

# Type Dynamics: WHAT THE MBTI INDICATES

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Unlike psychological instruments in general, the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator is, as its name suggests, designed to indicate to a theory – C.G. Jung's theory of psychological types. This is a key reason why feedback is required as part of taking the MBTI.

Furthermore, while its structure reflects core principles of Jung's theory e.g.

- scales with a mid-point; and
  - the ends of each scale being equally preferable opposites, not extremes;
- the core of his theory of types lays outside the MBTI itself.

The four letter codes or formulas devised by Isabel Myers report a person's preferences as recorded on the MBTI. They are designed also to interpret those results in terms of the dynamics of the type theory, based on the interaction of the functions (S–N;T–F) and the Jungian attitudes (E–I). J and P, of course simply refer to which function is extraverted, or used in the outer world and is a key method of Isabel Myers for making Jung's theory practical by asking the question "What does this look like in the outer world?" Isabel emphasised the importance of type dynamics by writing her type descriptions in the order of dominant to inferior preferences. She also structured her Type Table so that those with the same dominant function were either adjacent to each other, or on opposite boundaries of the Table.

It's important to note that there are various ways of describing Jung's theory. It's a theory of opposites, as mentioned above. It's also:

- Jung's theory of perception and judgement;
- Jung's theory of consciousness; and
- Jung's theory of individuation

All of these ideas overlap one another, as well as with Jung's idea of personality as a vocation or calling – who you are and who you are meant to be. Purpose is quite important in type theory. "Vocation" of course is outside the narrow notion of a career, although there can be a strong relationship.

## What is type dynamics?

Essentially it's the interaction of a person's type preferences, preferred and non-preferred, occurring throughout their lifetime. This interaction has a developmental focus, and is contingent on a person's level of Jung's idea of consciousness, which seems to be related to an awareness of self, and purpose

Type theory presumes that initially all the functions are unconscious in a human being. Whether development of consciousness starts in the womb or occurs at birth is uncertain, but current scientific research would indicate that consciousness of some sort begins *in utero*. Jung in any case believed that we are born with an innate predisposition to type and that our life saw the interplay of the functions according to that predisposition.

This depended, of course, on whether or not the person's environment supported and acknowledged those innate preferences. This is a potential activity: not everyone is conscious (in Jung's terms), nor is everyone a type. The level of consciousness is determined by the exercising of the functions and their differentiation i.e the conscious preference for the use of one function (e.g. Sensing) over its opposite (iNtuition).

Jung considered this differentiation occurred in an hierarchical pattern across the life-span. It is a major explanation for mid-life crises or issues, a field of research in which Jung was a pioneer.

Using the example above as a starting point, this is how it works: As a child develops from a baby, it naturally seeks its own identity. Part of this search involves the development of preferences for interacting with the world. If the child develops a preference for Sensing at this stage, it will prefer more practical situations related to tangible things: action oriented and hands on if extraverted sensing. If this is the case, then extraverted Sensing (Se) may become that child's dominant function.

The dominant preference can be apparent quite early in life, but more certain around 6 or so years. There's no specific time, but a broader time-frame such as occurs in child development. In observing children, you'd be looking for consistent patterns in their interests and behaviour.

Jung suggested that an individual's psyche had to be balanced (although not 50-50; you still needed to spend more overall time in your dominant preference) and so an auxiliary or support function would need to be developed, perhaps around adolescence, although it is naturally present beforehand. In the example here, this would be a judging function (T or F) to balance the perceiving function (Se) and it will be the preferred way this person likes to make decisions – either objectively and non-personally (T), or subjectively and personally (F).

This function will be introverted, because the dominant function is extraverted. In this case, we'll select introverted feeling (Fi), associated with universal values. Our type code for our example is hence ESFP. The combination of dominant and auxiliary functions is considered to comprise most of the ego and its development, or having these preferences in working order, is generally seen to be somewhere around 18-22 years old, earlier than that for some and later for others, contingent on their life experience, particularly cultural pressures

While this development is going on, there is relative neglect of the other preferences. We can develop some skills around them, but, naturally, not trust them as much. The one least preferred will be the opposite of the dominant function, and in the opposite attitude. In our example, this will be introverted intuition (Ni), concerned with symbols, interpretations and meanings, very far from the here and now of extraverted Sensing. Consequently, one would expect a focus on a pleasant, action-filled life in the here and now, with an avoidance of abstract concepts or searching for a deeper or symbolic meaning in life.

Jung considered differentiation crucial, but also placed emphasis on the reconciliation of the opposites i.e. the maintenance of the preferences for dominant and auxiliary, combined with the gradual recognition that preferences have their uses learning how to access and use important part of life. His theory in fact suggests that mid-life in particular is a time where we find ourselves in situations where our dominant and auxiliary are inadequate for the task set or encountered at this time. And so we have opportunities to develop our non-preferences, but in the service of the dominant, to help us experience life more fully.

It may be the case that some people are unable to make the distinction between a skill they possess, and a preference. This can often take some time to sort out in any case. Given also that there are thousands of skills that could be associated with a preference, it can be confusing.

A skill associated with a dominant function is normally something easily attained and expressed - a "falling off a log" skill. It takes less energy and the skill can be used under stress very effectively. A skill associated with an inferior function takes more energy and cannot be sustained or be effective for long. If I am an ENFP and have some skills around accounting, it does not follow that I have general skills in what can be associated with my inferior function, introverted sensing (Si). I may discover that I use my accounting skills in bursts, and that they are expressed differently to the conventional accountant's work. Type dynamics is a core component of Jung's theory. It does not come from MBTI scores, but rather by inference from combining the results on each scale.

Our self-understanding and efficacy with type as professionals is contingent on grasping this core idea.  
General acknowledgments to the work of C.G.Jung and Isabel Myers as well as suggestions and insights from Otto Kroeger and Linda Berens. Originally presented to an AusAPT Regional meeting, 2000. Edited for clarity 2001/3.

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