

# Leadership and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

## Using MBTI in a Team Setting

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**L**eadership – the ability to influence others – has become increasingly more important with the advent of teaming. Although leading a colocated team may be difficult, a virtual team compounds those problems. A virtual team is one in which the team members are located apart from each other, may or may not physically meet on occasion, and one in which team members conduct business through electronic means such as telephone or email. In my current job, I face the practical issues of leading a virtual team that must work together on a diversity of tasks, while located in different areas such as Boston, Mass., Philadelphia, Pa., Suffolk, Va., and Seattle, Wash.

Trying to lead a virtual team can indeed be challenging, primarily because personal interaction is minimized, resulting in the inability to “see” the team’s reaction to direction and follow-through. At one time, I considered myself a competent leader who treated everyone the same; however, my experience in a virtual team setting has shown me that my leadership style might not have been suitable for all team members. I also learned that leading effectively involves understanding what motivates each person, identifying characteristics that help/hinder the team, and determining what I can do, as the team leader, to promote a positive and productive work group.

### Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Realizing that I must understand myself first, I decided to learn more about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Toward that end, I took the elective, *Using*

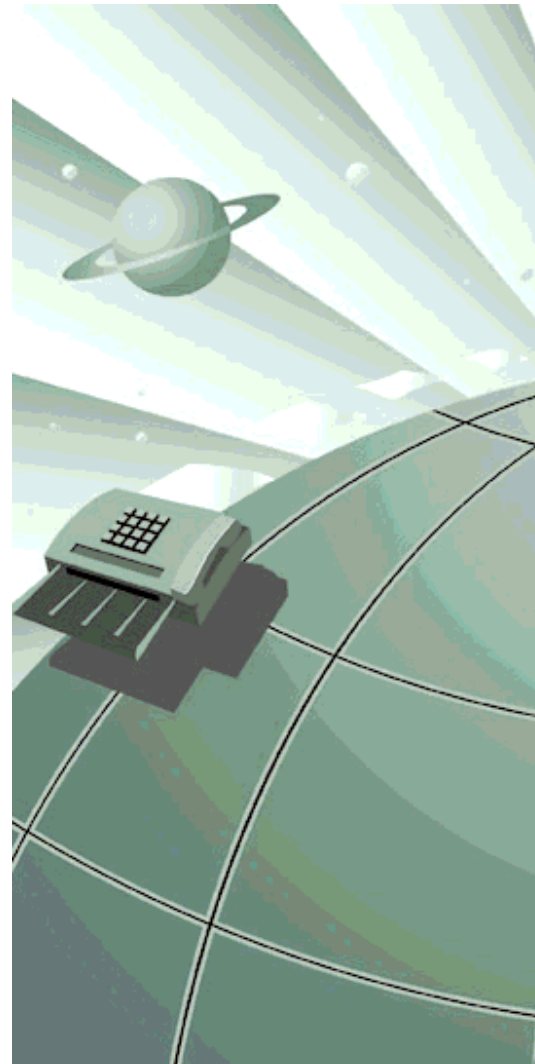
*MBTI at Work and at Home*, at the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC).<sup>1</sup> This course made me realize the importance of not only knowing your own MBTI, but the MBTIs of others as well. Since I have minimal contact with my team members, I used three other resources from the DSMC Learning Resource Center (LRC) to learn about being an effective leader:

- *Art of Speedreading People*<sup>2</sup>
- *How to be an Effective Supervisor*<sup>3</sup>
- *Situational Leadership II Program*<sup>4</sup>

While learning about basic skills, I also searched the World Wide Web for information or lessons learned on virtual teams.

MBTI is a tool that can be used to achieve effective communication with other people. People receive, process, and act upon information differently. If you understand their preferences and then communicate in a way that they understand, chances are you will not only get what you expected, but those with whom you communicate will feel good about how they received and acted on your communication.

I also learned that people might appear, on the surface, to be one type even though their preference is different. Certain “signs” emerge that will actually indicate their true preference. For example, a person who is an introvert may freely talk and appear to be an extrovert. If you listen closely, however, you may hear slight pauses and a more quiet tone, which is an indication of an introvert preference. Using the signs, you can generally determine the personality type of the people you meet.<sup>5</sup> MBTI knowledge



gives you the tools to make the communication process more effective.

Better understanding of different leadership styles also makes the communicating process easier. The styles may vary depending on the person and the situation.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1 describes different phases of situational leadership.) By trying to understand individual members of the team, possibly through MBTI, the

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FIGURE 1: **Situational Leadership Phases**

**Leader's Role**

- Directing - provides guidance
- Coaching - instructs and acts as a role model
- Supporting - reassures, compliments, and encourages productivity
- Delegating - moves responsibility for group tasks, creativity, solutions, and decisions to group members



best leadership style can be chosen. For example, in a case where a particular member of the team needs encouragement and recognition, then applying the supporting leadership phase would be the best choice.

**Becoming a Good Virtual Team Leader**

Virtual teams can be described as teams with communication links and group-

ware products.<sup>7</sup> I learned that a person's MBTI preference could be the key to becoming a good leader. As I defined at the very beginning of this article, leadership is the ability to influence others. In order to influence others, I have to understand how people receive, perceive, and understand what I ask them to do. If I understand what motivates them, I can communicate the necessity of the task in a manner that they perceive and re-

ceive as important, and the task will be as important to them as it is to me.

Due to the nature of a virtual team, I will have little physical contact with the team members. Learning to "read" certain expressed traits can initially give me an insight into their personality type. The reading can take place in a brief encounter, face-to-face meeting, tele-conference, phone or email.<sup>8</sup> How people act and speak indicates their personality types. (Figure 2 provides the Myers-Briggs definition of different types of personalities.) The selection of an appropriate leadership style depends on the situation as well as the personalities of those with whom you are communicating. Matching the style with the person and the current situation is a very important part of the communication process. Knowing and understanding the different types of personality can form the basis of your own personal leadership style right from the start.

Naturally, leadership style may change as the situation changes, even though the personality preferences of those being led may not change. Initially, I thought that a more delegating leadership style would be best for everyone; however, I now understand that although that style may work for some team members, it may not be the correct choice for others. I discovered that the virtual team is essentially no different than a collocated team. The biggest challenge is communication between the team members. As leader, I must help set the guidelines and create an environment for open communication between team members. I found out that regardless of collocated or virtual teams, leadership styles must be adaptive to the person or situation. (Figure 3 lists several issues that affect team leadership.)

**The PROFILOR**

My "PROFILOR" results indicate that my peers and supervisor view me as a better leader than how I perceive myself. However, my results also reflect room for improvement. I believe that implementing the findings I discuss in this article will hopefully improve my leadership ability, thus supporting my PROFILOR results.

**FIGURE 2: MBTI Personality Types**

Introvert/Extrovert  
Sensing/Intuitive  
Thinking/Feeling  
Judgmental/Perceiving

As I attempted to categorize issues regarding virtual team leadership, I ended up with three groups. Interestingly, although I identified these issues for myself as leader of a virtual team, most of my findings would apply to any team. The only virtual team-specific issue was the different locations and time zones. The first group – technology – lists things that can be used to bridge the gap, but obviously even the best technology still does not compensate for ineffective communication skills. Conducting more meetings at the different locations would increase physical contact and increase the likelihood of practicing the right leadership style; however, it would be extremely costly.

The team members are the real issue. They have many demands and requirements from different sources. It is imperative that I get their commitment to complete my task. Understanding their personality types and motives allows me to use a leadership style that matches their motivations.

**Applying Lessons Learned**

Leading a virtual team is no different than any other team except for the fact that communication is more difficult and challenging. I plan to use the character-

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istics of personality types to determine the appropriate communication techniques and the best leadership style – based on the person and the situation. To make initial assessments of my team members’ MBTIs, I will take the following planned actions:

- Ask team members if they know their MBTI and explain my reason for requesting the information.
- Explain my desire to improve my leadership skill and their role in achieving that goal.
- Attempt to identify the best communication methods and leadership style for that time given their MBTI or my assessment of their type.
- Put this information on a card to use as a reference while communicating with team members.

- Develop a habit of thinking about the best communication and leadership style for each person.
- Conduct quarterly meetings with my virtual team to discuss program status, and use my newly found knowledge to gain insight into the best way to lead each person.
- Provide time for feedback.
- Continue to identify and apply the appropriate leadership style and request continual feedback, preferably by situation rather than by schedule.

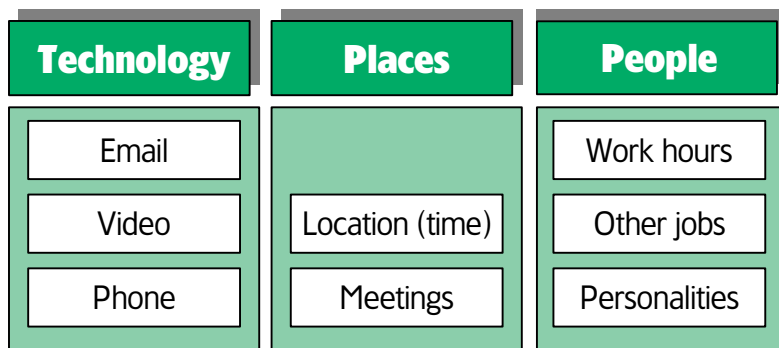
I believe that I can become a more effective team leader by implementing the plan described in this article. Not only will I become a better leader and develop the skill to communicate with others in a manner that is compatible with their MBTI preference, but I will also be opening the lines of communication between team members.

**Final Thoughts**

Prior to this project, I believed that I communicated clearly. I would write correspondence, re-read, and re-write until I was sure it was understandable. Now I understand that I was merely removing ambiguity. I wasn’t writing as if I were the *reader*. In the future, I will be more sensitive in my writing to accommodate each person’s communication method. I also believed that the best leadership style was to give people freedom to do their work. I have since found that not all people want the same level of freedom. I discovered that different leadership styles, from directing to delegating, are appropriate depending on the different situations and personalities. My goal is to be able to identify the best leadership style for each person in a given situation and apply it.

Surprisingly, I discovered that virtual teams are essentially the same as other teams. Although routine “physical” contact is infrequent, increasing communication can develop the same level of teamwork. It takes effort on the part of a leader, through communication skills, to keep the team motivated and on track. The effectiveness of the team really depends on getting the team members to trust and communicate with each other.

**FIGURE 3: Virtual Team Leadership Issues**



My biggest personal “ah ha” was MBTI –understanding what the different types mean and how to speed-read people. I found this fascinating and very useful in my personal life. It helped to answer the question, “Why did that person do that?” If I had to do this project again, I would have focused more keenly on applying MBTI considerations in my personal leadership style.

Some people may believe that MBTI is “touchy, feely stuff” –not something that is actually useful. I would definitely, however, recommend the MBTI to everyone. It helps you understand why people act or say the things they do and in what perspective something is said or done. And that, in turn, leads to better understanding, which leads to *effective* communication.

**Editor’s Note:** The author welcomes questions and comments on this article. Contact her at [YoungPM@NAVSEA.NAVY.MIL](mailto:YoungPM@NAVSEA.NAVY.MIL)

## ENDNOTES

1. Kroeger, O., *Using MBTI at Work and at Home*, Defense Systems Management College Class (DSMC), Fort Belvoir, Va., Nov. 2, 2000.
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## CHECK THIS OUT! SHARE A-76 WEB SITE!

SHARE A-76! is a place for people throughout the Department of Defense community to share knowledge and lessons learned about the A-76 process. The Web site is designed to capture and communicate the experiences of field operators from all DoD Components, including contractors and consultants, as well as anyone interested in the A-76 cost comparison process.

<http://emissary.acq.osd.mil/inst/share.nsf>

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In fiscal 2000, the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) developed a plan to offer all Web-enabled (online) courses to students who work for corporations in the Defense Industry. The program began at the start of the new fiscal year in October 2000.

A nominal tuition fee will be charged to students for the online courses. This key feature of the program should encourage defense industry students to enroll in the courses, thereby building upon and enhancing the skills of the Defense Industry professional acquisition workforce. Students will find application for enrollment very easy, since the program

will use the same online application form that is currently used by industry students who apply for DAU resident courses –available at:

[http://www.dsmc.dsm.mil/registrar/industry\\_applic.htm](http://www.dsmc.dsm.mil/registrar/industry_applic.htm)

The following courses are available to industry students online:

- Fundamentals of Systems Acquisition Management (ACQ 101)
- Fundamentals of Earned Value Management (BCF 102)
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- Basic Software Acquisition Management (SAM 201)
- Acquisition Business Management (BCF 211)
- Simplified Acquisition Procedures (CON 237)
- Acquisition Logistics Fundamentals (LOG 101)
- Introduction to Acquisition Workforce Test and Evaluation (TST 101)

DAU has put together a high-quality program, and the University is confident the program not only has long-term growth potential, but will also be of great benefit to the Defense Industry as well as the students.

For more information, contact Art McCormick, Registrar for Industry Students:

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