

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

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A Review/Response

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It has been estimated that 50% of all crewed attempts to sail around the world abort in disruption because the crew members fail to understand each other, to work together or to resolve conflict. What do you do? Where do you hide? As Nils Vikander so clearly points out in this article, in a wilderness setting people also live in unusually intimate contact with others. For the tour to have meaning for all participants, they must respect those different from themselves and be prepared to adjust their behaviour accordingly.

Friluftsliv is an integral part of Norwegian culture in general and has gained significance also in educational settings. It might or might not include an educational component. A well-known *outdoorsman* and *outdoor educator* once said, “after a tour leading others into the bush, I need a trip on my own to get really close to nature”. For him they were two different things. Yet probably all human beings can benefit from a return to nature, from feeling closer to themselves and to their origins. A “nature high” is a thing of beauty, a strong and lasting emotional experience. Would that all might be blessed with such experience... Yet many need help to get started. Hence the need for some organized activity, under competent leadership; *-outdoor education*, the pedagogically oriented branch of outdoor life or friluftsliv. And the key word is **leadership**. It is also here that we have a chance to inculcate attitudes of respect for nature and the beauty and benefits from using it responsibly. It may be here that we gain allies in sufficient numbers to protect nature for coming generations.

Although an experienced *outdoorsman* himself, it is the *outdoor educator*, Nils Vikander, who guides us into the wilderness of personality and leadership in this article. He gently introduces us to the risk activity of leadership and subtly reminds us of the obligation to provide **competent** leadership. He then escorts us deftly through ideas of personality typing and introduces the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as a tool of assessment. Using the metaphor “software”, he suggests that understanding the great diversity of individual needs and wishes is as essential as the “hardware” of technical skills. Both should be found in the leader’s metaphorical “pack”. And strangely, the “pack gets lighter” as we add more to it. Equipped with insight into the consequences of personality diversification, behavioural cues to help identify differences, and tactical tools to help tackle issues that arise in a group, the leader’s burden is indeed “lighter”. The wide range of individual differences becomes an asset.

Vikander then provides a framework for applications of the MBTI to outdoor education: organization, counselling and education. He further selects a) communication, b) decision making, and c) satisfaction with the leader(ship), as key issues in the outdoor education leader role. In concise key words he identifies the strengths of each of the four polar dichotomies, how persons of differing personality type communicate, how they gather information to aid in decision making and what they prefer in a leader.

Especially useful and timely for the reader is the overview of behavioural cues which in addition to verbal expressions of needs, can suggest where they might be on the “map” of personality type. For example, the rapid speech of the (talk it out) extrovert as opposed to the pauses in speech (think it through) introvert.

Lastly, the flow chart of decision making suggests a way to cater for the needs of all in a group. By, for example, sharing information first (desired by the extrovert) and then providing time for reflection (desired by the introvert), the leader provides for both. The flow chart proceeds in the same way for the sensory-intuition, thinking-feeling and judgement-perception dichotomies.

I congratulate the author on an excellent article, which not only introduces an extremely useful tool for understanding personality diversity but also implies a rich field for future research. His results for future leaders (students) are an excellent start and remind us of how much we yet do not know. His insight into leadership issues in an outdoor setting bespeaks both a broad and an in-depth personal experience.

I regard this article as an introduction to an extremely fruitful area of research in friluftsliv, especially regarding personality and leadership, as well as a framework for launching such research. Potential and relevant hypotheses simply leap out at the reader with every line. We look forward to more data in the future with surely some revealing results.