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Christine is an interface designer for software, and has published research into design for colour-deficient vision and other topics related to conceptual design for interfaces. Non-technical interests include personality type, coaching for Leadership, and applying type to relationships and spirituality.

Type and Leadership Coaching in IT

I work in a major telecoms company, perhaps more by accident than choice. Having started work in my 30s, I benefited from a company initiative to encourage women to get into IT (Information Technology) and electronics, and they sponsored me through an IT degree as a mature student.

The User Centred Design group of which I am part is an anomaly in the organisation that primarily focuses on technology and business. Although our work is technical, the people in the group primarily seek to meet the needs of the users of the software and translate those needs into a language understood by business managers and software developers. In 2004, the company ran an ICF accredited certificate in Coaching for Leadership (CLC)ⁱ. They sought to improve the quality of leaders within the company through an internal Executive coaching programme.

They selected about 50 of us to do the intensive eight-month course. We all did an online version of the Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI), and I worked with several individuals to find their best-fit type.

This article is an exploration of some observations that I found intriguing, relating to type and the mix of individuals on the CLC course. There are also observations from coaching in relation to the type mix within my company.

Preferences in a technical industry

What types would you expect to find attracted to work in the telecoms and software engineering industry? The company I work in is mostly men, in spite of frequent initiatives to encourage women in engineering. Denise McGuire, president of a major telecoms union, said in an address this year, "Today only 20% of the IT workforce is female, and the current gender composition of technical graduates means that this position will worsen."ⁱⁱ

From the MBTI manualⁱⁱⁱ, _STJ and ENTJ types are drawn towards management, administration and leadership, which any business needs. Science and technology tends to attract _NTP types, and applied technology appeals more to _STP. Ashridge Management School^{iv} has found that 2/3rds of their students report ENTJ, ESTJ, ISTJ or ENTP.

The majority of the work (in my unit) is software design and development, and the management of development projects. There are very few support or people-focused roles (eg library) and they are reducing. Admin and secretarial staff have nearly vanished from our offices, and Personnel functions have been almost totally outsourced.

It is interesting to note that the percent overlap in the top 50 occupations for any pair of opposite types^v is low, normally below 5%. From this one might deduce that individuals preferring F will be rare in the main work of a business which mainly appeals to T preferences, whether male or female, although all types will be represented and may be (more or less) successful in finding a niche where they can thrive.

Preferences within the coaching community

The trainers in the coaching course commented that generally they notice that coaching as a profession attracts _NFP types more than others. Leadersearch.com have done a study of their Leadership Coaching students, and most (93.6%) prefer Intuition. Three quarters

of those are NF, the remainder NT. NPs are attracted to that training course at nearly twice the rate of NJs. In contrast to the top Management types, more than two thirds of the Leadership coaches are made up of ENFP (28.3%) followed by INFP (19.0%), ENFJ (13.2%) and ENTP (10.5%). (Interesting to see ENTP turn up in both lists, at only 2.8% of the population!)

In a coaching for Leadership context, managers may be drawn towards it as a way of helping themselves to become better managers and to have more effective teams.

Preferences within the CLC course

We have already seen that the majority of the workforce to whom the course was offered are likely to have preferences around business and technology, and that types that tend to be naturally drawn towards coaching are likely to be in the minority.

Of the 50 who were on the course, 39 made their type preferences available to the group. About half of them have clarified their best-fit type, which I have used where available. Given the nature of the environment, some influence of work and culture on the reported types of a few individuals is to be expected.

Tables 1 – 4 give a flavour of the makeup of the group, based on 39 of the 50 students. The UK statistics in all tables are from the MBTI Manual Supplement^{vi}, and the LS column is from the coach training organisation Leadersearch.com.

Table 1: Distribution of preference pairs in the group, and gender balance

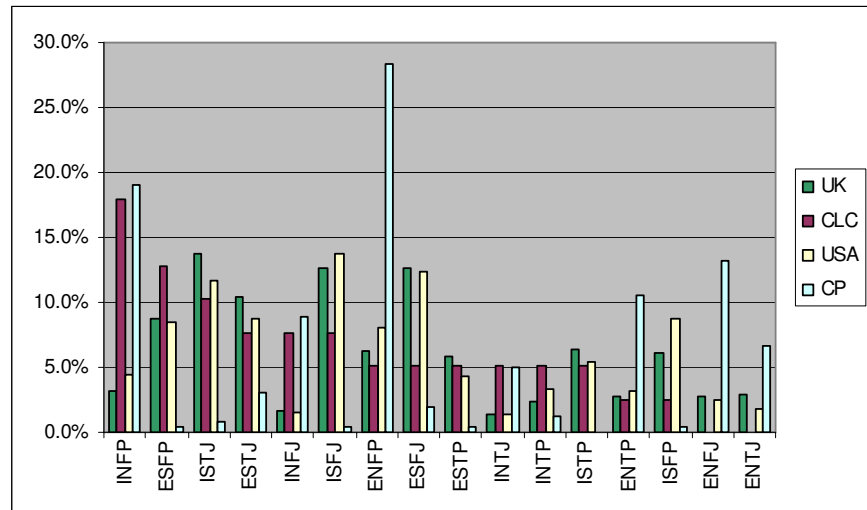
	<i>n</i>	CLC	UK	LS	Gender	<i>n</i>	CLC
E	15	38.5%	52.6%	64.4%	male	21	53.8%
I	24	61.5%	47.4%	35.6%	female	18	46.2%
S	22	56.4%	76.5%	7.4%			
N	17	43.6%	23.5%	92.6%			
T	16	41.0%	45.9%	27.6%			
F	23	59.0%	54.1%	72.4%			
J	17	43.6%	58.3%	39.9%			
P	22	56.4%	41.7%	60.1%			

Table 2: Distribution of function pairs and temperaments compared

Functions	<i>n</i>	CLC	UK	LS	Temperaments	<i>n</i>	CLC	UK	LS
NF	12	30.8%	14.0%	69.4%	NF	12	30.8%	14.0%	69.4%
NT	5	12.8%	9.5%	23.3%	NT	5	12.8%	9.5%	23.3%
SF	11	28.2%	40.1%	3.1%	SJ	12	30.8%	49.1%	6.2%
ST	11	28.2%	36.4%	4.3%	SP	10	25.6%	27.1%	1.2%

Table 3: Distribution of 16 types compared to UK population and Leadersearch.com

type	n	CLC	UK	LS
INFP	7	17.9%	3.2%	19.0%
ESFP	5	12.8%	8.7%	0.4%
ISTJ	4	10.3%	13.7%	0.8%
INFJ	3	7.7%	1.7%	8.9%
ESTJ	3	7.7%	10.4%	3.1%
ISFJ	3	7.7%	12.7%	0.4%
ENFP	2	5.1%	6.3%	28.3%
INTJ	2	5.1%	1.4%	5.0%
ESFJ	2	5.1%	12.6%	1.9%
INTP	2	5.1%	2.4%	1.2%
ESTP	2	5.1%	5.8%	0.4%
ISTP	2	5.1%	6.4%	0.0%
ENTP	1	2.6%	2.8%	10.5%
ISFP	1	2.6%	6.1%	0.4%
ENFJ	0	0.0%	2.8%	13.2%
ENTJ	0	0.0%	2.9%	6.6%



Observations

Looking at Table 4, INFP is the most dramatically over-represented within the CLC group in relation to the population as a whole – and one surmises even more so in relation to an IT business – but is in line with Leadersearch data. The occurrence of the top 4 management types (ESTJ, ENTJ, ISTJ and ENTP) is similar in both groups – 20.5% in CLC and 21.0% in Leadersearch.

There is a greater proportion of men than women on the CLC course, and yet a higher proportion of F types than that ratio would normally suggest.

There are more T preferring coaches in CLC than in Leadersearch, and more J than P. But the big contrast is in the number of CLC coaches preferring Sensing – over 56%, compared to only 7.4% of Leadersearch coaches.

The 'group type' in CLC is INFP, and in Leadersearch is ENFP.

On the one hand, managers are clearly taking advantage of an excellent opportunity to learn how to support their teams and be better leaders. But on the other hand, it also seems like many people preferring F have found this as an oasis within an otherwise technical environment.

The course content had NF tones of openness, subjectivity and connecting, as one might expect for coaching. Given the high proportion of Ts in the group, and a preponderance of introverts, I observed a reticence during some of the group activities was not surprising in that context, although as we got to know each other over the months many became more relaxed.

My coaching clients and colleagues provide another interesting insight. I find that several of them (all preferring F) are restless and looking for something 'more meaningful' at work, even though they are doing fine in their technical roles.

Many of these individuals have found an understanding of their type to be valuable in helping them to think through the issues and to recognise opportunities in work that support their natural preferences. But in the 2 years since the previous version of this article was written, of the 10 coaches who have now left the company, 7 out of 10 are NP, and 7 out of 10 have a preference for Feeling.

By contrast, the issues my T clients tend to bring to coaching are around being more effective at their role, particularly around communication and relationships. And they tend to be more interested in working on their options within the company.

I am intrigued by the efforts of the industry to 'remove barriers' that keep women out of IT. A lot of energy and thought is going into how to encourage girls in school and university to choose careers in software and telecoms, and making structural changes such as using aptitude tests rather than emphasising technical qualifications to support this.

Reducing barriers is valuable, and I am glad that I can pursue my career without feeling disadvantaged as a woman. However, it still surprises me that no one seems to have connected with the thought that maybe technology, as a subject of study and a career, is simply not appealing to most people with an F preference (which includes most women). Aptitude is not the same as interest.

ⁱ Training through the Co-Creative Alliance, <http://www.cocreativealliance.com/>

ⁱⁱ Denise McGuire, president of Connect, at an address to the TUC Congress, 2005. Quoted in *Connected*, the Connect members magazine, October 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ From *Introduction to Type and Careers* (pp 16–31), by A. L Hammer, 1993, Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. ♥ 1993 by CCP. (*ref* Table 12.9 in MBTI manual)

^{iv} Ashridge study...

^v From *Career Report Manual* (p 37), by A.L Hammer and G.P Macdaid, 1992, Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. ♥ 1992 by CCP. (*ref* Table 12.10 in MBTI manual)

^{vi} From *MBTI Manual Supplement* Table 4.1, 'UK population type table', © 1998 by Consulting Psychologists Press.