



Taking Inventory of Myers-Briggs

By Juana Llorens

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator has long dominated the realm of personality instruments. But are history and precedent enough for it to hang onto its crown?

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From its humble family origins during World War II to its spike in popularity during the 1970s, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has enjoyed a mostly unchallenged place in the sun. Many in learning and development tout its capability to provide deft insight into personality alongside job-fit, coaching requirements, and organizationwide interaction.

One cannot dismiss, however, that the MBTI is fundamentally a tool—an implement among several others. And by its nature, it is not above reproach as changes in the workplace and society stipulate new kinds of insight into individuals and working relationships. This is evidenced by the fact that some in the learning field feel that these days, the MBTI lags behind its competitors in efficacy.

Bruce Roselle is the founder and principal of Roselle Leadership Strategies, which utilizes MBTI on a regular basis. He thinks that part of the perception problem rests in the age of the inventory. "There is a tendency for people to gravitate toward the new and exciting," Roselle states. "The MBTI has been around for so long, and so many have taken or used it, that for certain people, it has lost some of its cachet."

In addition to longevity, the relative complexity of the MBTI might be responsible for a slip in regard. "It's harder for people to remember all of the letters and distinctions within the MBTI. It lacks that 'sound-byte' quality," adds Roselle.

But given that there are those in the learning field who find ongoing value in the tool and have used it to achieve the results that they seek, one might wonder, “what seems to be the problem?”

Some of the more intricate questions surrounding Myers-Briggs stem from concerns that neither it, nor the Jungian principles it was based on, have been validated statistically. Sharon Grimshaw, director of new product

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development with CPP, the company that owns the assessment, stresses that this is a fair question.

“There is a real merit in looking at the value of the psychometrics of an instrument and asking ‘does it measure what it needs to measure?’ One way to do this,” Grimshaw states, “is by taking other assessments and looking at how Myers-Briggs correlates when compared with those instruments.”

Having done a number of reliability and validity tests, CPP publishes a freely available, regularly updated Manual Supplement (www.cpp.com/MBTIvalidity) containing data on the internal consistency and test-retest reliability on the MBTI, best-fit type, and correlations with other personality

assessments. Myers-Briggs does in fact correlate in line with other instruments, including the Birkman Method, the CPI 260 Assessment, and others. The data, while perhaps a bit complex for some, is no big secret. “The psychometrics have always been available,” Grimshaw points out.

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“If people used it more appropriately, they would see its value,” states Roselle, who frequently uses the MBTI, in conjunction with other instruments,

MBTI: The Basics

The Myers-Briggs® Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument is one of the most widely used personality assessments in the world. Its typology is composed of four pairs of opposite preferences, called *dichotomies*:

- Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)

The MBTI assessment combines an individual's four preferences—one preference from each dichotomy, denoted by its letter—to yield one of the 16 possible personality types. Each type is equally valuable, and an individual inherently belongs to one of the 16 types. Trait-based instruments measure how much of certain characteristics people possess. Unlike the MBTI assessment, those instruments usually consider one “end” of a trait to be more positive and the other to be more negative.

Source: Excerpted with permission from the MBTI Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.



to help individuals garner the insight they need for development and making career decisions, to help groups better understand themselves and each other in a team context, and more.

Grimshaw agrees with that perspective. “The process of self-verification is a part of how trained evaluators use the test,” she says. “Once you really understand the qualities, you can make more well-informed choices.”

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