What 'type' of trainer are you?

In the summer of 2008 Training Journal and Academy28 ran a survey into the behavioural preferences of trainers and how they impact on the design and delivery of training. The research examined the extent to which the type preferences of trainers influence the training activities they use - and how much these activities match the preferences of learners. Dr Clare Howard summarises the main findings.

What 'type' of training do trainers like to deliver?

We all have innate behavioural preferences which impact on every aspect of our lives, both at work and at home. In the training room, these preferences manifest themselves in how people like to learn, their attitude to setting learning objectives and the goals they want to achieve afterwards. And trainers have their own behavioural preferences which they bring into the training room with them.

In the summer of 2008, Training Journal and Academy28 set out to examine these preferences to better understand how trainers should design and deliver training solutions and how the learning is ultimately transferred by each learner back into the workplace. The study also aimed to explore whether the distribution of type preferences of trainers correlates with that of managers and the general population in the UK.

As well as seeing which training activities were most popular with trainers, we were primarily looking to see how much trainers trained in the way they like to learn - and how flexible they are in their choice of training activities. In addition, the responses also enabled us to draw some more general conclusions about the tensions and challenges that trainers face today.

Understanding personality

There are four dimensions to our personalities:

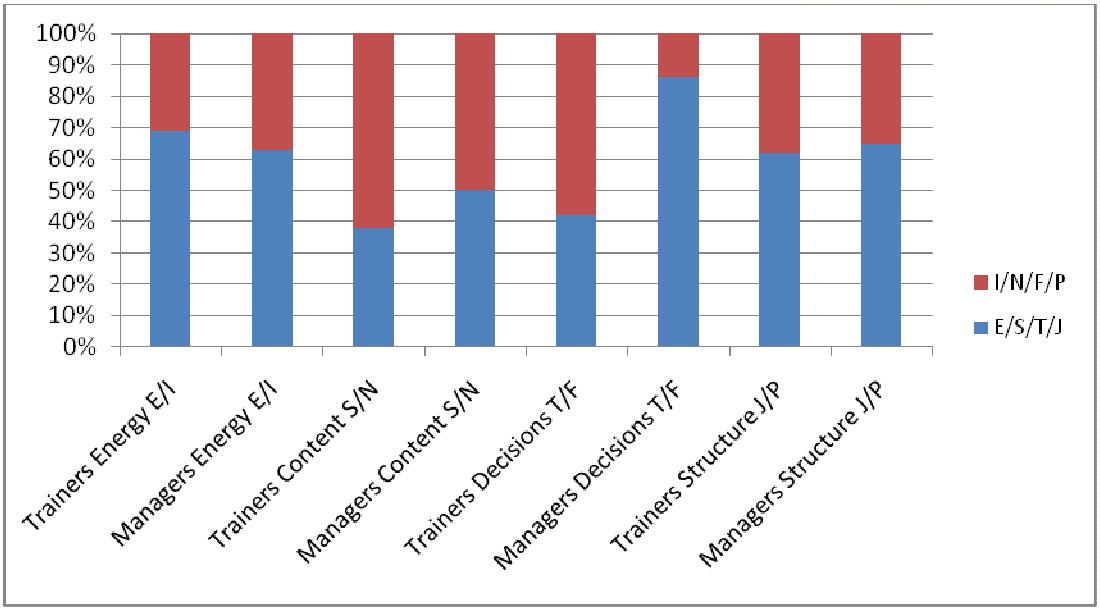
- Energy, do we like to take immediate action (Extravert) or think things through first (Introvert)?
- Content, are we more interested in facts (Sensing) or ideas (iNtuition)?
- how we make Decisions, are we more interested in the solution (Thinking) or the people (Feeling)?
- how we like our life to be Structured, do we prefer to be organised (Judging) or would we rather go with the flow (Perceiving)?

Within each of these four dimensions, there are the two options - with no right or wrong. The combination of these factors means that there are 16 distinct personality 'types', according to the work of Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology. Distribution across type is uneven in the general population.

Type distribution

We analysed type distribution - across the four dimensions - and compared it to an analysis of over 8,000 managers who had attended Ashridge Management School between 2000 and 2003 and for whom MBTI preferences data is available[1].

[1] MBTI Research into Distribution of Type; Melissa Carr, Judy Curd and Fiona Dent, 2004, Ashridge Management School
http://www.ashridge.org.uk/website/IC.nsf/wFARPUB/MBTI+Research+into+Distribution+of+Type?OpenDocument



Of the four most popular trainer types in the sample, three had a Feeling preference: ENFP 16%, ESFJ 14%, ENFJ 12%. The three least represented types all had an SP preference: ESTP 1%, ISFP 1% and ISTP 1%.

Amongst the control group of managers, the most popular of the 16 types all had a TJ preference: ESTJ 21%, ENTJ 15%, ISTJ 14% and ENTP 12%. Of the four least represented types amongst the managers, three had an SP preference: ISFP 1%, INFP 1%, ESFP 1% and INFJ 1%.

We also compared the distribution to a UK nationally representative sample[2].

	Percentage of each Type							
	E	I	S	N	T	F	J	P
Trainers	69	31	38	62	42	58	62	38
Managers	63	37	50	50	86	14	65	35
UK national representative sample	53	47	76	24	46	54	58	42

We can see that on two dimensions, the trainer sample and the manager sample broadly match:

- in terms of Energy (E/I): about twice as many Extraverts to Introverts in both samples
- in terms of preferences for Structure and Organisation (J/P): again a similar two to one ratio of preferences for plans and structure (J) over 'go with the flow' (P)

In both of these instances, the split is more marked than in the general population.

Where we see the greatest differences are in terms of preferences for Content (Sensing S and iNtuition N). In the general population as a whole, there are typically three times as many individuals who prefer their content to be factual, specific, detailed, in the here and now (Sensing), rather than based on ideas, concepts, theories and possibilities for the future (iNtuition). The manager population was evenly split 50/50; but the trainers showed more than a 60% preference for big picture ideas. This reinforces the need for trainers to become more aware of their own type preferences, and how they need to be flexible in their approaches to learners - and especially in the areas of matching content to the preferences of learners.

[2]OPP (distributors of the MBTI research data): http://www.opp.eu.com/German_data_supplement.aspx#type

There is also a striking difference in the preferences for Decision making: logical and solution-focused thinking or people-focused Feeling decision making. In the manager sample, it is striking that of the 8,000+ sample, over 86% showed a preference for Thinking, which is around 40% higher than for the general UK population. And in the trainer population, the preference for Feeling decision-making was 44% higher than the manager population and slightly higher than the UK representative sample.

This is the only dimension where there is usually a gender difference. Overwhelmingly, in studies, the Thinking decision-making preference is over-represented in men - and the Feeling decision-making preference is over-represented in women.

So it is appropriate to look more closely at the male/female split on this dimension.

	Percentage of each type by gender			
	Male T	Male F	Female T	Female F
Trainers[3]	56	44	35	65
Managers[4]	89	11	75	25
UK national representative sample	79	21	47	53

Here we see that the Feeling decision-making preference (decision making based on subjective people values rather than objective logic) is over-represented in the trainer population and under-represented in the manager population, amongst men and women.

Type and learning activities

Participants rated 26 questions/statements both from the viewpoint of themselves as a trainer and then as a learner. Certain questions/statements were designed to appeal more to certain types than to others.

Firstly we were looking at the extent to which individuals of each type temperament group[5] scored the questions that were appropriate to their type highly - as learners. The differences here appear to relate most closely to the preferences for taking in information: Sensing facts and experience and iNtuitive big pictures and ideas. In terms of learning, participants with a Sensing/detail preference were more likely to rate their type-appropriate activities more highly (80%) than the iNtuitives (61%). In addition, Sensing participants were generally more likely to rate most activities more highly (70%) than the iNtuitives (55%). So Sensing participants like learning that involves a lot of different activities.

What does this mean for learning and training? It's likely that individual learners with a Sensing preference will enjoy having a range of learning activities, because they are keen on variety. And Sensing trainers are more likely to want to include a greater variety of learning activities in their approach to training. When there's a match of Sensing trainers to Sensing learners, this could lead to a tendency to have activity for its own sake, which doesn't necessarily match the learning objectives. This can also lead to frustrations for the big-picture iNtuitive learners, who don't need the same level of variety (three or four approaches will work well for them). Instead, they will want to know the reason behind the choice of different activities: 'why are we doing this?' you'll hear them ask.

[3] In our sample, of participants with known type, it's a 67% to 33% female-to-male split
[4] In the Ashridge sample of managers, it's an 80% to 20% split of male-to-female
[5] For an explanation of type temperaments, see the article *Different Strokes* by Clare Howard, *Training Journal* September 2008. The four type temperaments are the Rationals (big picture iNtuitives with logical Thinking decision-making preferences); the Idealists (big picture iNtuitives with people-centred Feeling decision-making), the Guardians (preferences for Sensing facts and details, along with a structured Judging and planful approach) and the Artisans (preferences for Sensing facts and details, with a go with the flow Perceiving approach to life).

Type and training activities

The Rational tendency to question the purpose of things shows up in the analysis of the type preferences and training activities - from the viewpoint of the trainer. The Rational trainer is the least likely of the four temperament groups (at 49%) to rate highly the activities that relate predominantly to their own type preferences. So in this instance, it is less easy to judge the type preferences of Rational trainers from the activities they say they value in the classroom. The temperament with choices that most reflect their own type preferences are the Guardians (79%) closely followed by the Artisans (77%).

Idealists cut the middle ground, at 62%, as trainers choosing their own learning type activities; though they are less likely to value the training activities that would be appreciated by learners with opposite preferences - ie facts and detail, and logical analysis. And Idealists as learners are the least likely of all groups to choose activities that don't relate to their likely type preferences.

In terms of training styles, the survey showed that the most flexible types are the Artisans. But while Artisans are likely to make up around 27% of the general UK population[6], the low number of Artisans (7%) in this trainer survey backs up other research which indicates that they are likely to be underrepresented generally in the training population. The most popular temperament group amongst the trainers was the Idealists at 37%, followed by the Guardians at 32% and then the Rationalists at 24%.

The participant group for this survey predominantly comprised experienced trainers (91%) and over half (53%) were over the age of 41. Previous research has shown that valuing a wider range of training activities - such as developing flexibility - comes with training experience. With experience - and exposure to a variety of training environments and different learners - Idealists learn to become more flexible in their training styles. But their preference is to train in the way they like to learn and to use training activities that they would like to experience as a learner.

Conclusions

The survey showed up some of the very real tensions that all trainers face in fulfilling their training role and keeping to their standards. Irrespective of type, the most highly-rated activities included allowing discussion; giving thinking time; preparing in advance; presenting accurate information and using visual materials and diagrams.

Yet, in the 'do more with less' attitude of our speeded-up world, trainers are often faced with a situation where they have more information to cover in less time (so less thinking time, less time for discussion, less interactivity). Trainers don't have enough time to prepare in advance as they would like to. Trainers want to be able to introduce new materials regularly into their training - but again these takes time to research, refine, incorporate etc. The modern world, with Google at our fingertips, means immediacy is valued over accuracy, yet trainers want to present accurate information to their learners. Preparing diagrams takes time. It's faster and easier to do a sprawl of words in a document or densely bulleted PowerPoint slides than to create diagrams or search out the perfect visual[7].

Type preferences clearly play a strong part in learner needs and trainer approaches. By extending their own awareness of type, and the part it plays in learner preferences, trainers can continue to develop their flexibility and build on their experience to choose and use learning activities that are appropriate to their learners. An increased awareness of the likely type make-up of their learner groups will also enable trainers to better understand when they need to match to their learner's preferences, and when they need to help their learners to develop and stretch in ways that don't always come naturally.

[6] OPP 2007: Guardians 49%, Artisan 27%, Idealist 14%, Rational 10%
[7] The French philosopher Blaise Pascal, back in the 17th century, was already apologising for writing a long letter as he didn't have time to write a short one.

Methodology

Respondents completed an online survey that asked them to rate 26 different training methods, in order to diagnose their preferred choice of training activities (when delivering training) and preferred methods of learning (as a learner).

The first priority was to find out the type preferences of the trainers. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™ is a well known type assessment test. Of the 210 trainers who responded to this question, 97 (46%) gave their known MBTI type. Others were directed to Academy28's Your Preferences online assessment tool. 140 participants took this assessment (including some who already knew their MBTI type). So of the 236 respondents who completed the survey, we had the type preferences of 166. The analysis of trainer preferences was based on this subset of the survey respondents. Other analysis took the whole of the survey population into account.

Participants in the survey were predominantly from the UK but contributions were also received from the US, Australia, India and across Europe. Nearly 90% of the participants classified themselves as being very or fairly experienced trainers. 43% were aged 25–40; 43% were aged 41–55 and 13% were over 55.

There was a range of hours of training contact per week: 35% had less than 5 hours training contact hours per week; 34% between 5 and 10 hours a week; 21% between 11 and 20 hours a week and 10% trained for over 20 hours a week on average. The most common training room sizes were 11–20 and 5–10.

The strong response rate - over 260 people, and nearly 90% completion for a 10–15 minute survey which demanded reflective responses - shows that people in the training world take their role seriously. It also shows that they value being asked for their insights and opinions, and want to ensure that their voices and experience are part of ongoing research.

Thanks to Howard Hills for his help in developing the survey and analysing the data.

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