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Assessing Personality Differences

INSTRUCTIONS

On the following pages are thirty items that will help you learn about yourself and others. Understanding the basics of personality differences will enable you to be more aware of your behavior and responses to others and to interact more effectively in your work and life.

Your responses to the items that follow will help show you

1. How you like to gather information
2. How you like to go about deciding things

There are no right or wrong answers. Read each item carefully and circle your response. Do not spend too much time thinking about any one item. If you cannot decide on a response, skip that item and return to it later. Please answer all of the items.

Taking In Information: Realists and Futurists

When taking in information some people prefer to focus on facts, realities, and concrete information that can be gathered through the senses. These are the *Realists*. Other people prefer to look beyond the facts and focus on trends, possibilities, and ideas linking the facts together. These are the *Futurists*. Both approaches for taking in information are equally valuable, and each approach is useful in different ways.

Realists naturally focus on the realities and practical applications of information. They pay attention to here-and-now problems and situations and are aware of relevant facts and details. They enjoy working on tasks and solving problems to achieve solutions that are useful right away.

At work, Realists prefer practical tasks and like to see immediate results. They enjoy learning relevant and concrete information they can apply in the short term. They communicate by sharing experiences and useful facts and details. A Realist will want to be a member of a team that focuses on the present situation to accomplish practical goals.

Futurists naturally link pieces of information together and relate them to ideas and future possibilities. They pay attention to patterns and links between facts rather than to just the facts. Futurists enjoy thinking about what could be and often imagine different ways to do tasks or achieve goals. They enjoy working strategically to achieve long-term solutions.

At work, Futurists prefer roles that allow them to imagine new and different ways to do tasks. They enjoy learning about theories and ideas and want to connect facts to ideas and possibilities. When communicating Futurists share ideas and enjoy talking about what could be rather than what is. A Futurist will want to be a member of a team that focuses on connecting facts and ideas to accomplish long-term goals.



Personality Differences in Action

Personality differences become obvious when we work with other people, whether they be co-workers, supervisors or leaders, customers, clients, family members, teachers, or anyone else. These differences affect the way we approach our work, learning, and communication. They also strongly affect how we work in a group or on a team and how we go about solving problems. There are three important ways you will benefit from learning about personality differences.

First, thinking about personality differences helps you define and focus on how you prefer to do things. When you are engaged in work or learning that uses your natural preferences you will likely be more interested, energized, and successful. Because we often develop skills and competencies linked to our preferences, learning about our preferred ways of taking in information and making decisions will help us identify our natural strengths. For example, a Realist may shine when doing work that requires observation and attention to detail and a Futurist may find strategic planning or envisioning enjoyable. A Logician may thrive on work that requires logical analysis and a Champion may find cooperative activities rewarding.

WORK STYLES: REALIST AND FUTURIST

How do Realists and Futurists approach work?

Realists and Futurists approach work differently. Because Realists tend to be practical, they are observant and attuned to the facts and details of a situation. They enjoy hands-on work activities linked to here-and-now results. Futurists are more interested in alternative possibilities. They enjoy exploring new ideas and different ways of doing things, and like work that leads to imagining and working toward long-term goals.

What do Realists and Futurists contribute to the workplace?

In the workplace, Realists and Futurists each make a valuable contribution. Realists pay attention to the facts and realities of a situation. This practical focus is necessary for fine-tuning and adapting to changes in the day-to-day running of things. Realists also trust and build on their past experiences so that what has worked before is considered even when situations change. Futurists, attuned to trends and coming changes, contribute to the workplace by exploring new and improved ways of doing things. By imagining what might and could be, Futurists make sure change doesn't take them by surprise.

When do Realists and Futurists collide?

Since Realists are focused on facts and details and Futurists are focused on ideas and possibilities, workplace conflicts can occur. For example, a Realist might find it frustrating when a Futurist wants to change something just for the sake of change. In such a situation, a Futurist might label the Realist as resistant to change. However, the Realist simply needs a practical reason for change or won't want to change something that is already working well. Futurists might get excited about a future possibility without considering all the relevant facts and realities. Realists might see the same possibility as unrealistic and idealistic. In such situations, working to produce here-and-now results can sometimes seem in conflict with setting and working toward a long-term vision.

How can Realists and Futurists best work together?

People benefit by seeing the value of and using both the Realist and Futurist work styles. Realists and Futurists consider both short-term, immediate results and long-term results and possibilities. Realists start with the here and now and then think about the future. Futurists start with an idea and then see if the idea fits with current facts. Realists can help Futurists attend to the details of the situation by pointing out important realities and facts that need to be considered. Futurists can help Realists imagine and plan for the future by identifying important trends and sharing ideas about different ways of thinking about and doing things.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Read the work style bullets on the facing page for both Realists and Futurists. Circle or highlight the characteristics you recognize as true of how you prefer to work. Once you have thought about how you prefer to work, assess how effectively you are able to work with others by answering the following questions. Summarize your thoughts in the spaces below or on a separate page.

> CONSIDER a recent work activity that was highly effective, stimulating, or rewarding. Which of the descriptors on the opposite page did you use? What made your efforts successful? How can you use this work strength in other situations?

> CONSIDER a recent work activity that seemed ineffective and was frustrating or unrewarding. Which of the descriptors on the opposite page did you use? What made the activity unsuccessful? What could you do to improve your ability to accomplish your work in similar situations?

WORK STYLES: REALIST AND FUTURIST



REALIST WORK STYLE

“Just the facts, please.”

When working, Realists prefer to

- Use their senses and observation to understand the world
- Gain hands-on, trial-and-error experience from the world
- Trust and act on what is tangible and known from experience
- Invest time and energy in working toward practical goals
- Think about and attend to current facts and realities
- Work on tasks that provide useful, short-term, day-to-day results
- Focus on the realities and specifics of concrete situations
- Use a practical kind of creativity to modify or adapt to the realities of situations
- Work at a steady pace

Realist Work Style in Action

A Realist describes his practical approach to work.

“I am responsible for maintaining emergency equipment. I enjoy the hands-on work, especially at the end of the day when I can see what I have accomplished.”

A Realist shows how she is learning to use both short-term and long-term planning.

“As a manager I am required to be involved in strategic planning. I don’t naturally look that far into the future, but I am learning to use a step-by-step planning process to set some future direction.”



FUTURIST WORK STYLE

“I can see it all now.”

When working, Futurists prefer to

- Link and connect ideas to understand the world
- Imagine and build connections beyond real-world facts and experiences
- Trust and act on what can be envisioned and imagined
- Invest time and energy in exploring new ways to think about or do things
- Think about and attend to concepts and possibilities for the future
- Work on tasks that provide visionary, long-term, far-reaching results
- Focus on the associations and implications that can be made from situations
- Use an imaginative kind of creativity to generate new insights about situations
- Have bursts of ideas and inspirations

Futurist Work Style in Action

A Futurist describes her focus on ideas and possibilities.

“At work, I am usually the one who takes on the challenge of thinking about, planning, and implementing change. There is always a different way to do something.”

A Futurist comments on how he has learned to balance ideas and realities.

“I used to get a great idea and then run with it. I have learned that sometimes my ideas weren’t as practical as I thought. Now I collect more facts before jumping into a project.”



Putting It All Together

ZIG-ZAG DECISION MAKING USING ALL FOUR APPROACHES

Isabel Briggs Myers was keenly interested in understanding personality differences. She recognized the importance of using all the approaches—Realist, Futurist, Logician, and Champion—together when solving problems and making decisions. Because each approach has unique strengths and blind spots, the best decision-making or problem-solving strategy will incorporate aspects from all four. The material below has been modified from Myers' *Introduction to Type*® booklet. Her problem-solving approach is called the Zig-Zag model and follows four steps:

1. Use a Realist approach to define the problem.

Starting with a realistic approach sets the stage to clearly and practically define the problem. Some helpful questions to ask include:

- What are the facts?
- What have you or others done to resolve this or similar problems?
- What has worked or not worked?
- What resources do you have available?

2. Use a Futurist approach to consider all the possibilities.

Brainstorm to ensure that you are open to new ideas and ways of thinking. Brainstorming is a process that generates many ideas and