

Improved Teamwork Yields Better Results

Understanding personality types – our own and others’ – allows legal professionals to form thriving work teams – driving their organizations’ successes by capitalizing on individuals’ innate strengths.

BY LINDA HAZELTON



Team or group work is here to stay. We work frequently in teams in our law firms – attorney/staff teams, practice groups, special project teams, client teams, function or department teams, and other teams or work groups. Some teams produce better results than others. Some teams seem to function more smoothly. Why? The answer may be found in the “type” of team.

Diverse teams, comprising people with different innate mental habits and approaches, may find that they clash more frequently. Their processes may differ, and they may be uncomfortable with work styles in contrast to their own. Teams with similar thought patterns – birds of a feather flocking together, so to speak – may be happier working together. They may find that there is little friction because they share, unconsciously or otherwise, common traits or styles.

In reviewing the literature on type and team performance, Allen Hammer and Greg Huszczo in *MBTI® Applications: A Decade of Research on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®* (pages 97-98) concluded that:

“Similarity is positively related to process variables and negatively related to outcome variables. Teams comprised of types with similar communication styles seem to perform tasks quicker, have less conflict, demonstrate greater liking of other team members, and listen to one another more than do teams consisting of types whose communication style is different.

On the other hand, teams with more diverse communication styles seem to be more effective and to produce outcomes of better quality. This discrepancy seems to be more pronounced when the teams are working on ambiguous versus structured tasks. There was also some evidence that type-similar groups had more variable results on the outcome variables than did the type-diverse groups.”

(Source: Hile Rutledge of Otto Krueger Associates, Building Teams with Type, CAPT® course.)

As we look at teams and how to improve their levels of performance, recall that teams take on the “type” of their members. Here, type stands for personality type as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®), a psychometric instrument developed by Katharine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, based on the work of Carl Jung. Jung held that we all possessed and used *innate* mental habits. There are, according to MBTI®, 16 types, measured on four different scales. The four scales of preference are E/I, Extraversion and Introversion (where we get our batteries recharged); S/N, Sensing and Intuition (what kind of information we tend to gather); T/F, Thinking and Feeling (how we form judgments and make decisions); and J/P, Judging and Perceiving (how we like to organize or orient our world).



To know the type of a team, we must first know the types of the individuals on the team. Individuals taking the MBTI® will “score” as “ENTPs” or “ISFJs,” for example. The letters in combination are the “whole,” which is greater than the sum of its parts. Even if you have not been exposed to the MBTI®, you may be able to make some inferences based on observable behaviors and using the accompanying table.

<p>E Extraversion <i>Extraverts may</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk more • Process thoughts out loud • Appear more sociable • Recharge their batteries by being with others • Be interested in many things • Prefer to brainstorm or work in teams 	<p>I Introversion I <i>Introverts may</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk less • Think before speaking (pausing to gather their thoughts) • Appear less gregarious • Recharge their batteries by spending time alone • Be deeply interested in fewer things • Prefer to work on problems alone
<p>S Sensing <i>Sensing types may prefer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The details • Concrete data • “Now” orientation • Down-to-earth approach • Straight talk • Facts, figures 	<p>N Intuition N <i>Intuiting types may prefer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The big picture • Meanings, possibilities • Hunches, gut feel • Future orientation • Speculative or fanciful approach • Stories, analogies
<p>T Thinking <i>Thinking types may prefer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule of law or rule-based approach • Analytical approach • Reasons • Critiquing the ideas of others • What’s right 	<p>F Feeling F <i>Feeling types may prefer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective or circumstance-based approach • Personal approach • Values • Supporting the ideas of others • What’s harmonious
<p>J Judging <i>Judging types may</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be organized externally • Prefer following an established process • Prefer a schedule • Prefer finishing projects • Be perceived as more firm 	<p>P Perceiving P <i>Perceiving types may</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be organized internally • Plunge in without a process; adapt while doing • Prefer a flexible day without a preset schedule • Prefer starting projects • Be perceived as more flexible

A TEAM AT WORK: A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

Suppose that a team is formed to plan an upcoming firm retreat. The team consists of the firm’s administrator, the managing partner, the marketing partner, the heads of two practice groups, the firm’s lead marketer, and a marketing assistant. Let’s look at the type table for members of this particular team:

The above team is predominantly an ENTP type team, and it is certainly a P team rather than a J team. What strengths might emerge from this team? What pitfalls might it encounter? With so many Ns on the team, it will likely produce several ideas for the retreat. It may set ambitious goals for the retreat – a superb location, top-notch speakers, great results, and at least one fantastic “party.”

With so many Ps on the team, however, plans may change frequently. In fact, real plans may not be made in earnest until the time draws alarmingly near. The Js on the team, particularly since the marketing assistant may have a lesser voice and may feel uncomfortable with the lack of process the Ps seem to exhibit. They may have trouble getting the Ps to focus their attention.

Meanwhile, the Ps may be annoyed by the Js as the Js press for specific information and details and ask clarifying question after clarifying question. The Is may stop listening to the Es because the Es seem to talk so much and change their opinion so often. In fact, the Es probably aren’t changing their opinions, but instead they are simply thinking out loud. They may not know what they actually think until they’ve expressed all of their thoughts.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Knowing that “type” exists (and that it accounts for many differences) is a large part of the battle. Having a shared vocabulary helps, as does discussing type differences up front. Attributing different behaviors and styles to type is more useful than personalizing observations of divergent habits. In the previous example, the administrator (ISTJ) might say to the managing partner (ENTP), “If you are talking through this to crystallize your thinking ... I’ll be happy to be a sounding board.” The INTP practice group leader might say to the group, “I’m not withdrawn from this process. I’m committed to helping make this a great retreat. I just need time to think this through on my own before I brainstorm with you.”

Setting some ground rules for meetings helps (see sidebar on page 58), as does agreeing on roles and responsibilities. Also helpful is a process for making certain that styles or strengths aren’t being over or under-used.

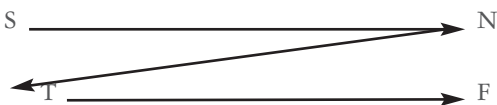
ISTJ (Analytical manager of facts and details) Firm administrator	ISFJ (Sympathetic managers of facts and details)	INFJ (People-oriented innovators of ideas)	INTJ (Logical, critical, decisive innovators of ideas)
ISTP (Practical analyzers)	ISFP (Observant, loyal helpers)	INFP (Imaginative, independent helpers)	INTP (Inquisitive analyzers) Practice group leader
ESTP (Realistic adapters in the world of material things)	ESFP (Realistic adapters in the human relationships)	ENFP (Warmly enthusiastic planners of change) Lead marketer	ENTP (Inventive, analytical planners of change) Managing partner Marketing partner Practice group leader
ESTJ (Fact-minded practical organizers)	ESFJ (Practical harmonizers) Marketing assistant	ENFJ (Imaginative harmonizers)	ENTJ (Intuitive, innovative organizers)

PROBLEM-SOLVING METHODS: CAPITALIZE ON STRENGTHS AND AVOID WEAKNESSES

One way of making certain you are covering all the bases is to use the “Six Thinking Hats” technique, outlined by Edward de Bono in his book of the same name. The hats stand for different perspectives to be used in approaching a decision:

- White hat: Examine the facts
- Red hat: Consider feelings surrounding the issue
- Black hat: Review the negative effects of the decision
- Yellow hat: Look at the positive aspects of the decision
- Green hat: Consider alternatives
- Blue hat: Identify which type of thinking is going on

Another option is the Zig-Zag problem-solving method, a tool designed to remind users to include all of the core mental functions. Many MBTI® practitioners utilize this method, which draws on the core strengths of the four innate mental habits: Sensing, Intuiting, Thinking, and Feeling.



Starting with S – Sensing, define the problem being tackled. Take care to define the problem accurately and succinctly. Gather data. Check facts. Dig for the details necessary to address the issues. When you believe you have gathered the facts and figures to the best of the ability of a person whose preference is sensing (whether that is your preference or the group's), move to N – iNtuiting. Now, you or the group use the skills that someone with a

preference for intuiting would use to generate options, alternatives, scenarios. Come up with as many options for a solution as possible.

People and groups will often move to the analysis phase (where you use T skills) when they have generated one possible solution. They say, “We’ve got a problem, and we’ve generated a possible solution, so let’s analyze it!” Instead, they would do better to stay in the N phase until they have fully brainstormed potential alternatives.

Once the group has a slate of options, move to the T – Thinking phase and consider or analyze the options generated. Use your critical, dispassionate reasoning skills during this phase. Once you have thought clearly about the possible solutions and selected the one deemed the best, call F – Feeling skills into play. Consider the effects or impacts of the proposed solution on all parties involved. If you are a Thinker, ask, “How will this make people feel? What impact will it have on their lives?” Remember to consider the effect on the Thinker, or the person or group considering the possible solution or change as well.

ACHIEVING BETTER RESULTS

When forming a work team – and assuming complete freedom of choice in composing a team – consider grouping teammates with similar personal styles or types when the work involved is of a routine or structured nature in order to have the most smoothly functioning process and easiest communication. But when the task at hand is more ambiguous or strategic, you may achieve a better result by putting together a group with divergent strengths (or types) and providing the group with training and tools to facilitate their work together.

Individuals can learn that different styles are reflections of innate habits or patterns of thought. They can also learn to communicate their needs or concerns using a common language and without labeling behaviors in ways that seem to be personal attacks. Using tools such as the thinking hats method or the zig-zag problem-solving method, teams can capitalize on their strengths and avoid being blindsided by their weaknesses. ♦

about the author



Linda Hazelton is the President of Hazelton Marketing and Management, a Texas-based consultancy offering organization and business development, profitability, communication, and strategy counsel to law firms. Hazelton is also the Chair of LMA's Resource Committee and previously served on LMA's Board of Directors as Treasurer. For information on MBTI® beyond the scope of this article, contact Linda Hazelton at linda@lindahazelton.com.

ABOUT THE LEGAL MARKETING ASSOCIATION



The Legal Marketing Association (LMA) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to serving the needs and maintaining the professional standards of the men and women involved in marketing within the legal profession. One of the LMA's principal goals is to provide to its members vital and timely information on a wide variety of legal marketing issues so that they may grow professionally as well as personally. LMA members immediately gain access to a wealth of resources, including national and regional educational programs, the monthly newsletter Strategies, the LMA Web site and online job bank, industry specific market research, timely and provocative white papers, and much more.

LMA Fast Facts

- Founded in 1985
- 2008 membership: 3,100 (and growing)
- Eighteen local chapters located around the world, including Vancouver and Toronto
- Members are law firm partners, marketing professionals, consultants, and vendors who support legal services marketing.
- 74% of the largest 250 U.S. law firms employ an LMA member.
- Members hail from 43 U.S. states and 11 countries.

Learn more at www.legalmarketing.org.

Example Aspirational Goals for Optimal Team and Work Group Meetings

Adapted by Linda Hazelton from *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge

TO STRIVE FOR: CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY GROUPS

Everyone participates. Extraverts allow plenty of time for Introverts to air their thoughts.

Introverts do their best to share their thoughts – out loud. Extraverts do their best to think before they speak. Both understand that communication style differences exist, and allow for those differences.

People give each other time to think and time to speak their entire thought.

People draw each other out with supportive questions. “Is this what you mean?” People probe for more information, gently.

Each member makes the effort to pay attention to the person speaking and to hear the emotion behind the words – to listen with an open mind and an open heart.

Members separate the brainstorming phase of discussion from the evaluation phase.

TO AVOID: CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVENTIONAL GROUPS

The fastest thinkers and most articulate speakers – or most extraverted, voluble participants – get more air time, particularly if they “outrank” others.

Introverts remain silent and deprive the group of their insights. Extraverts talk to hear themselves talk. Introverts silently think (about Extraverts) – “if only they would say what they mean and mean what they say.” Extraverts think, “If only I didn’t have to drag it out of him – why is he so aloof and removed?”

People routinely interrupt each other.

Questions are often perceived as challenges, as if the person being questioned has done something wrong. Questions are asked in a “deposition style.”

Unless the speaker *captivates* their attention, people space out, doodle, or check e-mail.

Thinkers in the group may switch to the critique phase before ideas have been fully fleshed out.
 “We tried that once. It didn’t work.”
 “Yeah, but ...”
 “That won’t work here.”