

The 5th Note of Personality –the Harmony of Whole Type

Have you ever listened to a barbershop quartet? Apart from the engaging lyrics and colorful costumes, what makes a barbershop quartet distinctive is what is called the 5th note. The 5th note is a musical phenomenon in which four voices blend to create a sound that is altogether unique. Interestingly, that 5th note cannot be created on any instrument; its very existence depends on the contributions of the four original voices.

Psychological type is in many ways similar to a barbershop quartet. In a barbershop quartet, each individual singer's voice is important and makes a unique vocal contribution. The same is true of psychological type; each letter in a person's type code is important and makes a meaningful contribution to our deeper understanding of that person. But in both cases, the magic is in the harmony—the 5th note of the barbershop quartet and the whole type of personality.

Although whole type has always been a fundamental and useful principle of personality type theory since Isabella Myers and Katherine Briggs developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), until recently, whole type has largely remained in the background of public attention, overshadowed by its more glamorous cousins: preference pairs, temperaments, and cognitive dynamics.

This is an understandable, and, some have argued, even necessary, state of affairs. After all, we get to whole type by determining each of its component parts. But without taking a side in the debate, I submit that how we arrived here is less important than where we go next. It is the future of our practice that engages my attention.

That future tells me that if we are not careful, we run the risk of completely forgetting about whole type in favor of focusing on its components. Because if we are honest, we will admit that we are all the “little scientists” that Piaget proclaimed us to be. Who among us could pass up the opportunity to examine *anything* under a microscope? And for the most part, those examinations have yielded beneficial results. But while maintaining our interests in learning more about the components, we must also remain committed to returning our gazes to the big picture of whole type, for that is the foundation on which our practice is built.

On the topic of practice, let me return to the usefulness of whole type to which I alluded previously. There is a good reason that the American Psychological Association has designated the MBTI a B-level instrument,

requiring individual debriefing. For as we all know, a large number of people have difficulty sorting between one or more preference pairs. If we had to stop at the component level with them, think of the thousands of people who would be stranded along type highway, their inability to sort forever denying them access to the benefits of self-awareness and greater understanding. But, as a type practitioner, how comforting it is for me to know that failure to sort between preference pairs is not the end of the journey. In those cases, whole type has always come to the rescue, like a welcomed AAA tow truck. I have been able to relieve the anxiety of my confounded by clients by simply presenting them with whole type patterns. Although it took some longer than others, invariably they have all been able to discover their best-fit, whole-type patterns, which also automatically resolved their sorting challenges. That is one example of the usefulness of whole type, especially when dealing with people who have no idea of the differences between introversion and extroversion, let alone introverted versus extroverted sensing.

It is true that I have preferences for introversion, intuiting, thinking, and judging; that based on my intuiting and thinking preferences, I have the theorist temperament; and that my leading cognitive process is introverted intuiting. But these components, while important and meaningful, like the barbershop quartet singers' individual voices, pale in comparison to the rich and life-changing understanding I gain about myself when I examine my whole-type pattern of INTJ. The magic for me is in the harmony, and I suspect the same to be true for you and all of your clients.

Biography

Paul “Coach Paul” Edward, PhD, INTJ, is an award-winning author and coaching psychologist. He is a leading expert in the fields of individual and organizational development, with a focus on entrepreneurs, law enforcement chief executives, and professional sports organizations. Coach Paul lives in the Southern California city of Claremont with his wife and two teenage sons. He learned about psychological type during his undergraduate university education and has been using it for more than 25 years. You can reach Coach Paul at coachpaul@lifechangingcoaching.com or 909-457-8280.

Reprinted from the Bulletin of Psychological Type, 32(3), 30-31.