

What is 'Psychological Type'?

The basics

We instinctively recognise that there are patterns in our differences and similarities, and 'psychological type' gives 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, just a way of describing some of the key differences in how we interact with the world and make decisions.



The psychological type 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 typing systems around, and many of them are based on the Jungian model, though Myers-Briggs is one of the best known and researched.

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.

Some people naturally draw their energy from the outer world of action, people and things, which we call **Extraversion**. Other people 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 – either what their senses are telling them is right in front of them (**Sensing**), or what their hunches tell them about implications (**iNtuition**).

We make decisions 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.

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.

These preferences are expressed as letters. So a person with a preference for Extraversion, iNtuition, Feeling and Judging has a type of ENFJ. Some systems use descriptive words instead, but the meaning underneath is the same. (See my web site for some suggested reading and web 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, type 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 I am! And it's OK too!" This helps with our self confidence and ability to trust ourselves.

Type 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 system will be able to encompass, just as there is more to any place than a 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, 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 maple, we retain the same underlying type throughout our lives.

Our environment affects how we express our type in our personality, according to whether it supports or suppresses the natural expression of who we are, in the same way that a tree in its natural environment may look different from the same type of tree growing in a pot. That includes the influence 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. This may sometimes feel as though we've changed into someone different, but in reality it's continued development of the same underlying preferences, and follows a pattern for each type.



Finding the right type

Doing a questionnaire, on its own, may not give you the right type - there is a 40% to 70% chance of getting all four letters (preferences) 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 very useful - because it is effectively talking to someone else, not you.

So it is important to find out which type *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 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.

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