

Leading with Personality Type, Satir’s Communication Model and the Learning Styles Inventory

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This paper explores three areas in which leaders can build rapport and increase motivation for followers. The areas are individual personality, individual learning styles, and individual interpersonal communication style. The models explored are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Kolb’s Learning Styles, and Satir’s Communication Model. Following an introduction and description of each, suggestions (“take-aways”) are offered for leaders to start implementing the model immediately. Individual personality styles, individual learning styles, and inter-personal communication styles are ways of understanding individual uniqueness and diversity. On that basis, if we understand each person’s uniqueness, we can orient to that uniqueness and therefore be more effective in building rapport, trust, and motivation.

1. Assessing Personality Using Jungian Type (MBTI)

The two prominent personality assessment tools that employ the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung’s theory of personality are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Jungian Type Indicator (JTI, produced in the UK). Both attempt to classify persons along a theory of sixteen different types, which are based loosely on Jungian theory. The Jung Type Indicator is also known as the “MBTI clone”, and measures the same eight types, but to different degrees (see Psytech, 1998). The basis of MBTI theory is structured around our interaction with information, and what we do with it (see BPS review of MBTI, 2011).

We take in and act on information with four core psychological processes. Persons take in information either through Sensing or Intuiting. Persons make decisions

(act) on the information through either Thinking or Feeling. The above four mental processes of Sensing and/or Intuiting, and Thinking and/or Feeling will be then directed toward an orientation of either outward, at the external world of people and things, (Extraversion), or inward, at the internal world of thoughts and subjective experience (Introversion). People have these preferences, just like they have preferences for which hand or foot they use mostly in a sports activity. Of the final two preferences, Judging is about a preference for planning and organizing oneself and the world, and Perceiving is about a preference for taking in information with little evaluation and putting off decision making until more information comes in.

Applying the above theory we end up with a possible sixteen types, which are located in the following table, and indicate 16 different ways of taking in information, decision making based on information, orienting that information to either the internal or external world, and how persons organize others and set goals.

16 MBTI Types

Introverted Sensing Thinking Judging	Extroverted Sensing Thinking Judging
Introverted Sensing Thinking Perceiving	Extroverted Sensing Thinking Perceiving
Introverted Intuiting Thinking Perceiving	Extroverted Intuiting Thinking Perceiving
Introverted Intuiting Thinking Judging	Extroverted Intuiting Thinking Judging
Introverted Sensing Feeling Judging	Extroverted Sensing Feeling Judging
Introverted Sensing Feeling Perceiving	Extroverted Sensing Feeling Perceiving
Introverted Intuiting Feeling Perceiving	Extroverted Intuiting Feeling Perceiving
Introverted Intuiting Feeling Judging	Extroverted Intuiting Feeling Judging

The most useful way to think of any of the above types is as a tribe, much like an extended family. While a person who belong to a specific tribe has certain traits and qualities in common with other members, there will also be differences within each type tribe. Members of each type are definitely not clones of each other or that particular type.

One advantage of the MBTI and JTI is that type measurement is highly used in team building and personal development. The MBTI/JTI also corresponds well to a lay view of personality, (ie, types as boxes). The advantage of this is that MBTI/JTI is a good

starter on developing the notion that people have personal preferences and are largely guided by these in their behavior. This creates a greater appreciation for acknowledging, appreciating, and working with diverse perspectives, strengths, and weaknesses on teams and in other relationships.

Leadership and the MBTI

The MBTI/JTI tests are excellent tests for personal heuristic reflection. They are not recommended by experts nor by their publishers as predictors for selection purposes. The reason for this is that Jungian theory espouses that persons are always engaged in processes of becoming, and can never stay the same. For that reason psychometric tests are considered much useful for selection than type tests. Below are several ways the MBTI and its clone, the JTI, can be utilized by leaders.

Using the MBTI for workplace counseling

Counseling in the workplace can address workplace problems such as conflict between employees. It can also address problems that are affecting worker productivity. The sources of diminished productivity could be from outside of the workplace or from within the workplace. Cook and Cripps (2005) recommend the MBTI/JTI as one example of several tests for use in such counseling.

The main lesson in the Jung approach is that persons are already differentiated on the basis of their personalities. Each of the two tests provides 16 possible personality types in which a person will belong. Some might even belong in one or more, one of which is dominant and a second, which could be subordinate. Rather than place a client in a “type”, I encourage him to consider the resulting “type” as one’s personality “tribe or “extended family”. Just like when we go on a family reunion we will see many similarities and some differences despite the fact that we all belong to the same family. Understanding how we are each different and unique helps us to understand other persons more readily. For example, while I’m a chatty person (extraverted) my co-worker occasionally pulls back and wants to be quiet. An administration of the MBTI or JTI might indicate she is more introverted than extraverted. Understanding this will help me have decreased expectations for more chat time and increase my appreciation that her

pulling back might not be about me but rather her needs for solitude and to spend more time with her thoughts.

Using the MBTI for individual development

As previously mentioned the strength of the MBTI/JTI is a heuristic tool for self-reflection, particularly to support enhanced understanding of self/other relationships. Team development can also be included. It could also be used to some degree for performance development if it is determine that knowing one's individual type could be helpful in that area. Performance appraisal might be better served though 360 review instruments in which a team member can receive feedback from several people who know his/her performance. I can see the MBTI having some value in a coaching situation in which it has been deemed valuable for an employee to grow and develop (ie, expand introversion tendencies to be better at customer service).

Using the MBTI for promotion

I would be inclined to not use the MBTI/JTI for promotion, and would prefer to use a dedicated occupational psychometric trait test such as the OPQ 32 or the Managerial and Professional Profiler. These are psychometric tests developed for that specific purpose, and very useful for selection. It is known in MBA programs that people often get promoted into supervision/management on the basis of technical skills rather than skills with motivating people. For promotions I would want to be able to make predictions along many managerial/leadership dimensions as well as task/analysis. Of course it is also valuable to follow Cripps and Spry's prescription (2007) and be sure to accompany testing with the two other Golden Triangle elements of Job Analysis and Person Specification from Benchmarks.

Using the MBTI for team development

Team development is perhaps one of the most popular uses for the MBTI/JTI. As mentioned previously, the MBTI/JTI excels in the area of self/other relations and helping persons understand their differences. But it is also important users are properly trained in the instrument and understand Jung theory, particularly that it is difficult to make

predictions on the basis of the theory. Cripps and Spry (2007) write that the MBTI can help determine if teams are “highly similar”. Too much similarity can have strengths and weaknesses for the whole team. They note that a team operates more effectively where there is a demonstrated balanced spread of preferences.

Using the MBTI for career guidance/mentoring.

The MBTI/JTI is a great instrument for building rapport as a person opens up and discovers himself/herself. Everyone likes to know about themselves, and framing life experiences within an understanding of type can be beneficial. Naturally I would also look at using other instruments such as the Strong Interest Inventory (Cripps and Spry, 2007) ability testing, and a comprehensive occupational test.

MBTI: Key Take-aways for Leaders

- Use the MBTI to establish Jungian type for new team members;
- Recognize and accept that different persons have unique qualities;
- Build team strengths on individual strengths;
- Because Jung theory espouses that persons are always in processes of developing, recognize that persons can develop different aspects of their personality;
- Coaching can help people develop the above, as well as provided them with assignments that help them stretch these aspects (ie, provide opportunities for introverted people to do some training for the team);
- Recognize the limitations helping team members develop other aspects of their personalities: ie, an introverted person who starts to do training will still need down time alone to process internally.

2. Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory

David Kolb published his learning styles in 1984. His premise is that there are four different kinds of learners.

Diverging (feeling and watching)

Those in this quadrant are able to look at things from different perspectives, are sensitive, and prefer to watch rather than do. They are oriented to observe and gather information, and the use of imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations several different viewpoints. Kolb concluded that these people perform best in those kinds of situations that require ideas-generation, for example, brainstorming.

They tend to have broad cultural interests and like to gather information. They are interested in people, tend to be imaginative and emotional, and tend to be strong in the arts. People with the Diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind and to receive personal feedback.

Assimilating (watching and thinking)

This learning style prefers a concise and logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people. These people require good clear explanations rather than practical opportunity. This style excels at understanding wide-ranging information and organizing it a clear logical format. People with this learning style are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts. They are more attracted to logically sound theories than approaches based on practical value. This learning style is important for effectiveness in information and science careers. In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through.

Converging (doing and thinking)

People with a Converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. They are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories, and can solve problems and make decisions by finding solutions to questions and problems. They tend to be more attracted to technical tasks and problems than social or interpersonal issues. This learning style enables specialist and technology abilities. People with a Converging style like to experiment with new ideas, to simulate, and to work with practical applications.

Accommodating (doing and feeling)

The Accommodating learning style is 'hands-on', and relies on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. In this process they learn more, through action and reflection. They commonly act on 'gut' instinct rather than logical analysis. People with this learning style will tend to rely on others for information, and than carry out their own analysis. This learning style is prevalent and useful in roles requiring action and initiative. These people prefer to work in teams to complete tasks, and like to set targets and actively work in the field trying different ways to achieve an objective.

Kolb: Key Take-aways for Leaders

Knowing a person's (and your own) learning style enables learning to be orientated according to the person's preferred method. It would thus be valuable to have persons with each learning style on a team. However, everyone responds to and needs the stimulus of all types of learning styles to one extent or another - it's a matter of using emphasis that fits best with the given situation and a person's learning style preferences.

- Use the Learning Styles Inventory to establish learning style for new team members;
- Most people clearly exhibit clear strong preferences for a given learning style;
- Assign tasks that utilize the person's dominant learning style as much as possible, and the person's secondary learning style;
- The ability to use or 'switch between' different styles is not necessarily easy for many people;
- People will tend to learn more effectively if learning is orientated according to their preference. For example, a person with an 'Assimilating' learning style would not be comfortable being thrown in at the deep end without notes and instructions, just as people with an 'Accommodating' learning style are likely to become frustrated if they are forced to read lots of instructions and rules, and are unable to get hands on experience as soon as possible.

3. Satir's Communication Model

Satir's communication model was developed in the 1960's and has been widely used for organizational work in both training, and organizational development. Satir was a pioneering practitioner working in the field of family systems, and like many, became influenced by the human potential movement, and psychologist Dr. Abraham Maslow. She was also an original member of Bateson's MRI group in Palo Alto, California, one of several teams that developed family and organizational systems, based on cybernetic theory. Cybernetic theory also found its way into organizational theory.

Satir believed that individual human behavior could be demonstrated by drawing a picture of an Iceberg (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991: p. 29). Using the Iceberg drawing, we can see that while a person's behavior is observable, we cannot be sure what drives it. Observable behavior is like the exposed part of an iceberg, and this behavior would include the coping styles that a person is using in stressful situations. Satir believed that survival coping styles include the following (see Satir, Banmen, Gerber & Gomori, 1991: pp. 31-53):

- Blaming
- Placating
- Being ultra-rational
- Being distracting (ie, through excess humor).

What drives the survival coping behavior is found underneath the surface, unseen and arranged in levels, like the various levels of need found in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid (Maslow, 1954). The unseen levels are the person's thoughts, feelings, expectations (including unmet expectations), beliefs, attitudes and values, and yearnings. These levels of an individual human system are stimulated to different degrees, either positively or negatively, in all interactions with the environment.

If we use the cognitive behavioral triad of behavior, emotions, and mental process, we can understand that a person's dominant coping style is a behavioral response to what is going on outside (and this includes power and authority), and inside (which includes mental process and emotional process). Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori (1991: p. 69) proposed a fifth communication style, which was referred to by her as "congruent" communication, being honest with others on the team about what is going on

in the moment: speaking up with your ideas and feelings about any situation or what is being discussed. This fits well with the necessity for leaders to empower others (Manning & Curtis, 2009: pp. 151-156)). A person who is free to speak up and not be reprimanded can be a resource from which new ideas emerge.

Satir: Key Take-aways for Leaders

Leaders should practice the following behaviors using the Satir model:

- Be observant of their team members, especially during times of distress;
- Notice how team members use negative coping styles and point it out;
- Encourage team members to speak congruently about their inner reactions to what's being discussed – this is empowering and can be a good source of information;
- Model the way by practicing the same approach so team members can see it;
- Provide basic training on the Satir approach, so that teams have a common baseline and can support each other to have an active and engaged team culture;
- Create a peer coaching culture that uses and integrates the above into everyday work.

Conclusion

In this article I have described three approaches to by which a leader can increase rapport, trust, and motivation with team members. These are the MBTI personality type instrument, Kolb's Learning Styles, and Satir's Communication Model. The description of each approach was followed with a short section for leader take-aways. My own take-away from this project has been the insight that I now have a working framework for a short workshop on leadership using personality, learning styles and interpersonal communication.

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