



## The Hard Wiring of Life

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By Paul Knudstrup

Each of us is an individual – a unique human being. And yet, we also have similarities to others. Certain people seem more “neat to hang out with” than others. We get along well with some people but then work with ol’ Harry, who just “rubs us the wrong way.” Often the differences that set us apart (and sometimes set our teeth on edge!) are part of what we refer to as our “hard wiring.”

Our hard wiring of life is a combination of several factors:

- Personality Preferences (Extravert, Introvert, etc.)
- Hemispheric Preferences (Right Brain, Left Brain)
- Information Processing Preferences (Visual, Kinesthetic, Auditory)
- Individual Talents or Gifts

The combination of these four individual characteristics sets each of us apart and, of course, tells only a part of the story of what makes us unique. Still, understanding the various components of our hard wiring can often provide clues about why we get along so well and easily understand some people and yet have so much difficulty with others.

### Personality Preferences

While there are a number of different approaches to understanding human personality, the most widely used and respected tool is the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* – better known as the *Myers-Briggs* or *MBTI*. This tool was developed using the theories of Carl Jung by Kathryn Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers.

The MBTI is based upon a significant body of research and looks at eight personality preferences that all people use at different times. These eight preferences are organized into four groupings. When a person completes the MBTI, the four preferences they identify as most like them are combined into what is called a “type.” The MBTI describes preferences, not skills or abilities, and says that all preferences are equally important; there are no “right” or “wrong” preferences or types.

The eight preferences are grouped as follows:

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|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Extravert/Introvert</b> — | How a person interacts with others and is stimulated |
| <b>Sensing/iNtuition</b> —   | How a person prefers to gather information           |
| <b>Thinking/Feeling</b> —    | How a person prefers to make decisions               |
| <b>Judgment/Perception</b> — | How a person prefers to orient their life            |

The combinations result in a total of 16 different personality types. All 16 types are profiled at <http://www.midwgroup.com/myers-briggs-16-profiles>

## Hemispheric Preferences

Most of us are familiar with the common way of referring to our brain in terms of left and right hemispheres. We understand that the right side of our brain controls the left side of our bodies and the left hemisphere of our brain controls the body's right side. Each hemisphere has a distinct approach to accessing and processing information. We use both sides of our brain all the time. However, as we mature our neurological system may tend to "listen" to one hemisphere more than the other, usually on about a 60/40 basis. The favored side becomes our dominant hemisphere and is the one we rely upon, particularly in times of stress.

People who are **Left Hemisphere** dominant learn best by: Details & Facts, Reading, Language, Speaking, Listening, Logic, Time-Oriented, Objective Tests, Hands-on/Concrete, Questions re "How?"

People who are **Right Hemisphere** dominant learn best by: Big Picture, Patterns, Music, Art, Visualizing, Colors, Emotions, Creativity, Intuition, Spontaneously, Essay (Subjective) tests, Concepts, a Holistic View, Questions re "Why?"

## Processing Information

While we use all five senses to gather and process information from the world around us, we use our three major senses – visual (sight), hearing (auditory) and kinesthetic (touch/experience) – when learning and gathering new information.

We tend to utilize these three senses to significantly different degrees. Early in the brain's development our nervous system evolves toward a dominant pattern for processing information. One sense is the strongest (let's call it the "conscious" sense); one is a support function (the "subconscious" sense); and one is the weakest (the "unconscious" sense.) This pattern has a great deal to do with how we learn and how we process information.

- **Auditory** learners prefer to hear material in order to learn it. Music and audio tapes are useful tools for them.
- **Visual** learners prefer to see what they are learning, often using charts, diagrams, models, outlines or films as tools.
- **Kinesthetic** learners prefer to learn through experience and "hands-on" physical manipulation. They seem to learn best by doing.

While each of us uses all three senses at some time, we learn best when we utilize our dominant sense. And, if the information is delivered to us using both our strongest and our support senses, we generally have that input "locked in" rather easily. For instance, as a visual-kinesthetic learner, if I can read information on a subject and at the same time highlight the important points or capture them in written notes, my retention goes way up. I find mind maps (or cluster diagrams) an effective note-taking tool and can often reconstruct a complex discussion months or years later from a simple mind map. Other people may find models, diagrams, or mind maps confusing or hard to create and grasp. For them, information might need to be delivered verbally or through some sort of physical activity. The point is, if we understand how we learn best we can learn easier. And, we can better understand others who process information differently than we do.

## Talents or Gifts

Each of us is born with certain innate talents; part of the process of growing up is to begin to get a clear handle on just what those talents – “gifts” if you will – are and how to utilize them to create a life-long vocation. We are not talking about “managerial competencies” or acquiring the outward appearance of success. Rather, we think of our talents as those in-born abilities and interests that seem to be part of our core individuality. Extensive research by the Gallup Organization has helped many organizations and individuals to focus themselves and their organizations on creating opportunities where people can do what they are best at on a daily basis.

Before we began to understand the potential for building talents into strengths, most developmental programs centered on identifying and correcting “weaknesses.” Often we attempted to determine what people’s weaknesses were and then focused on “fixing” them. There was an underlying assumption that all managers need to become equally adept at the same things. We see this frequently in development programs based on competencies, where an effort is made to identify a set of attributes, attitudes, and skills that all employees at a certain level should possess.

This focus on weakness is not the province of management alone; we see this drive for perfection throughout our society.

- Parents and teachers focus on a student’s lowest grades, virtually ignoring those subject areas where the student is doing well.
- The healthcare system is oriented more toward addressing current health problems than on preventing future illness and disease.
- Managers focus most of their performance management time on the poorest performers in the group, unintentionally reinforcing poor behavior and demoralizing other team members.

Having a weakness focus will, at best, bring an individual or organization up to some sort of average or “normal” status. When that status is achieved, the support, intervention, or assistance is usually withdrawn; the focus shifts to other individuals or to other areas of weakness in the same individual.

As a result of the work of Clifton and others, we have come to understand that those innate talents can become significant *strengths* through knowledge – education, training, etc. – and the practice of certain skills associated with those talents. Identifying your particular innate talents is only the beginning. Once you have identified them, you need to answer several questions, such as:

- How does each of these talents show up in my professional and personal life?
- What experiences have I had that might help turn each talent into a strength?
- What skills do I use when utilizing my talents? Do any of those skills need additional knowledge and/or practice in order to become strengths?
- How well do my talents match up with what I am doing professionally?

Your answers to these questions should provide you with clues about development or growth opportunities. At the same time, it makes sense to look at your teammates with an eye toward identifying their particular talents and helping them turn those into strengths.

Using the StrengthsFinder™ in combination with other tools, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™ and a comprehensive 360° feedback assessment, can bring about substantial improvements in your ability to understand yourself and other people. It all comes together to create your individual, unique “hard wiring of life.”

Why not consider exploring your own hard-wiring and that of your team? We’d be glad to help. Contact us at [www.MidwGroup.com](http://www.MidwGroup.com) or call 269-624-1940.