

Understanding What Types of Communication Will Be Most Effective for Your Audience

Step 1: Identify the Communication Preferences of the Different Personality Types in Your Audience

It is important to think through which personality types are likely to be in your audience, and what their communication preferences are, because it will help you consciously break out of the (unconscious) habit of designing a presentation to appeal only to those who share your own personality type. Even if you start out by deliberately designing your presentations to appeal to all types, if you routinely skip the step of thinking about the different personalities in the room, then there is a real risk that over time you will revert to accommodating only your own personality type preferences.

There are several considerations to keep in mind to avoid defaulting to a presentation design that appeals only to those who share your personality type.

If you like details, for example, keep in mind those who prefer the “big picture.” If you like people to get to the point quickly, don’t assume that everyone else is this way; speak also to those who want to know what other factors you have considered and rejected to get to this point. If you make your decisions based strictly on facts, expect that there will also be people in your audience for whom emotional considerations and people issues are of central importance.

For this first step of the Extreme Presentation process, you need to list the most important people in your audience (where “important” is defined as people whose minds or actions you need to change), estimate the personality type of each, and then work out the implications of each type for your presentation design. You can photocopy worksheets A.1a and A.1b in Appendix A and use them to list your most important audience members and their personality types and indicate the presentation implications of each (or you can download copies at www.ExtremePresentation.com).

This chapter will explain:

- How to estimate your audience's personality types
- How to match your presentation design to different personality types, especially when you expect to have multiple different personality types present in your audience (which is usually the case).
- What other information you could gather about your audience

How to Estimate Your Audience's Personality Types

You need to make a list of the most important people you are expecting to see in your audience, and try to estimate the personality type of each. The “most important” people in your audience are those whom you expect to have the most influence on whatever decision or action you are trying to encourage with your presentation. If you will be giving the same presentation to different audiences, then focus on whichever is the most important to you, or else design your presentation so that it will appeal to all audiences (more on this below).

In a perfect world, you would have each of your audience members fill out a formal MBTI assessment, but for most real-world conditions this is completely unrealistic. In firms that have made a significant investment in MBTI, different executives' types are known in the organization, and so you may already have the information you need if any of these particular executives happen to be your audience. For every other situation, though, you will need to make an informal assessment. I find the following questions helpful:

- Does the person seem to become energized from being alone (Introvert) or from being with people (Extravert)?
- Does the person respond to concepts (Intuition) or facts (Sensing)?
- Does the person seem more concerned with principles and things (Thinking) or with people (Feeling)?
- Does the person seem driven to closure (Judging) or to opening up further possibilities (Perceiving)?

As you go through and try to estimate the different personality types of your audience members, if you are unsure in any way about any dimension of any personality, then leave that part blank. *This is very important.* For example, if you know that Joseph in your audience is definitely an Extravert, but you are not sure how you would classify the rest of his personality, then write down an “E” and leave the rest blank. The meaning of a blank is that you will need to appeal to both sides of that dimension—because you do not know Joseph's preference. Therefore, a blank instead of a J or P means that you need to appeal to both J's and P's, so that whether Joseph is a J or a P, you will still be communicating properly to him. But if you guess that he is a J when in fact he is more of a P, then you will be presenting to him in a way that turns him off. It is always better to leave a blank than to make a wrong guess.

How to Match Your Presentation Design to Different Personality Types in the Same Audience

Once you have estimated the personality type of your most important audience members, then you can work out the presentation design implications for each of them and note these on Worksheet 1a from Appendix A.

Different personality types like to receive information in different ways, and are influenced accordingly. These ways are summarized in Table 1.1 and explained in detail below.¹

As we noted above, in many cases, you are likely to have a mixture of personality types in your audience. In these cases you will need to design your presentation to appeal to all the types that could be present. There will probably also be some people whose personality types you do not know. The implication here is similar: with an unknown type, you need to design your presentation to appeal to *all* possible types, so that whichever one the person turns out to have, you'll be covered. In what follows, we describe how to design a presentation to appeal to each side of the four different MBTI dimensions, and also talk about how to address situations in which both sides are present or that personality dimension is unknown.

¹For example, richer (multimedia) communication significantly increased online purchases of a complex product for iNtuitors and Feelers, but not for Sensors and Thinkers (Jahng, Jain, & Ramamurthy, 2002).

TABLE 1.1. Communication Preferences of Different Personality Types

| Personality Type | Typical Needs | Presentation Implications |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Introvert vs. Extravert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to reflect on information • Interactive discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide all or part of presentation in advance • Plan for lots of discussion and Q&A |
| Sensor vs. iNtuitior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The facts and (all) the details • The big picture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to include all relevant facts and details in presentation or appendix • Provide overview up-front |
| Thinker vs. Feeler | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles involved, costs, benefits • Whom this is valuable for, and why | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify principles, costs, and benefits • State implications for each person or group of stakeholders involved |
| Judger vs. Perceiver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions • Alternatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present conclusions up front • List all alternatives considered |

Based on Bacon (1996).

Introverts vs. Extraverts

The first consideration is your audience's "favorite world"—whether they are outer- or inner-focused, extraverted or introverted.

Introverts Introverts need time to reflect on information that they receive. The implication is that you should try to provide all or part of your presentation material—or some other relevant pre-reading—to introverts in advance of the presentation, so that they have time to think about your material prior to your presentation, especially if you expect them to make a decision by the end of your presentation. If you do not give them information in advance, they will probably be less comfortable with your presentation and less likely to agree to your recommendations.

There are times when you may not feel comfortable providing your whole presentation in advance (because it is highly confidential, perhaps, or because setting the context correctly is critically important). In such cases, try to send at least part of your presentation, or even some other relevant pre-reading, so that your audience will be more prepared for your presentation. The goal in this step—as in every other step in the Extreme Presentation method—is not slavish adherence to a process. The idea is to improve the persuasiveness of your presentations. We're not striving for some theoretical ideal of perfection; we're just looking for an improvement over what you are doing right now. With introverts, *any* amount of pre-reading is going to be better than what you are sending them right now, which is probably nothing.

Extraverts Extraverts, by contrast, need interactive discussion, so plan for lots of question-and-answer time during your presentation. If your presentation is scheduled to last one hour, do not expect to present more than thirty minutes' worth of material, because the rest of the time will be spent answering questions and engaging in discussion. Extraverts process information by talking about it. If you expect the extraverts in your audience to make a decision during your presentation, you will have to allow them time to "digest" your material by discussing it.

Some time ago I was sharing the Extreme Presentation method with an admiral of the U.S. Navy. His staff consists mainly of JAGs (judge advocate generals), who are all trained lawyers and mostly extraverts. His concern was that if he ever opened up his presentation to questions, the questioning would take over and he would lose control of his presentation. As I took him through this material, he came to see how such questioning is a sign that his people are absorbing the information that he is presenting to them, because extraverts process information by talking about it. (For more information on the "illusion of control" that presentation slides can give you, and why you are better giving that up, see Chapter 8 on layouts).

Both Introverts and Extraverts Together If you expect to have both introverts and extraverts in your audience, then you need to get pre-reading material to the introverts and allow discussion time for the extraverts. How do you get pre-reading to the introverts

only? Don't worry about that—send it to everyone in your audience; the extraverts will most likely ignore it.

You will also allow discussion time, which the extraverts will be sure to take advantage of. However, if you also want the input of the introverts, make sure to allow the discussion to go on long enough. Initially, while the extraverts jump in and start talking, the introverts will be listening to the discussion and processing it. Introverts will not speak up until they have had enough time to think, so be sure to allow the discussion to go long enough if you want their input. One way to do this is to allow silent pauses in the discussion to go on beyond the point that you would normally consider to be comfortable, because it can take that long for an introvert to decide to speak up. Other ways to draw introverts into the discussion include taking a “straw poll” and asking people to vote their preferences on a particular question (because once people have “expressed” their opinions by holding their hands up to vote, they are more likely to speak up), announcing a brief (two- to five-minute) exercise during which you will ask each audience member to write down their thoughts on the question and then share them, or breaking up the audience into small groups and asking them to discuss a particular point and then report back to the whole group.

Sensors vs. Intuitors

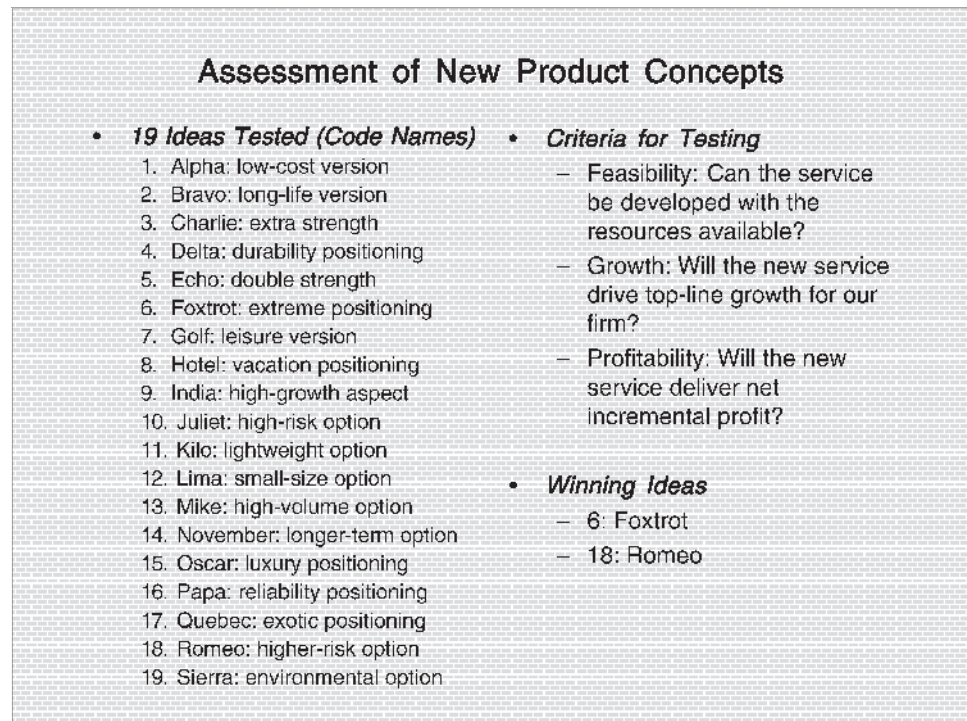
The second dimension is information: do audience members prefer to focus on the basic information they take in or do they prefer interpretation and added meaning? The former are called Sensors and the latter, Intuitors.

Sensors Sensors need to see all the facts and all the details. These should be included on the presentation page or slide, or at least in an appendix.

Intuitors Intuitors need the “big picture.” To satisfy the intuitors in your audience, you need to provide an overview at the beginning of your presentation.

Both Sensors and Intuitors Together This is one of the more challenging dimensions to address both sides simultaneously, and this is also where most people will stumble if they do not think explicitly about audience personality type and default to their own. If you are an intuitor, you tend to focus on the big picture, and the sensors in your audience may think you are a smooth-talking flake. If you are a sensor, you will present seventy-five slides of delicious (to you) detail, and the intuitors in the audience will want to shoot themselves (or you) before you reach slide 9.

The way to satisfy both sensors and intuitors is to provide both the concept and the details, ideally on the same page. For example, let's say that you are trying to communicate that your team has just assessed nineteen different new product concepts along three different criteria, and concluded that two of the ideas pass all the criteria. The sensors in your group will want to see what all of the nineteen ideas are, and what the criteria are, while the intuitors will really only be interested in the criteria and the two ideas that stood out. If you present all the details to satisfy the sensors, such as in the sample slide

FIGURE 1.1. Poor Design: Overwhelming Detail

in Figure 1.1, you are likely to overwhelm the intuitors in your audience. Alternatively, if you present only the big picture in something like Figure 1.2, to please the intuitors, then the sensors are going to be highly dissatisfied. What should you do?

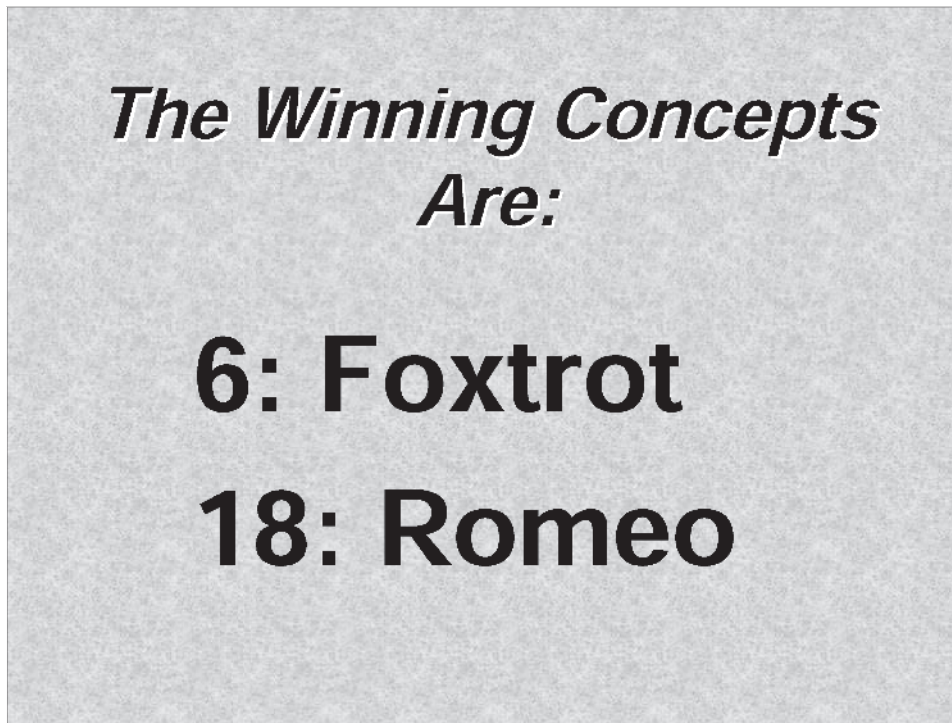
In principle, the way to satisfy both those who are detail-oriented (sensors) and conceptually oriented (intuitors) is to ensure that the layout of your page reflects the idea or main message of the page, while the details are then placed around the page in appropriate locations. This way the intuitors are happy because they see the concept and ignore the details, while the sensors focus mostly on the details. For our example, we have drawn the three criteria as screens across the slide, shown which of the nineteen ideas are screened out at each point, and placed the two winning ideas on the right, as you can see in Figure 1.3. (For a lot more information on how to do this, see Chapter 8, on layout.)

Thinkers vs. Feelers

The third dimension is about making decisions. The two sides of this dimension are called Thinkers, who prefer first to look at logic and consistency when making decisions, and Feelers, who prefer first to look at the people and special circumstances involved.

Thinkers To satisfy the thinkers in your audience, be sure to identify the principles, costs, and benefits involved with your recommendation.

Feelers The feelers in your audience will want to know what the implications of your recommendations are for the different people and stakeholder groups involved in your project.

FIGURE 1.2. Poor Design: Insufficient Detail

Both Thinkers and Feelers Together At one level, satisfying both thinkers and feelers is easy. The two different groups are looking for different kinds of data (data about principles, costs, and benefits for the thinkers and data about people for the feelers), and so all you need to do is provide both kinds, and both groups will be happy.

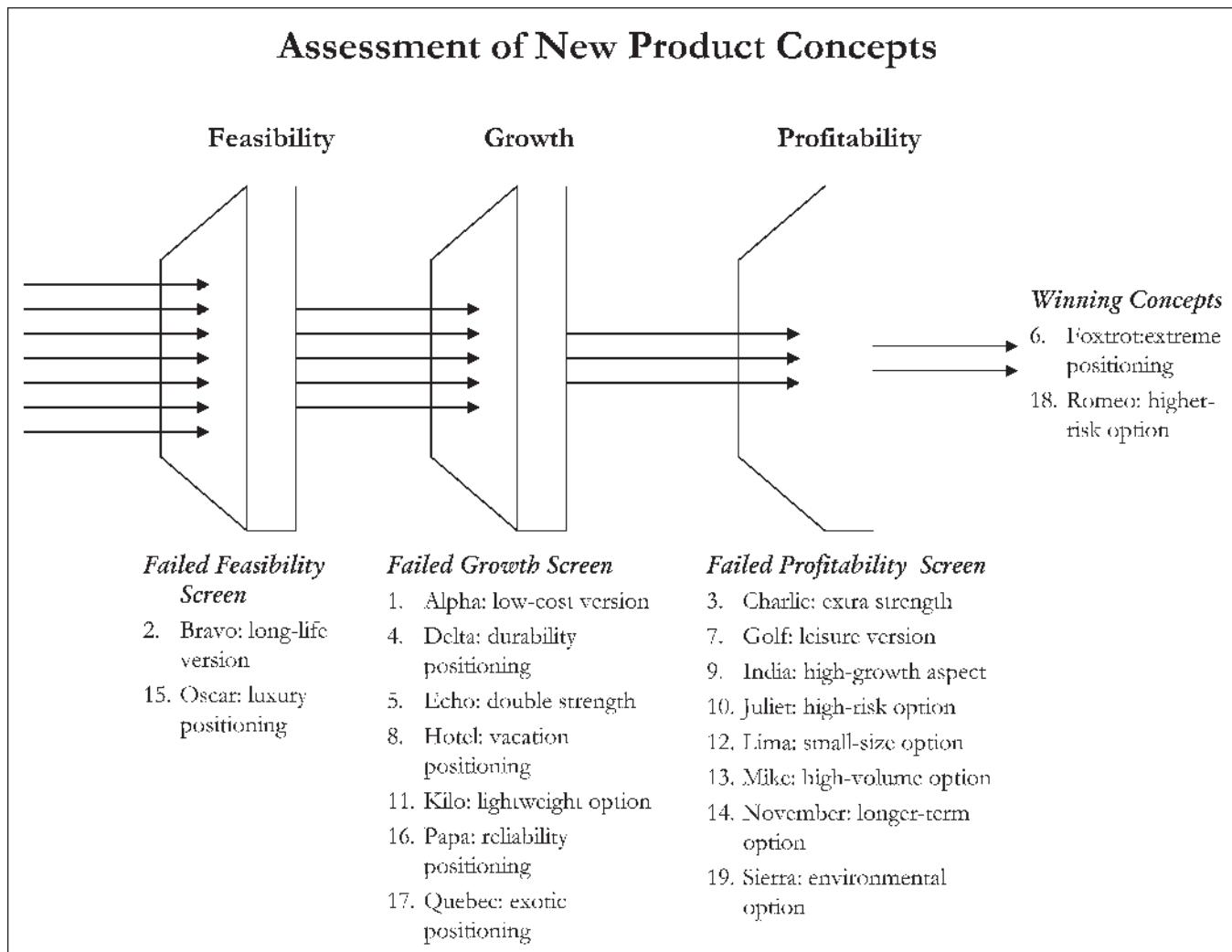
Where it can become difficult, however, is when thinkers are presenting to feelers. Some thinkers have great difficulty addressing “people issues”; it is almost a matter of principle for them not to allow people considerations to interfere with the logic of the recommendation. Anything else, for them, would indicate bias and lack of professionalism.

If you are one of these thinkers, it may help you to keep in mind that people implications are just another form of data—you are merely describing those implications, which does not bias your recommendation in any way. For example, you may be recommending a change to a new, more efficient system for—say—expense reporting. You know that staff are going to resist the change, even though ultimately they will benefit by saving time and avoiding errors. While a thinker might be inclined to dismiss such resistance as irrational, to a feeler this would appear to be a serious flaw in your recommendation. To satisfy the feelers in your audience, you should recognize this potential for resistance as additional data, and show how you are planning to deal with it.

Judgers vs. Perceivers

The final dimension is about structure: in dealing with the outside world, do your audience members prefer to decide things right away, or do they prefer to stay open to new

FIGURE 1.3. Good Design: Communicating Both Big Picture and Details Simultaneously



information and options? The two sides of this dimension are referred to as Judgers and Perceivers, respectively.

Judgers Judgers desperately need to know your conclusions up-front. They will not sit happily through any kind of inductive argument, no matter how carefully crafted. They need to know what your main point is, instantly. If you have a boss who is always pushing you to include an executive summary of your presentations or memos up-front, that boss is very likely a judger.

Perceivers Perceivers, on the other hand, want to know that you have considered all available options, and they would like to know what those options are. They want to be sure that you are not being too hasty in your recommendations and jumping to conclusions.

Both Judgers and Perceivers Together It is possible to satisfy both. The way to do this is to present your conclusions *and* the alternatives you considered, right up-front, on the first page.

All of this attempt to satisfy the various personality types may seem like a lot of effort. The main point of it, as we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, is to avoid defaulting to your own preferences. If you can ensure this without going through this exercise, perhaps just by quickly considering who will be in the room and which personality types are most different from your own, that will probably be sufficient. If you care about communicating effectively with people who do not have the same personality type as you do, then you do need to go through this first step at some level.

Additional Information About Your Audience

Before you move on, there is some further information about your audience that, if you can find it, you will find useful in the subsequent steps of the Extreme Presentation process. For Step 2, it will be helpful to know what your audience knows or believes about the issue that you are presenting. For Step 4 you would also like to know where your audience tends to find their information (e.g., which magazines they read, which blogs they follow) and which authorities they respect, so that you can incorporate information in your presentation that will be credible to them.

Now we know who we're presenting to, and how they need to be presented to, but we don't necessarily know yet exactly what we're trying to do. We will figure this out next, in Chapter 2.

