



Finally - big data and self-learning algorithms discover four new personality types. Good target groups for marketing?

Everyone knows these typical personality tests that continuously rejoice the readers of women's magazines. As entertaining as completely unscientific. There are also personality tests in human resources, the most well-known of which is Myers-Briggs, based on the Jungian archetype. This one might seem intuitively plausible - but it does not withstand the scientific reviews. Nevertheless, it is still used. It is just too tempting to divide employees into groups – and it is also a good business.

By contrast, many psychologists have come to conclude that there are probably no precise personality types. Of course, there are personality traits, such as the so-called Big Five (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism). These have been confirmed by many studies. Nevertheless, there have been no convincing approaches that could form stable, clearly differentiating types from these traits.

But now a huge study with 1.5 million people comes to the conclusion that there are indeed four types¹ (thanks to the BrainCandy reader Dr. Stockmann). A good, concise description of how the researchers have worked can be found here². It is interesting to me that they have not found a satisfactory solution with the usual cluster analyzes that we also use in market research.

So what kind of types are we talking about? The reputable Süddeutsche Zeitung already described these four groups with great relish³. „For example, the largest group, the **average person**: Accordingly, the types of people being described as average are characterized by the fact that they are emotionally not very stable and easily offended. Although they act sociable, they are not really open to new experiences. Women are a little more common in this group than men. “

I'm already glad that there are no such narrow-minded people among us BrainCandy readers. Let's take a quick look at the next group: „The **reserved** type, however, sounds rather boring, because he is emotionally stable, but neither very open-minded nor very sociable. On the other hand, these contemporaries are conscientious, able to compromise and not immediately hurt if they cannot enforce their wishes and ideas. “

This also doesn't sound like an inspiring target group for an ambitious product manager, does it? „The third type, which the scientists refer to as a **role model**, is open, sociable, reliable, and tolerable and, in addition, hardly offendable – seems like the ideal cast for many life situations. This type occurs more often with increasing age. More women than men belong to this group “. Sounds a bit more interesting - could be a pleasant colleague. However, it's also not a nice model for positioning.



„The **self-centered** type, on the other hand, is sociable, but not very empathetic, takes little consideration, is not very reliable, but easily offended. Male adolescents and young men are particularly strongly represented in this group.” Sounds more realistic than many of the circulating millennial glorifications, right?

Do you realize that these four types are also formed by age? This obviously means that personality types are not forever written in stone but that personality changes over time, considering a person’s environment and in life experience. This is also discussed in a new book by Jule Specht⁴. The psychologist criticizes the trend toward egalitarianism and concludes that changes in personality over time are very likely - and that these are more likely a response to someone’s environment than an internal development, as the flock of self-optimizing coaches would like you to think.

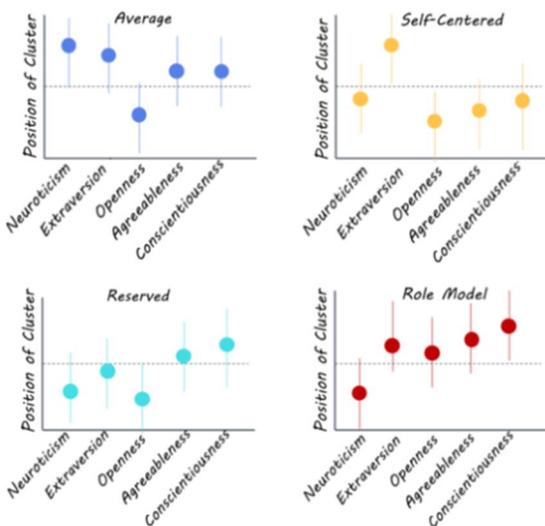


Figure: The four types according to the Big Five

We can certainly all come up with an immediate picture, a kind of caricature, of the four types in our head. Check. But now start assigning your friends to these four groups. All of a sudden, you realize that there are much more complex characters than just the 'normal', the reserved or the reliable role models. So what is the practical benefit of these four types? The researchers are also not sure yet. Similar to Myers-Briggs, they could maybe be used in the professional world, if for example work efficiency or teamwork should correlate. More research is needed. (Incidentally, many respondents could not be assigned to any of these types!)

For practical marketing you would need much more than this typification. Because these types would only become interesting to us if they also show a 'typical' behavior, especially in terms of buying. Earlier typifications have failed exactly at this point. Even the popular milieus correlate only weakly with buying behavior, especially if one disregards income. People are much more complex than we would like them to be. And our buying behavior is probably too little determined by our personality. Much more often, our life experiences, social contexts, and current feelings/hormones play a weighty role in buying situations. Understanding the contexts in which or for which people make (buying) decisions seems to be much more meaningful to marketing than targeting types. Unfortunately, we do not really realize, how strongly contexts influence us. Therefore, some current examples from research.



Shared happiness is double happiness? That's how we like to experience it sometimes. The case as shown by marketing professor Rajesh Bhargave, Imperial College London, may be more frequent. Test participants were allowed to make pleasant experiences. As soon as they learned that others had these experiences as well, the enjoyment quickly became dull⁵. If too many share our current preferences, we probably need new ones faster to get our thrill. We are not aware of this - and it has nothing to do with types, but only with the experiential context of our shared enjoyment.

How do you get people to get vaccinated? Currently the discussion is once again raging, how to improve the immunization of the population. A lot is being written about vaccine deniers. People try to persuade them. A meta-analysis by Noel T. Brewer of the University of North Carolina comes to a different conclusion⁶. Non-vaccination is more influenced by the life situation than by actual vaccination rejection. Consequently, the authors recommend influencing the behavior, not the attitude. If paediatricians stay firm, if general practitioners send timely vaccination reminders to everyone, as dentists have learned, and if unvaccinated children are not allowed to visit certain facilities (Italy as role model), then the behavior changes without new convictions being required.

People just have to think about too many things nowadays. It works if you understand this context and help them with it.

In BrainCandy, I will show more practical examples of the great importance of contexts in the future. Also, because I'm always surprised of how non-independent my own decisions are as well.

Sources:

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Book Recommendations

By Ralph Ohnemus:

Markenerleben. Die Strategie im Hyperwettbewerb und Informationstsunami [> order here](#)

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