

A Diagnostic Tool for Causes of Conflicts



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Long before Carol knew her type, she was able to describe with intensity the exhaustion she felt trying to work next to someone who interrupted her with random comments. What she did not know was that Roger found it just as exhausting to try to draw her out, find out what she knew, and get her to share data. In fact, it seemed to him that she was withholding information, keeping it from him on purpose.

These clues can serve to quickly engage clients in exploring type. As a type practitioner, translating the focused frustration, or presenting emotion, can point directly to the dimension at the root of a conflict. That, in turn, will enable options for developing resolutions.

Exhaustion

Despite the polarity of each dimension, the emotional impact of working with the opposite preference is the same whether you prefer extraverting or introverting. Why? An outgoing, thinking out loud person is comfortable sharing ideas and even benefits from the verbal articulation. This describes someone who prefers extraversion. Having to elicit that kind of participation, invite it, or cajole it out of someone else is a stretch that can be exhausting.

Why would the same reaction be true of the opposite type? The person who prefers introversion energizes by processing information internally. An interruption causes a distraction or interruption. Since the E/I dimension is rooted in "where do you get your energy?", it follows that the result of being repeatedly exposed to the opposite attitude drains energy and causes exhaustion and frustration.

Alienation

Alienation refers to not being able to understand the significance of what another person is saying. The person preferring sensing is seeking tangible informa-

tion, and may not grab onto useful data if a person preferring intuition is offering broad brush and/or future-oriented comments.

Software development groups offer an example. A sensor will be interested in the parts of the project and details of what is expected, as well as the parameters required to create the result. An intuitive tends to be concerned with the integrity of the overall design. These two approaches are quite literally talking about different things. So conversations between sensors and intuitives are often reciprocal monologues rather than dialogues.

The sensing/intuition dimension has to do with the way we collect information. It follows, therefore, that if our information is significantly different, as if we spoke different languages, we will not feel as if we share the same assumptions, the historical orientation, or information. We will be right.

Entrenchment

If you are consulting with two people who are entrenched, it is likely that the conflict has to do with a decision that is very important and that one person prefers thinking and the other prefers feeling. Although we often think of the thinking/feeling dimension as "how decisions get made" it is really more about the criteria that a person considers.

An excellent movie clip illustrating this dimension is from *Mr. Holland's Opus*. The father, a musician, is concerned that his deaf child, Cole, has the best possible schooling. The experts have said Cole should not use sign language, but the private school the mother wants to place him in does use sign language. Mr. Holland is not sure how he could afford the private school and, in addition, being able to read lips will prepare Cole better for the future in a world integrated with the hearing. While the parents are trying to sort this out, the 6-year-old child is screeching and slamming cabinet doors. With impatience, the father yells, "What does he want, give him what he wants", and the mother yells back, "I don't know what he wants. I just want to tell him I love him." Both parents are passionate about quality care for

their child whom they love. The father feels deeply and is using thinking criteria. The mother, who prefers feeling, uses different criteria for the decision.

It is the certainty, the absolute moral certainty, that causes the entrenchment. Often the solution seems so incredibly obvious that one can believe it needs no explanation.

Anxiety

Anxiety is relatively easy to identify as it often provides visceral responses: a racing mind, a pounding heart, a queasy stomach, or a sense of suffocation. Listen for these symptoms, as they point to a J/P difference at the root of the conflict.

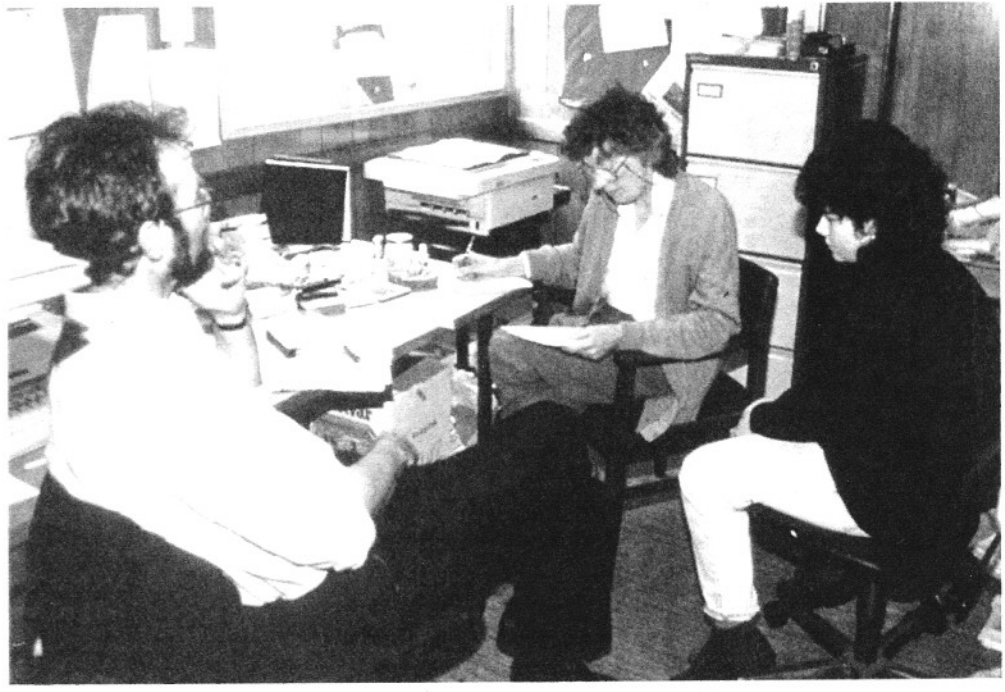
Judgers, who may be anxious if a deadline is looming or if plans have not been formulated, may be surprised to hear that perceivers experience anxiety at planning ahead, as it boxes them in. It may seem to a judger that there is no downside to planning ahead. Why not get to the airport on time to be sure not to miss the plane? Why not buy tickets to a much admired performer far enough in advance to ensure a seat? But to a perceiver, each sealed commitment may be a lost opportunity, causing anxiety.

Crossing to Resolution

It is possible to cross these chasms, or at least to make progress across them.

The first step is the personal recognition that your own way of thinking is a deeply ingrained habit that provides comfort to you. It is the comfort of preference, the comfort of successes you have had in approaching the world, and the comfort of working with your strength. Being able to observe and describe your preference is a valuable technique for beginning to cross the divide.

The second step is to attempt to restate the other person's point. The success of this step depends on your ability



to use different words, reflecting an attentive understanding of what might not even have been spoken. To be successful requires a patient, deeply attentive, and inquiring rephrase.

The third step is to reframe by defining the issue in new terms. In the *Mr. Holland's Opus* example, one way of understanding the difference is that the father was talking about quality education and the mother about relationship. A reframe might be: what kind of family environment do we want to create now and what will best prepare our son for the future?

Conclusion

The benefit of this approach, using the presenting symptom or emotional charge as the diagnostic, is that differences can be discussed at their root cause. These are things that really matter to the person. Additionally, even if the client you are working with is not familiar with type, your own expertise with the model will guide the process. Later, after your intervention has reduced the stress or provided a solution, the person may be quite eager to learn what alchemy you have applied, at which time you can assure them that it was their own self-knowledge that provided the key to resolution. ■

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