

Naturally Different: Personality types – a brief explanation

Peter Geyer is a teacher, writer and researcher of psychological types and personality in general. He has taught about type and the MBTI at all levels including Accreditation and advanced courses for AACC members in Victoria, currently advanced and applications courses on type theory and practice.

Every society is different from every other...all are, at the same time, variants of a universal human nature.”
W.G.Runciman

“If a theory describes something people do anyway, then it’s probably a good theory.”
Andrew Samuels

Personality, however described, is an important component in the search for work, a career, or simply how to live.

One of the dilemmas in providing career advice is balancing optimism (“you can be whoever you want to be”) with reality (abilities, interests, approach to life etc.). There’s evidence that being optimistic in this way isn’t very helpful and may have the opposite effect to what’s intended (Sennett 2003).

Different people approach life in different

ways. They have different interests, motivations and stresses. Understanding something about natural differences using a comprehensive, comprehensible and well-tested model and strategy is important.

No-one develops their personality because someone told them it would be useful or advisable for them to do so... C.G.Jung

The pioneer psychologist C.G. Jung presented his theory of psychological types in the earlier part of last century (1921 - 1971). His types have been used with effect in this aspect of careers counselling, workplaces, schools etc. for many years. Mostly this has been with the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®). There are also other processes that have adapted Jung’s ideas, with varying levels of accuracy and success.

The intent of this approach is not to predict career direction – type preferences are more about how you do the job, rather than what job you get to do (Tieger 1992). A person’s behaviours are a result of their type preferences, not the cause of them.

Psychological Types

Psychological types are used to ascertain normal personality, not pathologies. Jung’s considered neurosis arose when a person was unable to act as themselves, for whatever reason; psychological health involves living according to your typological preferences.

Jung’s typology is about a natural psychological orientation, rather than personality per se. It presumes fundamental psychological principles lie behind behaviours – people behave the same way for different reasons and type preferences tell you something about why they behaved in such a way.

“Type determines and limits our judgements.”
C.G.Jung

Jung considered people were born with a predisposition to type and that their personality developed (or not) in a nature/nurture interaction – the person in their environment. Personality being innate in part is a scientific perspective accepted today, but contentious for much of the last century.

This psychological orientation is expressed by sets of psychological opposites. From a typology perspective, preferences are developed in response to experience. Culture mediates the expression of type preferences, in that people of the same type preferences don’t act the same in different cultures. True adaptability is in the context of preferences: a person who prefers regulating and scheduling, may learn to schedule spontaneity if it fits in with their plan.

This kind of approach contends that there’s a limit to individual flexibility and adaptability. Psychological preferences provide a natural and helpful framework for where you want to go in life and if you don’t know where to go, it’s a good start.

The MBTI

The MBTI was developed by two Americans from an intellectual milieu: Katharine Briggs

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Isabel Myers

and her daughter Isabel Myers. Briggs discovered Jung's typology in 1923, taught it to her family and they tested it informally over almost 20 years before deciding to help people by developing a questionnaire or instrument, something Jung would never have considered (Saunders 1991). Personality measurement was then in its infancy and focused on pathologies rather than normal behaviour.

Isabel Myers worked on the MBTI for the last four decades of her life. She died in 1980. For her, Jung's typology to be about perception and judgement i.e. how to take in good information and make good decisions. She was an innovator, developing the statistics and questions required in order to describe Jung's typology as accurately as possible.

Recent MBTI forms have been developed by experienced professionals knowledgeable in the area of Jung's typology and psychometrics.

How the MBTI Works

The MBTI doesn't measure traits. It sorts into four sets of type categories. It has 4 groupings of questions loaded onto discrete scales, sorting

preferences for:

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

Results are expressed in a 4 letter code e.g. ENFP; ISTJ and so on. Brief descriptions of these categories will be given later in this article.

The categories aren't measured in amounts, as for traits. A clear score simply means confidence expressed in answering the questions one particular way. They also don't indicate ability or skill. A slight or a clear result for the same preference indicates simply that the same preference is preferred. There are no "borderline" results no matter the scores.

MBTI results don't stand alone. There must be feedback/discussion on the results otherwise the MBTI hasn't really been taken. Handing over a Report Form or computer-printed Profile and then explaining the results or reading from them is not appropriate, or useful. This is growing in importance these days, with the increasing number of online

options and profiles available.

The results also indicate to Jung's broader ideas on personality, particularly the developmental and dynamic aspects: type dynamics, type development, consciousness, self etc, none of which is implied by the instrument itself. This is why the MBTI and similar instruments are called Indicators because the results indicate to the theory.

If you like the MBTI or type in general, extra knowledge in these areas will help your clients most as it gives insight into their stage of life, developmental issues, stresses and the like.

Because it's an indicator, the MBTI is completed by stating what's preferred, not actual behaviour. Schedules may be imposed on otherwise flexible people by necessity: work, children etc. They are users of schedules, but may prefer not to use them if they were able.

Isabel Myers said it didn't matter whether the person answering an MBTI question had ever done what was being asked because it was about a psychological preference. The MBTI isn't asking what you do.

Questions can be left out if you don't like



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“Because it’s an indicator, the MBTI is completed by stating what’s preferred, not actual behaviour.”

either option. In that way, according to Myers, you’re not giving false information. This is more important than it may sound, as making a selection on questionnaires is very difficult if there isn’t anything you prefer and nothing at all that you like.

The name MBTI points to a specific tool, not to the selection of instruments available online and elsewhere with varying levels of efficacy that use the same categories derived from Jung. Isabel Myers strove to make her work as close to Jung’s ideas as far as she could, and so her work is still the benchmark.

This is not necessarily the case for those questionnaires, particularly online, which use the same labels for their results. For example, some inventories will give you a correct result, but not use the correct language of type: confusing feeling with emotions for instance, or clarity of preference as strength and /or ability.

Here’s a short paragraph on each of the categories.

Extraversion and introversion – where a person gets their energy from in the psychological sense. Extraverts are oriented to what’s happening in the outside world and like to connect. Introverts prefer to distance themselves and reflect rather than seek interaction with others. Not all extraverts are sociable and some are shy. Introverts aren’t necessarily unsociable – they socialise in a different way and prefer more time by themselves or in a very small group. Extraverts tend to be easier to get to know, usually because they tell you more about themselves without too much prompting, whereas introverts are more private. Interviews are biased towards extraverts in this way.

Sensing and Intuition – what we pay attention to, what catches our interest. For someone preferring Sensing, personal experience of events is important – details, facts, and tangibles, not generalities. Intuitives usually prefer to look for patterns, the big picture and interpreting the facts. Practicality for Sensing people is a focus on the here and now and what’s happened in the past, rather than the future orientation of Intuitives. Things as they are, as opposed to things as they might be.

There are 2 – 3 times more Sensing types in Australian society than there are Intuitives.

Tertiary education is a place where that situation is reversed, particularly in research facilities.

Thinking and Feeling – making rational decisions, which means there’s an order or system used. Thinking is about being objective-looking for general principles, logical, non-personal whereas Feeling is about being subjective-looking for the personal, harmony, empathy. Feeling is different from emotion; thinking is not intellect. We can make emotional decisions, but we’re then not using thinking or feeling.

In Australian society, my research, and others, shows more males prefer Thinking (c.60%-40%) and more females prefer Feeling (c.60%-40%). Women in politics or industry are much more likely to prefer Thinking than Feeling.

Judging and Perceiving – how people prefer to live their lives. It’s an implication Isabel Myers drew from Jung’s ideas. Judging is about schedules, order, organisation, structure and being decisive while Perceiving is about adaptability, flexibility, spontaneity, options, casualness.

Goal setting and planning are more natural for those preferring Judging. Perceiving types are usually motivated more by curiosity and interest. Offering “choices” is about Judging, not Perceiving as it involves serial decision making. For a Perceiving type it’s not a choice at all, particularly if none of what’s on offer suits.

Australian society is a mix of J and P. Judging predominates in schools and workplaces, especially systems like Centrelink and the Job Network. Judging behaviour also seems to be associated with being an adult. Curiously, Australian heroes tend to be Ps and we vote overwhelmingly for Js.

Interpretation and Use

Psychological type provides a non-judgemental language for talking about often serious issues. The notion of difference can be readily understood at walks of life. You must know the theory well in order to interpret the measurement and to be able to explain it in plain English. The information from formal Accreditation training, however good, is not sufficient. It’s an advantage to have some familiarity with other approaches to people and be broadly read. The most important part



is to listen to the person who completed the questionnaire.

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What to do next

MBTI Accreditation is solely available from Australian Psychologists Press (APP). Contact www.austpsychpress.com.au. MBTI Step II is now an Accreditation course, solely offered by APP. As I understand it, the Institute for Type Development (ITD) has permission to conduct MBTI Step I Accreditation Courses in Sydney for 2007 (www.itd.net.au). ACER ceased as an MBTI distributor on 31 December 2006. They have recently made available the Majors PTI. Its author, Mark Majors, worked on MBTI Forms M and Q, and is a co-author of the MBTI Step II Manual. MBTI Accredited people are eligible to use this instrument. Contact: power@acer.edu.au

Some References

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Acknowledgements

- MBTI® and Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® are registered trademarks of the Myers Briggs Trust in the United States and other countries.
- Quotations: W.G. Runciman from The Social Animal Harper Collins 1998; Andrew Samuels from Otto Kroeger, und., Jung quotes from Eduardo Casas APT X Newport Beach Ca. USA 1993 and C.G. Jung The Development of Personality (CW17) Princeton 1991 p172 para 291