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# Bulletin

of Psychological Type

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*Editor's note: Who hasn't had to deal with an IT department? Sometimes, it's hard enough to understand what they are talking about to begin with. Add in different temperaments and you may have a recipe for plenty of miscommunication. In today's Bulletin article, Carol Linden, who had more than 19 years of experience working with a global software company, discusses the use of type when dealing with IT folks. Of course, her advice is useful in many different work environments, as well. This is the first in a number of articles focusing on case studies and practical use of type. If you have a case study of your own that you would like to share, please email it to [apti@caphill.com](mailto:apti@caphill.com). We look forward to hearing from you.*

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## The Agony and the Ecstasy of Managing IT

Article by Carol A. Linden, MBTI Master Practitioner

All three of my parents were in IT.

My dad was one of the original "I've Been Moved" guys from IBM (a.k.a. relocated). He could "turn on a dime" and was a "dowhatever it takes to make it work" guy. So he was very talented at innovation and could take anything apart and put it back together. But he wasn't big on rules. It was all about "whatever it takes to make it work." My dad was an Improviser.

My mother was a horse of a different color. She managed a large bank's data processing center tape library. She was all about rules and woe-be-it unto the whatever-it-takes programmer who showed up at her door who was not big on rules. She did not like or tolerate "whatever it takes." There was a way to do it and you were going to do it that way or you would have to deal with her. She was a Stabilizer.

My step-father was yet a third type of IT guy. He was an "engineer's engineer," a systems analyst for a large bank. Like my dad, he was not much on rules and was a real risk-taker. Unlike my in-the-moment, hands-on father, he was a very heady, conceptual guy. He operated from a 65,000-foot perspective. It was all about designing the system and figuring out a more brilliant and elegant way to do something. He was big on risk and believed you have to break a few eggs if you want to make an omelet. My step-father thought taking a risk and creating a little chaos was fine in order to make the system better. He had confidence that Humpty Dumpty could be put back together again, better than before. He was a "Theorist" – big on risk and big on confidence that he could handle whatever needed to be made better.

The Improviser doesn't mind if Humpty Dumpty gets broken. They look forward to the challenge of an emergency situation so they can jump into action, get their hands dirty, and fix it. The Stabilizer thinks poorly of anyone who is careless enough to break Humpty Dumpty. For them, clearly, the universe and the organization need to be protected from Improvisers and Theorists. (And they are just the person to do it.)

These categories – Improviser, Stabilizer, Theorist – are three of the four temperaments from Temperament Theory. This theory goes back 2,000 years to the Greeks. We currently use the modern expressions of this theory, as expressed by David Keirsey, Ph.D. the father of Modern Temperament Theory, and as further developed by researcher, consultant and psychologist Linda V Berens, Ph.D. These categories give us a framework within which to understand others – a "map" if you will that helps us understand their behavior and the reasons behind it. Understanding why someone behaves as they do – and how they perceive and process information – helps human beings communicate better. It's like learning to speak someone else's language. Until you understand their language, it can be very difficult to find common ground. And if 75% of communication is nonverbal, then our spoken language is only a part of our communication and there is much more involved than just English to English or French to French.

As you read this, you may recognize these Temperaments (Stabilizer, Improviser, and Theorist) in people you deal with every day. When I began working with software documentation, I found myself with similar temperaments on my cross functional teams. I realized the difficulty of communication and that my teams were composed of very, very different people who needed to communicate with each other. Otherwise, there was not a

ghost of a chance that my writing team could make that documentation either accurate or usable.

My quest took me through education in project management, team building and team facilitation – all good things. Then, I happened onto a magic key for understanding the differences: the field of psychological type (think Myers-Briggs), modern temperament theory (David Keirse, Ph.D. and Linda V. Berens, Ph.D.), and later Interaction Styles (Dr. Berens, again).

I knew that IT needed *all* of these perspectives and talents to succeed. The perspective that sees the need to stabilize the system and maintain order is absolutely essential. The perspective that we need to jump in and do whatever it takes to make this thing work is also a strong work ethic that is just as essential. Finally, seeing the system from 65,000 feet is also critical to getting out of the “weeds” and seeing things from a holistic, systems perspective. Otherwise, we can be like a dog chasing its tail, always trying to solve the same problems because we don’t step back to see from a systems perspective how we can prevent those problems from being re-created in the first place.

The fourth Temperament, the Catalyst, is not found as often as the others in the IT world, but deserves to be mentioned because it, too, has a role to play. It truly does take a village. All of the perspectives are needed. We just have to keep the holders of these perspectives from driving each other nuts in the process.

Catalysts rarely show up as software developers, but you do tend to find them in roles that require communication skills. Some of the technical support personnel and managers were Catalysts. The Catalyst “helper” profile shows there. They are often found as editors, writers, trainers, and leadership development specialists. Even when they don’t have an official role as facilitator, their actions tend to be facilitative in nature, helping to bring the various perspectives together.

As are many in my field, I am a Catalyst. True to type, I helped large cross-functional teams work together as a writing manager. Becoming fascinated by trying to help people work better together, I accidentally created a new career for myself. I became certified in psychological type, learned Temperaments and Interaction Styles, and went on to work in the learning and development department. In this role, here are a few tips that I have used to help people understand each other:

1. Stabilizers need to understand that none of the other temperaments need as much structure and as many rules as they do. Other team members cannot be brought on board by being told “it’s the rule” or “it’s the way we’ve always done it.” They can engage the cooperation of others by helping them understand WHY it helps the system to observe the

rules. They also need to be aware that they can look like naysayers and blocks to necessary change. That makes others find ways to go around them, which only worsens the Stabilizer's need to control and maintain order in the system.

2. Improvisers need to respect how they can look like “gunslingers” at times. They can look like they're destabilizing the system, which makes them risky elements rather than trusted team members. They can easily lose the independence and freedom that they value so much when others think they need to be micro-managed in order to reduce the risk. And improvisers are at their best when they have the freedom to use their judgment in the moment.

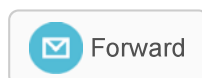
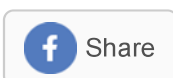
3. Theorists need to respect the fact that they can be very much on one end of the spectrum when it comes to risk and introducing elements of change. They can discount others' concerns and lose the freedom they want to improve the system. They tend to tell Stabilizers, “Those are just details. We'll handle that later.” (Hint: NEVER say the words “just details” to a Stabilizer.) They can bore Improvisers with the complexity of their reasoning. Theorists tend to be so comfortable with complexity that they underestimate how needlessly complex what they do and how they explain things can appear to Stabilizers and Improvisers alike.

4. Catalysts need to learn that “it's not personal.” They can use their diplomatic skill set, such as communication skills and empathetic nature, to bring divided groups together, but need to manage their own sensitivity. In a technical environment, it also helps them to learn to speak in analytical language. They can do it; it's just not “where they live.” But if they work in an IT environment, they need to remember “when in Rome,” as it were, and learn to couch their recommendations in a more analytical language which is where most of their IT co-workers live.

It takes a village. We're all necessary. But, sometimes, it's no wonder it feels like herding cats.

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- *Carol A. Linden* is a speaker, author, and consultant, who specializes in helping managers and teams deal with natural differences in a productive and effective way. She is an MBTI® Master Practitioner, certified in the Berens CORE™ Approach, has previously published articles on how to deal with different perspectives in IT, and teaches other practitioners how to use psychological type effectively with IT and other technical clients. Her work experience includes 19 years at a global software company as a technical writer, cross-functional team leader, and documentation department manager. See her at [www.effectivewithpeople.com](http://www.effectivewithpeople.com) and on LinkedIn.



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