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Introduction

This booklet is designed for anyone engaged in a helping relationship in the area of career and/or personal development. Its purpose is to increase the professional's ability to apply personality type theory when helping others manage and capitalize on career and lifestyle choices.

Helping relationships can be found in a number of contexts and may take many forms: manager/staff member, coach/client, human resources consultant/employee, mentor/mentee, counselor/client, and others. To simplify the language in this booklet, the term *practitioner* will be used to denote the person in the facilitator role of the helping relationship and the term *client* will be used to describe the individual receiving assistance with the process of career development.

Although the focus of this booklet is career development, the steps covered—setting the stage, conducting self-assessment, generating and researching options, making decisions, and taking action—can also be applied to other developmental situations in which a client is solving a problem, assessing a relationship, or looking to change patterns of behavior. The career development process is not only about finding work—it is interwoven and integrated with broader issues of lifestyle, health and well-being, personal satisfaction, and interpersonal roles and responsibilities.

Personality type theory can enhance the career development process in a number of ways. It can be used as a tool to facilitate client insights. It can also be used to tailor career development tasks to meet the

needs of individual clients. Furthermore, understanding personality type can help practitioners recognize their own style of helping and potential blind spots when guiding others through the process.

Prerequisite Knowledge

It is assumed that practitioners using this booklet are familiar with the language and basic concepts of personality type theory. Those unfamiliar with any aspects of type theory may find it helpful to consult the Resources section at the end of this booklet.

Type Preferences

Personality type refers to a set of innate natural preferences. These preferences relate to how individuals are energized, prefer to take in information, make decisions, and orient themselves to the world around them. The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI)® assessment helps people identify their personality type by having them choose one of each of four pairs of preferences. The result of this process is a four-letter code that, when validated by the client, represents his or her best-fit personality type.

However, everyone uses both the preferred and nonpreferred sides of each preference pair, as necessary, to adapt and thrive. It is important that readers know and can share with clients information about how these individual preferences contribute to personality type. It is also important that practitioners recognize that these preferences are not traits and that “trait language” should be avoided.

Type Dynamics

In type theory, whole type is greater than the sum of the parts. Identifying a four-letter best-fit personality type is only a starting point. To accurately understand and apply type theory, practitioners must understand how each preference relates to and acts in concert with clients' other preferences. This level of understanding is referred to as *type dynamics* and illustrates the importance of approaching personality type in an integrated and holistic manner. Please see Myers and Kirby (1994) for helpful material on type dynamics.

Type Development

Personality type theory asserts that over their life span individuals will strive to learn, grow, and find balance. Innate type will interact with environmental influences and experiences as individuals mature. Under ideal conditions, a recognizable and unique pattern of development, related to type dynamics, manifests for each whole type. This aspect of type theory is referred to as *type development* and is especially important to understand and explore when working with midlife clients.

Stress Patterns of Type

When clients are under stress, often they will act in a manner atypical of their natural personality type. Since stress is common during career transitions, you must recognize negative stress patterns as well as typical and positive behaviors associated with each type. Clients will often exaggerate their dominant function during times of stress. Then, as their stress increases, they may find themselves acting out of a poorly developed form of their inferior function. This booklet does not describe the various forms of stress reactions, but as a skilled practitioner it is important for you to be able to recognize stress reactions and sort them out from normal healthy functioning. See Quenk (2002) for more information on stress and personality.

Appropriate Use of Type

Personality type can appropriately be used for building awareness of individual differences, enhancing understanding of self and others, appreciating the strengths and gifts of self and others, and accommodating others. It also offers a way for people to learn from others and develop themselves and provides a language and framework to use when resolving conflicts. However, bear in mind the following:

- Situational factors can affect how individuals assess themselves and express their type preferences. When you work with personality type, your role as a skilled practitioner requires you to consider, assess, and take into account the context of the situation at hand.
- Everyone expresses his or her personality type in unique ways. Personality type does not measure or account for additional factors contributing to behavior, such as background experience, interests, skills, and abilities. Personality type does not explain everything. Overzealous practitioners and clients must be careful not to focus too much on personality type and neglect other factors affecting an individual's behavior.
- It is not appropriate to use personality type to avoid tasks or personal development, justify problem behaviors, stereotype, put others down, or blame others.

Type and Career Development

When clients understand their type preferences, they also deepen their understanding of the kind of work that will suit them. They may also gain insight into their developmental needs and/or the things about work that are stressful for or uninteresting to them.