

The Evolution of the Art of MBTI® Feedback

Understanding the Art of Feedback from the Eight Function Perspective

Part 3 in a 3-part series

In the first article of this series (*Bulletin of Psychological Type*, 31(1), 19-21), I wrote about the evolution of the eight-function feedback model as one alternative to teaching the layperson about psychological type. In Part 2, I interviewed Katharine Myers, who provided a context for the evolution of this model of MBTI® feedback and its importance within the development of type interpretation (*Bulletin of Psychological Type*, 31(2), 40-41). In this article, I will share my perspective on the components needed to successfully conduct an eight-function workshop – insights garnered from years of facilitating MBTI workshops and teaching Jung’s theory in MBTI qualification programs.

Different Approaches

In my first article, I highlighted the differences between the traditional model of feedback and the eight-function model. Here, I will summarize the most current *delivery format* for the eight-function model along with the traditional model, as reference points. It is through a synthesis of these models that I have had the most success with facilitating eight-function sessions.

The traditional feedback model is framed so participants understand they will be selecting their MBTI preferences

on each of the four dichotomies of Isabel Myers’ type code. Practitioners lead participants through the four dichotomies as they appear in order – first, E/I, then S/N, next T/F and, finally, J/P. Participants select their preferences from opposite poles of the dichotomies by participating in exercises and listening to explanations and examples. Leaders impart Jung’s psychological type theory by focusing on the four functions (S, N, T, F), the middle letters of the code.

In this model, the only mention of the eight Jungian mental functions (also called functions-in-attitude, mental processes, and cognitive processes) – the four functions in their extraverted and introverted attitudes – is within whole type descriptions. For example, someone exploring ENFJ as their best-fit type will read the ENFJ type description which captures the dynamic interaction between “Extraverted Feeling (dominant) with Introverted Intuition (auxiliary)” (Myers, 1998). It is up to the trainer to weave his/her knowledge of type dynamics (the movement of psychic energy between the functions) throughout the presentation. The core of Jung’s theory, the dynamic nature of the eight mental functions, is tackled within the context of follow-up work through type dynamics.

In contrast, the prevailing eight-func-



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four letters to gain an understanding of their psychological type.

Third, defining the meaning of *dynamic* within the context of type helps people understand why type does not put us in boxes. Myers (1998) stated that Jung observed *when we are awake and our minds are active*, we are alternating between two *mental activities* – perceiving (taking in information) and judging (evaluating that information), either inside ourselves (introversion) or outside of ourselves (extraversion). I explain to workshop participants that Jung concluded we can only engage in one of these activities at a time. I talk about the need for us to *move between* perceiving and judging, externally and internally, every day – indeed every minute or second of every day.

After teaching these concepts, it is an easy segue to Jung's eight mental functions by characterizing them as "tools" we use to *carry out* these cognitive activities (Myers and Kirby, 1994). There are four tools for taking in information and four for making decisions. We have all of these tools at our disposal (although not equally) and it is, "...the natural preference for one of these functions over the others [that] leads individuals to direct energy toward it and to develop habits of behavior and personality patterns characteristic of that function [the dominant]" (Myers, 1998, p. 7).

Conveying these concepts sets the stage for the eight-function session; it defines the theory from the start as a dynamic system. We mentally *engage in using tools*, defined by Jung, to operate in the world. These concepts lay the base for grasping type as a flexible system which provides one lens for understanding human behavior.

Presenting the Eight-Function Model

I have been most successful in communicating the true dynamic nature of Jung's theory when I present the eight mental functions within the context of the four dichotomies, in the order the preferences appear in the code. The sequence for presentation of the workshop follows the self-selection form I give to participants (see Table 1) and is as follows:

- 1) E/I defined as the attitude for energy flow
- 2) S/N defined as the perceiving dichotomy
- 3) S and N defined from a "big picture" perspective and compared as opposite perceiving functions
- 4) Se, Si, Ne, Ni presented with exercises
- 5) Participant self-selects the most natural function
- 6) Steps 2-5 repeated for T/F, the judging dichotomy, and

- 7) J/P as an indicator of the mental function we use externally.

The E/I Dichotomy and Mental Functions

The shift to presenting the E/I dichotomy before the mental functions is a subtle, but important, shift. The flow of psychic energy is the foundation of Jung's theory of typology. Myers put the dichotomy first for this reason (Thompson, 1996, p. 12). Jung observed that the functions were what carried the attitudes and made them observable. Jungian analyst John Beebe states, "...for Jung, the attitude type was the primary thing, and the function type a kind of sub-something that expressed that attitude in a particular way" (Beebe, 2005). I have found that if participants can understand the nature of the E and I attitudes in isolation, they more easily grasp the nature of the *movement of the functions* as they are expressed through these attitudes.

After the E/I dichotomy, I transition the group to the S/N dichotomy by using this quote from Jung:

Strictly speaking, there are no introverts and extraverts pure and simple, but only introverted and extraverted function-types (Jung, Psychological Types, para. 913).

This quote paves the way for me to define the mental functions as things that move through our psychic flow of energy. The quote illustrates that we are neither an E nor an I in isolation, but rather we use both attitudes to operate in the world and express the four functions in an extraverted or introverted way.

Jung's words also allow me to segue to the dominant and auxiliary mental functions which they will be selecting. One of these mental functions is used primarily in an extraverted way and one primarily in an introverted way. We use our favorite of these two mental functions in conjunction with our preferred flow of energy and the other one we use in the opposite direction. One of these mental functions will be for perceiving and one for judging. This is true because we need to have a way to gather information and make decisions, and the means to deal with the outer and the inner worlds. Then I give examples of what might happen if we did not have a natural preference for opposite ways of perceiving and judging!

Having used Jung's terminology as the basis for defining extraversion and introversion, I have a base for explaining each function in its mode of orientation. Extraversion is the flow of psychic energy toward the object, or anything outside of self; introversion is the flow of energy inward toward self, or the subject. Thus any extraverted mental function moves toward the object and any introverted func-

tion inward toward self. For example, sensing in its *extraverted* form is a cognitive process that moves outward toward the environment, immersing itself in and merging with the details of objects in the environment gathered through 5 senses. On the other hand, sensing in its *introverted* form requires a movement away, a detachment, from the objects in the environment in order to go inside toward self; it needs time to access the rich detail gathered and stored from previous experience and to process information from the 5 senses to make sense of the outer world.

Presenting the J/P Dichotomy

I present the J/P dichotomy by stating Myers' intention in construction – to indicate whether we predominantly extravert a judging or perceiving function (Myers, 1988). The majority of participants will have already selected one extraverted and one introverted mental function and determined which is their favorite. If their Perceiving function is extraverted (Ne or Se), they will select P and if their Judging function is Extraverted (Te or Fe), they will select J. I provide basic descriptors for those who have selected two mental functions in the same direction, or for those who are still confused about their selection.

Caution to Practitioners

I have found that I can adapt this model to any audience as long as I tailor the presentation and examples for their industry or cultural environment, but this takes practice. Also, after years of experimenting with the model (and adding my own flair!), I can facilitate an effective session for a group in four hours and for an individual in two hours. I would not recommend these timeframes for practitioners new to the model; there is a lot of information to cover. In fact, even a seasoned practitioner will get more mileage out of the model if they have a day to impart the information – this provides a short window of time in which to add a practical application so that people understand the model's value. It is important to remember that there is a learning curve which includes the study of the mental functions as well as the design for delivery.

Conclusion

In general, the benefit of the eight-function model is that it provides participants with an introduction to the dynamic nature of type in a profound way. The model serves to enhance the introduction of type as a system of energy and balance – between extraversion and introversion as well as perceiving and judging – and it provides the potential for new learners to grasp the true power of Jungian typology.

There are added benefits to facilitating the eight-function model within the parameters of the type code as I have described. First, I feel I am imparting the theory with more accuracy and in the manner in which it was developed. Second, Myers' context helps practitioners to teach the mental functions through the dynamics of whole type and the movement between, and interactions of, the preferences. It keeps the mental functions within the parameters of a dynamic and interconnected system which is the type code.

Keeping the mental functions within this system helps people to understand that the mental functions represent how we are *using* the functions; it steers us away from our human tendency to apply type in a stereotypical way! However, there is as much danger of using the mental functions as separate entities that function alone, as there is of using any of the four letters of type in isolation. In fact, I have heard the proclamation that someone is like they are because they are a Te, for instance. How is this any different than proclaiming that I do or do not engage in certain activities because I am a T?

There is no right or wrong approach to facilitating the MBTI and Jungian psychological type! The approach you use will surely work for you, and it is a personal decision. I can only impart the benefit of my experience. After years of facilitating type through this model, I have seen that it is a type approach that can leave clients with a self-sustaining path to self-awareness they can, and do, call upon when I am gone. It paves the way for people to look at their own use of the mental functions and to determine in certain circumstances whether they need to maintain more balance in a certain direction, or perhaps develop better skill in using a function they have discarded. I am reminded here of the old adage, "Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime."

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