



Administrator types

TN60 Training Notes series: Administration

These notes were first published on the website in June 2011 and last updated in April 2025. They are copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted.

Many will be aware of the personality types described by Eysenck and by Myers-Briggs. In rather a different context you may be familiar with the nine team roles associated with Dr Meredith Belbin.

So it is odd that so few people appear to know of the seminal work of an earlier researcher, A A Milne. He proposed, in a two-volume work subtly disguised as stories for children, that there are eight types of people to which he gave the names:

Pooh Piglet Rabbit Owl Eeyore Kanga Roo Tigger.

Modern research by the author of these notes has further discovered that a good administrator needs to display the characteristics of four of these types, and then to be able to work within a church populated also by the other four. These notes outline this stunning new theory and apply it to administrative work in churches today.

It is recommended that readers refer back to the two main source documents: *Winnie-the-Pooh* (first published in 1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928).

The Rabbit-type administrator

Rabbit rushes around, busily organising other people.

It was going to be one of Rabbit's busy days. As soon as he woke up he felt important, as if everything depended upon him. It was just the day for Organizing Something, or for Writing a Notice Signed Rabbit, or for Seeing What Everybody Else Thought About It.¹

He is so meticulously well organised that losing anything or anyone is a major distraction. So when he cannot find Small, one of his many friends-and-relations, the issue is one of information not communication.

*"Did you want him for anything?" (asked Pooh).
"I don't want him," said Rabbit. "But it's always useful to know where a friend-and-relation is, whether you want him or whether you don't."*²

Precisely. But when Rabbit organises, he has to be In Charge. Not only does he organise the search for Small, on another occasion he produces an 11-point plan for kidnapping Baby Roo.³

Rabbit both sets up and chairs meetings he is involved in. When it seems that Christopher Robin is going away it is Rabbit who takes the initiative.

*One day when he felt that he couldn't wait any longer, Rabbit brained out a Notice, and this is what it said:
"Notice a meeting of everybody will meet at the House at Pooh Corner to pass a Resolution By Order Keep to the Left Signed Rabbit."*⁴

So it is clear that Rabbit-administrators:

- are single-minded and highly focused people with lists of objectives and detailed plans;
- are immensely well-organised and tidy with a precise place and time for everything;
- have an amazing ability to get things done – they are high achievers, brimming with initiative.

But there is a downside too. Rabbit-administrators:

- always need to be seen to be busy, work at speed, and so exhaust their colleagues;
- have few people-skills, putting task first at all times, often with controlling personalities;
- find it hard to understand that their systems are not the only ways of working.

Here we have the administrator who spends the hour after the Sunday service with a clipboard in hand organising committee meetings and getting things done while upsetting a few people in the process.

The Piglet-type administrator

Whereas Rabbit clearly has to be Number One at all times, Piglet, a humble soul, lives life as the archetypical Number Two (to Pooh). He is the administrative assistant, the loyal and uncomplicated person who gets on with the job and stays out of the limelight.

It is Piglet who discovers the sticks for the House at Pooh Corner. As Pooh remarks,

*"What you have just said will be a Great Help to us, and because of it I could call this place Poohanpiglet Corner if Pooh Corner didn't sound better, which it does, being smaller and more like a corner."*⁵

But he never complains. Piglet clearly stays away from self-assertiveness courses.

Piglet is frightened of anything out of the usual: Heffalumps, Woozles, Jagulars, Tigger of course and Kanga, when she first appears.

He is no creative thinker. When giving Eeyore his balloon as a birthday present, Piglet has no Plan B.

*"Yes, but I'm afraid – I'm very sorry, Eeyore – but when I was running along to bring it you, I fell down."
"Dear, dear, how unlucky! You ran too fast, I expect. You didn't hurt yourself, Little Piglet?"
"No, but I – I – oh, Eeyore, I burst the balloon!"
There was a very long silence.*

*"My balloon?" said Eeyore at last.
Piglet nodded.
"My birthday balloon?"
"Yes, Eeyore," said Piglet sniffing a little. "Here it is. With – with many happy returns of the day."
And he gave Eeyore the small piece of damp rag.⁶*

It all works out fine in the end of course.

But he is made of sterner stuff than most of us realise. When Owl's house blows down it is Piglet who is hauled up to the letterbox on the ceiling by a fragile piece of string and who thereby escapes and brings rescue.⁷ When Baby Roo is kidnapped, it is Piglet that has to act as replacement in Kanga's pocket – and then has to go through the rigmarole of a Kanga bath.⁸

Piglet-administrators:

- are utterly loyal to the team and its vision, never questioning what has been agreed;
- carry out their routine tasks with dedication and impressive humility;
- surprise everyone from time to time by unexpected bravery or dedication.

But they:

- lack initiative and have low self-worth;
- are fearful of anything unknown or visionary and find change difficult;
- need much encouragement and clear guidelines if they are to achieve anything.

Here is the loyal and utterly dependable Assistant who can be found after the church service quietly straightening the chairs and tidying the books.

The Eeyore-type administrator

Life is tough for Eeyore. He loses his tail.⁹ During the expedition to the North Pole it is Eeyore whose lunch of thistles is sadly squashed when Pooh sits on it. It is Eeyore who is left dangling his tail in the river to rescue Roo long after the rescue has already been effected.¹⁰ It is Eeyore who, in the snow, finds his house moved stick by stick to a new location by an unwitting Pooh and Piglet.¹¹

A typical Eeyore response is given to Roo at Pooh's party, when all should have been gaily.

*"Hallo, Eeyore!" said Roo.
Eeyore nodded gloomily at him. "It will rain soon, you see if it doesn't," he said.¹²*

The story that explains Eeyore well is that of the game of Poohsticks. The animals are waiting for the winning stick to appear in the river when out floats Eeyore.

*"How did you fall in, Eeyore?" asked Rabbit, as he dried him with Piglet's handkerchief.
"I didn't," said Eeyore.
"But how —"
"I was BOUNCED," said Eeyore.
"Oo," said Roo excitedly, "did somebody push you?"
"Somebody BOUNCED me. I was just thinking by the side of the river – thinking, if any of you know what that means – when I received a loud BOUNCE."
"Oh, Eeyore!" said everybody.
"Are you sure you didn't slip?" asked Rabbit wisely.
"Of course I slipped. If you're standing on the slippery bank of a river, and somebody BOUNCES you loudly from behind, you slip. What did you think I did?"¹³*

Eeyore-administrators:

- have great experience of life in all its hardships;
- treat everyone fairly and in the same way, with great dignity and seriousness;
- pace themselves in a steady way and are quite unflappable in a crisis.

But they:

- come across as mournful and appear to have a curmudgeonly attitude;
- are very much glass-half-empty people, tending to fear the worst possible outcome;
- are unable to work with visionaries or anyone who bounces in any way.

The Eeyore-administrator can be found after the service deep in empathetic conversation with anyone in trouble, but then complaining to a circle of friends that the Minister's expenses have come in late yet again.

The Kanga-type administrator

Kanga is the one clearly female member of the animals, the mother-figure. She also arrives in the Forest from a foreign, Antipodean country. What is immediately apparent is that she is Sensible. Consider when she discovers Piglet in her pocket rather than Roo.

"Of course as soon as Kanga unbuttoned her pocket, she saw what had happened. Just for a moment, she thought she was frightened, and then she knew she wasn't; for she felt quite sure that Christopher Robin would never let any harm happen to Roo. So she said to herself, "If they are having a joke with me, I will have a joke with them." ¹⁴

Note, in particular, her mature faith in Christopher Robin. This explains much.

Her motherly and generous character comes out when Tigger arrives in the forest and is brought round to her house.

So they went into Kanga's house, and when Roo had said, "Hello, Pooh," and "Hallo, Piglet" once, and "Hallo, Tigger" twice, because he had never said it before and it sounded funny, they told Kanga what they wanted, and Kanga said very kindly, "Well, look in my cupboard, Tigger dear, and see what you'd like." ¹⁵

And bouncy Tigger then goes to live at Kanga's house, and has Extract of Malt for breakfast, dinner, and tea.

Kanga-administrators are:

- kind, loving and generous people-people who really care for those they deal with;
- sensible about what may work and what may not;
- able to fit in to a new culture and adapt to it well in a laid-back way.

But they:

- are so people-centred that that may take priority over planned work;
- are over-protective of those they feel responsible for;
- tend to know what's the best medicine for people, which can make them unpopular.

Kanga-administrators will be busy after the service with their own family and concerned with the pastoral needs of others, oblivious of any administrative needs just at that moment.

Their context

These four types of administrator then have to work within a world of other people.

- Poohs – loveable leaders, perhaps just a fraction tubby and slow to pick up new ideas, but the bedrock of stable ministry.
- Owls – academic theologians and careful analysers who will always choose a complicated idea over a simple one but who provide depth and gravitas to any church.
- Tiggers – charismatic visionaries having ten good ideas before breakfast and trying them out without thought, bouncing others out of the way in the process.
- Roos – those with childlike enthusiasm for everything but needing a mother figure to keep them safe and under control.

And finally there is Christopher Robin, who loves them all, who is clearly In Charge, who is the fount of all wisdom and advice. Without him, the whole animal kingdom would not exist.

Exercise for administrators

- 1 Score yourself on each of the four administrator types from 10 to 1 where 10 means the positives describe you to a T and 1 means hardly at all.
- 2 Consider how you fit the more negative points in each type. What could you improve?
- 3 Ask friends and colleagues to analyse you in the same way. Why do they see you differently from how you perceive yourself, if they do?

And the new theory is ...

The best administrators combine all four types within them. A good score would be 6:7:7:6. A weak score on this analysis might be 10:2:3:1. Good administrators have the organisational ability of a Rabbit, the humility of a Piglet, the understanding of life that Eeyore displays, and the people-skills and care of a Kanga. Being human, they may have a few downsides too. What about you?

Footnotes

WTP *Winnie-the-Pooh* THAPC *The House at Pooh Corner*

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---|---------------|----|-------------|----|-------------|
| 1 | THAPC ch V | 5 | THAPC ch I | 9 | WTP ch IV | 13 | THAPC ch VI |
| 2 | THAPC ch III | 6 | WTP ch VI | 10 | WTP ch VIII | 14 | WTP ch VII |
| 3 | WTP ch VII | 7 | THAPC ch VIII | 11 | THAPC ch I | 15 | THAPC ch II |
| 4 | THAPC ch X | 8 | WTP ch VII | 12 | WTP ch X | | |

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN60. See also Article A42, *What do Church Administrators do?*, and Training Notes TN4, *Advice for all church administrators*, TN68, *Administrators who miss the point*, TN77, *Administrator wisdom*, TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*, and TN126, *The small-church administrator*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN60 under Administration with a link to Management.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>

