The Whole Is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts: Observations on the dynamics of type

By Dr. Naomi Quenk

(This article was originally published in the Fall 1992 Bulletin of Psychological Type, Vol. 15 No. 4)

This material was excerpted by Quenk from the forthcoming book, Beside Myself: The Inferior Function in Everyday Life, by Naomi L. Quenk, to be published by Consulting Psychologists Press (Summer 1993). Quenk is a former President of APT a member of the Committee which developed APT'S qualifying training program, and currently heads the Training Committee charged with directing that program. She has been using the MBTI and type for more than thirty years.

It usually takes a while for newcomers to type to fully understand its dynamic character. They may initially think of a type formula as the result of simply adding together its four letters -as the sum of two attitudes and two functions. For people at this stage of understanding, type is little more than a shorthand way of describing some very interesting personality characteristics.

People whose understanding remains at this level often forget about type after a while. We've all met people who say something like, "Myers-Briggs? Oh, yes. I took that test once. It was kind of interesting, but I don't remember how I came out. . ." For years, when I talked to clients or colleagues who had taken the Indicator but couldn't remember their types or what was "interesting" about it, I automatically concluded that they were not given good feedback. If they had had a "proper" explanation, I thought, surely they would remember their own type and would have continued to observe and learn more about this exciting way of describing and understanding people.

But many people who take the MBTI have been provided with an adequate introductory explanation -one which defines the four preferences, gives examples, has the person verify his or her reported type, etc. They may have discussed the notion of interaction amongst the preferences and been introduced to a theoretical understanding of dominant and auxiliary functions. Nevertheless, unless people continue to explore typology, they are likely to remain unaware of the unique character and profound potential of its dynamic system.

One example of what I mean comes from the APT MBTI Qualifying Training Program. There are an increasing number of professionals attending our training who are quite new to type concepts. In spite of their initial inexperience, however, they absorb a remarkable amount of information and depth of understanding as a result of participating in the APT program. But often, in the portion of the training which explores the effects of type dynamics, people new to type have trouble describing and appreciating the influence of type dynamics on their personalities -for example, in seeing the difference between introverted sensing as an auxiliary and introverted sensing as a dominant function.

There are many ways of discussing the interaction of dominant, auxiliary, tertiary, and inferior functions -the dynamics of typology. We may use metaphors, such as the dominant as the
captain and the auxiliary as first-mate; or Isabel Myers' (1980) analogous description of "the general" and his "aide." We can focus on Myers' hypothesis that the auxiliary provides balance between the critical mental processes of perception and judgment as well as the extraverted and introverted attitudes. We can apply Jung's theory of psychic energy, which sees the dominant function as most fully under our conscious control and having the lion's share of available psychic energy, while the auxiliary, tertiary, and inferior functions have decreasing amounts of energy.

No matter how we think about type dynamics, it is the critical feature of type theory which makes "the whole greater than the sum of its parts" and gives the MBTI its potency as a system of explanation. It permits understanding and assessment of a very broad range of human characteristics, from everyday attitudes and behavior to complex unconscious processes. It also provides insight into personality development over the lifespan. In short, were it not for the dynamics of type, the MBTI would likely be a mere footnote in the history of personality testing, and you would not be reading this article in the Bulletin of Psychological Type, which is published by an international membership organization devoted to studying and applying psychological typologies to a wide diversity of human endeavors.

If you are not entirely clear about how type dynamics are determined and the theory which underlies them, read "What are type dynamics" in this Bulletin, p. 11, before continuing with this presentation. What follows will then make much more sense to you.

**Differing dynamics and their effects**

If you understand the underlying theory of type dynamics and a system for identifying the dynamics in any type formula, we can explore what difference these dynamics make in people's personalities.

*For example, how are ISTJs and ESTJs different?*

We can begin with their similarities. We might safely assume that an ISTJ and an ESTJ would prefer the same kinds of information-gathering approaches and decision-making methods because of their shared preferences for sensing and thinking. We would also expect both to be comfortable with structure and closure. Both have the same two letters missing from their formulas, F and N; so we would not expect to see much attention paid to feeling values and future possibilities.

However, the degree of differentiation* or development of the sensing and thinking functions of these two types should produce different effects. Jung and Myers specified that the dominant function is the most highly differentiated and under the most conscious control. The auxiliary, tertiary, and inferior functions are (at least theoretically) respectively less developed.

Thus, for the ISTJ, **dominant introverted sensing** would be most differentiated and therefore consciously directed. We would expect an ISTJ to **first** process information internally and to be quite confident about the accuracy of her perceptions. **Auxiliary extraverted thinking** would be less developed, but quite accessible. We would expect her to be somewhat less confident about
communicating logical conclusions. Tertiary feeling is less developed than auxiliary thinking, so she might be rather uneasy about her feeling values. Inferior extraverted intuition would be virtually undifferentiated and unconscious. We would expect her to pay little attention to future possibilities.

For the ESTJ, dominant extraverted thinking is most differentiated. We would expect an ESTJ to make judgments about the outside world quickly and with great certainty. Introverted sensing is next in line; the ESTJ’s second concern would be with processing the data relevant to his decision. Tertiary intuition might be expressed through reluctant or occasional attention to possibilities. Inferior introverted feeling, undifferentiated and unconscious, would result in little or no attention to the feeling values in a situation.

The difference the dominant makes

This is true for other types who share the same preferred functions used in the same attitudes, but for whom the dominant and auxiliary differ. Research by Wayne Mitchell (1992) suggests that the following model may form the basis for differences in dominant versus auxiliary differentiation:

If introverted feeling [INFP, ISFP] is my dominant and your auxiliary [ENFP, ESFP], I should use introverted feeling more often and with greater confidence and facility. Most likely, I would also have developed all or most of the personality characteristics associated with habitual use of the preference. By contrast, your auxiliary form of introverted feeling would be expressed less often and with less confidence and facility. And you may have developed only some of the attributes associated with a preference for introverted feeling and have somewhat less expertise in using them.

Practical applications of type dynamics

The remainder of this article describes some of the important effects of type dynamics. These include differences related to:

1) which function is used first;
2) whether the dominant function is a judging or a perceiving function;
3) whether the dominant is extraverted or introverted;
4) using the dominant in the less-preferred attitude;
5) “the other side” of the JP dimension.

1) Which function is used first?

Example:

An ENFP (dominant extraverted intuition, auxiliary introverted feeling) and an INFP (dominant introverted feeling and auxiliary extraverted intuition) were co-leading a seminar. During the
afternoon session, both noted and commented to each other that there was something amiss in a particular segment of the teaching. They agreed to review it later. As soon as the seminar ended, the ENFP said, “Okay, we need to talk about that now and figure it out.” The INFP said, “But I’m not ready yet. I need some time to evaluate it by myself before I’m ready to talk about it.”

**Applying dynamics:**

The ENFP’s urge was to explore the possibilities first and come to a conclusion second. The INFP needed to “get a feel for” (make a judgment about) what happened before being ready to consider possibilities which could confirm or contradict her conclusions. **The dominant function of each was engaged first.** The dominant may be thought of as a kind of “default” setting in the settings in a computer program - it’s what we automatically go to first.

2) **Is the dominant a judging or perceiving function?**

**Example:**

An ISTJ (dominant introverted sensing, auxiliary extraverted thinking) and an ESTJ (dominant extraverted thinking, auxiliary introverted sensing) were business partners. After investigating alternative computers, they agreed on one. But just before they actually purchased it, one of their customers told them about another machine with additional features that could be useful in their business. The ISTJ was ready to buy this other computer, or at least reopen the analysis; the ESTJ gave many reasons for sticking with the original decision and minimized the alleged assets of the new alternative. It took several days to convince him to reevaluate his decision.

**Applying dynamics:**

Dominant judging types (regardless of whether the preference is for thinking or feeling and regardless of whether the final letter in their type is J or P!) tend to be more reluctant to change a decision in the face of contradictory evidence than are dominant perceiving types. For the latter, the “data” (perceptions) are primary; conclusions (judgments) are relatively less important. So when new information challenges a previously held conclusion, dominant perceiving types find it relatively easier to change the decision, even if they were comfortable with it.

For dominant judging types, the conclusion is primary and much energy and certainty is invested in it. In the face of contradictory evidence, they find it more difficult to give up the conclusion, open up the decision-making process again. They may doggedly question the new data before reluctantly reconsidering and altering the decision.

3) **Is the function extraverted or introverted?**

People new to type may find it difficult to understand the difference between extraverting and introverting a particular function. The following are some differences we may see, depending on whether the dominant is introverted or extraverted.
Is dominant sensing extraverted (ESFP & ESTP) or introverted (ISFJ & ISTJ)?

Example:

Myra, ESFP (dominant extraverted sensing), and Bonnie, ISFJ (dominant introverted sensing) went to the Bahamas together. Neither had been there before. Bonnie came prepared with a list of specific things to see and do, with time estimates for doing them. Myra objected to this imposed structure. She wanted to have the fullest possible range of experiences and to remain open to any sensory exploration which came her way. They succeeded in compromising by alternating days of doing it “Myra’s way” with days of “Bonnie’s way.” But neither was quite comfortable with the other’s preferred mode of operation.

Applying dynamics:

Dominant extraverted sensing types (ESTP & ESFP) take in the widest range of available sensory messages from the environment, receiving pleasure from their intensity and extensity, with little or no restrictions on what are acceptable data. Dominant introverted sensing types (ISTJ & ISFJ), by contrast, seem to operate with an inner structure within which incoming sensory information is classified and ordered. The data are then readily available in all their detail for the appreciation and use of the introverted sensor.

Is dominant intuition extraverted (ENFP & ENTP) or introverted (INFJ & INTJ)?

Example:

Yolanda, an ENFP (dominant extraverted intuition), feels that she is frequently criticized and “shot down” for her ideas. As an extraverted intuitive, she talks about them as they are being formed and before she has subjected them to her own feeling judgment. By contrast, Hal, an INFJ (dominant introverted intuition), keeps his ideas inside for a long time before talking about them. When he does talk about them, he wants to make it clear that they are “only ideas,” and not worked-out systems. He thus incorporates many “disclaimers,” testifying to their tentative nature.

Applying dynamics:

The dominant introverted intuitive (INTJ & INFJ) tends to focus primarily on ideas and possibilities at a conceptual level and focuses on the essence of those inner ideas that are certain. Introverted intuition is tuned in to inner interconnected possibilities which may take the form of complex theories, models, and the like. Their relevance to the outer world is usually secondary, so only well-thought out and important ideas are shared with others.

The dominant extraverted intuitive (ENFP & ENTP) tends to be more attracted to a wide range of possibilities in the outer environment, readily sharing them with others as ideas to be explored and applying those ideas in the outer world. So Yolanda, in sharing her ideas before she has critiqued them herself (used her judging function), risks being misunderstood by others. Hal, in initially keeping his ideas to himself, misses out on feedback that could help him further shape his ideas.
Is dominant thinking extraverted (ENTJ & ESTJ) or introverted (INTP & ISTP)?

Example:

Two INTP (dominant introverted thinking) researchers were discussing possibilities and plans for continuing their research. They explored many wide-ranging possibilities, discussing each with great enthusiasm. At one point in their discussion, their ENTJ (dominant extraverted thinking) project manager came in briefly and listened with great interest to their ideas. Two months later, the two INTPs were surprised and rather vexed when they discovered that the ENTJ had applied for a grant to do the research project he had listened in on!

Applying dynamics:

For the INTPs, their discussion was "just tossing around ideas." That particular idea was no more important than ten others they talked about that day. To the ENTJ, their enthusiasm about it (and the fact that it also appealed to him) were sufficient motives for action. Dominant extraverted thinkers use their judgment in the arena of the outer world, critically evaluating what is happening (if they have a sensing auxiliary) or the potential for effective outcomes (if they have an intuitive auxiliary) with the goal of logic and coherence in the outer world. They are oriented to acting on their conclusions.

The critical judgment of introverted thinkers, on the other hand, operates internally, figuring out what is going on or what is possible with the goal of inner logic and coherence. For them, actualizing their conclusions is secondary.

Is dominant feeling extraverted (ENFJ & ESFJ) or introverted (INFP & ISFP)?

Example:

George, an ENFJ (dominant extraverted feeling), hired Ellen, an INFP (dominant introverted feeling), to edit his book-length manuscript. Sometime after she finished her task, Ellen was gratified to learn that the edited manuscript had been accepted for publication by a prestigious university press. This news confirmed her feeling that she had done a good job.

She was embarrassed, however, when George - who had already paid her for her work - took her out to dinner and presented her with an expensive gift to show his appreciation. Rather than increasing her confidence in her work, this "excessive" (to her) display of gratitude made Ellen distrust George's judgment of her. His unbounded enthusiasm seemed to indicate to her his lack of discrimination.

Applying dynamics

This is a good example of how dominant introverted feeling types focus on inner harmony and "being at peace" within themselves. Dominant extraverted feeling types devote their energy to maintaining harmony in the outer world. The zealous ENFJ was merely sharing his delight in his success with the person whom he felt had contributed greatly to it. He would have been puzzled and shocked had he known of the INFP's reaction, which she, of course, kept carefully
concealed. For the INFP, her own inner sense that she had done her job well and met the responsibility she had undertaken for George was all she needed to feel good about her work.

**Dealing with those who use "our" dominant in the other attitude**

Jung observed that we have more difficulty with people who use our dominant function in the "other" attitude than we have with our complete opposite type. Thus, dominant introverted thinkers (INTP & ISTP) may find their dominant extraverted thinking colleagues (ENTJ & ESTJ) lacking in depth and conceptual clarity, too quick to reveal their thinking process to others, not "thinking things out" well enough. Dominant extraverted thinkers may see their dominant introverted thinking counterparts as obtuse, obscure, and esoteric in their interests, as unnecessarily complex-and perhaps as with-holding and unwilling to share their thinking with others.

Dominant introverted feeling types (INFP & ISFP) may see their dominant extraverted feeling associates (ENFJ & ESFJ) as insincere and non-discriminating in their expression of feeling values; as intrusive and overbearing in their focus on establishing and maintaining harmony for the people in their environment; as choosing breadth rather than depth of feeling. Dominant extraverted feeling types (ENFJ & ESFJ) may feel unsure about the values of their introverted feeling friends and colleagues. They may experience doubts about whether they are appreciated, may feel criticized, and may perceive (often accurately) the introverted feeling type's judgment that they lack depth.

**“The other side” of the JP dimension**

When people discuss the JP dimension, they usually talk about the attitudinal and behavioral differences which result from extraverting one’s preferred judging process versus extraverting one’s preferred perceiving process. Examining from the perspective of type dynamics leads us to look at what attitudinal and behavioral differences result from the fact that Js introvert their preferred perceiving process, while Ps introvert their preferred judging process. These differences are apparent, regardless of whether we are looking at the type's dominant or auxiliary function.

**Extraverting versus introverting the perceiving process.**

**Example:**

*Bill, an INTJ, and his wife Arlene, an INFP, spent a week at an artist colony in New England. Later, Arlene commented that she enjoyed participating, at least peripherally, in some of the “counter-culture” activities at the colony and thought she could get caught up in it for awhile if she spent more time there. Bill saw his wife’s statement as evidence of a possible “character flaw,” indicating a failure on her part to maintain strong and unalterable values. He indicated that he had no such urges to “go native” and was immune to any dubious attraction to “immoral” behaviors.*

**Applying dynamics:**
How can we account for the different reactions of Bill and Arlene? Remember that the types who extravert their perceiving function are those whose last formula letter is P: ENFP, ENTP, ESFP, ESTP, INFP, INTP, ISFP, ISTP. Of course, all of these types introvert their judging function. The external focus of their perception makes it likely that they will easily change and adapt to a changing outer environment, even having a “chameleon-like” tendency to take on the behaviors and values of others in different contexts.

Those who introvert their perceiving function are types whose last formula letter is J: ENFJ, ENTJ, ESFJ, ESTJ, INFJ, INTJ, ISFJ, ISTJ. Because their perceptive focus is inside them, they tend to be relatively unaffected by a changing environment. Their inner perceptions have a constancy and predictability from one circumstance to the next. Of course, all of these types extravert their judging process.

Bill seemed to confuse Arlene’s openness to new data with a readiness to change her basic moral standards, embodied in her dominant introverted feeling. He did not himself experience the “pull” of the outer environment, for his own perceptive focus is internal and relatively uninfluenced by the external environment.

Js, who extravert their judging function, like to control and regulate and are more comfortable in a predictable environment; this is promoted by their introversion of their perceiving function -the outer environment has less impact on them than it does on types who extravert their perception. For extraverted perceivers (whose type ends in P), their basic decision-making structure (thinking or feeling) remains constant and secure, inside. But in their effort to fully observe or experience their environment, they may appear to have shifting and unreliable judgments.

**Extraverting versus introverting the judging process.**

**Example:**

The phone rang. It was Carla, Rosa’s ENFP daughter. Rosa is an INTP (dominant introverted thinking). Carla also introverts her judging process -in her case, auxiliary introverted feeling.

Carla was attending college in another state. In her phone call, Carla said: “Mom, I’ve got this chance to move out of the dorm and into a six-bedroom house with four girls and a guy.” She said excitedly, “It’s a great house, right close to campus, and it will even be cheaper than the dorm! It’s okay with you, isn’t it?”

Rosa quickly thought, “She’s too young to live off-campus. It seems to me it’s against the rules for freshmen anyway. She probably doesn’t know the prospective roommates very well, and her judgment about people can be really off-she’s always positive, at least in the beginning. It sounds like a bad idea to me.” Rosa responded, “tell me some more about the house and your friends. How did you hear about it? Are the others freshmen too?”

At that moment, Rosa’s INTJ husband Mario came in (dominant introverted intuitive with auxiliary extraverted thinking). “It’s Carla,” said Rosa. Mario picked up the phone and Carla repeated her exciting news. Mario immediately said, “That’s a terrible idea. You’re too young to
live off campus. Isn’t it against the rules for freshmen anyway? And who are these people anyway? You know you’re not a very good judge of people!”

Carla burst into tears, accused her parents of treating her like a child, and angrily hung up the phone. The next day, after everyone had calmed down, she gave her parents information about the house, the roommates, and the college rules. Both parents were satisfied and relieved, and Carla was ecstatic when they agreed to her request.

**Applying dynamics:**

This story demonstrates one of the consequences of people’s using their judging process in opposite attitudes. In this example, whether the judging process was dominant or auxiliary, thinking or feeling, didn’t have anywhere near as much impact as the fact that Mario extraverted his judging, while Rosa and Carla introverted theirs.

Later, in discussing what had happened, Mario and Rosa noted that they had immediately had very similar judgments about their daughter’s plan. However, Rosa’s introversion of her judgment led her to keep her negative reactions to herself, while her extraversion of perception encouraged her to ask for more information. Mario’s extraversion of his judgment led him to state his concerns “up front.” He acknowledged that, after Carla hung up, he realized he was missing a great deal of information about her plans.

**The understanding which comes from using type dynamics**

There are many more dramatic as well as subtle effects of differing type dynamics, and we can use them to make specific behavioral predictions. The dynamic character of typology teems with possibilities for observing individual similarities and differences. How at variance this is with a conception of type that stays at the simplistic level of “I’m an INTP, so I like mathematical models. You’re an ENFJ, so you like people to get along.”

One of the common objections from people who are first introduced to type is that it is putting them “in a box.” Of course, in one way it does -one of 16 boxes. As we come to understand and use type dynamics, however, we develop an appreciation for the complexity and subtlety of Carl Jung’s and Isabel Myers’ understanding of psychological type. A dynamic view of type provides almost unending possibilities for new insights about how people operate, what they share, and how they are different.

---

*Jung defined differentiation as: “the development of differences, separation of parts from the whole” in Psychological Types; according to Jung, psychological type functions must be differentiated from each other for them to be used effectively by the individual. A differentiated function is separate and exists by itself; that is, it is not intermingled with one or more of the other functions and can therefore operate independently.

**References:**
