

## The Key Role of Personality Factors in Crisis Management

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The Myers-Briggs Personality Framework, which is encapsulated in the Myers Briggs Typology Indicator or MBTI is crucial to the understanding of Crisis Management (CM).

Before I begin, I need to acknowledge that the MBTI is not without substantial controversy. Its validity has been questioned repeatedly. In spite of this, its record is no less than any other personality framework in accounting for human behavior. Indeed, my colleagues and I have used it successfully for years in helping organizations cope better with the complex problems facing them.

The MBTI is based on the pioneering work of the Swiss Psychologist/Psychoanalyst Carl Jung. As a highly educated person of his time, Jung was well versed in European History, Literature, and Philosophy, to mention only a few of the many subjects in which he was knowledgeable. No matter what the particular subject matter with which he was familiar, Jung observed the same fundamental differences again and again with regard to how people approached their work.

Two dimensions of the MBTI are key: (1) what people regard and thus take in as Information, and (2) the process they bring to bear to make decisions with regard to the Information that they have recognized as such.

The first dimension is bounded by Sensing or S on the one end and Intuiting or N on the other. N is used for Intuiting for the letter I is already used for Introversion.

Sensing Types automatically prefer to break any and all situations down into their "essential components". As such, they are Reductionists through and through. To be accepted as valid, things need to fit in standardized, well-recognized categories according to separate disciplines.

In sharp contrast, Intuitive Types are basically attuned to see the Big Picture and thus to make connections between things that on their surface are totally unrelated.

The second dimension is bounded by Thinking or T at the one end and Feeling or F at the other.

Thinking Types automatically use impersonal modes of analysis such as Logic and Statistics in reaching important decisions.

In sharp contrast, Feeling Types use their "personal likes and dislikes" in making important decisions. Although it's especially sensitive to the emotional states of others, Feeling itself is not necessarily "emotional" for all of the Types can be highly emotional in defending their ways of perceiving and reacting to the world.

Combining the two dimensions in all possible ways results in the four basic Personality Types: (1) Sensing-Thinking or ST; (2) Intuitive-Thinking or NT; (3) Intuitive-Feeling or NF; and (4) Sensing-Feeling or SF.

STs are guided primarily in breaking things apart into their “essential components” and analyzing them separately in terms of standardized methods to reach well-validated conclusions. In this regard, Mathematics is the unequivocal standard. Starting from Primitive Truths whose veracity can’t be doubted, and using the accepted procedures of mathematical operations, one proves general theorems whose Truth is supposedly not in question.

NTs are not only guided by the Big Picture, but by using the broadest possible ways of looking at the world, in perpetual search for multiple and even conflicting Truths about any situation. In doing so, they are not ruled by what is acceptable given today’s knowledge, but in formulating new creative breakthroughs and insights. As such, they are not interested in theorems per se but in Wonder and Enlightenment.

NFs are also guided by the Big Picture, but it’s not an impersonal one. Instead, they are concerned with improving the “General State of Humankind” as a whole.

Finally, SFs are concerned with the intimate details of their families and close personal friends. Humankind is too abstract a concept for them to take seriously.

While all of the Types are critical with regard to CM, NT and NF play leading roles.

Given that no crisis is ever a single, well-defined, and isolated crisis, NT is critical. In brief, every crisis is part of a whole interrelated system of crisis. Every crisis either sets off a chain reaction of other crises or it’s the result of previous ones. In reality, both happen at the same time, thus creating vicious feedbacks. In this way, the various Types of crises constantly reinforce one another and thus make it harder to cope.

NF plays an equally critical role. First of all, it’s needed to convince the members of an organization and its Stakeholders that they need a comprehensive program in CM. To do this, one needs to consider how the basic fears and anxieties of people regarding the crises they dread the most can be addressed, if not overcome. In this regard, Organizational Psychologists who are able to conduct realistic simulations that will give people a sense of the emotions they will feel in the heat of an actual crisis play a crucial role.

ST plays an important role in ensuring that the enumerable details that crisis plans entail are carried out correctly and in time. It’s also needed to monitor the effectiveness of crisis plans and procedures.

Finally, SF is needed as well. One-on-one personal interviews with how individuals are coping is an absolute necessity. Led by trained facilitators, small groups are needed in providing serious and ongoing support to one another.

In sum, all of the types need to play an integrated role in planning for and coping with crises. None of them can go it alone.

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