



## Team Behaviors and Personality Type

Understanding Why Teams Don't Work

*By Paul Knudstrup*

"I don't understand Harry – he doesn't seem to be a team player."  
"Sallie just tries to browbeat everyone over to her point of view; she never shuts up!"  
"Sam can't take any criticism without getting really defensive."  
"Jane can't seem to make a decision without taking forever."

Sound familiar? Maybe you see yourself in one of these examples? Or do you spot a teammate who makes your life difficult?

Over the past twenty-five years, as we've used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) while working with managers and teams, we've seen a strong linkage between MBTI type and behavior on teams. It's no surprise. People consistently act in ways that are true to their personality preferences.

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First, a quick detour to explain the basics of the MBTI:

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator describes eight personality preferences that all people use at different times. These eight preferences are organized into four dimensions. 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. All preferences are equally important; there are no "right" or "wrong" preferences or types.

The eight preferences used in the MBTI are grouped as follows:

**E**xtravert/**I**ntrovert — How a person interacts with others and is stimulated

**S**ensing/**i**Ntuition — How a person prefers to gather information

**T**hinking/**F**eeling — How a person prefers to make decisions

**J**udgment/**P**erception — How a person prefers to orient their life

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So how do these personality preferences affect people on teams? We've broken it down by each of the four dimensions.

## **Team Behaviors – Extraverts and Introverts**

Where a person's energy is focused (externally to themselves [E's] or within themselves [I's]) has a lot to do with how they behave in a team. Extraverts will usually be more vocal, will tend to more readily share their thoughts, ask questions, and state their point. Introverts will be less likely to do these things, unless the group is small and made up of people they know well. Strong Extraverts may try to dominate the meeting, while strong Introverts may have so little to say that other team members forget they are even there.

Be aware of the tendency for people to behave in ways that are true to their Type. If you are a strong Extravert, avoid the natural tendency to interrupt others and to self-disclose so much. (Introverts often don't care about how every point relates to you personally). Strong Extraverts can help the group by listening more and talking less. Strong Introverts can help the team by speaking up, sharing their thoughts and ideas more readily, asking questions, and using a slightly louder voice when making their point.

In the United States, the population is about 50% E's and 50% I's. But the quiet, thoughtful Introverts are frequently dominated by the louder, more boisterous Extraverts.

## **Team Behaviors – Sensors and iNtuitives**

When a team is trying to problem-solve, brainstorm, and look at the "big picture," this next dimension frequently comes into play. Sensors tend to focus on practical, fact-oriented details, to get to the heart of the matter quickly, and to avoid theoretical discussions and explorations of all the alternatives. Intuitives tend to see relationships and patterns between discrete events or details that may be unclear to the Sensors. Intuitives may not pay much attention to the details, may be happy to skip over steps, may make errors of fact, and may be impatient with Sensors' linear, detail-oriented approach. At the same time, the Intuitive frequently excels at the brainstorming and planning process, at dreaming up new projects or ideas, at being creative and future-oriented. The Sensor will typically be more present-oriented, more practical, and more focused on the details and facts associated with a project.

If you are a strong Sensor, understand the Intuitive's need to generate alternatives, to "blue-sky," and to ignore the details to some extent. Make sure you have at least a couple of Intuitives on the team to help in the planning and creative development process and to serve as sources for ideas. Then, make sure the Sensors take responsibility for tracking the details of the project and keeping the group on task. If you are a strong Intuitive, understand the Sensor's need for facts, details, and practical results-oriented outcomes. Be willing to jot down your creative ideas for six new projects and hold them until the present project is more complete.

The U.S. population is made up of about 70% Sensors and 30% Intuitives. So it's no great surprise that most American businesses have a short-term, practical, number-oriented focus. Most American managers find the strategic planning process to be either a big bore or an opportunity to demonstrate their command of myriad details.

## **Team Behaviors – Thinkers and Feelers**

Generally called the "decision-making preference," the Thinking/Feeling dimension is important in understanding human behavior. Thinkers have a preference for making decisions in a logical, "head-oriented" manner – more dispassionate and less personal in their approach. T's can usually see the bottom-line pros and cons when make decisions. They often forget to take into account the impact decisions will have on the people most affected by those decisions. On the other hand, Feelers are more likely to make decisions on a "heart-oriented" basis, focusing on their relationship to the people involved and their personal value system.

Most business groups are dominated by Thinkers. Many times, even strong Feelers will have learned how to submerge their natural preference, since exercising their preference is viewed as a weakness by strong T-oriented managers and cultures. As a result, decisions with a significant impact on people may go awry when T-dominated senior managers fail to take into account how their employees might react.

Feelers generally have great difficulty dealing with conflict, since they tend to value harmony in interpersonal dealings above all. As a result, they often postpone dealing with personnel issues and performance problems until much too late in the process. Often, they will avoid the conflict inherent in these discussions until the only avenue open is to fire the employee. For strong F's to be more effective in T-dominated organizations, they frequently need to learn how to be more direct and dispassionate in their interpersonal dealings.

While the U.S. population is divided between Thinkers (40%) and Feelers (60%) 57% of the males are T's and 76% of the females are F's. This is the only one of the four dimensions where there is a difference based on gender.

## **Team Behaviors – Judges and Perceivers**

Judgers are usually fairly well-organized people. They value getting to closure, often choosing to do so with very little information. Deadlines are not typically a problem because most strong J's tend to "plan your work and work your plan." Perceivers, on the other hand, may be less well organized or focused, preferring to be more spontaneous or to "go with the flow." Business management teams tend to have a higher percentage of Judges, since their preference for being organized and making decisions quickly is often rewarded by promotion into management ranks.

In teams and groups Judges will tend to drive meetings, wanting to stick to the agenda and move forward in an orderly manner. Strongly Extraverted J's may have a tendency to dominate meetings and push for decisions before their more Introverted Perceiver colleagues are ready. This can result in what we call "malicious compliance." Team members may think – but not actually say – things like, "This is a dumb idea, but nobody asked me for my opinion. I'm only going to do what I have to on this project." Team

leaders need to watch for this oppositional behavior – it is often a reason behind a project’s slow progress or lack of success.

At the same time, strong Perceivers may be reluctant to make decisions quickly, may need more information before becoming committed to a decision, and may argue for changing the decision later if new data appears. Being somewhat less organized than the J’s, the Perceivers may have more difficulty meeting deadlines, especially if it involves what they view as rigid, lock-step kinds of tasks. When critical new information shows up on the team’s radar screen, the P’s may become frustrated with the J’s lack of flexibility in performing course corrections.

In the United States, the population is comprised of 54% J’s and 46% P’s.

### **Teams and Type**

Involving people with different personality preferences is important to leveraging the value of a team. When a team is made up of people who have highly similar MBTI type preferences, its work may progress rapidly, but the members will usually share common blind spots and weaknesses. For instance, a project team comprised of mostly STJ’s (a fairly typical combination in management) may skip over the brainstorming and creative development phase of start-up and jump right to what they see as the best, bottom-line, detail-oriented choice. A group dominated by Extraverted Perceivers may spend all their time talking to each other in meetings, listen very little, and have so much difficulty in getting to closure that they never finish their project.

While the use of MBTI information certainly does not explain *all* of the dynamics of team behavior, it does help us better understand some of the reasons for the behavior of individual team members. Having a better understanding of the differences in human behavior can markedly improve our individual and group ability to be productive and successful.

For more information about the use of the MBTI with individuals and groups, see [Type Talk](#) (1988) and [Type Talk at Work](#) (1992). Both are written by Otto Kroeger & Janet M. Thuesen and published by Delecorte Press. For descriptions of each of the sixteen type preferences, go to <http://www.midwgroup.com/Myers-Briggs-16-Profiles.aspx>

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