

# The IT crowd

## *The type distribution in a group of information technology graduates*

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Information and communications technology (ICT) is fundamental to the operation of any contemporary organisation, in the public sector as much as in the corporate sphere. The ICT labour market is highly competitive, with employers vying for a limited pool of skilled labour. Earlier this year the trade magazine *Computerworld* reported that the demand for ICT skills in Australia was at an all-time high.

In 2006 the Queensland Government Chief Information Office initiated a recruitment program for ICT graduates. Nine state government agencies opted to take part, together with a major local authority, the Brisbane City Council. The participating organisations offered 37 positions in total, spanning a range of specialisations within the ICT discipline.

More than 500 applications were lodged. Applicants were shortlisted against the ICT role specifications, based on their responses to an online survey of their work preferences and a (non-Jungian) behavioural profile, with final selections being based on interviews. 34 of the 37 positions were ultimately filled.

The graduate recruits began their two-year placements early in 2007 with a week-long induction program, which included a workshop on appreciating individual differences using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. That workshop is the subject of this paper.

As Isabel Myers noted in a 1975 address (*reprinted in this issue*), the most important thing type can do is to 'enhance people's lives by their knowledge of type in general, and their own type in particular'. And that harmonises with the sponsors' objectives in choosing to include an MBTI workshop in the graduates' induction program.

The 34 graduate recruits comprised 27 men and 7 women. The predominance of males paralleled the gender balance in the field of applicants (75% male). The program was open to individuals who had graduated in 2004, 2005 or 2006. Most of the recruits held bachelor degrees, while a few had completed higher degrees.

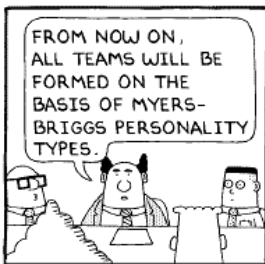
While specific age data was not collected, observation indicated that the majority of recruits were in their twenties, with some mature-age graduates.

### **The ICT occupation**

Which types tend to be drawn to the ICT profession?

We might speculate that the formal logic of the discipline, combined with its focus on technology-based 'hard systems', would make ICT more attractive to those with a preference for *thinking*. In particular, Susan Nash characterises *extraverted thinking* (the preferred judging function of TJ types) as 'systematising'. In temperament terms, moreover, the NT types are dubbed the 'Rationals'. On that basis we might expect T and J preferences, and NT types, to be over-represented among ICT professionals.

For the general public, the ICT profession is perhaps exemplified by Microsoft's Bill Gates. When the British APT canvassed his type a few years ago, the consensus was INTJ, or maybe ENTJ, in line with our speculation. A letter in *The Australian's* IT section recently suggested that 'Dilbert is more relevant to the reality of working in the IT sector than people realise'. And a study conducted by TNS Social Research for the Queensland Government last year offers snapshots of perceptions of ICT.



'Relevant to the reality':  
Dilbert

In interviews with TNS’s researchers, ICT students saw their fellow professionals as ‘problem solvers’ with ‘logical mathematical minds’. High school students, by contrast, saw them as ‘nerds’ and ‘geeks’, in ‘their own little world’. Even school counsellors, while noting that the ‘nerd’ stereotype was giving way to one of ‘creative people’ in a ‘good career area’, saw them as ‘not outgoing’, working ‘behind the scenes’.

The high school students’ picture of ICT was a ‘guy with thick glasses’, alone in a cubicle ‘staring at computer all day’. The BBC TV sitcom *The IT Crowd* plays up such images, portraying its anti-heroes—the basement-dwelling IT department in a nondescript company—as lacking in social skills and oblivious to their clients’ needs.

Such are the stereotypes. The reality is that ICT covers a range of strands that call for differing skills and attributes. The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) subdivides ‘ICT Professionals’ (code 26) into:

- business and systems analysts, and programmers
- database and systems administrators, and ICT security specialists
- ICT network and support professionals

ANZSCO also has separate codes for ‘ICT managers’ and ‘graphic and web designers, and illustrators’.

The ICT graduate positions ranged across 11 distinct role specifications:

- business analysis
- software development
- data analysis, database management
- information security
- network and server support
- information systems support
- spatial information systems
- enterprise architecture
- ICT strategy
- ICT product management, marketing
- ICT procurement, contract management

A nuanced analysis of type preferences in ICT might suggest that conceptual fields such as enterprise architecture and ICT strategy would tend to attract NTs and NJs, while the practical logistics of procurement would particularly suit SJs. There is room in the ICT profession for a variety of type preferences.

The *MBTI Atlas of Type Tables* offers type distribution tables across a diverse range of occupational samples. Michael Lyons’s sample of 1229 ‘computer professionals’ (mostly programmers, analysts, engineers and managers) is particularly relevant here. Lyons’s data, collected in the USA, UK and Australia between 1982 and 1984, is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Type distribution for a sample of computer professionals (international)

<b>ISTJ</b> 22.6%	<b>ISFJ</b> 3.9%	<b>INFJ</b> 2.7%	<b>INTJ</b> 15.5%
<b>ISTP</b> 5.2%	<b>ISFP</b> 1.5%	<b>INFP</b> 3.6%	<b>INTP</b> 12.1%
<b>ESTP</b> 2.1%	<b>ESFP</b> 0.7%	<b>ENFP</b> 3.4%	<b>ENTP</b> 5.6%
<b>ESTJ</b> 9.3%	<b>ESFJ</b> 1.0%	<b>ENFJ</b> 2.4%	<b>ENTJ</b> 8.4%

Lyons (1985), reported in the *MBTI Atlas of Type Tables*, 1986, p 272. n = 1229 (73% male, 27% female). MBTI Form G, from USA (83%) and UK and Australia (17%).

The gender balance in Lyons’s sample approximates that of the ICT graduates group, making it a potentially suitable benchmark for comparison.

On the down side, however, this sample dates from another age, almost a quarter of a century ago, before the explosion in personal computers, distributed networks and the internet. Since then the ICT world has gone through several generations of technological evolution, with the emergence of role specialisations that did not exist in the 1980s—and which may have shifted the mix of types who are drawn to the ICT industry.



‘A guy with thick glasses’:  
*The IT Crowd*

Just three types (ISTJ, INTJ and INTP) account for half of Lyons's 1980s sample. How does that compare to the data from closer to home, in both space and time?

The Australian MBTI Data Archive holds type and occupational data from completed forms submitted to the Psychological Type Research Unit at Deakin University. Table 2 (below) sets out the type frequencies for the 'Computing Professionals' occupation, as accumulated in the archive.

Table 2: Type distribution for computing professionals (Australia, Forms G, K, M)

<b>ISTJ</b> 24%	<b>ISFJ</b> 4%	<b>INFJ</b> 3%	<b>INTJ</b> 11%
<b>ISTP</b> 6%	<b>ISFP</b> 4%	<b>INFP</b> 2%	<b>INTP</b> 6%
<b>ESTP</b> 5%	<b>ESFP</b> 4%	<b>ENFP</b> 4%	<b>ENTP</b> 5%
<b>ESTJ</b> 10%	<b>ESFJ</b> 5%	<b>ENFJ</b> 2%	<b>ENTJ</b> 5%

Australian MBTI Data Archive Project, ACSO Code 2231 (Computing Professionals), n = 126 (male 85, female 41). MBTI Forms G and K (n = 102) and Form M (n = 24), as extracted by Ian Ball (2007).

As with Lyons's international sample, the predominant types in the Australian archive are ISTJ and INTJ (with ESTJ, rather than INTP, third). Does this mean that ICT is a profession attractive to those types—or does it simply reflect the frequency of those types in the community generally?

In examining type distributions in the ICT profession, a key question is which **base population** to use as a comparator.

In the absence of normative type frequency data for Australia, the next-best option is the Australian MBTI Data Archive which, as noted above, is a repository of forms submitted by MBTI practitioners. Although a non-random 'sample of convenience', it is comprehensive, with more than 20 000 records from urban and rural locations, and from all occupational groups.

As Ian Ball (2001) notes, there are striking differences between men and women on the T–F dichotomy. In the Australian MBTI Data Archive 80% of the males report a T preference, while for females the figure is just 43%. When comparing type samples with the archive data, it is therefore vital to take account of the gender angle.

The ICT graduates sample comprised 27 males and 7 females. To assess how the type distribution in that sample is similar to and different from the Australian population generally, the appropriate yardstick is a blend of the Data Archive's type tables for men and women, weighted in proportion to the gender mix in the graduates group (79% to 21%).

Table 3 (below) presents those gender-weighted type frequencies for Australia, using the Form G and Form K data as reported by Ian Ball in 2004.

(For example, the frequency of ESFJs in the Data Archive is 3.0% for males and 8.0% for females. The figure of 4.0% in Table 3 is the weighted average of those frequencies, with more weight to the male figure commensurate with the proportion of males in the graduates group.)

Table 3: Reference type distribution—adult MBTI respondents (Australia, Forms G and K, gender-weighted)

<b>ISTJ</b> 19.5%	<b>ISFJ</b> 6.0%	<b>INFJ</b> 3.3%	<b>INTJ</b> 8.2%
<b>ISTP</b> 4.9%	<b>ISFP</b> 2.6%	<b>INFP</b> 4.2%	<b>INTP</b> 5.8%
<b>ESTP</b> 4.2%	<b>ESFP</b> 1.8%	<b>ENFP</b> 4.8%	<b>ENTP</b> 6.4%
<b>ESTJ</b> 14.5%	<b>ESFJ</b> 4.0%	<b>ENFJ</b> 2.4%	<b>ENTJ</b> 7.6%

Australian MBTI Data Archive, adult males (n = 11 538) and females (n = 8456), MBTI Form G and Form K, as reported by Ball (2004). Derived by combining the type frequencies for males and females, weighted in proportion to the gender mix in the ICT graduates sample (79% male, 21% female).

ISTJs and INTJs are the predominant types of the computing professionals in the Australian archive and international sample

## Method

The challenge for us as facilitators was to introduce type concepts through the MBTI, and to create an experiential workshop for participants to discover more about individual differences—all in two hours.

The need for a robust and ethical process was heightened by our clients' openness to using type as a continuing theme in the graduates' professional development. If the introductory workshop offered negative experiences, or left participants confused or uncertain, then our ability to use type for further individual and group development would be significantly compromised.

Our non-negotiable content included ethical use of type; the history, theory and validity of the MBTI; and activities for each of the dichotomies. Much careful thought went into the design of the workshop—Sarah's rule of thumb of 10 hours preparation for each hour of delivery was borne out.

### Completing the indicator

The graduates completed Form M in a group setting two days prior to the workshop. The timetable for the induction week required this to be undertaken on their first morning together, which was not really conducive to the 'shoes-off' state of mind in which the MBTI is ideally completed. As the summer heat ruled out sending the group outdoors, the graduates were invited to split off from their table groups and disperse around the auditorium in which the day's activities were being held.

One unforeseen issue was the difficulty in completing the instrument experienced by a few graduates whose first language was not English. Two asked for explanations of unfamiliar words ('ingenious', 'gregarious'), and a third required help with several of the questions. The nuances of Form M's word pairs may well be very effective in discriminating the preferences of respondents who are proficient in English, but are plainly less so for those who are unsure of the basic meaning of the words.

The completed forms were template-scored during the 48 hours before the workshop.

### The MBTI workshop

After introducing themselves, the facilitators began the workshop with an outline of the Jung's theory of personality type and its application by Briggs and Myers, leading into an overview of the four dichotomies.

The participants were then asked to sign their names, firstly as usual, and then with their non-preferred hands. This is a simple and effective activity for demonstrating the key concept of 'preference'.

The participants then **self-selected** their preferences, using the descriptors in Mary McGuinness's *You've Got Personality*. After settling on a provisional four letters, they were guided to the whole-type descriptions for confirmation.

Four activities to demonstrate each of the dichotomies followed. One hour of the two-hour workshop was allocated to these.

Firstly, the graduates split into two groups based on their self-selected preference for **extraversion** or **introversion**, for the task of describing the celebration they would most enjoy to mark a significant life event, such as a major birthday, a graduation, or buying a house.

The contrast in the group processes was striking: the E group was interactive and noisy, while in the I group individuals spoke quietly in turn as the others listened. Each group's description of its ideal celebration affirmed the expected differences on the E-I dichotomy.

The graduates then split up, according to their self-selected preference for **sensing** or **intuiting**, for the task of describing the workshop venue (Brisbane's 1930s-era City Hall). With their contrasting levels of detail and generality, the groups' respective descriptions again affirmed the expected differences on the S-N dichotomy.

The third dichotomy presented a logistical challenge. Given the group's gender mix and vocational specialisation, the facilitators had anticipated an imbalance between **thinking** and **feeling**, and that proved to be the case: only 3 of the 32 participants self-selected the F preference.



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This time, instead of splitting into T and F groups, 3 volunteers from the T-preferring graduates acted out a scenario in front of the whole group, as did the 3 F-preferring graduates. The scenario was that, as the leaders of a team of 10 people, they had been directed to downsize due to a budget shortfall. Their task was to decide which three team members were to go. The rest of the group observed the T and F trios act out the scenario in turn.

After initially skirting around the question, the T group began to propose criteria for deciding which team members were to go, such as 'last on, first off', and individual productivity. The F group favoured a more personal approach, first proposing to ask if any of the team wished to leave, and then discussing options such as part-time work and shared pay cuts that would avert the need for anybody to go. These differing approaches prompted some sharp banter between individuals in the T and F groups at the conclusion of the activity.

For the fourth activity the graduates were not split up according to their self-selected **judging** or **perceiving** preference. Instead, in table groups (each including both J and P members), they described how they had completed their last university assignment.

Curiously, even the J-preferring graduates recounted a looser approach than might be expected in (say) the workplace. Perhaps the university environment fosters a more open-ended style.

A key theme in the group discussions was that, in their different ways, the Js and Ps both got their assignments done. The Js tended to work to plans, of course. The Ps too had plans, albeit in a rough form, and accepted that it would not come together until the end (often in an all-night burst on the eve of the deadline).

In their mixed J–P groups, the graduates also acknowledged the mutual benefits in working with others of the opposite preference. The Ps valued the structure and scheduling offered by the Js, while the Js appreciated how, after they had drafted an assignment, their P colleagues were able to suggest other angles and options.

On the other hand, one of the Js told of finally giving up on his P team mates and finishing the assignment on his own.

Each of the four activities was capped off with examples of the type biases that can arise from differences on each dichotomy, as cited by Isabel Myers in *Introduction To Type*. These were presented to highlight the need to not only know one's own type, but to also value what the opposite brings.

After the activities on the four dichotomies, the graduates received their **MBTI report forms**, and compared their reported types with those they had earlier self-selected.

27 of the 32 participants found agreement on three or more dichotomies, including 13 with agreement on all four dichotomies. This is a good result, particularly as 8 of the group had scored equal on one dichotomy, and therefore had only three letters in their reported types.

Those 8 graduates with tied scores on one dichotomy equate to a quarter of the group. For comparison, John Bathurst found equal scores in just over 10% of the records in the New Zealand MBTI database (2004). By that yardstick, the 25% incidence in the graduates group seems to be a statistical anomaly—or simply bad luck.

The workshop concluded with an offer of individual consultation or coaching for any of the participants who required it.

The next session in the induction program's packed schedule was time management—a nice segue from the preceding discussion of the J–P dichotomy.

### **Supplementary session**

Two graduates who joined the program a few weeks after the workshop group were given a condensed induction. The MBTI component was covered by a 90-minute face-to-face debrief and validation with one of the original facilitators (Phil), using Form Ms completed beforehand.

The type data for these two graduates has been included in the analysis below. (One scored a tie on one dichotomy, taking the total number of tied scores to 9.)

27 of the 32 graduates found agreement on at least three dichotomies between self-selected and reported types

## Findings

The distribution of **reported types** in the graduates sample is presented in Table 4 below. (The 9 graduates with tied scores have been omitted.)

Comparison with the Australian reference distribution (Table 3) indicates which types are over- and under-represented in the ICT graduates sample. This analysis is, however, sensitive to the vagaries of the small numbers in the sample, and the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Table 5 shows the relative frequency (SSR) for each type in the ICT graduates sample. Subject to the preceding cautions, we can make the following observations about type frequencies in the graduates sample, relative to the Australian reference distribution:

- ENTJ, INTJ, ESFJ, ENTP, ENFJ, ISTP and INTP are over-represented
- ESTJ is represented at a frequency comparable to that in the Australian reference population
- ISTJ, ISFJ, INFJ, ISFP, INFP, ESTP, ESFP and ENFP are under-represented (with all except ISTJ *not represented at all* in this particular sample)



**Philip L Kerr** (INTP) wrote his first Fortran program as a science undergraduate in 1971, and later majored in computing in his business degree.

Phil has had a 32-year career with technology-based shared services providers and government-owned corporations. He currently manages a workforce capability program with the Queensland Government Chief Information Office.

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Table 4: Type distribution for a sample of ICT graduates (Australia)

<b>ISTJ</b> ■■■ 12%	<b>ISFJ</b> 0%	<b>INFJ</b> 0%	<b>INTJ</b> ■■■■ 16%
<b>ISTP</b> ■■ 8%	<b>ISFP</b> 0%	<b>INFP</b> 0%	<b>INTP</b> ■■ 8%
<b>ESTP</b> 0%	<b>ESFP</b> 0%	<b>ENFP</b> 0%	<b>ENTP</b> ■■■ 12%
<b>ESTJ</b> ■■■■ 16%	<b>ESFJ</b> ■■ 8%	<b>ENFJ</b> ■ 4%	<b>ENTJ</b> ■■■■ 16%

n = 25, reported types, Form M. Excludes 9 graduates with tied scores on one dichotomy.

Table 5: Self-selection ratios (SSRs) of type frequencies: ICT graduates relative to adult Australians (gender-weighted)

<b>ISTJ</b> 0.6	<b>ISFJ</b> 0	<b>INFJ</b> 0	<b>INTJ</b> 2.0
<b>ISTP</b> 1.6	<b>ISFP</b> 0	<b>INFP</b> 0	<b>INTP</b> 1.4
<b>ESTP</b> 0	<b>ESFP</b> 0	<b>ENFP</b> 0	<b>ENTP</b> 1.9
<b>ESTJ</b> 1.1	<b>ESFJ</b> 2.0	<b>ENFJ</b> 1.7	<b>ENTJ</b> 2.1

Ratios of type frequencies for ICT graduates (Table 4) to gender-weighted Australian reference sample (Table 3).

On the above (inherently limited) analysis, the following types are over-represented in the ICT graduates sample:

- all 4 of the **NT** types
- 5 of the 8 **T** types
- 3 of the 4 **TP** types
- 2 of the 4 **TJ** types

The preceding analysis is limited by the statistical sensitivity inherent in the small numbers of each type. If we shift our focus from whole types to the four **dichotomies**, the numbers in each category are more robust and we are on more solid ground. Furthermore, this part of our analysis can include the data for the 9 graduates who scored equal on one of the dichotomies (and who were therefore omitted from the analysis of whole types).

Two sets of data on the graduates' type preferences were gathered: one based on their **self-selected** types (by counts of the E and I, S and N, and T and F sub-groups during the activities on those dichotomies); and the other on **reported** types.

The tight schedule precluded the collection of **best-fit** type data at the end of the workshop. Throughout the session, however, the facilitators reiterated that participants had the freedom to choose (or *not* choose) their own type.

Figure 1 (*below*) shows the **self-selected** distributions of the 34 graduates across E–I, S–N and T–F. (As the group was not split up for the J–P activity, there was no opportunity to observe those numbers.)

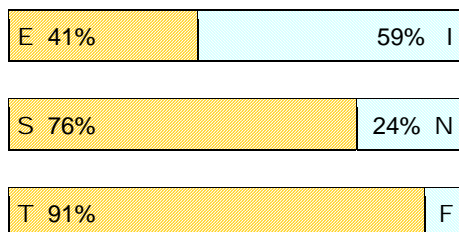


Figure 1: ICT graduates' type preferences—*self-selected*

Figure 2 (*below*) shows the distribution of the graduates across the four dichotomies as **reported** by their MBTI scores. (A few instances of tied scores on each of S–N, T–F and J–P have been excluded from the calculations.)

Comparison of graduates' self-selected and reported type preferences reveals both consistencies and inconsistencies:

- A clear majority of the graduates (59% to 41%) self-selected **introversion** as their preferred attitude, but their MBTI scores indicated an even split between **extraversion** and **introversion**.
- For their preferred *perceiving* function, more than 3 in 4 of the graduates self-selected **sensing** (76% to 24%). Their MBTI scores, by contrast, indicated a small margin for **intuiting** (55% to 45%).

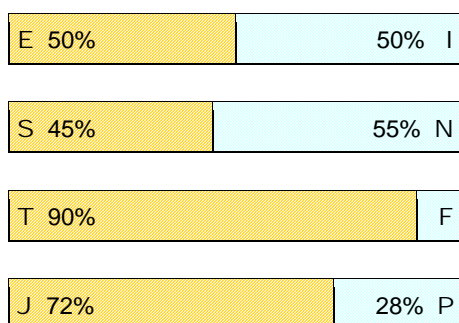


Figure 2: ICT graduates' type preferences—*reported*

- For their preferred *judging* function, the graduates' self-selected and reported preferences were broadly consistent. A massive 91% self-selected **thinking**, and their MBTI scores confirmed that preference (90%).
- The graduates' MBTI scores indicated a preference for a **judging** orientation by a wide margin (72% to 28%). (No *self-selected* preference data was available for this dichotomy.)

How do the ICT graduates' preferences on each of the four dichotomies compare with those in the general population? Table 6 (*below*) compares the graduates' reported preferences with those that predominate in our gender-weighted reference distribution of Australian adults (Table 3).

Table 6: Reported type preferences for ICT graduates relative to adult Australians (gender-weighted)

	Australian adults	ICT graduates
I	54%	50%
S	57%	45%
T	71%	90%
J	65%	72%

Percentage of the relevant sample reporting a preference for I, S, T or J. 'Australian adults' (gender-weighted) data from Table 3; 'ICT graduates' (reported) data from Figure 2.

On the above comparison (and mindful of the small numbers) we see that, relative to our Australian reference population, the ICT graduates in this sample display:

- a roughly similar balance between **introversion** and **extraversion**
- a marginal preference for **intuiting**, rather than for sensing
- a much stronger preference for **thinking**
- a marginally stronger preference for **judging**

91% of the graduates self-selected a **thinking** preference, and that was confirmed by their MBTI scores

## Conclusions

The single most striking feature of the ICT graduates sample is the **predominance of the thinking preference**. In a sample of 27 men and 7 women we might expect (on the evidence in the Australian MBTI Data Archive) around 70% to prefer T. In fact, our ICT graduates reported a 90% preference for T, and confirmed that in their self-selected types.

T also predominates in Lyons's international sample of computer professionals (Table 1), but not to the same extent (81%). Interestingly, the computing professionals in the Australian MBTI Data Archive (Table 2) report a somewhat lower preference for T, just 72% (albeit with a higher proportion of women than in the graduates sample).

Drilling deeper, we see that *both* forms of the function, extraverted thinking and the 'fundamentally different' (in Jung's words) introverted thinking, occur more frequently in the ICT graduates sample than in our Australian reference sample: 61% vs 50% for the TJ (Te) types, and 29% vs 21% for the TP (Ti) types.

The function-pairs lens reveals a further distinction. In comparison to our Australian reference population, the ICT graduates sample has a much higher proportion of NTs (52% vs 28%), and a marginally lower proportion of STs (37% vs 43%).

In our introduction we speculated that T, J and NT would be over-represented among ICT professionals. In our sample of ICT graduates that has indeed proved to be the case, to a greater or (in the case of J) lesser extent. The *IT Crowd* stereotype of introversion *in extremis* is not borne out, however: our ICT graduates are no more introverted than a comparable sample of Australians generally.

For the facilitators, the upfront negotiation of objectives and content was fundamental to the workshop's success, particularly in the tight time frame of two contact hours. Those negotiations were assisted by the respect for the interests of the participants evidenced by the program coordinators who commissioned the workshop.

The workshop design and delivery also required the facilitators to negotiate with each other. Sarah, highly experienced in running type workshops, saw the brief as delivering a piece of facilitated work for a client, while Phil, whose involvement with type is mainly behind the scenes in writing and editing, saw the opportunity to glean insights into the type characteristics of the ICT occupation. And, in the sharing out of the segments of the workshop, Phil (INTP) presented the history and theory of type, while Sarah (ISFP) handled its application in the group activities.

## Next steps

At the close, the workshop the facilitators solicited the graduates' reactions to what they had learned. One of the group voiced an experience common to many of us on first encountering our type description: 'It's freaky', he said.

The graduates' learnings from their MBTI workshop found an immediate application later in the induction week, when they met their new supervisors and mentors (some of whom also had some knowledge of type concepts). In their three-way discussions the graduates, supervisors and mentors were encouraged to share their insights into their respective type preferences, in order to lay a foundation for their ongoing relationships.

The final day of the induction week offered evidence that the MBTI workshop had left an impression. The day's program included an outdoor activity in which several of the graduates opted not to take part. Invited to suggest a topic for an alternative session, they asked for more on type. Sarah and Phil were not present, but the facilitator on the day happened to be MBTI-accredited, and took the group through an introduction to type dynamics and development.

It appears that the introductory workshop not only fulfilled its objective of helping the graduates to understand and appreciate individual differences, but also whetted their appetites to learn more. This augurs well for their careers in ICT—or wherever else life takes them. ❖

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