type code, it's just a way of describing some differences in how we prefer to interact with the world and make decisions.

The psychological type preference theory discussed here is based on the work of Carl Jung, and has been expanded and clarified by Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs. They developed a questionnaire for profiling called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). There are several other systems around, and many of them are also based on the Jungian model, though Myers-Briggs is one of the best known and researched. The MBTI type code labels are not the most accurate and deeply truthful ways of naming the 16 types, but they are a good start and point to more depth of information for anyone who wants to explore.

Psychological type preferences are a bit like a preference to use one's right or left hand. A preference is there, even though we use both hands. The interaction between these preferences is dynamic and complex – so the introduction I give here is just a high-level and somewhat simplistic summary. See my web site for various books to read if you want to go deeper.

Some people naturally draw their energy from the outer world of action, people and things, which we call **Extraversion**. Others draw their energy from the inner world of thoughts and feelings, known as **Introversion**.

Other differences revolve around what sort of information individuals most easily notice, or 'Perceive' – either what their senses are telling them is right in front of them (**Sensing**), or what their hunches tell them about unseen implications (**iNtuition**). Either of these may be directed towards the outer world of things and people, or the inner world of ideas and awareness.

We make decisions ('Judgements') differently, too. Some start with objective criteria (**Thinking**), others start with what matters to them or those close to them (**Feeling**) - although most of us use a combination of both at different times. As with Perception, these Judgements may be focussed primarily towards the external world or towards the inner world. Generally, if one's Perception is extraverted, one's Judgement will be Introverted, and vice versa. This is how our psyche keeps balance, because we all need both.

Finally there are the natural differences in lifestyle preference. Some of us need to plan our lives (**Judging**) and are more comfortable when we know what is happening. Others of us need more space for spontaneity and flexibility (**Perceiving**) and prefer to take things as they come and keep our options open. In terms of the dynamics of type, this means one tends to prefer to approach one's external (Extraverted) part of life either with Judgement, or with Perception, which is what gives rise to the appearance of planfulness with a Judging preference, or the appearance of flexibility with a Perceiving preference.



These preferences are expressed as letters. So a person with a preference for Extraversion, iNtuition, Feeling and Judging has a type code of ENFJ. This code points the way to all kinds of valuable insights, with deeper exploration. Some systems use descriptive words instead, but the meaning underneath is the same. (See www.insightsforchange.co.uk for some suggested reading and links to places on the web if you want to understand more, or call me and we'll arrange a chat.)

How is this useful?

In some ways, a type code is a kind of map for understanding some of the ways that we differ. It doesn't tell us everything, but what it does tell us can be very useful.



By understanding these differences we can improve our communication with other people, make sense of why they are as they are and be more relaxed with those differences. This can help improve our relationships.

It can help us to understand ourselves better, and learn to accept ourselves. "So that's why I'm like this! And I'm OK too!" This helps with our self confidence and ability to trust ourselves.

Our type code can help us recognise our special strengths and gifts, enabling us to play to those strengths. At the same time we can see our weaknesses and what needs development. These insights can be very useful for career exploration and life choices.

Clearly each of us are more than any type code or system will be able to encompass, just as there is more to any place than even the most sophisticated map can show. But if we have the right map for where we are, it is a very useful tool that can lead us into new discoveries.

Does our type change?

According to the theory (and recent psychological research), our core psychological preferences are inborn - we are in some sense made to be who we are, with preferred ways of perceiving and deciding and of relating to the world, which are as natural to us as preferring to use our right or left hand to write.

Just as an oak tree will never grow into a palm tree or a maple, we retain the same underlying type code of preferences throughout our lives.



Our environment affects how we express those preferences, according to whether those around us support or suppresses the natural expression of who we are, in a similar way that a tree in its optimum natural environment (like the oak tree above) may look very different from the same type of tree growing in a pot (like the bonsai oak tree on the left, or the wind-blown oak at the beginning of this article). This includes the influence on us of family, friends, school, work, culture, choices and experience.



However, as we get older, we do usually develop the ability to use our non-preferences more comfortably. It is not a distortion of who we are, but part of becoming more mature. This may sometimes feel as though we've changed into someone different, but in reality it's continued development of the same underlying dynamic preferences, and tends to follow a pattern for each type.

Finding the right type code

Doing a questionnaire, on its own, may not give you the right type code - there is a 40% to 70% chance of getting all four preference letters of the code correct for you, depending on a number of variables. If the report gives you a type description that doesn't quite fit, it will not feel right. Nor will it tell you much that is useful - because it is effectively talking to someone else, not you.

So it is important to find out which type code *really* fits you best (called a 'best fit type'). All questionnaires are indicative (showing the right direction to look) rather than definitive (that is, they are not guaranteed to be totally right first time). For some people discovering their best fit type is straightforward, for others it is more of a journey. And of course for a few people, this system may not be at all useful.

Contact Christine Rigden

For more information including a list of helpful books and online resources, see Christine's web site at www.insightsforchange.co.uk.

Or contact me directly to discuss having an MBTI assessment and exploration, or a workshop:

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Christine is also a qualified, accredited Career Coach and Life Coach, offering coaching to individuals at a cross-roads, who need to work out who they are and what they want from life and work.