

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How to Create a Better Team Using Personality Traits

DARRELL11 COMMENTS

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much."

Helen Keller

Team Collaboration Takes Understanding

We've all been there, right? We've all had to work with someone in some capacity whom we just did not connect with. And that may be putting it mildly. Personality style may have a lot to do with it.



Consider the always-15-minutes-early coworker thrust into a situation where she must work with a free-spirited artist. Creative people aren't always clock-watchers, and this artist proves it by wandering in a few minutes late most days.

We can fine-tune strategies according to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual team members.

Our first instinct may be to blame the artist for not keeping to a tighter schedule. Discipline *is* important. However, the always-early coworker might also need some scrutiny here. Perhaps she needs to loosen up and give her coworker some space – creative ideas need some freedom to flow. And different people tend to be more productive at **different times of the day**. Being on time isn't everything. Maybe the artist's best ideas happen while listening to music at 3:00 a.m. If so, the artist may have been working hours earlier (or later) than her punctual coworker – just not at the office. Now, who's the slacker?

If we explore such partnerships, we can see how the different players on a team may contribute in unique ways. Sometimes that may be irritating. But everyone has their weaknesses – just as they have their strengths. With a better understanding of personality types, those differences need not interfere with daily team collaboration. Strategically applying this information may even enhance a team's efforts.

Our personalities influence our approach to work. But can we create a dream team based entirely on personality traits? Probably not. The factors that contribute to building a successful team are many. Usually, when engineering a team, it's normal and practical to consider skills and experience. But while forming groups (or perhaps when evaluating the effectiveness of a current team), we can still use personality traits to gain useful information about compatible and beneficial pairings. From there, we can fine-tune strategies according to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual team members.

Let's Look at Traits

Learning to discover, appreciate, and utilize these specific “superpowers” at work can make a team stronger.

For our purposes, we won't talk about *all* the possible combinations of the 16 personality types. The number would be too daunting. Instead, we'll look at the trait pairs, and from there, let you, as the reader, cobble the pieces together for

your more definitive type. (It also might be easier to look at the separate, more apparent traits of partners who haven't taken our [NERIS Type Explorer®](#), rather than guessing their combined traits – a.k.a. personality type. Then again, why wouldn't they take the test?) We'll then discuss each trait combination in brief terms of advantages and disadvantages.

When people employ their personality traits throughout a lifetime, experience makes them perform better using their own styles. Unless somehow influenced to do otherwise, people tend to go in a comfortable and familiar direction. They tend to repeat the things they're good at. Learning to discover, appreciate, and utilize these specific “superpowers” at work can make the team stronger. It can foster diverse skill specialization. It can also reveal where work needs to be done to develop the individual (or the group) further and enhance a spirit of cooperation.

It might seem that individuals who share similar traits will naturally work well together. Often that is true. But don't assume there are no difficulties with such relationships. Mostly, it comes down to a matter of “too much of a good thing” and a lack of the diverse qualities needed to complete tasks. This makes people working with similar traits a topic worth exploring. However, for our purposes, we'll stick with “opposing” qualities to focus a broad subject in a small article.

Click on the binary personality traits you may be dealing with to get an idea of some things to consider when refining your team (or your attitude toward your organization) – or simply keep scrolling down:

[Introverted and Extraverted Team Members](#)

[Intuitive and Observant Team Members](#)

[Feeling and Thinking Team Members](#)

[Prospecting and Judging Team Members](#)

[Turbulent and Assertive Team Members](#)

Introverted and Extraverted Team Members

Advantages

To appreciate how [Introverts and Extraverts](#) work together, we need a little more in-depth understanding of those terms. Most people know the social aspect: Introverts gain energy from time alone, whereas Extraverted personality types thrive among other people. In this respect, Extraverts can effectively play the social front person and do the networking and face time with outsiders. They can

shine where sales or promoting a venture to investors are involved. Meanwhile, the Introvert might manage the “quiet work” behind the scenes.

Most teams don't want a stalled venture, but they also don't want to careen out of control – making both approaches and attitudes vital.

But to better understand each personality type's value to a team, we must look deeper. Extraverts are experiencers and have a willingness to try things more readily than Introverts. (This is especially true if the Extravert trait is paired with the Prospecting trait.) In this sense, Extraverts are outgoing not only socially but experientially. Introverts more typically stop and look a situation over before trying it out, and they are more likely to look before they leap.

As with a car, a collaborative venture might benefit from having both an accelerator and a brake. The “go-go” Extraverted people's accelerators push the enterprise forward, while the more reticent Introverted individuals' brakes slow it down. Most teams don't want a stalled venture, but they also don't want to careen out of control – making both approaches and attitudes vital. (We'll see this dynamic mirrored in the Prospecting and Judging as well as Turbulent and Assertive personality traits below – but for different reasons.)

Potential Problems

While both Extraverts and Introverts can gain from expanding their comfort zones to include a little of the other's style, insisting on it can cause conflict. There's nothing wrong with fostering adaptive behaviors that stretch a person's capabilities and broaden their skill set. However, that needs to be balanced with an appreciation for the person's core personality traits. It's better if expanding one's comfort zone is voluntary rather than forced.

There also must be flexibility and respect both ways. The Introvert must trust the Extravert's impulse to accelerate, while the Extravert respects the Introvert's need to slow the process down when necessary. This takes confidence in the other person, ample communication, and a willingness to be flexible. Learning to negotiate differences in personality styles is a skill worth developing and starts with awareness.

[Back to the trait list](#)

Intuitive and Observant Team Members

Advantages

A visionary and a pragmatist walk into a bar. The visionary says to the bartender, “I can almost taste a frothy beverage possessing elements that will interact in such a way as to satisfy me to the depths of my soul.” The pragmatist says, “Give me a beer.”

Okay. As “walk into a bar” jokes go, that’s probably not a sidesplitter. It probably doesn’t even fit the definition of a joke. (For real “walk into a bar” humor, try [this](#).)

But the scenario illustrates the mind-set differences between [Intuitive and Observant](#) partners. In this scenario, the visionary looks a little silly. That isn’t always the case. Intuitive personality types can be down-to-earth. However, sometimes we need a few people who look a little silly – or at least think in more unorthodox ways – to help us move forward. Innovation is important.

(Another example of Intuitive thinking is [Elon Musk](#), who as a child, convinced himself not to fear the dark when he realized that darkness was only the absence of photons. “It’s really silly to be afraid of the absence of photons,” Elon told his young self. What an innovative way to convince oneself not to fear the dark. Who thinks like that? Many Intuitive people, that’s who.)

Intuitive personalities frequently [imagine potential blueprints](#) for progress or new methods of doing things. But, alone, that is potentially just so much dreaming. Something else is needed.

That’s often where the practical – and frequently brilliant – Observant folk come into play. Observant partners take those ideas and the blueprints and make them work. They also maintain the methods once they’re in place.

Marry that Dreamer to the Doer, and the meandering theories will settle onto a productive path.

And so it is when you team up Intuitive people with Observant people. With two Intuitive people working together, you may have an abundance of ideas. But if you’re setting up a team endeavor, ideas will only take you so far. With two Observant people, efficiency and results will rule the day, but growth may be limited. But put the differing personality traits together, and there is the potential for magic.

Marry that Dreamer to the Doer, and the meandering theories will settle into a productive path. With the help of Intuitive people, that productive path avoids becoming stuck in an efficient yet stagnant and well-worn rut. Intuitive minds

typically promote the idea that there is something better down the road, if only one takes the time to explore the vast possibilities.

Potential Problems

Observant team members might enjoy the vision of the Intuitive folks... up to a point. Then they may be eager for Intuitive people to stop talking and theorizing and get on with it. Endless theorizing and dreaming can never end soon enough for Observant personalities as they wait for Intuitive coworkers to actually “do” something. Yet the Intuitive team members may be doing quite a bit – just not in ways the Observant members may see as valuable.

(As an aside, some recent [studies](#) suggest that, since there is more tangible evidence of their labor, doers are also often erroneously viewed as more valuable members of a team than idea people.)

Also, new ideas may even be a threat to some Observant partners, particularly if they also rely on the orderly Judging trait, as Sentinel personality types do. They can be a little gun-shy with change. If new ideas are coming at them too fast and furious, they may feel that things are off-kilter. It can be maddening for them when an Intuitive person refuses to settle into the tried and true – even for a short time.

On the Intuitive side, being a somewhat uncommon trait, some might get a sense that they are “special.” Most come of age understanding the power of their broad, Intuitive nets. They are always gathering information in ways that suit the other aspects of their personalities. They likely recognize their own abilities to process what they collect in unique ways.

Some Intuitive personality types might look condescendingly at Observant people as too concrete. This can be damaging in a working relationship. But what is more Intuitive than grasping how much someone with a different style adds to the mix? There is a certain genius in efficiently keeping things running smoothly in a timely manner. It can be vital to success. The sooner the Intuitive person appreciates [that genius](#) in their Observant associates, the better.

[Back to the trait list](#)

Feeling and Thinking Team Members

Advantages

When considering [Feeling and Thinking traits](#), much depends on the venture in which the two types are involved. Suppose the team is involved with research and

development in the pharmaceutical industry. If it is just about lab work within the confines of a lab, it may not be that important to involve someone with the Feeling personality trait. However, should it progress to human tests, it might help to have a Feeling person working with the test subjects. And therein lies the advantages of people with Thinking and Feeling personality traits working together.

It might be fun to view a Thinking and Feeling partnership like the “good cop, bad cop” of the movies. Instead, we have the “rational cop” and the “sensitive cop.” The rational cop comes at a venture from a logical, cost-benefit direction that highlights a starker effectiveness. Meanwhile, the sensitive cop approaches the same venture from a more “human place” where the needs of others are highlighted.

Instead of getting a confession, our cops get a finished product or idea that is rationally functional while responsive to the needs of others. Such a combination can be helpful when an endeavor must appeal to both the head and the heart.

Potential Problems

Again, any disadvantages facing these team members are probably the result of intolerance to each other's style. Here, the Feeling person may be put off by the calculating and colder approach of the Thinking person, and the Thinking partner by the touchy-feely approach of the Feeling personality.

Notice that we describe these perceptions in extremes. Usually, it's extreme thinking that causes such conflicts to arise. It may seem to one like too much of the other's characteristics are driving the efforts. “She's heartlessly strategic, and she's taking away the company's spirit.” “He's such a softy, and we're losing all of our rigor because of it.”

Thinking personalities might grow impatient with what they see as resistance to the best solution. Meanwhile, Feeling personalities may continue to struggle in search of a more humane path.

As an example, in a business setting, laying off employees might be something that Thinking types would see as a rational, cost-cutting measure that leads to the greater good. Better to cut a few now than cut everybody later. While it might sound cold, it might also be true. On the other hand, Feeling personality types might focus on the lives of those being sacked. Again, it's a worthy and compassionate consideration. But, if each type stands their ground without compromise, conflict is likely to be the only result.

Thinking personalities might grow impatient with what they see as resistance to the best solution. Meanwhile, Feeling personalities may continue to struggle in search of a more humane path. Tensions rise as each team member thinks in terms of their own efforts being the only direction that's worthwhile. Thinking people can be stubborn based on the perceived truth of their logic. Feeling people can be overzealous in their mission to help others, even when it's impractical or even impossible.

Learning to compromise and not take their own positions so seriously can go a long way toward finding a solution. Compromise will turn, "It's either my way or no way," into, "It's my way – and it's your way too." The partners involved need to remember and appreciate what each brings to the table. Then compromise becomes easier. Often, if people earnestly take the time to look for synergy, they'll find it.

[Back to the trait list](#)

Prospecting and Judging Team Members

Advantages

The [Judging and Prospecting](#) traits in our framework can be robust. What a difference a single trait among many can make. For example, a [Sentinel](#) (Judging and Observant) differs significantly from an [Explorer](#) (Prospecting and Observant). And yet there's only one trait difference with every other personality trait running parallel in the two categories. While some [Diplomats](#) and [Analysts](#) are Prospecting, others are Judging. But all Sentinels are Judging, and all Explorers are Prospecting.

And so, for the sake of illustration, we'll temporarily switch from describing *traits* to describing *types*. But similar dynamics are likely to exist among Diplomats and Analysts with the Judging and Prospecting difference.

These personality types can work well together if they "get" each other and lay some ground rules.

While Sentinels value [orderliness, tradition, and loyalty](#), Explorers are spontaneous, always looking for the next "thing," and are independent. Can this odd couple ever come together? These personality types can work well together if they "get" each other and lay some ground rules.

A prevailing theory that is still in the realm of hypothesis has types similar to a Sentinel and an Explorer finding marital bliss with one another, especially as the individuals get older. It does make sense. Explorer personality types may realize that their live-in-the-moment philosophy may not serve them well when it comes to security and stability. Falling in love with those who plan and follow the rules can complement their more impulsive nature.

On the other hand, Explorers' impetuosity can be exciting and add some spice to the lives of Sentinels. Even stalwart Sentinels may sometimes grow a little tired of playing it so safe for so long. Both personalities may benefit from such a pairing if one doesn't overwhelm the other. Besides, how much of literature and drama is dedicated to convincing us of the idea that opposites *can* attract?

As with marriage, so it may be with other partnerships – they can be complementary if each understands, tolerates, and even appreciates the gifts of the other. Depending on the venture, there may be a time or activity that calls for a careful approach that follows the rules and procedures precisely. At other times, a situation might call for thinking more flexibly on one's feet and "[MacGyvering](#)" the heck out of a situation – even if it disrupts some of the consistency and standards along the way.

This yin-yang situation between these team members can be a powerful combination if appreciated. But only if the parties apply some effort and seek to understand and respect each other.

Potential Problems

Okay. Back to traits.

Those with the Prospecting personality trait rely on their nonconformity and sense of freedom to do what they do best. If they feel too boxed in, or if their freedom of thought or movement feels stifled, they will become anxious. Prospecting types will feel like their hands are tied, and the last thing you want to do with Prospecting types is to tie their hands unnecessarily. They sometimes just won't settle for it. They will somehow "get loose" and be themselves – even if that means breaking away completely.

Unfortunately for this combination of traits, those with the Judging personality trait are looking for a clear, established direction and stable predictability. They are unlikely to take many unplanned chances. They are looking for standards and firm boundaries, and they will not feel secure without those things. In some sense, being boxed in is exactly where these personality types want to be.

See the problem?

When the Prospecting person is feeling his or her oats, the Judging person may feel that things are going off the rails. When the Judging person is clinging to their tight standards and need for order, the Prospecting person will feel trapped or confined. If they can't use their differences in a complementary way, they are likely to find themselves in deep conflict.

[Back to the trait list](#)

Turbulent and Assertive Team Members

Advantages

The [Turbulent and Assertive traits](#) reflect our confidence levels and sensitivity to the criticisms and the opinions of others. This colors almost everything a person does.

Assertive people generally get the good press. Boldness is seen in many cultures as attractive and desirable. Plenty of self-help books describe building confidence while there are few, if any, dedicated to enhancing our insecurities and hypersensitivity. There clearly can be a cultural bias – optimism and confidence are often viewed as preferable to pessimism and uncertainty. And it's true. Confidence and boldness can be most useful in an endeavor in obvious ways.

But Turbulent personality types continuously strive to improve themselves and project that need to more positively develop into anything they are doing. They are likely to always be wanting to nudge things toward "better." If that is recognized and appropriately utilized within a team, it can lead to innovation and progress. Turbulent personalities want things to improve. And who doesn't want that kind of energy on a team?

There is value in having someone with a mind-set (and perhaps the courage and conviction) to say, "What if that doesn't work?"

It also helps to have the Turbulent person on board with just enough doubt to keep things real. They are more likely to see the problems. They may notice what needs fixing long before the Assertive personalities have a clue. Assertive team members can be so confident that they gloss over problems or minimize difficulties. There is value in having someone with a mind-set (and perhaps the courage and conviction) to say, "What if that doesn't work?"

Potential Problems

The reason confidence gets good press is that it is typically linked with leadership and winning. The Turbulent person may pick up on the vibe that others sometimes see them as the “B Team.” **This can feed into their insecurities.** It may not matter that it's just the biased perceptions of others.

On the other hand, Turbulent personality types may automatically assume that Assertive confidence, being so different from their own style, is a form of smugness. They may see people with the Assertive trait as full of themselves. This can color their willingness to cooperate with their fellow team members.

If the Turbulent person is dismissed too easily by others, then their gift of doubting might be lost. If the Assertive person is pigeonholed as arrogant, there may be a disregard for their useful positive energy. Recognizing and accepting that there is something different but valuable being expressed by both Assertive and Turbulent personality types can help mitigate any bias either way.

[Back to the trait list](#)

Conclusions

You've probably looked at a YouTube video with someone doing something strange or even stupid and muttered to yourself the saying, “It takes all kinds.” And while we use it as a negative throwaway line, perhaps we should give the phrase a more positive, honored place in our thinking. Perhaps it would help to use that phrase when thinking about personality traits and types and teams.

A popular theory of how certain personality traits survived, thrived, and became what they are today is the evolutionary idea of survival of the fittest. The traits that worked for mankind stayed around and were passed down (genetically and/or culturally) because they worked for survival. If we combine our theory with the evolutionary one, 16 combinations of traits made the cut. Why did they all survive in the form they did? Because they served a purpose, according to the popular theory.

When forming a team and using personality as one of the deciding markers, it might help to consider that theory. Each person may have starkly different gifts or approaches. In the right hands and with a generous and compromising spirit, that can be a good thing.

To expand on this theme of collaboration among personality types, our article **[“Trait Conflicts and Finding Balance”](#)** offers a more how-to approach to match the

ideas above.

What are your experiences working with different personality types? Do you have any tips for building better teams? Let us know in the comments section!

Further Reading

[Let's Talk to Other Personality Types: The Art of Conversation](#)

[How to Survive Your First Day on a New Job, by Personality Type](#)

[Two Roommates and Some Coffee – Stories from the Real World](#)

[Playing to Win: Personality Type and the Drive to Compete](#)

[Successfully Failing and Personality Types](#)

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