

# Using Personality Type Preferences to Enhance Team Work in Extension Programs<sup>1</sup>

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This EDIS document, the fifth in a series on teaching different personality types, covers the practical benefits in which Extension professionals can use the influence of personality type preferences to enhance team dynamics in Extension program development and implementation. The entire series includes the following EDIS documents:

1. [Teaching to Different Personality Types \(WC232\)](#)
2. [Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator to Strengthen Extension Programs \(WC233\)](#)
3. [Using the True Colors Personality Assessment to Strengthen Extension Programs \(WC234\)](#)
4. [Using the Kirton Adaption Innovation Inventory to Strengthen Extension Programs \(WC235\)](#)
5. [Using Personality Type Preferences to Enhance Team Work in Extension Programs \(WC269\)](#)

## Introduction

In present times, complex issues facing the agricultural and natural resource sectors have called for Extension professionals to collaborate with individuals from differing areas of interest in order to identify creative solutions. These complex issues include aerospace, agricultural production, natural resource management, energy consumption, and climate change (Andenoro, Baker, Stedman, & Weeks,

2016). When working with a team, it is important to understand one's own personality preference as well as the personality preferences of others. This understanding assists in developing the human capital of an organization by improving leadership and communication practices among group members (Bruner, 1985; Lamm et al., 2011). Personality preferences identify how individuals use their minds and focus their attention on a given task or topic. Personality preferences can be assigned using various types of assessments designed to identify different ways in which an individual cognitively processes a problem or topic. As an administrator, manager, or leader of a team, it is critical for Extension professionals to understand how to lead discussion on complex issues using the knowledge gained from personality preference indicators and assessments. When considering the needs identified by personality preferences among individuals on a team, an Extension professional can be selective when assigning individuals to group projects. Matching the level of complexity of a project to either a more diverse or a more homogenous group can enhance the group's ability to build consensus on a creative solution (Lamm, Carter, Settle, & Odera, 2016).

1. This document is AEC607, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 2016. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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## Personality Type and Team Work

When working in teams, personality type preferences can play a large role in the cohesiveness of group members (Lamm et al., 2016). In addition, group makeup in regards to personality type can enhance both the creativity levels of the group as well as the amount of time taken to reach consensus on a solution. This article will cover the Myers-Briggs personality type indicator (MBTI®), True Colors™ personality type indicator, and the Kirton Adaption Innovation Inventory (KAI).

The Myers-Briggs personality type indicator (MBTI®) specifies how individuals view the world in addition to how they use their judgment to make sense of tasks presented to them (Briggs Meyers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 2009). The MBTI® uses four dichotomous continuums to describe how individuals form attitudes, relate to the world, and deliberate over experiences. These continuums include introversion (I) to extroversion (E), sensing (S) to intuition (N), thinking (T) to feeling (F), and judging (J) to perceiving (P). For a more in-depth look into the four continuums of the MBTI®, see the second article (see [Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator to Strengthen Extension Programs](#) WC233). This personality type indicator provides a more specific understanding of an individual's personality preference than the True Colors™ personality indicator and Kirton Adaption Innovation Inventory. The more specific nature of the MBTI® is associated with the greater amount of personalization possible using the eight different characteristics embedded in the four continuums presented by this personality type indicator. Extension can use the MBTI® to group individuals into compatible teams based on how their scores fall on the four continuums (I:E, S:N, T:F, and J:P). In the same way, administrators, managers, and leaders have used this method to enhance collaboration

of teams while mitigating stressors resulting from programming biases towards a certain personality type.

Closely associated to the MBTI® is the True Colors™ personality indicator. Instead of the four continuums, the True Colors™ indicator uses four colors to represent four different learning styles: Thinking (Green), Feeling (Blue), Judging (Gold), and Perceiving (Orange) (Miscisin, 2010). When appealing to a team of members identifying with “Green,” an Extension professional might use solitary readings, open-ended questions, debates, or experiments to keep the group focused on learning the task or topic. A group of “Blue” learners might better retain information introduced by the Extension professional as a relational task. This type of non-confrontational task might include group discussions, drawing, or role-play activities. “Gold” learners prefer material to be presented routinely in a more detailed and structured fashion. More specifically, members from this group tend to respond more favorably to topics presented using worksheets, lectures, and quizzes. When working with “Orange” learners, an Extension professional should opt for a more unstructured environment with plenty of allowance for creativity. In order to keep members of this group engaged in an activity, methods involving demonstrations, problem-solving exercises, and competitive debates would be helpful.

The Kirton Adaption Innovation Inventory (KAI) refers to the manner in which people prefer to solve problems (Kirton, 2003). Like the personality indicators described previously, the KAI uses a continuum to quantify the personality preference of an individual. The continuum ranges from adaptive learners on the lower end of the spectrum to innovative learners on the upper end of the spectrum. Adaptive learners, like members of the Gold group from True Colors™, thrive under environments where tasks are presented with structure and clearly defined expectations. When working to create change, adaptive learners will meticulously initiate small and targeted changes that fall within the guidelines of the already established system in order to create larger change over time. An Extension professional working with a group of adaptors might use a written set of instructions and deadlines in order to avoid ambiguity, which could lead to later frustration among group members. In contrast, innovative learners, much like the members of the Orange group in True Colors™, thrive under ambiguous circumstances that require creative solutions. Innovative learners are valuable during brainstorming sessions where an Extension professional needs to come up with ideas for a solution that is outside-of-the-box.

Table 1. Summary of personality inventories.

	Purpose	Elements
MBTI®	Describes an individual's perception and judgment of world	Introversion (I) and Extroversion (E)
	Describes an individual's approach to task resolution	Sensing (S) and Intuition (N) Thinking (T) and Feeling (F) Judging (J) and Perceiving (P)
True Colors™	Categorizes an individual's personality type	Thinking = Green Feeling = Blue
	Describes individual's preferred learning environment	Judging = Gold Perceiving = Orange
KAI	Identifies an individual's problem solving style	Adaption
		Innovation

## Using Personality Type to Enhance Team Work

Depending on the nature of the task, different compositions of personality types among group members might be more effective (Lamm et al., 2016). A homogenous group consists of members sharing similar or compatible personality types. In contrast, a heterogeneous group is made up of members from varying personality types. Each group is valuable in different scenarios depending on the task or issue type.

For simplistic issues or routine tasks where guidelines, outcomes, and deadlines are clearly identified, a homogenous group would work most efficiently. A group of similarly minded individuals will generally be able to reach consensus on a task and move to the implementation phase of a program more quickly than a group of individuals with varying personality types. An example of a situation where a homogenous group might be more effective would be a task involving an assembly line approach where everyone in the group knows their specific role in the process of moving an idea from individual parts to a finished product in the most efficient manner.

Complex issues and interrelated tasks where there is no clear answer to a question are often more effectively addressed by a more heterogeneous group of individuals. In this circumstance, individuals with more creative personality types will often serve as the leaders of the group (Lamm et al., 2016). Creative personality types might be attributed to individuals characterized by an innovative problem solving style in the KAI (Kirton, 2011). Depending on the

overall makeup of the group, varying characteristics from the MBTI® and True Colors™ personality type indicators could be considered as creative. These group members will offer a wide range of ideas, providing context for the issue and recommendations of complicated solutions to completing the task. In turn, individuals with personality types that thrive under structured contexts will sort through the other members' ideas in order to identify a plausible solution. The initial leadership role of the more creative group members might be shared amongst the more structured group members during the implementation phase of the solution when a greater understanding of the task or issue has been reached among the group as a whole (Lamm et al., 2012).

## Conclusions

Taking personality type into consideration when grouping individuals into teams is an important tool. Extension professionals can use not only to improve the effectiveness of a group, but also to develop individual skills in communication and leadership among group members. When identifying a task or issue, Extension professionals should consider the type of group (i.e. homogenous or heterogeneous) that would best suit the type of outcome desired. Since groups are often influenced by varying personality types, the Extension professional in charge of the activity should implement varying teaching styles to best motivate group members to communicate and work with one another in a way that builds consensus towards a common goal. In the same way, assembling heterogeneous groups might assist in developing creative solutions towards addressing the complex issues facing Extension in aerospace, agricultural production, natural resource management, energy consumption, and climate change (Andenoro, 2016).

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