

The Key to Enterprise Support

Brain structure and the entrepreneur

Summary

- Personality profiling is well-established and brings differences in preference and aptitude into focus
- These differences tie to underlying brain structure
- Brain scans show that exercising natural aptitudes are far more efficient than working “out of type”
- Diagnosing preferred-type in Entrepreneurs is remarkably easy
- Appealing-to and capitalising-on brain efficiencies represents not just common sense but a fantastic opportunity for Enterprise Support organisations

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Personality Profiling

Although the popularity of personality profiling rises and falls like fashion, it's likely that most people from a corporate background will have been profiled at some point. Myers-Briggs and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) are two of the most popular, and both describe an individual's likely responses to a given situation – with remarkable accuracy.

That a set of common “traits” can be used to categorise human behaviour isn't surprising (who doesn't categorise themselves as Introverted or Extroverted for example?). But the fact *your own actions can be predicted* based on the results of an hour's paper-based survey can be rather unnerving.

That's not to say the indicators and predictors are perfect – all sorts of factors can influence our behaviour such as environment, social influences and even the amount of sleep you've had¹, but our default responses really are rather predictable. So much so that criminal investigation forces *across the world* use psychological profiling to extrapolate from specific, isolated acts to predict the sort of person that committed them – down to gender, age, even hair-colour.

Why Are We So Predictable?

As computers become more advanced and Artificial Intelligence comes closer to becoming a reality we're starting to realise that the human brain – and our consciousness, souls and the things that make us human – can be described very effectively using computer programming models.

The Turing Test

Back in 1950, one of the UK's greatest minds – Alan Turing – [set a test](#). He foretold that technology would become sufficiently advanced that we would be unable to tell, by questioning alone, between a computer and a human.

When this happens isn't the point (though it may be sooner than you think). The fact is, the junctions between the billions of neurones that make-up our brains are far more analogous to a computer processor than you might expect. And though our brains learn and change over time we really are “programmed” to respond to a given situation in a predictable way.

¹ Note that free-will and personal choice don't appear in this list. The deeper you dig into psychology and neuroscience the less the concept of free-will appears to be valid – we're all simply responding to the stimulæ around us according to our “programming”. Programmed by our biology, our upbringing, our experiences and the environment around us...

So What?

Aside from the resistance you're now feeling to the idea you don't really have as much free-will as you thought, there are some genuine benefits to better-understanding more about your personality – and that of your clients.

You'll have heard the term "left-brain thinker" (or right-brain of course). It's entered common language now – some people are more creative and some are more logical. And this does correspond to halves of the brain: one side of your brain is more involved in creative thinking than the other.

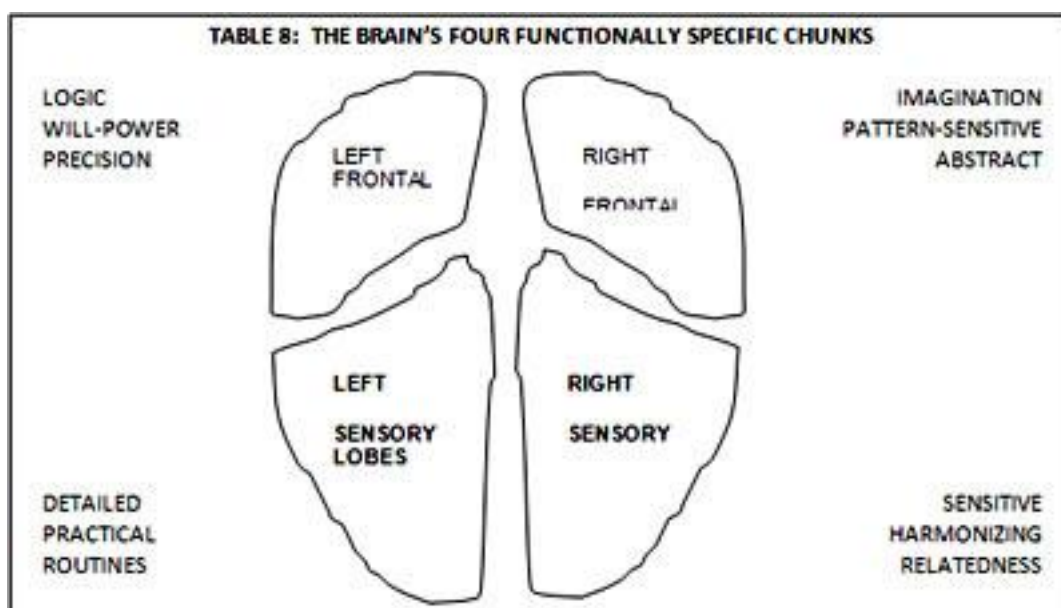
The Connection to Brain Structure

In the 1980s and 90s [Dr Katherine Benziger](#) used detailed MRI brain-scans to show that the connection to physical biology goes much further than simply left or right brain halves.

Not only are specific parts of our brains adapted to handle specific types of task, but in each person one particular area will be up to **one hundred times more efficient** at processing information than the others. Less energy is consumed, less heat is generated and we tire far less quickly. You, and every one of your clients, is naturally far more efficient at tackling tasks in a specific way.

This was a missing piece of the puzzle – this natural aptitude to handle things a particular way brought the studies of personality and brain structure together. It's no longer a mystery why we respond predictably. Not only have we learnt and been "programmed" by our experiences, but our brains find it much easier to respond a particular way.

The image below shows how the relevant brain sections are organised, and how they relate to specific mechanisms of thinking and tackling tasks:



The Key to Enterprise Support: Brain Structure and the Entrepreneur

Take a moment to look at labels in the corners of the image above. You will likely recognise that you naturally prefer a particular approach.

Planning Preference (Left Sensory Lobe):

You enjoy not only creating plans and processes, but following them. You're a traditional "completer-finisher", and make a fantastic project manager. You don't enjoy analysing problems down to the smallest detail, but really do enjoy ticking things off the list and getting things delivered.

People Preference (Right Sensory Lobe):

You get a buzz from interacting with people. Your idea of hell is being locked-up with a spreadsheet all day long. While you may still feel the nervousness of meeting new people, you find it easy and are naturally motivated to help people. People-people make fantastic leaders.

Creative Preference (Right Frontal Lobe):

You're innovative, creative and imaginative. You're not one for planning – but you can come up with incredible new ways to tackle problems or meet requirements. You may be artistic, with a natural eye for creating something that looks great.

Analytical Preference (Left Frontal Lobe):

You are a "numbers person". You find detailed analysis and logic enjoyable, probably found maths easy at school and you find creating checklists and breaking-things-down to be rewarding. You aren't quite so good at actually finishing things though because the challenge diminishes as you get into that final mile.

(This is quite a common preference for people who support startups – you will have come into the profession thanks to your natural aptitude with business and analysis. Unfortunately this also leads you to underestimate the difficulty others have with structured analysis and numbers.)

Diagnosing "Type"

One of the best ways to identify an individual's natural "type" is to look at what they do in their spare time.

- People who are "planners" will tend to be the organiser in the family – with lists of presents, plans for the weekends to come etc.
- "People-people" will have a large network of friends, and will tend to keep in touch with previous colleagues regularly. They choose to spend little time alone, preferring contact with others.
- Creatives will be "arty" – with hobbies and projects on the go such as painting, knitting, cross-stitch and so-on. Their skills help them to stand out.

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- Analytical minds will enjoy tackling detailed problems – they may enjoy computer programming, fixing cars or keep a close eye on world news.

Diagnosing Entrepreneurs

The great thing about working with entrepreneurs is that their business idea will likely reflect their natural preference. An artist will be creative, a mechanic will be analytical. But you will need to be aware and on the lookout for type when you meet them – listen-out for signs such as the type of task they're prioritising, what they see at their key role as a business-owner, and what they see themselves doing in a few years time.

The Implications

Benziger's research has a number of implications:

- We enjoy and are far better at some tasks than others because our brains have developed that way. This is decided very early in our brain development and isn't something that can be changed.
- If we tackle tasks that are not suited to our biological aptitude we tire more quickly – and stress ensues. In fact it goes far deeper – **consistently trying to perform “out-of-type” activities can result in changes to brain chemistry, depression and even immune system alterations.**

Though this means that whole groups of activities are harder for us to execute, it doesn't mean the objectives need to be difficult to achieve. **It means we should tackle tasks in a way that suits our natural aptitude.**

The Opportunity

Clearly there is an opportunity afoot: Present tasks so you and your clients can tackle them in a way that energises and engages them rather than causes stress. We all avoid things we don't like, so be smart and approach things in a way that suits the individual.

There aren't very many optional activities when setting-up a business. However, many of the mandatory ones can be tackled several ways. **Choosing a mechanism that suits the individual will mean not-only do they enjoy the activity more, but they will do it more thoroughly and effectively.**

Every enterprise agency, university and accountant has a series of steps they take new businesses through. The chances are you relate to those steps in a way that suits your personal type. Get that list out now, and take a moment to put yourself in each of the other 3 “types” and think how you could tackle these steps in a way that would suit you better.

For example:

Market research

Market research can be executed by trawling through reports in the library and reading white-papers on trends and market size. That would suit an analytical type. But it wouldn't suit a people-person. Those might be better to start with social media, competitor blogs and even get out there and meet people to ask what they'd pay for the product and why.

The objective is still the same – understand whether there is a market for your product and how big it is – but there are different ways to tackle it.

Create a Business Plan Document

While the business plan draws lots of other strings together, it's an exercise that planners will naturally enjoy if they build it as a series of connected steps. Giving them a template will be very valuable – but they'll need to be able to see progress as they go.

Creatives will find the process of creating a business plan tedious and will want to get on with creating. So break it down into groups of challenges requiring solutions, rather than a monolithic document. They can be innovative with how they identify new markets, how they plan to sell to them and how they're going to produce their goods. Tackling the business plan as a set of opportunities to be creative will unleash their passion for the business rather than associating it with a mind-numbing Word file march.

Financial Plan

The good news is that analytical types will get-on well with a spreadsheet. They're unlikely to be happy with the one you give them though – so they will add to it, change things and so-on. You'll need to spend time afterwards checking through their new formulae in order to be confident they're seeing the right answers – but they will enjoy doing it.

Other types find the numbers harder to get into. Display things to them visually, with constant feedback. Planners will want to know they are making progress – and big tables of numbers don't do that. Help them build-up graphs and models a piece at a time and they will get truly stuck into the process.

Creatives and people-people will need that same visual feedback to keep them motivated – but they will have less patience for breakdowns in formulae. They will find it harder to cherry-pick the information they need, so presenting them very clearly with break-even points, margins and so on is crucially important. That's if you can engage them at all – there is little likelihood people of this type will engage with entering numbers into a spreadsheet unless they see immediate feedback and value from it.

Summary

Every enterprise programme is different – that's part of the value you add, and the reason people come to you. So take a moment to look down the list of deliverables and steps you take people through, and think how you can deliver them in a way that treats your clients as individuals. If you struggle or hit any challenges, [get in touch](#). Our success depends on yours – and we really are passionate about breaking down barriers for entrepreneurs.

Their experience of business will depend heavily on whether they find the activities enjoyable or a drudge, and there's no need – no excuse – for them to be a drudge. Sadly the impact is far higher than just a feedback score – if people start-off disliking their business plan or the numbers that define their success they won't bother. And that can only mean one thing – a weaker business.

If you'd like to know more about thinking-styles (diagnosing them and capitalising on them), Katherine Benziger's book (1) is a great place to start. She has developed a diagnosis assessment called the BTSA which is available here: benziger.org

About Finanscapes

Designed specifically to meet the needs of startups and the organisations that support them, Finanscapes is an intuitive and robust financial forecasting tool developed with reference to user psychology and feedback. Equipped with an administration console it allows organisations to manage users and mentors centrally and securely, with at-a-glance login and completion metrics and full remote access to user forecasts.

Better-informed decision-making means stronger businesses, so each license allows the entrepreneur to create an unlimited number of forecasts and scenarios, with no fear of broken formulae or errors alienating them. The software is provided securely, “in the cloud” meaning you can be using it with your clients in minutes, with no operational overheads or maintenance.

And it’s priced per user so it pays-back within the first week in mentor cost savings alone. Once your clients truly “own” the numbers you’ll never go back.

Email us at enterprise@finanscapes.com.

Other Articles in this Series

This article is one of a series of papers put together for Finanscapes based on academic and market research, and feedback from their clients. If you would like to receive others (such as “**Mind the Gap: the 5 things start-ups need that you aren’t giving them**”) please email enterprise@finanscapes.com.

References

1. **Benziger, Katherine.** *Thriving in Mind: The Art & Science of Using Your Whole Brain.* s.l. : K B a Pub, 2000.