

# **PERSONALITY DISPOSITIONS IN THE OUTDOORS: -LEADERSHIP AS “COMPELLING DEMONSTRATION”?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although the psychology of personality has a long history, it does not appear to have been systematically researched and applied to leadership in outdoor recreation and outdoor education, nor to the experiences of students or clients in those settings. These shortfalls are notwithstanding the attention that meeting the needs of the individual has received in the general post-modern educational debate. They are especially striking in view of the particularly close contact with others engendered in the *friluftsliv* context. The present work is proposed as a call for recognition of the importance of this issue for the quality of the outdoor experience. The framework for the discussion is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the most widely accessible and used instrument internationally for mapping differences in normal personality dispositions. The dimensions of the Jungian-based MBTI point to the importance of acting upon human psychological variability in the outdoors. Issues of communication, decision-making, and elements leading to satisfaction with leadership are considered. Fundamental to quality leadership is cognizance of personal profile in relation to those of the individuals for whom the leader carries responsibility. When this is achieved, leadership can become, in Kurt Hahn's words, a *compelling demonstration* both of the leadership role as such, and more broadly, of being truly and deeply human in a full sense of the word.

## **WHAT KIND OF PACK SHOULD THE LEADER CARRY?**

The basic structure of the leader's pack is shaped by the Socratic imperative; “*KNOW THYSELF*”. Only by knowing oneself is it possible to

match self optimally to the challenges of leadership in the outdoors. Knowing oneself is also the point of departure for determining the details of the leader's pack; -knowing how to guide the group by understanding the varying texture of the individuals in it. Kierkegaard phrases it as follows:

*“WHEN WE TRULY SHALL SUCCEED TO GUIDE AN INDIVIDUAL TO A GIVEN DESTINATION, WE MUST FIRST OF ALL FIND HIM WHERE HE IS, AND BEGIN THERE.”*

This is the pedagogical essence, as Ken Dryden, icon of ice hockey history, succinctly noted; *“GOOD TEACHERS TEACH PEOPLE, NOT SUBJECTS.”* By facilitating people, the leader, who is always a teacher, will set the stage for Nature, that consummate guide in human affairs, to lead us to her secrets.

### **WHAT SHOULD BE IN THE LEADER'S PACK?**

The leader, then, needs tools and skills for self-knowledge and, by derivation, these also open the door to knowledge of others. These tools and skills may be viewed as the leader's “software” to complement the “hardware” of technical skills.

An in-depth source of such software may be found in Carl Gustav Jung whose work can be seen as a “psychology of space and time”. As a major figure in Western psychology, Jung stands pre-eminent in his cross-cultural and evolutionary stance, a posture of importance in post-modern internationalized life. Leadership in all dimensions of life call increasingly for sharp insight into the nuances of human variation.

In mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers<sup>8</sup> developed the Jungian-based “Myers-Briggs Type Indicator” (MBTI) which has since become the most widely used instrument internationally for understanding normal personality differences.

### **HOW CAN THE MBTI LIGHTEN THE OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP PACK?**

The MBTI reports individual dispositions or preferences in 4 essential dimensions of life. Each dimension is expressed as a dichotomy of polar opposites<sup>1,2,4,7</sup>. Scores closer to the poles indicate strongly established

dispositions. The dichotomies are as follows, with preferred characteristics selected for their relevance in outdoor leadership. Readers are invited to examine themselves accordingly:

**THE “E – I” DICHOTOMY: FOCUS OF ATTENTION, SOURCE OF ENERGY**

**E = EXTROVERSION:** Externally directed, Sociable, Breadth oriented,  
People/Things, Do-Think-Do, Action, Verbally expressive

**I = INTROVERSION:** Internal, Private, Reflective, Think-Do-Think, Depth  
oriented, Concentration, Expressive in writing

**THE “S – N” DICHOTOMY: INFORMATION SOURCES / PROCESSING:**

**S = SENSING:** The 5 senses, Past / Present, Facts, Realism, Utility,  
Practical, Actual, Experience, Sensible, Perspiring

**N = INTUITION:** 6<sup>th</sup> Sense, Future, Theoretical, Ingenuity, Insight, Novelty,  
Imaginative, Possibilities, Meaning oriented, Inspiring

**THE “T – F” DICHOTOMY: DECISION-MAKING:**

**T = THINKING:** Head, Principles, Logic, Analysis, Justice, Reason, Objective,  
Critique, “Tough-minded”, Impersonal

**F = FEELING:** Heart, Values, Sympathy, Intimate, Harmony, Mercy, Personal,  
Subjective, Compliment, “Tender-hearted”

**THE “J – P” DICHOTOMY: ORIENTATION TO OUTER WORLD:**

**J = JUDGEMENT:** Schedule, Control, Settled, Goals, Decisive, Regulate,  
Plan, Organized, Closure, Urgent

**P = PERCEPTION:** Spontaneous, Flexible, Casual, Flow, Tentative, Open,  
Adaptable, Tending, Emergent, More data, Loose

Almost all individuals possess dispositions in *both* polar directions of all four dichotomies, but in varying degrees. The MBTI is sufficiently broad and nuanced in scope to ensure that an individual’s score profile is unlikely to be exactly replicated by anyone else. This meets the often voiced critique that personality instruments put people in “boxes” (notwithstanding the fact that instrument results are a consequence of self-report). On the other hand, the

basic dimensions of the MBTI are also simple enough, as shown above, for an introduction of individuals to self-mapping, and derivatively, to enhance their capacity to more fully understand others.

### **Are Personality Preferences Evenly Distributed?**

Essential in more fully understanding self and others is that individuals are generally not evenly distributed in any of the dichotomies. Some dispositions are more common than others, while others are relatively rare. Table 1 shows the distribution of Norwegian friluftsliv students from two university colleges.

Table 1

Distribution of Norwegian friluftsliv students from two university colleges  
(N = 67)<sup>10</sup>.

EXTROVERSION	54%	INTROVERSION	46%
SENSING	54%	INTUITION	46%
THINKING	66%	FEELING	34%
JUDGEMENT	31%	PERCEPTION	69%

Although in the first two dichotomies, the distribution is quite even; particularly the first varies considerably from two Norwegian samples of Nordvik which are more representative of the general population than the above student sample. His first sample (N = 357) showed an E:I distribution of 69% : 31%, while the second (N = 320) had a 67% : 33% ratio. The S:N dichotomy of Nordvik, though not greatly different from the student sample, shows a less even distribution, with 59% and 61% respectively, favouring the S side. The Thinking/Feeling dichotomy in the friluftsliv sample shows that nearly 2 of 3 prefer the T mode, while the Nordvik samples are even more heavily weighted in this direction; - 74% and 77% respectively. The J:P dichotomy, finally, shows the most pronounced difference of all in the friluftsliv sample, with more than 2 of 3 preferring the P disposition. On the other hand, the Nordvik

samples' distribution is remarkable in its weight in the opposite direction; - 76% and 71% respectively report preference in the J direction.

The Nordvik samples, then, indicate a weighting in the ESTJ direction while the friluftsliv sample points to ESTP. While the Nordvik data cannot be fully argued to be nationally representative, nor can the student data be seen as meeting criteria for generalization to Norwegian higher education friluftsliv students, nevertheless the often strongly uneven distributions shown here should sensitize the outdoor leader in Norway to the possibility that their students or clients may reflect similar patterns. The J:P figures are of special interest in that they may indicate that individuals with P dispositions may be particularly drawn to the freedom and challenge found in natural environments. Leader cognizance of and adaptation to this mode could lead to very different experiences of groups in the outdoors.

What, then, of distribution patterns outside Norway? One example for reflection could be data from a representative sample from the United States (N = 3,009). The proportions in the four dichotomies were as follows: E:I = 49 : 51%; S:N = 73 : 27%; T:F = 40 : 60%; and J:P = 54 : 46%. Most of these distributions are substantially different from the Norwegian numbers, indicating that patterns may vary greatly in different parts of the world. When adding to this the variations of disposition according to gender that also are common, then the importance for the outdoor leader of the recognition of personality differences becomes yet more clearly apparent.

An informal meta-analysis of the above data indicates that it may cautiously be expected that the dispositions of E,S,T, and J may generally be more common. Particularly numerically strong is the S preference. Individuals with an ESTJ profile would then tend to have few reasons to doubt their place in the social scheme of things. On the other hand, individuals with an INFP profile could be surmised to rarely find settings consonant with their dispositions to life. However, it should be understood that these end-point profiles, and the plethora of variations in between, all contribute their unique qualities to the richness of the social fabric. Of particular importance, however, both for the leadership role and for the self-insight *per se* inherent in

the MBTI mapping process, is its contribution to the validation of the rare constellations of dispositions. Individuals possessing these can then rest more assured that they are not deficient, but are simply more unusual flowers in the meadow of humanity.

*“People just don’t want to believe that other people experience the world differently than they do.”*

Dr. Philip Merikle

- cognitive neuroscientist, University of Waterloo

### **WHAT APPLICATIONS DOES THE MBTI HAVE?**

Of the four major areas of application<sup>1</sup>, three are of relevance in the outdoor professional field:

- A. Organizational: Leadership style, team building, conflict resolution, problem solving, diversity training, and communication are all important facets of organization where the MBTI has been shown to be a valuable enhancement tool.
- B. Counselling: Core uses of the MBTI have been in the areas of facilitating the appreciation of individual human uniqueness, and in improving the quality of human relationships.
- C. Educational: The MBTI has been a widely used vehicle for elevating self understanding, mapping out learning style, and pointing to key differences in the motivation to learn.

Are any of these areas of application beyond the outdoor leadership sphere?

Of the many leadership issues that have been investigated within the MBTI framework, three have been selected for attention in the present inquiry: communication, decision-making, and satisfaction with leader.

## **COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES<sup>1</sup>**

Two essential questions that outdoor leaders should ask themselves are: 1) How well do my personality dispositions meet my leadership communication challenges? And 2) When do I need to develop and use my less favoured communication preferences? The outline below will provide the reader with some means to navigate in the sea of these queries:

**EXTROVERSION (E):** “Town meetings” with questions and/or small group discussions. A variety of face-to-face give-and-take sessions.

**INTROVERSION (I):** Information provided in writing on a “need-to-know” basis. Generally discussions of informal type only.

**SENSING (S):** Current information is related to past experience. Visions ahead are connected to present realities. Specific expectations are given to group members.

**INTUITION (N):** “Big picture” information is provided. Emphasis is on visions for what lies ahead. Little specific direction given to group members.

**THINKING (T):** Information is disseminated through logical analysis. Little mention is made of values or impact of information on group members.

**FEELING (F):** Underlying values of procedures are stated. Group involvement is invited with time and support for this provided.

**JUDGEMENT (J):** Emphasis is on goals, plans, and structures. Little room is offered for flexibility and processing. Information is generally presented after decisions are made.

**PERCEPTION (P):** Flexibility is built into plans and schedules. Openness to new information is shown. Communication takes place before decisions are made.

## BEHAVIOURAL CUES IN COMMUNICATION

In addition to being alert to the variety of verbal expression in the group as a means to assess individual dispositions and preferences, outdoor leaders should also be sensitive to behavioural variations in communication<sup>3</sup> as a guide to insight into the nature of the individuals under their care. Below are some cues that can assist in this process:

### EXTROVERTS ("TALK IT OUT")

Rapid speech, interrupt, louder volume, appear to think aloud, more body movement

### INTROVERTS ("THINK IT THROUGH")

Pauses in speech, shorter sentences, quieter volume, stand further away, dominate in group

### SENSING ("SPECIFICS")

Ask for step-by-step information, ask "what" and "how", use precise descriptions

### INTUITION ("BIG PICTURE")

Ask for purpose of action, look for possibilities, ask "why" questions, speak in general terms

### THINKING ("LOGICAL RELEVANCE")

Appear to be testing people, weigh objective evidence, unimpressed by others' decisions, conversations check logic of others

### FEELING ("IMPACT ON PEOPLE")

Strive for harmony, may speak on what they value, ask about others' solutions, need to take account of others

### JUDGEMENT ("JOY OF CLOSURE")

Impatient with long procedures, want to speed up decisions, may decide prematurely

### PERCEPTION ("JOY OF PROCESS")

Need "space" for own decisions, want to explore before making decisions, may decide at the last moment

## GROUP COMMUNICATION STYLES

Groups may be composed of individuals with very similar dispositions, on the one hand, or with widely different dispositions, on the other. Groups may also be found anywhere along the continuum between these polarities. Clearly the communication "climate" will be affected depending on where along this spectrum a group is located. Taking the end points as a depiction of the most



marked distinctions in communication style between groups<sup>6</sup>, the outdoor leader may then be brought to an understanding of the communication nuances of groups at varying points along the continuum:

*GROUPS WITH SIMILAR COMMUNICATION STYLES:*

- perform their tasks more quickly, experience less conflict, like each other more, and listen to each other more.

*GROUPS WITH DIVERSE COMMUNICATION STYLES:*

- are more effective, produce better outcomes, but may take more time.

Under benign environmental conditions, groups with a homogeneous communication style are likely to have deeply satisfying and harmonious outdoor experiences. However, under challenging conditions a group composed of heterogeneous communication styles has a broader range of capacities in its repertoire for problem solving. On the other hand, the effectiveness of such a multidimensional process may be at the cost of taking too much time, and time is often a luxury, particularly in crisis situations.

## **DECISION-MAKING**

Paramount in high quality decision-making as a key responsibility of the outdoor leader, is the use of the group's resources. Drawing out the full scope of the group means that all angles on an issue in question represented in the group, are taken into account. Key strengths of the MBTI dichotomies in the decision-making process<sup>1</sup> are outlined below:

**E:** SHARE INFORMATION AND DISCUSS

**I:** REFLECT AND THEN DISCUSS

**S:** IDENTIFY FACTS AND REALITIES

**N:** GENERATE POSSIBILITIES

**T:** ANALYZE BY LIKELY OUTCOMES

**F:** EVALUATE BY VALUES AND RELATIONSHIPS

**J: MAKE A PLAN**

**P: BE OPEN TO CHANGING THE PLAN**

Good decisions, though perhaps time-consuming, will be stronger if as many perspectives as possible are included. Larger groups are likely to have all preferences represented, while smaller groups may not. The dichotomy sequence as presented above can be used as a decision-making “flow-chart” whereby the process begins by a sharing of information (E), after which time for reflection is provided (I). A discussion then ensues, which leads into a presentation of the relevant facts (S), followed by an outline of the possibilities ahead (N). An analysis of the likely outcomes of these possible diverging directions is then undertaken (T), with an exposition of the implications of this analysis according to group values and relationships following (F). All this information is then structured into a plan (J), with flexibility being introduced in case of unforeseen circumstances (P).

### **SATISFACTION WITH LEADERS**

MBTI-based studies on how individuals regard their leaders have uncovered nuances of importance concerning the leader role<sup>5,6</sup>. Some findings of relevance to the friluftsliv setting follow below:

- Leaders with “**E**” and “**F**” preferences are generally rated higher.
- Leaders with “**NTP**” preferences are viewed to interfere with teamwork.
- Leaders *different* from the group in the “**T – F**” dichotomy are rated more effective than leaders who are the *same* in this dichotomy as the group.
- Leaders with “**I**” preference have difficulty remembering names, a not insignificant barrier to establishing close *rappport* with group members.
- “**F**” types are more able to use a participative leadership style.

## REFLECTIONS

Because of the idiosyncratic nature of life in the friluftsliv setting, it appears that special attention should be focused on two of the four MBTI dichotomies concerning their role in the social dynamics of the group.

1. The “**E – I**” dichotomy: In the outdoors, individuals live in unusually intimate contact with others. For the comfort of all, this implies not only respect for those different from ourselves, but also a willingness to adjust behaviour accordingly. In the “E – I” dimension, the burden of adjustment falls mainly on the extrovert since extroverted behaviour tends to interfere with the introvert’s preferred mode of life, *but not vice versa*. This is often a difficult insight for the extrovert to achieve since extroverts are a majority in most settings and thus may form a belief that their approach to life is the “normal” one. Further, the “E- I” polarity can, then, have consequences for the *social* experience vis-à-vis the *nature* experience in friluftsliv. The extrovert’s agenda may lie more in the direction of a social experience in nature, while the introvert may be more inclined to a nature experience in a quiet, small-scale, intimate, social setting. These disparities pose a challenge to the outdoor leader. Should a conscious “apartheid” policy be carried out, or should an effort be made to develop insight into this issue in the group? In the day-time journeys of friluftsliv groups, individuals usually are able to place themselves to their satisfaction. In camp, however, it may require some intervention and planning to ensure that all are satisfied. Having compatible tent-mates is a key issue that may make or break a friluftsliv trip.

2. The “**J – P**” dichotomy: While the Judgement disposition carries with it what is essentially a model of structured urban life with its routines and predictabilities, the Perception preference implies an adaptive flowing in the stream of change. In the flux of nature, the tension between these provides another challenge for the outdoor leader. The “J” disposition may be a hindrance to good decision-making in the field, particularly if this preference is held by the majority in the group. The “J’s” are numerically dominant in many settings, though as indicated by the limited Norwegian data, in friluftsliv they may be outnumbered by “P” group members, with their greater capacities for

rapid adjustments. Again, in the camp setting, the astute leader may be well advised to influence tent-mate compositions since the “P” disposition, (often in the direction of “creative chaos”?) almost guarantees conflict development with the orderly “J” preference in the cramped quarters of the tent, *but not vice versa*.

## CLOSURE

By further enhancing their strengths; -their established personality dispositions; and by cultivating their less developed capacities, as well as honing their “radar” to more deeply understand the profiles of the individuals in their care, outdoor leaders can be well on their way to become what Outward Bound’s Kurt Hahn called “compelling demonstrations”. Such leadership can, then, be expected to leave lasting positive impacts on those experiencing it.

***“To journey into the human mind may be the most formidable journey of them all; the greatest challenge, and our most magnificent adventure...”***

Freely, from Dahlström

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