

12-1-2002

Personality types and conflict: finding our way through the maze

Peter Condliffe

Recommended Citation

Condliffe, Peter (2002) "Personality types and conflict: finding our way through the maze," *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 5: No. 8, Article 7.
Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol5/iss8/7>

This Article is brought to you by epublications@bond. It has been accepted for inclusion in ADR Bulletin by an authorized administrator of epublications@bond. For more information, please contact [Bond University's Repository Coordinator](#).



Practical skills in ADR

Personality types and conflict: finding our way through the maze

Peter Condliffe

In a section of my upcoming book called 'Communication and verbal jujitsu' I have classified personality and interpersonal factors as 'Level 1 conflicts' because they are constantly, and often unconsciously, with us. They lead us into difficulties even in those situations where the expectation is that co-operation to achieve common goals is understood by all. We often move into conflict for reasons that are not the result of a deliberate confrontation, negotiation, competition or fight, simply because the personalities and resultant styles of the participants are different.

The last two centuries has seen enormous advances in the way we understand these general relations between our internal and external lives. Perhaps, apart from Freud, Jung has been the most influential theorist and practitioner. He suggested that people tend to process information about the world in terms of sense or intuition, and to make judgments in terms of thought or feeling. According to this analysis the dominance of a particular set of functions will give a good indication of how any particular person will manage the world. This idea has had widespread application

Figure 1



by psychologists and most popularly by Myers and Briggs whose model is outlined below.

Myers–Briggs system

The well known Myers–Briggs Type Indicator[®] (MBTI[®]) has been used extensively as a way of understanding how individuals respond to conflict and change. The MBTI measures individual preferences in four areas, mainly concerned with information giving and decision-making. It does this through measurements obtained on four scales as follows.

- Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I) — indicates whether individuals prefer to derive energy from the outer world (E) or the inner (I).
- Sensing (S) or Intuitive (N) — indicates how individuals perceive or gather information. Some prefer to rely on their senses (S) while others prefer to rely on their perception of relationships, meanings, concepts and possibilities beyond what is immediately apparent (N).
- Judging (J) or Perception (P) — indicates the attitude individuals adopt when dealing with the world. The J person seeks to command and control events in a decisive way while the P person lives in a more spontaneous way, seeking to adapt to life.
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F) — indicates what one relies upon when making a decision. T people like to rely on analysis, logic and objectivity. F people rely upon more subjective, personal and social values.

Each preference on each scale is independent of the other three. This results in sixteen possible combinations denoted by four letters (such as ENFJ, ENTJ and ISTP). Each of these types has different preferences, weaknesses and strengths. The ways in which they will deal with conflict is likely to be different. The MBTI is useful in indicating the complexity of responses to conflict. It is less useful in designing system wide responses.

Verbal jujitsu

In verbal jujitsu, however, we use a system adapted from an author called Brandon Toropov (*Manager’s Guide to Dealing With Difficult People* Prentice Hall Paramus NJ 1997), as I find the Myers–Briggs and other models too unwieldy and complex to be of much use in my own practice. It is a simple model that I have found most useful in better analysing and responding to conflict situations. In this model there are four initial frames of reference or styles that people bring to bear in their relationships with one other. These four types have different ways of getting things done. These four ‘personality types’ are based upon two priority scales.

Most of us have a preference along one of these scales. The first scale (Figure 1) is balanced between the two extremes of doing things by ourselves or doing things through others. The second scale (Figure 2) is a balance between an extreme preference for getting things right and checking the detail regardless of time, and getting things done within the time constraints.

By putting these two scales together Toropov developed a quadrant model (Figure 3) which, with adaptations, I have found extremely useful in the Australian context. These four sets match the priorities of most people.

Figure 2



Most people can identify these four groups of people almost immediately. Some take a little longer to work it out. I have provided a checklist of characteristics of each which you can use to analyse your own and others’ particular styles. Each type can be summarised as follows.

Lone Rangers are self-directed, goal oriented and persistent. They like to keep to deadlines but have a tendency to over-commit themselves. They generally have great confidence in their abilities.

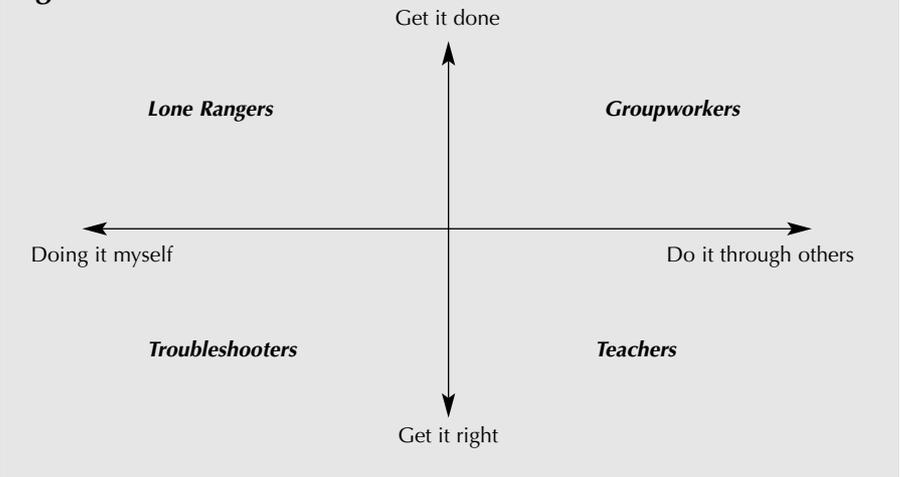
Troubleshooters are self-directed and persistent also. They prioritise their technical knowledge, finding the problems or issues to be fixed.

Teachers like technical detail but focus on developing policies, procedures and systems that keep the whole group focused.

Groupworkers like to work through the group as with teachers. They are generally optimistic and gregarious and tend to be time sensitive and goal-oriented.

Using the four types can be very helpful in understanding why you are having conflict or misunderstandings with particular people and it also gives

Figure 3





Checklist of the four types

Lone Rangers

- Self directed
- Goal orientated
- Persistent
- Enjoys developing projects/new ideas
- Takes deadlines seriously
- Finds doing it easier than explaining
- Handles pressure
- Can over-concentrate on one project
- Can over-commit
- Often expect/assume similar of others
- Often assumes others understand
- Often highly intuitive

Groupworkers

- Group directed
- Gregarious/optimistic
- Enjoys working with others/talking
- Enjoys 'adventures'
- Reluctant to alienate others
- Generally concentrate on particular projects and goals not systems
- Credits and trusts the team
- Assumes the best in others
- Have difficulty disciplining/replacing others
- Often intuitive
- Can over-compensate in management

Troubleshooters

- Self directed
- Persistent
- Enjoys finding mistakes/issues
- Enjoys details
- Everything is a search for quality
- Finds discrepancies/inconsistencies
- Like to be technically proficient
- Sometimes can be seen as harsh/tactless
- Can be indirect (to avoid conflict)
- Likes to write things down
- Assumes others will pick up errors like them
- Can go in the 'wrong direction' because of the need to find the problem

Teachers

- Group directed
- Enjoys detail/sensing
- Enjoys problem solving/measuring/quantifying/trial runs
- Team worker
- Systems and procedures maintenance are important to help others
- Reluctant to alienate others
- Concerned with problems but so as to make the other system work more smoothly
- Can be conservative/risk averse
- Can concentrate too much on generating data and not doing

General guidelines for dealing with each type

Lone Rangers like to frame things within deadlines and talk in terms of persistence and effort.

Troubleshooters like to frame things in term of problems and fixing things usually through their technical mastery. They often see things as potentially a crisis.

Teachers frame issues in terms of systems, processes and checklists. They like to work through the group.

Groupworkers frame issues as challenges to be met by the group or team. They like to bring the best out in people.

you some clues as to how to talk and respond to them. However be warned! They are not prescriptions for dealing with others. People are adaptable and act differently in different contexts. These descriptions will enable you to respond to each type in the most or more appropriate way.

If you can ascertain the conversational style of the person you are dealing with, you will be more likely to be able to head off any misunderstandings and conflict. The basic way of doing this is to *mirror the conversation* (and non-verbals) of your conversational partner. This helps you to connect with the other and helps the other, and you meet your interests and needs. To do this you send your messages in the language of the other. In this way you get into their 'mindset' and this will maximise your chance of harmony. Another way of putting it is to put yourself in the shoes of the other and present the concerns and issues in a way that they will best understand and respond to.

You can use these guidelines in most situations to improve your communication with people and to prevent conflict from occurring. By framing your conversation in ways which the other relates to it can be rewarding for you and them. Try to think of people around you whom you can safely practice this on. Discuss with them the four styles and while you are doing it try to establish the other's style, and mirror some of (do not parrot) their style. Good luck! ●

Peter Condliffe is Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators, Melbourne, and can be contacted at ceo@iama.org.au.

This article is an excerpt adapted from Peter Condliffe's recently published book entitled Conflict Management: A Practical Guide (2nd ed) LexisNexis Butterworths Sydney 2002.

PUBLISHING EDITOR: Natalie D'Enyar **MANAGING EDITOR:** Elizabeth McCrone **PRODUCTION:** Kylie Gillon **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** \$445 per year including GST, handling and postage within Australia of 10 issues plus binder and index **SYDNEY OFFICE:** Locked Bag 2222, Chatswood Delivery Centre NSW 2067 Australia **TELEPHONE:** (02) 9422 2222 **FACSIMILE:** (02) 9422 2408 **DX** 29590 Chatswood www.lexisnexis.com.au natalie.denyar@lexisnexis.com.au

ISSN 1440-4540 Print Post Approved PP 255003/03417 Cite as (2002) ADR 5(8)

This newsletter is intended to keep readers abreast of current developments in alternative dispute resolution. It is not, however, to be used or relied upon as a substitute for professional advice. Before acting on any matter in the area, readers should discuss matters with their own professional advisers. The publication is copyright. Other than for purposes and subject to the conditions prescribed under the Copyright Act, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission.

Inquiries should be addressed to the publishers. Printed in Australia ©2002 LexisNexis Butterworths ABN: 70 001 002 357

