

PEOPLE MATTER

It is accepted that it is people – not tools or processes – that run projects. Getting the people factor right is essential, from the psychology to the practice.

Every individual is the exception to the rule

Dr Stephen Benton



Stephen Benton gained his PhD in psychophysics and as a researcher worked in both psychoacoustics and visual psychophysics before, as a lecturer, developing courses in human information processing, cognition and psychophysiology. For the last 11 years he has developed business psychology programmes that highlight the way in which applied psychology can be used to support the individual and individual differences within the workplace. In 1997, he created the MSc in Business Psychology programme at the University of Westminster, the first of its kind in Europe.

Stephen is director of the Business Psychology Centre at the University of Westminster, which specialises in applying Bpsy within both public and private sector organisations. He is also course leader for the innovative MA in Psychology for Project Management and a member of the accreditation and validation panel of APM and of the management board for the Association of Business Psychology (ABP).

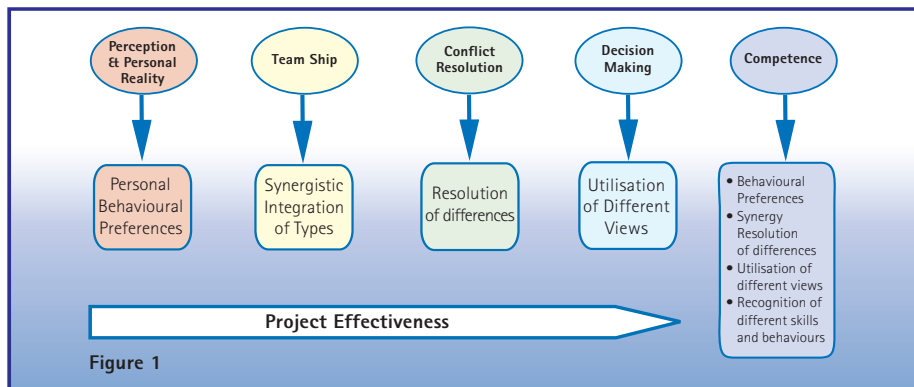
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Recommended reference: Jacobi, Jolande (1973) *The Psychology of CG Jung*, Yale University Press. ISBN 0300016743

Project teams are complex working environments, where each individual member, whether they want to know it or not, is responsible for shaping the quality of teamwork, which in turn impacts on deliverables. Awareness of individual differences may dawn, as the project timescale starts to flag and the budget plan seems increasingly remote from where the project is heading, but at this stage this is unlikely to lead to a 'positive expression of diverse views'.

These issues are addressed by a business psychology (Bpsy) approach, that has developed a systematic approach to the identification of, and working with, individual differences as they impact on activities central to teamwork and project completion (see Figure 1). Often the message is drowned by the behavioural 'noise' that can lead to misperception, misdiagnosis and missing the point.

In principle, teams should contain a capacity



to work at their best during the most difficult times. In practice, instead of tackling the roots of failure, avoidance often leads to compromise and compromised solutions.

Individual differences: team fragmentation or resilience?

Adaptive team behaviour increases a team's capacity to deal with the impact of those differences that go beyond the technical to include the personal and interpersonal. It may be technical competence, analysis and presentation that win a project contract but it is equally likely that it will be failing personal and interpersonal attributes that sink it. Individuals' personal characteristics will interact and shape the quality of exchanges, underwriting the team process.

It is likely that professional project managers might have the legitimate expectation that a level of technical competence and associated professional protocol may constrain the impact of personal differences and allow for individuals to 'get along' well enough to get the job done. However, this is not the same as building skills in working interpersonal processes, which can override these behavioural 'comfort zones'.

Every team has a threshold, or a stage at which the benefits of working in a team disappear. The aim is to increase a team's threshold, its capacity to build a resilience based upon personal and interpersonal awareness. Failing project teams look the same as other teams; they run out of options – when they need them most.

Typology: one way to many options

The start point of any interpersonal learning curve is the individual's perception of where they are in relation to others. All perceptions of others will be filtered through the personal sense of the moment, comprised of what it means, what to do, what is important and how they feel about it. The Jungian theory of personality offers a start point for individuals, which can be recognised and shared. Jung describes personality in terms of preferences rather than traits (Jacobi, 1973). Where trait theorists assume that behaviour is determined by underlying traits, each of which are independent

of each other, preferences result from complex interactions of the fundamental personality structures (*attitudes and functions*) which means that our behaviour will be the product of more than one dimension working together in response to situational as well as dispositional pressures.

Jung's attitudes (*extraversion and introversion*) interact with the four functions (thinking, sensing, intuition and feeling). Each attitude can be expressed in each function, thereby producing eight Jungian attitudinal functions which shape our personality preferences. Some of these shapers of personality are more available for conscious use than others, and it is here that the barriers to full personal awareness and the blocks to interpersonal communication arise as individual differences match or distort exchanges.

It is not unusual to be completely at a loss when faced with others' unprofessional or at best, unreasonable behaviour, because we cannot see where it has come from, or why. We are at a loss when communication fails and all we had been trying to do was 'move things along', 'get some more details', 'get agreement on a deadline', 'review strategy' or 'check for consensus'.

Most unreasonable behaviour has a reasonable starting point. The business psychology approach utilises systems, such as that of Jung (accessed by the Insights evaluator), and other related tests such as Myers Briggs Trait Inventory (MBTI) in order to relate the impact of individual preferences upon core competences such as conflict resolution, team building/leadership and individual and group decision-making.

Illustrations of Jungian preferences

Extraverted thinking (ET): seeking systems and taking action

Extraverted thinking can be summarised as a preference for bringing systems to bear on apparent chaos and develops structures which are designed to deliver. This project member would prefer to seek out objective facts in order to improve their capacity to solve problems. They tend to value action rather than reflection and may be perceived as (have an impact value of) boldness, assertiveness or overbearing and outright aggressiveness.

Introverted thinking (IT): development of ideas based upon analysis

The preference here is for developing and playing around with new ideas and building solutions. This project team member might delve into details, be comfortable with reflection and here preferred action might be 'further investigation'. They may be perceived as 'once-removed' from the business at hand, not a team player, overly cautious yet with a strong capacity for critical analysis, or subject to paralysis by analysis.

Extraverted feeling (EF): new vision, the bigger the better

Individuals with this preference tend to be outgoing, sociable and at ease within group and team settings. They will respond with their opinions immediately, even when not asked. Confident at engaging with and exploring others' views and building team goals and awareness. May impact as losing the point or 'going off at a tangent'.

Introverted feeling (IF): reflect in order to connect

Prefers to keep considerations internal until properly formed and reflected upon. Reflection tends to be focused upon how information relates to and/or may be integrated with personal principles and deeply held values. This team member is keen and able to see the other person's point of view and to bring to bear supportive evaluations. Probably inclined towards dealing with information in a manner that seeks to connect with others' perceived values. May be seen to impact as overly concerned with consensus at the expense of taking difficult decisions.

In the world of stereotypes, guess which type tends to characterise project managers?

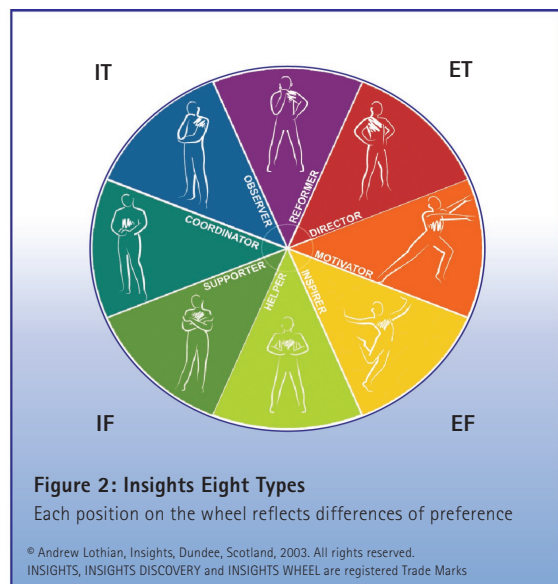
A 2½ D sketch

Without elaborating the Jungian system, some root origins of misperception and subsequent miscommunication may be apparent. To add to this profile is the fact that these types interact in different ways depending on the degree of stress. As expected, each type will find different team attributes stressful and will respond to stressors in a type shaped manner. The frustrated ET may push

harder for a decision and some sign of action, the IF may push the process by focusing on the need for agreement, the IT may focus on apparently 'critical' points of detail, while the EF knowing the strengths of a team can also find the weak spots with alacrity.

In order to promote accessibility to understanding and utilising Jungian typology, the Bpsy model integrates the properties of 'preference' within the interactive core and components, shown in Figure 1. The benefits allow individuals to identify where significant cognitive and behavioural blocks tend to emerge within key interpersonal environments and how such blockers may be able to be reassessed and better managed.

A number of different typological systems exist that promote understanding of self and others through the perspective of 'preferences', and Insights is one such example employed within the Bpsy model. An illustrative example shows the practical consequences of combining Insights preferences with core aspects of competence for the project manager. On completion of the Insights evaluator individuals are better able to determine their and others, (eg team members) perception preferences. The first stage of the Insights system produces eight types, which can be represented as shown in Figure 2, with each of the eight Insight type, allocated to a wheel position.



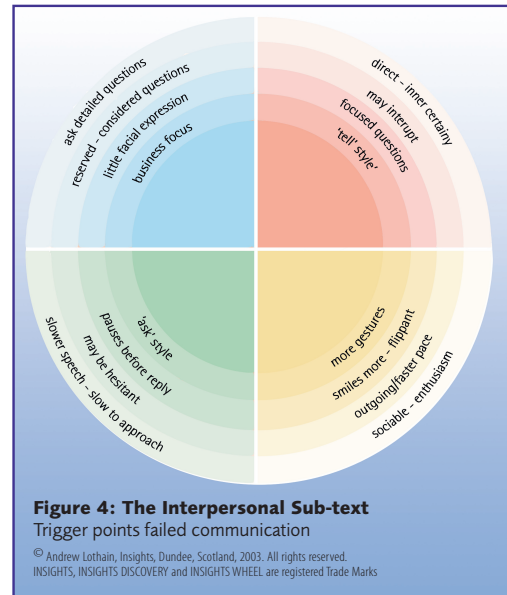
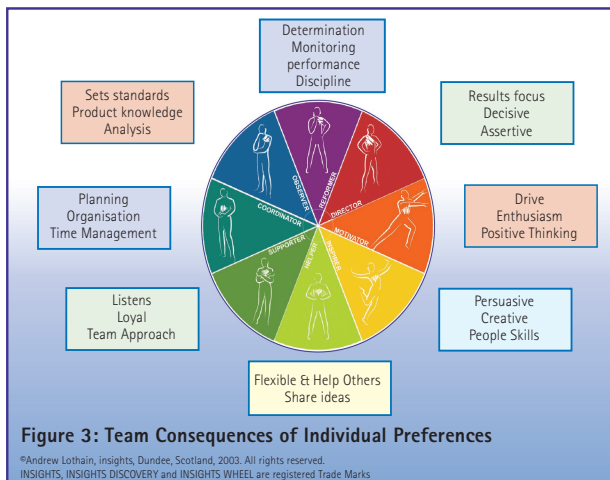
Each position carries a signature of perceptual and behavioural preferences, which are housed within each of the 'bubbles' shown in the Bpsy model in Figure 1. Plotting preferences is one thing, but as each position is different this has only managed to separate out the differences. Without a way of understanding the interactive consequences we would have achieved changes in geography without understanding how to navigate the map, a behavioural puzzle of little practical value.

How to solve these behavioural puzzles before they subvert the project process?

Bpsy places the influence of individual differences at the centre of a model that seeks to make explicit the influence that these differences have upon core people competences for project management. Essential to understanding and managing this impact is the ability to recognise the impact your 'differences' are having upon others' differences when in pursuit of task completion.

A combination of social, cognitive and management models provides access to personal insights which increase an individual's capacity to 'clean' up the message from the behavioural noise while building an individual's perceptual and behavioural options. Working against the grain of individual preferences is fine, if you know that you are doing it and that you have options to deal with the sticking points.

Preferences are associated with attributes and mapping out how these preferences impact on the core activities of project management teams may promote ways in which to work through the blocks, by in the



first instance, recognising that they are active. How do these preferences translate into team knowledge and skills for the benefit of the team members? One application is shown in Figure 3, where the position on the wheel carries a consequence in terms of likely and preferred team dynamics resulting from individual characteristics.

Having established, in broad behavioural terms where the preferences might connect with team attributes, Figure 4 illustrates a finer-grained application that opens up channels of communication and perception for use in scaling these broader concepts to specific behaviours. Figure 4 contains examples of how individuals' preferences can be profiled and placed (within the main type quadrants) in order to highlight potential triggers for misperception and miscommunication.

When this information is integrated into models of best practice for team development, it becomes possible to develop practical guides for project managers when working within project teams that need to address issues of quality, commitment, participation and resilience. For example Figure five summarises how knowledge of different preferences can be applied in the creation of opportunities for extending the team's behavioural repertoire while also building resilience.

Each Insights type is here shown with ways in which to encourage a team's capacity for working beyond individual comfort zones, and thereby be better prepared for those times when projects enter periods of heightened pressure and 'increased stress'.

	How to help them	How to stretch them
Directors	Let them lead the process	Wander from the agenda
Motivators	Allow them to use their creativity	Give them tasks which require attention
Inspirers	Let them talk and share their feelings	Give them time for reflection
Helpers	Give them positive feedback	Encourage analysis and rigidity
Supporters	Give them space and praise	Stick to deadlines
Coordinators	Give them clear instructions	Encourage them to dream
Observers	Give them time to analyse and study	Encourage them to express themselves
Reformers	Allow them to analyse situations	Encourage them to explore their feelings

Figure 5: How to Work with the Grain of Preferences

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Business psychology: utilising diversity

Within the Bpsy model (see Figure 1), each skill set provides a way of identifying and working with the influence of these 'preferences' as they emerge within each of the core competences taken to underwrite effective psychology in the workplace. The model integrates the psychology of individual differences into each of the core areas shown, as a precursor to understanding the behavioural drivers/inhibitors active within the interpersonal processes found within each area.

This knowledge base is then extended through integrating each of the competence areas to produce a coherent framework within which the combined impact of typology and best practice can be made explicit. The interactions between each competence

area (bubble) are utilised to provide a framework that highlights the mutually reinforcing role that preferences can play between these competence areas, such that skills and knowledge acquired within one area actively creates opportunities within another. The aim is to offer a coherent approach in which to acquire skill sets and concepts that are relevant to best practice and mutually reinforcing, therein heightening the potential for utilising individual differences (eg preferences).

If skill sets across areas of competence, as outlined in the Bpsy approach, can be shown to benefit from an understanding of individual differences, then continuity of personal competence to professional competence can prompt sustainable benefits across situations. The psychology of preference plays a central role in pointing the way towards personal insight that is focused within core workplace competences.