

# **SELECTING SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The literature on the effectiveness of teachers is replete with studies addressing student evaluation of instructors. What may not be garnering adequate attention is the instructor's personality. Our pilot study resulted in significant correlations of student evaluations and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator instructor characteristics of Intuiting and Judging. Our study also found the use of humor and existence of classroom policies did not affect the student evaluations. Such characteristics and pedagogical beliefs might be important to assess when screening future applicants for faculty positions. Finally, the newer evaluation format resulted in significantly higher ratings than the previous long-standing evaluation format.

## **BACKGROUND**

Our students often ask whether management is an art or a science. "Art" can be viewed as the skills necessary to be an effective an effective manager, "science" could be considered the knowledge needed to successfully manage. The answer is that competent managers need to possess both attributes. Thus, selection of faculty that combines these characteristics with personality traits that complement student learning modalities can be a daunting task for academic institutions.

The literature on education is replete with research addressing student evaluation of instructors with regard to teaching effectiveness, student learning, and a myriad of other outcomes (including reactions by faculty and students to the use of student evaluations). [5] [22] Ambady and Rosenthal found that instructors rated on a number of personality traits (e.g. confident, dominant, optimistic, etc.) were very good predictors of end-of semester evaluations by the instructor's students. [2] Later studies have obtained similar results showing that audience ratings of a lecture are more strongly influenced by superficial stylistic matters than content. The research has undoubtedly been dissected, discussed, debated, digested, and even dismissed by administrators and faculty. Yet, there continue to be student evaluations of faculty because they serve a useful (albeit sometimes questionable) tool for purposes of retention, promotion, tenure, and merit pay increase decisions by administrators. [7]

## **Issue**

Colleges and universities try various methods of screening and/or evaluating faculty applicants. Typical searches for new faculty members include a variety of methods including interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of resumes, letters of recommendation, and academic credentials. None of these guarantee that a prospective faculty member will engage students and earn noteworthy End-of-Course (EOC) student evaluations of teaching (SETs).

The ability to engage students in the learning process can be a major determinant of teaching success. Thus, one question is “what constitutes ‘engagement’ and how is it best achieved?” Past research has examined the relationship between “instructor expressiveness” and SETs. Naftulin, Ware, and Donnelly concluded that instructor expressiveness influenced EOC SETs more than teacher effectiveness. [19] Marsh and Roche reported that instructor expressiveness tended to be more related to ratings of enthusiasm than any other factors. [19] Acikgoz suggested the classroom climate established by the instructor’s personality influences SETs. [1] Perhaps EOC SETs are less focused on the instructor’s technical or pedagogical competence or professional qualities and more focused on what instructor’s personality. [3] In regard to the best classroom personality, McDevitt suggests the faculty member remember “it is your personality and you must come up with an approach that fits you. [19]

Speculating about what “makes” or “is” a successful teacher is easier than actually achieving the moniker. An instructor’s personality is relatively established and it is difficult to become someone you are not just to earn desirable student ratings. What is achievable is coming up with an approach to teaching that fits you. [18] Typical characteristics from which every teacher can benefit include a sense of humor, a positive attitude, high expectations, consistency, fairness, and flexibility. [2] Many of these characteristics may influence SETs but they do not guarantee teaching success.

A lingering question still goes unanswered: “Which hiring criteria portend the most effective teacher?” Generally, the desired characteristics of any faculty member are a combination of proven or potential scholarly activities that supplement a masterfully constructed instructional pedagogy with noteworthy classroom presence that captures student attention and promotes learning.

Our combined experience in higher education leads us to conclude that certain faculty members consistently receive accolades for their teaching acumen. Instructor variables (e.g., gender, age, and professional background) and system variables (e.g., course subject matter, required or optional course, and grade distributions) have no apparent bearing on who the students designate as top notch instructors. This leads us to believe that the instructor’s personality is the most influential variable.

In turn, the instructor’s personality influences many factors (e.g., course design and interactions with students. Considering this and the potential benefit of using a meaningful predictor of teaching effectiveness in the hiring process, we conducted a pilot study to determine whether a relationship exists between EOC SETs and personality evidenced from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Because this was an exploratory study, we also investigated other measures of personality (i.e., Emotional Intelligence, use of humor, agreeableness), number of years teaching in higher education, and enforcement of classroom policies. Finally, we compared the average ratings of the two forms of SETs.

## **MBTI**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) survey is designed to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. These preferences are based on Carl Gustav Jung theory that there are four principal psychological functions by which we experience the world: sensation, intuition, feeling, and thinking. [12] He asserted that one of these four functions is dominant most of the time. Isabel Myers and Kathryn Briggs added measures for extraversion versus introversion and judging versus perceiving. [14] The four sets of preferences are briefly described below.

People who prefer *extraversion* (*E*) draw energy from action and reflect before they act again while

those who prefer *introversion (I)* reflect before acting and reflect again. *Sensing types (S)* are likely to trust information that is in the present, tangible, and concrete. *Intuiting types (N)* typically trust information that is more abstract or theoretical and that can be associated with other information. They may be more interested in future possibilities. The *thinking (T)* and *feeling (F)* functions are used to make rational decisions. Those who prefer *thinking* tend to make decisions objectively—measuring decisions by what seems reasonable, logical, causal, consistent, and match a set of rules. Those who prefer *feeling* typically make decisions by through empathy considering the needs of the people involved. Finally, *judging (J)* and *perceiving (P)* orientations represent two ways people prefer to organize their worlds and live their lives. [8] *Judging types* prefer a planned, ordered world that is decisive while *Perceiving types* are more flexible and spontaneous.

Capraro and Capraro reported the following acceptable reliabilities for the MBTI (Cronbach's Alpha; EI = .79, SN=.84, TF = .72, and JP = .82). [4] Furthermore, they reported test-retest coefficients to be relatively stable over time.

The MBTI has been used to predict various professions. Barry and Yates asserted that the MBTI provides a helpful comprehensive model that is helpful when addressing teaching and learning. [3] Yet, the MBTI is not commonly used in in this context. [9] Nevertheless, Rushton, Morgan, and Richard reported that a national study of 189 teachers who fit all but ISTP or INFJ profiles. [20]

Given the variability of instructor and student preferences, the MBTI is typically used to help the instructor become (more) aware of his/her type so that adjustments to teaching techniques can be adjusted to fit MBTI profiles of his/her students. Yet, college instructors may have all 16 MBTI profiles in their classes. [20] Thus, we posit that an instructor's dominating type may stay dominant because of the difficulty to adapt to each student's learning profile.

Certain MBTI profiles are more associated with teaching than others. The ENFJ profile could be a good teacher, fluent presenter, persuasive, charismatic, sociable and active—all appropriate traits for engaging today's college students. [6] [14] Keirse.com identifies the ENFJ profile as the "Teacher." [13] In education, people with this profile are drawn to be college professors or high school teachers. Sears, Kennedy, Kay, & Gail reported that *\_NTJ* were more attracted to careers in secondary teaching. [21]

Based on the above discussion, we expect that differences in SETs will be associated with the profiles in each of the pairs of MBTI characteristics: EI, SN, TF, and JP. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we will not investigate complete MBTI profiles.

In conclusion, we conducted a pilot study to validate a suspected correlation between personality characteristics as measured by the MBTI assessment and university form of SETs. We also investigated classroom policies, self-described interpersonal traits, and the application of humor in the classroom. The underlying purpose of our research was not so much to validate other researchers' findings but to suggest strategic approaches to hiring future faculty members for Management Departments.

## METHOD

### Organizational Context

Our pilot study included the 16 faculty members of the Management Department in a School of Business located at a large western urban university. The University is accredited by HLC and the

business school is in the candidacy stage of AACSB accreditation planning for the visitation team to arrive 2015. We studied these faculty members because many are acknowledged for generally earning commendable end-of-course SETs in one of the most sought after academic programs. Because the university has a teaching mission, teaching is given a higher priority by faculty and administrators than at other universities with research missions.

### **Demographics of Sample**

The sample included eight male and six female faculty members. Nine were tenured and the other five were tenure-track faculty—all of whom were one year from going up for tenure. The number of years taught at the university level ranged from 5 to 38 years. The faculty members' terminal degrees included Ph.D. in Business Administration (7), Industrial/Organizational Psychology (1), Social Psychology (1), Education (1), and Administration/Sports Administration (1). In addition, one faculty member had a Doctorate in Management and two had Juris Doctorates.

The faculty members typically taught four sections each semester with two to three preparations each semester. EOCs were administered during Fall and Spring semesters. The faculty members taught the typical management courses (e.g., organizational behavior, operations management, international management, strategic management) with several elective courses in business law, entrepreneurship/small business, operations, and human resource management.

The instructors were evenly split among extroverted and introverted preferences. A few more than half indicated a preference for intuiting, thinking, and perceiving. Since the differences in the scores were slight, one conclude they were evenly split in each of the four MBTI preferences.

During the time frame of our pilot study, the average student age was 26 years old. The students attended day and night classes. The majority of the students were business majors or minors many of whom also work part-time or full-time jobs. The university was mainly a commuter campus.

### **Measures**

The surveys were distributed in paper form. Of the 16 Management faculty members, 14 faculty members responded to the survey resulting in an 87.5% response rate.

The SETs were administered (in paper form) during the last 35 days of Fall and Spring semesters during 2011 and 2012. Instructors decided which class period to have the SETs filled out by the students and whether to have them administered at the start or end of class. The process was overseen by students with no instructor present in the classroom. Students were not required to fill out the SETs.

Two forms of SETs were used during the time period included in this pilot. The older long-standing format included four summary questions (Course as a Whole, Course content, Contribution to the Course, and Effectiveness in Teaching Subject). These four questions were preceded by 18 questions including course organization, clarity of instructor's voice, and availability of extra help. The Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 SETs were in the older format.

The newer SET format was first used during Fall 2011. This format included only the first and third of those summary questions: Course as a Whole and Contribution to the Course. Each of these two summary questions was followed by a box with lines to encourage unscripted student comments. Thus,

the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 SETs were in the newer format. All of the SET questions in either format used the same Likert scale (1=very poor, 2=poor, 3=fair, 4=good, 5=very good, and 6=excellent).

To assess the MBTI characteristics, the participants answered a forced choice 32 item Personality Assessment: Jung's Typology published in Daft and Marcic. [6]

A list of additional variables we measured is presented in Table 1. Agreeableness (part of the Big Five Factors) was measured by three items and four types of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) were measured with two items each. [6] (The scale ranged from Very Inaccurate to Very Accurate) The application of humor in the classroom was measured through eight items extracted from a list of questions utilized by Makewa, Role, and Genga. [16] (The scale items were Never, Seldom, Often, and Frequently.)

**TABLE 1**  
**VARIABLES MEASURED IN ADDITION TO MBTI**

- Which policies do you consistently enforce during class? (*check all that apply*)
  - texting/phone usage;
  - computer use during class;
  - side conversations with others;
  - none of them
  
- Agreeableness:
  - I am kind and sympathetic.
  - I have a good word for everyone.
  - I never insult anyone.
  
- Emotional Intelligence
  - I am aware of my emotions. (Self-Awareness)
  - I have good sense of why I have certain feelings. (Self-Awareness)
  - I am slow to react to others' slight or negative actions toward me. (Self-Management)
  - I calm down right away if upset and am quick to forgive. (Self-Management)
  - I can tell my friends moods from their behavior. (Social Awareness)
  - I often sense the impact of my words or behavior on others. (Social Awareness)
  - I am good at building consensus among others. (Relationship Management)
  - Other people are happier when I am around. (Relationship Management)
  
- Use of humor with students and/or in class
  - I usually laugh or joke with my students.
  - I am willing to and always make my students laugh by telling humorous stories about myself.
  - I usually lie to tell jokes or amuse my students in other ways.
  - I usually can think of witty things to say when I'm with students.
  - I often play jokes with my students to make fun.
  - When I say something funny, most students usually will laugh.
  - Making students laugh is my natural way to communicate.
  - If a student has a shortcoming, I often will tease him/her about it.
  - If a student made a mess of something, I often will tease him/her.

## RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are available upon request. In regard to the MBTI characteristics, all of the SETs (except Fall 2010) were positively correlated with Intuition (N). The correlations with Contribution to the Course for Spring 2011, Fall 2011, and Spring 2020 were .63, .59, and .50 respectively ( $p < .05$ ) and with Course as a Whole for the same semesters were .67, .67, and .54 respectively ( $p < .05$ ). Only Contribution to the Course using the older version of SETs (Fall 2010) were positively correlated with Judging (J),  $r = .55$ ,  $p < .05$ . No correlations of SETs with Introvert/Extravert (IE) or Thinking/Feeling (TF) were significant.

The interpersonal traits (e.g., EQ) and use of humor indicated no significant correlations in SETs. We also compared SET means using other variables as moderators. The existence and enforcement of classroom policies did not result in significant differences in any of the SETs.

We also combined like SET formats. For both SET questions, the newer format resulted in significantly higher SETs than the previous format,  $p < .001$ . The means and standard deviations for the Course as a Whole in the new and previous formats were 5.09 (SD=.41) and 4.66 (SD=.77) respectively and Contribution to the Course were 5.33 (SD=.42) and 4.98 (SD=.82) respectively.

Finally, Years Teaching was negatively correlated with the older SET format (Fall 2010 and Spring 2011) for Course as a Whole,  $r = -.529$ ,  $p = .052$ , and Contribution to the Course,  $r = -.554$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## CONCLUSION

The most successful instructors are a special breed who play a multitude of different roles in a given day with fluidity and grace while remaining true to themselves [4]. The construction, administration and interpretation of SETs play a considerable role in the validity and reliability of ratings. Interestingly enough, students and faculty agree that instructor's personality is relatively important.

Our pilot study indicated the MBTI could help identify one personality type (Intuiting) which resulted in higher SETs. We also found that the SET format and years teaching influenced student ratings of instructors. This indicates SETs are influenced by factors other than personality and teaching prowess.

Our sample size was too small to allow us to investigate different MBTI profiles and other potential influences. The Emotional Intelligence (EQ) questions did not present a complete set of EQ questions and may have limited the potential to ascertain how EQ influences SETs. A larger sample in one field (e.g., Management) or investigating more fields represented in Schools of Business may better reveal the influence of the variables investigated in our exploratory study.

Whether personality should be a deciding or even predominant factor in hiring is debatable. Just as with stage performers, an instructor can be taught or learn the correct lines but without an innate personality delivering the lines as scripted to go with the performance the audience will want a refund.

## REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST