

# What are you like?

How much of a part does personality play in the success of therapy?

**Eric Foggitt** introduces us to the Enneagram and explains the difference it can make to our personal and professional development, workplace relationships and clinical outcomes.

READ THIS IF YOU WANT TO

- BRING OUT YOUR BEST SIDE
- HELP CLIENTS UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES MORE
- ENJOY GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Some years ago I was responsible for organising in-service training for my colleagues. I set up a day course entitled *Why did I do that?* led by a visiting speaker who had written and spoken widely on the topic. It was fascinating and, as usual for such study days, provoked many more new questions than it answered. The course title remained with me and reared its head in many different situations, whether at work, in relationships or thinking about politics. "Why did I do that?" is an awkward question because the answer, if truth be told, is often "I don't know!" Think of the times when we react to a situation in a particular way then berate ourselves for being so foolish, or when we establish an instant rapport with someone, or when a new colleague says something fairly anodyne which brushes us up the wrong way and we take a dislike to them.

The Enneagram is a psychodynamic way of answering the question. Based on very ancient thinking rooted in Egyptian, Hebrew and early Christian and Sufi Muslim ideas, it has been transformed in recent years by followers of Karl Gustav Jung and others into a sophisticated and fascinating system giving insights into our own and others' characters. What makes it enticing is the availability of testing resources on the internet and increasing access to training opportunities. I hope in this article to whet your appetite by opening up some of the possibilities the Enneagram offers speech and language therapists.

The Greek words for nine - "ennea" - and word - "gramma" - provide a starting-point in understanding what the Enneagram is about. There are nine basic personality types and everyone fits into one of them. Each type has variants, and people also differ in their maturity, experience and culture, so any two individuals of the same type may not look at first sight very similar at all.

Why are there only nine different types? Put most simply, there is a limit to the resources we have to deal with the world. We can use our 'heads' (thoughts and concepts) or our 'hearts' (feelings and emotions) or our 'bodies' (gut instincts and passion). It doesn't matter where we localise these abilities; different cultures and languages vary in this. All that matters for the present is that we recognise these three sets of abilities.

Type	Positive qualities	Manifestations	Problems
1	Conscientious and ethical, with a strong sense of right and wrong. At best: wise, discerning, even heroic.	Teachers, crusaders, advocates for change. Striving to improve things.	Resentment and impatience. Critical.
2	Empathetic, sincere, and warm-hearted. At best: altruistic and loving.	Carers and counsellors. Friendly, generous and self-sacrificing. Close to others.	Sentimentality and flattery.
3	Self-assured, attractive and charming. At best: authentic role-models.	Diplomatic and poised; ambitious and competent. Team players.	Concern with image and competitiveness.
4	Self-aware, sensitive, and reserved. At best: inspired and creative.	Emotionally honest, empathetic and personal.	Self-pity and moodiness.
5	Alert, insightful, and curious. At best: visionary pioneers.	Independent, innovative, and inventive. Scientists. Good with ideas and theories.	Isolated and intense; eccentric.
6	Committed and security-oriented. At best: stable, self-reliant and brave.	Troubleshooters who foresee problems; foster cooperation; hard working, reliable.	Decision-making and excess caution.
7	Extroverted, optimistic and spontaneous. At best: focused and joyful.	Talented and practical; versatile and efficient. Self-starters.	Focus and discipline.
8	Self-confident, strong and assertive. At best: inspiring and brave leaders.	Resourceful, straight-talking and decisive; controlling. Able and willing to take charge.	Vulnerability and anger.
9	Accepting, trusting and stable. At best: indomitable conflict-healers.	Quiet and likeable; optimistic and supportive; peace-makers.	Inertia and conflict.

All of us use all three, but we have preferences which we're more comfortable with than the others, just as we are usually more skilled with one hand than the other. Our preferences determine our type. Types 2, 3 and 4 are said to be 'heart types' who are much influenced by feelings; 5, 6 and 7 'head types' who are more comfortable with thinking; and 8, 9 and 1 'gut' or 'body' types who are more instinctual and passionate.

While fuller information on the different types can be readily found at the Enneagram Institute website, table 1 provides a very rough outline of the nine types. You may find it helpful to think about yourself and others you know as you read through it. The outlines are simply shorthand caricatures which do not do justice to the intricate complexity

of each type; nor do they take into account variations due to personal experiences, mood, lifestyle and local culture. Although no-one actually changes type, we may mature and become more peaceable, wise or effective as we deal with the demands of life, or we may become more stressed and 'out of balance', with the result that other attitudes, feelings and behaviours come to the fore. Thus there are very wide variations within each type.

How can we determine which type someone fits into? The Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI) is a self-assessment tool created by the Enneagram Institute to enable accurate typing. Its availability on the internet makes it very easy to access, and studies (such as Newgent, 2001) have confirmed its accuracy (well in excess of 75 per cent) as well as its

correlation with better-known tests such as Costa & McCrae's NEO PI-R. Anyone with an interest in the subject and ready to part with \$10 is able to complete the RHETI online.

Other tools are also available such as the screening-type technique outlined in Riso & Hudson (1999). On the other hand, simply studying in-depth outlines of each type may be more helpful to others. It is axiomatic to this approach that we are the best judges of our own type. Whilst I may have an opinion about someone else's type, and that opinion may help me in better relating to that person, ultimately it is the individual's right to have the final say.

## Deep insight

There are five main ways in which the Enneagram may be helpful to speech and language therapists. Firstly, it will be of personal interest to many therapists simply wanting to get some insight into their own personalities. "Why did I do that?" is an important question, and the correct answer helps us get to the root of who we are, what we are like and what kind of work we should do. Many of us who have engaged in Enneagram training have found that it changes the way we treat people and adds depth to our relationships because it enables deep insight into others' attitudes and needs.

Secondly, as discussed recently in this magazine (Middlemiss, 2009), conflicts at work can be a source of considerable stress. Understanding their cause (and we may be part of the problem as often as the solution!) will offer us a way forward in resolving them. It may be that one colleague (a type 5, for instance) takes a very rational approach, whereas another (a type 4) approaches it with a greater degree of emotional intelligence. But the former may berate the latter for being overly indulgent and emotional, while the latter might complain that the other is too cold and distant. The truth is, both approaches have their value. The Enneagram offers us mutual understanding, so that we can work better together and benefit from each other's strengths rather than complain about each other's weaknesses.

Thirdly, we recognise that we come to the therapeutic situation not as cold, distant professionals but as human beings. Firstly we bring our humanity, then we bring our skills. The Enneagram helps us with the Burnsian task (as in his poem 'To a Louse') of seeing ourselves as others see us, hence enabling us to modify our behaviours so as to establish a better rapport with clients. We may come over as somewhat cold, or as controlling, or even as overly emotional. The notion that we can maintain a professional and impersonal façade is of course naïve, as our real personalities find a way to break through.

Fourthly, and again touching on areas recently covered in the excellent *Winning Ways* series, the Enneagram helps in professional development. Some types work independently more easily than others; some will work as team players whilst others will be



Eric says of himself:

**I am a type 7, which means I am a "head" type. I am good at initiative and I enjoy many varied challenges. Although I don't need a lot of encouragement to keep going, I resent too many restrictions and rules, because freedom is a strong root need for me. Like many 7s I am good with languages – I speak four fairly fluently – but I don't have good "emotional antennae". I have a lot of inner energy, but I can come over as too strong and assertive without realising it. Work-wise I have had a varied career, because staying in the same post – or rather doing the same kind of work – would be boring. I have a good deal of autonomy, and I flourish this way. I am good at getting things done, being more task-focused than person-focused, but I recognise my need to have people near me who will attend to those things I do less well, such as detail!**

pioneers; some will be enthusiasts who need a light touch management approach and others will be highly effective plodders attending to detail. Without proper self-understanding it is easy to either fall into the wrong job, or indeed to fail to move on into the greater demands of another one. Self-understanding will also reveal the needs that we have from work: for instance, the satisfaction of client progress, or the reward of thanks, or the sense that we have helped someone function better. Higher pay may be very welcome for those who are adept at the exercise of power, but for the expert clinician the reduced client workload may make it a very mixed blessing.

Finally, with in-depth Enneagram training, therapists may be able to offer help to their clients. Fransella's work with Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (Fransella, 1972; Fransella *et al.*, 2004) has helped many people who stammer and others to gain a better understanding of themselves and of the inner conflicts which can cause stammering. The Enneagram offers a psychodynamic perspective enabling a wide range of clients to gain insights into their own behaviour, which in turn helps in remediation.

We can see the Enneagram as a psychological tool which helps us to assess our clients' personalities more deliberately and objectively than we usually do. It is commonplace to suggest that we make all sorts of judgments about people unconsciously. Even before they have spoken to us we have observed

their clothing, hair colour and style, and body language and drawn our conclusions. While we routinely find comments in clients' notes such as the vague ("Mr X is a nice gentleman") or subjective ("A likeable lady of 84") or value-laden ("Jim is difficult and resentful"), the Enneagram provides us with more objective terms. These aim to outline the client's personality rather than simply reflect our biases and, indeed, our own personalities.

The Enneagram therefore helps us to respond to client needs more effectively and is a powerful tool in the task of ensuring client-centred care. The rational, slightly distant type 5, for instance, will probably want us to stick to the facts and get on with assessment and therapy, whereas the sensitive and self-aware type 4 will probably need careful handling of their feelings beforehand. Moreover, some types will appeal to us personally more than others, because of our own type. (How many of us have had the experience of clicking with one client, but just failing to gel with another?) Bringing these facts into the open and dealing with them accordingly helps us start the therapist-client relationship on a better footing.

The Enneagram is not about labelling people or putting them into boxes; rather it is about identifying those tendencies which govern the way we think, feel and react. It has the potential to help us genuinely empathise with clients, as we better understand the way they experience life.

Furthermore, having an understanding of clients' personality types can guide us in choice of treatment. Type ones will typically want to make things as perfect as possible and may be deeply critical of themselves when they fall short; type sixes may be very reliant on the therapist and trust his / her judgment, whilst entertaining doubts about themselves; type eights often want to retain or regain control of their lives and may deeply resent their reliance on the therapist. So what, then, are the benefits of the Enneagram in therapy and client management?

## Client-centred

The Enneagram approach is strongly client-centred because the goal is to understand how the client sees his problem. We are aiming to see through the client's eyes, as it were, and we can make a start on this sometimes even before the client does.

Secondly, it is client-initiated. The speech and language therapist's role is to facilitate the client's self-understanding by appropriate questioning, encouragement and support. It is a journey of self-discovery and, as with many journeys, travelling is more informative than arriving. But, for all sorts of reasons, some clients do not want to embark on the journey of self-discovery. We need to respect that choice, not least because people vary in their readiness to explore the issues with which the Enneagram deals.

Thirdly, it is client-led. Every individual is the best expert on him/herself and, while we can observe behaviour, only the client can tell us what's going on inside. On several occasions I have been surprised to discover how wrong my initial impressions were. The kind of stresses which lie at the root of some dysphonias, for instance, may force people to behave in a very unfamiliar way. I have marvelled at a friend's behaviour and remarked, "I didn't think she would do that!" But that's the point: when people are stressed, they may behave in very unpredictable ways, hence the importance of allowing the client to voice their inner feelings and be guided by them.

A key learning outcome from case examples 1-3 is that what is stressful for one client is not for another. If we understand something of a client's personality we can better determine what they will find stressful.

The Enneagram is a welcome addition to the therapist's armoury of tools. It provides an alternative way of seeing familiar issues and problems. Above all, it helps us to be more overt and objective in an area where we are usually vague and subjective – what people are actually like. SLTP

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### Case example 1: Mary

Mary (53) was referred by her GP, having been examined by an ENT Consultant who had found nothing anatomically wrong. She was dysphonic, with supralaryngeal tension, a non-smoker and occasional drinker. No recent stressful incidents were reported.

During assessment I offered Mary the option of help with self-appraisal using the Enneagram, which she willingly took up. She and her husband accessed online Enneagram material and Mary took the test. Study of the results revealed that she was probably a type 6: a questioning, somewhat hesitant person, with a lack of confidence in her own judgments.

When we discussed her employment, it became apparent that this was the primary source of stress. It required her to give polished demonstrations of quite complex tasks to groups of up to 20. These are skills which the Enneagram associates strongly with type 3 – her weak spot. Mary's job was demanding attitudes and behaviours which her type 6 personality found very stressful.

This insight enabled her to make the decision she had been hesitating over – changing jobs. It also enabled her to reflect about her planned future employment and determine that it would not give her unexpected and unwanted stressors. A review appointment revealed that her voice problems had disappeared.

### Case example 2: Robert

Robert (56) was referred by his GP. A stammerer since childhood, Robert's speech had recently deteriorated and, according to the referral letter, was affecting his marital relationship.

He took the online Enneagram test (RHETI) with his wife alongside him, and she then also took the test. They both came for subsequent sessions. The key insight Robert attained was his tendency to resort to an inner world of fantasy – a key element of his type 9 personality. His wife sensed this and felt excluded from it. But Robert noted his wife's tendency to dwell on inner feelings and strong memories (key elements of her type 4 personality). They found it very helpful to identify these tendencies and to commit to avoiding them because they caused friction between them.

Robert's inner world is doubly attractive when communication is problematic, and he came to understand that his anxiety about speaking stems from reluctance to be 'on show'. Yet this is precisely the kind of development which the Enneagram suggests as helpful to Robert's type: when type 9s mature and grow they tend to show some of the type 3 characteristics such as a readiness to be on show. Therapy on Robert's speech skills continues. He recognises that he has grown in confidence, which in turn enables him to speak more fluently. He stammers less than previously.

### Case example 3: Darren

Darren (41) was referred by his GP, for treatment for dysphonia. He is a music teacher and professional singer. He reported that he performs to large audiences and sometimes under considerable pressure, but it was teaching groups of primary children which provoked dysphonic episodes.

He took the online Enneagram test (RHETI) and identified himself as a type 7. Challenges such as one-man shows and large audiences were not stressors, but the limited and rule-laden elements of primary teaching were. Teaching also requires skills usually associated with type 1 personalities, and this is the stress point for type 7. As with Mary in the first case example, Darren's work was pressing all the wrong buttons.

Darren's improvement came with:

- (1) recognising the stressors for what they truly were. This understanding reduced their impact.
  - (2) reconstruing how he saw his work and recognising that it enabled him (financially) to do what he really wanted to do – perform on the stage. It thus became a liberator rather than a constraint.
- He has virtually no dysphonic episodes, and is now on review.

## References

- Fransella, F. (1972) *Personal Change and Reconstruction*. London: Academic Press.
- Fransella, F., Bell, R. & Bannister, D. (2004) *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* (2nd edition). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Middlemiss, J. (2009) 'Conflicting ideas', *Speech & Language Therapy in Practice* Autumn, p.11.
- Newgent, R. (2001) 'An investigation of the reliability and validity of the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator', *Dissertation Abstracts International* 62(02), 474A (UMI No. 3005901).
- Riso, D.R. & Hudson, R. (1999) *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*. New York: Bantam.

## Recommended reading

- DeMello, A. (1990) *Awareness*. New York: Doubleday.
- Jung, C.G. (1974) *Psychological Types*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## Resources

- NEO PI-R – [www.neopir.co.uk/index.html](http://www.neopir.co.uk/index.html)
- RHETI – [www.enneagraminstitute.com/discover.asp](http://www.enneagraminstitute.com/discover.asp)

## REFLECTIONS

- DO I TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE IMPACT THAT PERSONALITY HAS ON RESPONSE TO THERAPY?
- DO I TRY TO SEE SITUATIONS THROUGH A CLIENT OR COLLEAGUE'S EYES?
- DO I RECOGNISE, VALUE AND MAKE THE MOST OF PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS - INCLUDING MY OWN?

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