

Development of the Pearman Personality Integrator

Why I developed another personality type assessment tool—to move the development conversation forward.

For the last forty years, I have been actively using an array of personality inventories and assessments to facilitate insight and growth of my clients. With numerous books published on my research on leaders and psychological type as measured by the MBTI, you might well wonder why I would feel compelled to develop another tool in the field that has a number of tools already.

When I completed a massive data analysis of variables collected at the Center for Creative Leadership in 1991, I published a number of articles indicating the presence of significant patterns in a number of independent variables which generally confirmed the MBTI hypotheses about personality patterns. But that was only a fraction of the story. The analysis involved hundreds of pages of statistical computations which both supported the basic propositions of psychological type and revealed a number of other factors, about which I've been writing and talking about for twenty-five years. I have been raising questions and pointing to exceptions to the rules of type as framed by Myers' model based on this evidence.

As the experiences with clients have increased, their questions and probing about psychological type prompted me to do the same. I will never forget the coachee I was working with in 1992 whose MBTI scores were E5 N3 T9 P1. According to conventional MBTI frames, his type is ENTP. In the conversation with him, my coachee asked, "Those scores suggest I answered a lot of I, S, F, J questions. How do those patterns fit into the picture?" This question sent me probing and exploring possibilities about psychological type which influence my thinking today.

Another event which altered my use of type occurred when working with the Young Presidents' Organization. While doing my standard presentation, one of the very energetic participants challenged the value and utility of what I was saying. I did a full stop and backed up to some basic questions. By getting them to tell me about their behaviours I was able to connect their everyday behaviours to type related expressions. Before my eyes, the eight functions of type as part of a comprehensive psychological system revealed itself. I've never been able to present type in any other way—as a system of eight psychological functions, which are as Jung initially described with Extraverted Thinking, Introverted Thinking, etc.

In addition to coachees asking great questions, researchers in the assessment field have been pointing out that measurement of perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours is filled with challenges, especially when trying to simplify complex elements of psychology. It is fair to say that measurement approaches in the vast majority of cases assume degrees of expression or amounts of an attribute such that asking about behaviour on a continuum rather than an either/or categorical responses. I fully aware that psychological type presents qualitative polarities as if it is an either/or proposition; however, if you reframe the polarities as having degrees then there will be shifts in our thinking about the underlying model. And it is important to note that the evolution of the science of assessment has largely post Jung and in many ways, post Myers. Jung's observations are 90 years in the past and Myers' formulation is 70 years in the past and a great deal has changed in the way we think about personality. Heisenberg's proposition that the tool we use to measure, influences and biases the outcomes. So, if we recalibrate our assumptions, we begin to see a more complex and richer model.

The growth of knowledge in the behavioural and social sciences, inclusive of the neuroscience of behaviour, reminds us that personality assessment has not simply been standing still over the last fifty years. In fact, we now have a wealth of information on human patterns that has been confirmed by our most robust sciences. If you are serious about understanding yourself and others, you have to be mindful of the current research trends, which hopefully will lead deeper insights and developmental steps forward.

So, what questions are worth exploring and will forward our thinking about personality and integrate new knowledge to give a fresh perspective on an old challenge—measurement of behaviour. Revisiting Jung, reframing the model, adding new insights on measurement, and paying attention to the evidence related to key factors of development provides for a fresh look at personality.

As Jung set the stage for thinking about psychological type, it is important to look with fresh eyes to what he suggested versus someone's interpretation of what he meant. Briggs and Myers framed their understanding of type using a couple of key ideas. Besides using his key propositions on Extraversion, Introversion and so forth, Myers and Briggs created a way to generate a hypothesis about the dominant and auxiliary processes, thus creating a fourth dimension reflecting an outer world behaviour labelled judging and perceiving. This produced a neat and tidy system of sixteen patterns. But this is one interpretation of what Jung suggested and not necessarily the "right" one—just a convenient and simple frame.

Jung talks about his initial awareness of the extraverted and introverted use of psychological energy and his realization that this was insufficient in understanding the trends he observed. He added the notion that Sensing as projected in the outer world and inner world had different effects. So, he had eight types: Extraverted Sensing, Extraverted Intuiting, Extraverted Thinking, Extraverted Feeling, Introverted Sensing, Introverted Intuiting, Introverted Feeling, and Introverted Thinking. This is an argument for qualitatively different mindsets and perspectives on behaviour. Jung did not present these as independent factors; it is not Extraversion plus Sensing, it is Extraverted Sensing for example.

It is reasonable to argue, given his statements, that Jung believed there is an underlying psychological system using ways of perceiving ("irrational processes") and judging ("rational processes") experience that was operating in each person. Among the eight mental functions, one was primary, thus giving rise to a type, while the other functions were in service to this primary driver of the personality. He made the statement of a mental function having a co-determine influence on the leading function but he didn't say always and under certain conditions. Jung was clear that personality was an expression of biological—neurological—processes which inherently means a profoundly complex set of processes are at work, which any assessment of these processes should seek to include.

That Jung worried that his psychology of the types would become a tool to pigeon hole people and in so doing close developmental conversations which was noted in numerous letters to colleagues. When Jung noted that "Inferior functions are inferior to consciousness, not in strength," he was point out that all of the functions are present, just not at the same level of intentional use. Further, Jung noted that in the psychology of the types, the "object" of attention and focus are different for each type, and to learn to hold the different psychological energies in awareness at the same time allows for flexibility of response, which is at the heart of his notion of the "transcendent function".

So, I am suggesting the following:

Jung's main perspective:

- Eight mental functions
- Primary function leading the personality
- Whole system at work, inclusive of conscious and unconscious processes
- Organic bases meaning the individual is behaving in ways to meet needs and flexes in order to adequately adapt
- Recognition in the natural tendency individuals have in tension with what is required
- Learning to own both your dominant function and the power of the whole system creates opportunities for adaptation
- Process focused rather than product focus—role of function in perception and judgment rather than a description of static qualities

Post Jungian Interpretations in assessments:

- Measuring four polarities (not directly accessing eight functions)
- Dominant is deduced
- Focus is on factors e.g.: E, S, T, J, all else deduced
- Auxiliary is “fixed” to create 16 types
- Qualities and pattern description focus rather than process focused
- No systemic connection or access
- No recognition of tension between natural and expected expressions

The Pearman Personality Integrator covers the following:

- Eight mental functions
- Dominant is directly assessed
- Relative use of all other functions directly assessed
- Recognition of the way environment influences use and expression—what is natural and what is needed to respond
- Flexing among dimensions assessed
- Degrees of use produce elements of uniqueness
- Access to whole psychological type system
- Unique patterns of use of eight functions

It is my belief that Jung was intentional about the interplay of conscious awareness and psychological processes that were used for individual adaptation. His use of terms like “object” of awareness, mental functions, limits of each function, and individuation are the antecedents to a principle of subject-object relations. When he noted that “you don’t have an inferior function, it has you” he was explicitly noting that the psychology energy of that function was in control of an individual’s psychology—the individual is subject to the function unlike when the function is an object of utilization by the individual. Robert Kegan of Harvard has given extensive attention to the importance of understanding this principle in order to increase the level of functioning by individuals. Just as Kegan notes that those who are continually the subject of their psychology have very rigid boundaries and narrow perspectives and those for whom their psychology is the object of understanding, owning the tendencies and patterns and integrating these into a mindset that takes into account an overall larger system of systems are more flexible and adaptive. Jung’s continuum was simply concrete to abstract, which have the same attributes Kegan describes. Jung believed in the uniqueness of the individual and in the capacity to embrace the creative energy of each psychology. My goal is to create an assessment that opens this conversation in such a way as to honour the psychology of the types and the potential of each individual.

The Pearman Personality Integrator returns to Jung’s focus on the mental functions as a system, recognizes the differences between what is natural and what is required of the situation, and the role of flexibility to allow the full embrace of human potential.

