

Using temperament typing to improve your approach with clients

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Abstract. Recent work in the Grain and Graze mixed farming program has explored the influence the head (logical), heart (values and beliefs) and the gut (intuition) play in complex decision making. Historically consultants and advisors have focussed on the head part of the decision, presenting facts and analysis that is supported by the evidence they can find. Unfortunately this approach neglects the heart element of the decision, a person's values, beliefs, stage of life, goals, personality and temperament. Analysis by Strachan showed a unique rural culture exists, with skewed temperament types compared to the wider Australian population. This paper describes an approach to recognise a client's temperament type quickly and unobtrusively and then suggests what approaches should be used to better match future discussions with personality type.

Keywords: Temperament, personality, MBTI, Grain and Graze.

Introduction

Australian agriculture is dominated by small businesses. Of the 135,000 farms in Australia in 2011, 93,300 were classified as farming families, consisting mainly of couples living by themselves, individuals running properties owned by others or in partnership with other family members (ABS 2012). The 2010-11 Agricultural Census found the majority (63%) of these were involved in beef cattle farming, mixed grain and livestock, specialist sheep or grain growing. A further 8% were involved in dairying.

Each person in these small operations will have their own personality. Work by Strachan (2007) (reported in Jennings, Packham & Woodside 2011) provided the first insights into the 'culture' of Australian farmers by using Myers Briggs Type Indicators (MBTI) to profile over 3000 farm managers. It found there was a distinctly different 'culture' in farming compared to the rest of the Australian population, much more so than between different farming enterprises.

The information collected by Strachan and colleagues was further refined to describe four distinct temperament types (based on Kiersey, 1987). Temperament is defined as the combination of the mental, physical and emotional traits of a person that influences what they do. The clustering of the four temperament types for agriculture was then compared to the wider Australian population (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of temperaments in selected rural industries

	SJ	SP	NT	NF
Beef	57%	25%	13%	5%
Cropping	52%	25%	17%	6%
Intensive	57%	22%	15%	5%
Australian sample	42%	13%	26%	18%

SJ = Sensing, judging, SP = Sensing, perceiving, NT = Intuitive, thinking, NF = Intuitive, feeling.

The data showed about 80% of farmers were the 'SJ' or 'SP' types, indicating they (amongst other things) have pride in being a farmer, are reliable, steady and cautious. Importantly they are inclined to resist change or only change once there is a good reason to do so.

There is no equivalent data on the agricultural advisory sector except for some work with Landcare facilitators across Australia (Long unpublished data). This shows a very distinct difference between the Landcare support fraternity and the farmers they are engaging with (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of temperaments in Landcare facilitators

	SJ	SP	NT	NF
Landcare facilitators	23%	17%	36%	24%

n=185; Long (unpublished data)

The conclusions of Strachan and insights from Long suggest a significant challenge for effective agricultural extension. The majority of the target audience appear to be naturally reluctant to change because of their temperament. They change when they can see tangible benefits and

the risk of adoption has been reduced through refinement by others. Secondly the people providing advice, in this case towards natural resource management, have very different personalities to those they are likely to be engaging with. The potential trap is for advisors to conduct extension that suits their personality and not in a way that suits the target audience.

But even if we recognise the importance of different personality types in agriculture, how can we conduct personality analysis and use this information to become more effective in understanding our audience, what we present to them and how we facilitate their learning?

Recent work in the Grain and Graze mixed farming program has explored what influences complex decision making. It was concluded the perceived failure of many farmers to adopt new or different practices was a result of an over emphasis on winning the 'head' or logical part of the decision (facts and analysis) and insufficient respect for the 'heart' (values and beliefs) and the 'gut' (intuitive) elements of the decision (Nicholson 2015). The reluctance of farmers to change identified by Strachan may well be anchored in a failure by extension practitioners to recognise the 'heart' and 'gut' influences which are partly shaped by the personality and temperament of the target audience.

Personality influences the way we learn, the way we make decisions, organise our lives and communicate with others. There is often debate about what shapes our personality type and while the percentages vary, roughly 40% of personality is genetic, 40% is formed during our formative years (up to about the age of 14) and 20% is through socialisation (Plowman 2015, pers. comm., 2 May). This suggests that we are unlikely to change the personality of the target audience, so we need to adapt our extension approach.

By understanding the personality types and temperament of individuals, extension practitioners can tailor their interactions and messages to better suit the target audience. They can also recognise their own personality biases and look to flex their approach to suit a different personality or even different personalities within the same business. Unfortunately undertaking the complete MBTI analysis takes about one hour (Briggs Myers 1980) and results in 16 possible personality descriptions. Personality type can then be condensed into one of four temperament groups (Keirsey 1987), but relies on completing the initial MBTI. Shorter but less comprehensive approaches are available but still take time and are often intrusive on the audience.

The Grain and Graze program has taken the MBTI approach and temperament typing to create six descriptors than can be used by extension practitioners to quickly align behaviours they observe in their clients with a temperament type. This typing can then be used to tailor how to engage, what to say and how to assist in informing a decision.

The approach is relatively simple, by reading descriptions and making a two-step judgement based on what is observed. This gives four temperament types of farmers, consistent with the categories used by Strachan. This two-step process can be summarised as follows (Figure 1).

Identifying the Grain and Graze personality descriptors

Step 1: Determine how they learn

This separates people into two types of learners, the **detail** learner (the 'S' group in MBTI) or the big picture learner (The 'N' group in MBTI). Approximately 75% of the farming population are detail learners.

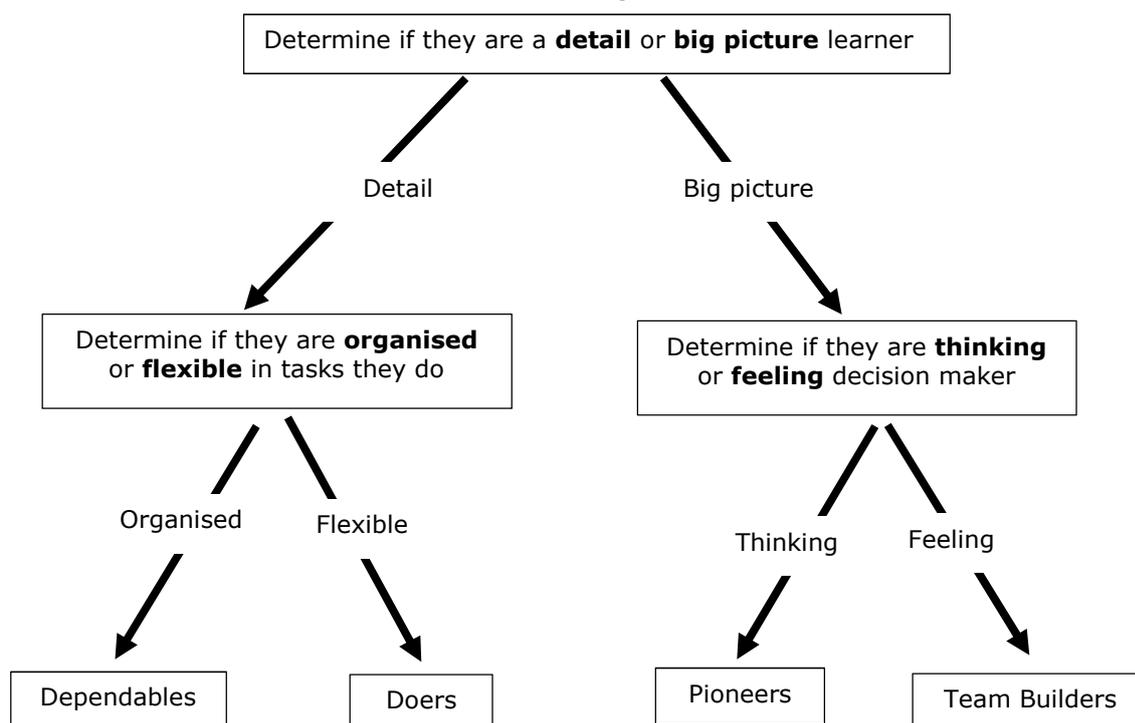
A detail learner (S) behaves something like this:

They focus on the present and what is real and concrete. They like to learn using all five senses and work through problems from the beginning, progressing in a logical sequential way. They like facts, but also trust their intuition and past experiences to inform their learning. You would describe them as practical and down to earth, if not a bit conservative. They only see the bigger picture once they have worked through the parts.

A big picture learner (N) behaves something like this:

They jump in the deep end, motivated by the possible outcome, big results and what could be. The details get worked out as they go. They value innovation, can be speculative and are imaginative, liking theories and possibilities. They learn by connecting patterns or bits of the jigsaw. They are future focused.

If they are a detail learner (S), decide if they like to be organised (the 'J' group in MBTI) or are flexible (the P group in MBTI).

Figure 1. Two-step process to determine temperament type based on MBTI and Kiersey**Step 2a: How they like to be organised**

An organised person appears something like this:

They make plans and follow them and don't like to rest until the job is done. It's often one job at a time. They make lists, file things, make appointments and keep them, getting annoyed when things change especially at the last minute. When they meet you, they will have all their questions and documents at their fingertips. They handle time-limits well, planning their life towards deadlines. They are more likely to follow the 'rules' and like to have order in their world.

A flexible person appears something like this:

They appear spontaneous and adapt readily to changing circumstances. They are more likely to have lots of balls in the air at one time and find it hard to say 'no'. Deadlines and 'rules' are for guidance only and they often plan backwards from a deadline, getting things finished at the last second or a bit later. A flexible person often appears chaotic but it doesn't seem to bother them. Don't expect them to have specific documents at their fingertips.

Step 2b

If they are a big picture learner (N), decide how they make decisions either as a thinker (the 'T' group in MBTI) or as a feeler (the 'F' group in MBTI) person. A thinking person operates something like this:

You see them coming up with logical solutions to problems, working through a process because they believe there is a 'right' answer at the end of it. They conduct analysis before making a decision and value collecting information to calculate the bottom line. They will often hold a strong point of view and defend it, often being insensitive to the feelings or reactions of others. To outsiders a thinker can appear 'hard and cold', often negative to new ideas and suggestions and willing to pour cold water over a new idea.

A feeling person operates something like this:

They take into account people's feelings and values when making decisions, preferring to keep the peace rather than 'poke the possum'. They are hurt by criticism or ridicule, taking it personally and commonly withdraw to avoid further distress. They are great hosts and are 'people' people, being inclusive and

canvassing a range of thoughts and opinions when important decisions are made. You see them looking after the emotional wellbeing of others around them, often spending money and putting in systems to make their job easier. We often describe them as 'warm and fuzzy' and often have a strong environmental focus.

While there is nothing black and white about personality types, the four temperament groups do have distinct characteristics that help describe differences in the farming population. In this paper each group has been given a name and description to align more with farming and agriculture.

Group 1: Dependables (the 'SJ' in MBTI)

They are proud of the industry they work in and believe what they do is of great value and service to the community. They like being called a farmer and achieve great satisfaction from growing products that look and taste good. Dependables have a strong work ethic. They value consistency and routine, often getting pleasure out of doing the same task day after day until the job is done e.g. shearing, sowing, harvest. They are careful and value reliability, consistency, loyalty, security and order, so tend not to 'rock the boat' and protest. If they don't like something they simply don't participate. They like to be helpful and will often involve themselves in the local community through sport, services (e.g. fire brigade) or local committees, but more as a helper than a leader.

Their skills include attention to detail, reliability and a capacity to work to a deadline. They like solid facts and are good at developing policies and procedures. They dislike change for change's sake but will take on new innovation once it has been tried and tested and a process or guideline has been developed, usually by the Pioneers. They are more risk averse than the other groups.

If you visit their farm most are likely to have a shadow board in the workshop with the tools neatly arranged in their place. A whiteboard will show the jobs list and this is marked off as completed. Machinery is neatly parked around the sheds, most gates swing and the woolshed is tidy after shearing is over. They like to be provided with a detailed plan from their adviser. Being clear about things like pesticide or fertiliser rates is important to them and they will double check the detail. They like to have a contingency plan for alternatives like an early or late break.

Group 2: Doers (the 'SP' in MBTI)

Doers like farming but don't hold the same level of consistency and routine of the Dependables. They like to jump into things and get them done even if all the detail hasn't been sorted out. It is common to see them with multiple activities on the go at any one time, many of which will not be finished. They work hard, often at a frantic pace but generally have a good sense of timing. They are more likely to take on new ideas, are at their best when the pressure is on and don't mind taking risks. They will do whatever works for a quick and effective payoff even if they have to ignore convention and rules.

They are good with detail, realistic, open minded and fairly tolerant but are impatient with theories and abstractions. They also have a shadow board in the shed, but not all the tools are in their place. However they usually can put their hands on what they need when they need them. Machinery will often be in pieces, taking a part off one implement to put on another so the job gets done. Enjoying practical hands on activities, they are likely to favour spending time in the technical aspects of farming such as fixing machinery, building fences and making things. They like working in the business not on the business. While they still value the detailed plan from the adviser, they don't follow it as closely as the Dependables.

Group 3: Pioneers (the 'NT' in MBTI)

Pioneers will try almost anything and will often be the first in the district to try something new. While they love getting their teeth into the start up, they have to concentrate to sustain interest once the project is past the design phase. Pioneers are consistently good at generating new ideas. Their strengths include problem solving, strategic planning and understanding complex systems. They see patterns in complexity and are the innovators of new technology. Their potential weakness is failing to focus on the needs of other people because they are too wrapped up in the next thing.

The Pioneers are likely to have several projects on the go at once, which may show up as an untidier farm yard. They will often have trials on their property; evaluating new products or ideas. They are often the first in the district to try something new such a new crop or pasture.

Gates often don't swing, the woolshed still has the oddments from shearing lying about and there are a lot of 'I must get around to that' jobs to do.

When working with advisers they will talk conceptually about the plan for the year identifying the goals and outcomes and are not so interested in the detail of the plan, as they will work it out as they go along. The adviser will often find the plan they prepared has changed since their last visit.

Group 4: Team Builders (The NF in MBTI)

Team Builders are genuine people with integrity. They always try to reach their goals without compromising their personal code of ethics. They speak mostly of what they hope for and imagine what might be possible.

They tend to focus on the people needs of a business or community and make great community leaders. They support inclusive decision-making and firmly believe the strength of the business lies in the people. Their strengths include developing a vision and empowering others to join them. They often avoid conflict, strive for harmony and may ignore problems in the hope that they will go away. Team Builders are more likely to recognise the sometimes difficult role women can experience in farming businesses and where conflict can arise. They recognize the differences between genders and work to accommodate these.

Team Builders with staff will like their adviser to visit early in the week so activities can be planned to ensure the staff have family time on the weekend. It's important to them to have a harmonious team and value social events to show their appreciation.

Using this knowledge to adapt your extension approach

The four temperament types require a different approach to maximise the chances of meaningful engagement. Key considerations to enhance engagement with the four temperament groups are presented (Table 3). With these ideas, four different strategies may be appropriate for the same practice change.

An example may illustrate how the insights from Table 3 can be applied.

Consider a cropping operation that is beginning to encounter major herbicide resistance problems because of the over reliance on repeated use of a small number of chemical groups. As an industry we may see the likely solution in an integrated approach to weed management (IWM) but it would require some major changes to the practices and possibly enterprise mix on farm. We have some experimental data to support the need for change, some good theories about what to do and some useful extension materials.

The four temperament types will respond differently when confronted with this problem. The same thinking can apply to individuals or if dealing with a group of farmers.

The Dependables and Doers (~75% of the farming population) will struggle to see the long term implications of the problem because they tend to focus on detail and not the big picture (tactical not strategic). They would rather work solving today's challenges than thinking too much about the future. The long term is too far away and possibly too confronting to think about, so they tend gravitate to dealing with the here and now.

The Dependables avoid disruption and are more likely to be focussed on finding the next chemical to hit the market than implementing an IWM program. However the next chemical is the starting point for discussion because this is where their thinking is at. While exploring what's new on the horizon, we also discuss how the problem has arisen (not their fault) and that it is a paddock by paddock problem that we don't fully understand. We offer farmers the opportunity to submit some of their own samples for resistance testing (this creates ownership of the problem) to determine the extent of the problem.

Once the results are available, a further discussion is held to discuss the findings and their meaning. At this discussion some simple alternative strategies such as annual fodder crops or green manure crops are also raised, as this is relatively easy to try. For both the findings and alternatives, we discuss their experiences with these fodders and anecdotal stories of resistance. To test these ideas we think are worthy (even if some may not work, to learn from, as they are strong experiential learners), we offer to set up a small trial of different fodder options (strips in a paddock) and do some basic monitoring that are observed over time. As we reflect on the results we look to take the next small step towards change.

Table 3. Four broad temperament types and key considerations for enhanced engagement

Temperament type	Key considerations that may enhance engagement
Dependables	<p>Avoid saying what they have been doing is 'wrong' (no longer best practice) because they may take offence and turn off.</p> <p>Change needs to be incremental, with motivation built on evidence and facts that relate immediately to them and not some remote example.</p> <p>Introduce ideas that don't disrupt current practices too much (small steps).</p> <p>Localise the solution and information as much as possible because they only trust local and proven.</p> <p>Design programs that allows farmers to test their own issues and help them monitor changes on their farm.</p> <p>Value and explore their past experiences and intuition as this is the foundation of their learning.</p> <p>Use small scale demonstrations of different approaches identified by participants (some of which may not work) to learn from because they are strong experiential learners.</p> <p>Discuss problems in a group setting (but maybe not as a stand-alone topic) so participants know they are not alone and that it is a district problem that we need to work on collectively to solve.</p> <p>There needs to be a long term commitment to this temperament type because change is slow and methodical and they are developing their own procedures, not adopting them from somewhere else.</p>
Doers	<p>Have bolder type suggestions on possible solutions that they may test.</p> <p>Invite other farmers who have already had a go to tell their story.</p> <p>Go direct to the paddock scale trialling but be prepared to offer some support because they will get too busy and may miss potentially critical timing and measurements.</p> <p>Avoid boring them with theories and left field ideas. Concentrate on what seems to be working and what we could do next to build on this success.</p> <p>Be prepared for them to drop the practice if a short-term gain can be made by reverting to their 'old ways', but encourage them to start again, using this as a learning experience (e.g. a crop that is inappropriate in a rotation to achieve long term weed control will be introduced because the price that year is really high, so when they come back to the rotation discuss what might have been lost compared to what has been gained).</p> <p>Facilitate discussion around how they could make these ideas work in their farming system, what changes would need to be made and how they might make these changes.</p> <p>Offer to mentor them so they become a speaker for the Dependables (as people in this group have a lot of things in common with the Dependables but maybe are a bit bolder).</p>
Pioneers	<p>Sell the problem without offering a solution.</p> <p>Be a 'gopher' to support them with information and data that they need to answer the questions they have.</p> <p>Provide a sounding board for their ideas without sitting in judgement, however be prepared to challenge their thinking especially with how these possible changes may affect others in the business.</p> <p>Never sell your solution, as tempting as that this may be, because their thinking is likely to be ahead of yours and they can contextualise the problem within the farm business much better than you can.</p> <p>'Tidy up' the story of what they have done with a focus on the bottom line (e.g. a case study), because they will have moved onto something else and the insights could easily be lost.</p> <p>Invite them to 'sell' the issue to industry leaders.</p> <p>Don't ask them to design programs for the Dependables or Doers (because these people are often on panel or boards or committees but think differently so don't really appreciate what the Dependables and Doers want).</p>
Team Builders	<p>Broaden the big picture problem used with the Pioneers to grab the ethical and moral side to the story as well (e.g. the sustainability and environmental issues, long term legacy for future generations, family harmony etc.).</p> <p>Support them with information and data (like the Pioneers).</p> <p>Capture their story but focus on the people considerations and key statements they are likely to make that will resonate with other farmers.</p> <p>Offer to pay for their services to spread the message to others (they will be inclined to want to do so anyway and payment is recognition of their expertise).</p>

A slightly different approach is used with the Doers compared to the Dependables. Elements such as weed resistance testing are included but we talk up the 'crisis' element of the problem and that a solution will require us to think differently and take a punt (this appeals to their greater appetite for risk and solving 'in the moment' problems). We present a few ideas of what others who have faced similar problems are using (e.g. windrow burning, chaff carts, crop topping) and invite them to a meeting we organise where speakers from outside the district will talk about what they have done. A short trip follows.

At a debriefing from the presentations and trip, we ask who would be willing to try a paddock with an alternative approach. We offer to undertake some monitoring of things like weeds and dry matter production so we can quantify the effect of the treatment. Results are discussed with the individual but we also hold a follow up meeting where the experiences of individuals are shared with others. Particular emphasis is placed on how we could make these ideas work at the whole farm level. A few shining lights are approached to talk to members of the Dependable group.

For the Pioneers and Team Builders we start with the problem, warts and all and the long term implications to their farming business. We discuss where we need to get to (the goal) and some high level strategic approaches that might help us get there. We act as an investigator, finding out about different approaches the farmer thinks may work. We avoid designing a solution for them, instead feeding in ideas, testing and critiquing the approaches they are formulating. For the Pioneers our questioning also includes asking about the reactions of other people in their business to the possible changes being proposed (e.g. bringing sheep back onto the property).

We make a commitment that their pioneering endeavours are not lost to the industry by capturing their 'journey' in a case study that can be used by others. We also make contact within the industry to make sure key decision makers know about what is happening (good news story) but also so they can shape the investment agenda.

In conclusion

We have no doubt extension practitioners will recognise many of the approaches described in the above example. Given most farmers are detail, practical, hands on people, techniques such as discussion groups, plot trials and bus trips will be common practice. However there are useful insights to appreciate from temperament analysis including the need for small, incremental, low disruption steps with the Dependables, to more robust discussion with the Doers and knowing to play a support role with the Pioneers and Team Builders.

Commonly our extension programs try and cater for all temperament types with one approach and don't allow the flexibility to adjust for different personalities. In private practice our engagement with clients is often the same, when we are likely to be encountering a variety of personalities that require an individual approach to be most effective.

By applying this simple descriptive analysis of a farmer's behaviour we believe improvements can be made to the effectiveness of agricultural extension.

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