As a trainer, your own personality preferences - and those of your trainees - can influence the success or failure of your training. Clare Howard from Academy28 explains how to create a learning environment, develop content and flex your delivery to suit the different personalities in your training group.

Different Strokes

According to Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, there are 16 distinct personality 'Types'. This means that a typical training group of 10-12 participants is likely to be made up of at least six different personalities. When a trainer matches their style to that of their training group, the trainees enter a 'learning zone', where fast and effective learning happens. If the trainer gets it wrong - there can be trouble.

Jung's theories tell us that the personal style of each individual reveals itself in four main areas (or dimensions).

- The first is *Energy* (whether you are active and like to talk things out or reflective and prefer to think things through).
- The second relates to *Content and information* (whether you prefer facts, details and specifics or ideas, patterns and possibilities).
- The third relates to *Conclusions and the basis for decisions* (whether you are objective and solution-focused or subjective and people-focused).
- The last is about *Commitment and personal organisation* (are you structured, planned and organised or are you more flexible and prepared to go with the flow?).

Clearly, if you have a mix of these people in your training group, you're going to need a more flexible training style.

Environment

The first thing to consider is the physical learning environment.

At the 2006 conference of the British Association of Psychological Type, we ran a workshop on Type in the training room. Participants - who were obviously very familiar with Personality Type - divided themselves into two groups, based on preferences for extraversion (action) or introversion (reflection). They each had their own half of a large seminar room, which was separated by room dividers. Their task was to design their ideal learning environment.

The two groups tackled the task in very different ways. The Introverts formed a circle, allowing individuals to make their contributions in a quiet and reflective manner. One person spoke and the others listened. Careful and well-structured notes were taken.

The Extraverts worked in a much more energetic and noisy manner, with little apparent organisation. After their demands to take over the Introvert space (because it was bigger) had been declined, a flip chart was filled with notes, while people moved around, talking over one another.

Each group then physically set up their ideal learning environment and invited the other group into it.

The Introverts created a variety of spaces, each with different functions: a stimulus area where people might meet and talk to the trainer; a sharing space, in which a small table was provided for interaction between just a few people; individual points for personal reflection, with chairs placed near the window, away from the rest of the group.

The Extraverts had a number of tables scattered around, with no formal organisation of the furniture. A large horseshoe shape of chairs was

left in the middle of the space for large group discussion.

But it is not just the physical environment that makes a difference.

Energy

The preferred focus of energy and attention is important in the learning process. Get it right and learners will be motivated and engaged. Get it wrong and they'll be bored, restless, and disruptive.

Thinking it through

A learner with preference to 'think things through' is likely to focus on an inner world of reflective understanding. Reflection helps them to understand the task or problem, and recognise what is required. They will tend to treat tasks, events and experiences one at a time.

They will want to be able to think things through before offering their input. They don't want to be put in the spotlight and will be reluctant to offer an instantaneous ad hoc account of their thoughts, their conclusions and especially their feelings. These learners are likely to thrive in a learning environment that includes:

- independent study
- comprehension-style exercises
- plenty of time for contemplation and reflection
- a teaching or training delivery that leans more towards a lecturing style
- overhead projector or PowerPoint presentations

Action and talking it out

A learner with a preference for 'action' needs to be energised by interaction in order to stay engaged and learn. Talking things out helps them to clarify what's needed.

Their ideal learning environment is dynamic, interactive and fast-paced, one in which everyone has the opportunity to contribute to discussions and put forward their own views. 'Talk it out learners' are likely to thrive in an environment where teaching and training techniques include:

- promoting active learner contributions
- class participation in games and quizzes
- teambuilding exercises
- asking for volunteers to help illustrate points
- audio/visual materials
- role-plays, sketches

Organised

Learners with a preference for structure and organisation prefer to follow a structured route through learning points. They need to know the day's agenda. They want to know how far through it they are at any point. They want there to be a plan and they want that plan to be adhered to.

These learners will expect training sessions to have been planned in advance. They need the satisfaction of ticking-off topics as they have been completed. They like to see their learning progressing in an orderly manner towards a pre-determined goal. They need learning activities:

- that have a clear beginning, middle and end
- where there is a single focus of attention
- where the purpose is clearly defined and worked towards
- which provide the satisfaction of completed topics and assignments

Go with the flow?

Learners with a preference for 'going with the flow' have a need to explore. They like things to be open and spontaneous, rather than planned. They welcome disruptions to a schedule (and often seem to be the cause of the disruption, especially to trainers with the opposite preference!).

Their learning style is free-moving and imaginative. Their pattern of work is flexible in the extreme, changing focus and interest in what can appear to be mid-stream. They need training techniques:

- that allow them to give input to the lesson structure, avoiding the staleness of routine and repetition
- that regularly introduce new material
- that encourage them to be spontaneous
- that present an environment that is open to - and promotes - new ways of thinking

Content

Different personalities also have different preferences for content.

'Specifics and the immediate'

A learner with a preference for 'specifics and the immediate' prefers to gather information through their senses, experiencing what is real. They are

likely to get frustrated with too much theory or with learning that has little or no practical aspect. Book work is likely to be a complete turn-off. With a preference for facts and concrete examples, this learner needs to take a step-by-step approach to understanding information.

Their ideal learning content is based on a real-life application of what is being taught: the 'who, what, where, when and how?' of a subject. For them it's about actually experiencing the everyday applications of facts.

The big picture

Learners with a preference for ideas and 'the big picture' have a tendency to look towards the possibilities of a situation rather than the here-and-now reality. They need to visualise the big picture before they can focus on the details.

Their ideal learning environment first gives them an overview of the ideas and concepts behind what is being taught. They want to ask 'why?', first and foremost, and not get too bogged down in actual physical details. Learning is about sparking the imagination and letting ideas come to life.

Decision-making

Different people have a different focus from which they base their decisions. This too has its place in the training room. Any trainer needs to be able to answer the 'so what?' question. The answer needs to be framed depending on the rationale and values of the person who asks the question.

Objective analysis: what do I think about this?

Learners with an objective and solutions-thinking approach to decision-making need clear and logical structures, frameworks and processes. They are more inclined to focus on solutions than on the effects of their decisions or actions on other people. They are more likely to go for truth over tact.

Their ideal learning materials are clear, concise, logical and well-structured. They often want the freedom to study in their own way and can get irritated or frustrated with too much input or over-involvement from the trainer.

People's values: how am I feeling about this?

These learners need a personal approach to learning. To them, the people they are learning with are often as important as the 'content' of the learning. They thrive in a supportive environment where their efforts are appreciated as much as (if not more than) their achievements.

As people and relationships are important motivations for them, their ideal learning approach comes from a personal perspective. The ideal training room atmosphere is harmonious and cooperative, with lots of positive feedback and support. These learners need lots of praise. Avoid critical feedback which can lead them to feel discouraged or picked on.

Temperaments theory

Another way to look at learning preferences is through the lenses of the four temperaments. Temperaments were first explored by the Greeks and form an important part of the theory and application of Type.

Rational

Those with this temperament are interested in the big picture and are driven by a desire to understand concepts and develop their personal competency. They enjoy developing consistent and linked theories and seeking patterns in a theoretical understanding.

Idealist

People of this temperament are interested in the greater good and in relationships. They have a sense of purpose and enjoy helping others, which promotes harmony and prevents conflict. They are motivated to meet the needs of other people.

Guardian

Individuals of this temperament like structure and order. They will value learning based upon previous experience. They prefer stability and dependability and their primary motivation is to be useful. They enjoy taking charge and organising things in the pursuit of achievement, efficiency and effectiveness. They are motivated by the practical applications of learning and are driven by group membership and accepting responsibility.

Artisan

The Artisan (Improviser) is driven by the need to see results. They like variety and stimulation but are extremely practical. They tend to see and meet immediate needs and like hands-on learning. Above all, they need to see the immediate benefit of learning.

Summary
In a training room:

- **Rationalists** want to know 'why?', ''how does this all fit together?' and 'how can I improve my competency?'
- **Idealists** enjoy looking for the good in people, and want learning to make sense for everyone around them
- **Guardians** will ask 'in what ways has this been done before?' and they'll take charge in order to get things done efficiently
- **Artisans** need to know 'how?', look for answers in many different ways and work best when learning hands-on

Goal setting and Type

Personality preferences mean that each of us will react differently to the process of goal setting and the development and implementation of action plans. This means that the minute a trainer turns to setting goals - SMART or otherwise - he/she is fighting against the innate behavioural preferences of around half of their trainees.

Some people like to know what they have to do, and do it. For them, having a goal gives them clarity of purpose, something to directly aim for, something to achieve. Having a goal, and a plan of action to achieve that goal, is motivating and energising. Others like to explore possibilities, to go with the flow. For them, everyday is voyage of discovery. For them, even the word 'goal' can be restricting and de-motivating. But the words focus, intention, direction, outcome might do the trick.

By applying what we know about Type - our own, and the Type preferences of those we coach, manage and train - we can make it easier for those who are 'wired' to go with the flow, achieve even better results, with less stress on themselves and on others around them.

Practical examples

Niamh likes big picture possibilities and to go with the flow. Help her think about her desired outcomes and the focus. For her, it's about the goal posts that help focus energy and action. And it's even more compelling for her if she sees the goal posts as an opening to future possibilities.

Sam lives in the present, in the moment. For him, it's about movement, direction and intention. Talk tactics and you'll get action.

Emma likes the big picture, logic and achieving goals. A natural leader, you just set her off and she'll get there before you.

By understanding Type preferences, the trainer can help all trainees put the action into the plan - and the plan into action.

Conclusions

Summary
In a training room, learners with a preference for:

- **Taking action:** are likely to prefer involvement, activity, a dynamic environment
- **Thinking it through:** will probably prefer peace, stability, time left alone to think
- **Facts and detail:** want to know the specifics, based on the here and now, and will learn by repetition and action
- **Big picture:** will ask 'why?' and need to be given room to theorise and speculate
- **Logic and solutions:** need accuracy, clarity and logic
- **People-focus:** thrive on praise and encouragement, and in an atmosphere of personal interest
- **Structure and organisation:** need structure, order, a timetable, a plan that is obvious and worked through
- **Going with the flow:** get frustrated by being tied to a schedule, they want to explore and follow interesting digressions

What this means is that an apparently 'disruptive' trainee may only be the product of a difference in preferences with the trainer - or with the expected norms of the learning environment.

As a trainer, you'll need to ensure that you don't let your own preferences for how you like to learn unconsciously drive how you deliver your training. Think about different Type preferences and their needs as you design and deliver your training. It's not that some trainees are crazy, it's just that they're not like you.[1]

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Additional reading:

Isabel Briggs Myers, *Gifts Differing*, 1995. The original developer of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

Kise, J., and B. Russell. *Are they really problem students? Bridging differences through understanding*. 2004 (accessed 30 January 2008). http://www.personalitypathways.com/MBTI_articles4.html.

[1] Pearman, R.R., and S.C. Albritton. *I'm not crazy, I'm just not you: the real meaning of the 16 personality types*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black, 1998.