

Type and influencing

Effects and impacts

Damien Killen and Richard Thompson
with Derek Carter, Brendan Doyle, Ann Flaherty,
Sharon Moran, and Nancy Schaubhut

Introduction

We set out to demonstrate the relationship between Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) personality types and influencing. We succeeded in showing how the two middle letters of people's MBTI type impact how they are likely to influence others and how they themselves prefer to be influenced. In addition, we determined that the likelihood of successfully influencing others is affected by our being able to speak their influencing language.

This white paper provides an overview of the various quantitative and qualitative research approaches used in the study. It looks in depth at an online survey completed by over 3,600 people and then at some of the findings from a second online survey as well as one-to-one interviews. The paper concludes with a summary of our key findings and descriptions of the four different influencing styles that emerged.

Data Collection

As indicated above, the two primary methods of data collection used in this study were online surveys and individual interviews. The first, largesample, online survey (detailed below) combined convenience sampling and a “snowball” approach whereby invitees were asked to forward the survey invitation to others who might be interested in participating in the project. This survey was preceded by an initial round of interviews, from which two hypotheses emerged: (1) that the link between people’s MBTI type and influencing was related to their process pair (ST, SF, NF, or NT – i.e., the two middle letters of their type code); or (2) that this link was related to their first process. These hypotheses were tested in the first survey, which was later followed up by two qualitative online surveys and additional individual interviews.

The first-wave: Preliminary interviews and large-sample online survey

To examine the insights gained from the earlier interviews, a survey was assembled that included items focused on hypothesized influencing approaches based on the four MBTI mental processes – Sensing (S), Intuition (N), Thinking (T), and Feeling (F) – and questions regarding MBTI type. Respondents were asked to identify their four-letter MBTI type if they knew it and, if so, their level of confidence in each of their four preferences as being a “good fit” for them. Respondents who could not recall their type or who were not confident about their preferences were screened out of the survey.

Next, four items in the survey addressed requirements and barriers to effective influencing. The goal was to identify whether whole types or process pairs differed based on select key elements drawn from the influence literature. One item asked respondents to indicate critical elements of influencing, and a second item asked them to identify the single most important one. The next item asked them to indicate barriers to effective influencing, and then again a follow-up item to indicate the biggest barrier.

The remainder of the survey included items asking about respondents’ approach or strategy when influencing others – people they know and people they do not know – and items asking about which influence strategies work or do not work for them.

Each of these items offered four response options, each designed to appeal to individuals reporting an ST, SF, NF, or NT process pair. Two of these items are detailed below in the survey items section.

Participants

Survey invitations were sent to 16,700 individuals who had completed the MBTI Form M instrument in North American English in late 2014 and early 2015, and to others contacted by Thrive, an HR consultancy based in Dublin, Ireland, and by The Myers-Briggs Company’s global partners. The total number of those responding to the survey was 3,699. A subset of 2,871 individuals who reported knowing their MBTI type and being confident or very confident in their type’s fit was retained. This sample included individuals from 85 countries, primarily from the United States (35%) and the United Kingdom (29%), followed by Brazil (14%) and South Africa (6%). The gender distribution was 65% women and 35% men, with an average age of 42 years (SD = 13.1).

Initial Results

The sample included respondents representing each of the 16 MBTI types. Type distributions are summarized in Figure 1. Figure 1 compares the influence study sample obtained to a large global sample – compiled by The Myers-Briggs Company – composed of several representative samples of the MBTI assessment obtained since the late 1990s, primarily comprising respondents from the United States and the United Kingdom. The figure shows that the most underrepresented types have SF preferences (ISFJ, ISFP, ESFJ), while the most overrepresented types have NT preferences (INTJ, ENTJ). While not ideal, this result is not unexpected, and the sample size is sufficiently large to allow analyses to be conducted and interpreted.

Figure 1. MBTI type distribution of influence study sample and global sample

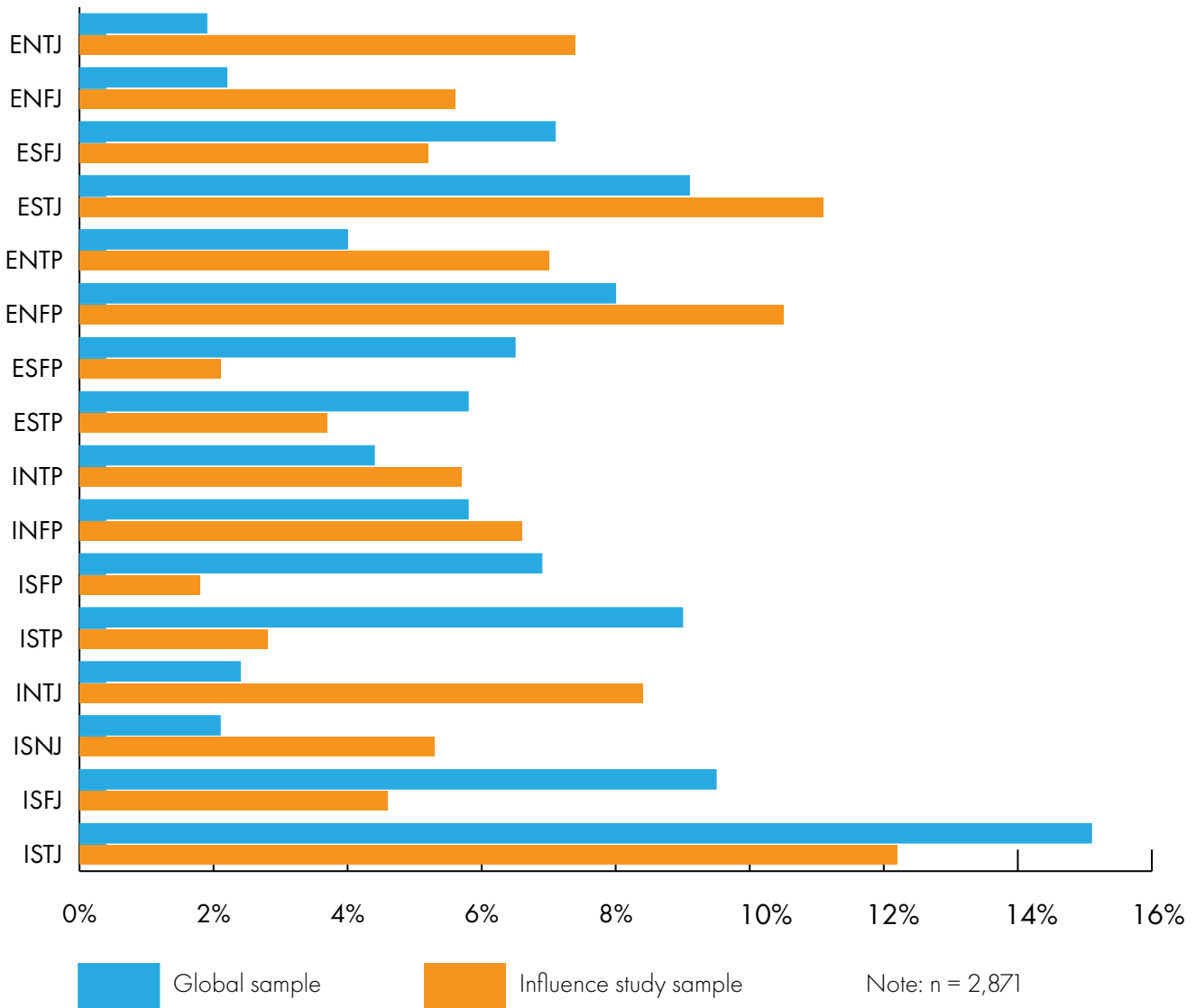


Table 1 provides a summary of the survey sample’s four process pairs. As shown, the SF process pair makes up the smallest portion of the sample, with the remaining three pairs having approximately equal representation.

Table 1. Process pair representation in the survey sample

MBTI process pair	n	%
ST	855	29.8
SF	394	13.7
NF	803	28.0
NT	819	28.5

Note: n = 2,871

Survey items

General influence items

As described earlier, two items were designed to elicit respondent perceptions of the important elements of the influencing process. One item asked them to select from among five options (Appreciation of their point of view, Trust, Understanding, Rapport, and Willingness to compromise) which ones they needed to be present when trying to influence another person, choosing all that might apply. Then, in a second item using the same response options, they were asked to indicate which of their selected options was most important.

Two additional items evaluated barriers to effective influencing. Again, respondents were first asked to select elements that might be a barrier to effective influencing (Being told what to do, Absence of listening, Lack of time to debate and discuss, Either party being ill-prepared or unclear, and Closed to alternatives). They were then asked to select the biggest of those barriers.

The endorsement rates for the entire sample by respondents' whole type are summarized in Table 2. A review of the table shows that the type with highest endorsement rates for most of the responses was ENFP, having the highest percentage endorsing four of the five response options. The type with the lowest endorsement rate across four of the five response options was ISTP. The response options tend to be more social elements of an influencing situation, and the results are consistent with expectations derived from Jung-Myers type theory.

Importance items by process pairs

Significant differences ($X^2(12) = 44.69, p < .0001$) were found to exist among respondents' endorsement rates of response options indicating which element was most important in influencing others when analyzed by process pairs. The percentages of respondents' endorsing a particular option as the most important element in influencing, by process pair, are summarized in Table 2. The table shows that for all process pairs, trust was the primary factor. However, endorsement rates of "Trust" differed by approximately 10% between individuals with a preference for Intuition and those with a preference for Sensing.

Similarly, individuals with a Sensing preference were less likely to endorse "Appreciation of my point of view" compared to those with a preference for Intuition. Also, those with NT preferences endorsed "Understanding" as important about 5% more often than individuals preferring the remaining process pairs.

Another way to look at the "most important" rates is through the residuals provided by chi-square (X^2) analysis. In computing a chi-square, each cell has an observed value and an estimated value (the estimated value is the number of people who would be "observed" if there were no differences). The residual value is the difference between the observed value and the expected value.

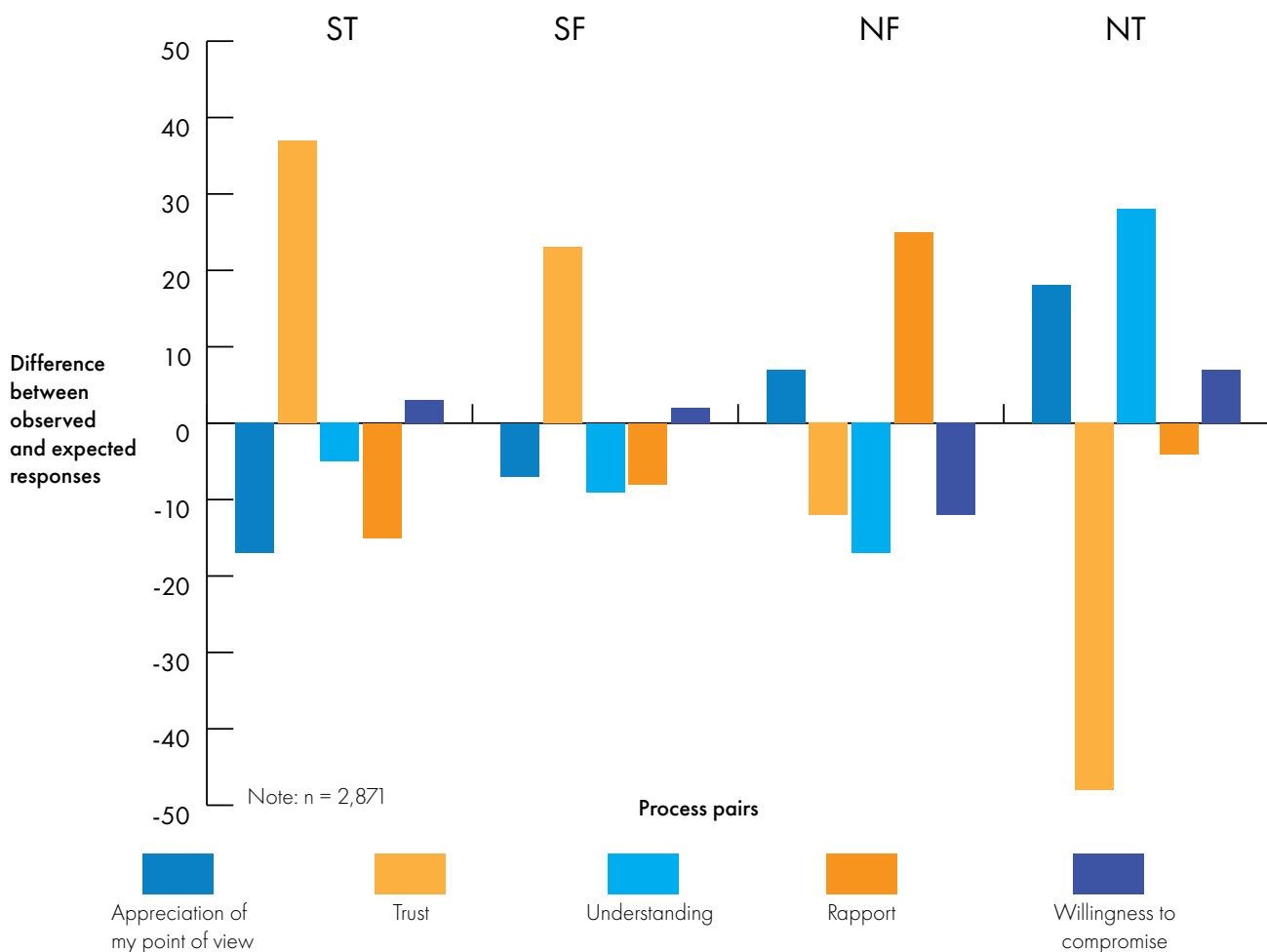
The residual values (residuals) are plotted for each of the five response options for the item asking respondents to identify the "most important" influence strategy in Figure 2. The figure shows that for the "Trust" response option, the residual value for ST is the highest (meaning STs endorsed this response as the most important element of influence at a rate higher than expected). This result indicates that trust is critical for STs, and nearly as critical for SFs. By contrast, for NTs trust is not as critical; however, for NTs understanding is very important in an influence situation. The figure also shows that for individuals with the NF process pair, rapport is an element of critical importance to them.

Table 2. Respondents' endorsement of requirements for influencing by MBTI process pair

MBTI process pair	n	Appreciation of my point of view (%)	Trust (%)	Understanding (%)	Rapport (%)	Willingness to compromise (%)
ST	855	14.3	43.2	24.8	8.2	9.6
SF	394	14.5	44.9	23.1	7.9	9.6
NF	803	17.4	37.5	23.4	13.6	8.1
NT	819	18.3	32.8	28.9	9.6	10.3

Note: n = 2,871

Figure 2. Residual values for the “most important” item



Barrier Items by process pairs

Significant differences ($\chi^2 (12) = 49.91, p < .0001$) were found to exist among respondents’ endorsement rates of response options indicating which element was the biggest barrier to influencing, when analyzed by process pairs. The percentages of respondents’ endorsing a particular response as the biggest barrier to influencing, by process pair, are summarized in Table 3. Across all process pairs, “Absence of listening” was endorsed most often. However, a sizable difference exists between those expressing a Thinking preference and those expressing a Feeling preference on this item. Specifically, the difference in endorsement of “Either party being ill-prepared or unclear” between ST and NF respondents is 7%; individuals with a preference for SF were less likely to endorse “Closed to alternatives” compared to individuals indicating the remaining process pairs by approximately 4%. While these differences are not extreme, they are consistent with the idea that individuals with different process pairs perceive different barriers to influence.

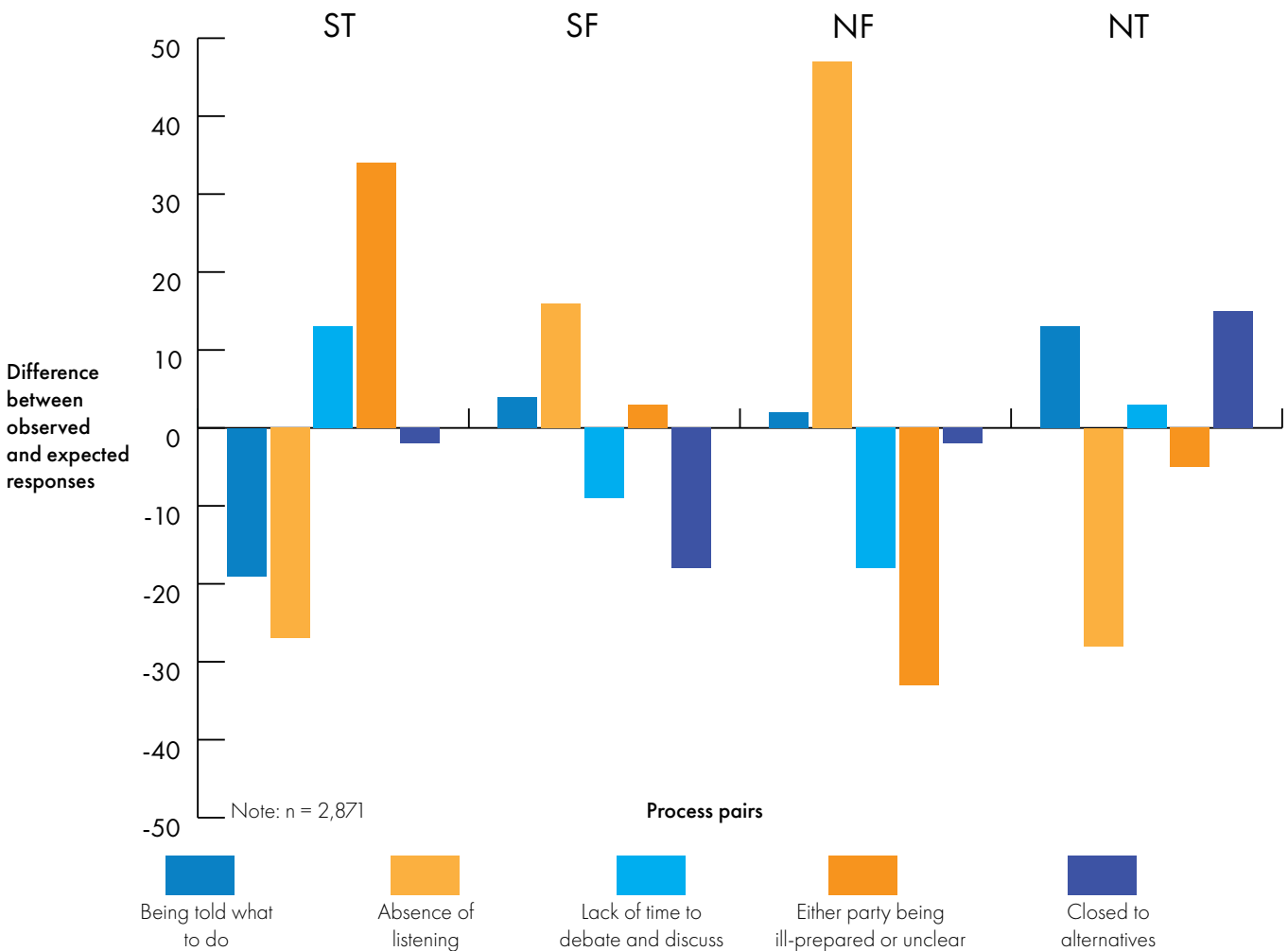
As was done for the “most important” item, results of the “biggest barrier” item residual values were also examined and are summarized in Figure 3. Here again, the residual values tell us something about the distribution of responses and where differences in the responses occurred based on the respondents’ process pair preferences. The figure shows that for this item, the pattern of residual values for the ST respondents is almost a mirror image of the pattern of residual values for NF respondents. Further, it is also clear that for STs, either party being ill-prepared or unclear is a barrier, and for NFs an absence of listening is a major barrier. For SFs, there are no exceptionally large residual values, but absence of listening matters, and being closed to alternatives is not that significant an issue. Figure 3, like Figure 2, shows the residual values for the current analysis and is included to help demonstrate where differences in responding occurred, but these should not be overinterpreted regarding the actual residual values.

Table 3. Respondents' endorsement of the biggest barrier to influencing by MBTI process pair

MBTI process pair	n	Being told what to do (%)	Absence of listening (%)	Lack of time to debate and discuss (%)	Either party being ill-prepared or unclear (%)	Closed to alternatives (%)
ST	855	15.4	42.0	6.8	14.5	21.3
SF	394	18.8	49.2	3.0	11.4	17.5
NF	803	17.8	49.7	4.4	6.8	21.3
NT	819	19.4	41.6	5.5	10.0	23.4

Note: n = 2,871

Figure 3. Residual values for the "biggest" item



Items to indicate process pair influencing style

The remainder of the survey consisted of five items meant to identify differences among individuals preferring different process pairs in how they go about influencing others and being influenced. Two of those items are addressed here.

Items to indicate process pair influencing style

The first item addresses influencing style. The item is presented below with the associated process pair linkage indicated.

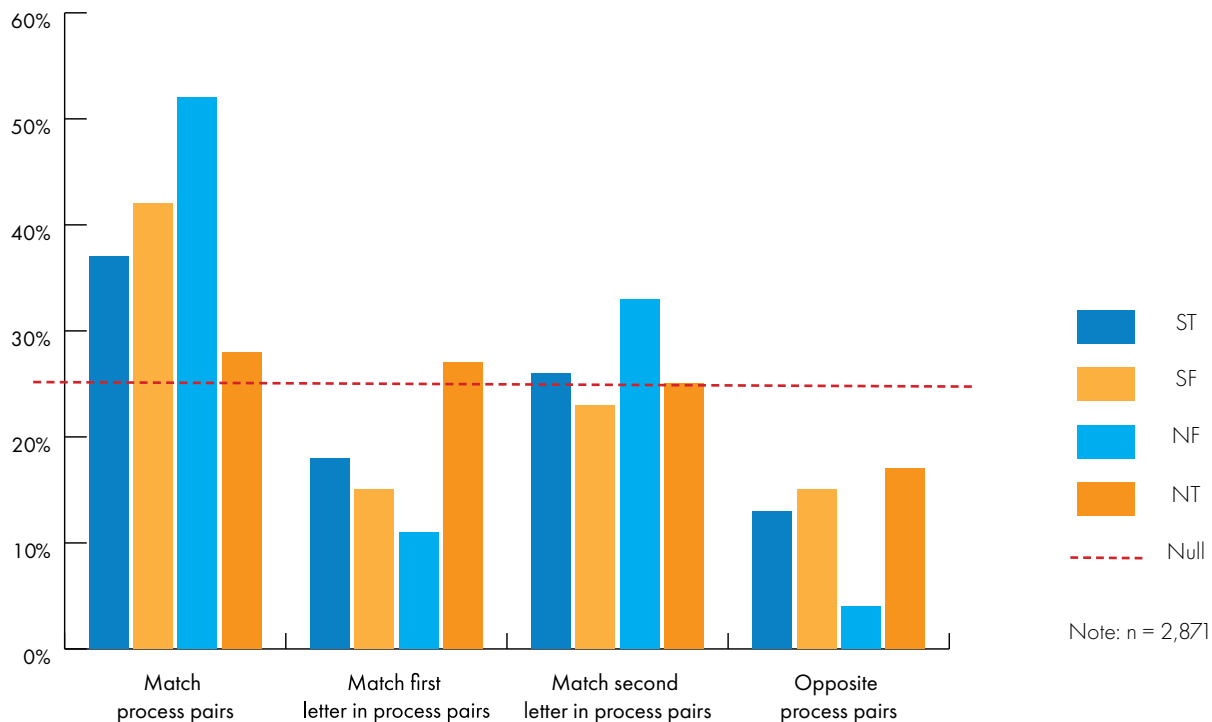
Which of the following most closely describes your influencing style?

- Presenting the facts in a detailed, logical way (ST)
- Connecting with people and offering inspiring options (NF)
- Being supportive and clearly explaining the situation (SF)
- Being knowledgeable and confident about the issue (NT)

Figure 4 shows the response pattern for this item. Note that for each of these items, the results are summarized based on the

MBTI type of respondents and whether or not they endorsed a response that was (a) consistent with their process pair, (b) matched the first letter of their process pair but not the second letter, (c) matched the second letter of their process pair but not the first, or (d) matched neither letter of their process pair. Respondents' selecting the response option more consistent with their process pair is evidence that their process pair is relevant to their self-reported influence preferences. For this item, a significant difference was found ($X^2 (3) = 543.83, p < .0001$). As can be seen in Figure 4, all respondents selected the response option that matched their process pair at a level greater than chance (i.e., greater than 25%). Similarly, fewer respondents endorsed responses associated with the opposite of their process pair preferences. Here, only 5% of NF respondents and as many as 19% of NT respondents endorsed the opposite processes. The figure also shows that the NT respondents had the least differentiation across response options, although the patterns were generally consistent with what was expected. The data suggest that for the NTs, the phrase beginning "Connecting with people..." was about as equally valuable as the phrase beginning "Being knowledgeable...."

Figure 4. Influencing style item responses based on process pair



Influencing the respondent: Least effective strategy

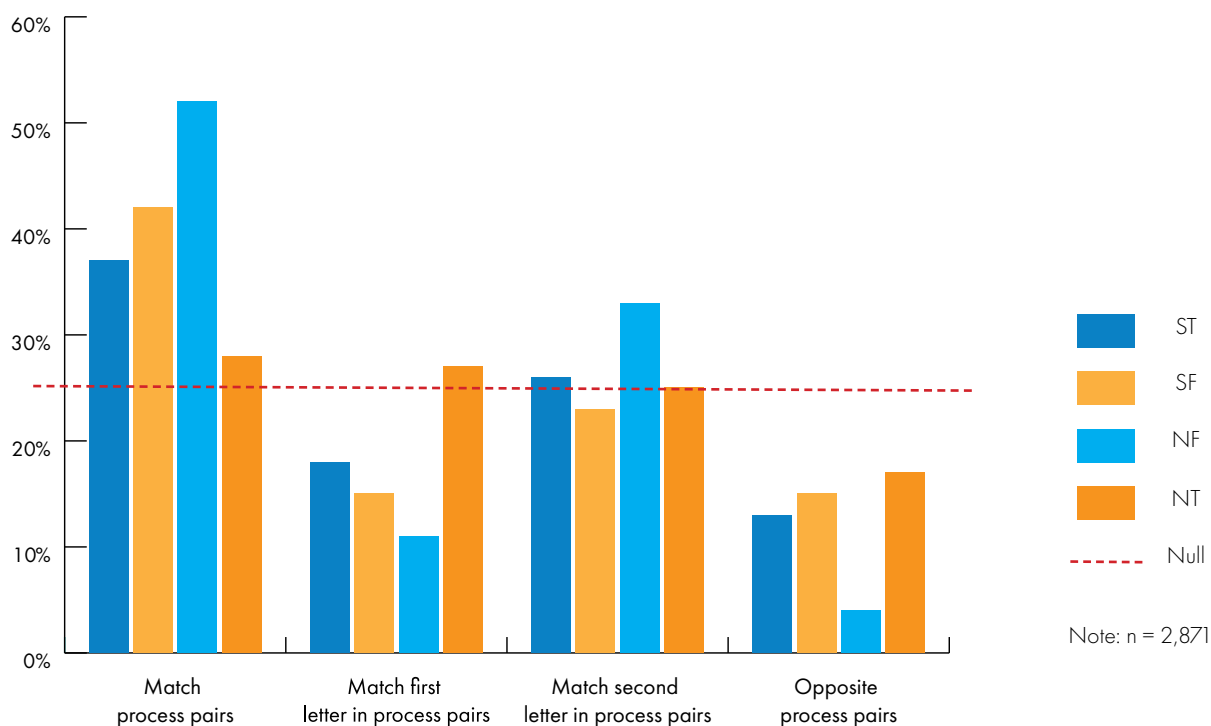
The final item in this section of the survey dealt with which influencing strategy used by others would be self-reported as least effective for the respondent. Again, here a match to the respondent's process pair is defined as when the response option written to be the opposite of the respondent's process pair preferences was selected, for example, when an ST chose the NF option as least effective for him or her. The item and response options are as follows:

When someone is trying to influence you, which of the following would be the least effective?

- Poorly thought-through argument with few possibilities (opposite of NT)
- Idealistic, emotive arguments with little relevance to real life (opposite of ST)
- Closed-minded and narrow-focused approach (opposite of NF)
- Detached, impersonal, with a complicated rationale (opposite of SF)

Once again, a significant difference was found ($X^2(3) = 460.08, p < .0001$), indicating that the response patterns differed from chance. The results for this item are summarized in Figure 5 and show that what is deemed least effective is quite clear to most of the respondents, with perhaps the exception of ST respondents. For them, "Detached, impersonal with a complicated rationale" was most indicated as the least effective, followed by "Idealistic, emotive arguments with little relevance to real life." Interestingly, ST respondents showed the smallest differences across the different response options. On the other hand, NT respondents clearly endorsed influence attempts based on a "poorly thought-through argument with few possibilities" as the least effective for them. For NF respondents, "Closed-minded and narrow-focused approach" and "Poorly thought-through argument with few possibilities" were deemed equally ineffective strategies. Finally, SF respondents clearly indicated "Detached, impersonal, with a complicated rationale" as an ineffective way to be influenced. Again, the pattern of results here suggests that there are clear differences in the way an influence attempt should be framed based on the process pair preferences.

Figure 5. Item responses for least effective influencing strategies based on process pair



Summary of the large-sample survey results

Overall, the results of this portion of the study support our hypothesis that the process pairs play a role in influence. The items evaluating important elements of and barriers to influencing show clear patterns of differential responding based on the process pairs. While most of the “importance” response options had a social aspect, there were still differences based on those pairs. The analysis of residual values perhaps most clearly demonstrates this finding. Similarly, the barrier items show clear differences across the process pairs, with different priorities emerging for most of the process pairs on both what must be present as well as which are not very important in an influencing situation. The mirrored pattern of results for respondents preferring ST and NF process pairs is perhaps the most telling.

These overall results were further supported in the more specific analyses of the influence items. The results show that people influence others and are more influenced themselves when there is consistency with how each party prefers to take in information (S or N) and make decisions (T or F). Further, respondents with a preference for NF use the NF language consistently, with an emphasis on the Feeling component, and respondents with a preference for ST are least likely to require others’ influencing style to match their preferences unless, that is, the influence attempt uses NF language. While all of the items showed differences, the largest differences are found for the measures of respondents’ influencing style and the least effective influence attempt, as reported here. Respondents across all four process pairs were more likely to endorse using an influencing style consistent with their process preferences. Regarding the least effective influencing attempts by others, respondents with a preference for NT and SF clearly indicated that an influencing attempt utilizing processes opposite their own preferences would be less effective for them. The results are less clear for those with ST and NF process pairs, although they are generally in the right direction for these groups. However, more research needs to be done to further investigate effects on ST and NF pairs.

The second wave

Armed with the results from the first survey that suggested the relationship between MBTI process pairs and influencing, we invited participants to answer more open-ended questions.

These included:

- Describe your influencing style
- Think of a situation when someone tried unsuccessfully to influence you. What did they do or say?
- How could you increase your effectiveness when influencing?

The answers to these and other questions not only confirmed the findings of the first survey but also provided concrete examples that gave life and color to the four different influencing styles that resulted.

The four influencing styles

Study results have demonstrated strong evidence that the two middle letters of people’s MBTI type impact how they go about influencing and being influenced by others. Each process pair – ST, SF, NF and NT – is associated with its own influencing style and preferences for the influencing approaches that are most effective for them, as described on the following pages.

STs: straightforward, direct, and efficient influencers who gather relevant facts to support a robust rationale

■ “Let’s do the right thing”

STs typically listen to people who are clear and objective and find an emotional connection through shared past experiences. However, they may need to connect more with others and their values to improve their effectiveness.

If you want to influence them,

Do

- Outline the pros and cons of each alternative
- Provide facts and evidence to support a viewpoint
- Be clear, direct, honest, and credible

Don’t

- Be too emotional or overly personal
- Present inconsistent or flawed arguments
- Hesitate or lack confidence

SFs: practical, positive, and collaborative influencers who empathize with others to build a “real” relationship

■ *“Let’s work together”*

SFs typically work actively toward reaching agreement and use personal examples to demonstrate understanding. To become a more effective influencer, they need to not feel guilty about influencing others.

If you want to influence them,

Do

- Lead by example
- Remember that trust and honesty are at the heart of the interaction
- Show them you have listened and understood them

Don’t

- Be deceptive in what you are doing
- Exclude important facts and feelings
- Use big words or technical information to make yourself look important

NFs: encouraging, inspiring, and impactful influencers who engage people and consider the overall benefits

■ *“Here’s another way”*

NFs typically form an emotional connection to both the person and the topic and motivate others to think or act in different ways. They need to provide more relevant facts and to remember not to overwhelm others with big ideas in order to improve their effectiveness.

If you want to influence them,

Do

- Show passion and authenticity
- Engage their values and challenge their imagination
- Give them the overview and tell them why this is important for people

Don’t

- Bore them with too much detail
- Lack energy or belief in your presentation
- Forget to provide the big picture when explaining why

NTs: confident, reasoned, and convincing influencers who present an informed and intellectual argument

■ *“Here’s the way forward”*

NTs typically make the right choices by challenging mind-sets and will seek the right emotional connection. To improve their effectiveness, they should exercise more patience and focus on the emotions of everyone involved.

If you want to influence them,

Do

- Be competent, credible, and compelling
- Acknowledge their expertise and listen to their ideas
- See their questions and doubts as enabling everyone to get a fuller picture

Don’t

- Be overly emotional or fake goodwill
- Be unprepared or lack focus
- Have nothing to back up your claims

About the authors

Damien Killen

Founder and Managing Director, Thrive

Damian Killen is managing director and founder of thrive, an international human resources consultancy based in Dublin, Ireland. He consults for organizations across the globe and is recognized worldwide for his work and research using the MBTI assessment.

An expert in conflict resolution, creating an innovation culture, influencing, and team development, Damian has used the Myers-Briggs® assessment for more than 20 years, both as a consultant and as a member of the European Qualifying Program faculty. He is coauthor of Introduction to Type® and Conflict, MBTI® Conflict Management Program, and Introduction to Type® and Innovation. He leads workshops on personality type throughout the world. Damian has delivered keynote speeches at numerous international conferences and events on a range of topics covering all areas of development.

Damian's Myers-Briggs type preference is ENTJ.

Rich Thompson

Divisional Director, Research, The Myers-Briggs Company

Rich Thompson joined The Myers-Briggs Company, in 2000 and since 2006 has served as Divisional Director, Research, managing The Myers-Briggs Company's research team, leading the company's research efforts in the U.S. and worldwide, and providing strategic input on cross-functional product development efforts. During his tenure at The Myers-Briggs Company, Rich designed and developed The Myers-Briggs Company's Research website, which has been used in many major corporate initiatives including the Strong Interest Inventory® assessment revision; played a major role in the rollout of Professional Services, The Myers-Briggs Company's consulting division; and has authored multiple in-house surveys for customers. He represents The Myers-Briggs Company at major conferences such as SIOP, APA, ASTD and SHRM.

Rich's Myers-Briggs type preference is ISTP.

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