

The Jungian Framework: A Major Tool for Problem Solving

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Received: February 26, 2021; **Published:** March 30, 2021

In 1967, I began my teaching career as an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. Even though my PhD was in Engineering, I ended up in a Business School because C. West Churchman, the person who taught me the Philosophy of Science for my Minor Field, was in the UC Berkeley Business School. More importantly, I was disenchanted with Engineering. In a word, while I absolutely loved Engineering, I found the thinking of Engineers increasingly too narrow and pedestrian.

Barely a year after I began teaching at Pitt, I became a close colleague and lifelong friend with Ralph H. Kilmann who also started as an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Business. It quickly became clear that we shared a number of interests, the main one being our deep appreciation of the work of the noted Swiss Psychiatrist/Psychoanalyst Carl Jung. In particular, we were both interested in the Myers-Briggs Personality Test which measured a person's Jungian Personality Type.

Applying the Jungian personality types

As a highly educated European of his time, Jung was knowledgeable in a wide variety of fields. No matter what he studied--Art, History, Literature, Philosophy--Jung observed the same fundamental differences in basic outlook regarding how different people approached their subject matter or work.

Two dimensions are key with regard to how Ralph and I used the Jungian Framework. The first has to do with what a person regards as the "elemental building blocks of Knowledge and/or Reality". The second has to do with one's preferred process for making a decision. In short, once a person is partial to particular building block, how does he or she reach a decision with regard to an important issue bearing on it?

With regard to the first dimension, Jung differentiated between Sensing and Intuitive Types, or S and N for short. With regard to the second, Jung differentiated between Thinking and Feeling Types, or T and F. In the Myers-Briggs, the letter N is used for Intuition because I is already taken for Introversion and E for Extroversion, another key dimension of the Framework, but one that Ralph and I generally didn't use.

Sensing refers to the fact that those whose Sensing part of their personality is highly developed prefer instinctively to gather information via their senses. They prefer to break a complex whole down into its “separate parts” and to gather “Hard Data” on the “individual parts”. Sensing or S types are also interested in the “here and now”-the Short-Term--not “hypothetical futures”. Likewise, they are largely guided by conventional ideas and thoughts that have been well-validated.

In sharp contrast, Intuitive Types are oriented to the future-the Long-Term--not with what “currently is”. Furthermore, they are not interested in the parts per se, but rather in the “whole system”. In other words, their focus is on the proverbial “Big Picture”. If they have any interest in the parts, it’s only because of their “interactions and interconnections, not in any single one of them per se”. They are also interested in “new possibilities,” i.e., “new modes of thought and ways of doing and envisioning things”.

Thinking Types use Logic and Statistics and other impersonal modes of analysis and reasoning in reaching important decisions. Feeling Types on the other hand use their Personal Feelings, Likes and Dislikes, in making important judgements.

It’s important to note that Feeling does not necessarily mean “emotional” for all of the Types can be highly emotional in defending their way of perceiving the world and acting with respect to it. It’s also important to note that it’s definitively not the case that one Type is “right” and the others are “wrong”, but that they all need one another to compensate for their inherent weaknesses and limitations. In brief, they need to work together to build a robust picture of Reality.

Combining the two dimensions results in the four major Jungian Personality Types ST, NT, NF, and SF. STs are interested primarily in breaking a complex system down into its “separate, individual parts, “analyzing them independently, and reaching decisions based on impersonal methods of analysis. In contrast, NTs are not only interested in the “whole system”-the Big Picture--but in analyzing it impersonally. NFs are also interested in the Big Picture, but it’s not an impersonal one. It’s “the whole of human communities”. Furthermore, the “Feelings” of the community are paramount in reaching important decisions. Finally, SFs are interested primarily in their close circle of friends and immediate families, and how they “Feel” about important matters that affect them personally.

The ideal organization

What really brought the Jungian Typology to the fore was the fact that Ralph and I had agreed to do a four-hour workshop with a group of teachers on Decision-Making and Leadership in Organizations. But other than giving a standard lecture, we were completely at a loss as to what to do to engage them personally. However, while we were pondering the matter, the same thought literally popped into both of our heads simultaneously. First, we’d administer a short form of the Myers-Briggs. Next, we would put all the STs into one group, the NTs into another, and the NFs and SFs into their respective groups. We then thought of an exercise that would not only bring out the inherent differences between them, but would hopefully make them abundantly clear to all of the participants. In a word, we asked each group to describe their Ideal Organization in as much detail as possible. We would thus be discussing the topic of Decision Making and Leadership in Organizations but in a way that would directly involve the participants.

We didn't know whether the exercise would work or not so we were taking a risk for if it didn't, we had no backup other than a standard lecture on organizations. Fortunately, it not only worked, but it did so spectacularly. Putting like Types together not only resulted in the groups "jelling immediately," but in intensifying the differences between them.

The Ideal Organization of STs is Bureaucracy. If it had never been invented, STs would recreate it endlessly. It embodies everything they value. In a word, there is complete certainty and no ambiguity whatsoever. Everyone knows exactly what his or her job is, and thus completely what's expected of him or her. They know the precise standards by which their performance will be measured, namely, what the rewards are for accomplishing their assigned tasks and conversely what the punishments are for not doing them as required.

In contrast, the Ideal Organization of NTs is what is referred to as a Matrix Organization. People are not assigned to fixed jobs or positions, but rather to different Teams that vary in composition as the nature of the Tasks that need to be done change. In addition, the standards of performance also change in response to the changing nature of the Tasks and Teams.

The Ideal of NFs is literally no formal organization at all. People "just show up and depending on how they Feel that day form themselves into various tightknit groups". Furthermore, the groups decide how they will reward one another.

Finally, the Ideal Organization of SFs is that of a "Close-Knit Family". Everyone knows one another intimately. They know their families personally, go to one another's parties, attend weddings, celebrate birthdays, and anniversaries.

A general method

In the years since, we've used the Jungian Framework with countless groups and different types of organizations. Indeed, my wife Donna and I have used it repeatedly as well. We've developed several variations on the basic theme that accomplishes the basic task even better. Thus, we've used Tinker Toys to have people build physical constructions so that the various Types can literally "see" their respective personalities, something that is mostly invisible to the unschooled mind. For instance, the Tinker Toy constructions of STs are generally symmetrical reflecting their high need for order. We've also given people magazines to build collages so that once again people can "see the Types in action". In addition, we've found that the more general exercise of Society's Most Important Problem works best of all. Each of the Jungian Types describe what they regard as Society's Most Important Problem.

For STs, Society's Most Important Problem is improving the efficiency of some already existing machine, like an automobile. For NTs, it's inventing a whole new system of communication or transportation. For NFs, it's improving the entire state of the world, at the very least one's neighborhood and community. And for SFs, improving one's immediate family and close friends.

In organizations, we've used the Jungian Framework to help them better confront the full nature of their problems. Thus, all problems worthy of the name have ST, NT, NF, and SF components. The danger is that many organization have a strong tendency to hire people that fit merely one or two of the Types, and thus "with whom they feel most comfortable" and thereby "fit in nicely with our culture". Accordingly, Public Service organizations mainly hire SFs and NFs; Tech companies, STs

and NTs. As a result, they do not consider how the other Types would define the problems facing them, often with disastrous results. For this reason, we've often had to role-play how the other Types would respond to a situation.

Finally, one of the first books that Ralph and I wrote was *Methodological Approaches to Social Science* where based on the Jungian Framework, we described four very different methods of doing Social Science¹.

The point is that the Jungian Framework does more than merely describe different personalities. It's an indispensable tool for problem solving.

Volume 10 Issue 3 March 2021

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¹Ian I. Mitroff and Ralph H. Kilmann, *Methodological Approaches to Social Science*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1978.