The numbers game

A three walks into a bar, and starts talking to a seven. Believers in the Enneagram will tell you they can predict exactly what will happen next, writes **Karen Kissane** in part three of our series on personality tests.

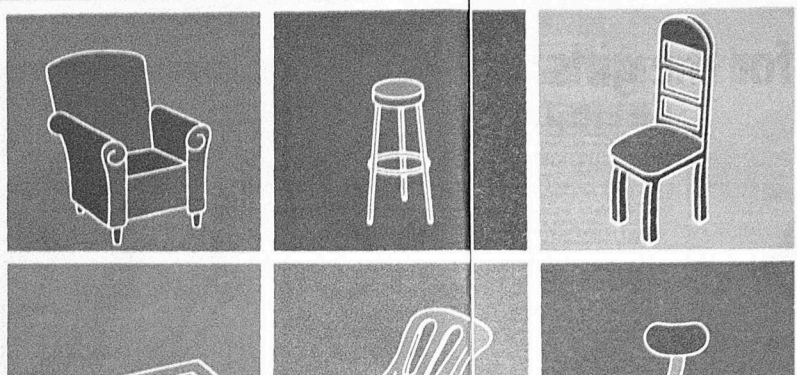

ILLUSTRATION: JIM MIDDLEDITE

The Enneagram is not for the faint-hearted. Unlike the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which is carefully non-judgemental, the Enneagram bluntly describes the destructive aspects, as well as the gifts, associated with each personality.

The Artist or the Romantic. Fours are terrified that their work will be "ordinary", they need to feel special. They feel more extreme highs and lows of emotions and believe they have the sensibilities of creatives or tormented lovers. At their worst, they are depressive drama queens; when well-developed, they have highly original minds, great integrity and an ironic sense of humour.

"To an Eight manager, the fact that the Four spends most of his time in a fogue state because he's in the world of his imagination is maddening," says Fuller, who sometimes uses the Enneagram in her work. The Eight will keep pushing until the Four asserts his boundaries. "The Four has to realise, 'She's a tiger, and I must meet her head on and argue back; then we will be able to connect,' Fuller says. "He needs to accept that, 'When I "disappear" by being vague and withdrawn and submissive, she will eat me. I have to learn to give as good as I get or she'll remain contemptuous and micro-manage me into leaving.'"

The Eight boss, for her part, needs to realise that she will only get the best out of the Four if she allows him an atypical working environment. "Fours absolutely want meaning, integrity and self-expression, and they want to be acknowledged as a 'special' individual in that workplace," Fuller explains. "They work best if they can be forgiven for late arrivals and for taking time for reflection. They need to work for themselves, in fits and starts, and then they'll bring their creative ideas to the group. To work unacknowledged in a large team and to be treated as just a number, and to have to go by rules and regulations, extinguishes their capacity to contribute."

Fuller is a psychologist with a strong background in psychometric testing. She finds the theory of the Enneagram useful in vocational counselling. "It helps work out what unconscious barriers or fears block us from taking action."

For example, take the successful Three (the Achiever/the Motivator, competitive, image-conscious, pragmatic and hostile) who needs a mid-life career change because he feels depressed in his current role. Changing jobs would require a period of obscurity while he masters new skills. Fuller says he may fail to act simply because he is too puffed up with importance to risk failure. If he devises strategies to maintain his "successful" profile, he is more likely to take the plunge.

John Stuart, a former Catholic priest who now works as a spiritual counsellor, says the Enneagram is also valuable for teachers, to help them understand their own operating style and the ways in which their students are different. "Enneagram expert Helen Palmer says it's a great tool for getting a better understanding of yourself and to help you see other people as they are, not as you want them to be."

Yes, Stuart says, it is possible for people to be upset by what they learn, but many people also feel relief when they find out they are not alone in the way they approach the world. While flaws are named, no number is "better" than any other in the system: "It's a question of how evolved the person is within that space."

The other types are: One: the Judge/Reformer (rational, idealistic, principled, orderly, perfectionist, judgemental and self-righteous); Two: the Helper/Giver (nurturing, generous, possessive and manipulative, people who love fulfilling others' needs but deny their own); Five: the Thinker/Analyst (intense, cerebral, original, eccentric, but detached and emotionally shut-down); Six: the Loyalist/Devil's Advocate (committed, security-oriented and responsible, but anxious, defensive and paranoid); Seven: the Generalist/Epicurean (enthusiastic, accomplished, excessive, commitment-phobic, fearful of boredom, and reluctant to delve into their own or others' troubles. "Sevens dance across their pain as if it never happened," Stuart says).

Although widely used in church circles, where it is seen as an aid to spiritual growth as well as psychological health, the Enneagram has been sharply criticised by some religious authorities. Several Australian Catholic archbishops have banned it in their archdioceses. One such bishop told ABC radio in 2001 that salvation or liberation was not brought about by psychology but by the grace of Jesus Christ. There seems to be a fear by some church figures that if people rely on self-awareness as their main reflective tool, they will abandon God. But Stuart says theology teaches that each person has a spark of the divine, so looking inward could, in fact, lead to finding the sacred rather than rejecting it.

Secular critics also criticise the Enneagram, accusing it of being methodologically flaky because it is not backed by statistical research ("but if psychology is about the inner journey, no statistics are going to help with that", says Stuart). They also accuse Enneagram users of putting people into boxes.

Stuart argues that it does just the opposite because it helps people to understand and escape from their compulsive reactions. A well-developed person of any number can access the positive qualities of all the other numbers. "This is a process of coming home to your true self. The Enneagram is about that journey into growth, a journey into God, a journey into mystery, a journey into yourself."

WHERE DO YOU SIT?

What people in each type believe they must do in order to be happy:

One: I must be perfect and good
Two: I must be helpful and caring
Three: I must be impressive and attractive
Four: I must avoid painful feelings
Five: I must be knowledgeable and independent
Six: I must be secure and safe
Seven: I must be high and entertained
Eight: I must be strong and in control
Nine: I must be peaceful and easy to get along with

Source: Sinclairnotes.com

BOOKS

Discovering Your Personality Type, by Don Richard Riso
Understanding the Enneagram, by Don Richard Riso
The Enneagram: Understanding Yourself and the Others in your Life, by Helen Palmer
The Enneagram in Love and Work, by Helen Palmer
Getting Your Boss's Number, by Michael J. Goldberg
The Enneagram of Parenting: the 9 Types of Children and How to Raise Them, by Elizabeth Wagele

WEBSITES

- www.enneagraminstitute.com (includes analyses of partnerships between all the numbers)
- www.9types.com
- www.enneagram.com.au
- www.ennea.com
- www.abc.net.au/rn/religion/stories/s1576551.htm for a Radio National Encounter with Enneagram author Helen Palmer.

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