

Coaching Transformational Leaders with the Myers-Briggs® Assessment

For a High-Performance Organizational Culture

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Organizational leaders at all levels are under constant pressure to improve the performance of their company, business, agency, unit, or team. “Change management” strategies have become popular methods of enhancing organizational performance. These strategies include approaches such as implementing new technology, instituting cost reduction programs, and introducing quality improvement programs—and, at the extreme, restructuring the organization. While these strategies have merit in making incremental improvements in performance, they do not produce the systemic change required for significant long-term improvement in organizational effectiveness and performance.

More and more organizational leaders are realizing that change management strategies alone don’t provide an optimal return on investment. These leaders understand that their organizations must undergo deep, substantive change if they are to move to higher levels of improved and sustained performance. This deep change involves the reshaping of the organization’s culture through “transformational leadership.” The purpose of this paper is to describe how coaching based on this model can incorporate the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) assessment.

The approach I describe in this paper is based on my professional experience as an international executive coach, university professor of organizational leadership, and researcher/writer/speaker on organizational culture. Concepts presented here are drawn from my book, *Leadership in High-Performance Organizational Cultures*, 2nd ed. (MSD Leadership Consultants, 2010).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHAPING A HIGH-PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Lou Gerstner, former chairman and CEO of IBM, led this blue-chip giant back from the brink of bankruptcy and mainframe obscurity to the forefront of the technology business. Shortly after his departure from IBM in 2002, Gerstner was quoted as saying, “Culture isn’t part of the game—it is the game.” This quote from his book, *Who Says Elephants Can’t Dance?* (Collins, 2002), was in reference to the important role that transforming IBM’s culture played in the company’s turnaround.

Shaping the culture of the organization is one of the most critical responsibilities of senior executive leadership. Most leadership development professionals agree, however, that before executives can transform their organization’s culture, they must first transform themselves. In order to effect this deep personal change, individual leaders must first increase their self-awareness. Using the MBTI assessment can help leaders see how their personal preferences may be influencing their organization’s culture and how they can adopt a fuller spectrum of leadership to improve the organization’s effectiveness and performance.

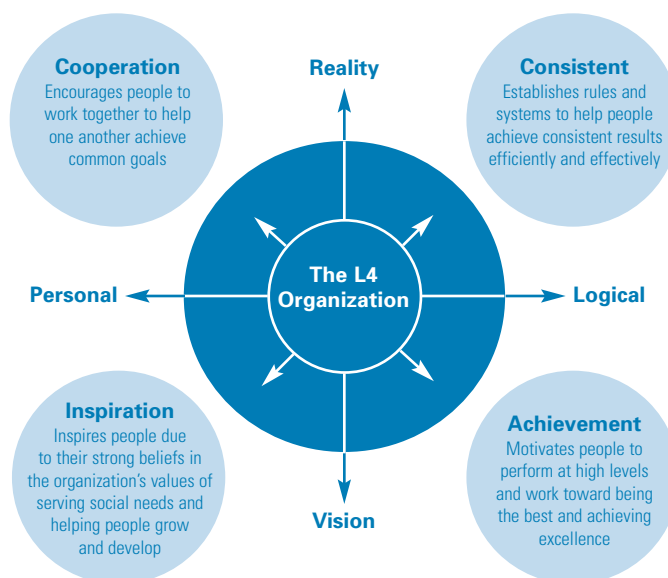
THE L4 STRATEGY MODEL

Most leaders struggle with attempting to create the right culture within their organization. The L4 Strategy Model can help. This research-based model can easily be used in conjunction with the MBTI assessment to help leaders understand the importance of organizational culture and the powerful impact they, as leaders, can have on building a performance-enhancing culture that will attain superior results.

The L4 Strategy Model comprises four cultural patterns, briefly described below, that have been correlated with effective organizational performance.

- **Cooperation cultural pattern:** Emphasizes the organization's values; positive elements include cooperation, teamwork, sharing, diversity, and collaborative problem solving.
- **Inspiration cultural pattern:** Emphasizes the importance of treating people as individuals who desire meaning in their job and in their life; positive elements include job challenge, engagement, recognition, career planning, and training and development that enhance worker motivation and inspiration.
- **Achievement cultural pattern:** Emphasizes the need to achieve excellent organizational performance; positive elements include discovery, innovation, competition, being the best, and striving for excellence.
- **Consistent cultural pattern:** Emphasizes the need for discipline throughout the organization in order to obtain consistent results; positive elements include order, rules, standardization, planning, follow-through, and measurement.

The figure below illustrates how the four cultural patterns of the L4 Strategy Model, when integrated into an organization's culture in a balanced fashion, contribute to the organization's effectiveness and ultimately enhance its performance.



The L4 Strategy Model

The challenge facing leaders is how to understand, adopt, and apply the strategy of shaping an optimally balanced culture within their organization.

USING THE MBTI® ASSESSMENT TO HELP LEADERS SHAPE AN OPTIMALLY BALANCED ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Exploring one's thought-processing system is important, especially for leaders, because one's assumptions are strongly influenced by the structure of the human consciousness. Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung developed and expanded this theory early in the twentieth century. According to Jung, human beings are born with certain preferences for using their mind in different ways. Jung believed that although all individuals have the capability to process (i.e., take in, organize, and retrieve) information, there are natural inborn differences in the ways they use this capability.

Isabel B. Myers and Katherine Briggs expanded on Jung's concepts and developed an instrument to help people identify their Jungian preferences. Their instrument, the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) assessment, provides a structured, systematic way of recognizing individual differences and, further, helps leaders understand how their individual preferences affect their leadership style. During the past 20 years, the MBTI assessment has been extensively and effectively used in leadership and management development.

The MBTI instrument helps people determine their preferences on four pairs of opposites, called *dichotomies*:

- Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)—where you focus your attention and get energy
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)—how you take in information
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)—how you make decisions
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)—how you deal with the outer world

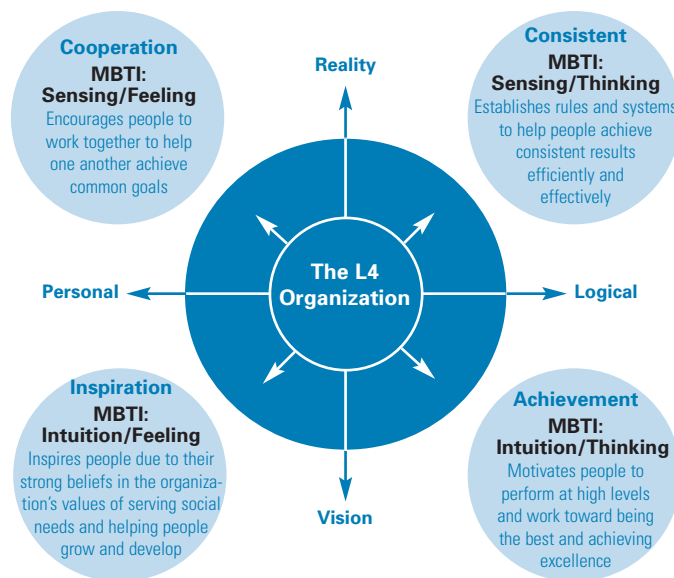
An individual's four preferences—one preference from each dichotomy, denoted by its letter—combine to yield one of sixteen possible personality types (e.g., ESTJ, INFP, etc.). Each type is equally valuable, and an individual inherently belongs to one of the sixteen types.

The MBTI assessment is an excellent tool for coaching leaders and helping them understand how their individual preferences influence the way they shape the culture of their organization. While leaders benefit from gaining an awareness of all four of their MBTI preferences relative to their leadership style, their preferences on the middle two dichotomies, Sensing–Intuition (S–N) and Thinking–Feeling (T–F), are particularly telling in regard to the cultural pattern they tend to favor most. The preferences on these two dichotomies can be paired in four possible ways, as shown below. People with these preferences tend to have the following characteristics:

- Sensing and Feeling (SF)—sympathetic and friendly
- Sensing and Thinking (ST)—practical and analytical
- Intuition and Feeling (NF)—insightful and enthusiastic
- Intuition and Thinking (NT)—logical and analytical

All of these preference combinations have merit relative to positive qualities of a leader. Each combination also has a corresponding preferred cultural pattern. So, in essence, every leader will tend to favor one of the four cultural patterns, as follows:

- **SF leaders** tend to favor the **Cooperation** cultural pattern
- **ST leaders** tend to favor the **Consistent** cultural pattern
- **NF leaders** tend to favor the **Inspiration** cultural pattern
- **NT leaders** tend to favor the **Achievement** cultural pattern



THE POTENTIAL BLIND SPOTS ASSOCIATED WITH A LEADER'S PREFERRED CULTURAL PATTERN

Leaders who highly favor a preferred cultural pattern run the risk of overemphasizing that pattern to the extent that the organization becomes unbalanced, leaning toward that pattern. For example, an **SF** leader who highly favors the **Cooperation** cultural pattern will tend to focus on creating a culture that is warm, friendly, empathetic, caring, and collaborative. This leader may create a “country club” type of organization that lacks the important positive elements of the other three cultural patterns, thus creating an unbalanced culture that diminishes the organization’s effectiveness and ultimately lowers its performance. Listed below are some of the possible negative outcomes of leaders overemphasizing their favored cultural pattern.

An overemphasis on...

Cooperation (SF leaders)

Inspiration (NF leaders)

Achievement (NT leaders)

Consistent (ST leaders)

May create an organization that is...

Managed by committee, directionless, unaccountable

“Clubby,” low performing, undisciplined

Cold, indifferent, blindly ambitious

Controlling, autocratic, political

When a leader has clear preferences on one of the preference combinations discussed above (in our example, SF), he or she likely favors the corresponding cultural pattern (in the example, Cooperation) to the point of overlooking important positive elements associated with the other three cultural patterns. So, in our example, the SF leader may overlook and disregard the importance of Consistent elements, such as rules, regulations, and control, to the point that these qualities are virtually nonexistent, thus creating an organization that lacks the discipline to perform consistently at a high level. Making the leader aware of this in the early stages of the coaching process is the first step in helping him or her reach “full-spectrum” leadership, implying the awareness of the full range of positive elements in all four cultural patterns.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE

High-performing companies such as Southwest Airlines, Nucor Corporation, Levi Strauss & Co., BMW, and IBM have one important thing in common: They have the desire and drive to continually improve their organizational culture and strive for optimal balance.

The executives who lead these high-performing companies are willing to adopt seemingly opposing values that in actuality complement each other. Furthermore, they believe that these opposing values are bound together as parts of a whole—for example, superior quality and lower costs are equally important, and one is not sacrificed at the expense of the other.

Conversely, I have discovered that companies with an unbalanced organizational culture tend to be underperformers who struggle to survive and in many cases go out of business. Enron is a good example of a company with an unbalanced, achievement-oriented culture. Accounts of the company during its rapid rise indicate the culture was focused on winning, achieving, growing, and succeeding—at any cost, even if it meant acting unethically and illegally.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING LEADERS TO TRANSFORM THEIR ORGANIZATION’S CULTURE

One of the most important lessons for those coaching leaders is this: Leaders must first transform themselves and then begin to transform their organization’s culture. The process of assessment for self-awareness aids client leaders in fully understanding how their preferences influence the way they shape the culture of their organization. The L4 Strategy Model can be used in conjunction with the MBTI assessment to help leaders transform and adapt to ensure that they are reshaping their culture in a manner conducive to improved organizational effectiveness and performance. So, essentially the leadership coach’s mission is twofold: first, to help the client leader transform him- or herself and, second, to help the client transform and shape the culture of his or her organization.

Here are some guidelines to consider throughout the coaching process:

Conduct a thorough orientation with your leader client. As a first step, spend enough time with your client to explain your entire coaching process: the steps involved; the assessment tools you plan to use, including the MBTI instrument and the feedback process; the timeline; your coaching approach; and confidentiality issues. Answer any questions your client may have and get his or her permission before you move forward in the coaching process.

Fully prepare your leader client. Do not assume that your leader client will just go with the flow as you move through your coaching process. Your client must thoroughly understand the L4 Strategy Model and the MBTI instrument (including the importance of the proper mind-set), and how the two combined can help him or her gain the self-awareness needed to achieve full-spectrum leadership. In addition, be sure to explain the theory behind, and the purpose of, any other assessment tools to be used, such as a 360-degree instrument. Too often, practitioners have clients complete assessment tools without first fully explaining the purpose of the tools and the theory behind their use. Clients must fully understand the purpose, reliability, validity, confidentiality issues, and anticipated outcomes of any personality/psychological instrument they are asked to complete. This is a moral and ethical professional imperative.

Administer the assessment(s). After the leader client fully understands the concepts associated with the MBTI assessment, the L4 Strategy Model, and any other assessment tools you will be using, have the client complete the instrument(s) following test administration protocol.

Conduct a thorough feedback session. Schedule enough time for the feedback session—including, for the MBTI assessment, a type verification session. Erring on the side of scheduling too much time is much better than allowing too little time and being rushed. Also, make sure the feedback session is conducted in a private area void of possible disruptions and distractions. The session should include both oral and written feedback. After presenting the feedback orally, it is important that the client receive a written version to review following the feedback session. In conducting the portion of the feedback relative to the MBTI assessment/L4 Strategy Model, here are important steps to follow:

1. Point out the client's results on the middle two dichotomies of the MBTI assessment indicating one of the four preference combinations: SF, ST, NF, or NT. Review the positive qualities of that preference combination relative to their positive contributions to effective leadership according to the L4 Strategy Model.
2. Review the L4 Strategy Model and discuss the client's MBTI preferences, and point out the cultural pattern leaders with those preferences tend to favor. Discuss again the positive elements of that particular cultural pattern, then discuss how an overemphasis on that favored cultural model could lead to an unbalanced culture and explain how that could affect organizational effectiveness and performance.
3. Review the positive elements of the other three cultural patterns and the possibility that the client might be disregarding them by overemphasizing his or her preferred cultural pattern. Remember, you are only *suggesting*, not asserting that the client is disregarding these positive elements. If you assert that the client is disregarding these other positive elements, you may make the client defensive and perhaps move him or her into a state of denial.
4. Ask for some immediate response from the client relative to the feedback. Point out that there will be time for deeper reflection following the feedback, but getting an initial reaction will yield some important information regarding the client's level of acceptance relative to the assessment results and feedback.

5. Schedule a follow-up session to begin to jointly design a personal development plan upon which your coaching will be based. Successfully changing leadership behaviors and implementing leadership actions usually takes at least 6–8 months. The client should be encouraged to reflect on the feedback and come prepared to begin working on the personal development plan.
6. Ask the client to think about behaviors he or she could adopt and actions he or she could implement to integrate the positive elements of the less-favored preferences/cultural patterns identified in the feedback.

Jointly prepare a development plan. The information from the feedback provides the foundation for preparing a development plan. It is extremely important that the client participate in the preparation of the plan in order to ensure his or her commitment to the goals and objectives of the plan. Essentially, the plan should consist of two primary parts: behaviors and actions.

- **Identify leadership behaviors.** Modeling behavior is what leadership is all about, but the key question is, what behaviors should be modeled? ST leaders tend to favor the Consistent cultural pattern and thus may ignore positive elements of the other patterns. For example, an ST leader may be overlooking and not practicing important behaviors that reinforce the positive elements of the Cooperation cultural pattern, such as caring, sharing, collaboration, and teamwork. So the goal should be to identify the behaviors that reinforce these positive elements. The following are examples of behaviors that the leadership coach and the ST client could discuss and consider as potential parts of the leader's repertoire of behaviors, if they are not already included:
 - Help peers/direct reports by sharing competencies and information
 - Frequently initiate informal or casual contacts with associates to build rapport
 - Genuinely value others' input and expertise, and invite members of the team to participate in and contribute during team meetings
 - Seek input and opinions from peers/coworkers in making decisions

The key is to identify and agree on these full-spectrum behaviors and develop a plan for implementing them, including strategies, timelines, and a method for measuring results.

- **Identify leadership actions.** Leadership behaviors contribute to shaping a culture. However, behaviors alone will not transform an organization's culture. Processes and mechanisms must be implemented to supplement full-spectrum leadership behaviors and support the integration of positive elements of all four cultural patterns. These processes and mechanisms (actions) include policies, procedures, and practices that become an integral part of the organization's operating plan. The nature of these actions varies according to the organizational level of the leader. For example, if the ST leader from the above example serves in a high-level corporate position, he or she may advance a corporate initiative to implement a plan to physically arrange offices and work areas so that employees can easily collaborate and work in teams on a daily basis. On the other hand, the ST leader serving at a lower level may establish and implement teamwork guidelines for groups to follow in meeting to work on tasks or problems.

The important thing to remember is that there is a corporate culture, and its myriad connected subcultures may or may not be in sync. When working with managers of divisions, departments, units, or teams (subcultures), I always tell them that although they may not have the power to change the corporate culture, they can still have a positive impact on their immediate subculture.

Coach according to the plan. The actions and behaviors, once decided and agreed upon, provide the road map for moving the coaching process forward. It is now the coach's responsibility to provide the assistance, advice, and resources to help the client implement the behaviors and actions outlined in the development plan. Through weekly or biweekly sessions (face-to-face, online, or by phone), the coach provides advice, encouragement, suggestions, and feedback to help the client transform him- or herself, and subsequently the culture of his or her organization. The coaching process can take up to 12 months, again to allow adequate time to successfully change leadership behaviors and implement leadership actions. Evaluation at the end of the process can be administered in the form of a 360-degree survey, an employee attitude survey, small-group feedback, or other organizational performance measurements in order to receive additional views into the development that has occurred.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stanley D. Truskie, PhD, (ENFJ), is Program Professor of Organizational Leadership at the Fischler School of Education and Human Services, Nova Southeastern University. Dr. Truskie has advised and coached executives and directors on leadership/organizational development for the past 20 years. He has also conducted research and written extensively on leadership topics. He has appeared on television and radio, spoken at hundreds of conferences and seminars, and written extensively for popular publications, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *BusinessWeek*. His book, *Leadership in High-Performance Organizational Cultures* (2nd ed., 2010), is published by MSD Leadership Consultants, Inc.

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