

An evaluation of myers briggs type indicator



The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a test designed by Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs for the purposes of measuring personality based on Carl Jung's Theory. A test takers personality is defined on eight different personality characteristics with the results of the test given in four letters indicating a test takers strongest preference. The main issue that the MBTI faces as a test deals with the accuracy of the reliability and validity that the test manual reports. Due to the question marks surrounding the MBTI's credibility the usefulness of the test is also brought into question with many psychologist concluding a very limited use for practical counseling.

An Evaluation of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a psychological test that was originally designed in the early 1940s by a mother-daughter team of Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs. Myers and Briggs developed their test in response to the calamity of World War II, because they believed the war was caused by the countries involved failing to understand each other's differences (Coe, 1992). The MBTI is designed to measure personality, and the basis for this test comes from the work of personality types as described by Carl Jung's theory. All the information provided in this evaluation comes from form M of the MBTI.

Purpose, Design and Format of the MBTI

The purpose of the MBTI is to classify individuals on each of the four levels as identified in Jung's theory, and then provide them with a description of their personality as a result of their test (Fleenor, 2001). On each of the four levels to identify a person there are two options on each level making a total of

eight different possibilities that can be used to describe someone's personality. Those levels are: Extraversion v. Introversion, Sensing v. Intuition, Thinking v. Feeling, and Judging v. Perceiving. As defined for the MBTI Extraverts enjoy communication with others and thrive off that contact; while Introverts tend to not find any pleasure in their relationships and prefer to be alone. Sensors use their five senses to gather information about a scenario and see the present for what it is; in contrast people scoring high in Intuition like to look toward the future and the possibilities that could exist. Finally, Judgers use the information available and come to a decision quickly; whereas Perceivers tend to be procrastinators and are always waiting for more facts before deciding (Coe, 1992). It is important to note that while the MBTI places test takers in a category of having one trait or the other that people do display characteristics of all eight, but tend to display one aspect on each level more prominently. The degree to which a person varies on a particular attributed is explained upon completion of the test. The questions on the MBTI are also designed in such a way that it is impossible to fall in the exact middle of a particular trait, everyone will vary slightly one direction or another (Fleenor, 2001).

This test is designed for the general population ages 14 and older, and there is not a specific group who is not eligible to take the MBTI. This is considered a weakness by many and will be covered later. There are 93 multiple choice items on the MBTI, and the questions are written at a seventh grade reading level to ensure comprehension of the questions (Fleenor, 2001). Each question is designed so that one question is measuring just one type of personality level for simple and accurate scoring. In defining the norms for

this test a group of 3009 people were administered the MBTI all were adults from the United States and were 18 years and older. The specific demographics of the normative sample are not given, but the sample was lopsided towards females and Caucasians (Fleenor, 2001).

Psychometric Properties of the MBTI

The reliability of the MBTI has mixed reviews and the data can be slanted one way to make the reliability seem high or slanted another to make it appear low. The data on the internal consistency of the MBTI is very good and has been reported at .90 and higher with the use of continuous scoring. Using test-retest as a measure of reliability for continuous scoring has also produced high reliability, between .83-.97 at a four week interval (Fleenor, 2001). However, the nature of the MBTI does not really permit the use of continuous scoring because the test is meant to encompass the whole of the individual's personality. Therefore, the only accurate measure of reliability will come from the MBTI's ability to produce the same four levels for the same individual. Unfortunately, in a study of the test-retest reliability for this holistic approach after a four week interval only 65% of the test takers managed to get the same four levels again (Fleenor, 2001). Focusing on this latter way of measuring the reliability can cause many to wonder if the reliability is high enough to consider this a good test of personality.

The validity measures for the MBTI have produced some strong convergent validity scores between the various levels on the MBTI and levels on different psychological tests measuring the same attributes. For instance, Furnham, Moutafi, & Crump (2003) used the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) and the MBTI to measure the convergent validity of these two tests. The results

that follow are all presented on the $p > .001$ level. The correlation between Neuroticism from the NEO PI-R and Extraversion was $r = -.30$, and Introversion was $r = .31$. The correlation between Extraversion from the NEO PI-R and Extraversion was $r = .71$ and Introversion was $r = -.72$. The correlation between Openness from the NEO PI-R and Sensing was $r = -.66$ and Intuition was $r = .64$. The correlation between Agreeableness from the NEO PI-R and Thinking was $r = -.41$ and feeling was $r = .28$. Finally, the correlation between Conscientiousness from the NEO PI-R and Judgment was $r = .46$ and Perception was $r = -.46$ (Furnham et al., 2003).

The strength of the face validity of the MBTI is pretty strong and many experts do believe it is a valid test if used in the proper situations (Coe, 1992; Mastrangelo, 2001; Fleenor, 2001). Some believe that the simple, easy to understand, and easy to score nature of the test adds to the strength of the face validity (Mastrangelo, 2001). The questions are straight forward and to many the MBTI seem to correlate quite nicely with the different traits that it claims to measure. Also some strong evidence for the face validity is that in one particular study 78% of the test takers agreed that their four letter personality assessment was the best fit for them (Mastrangelo, 2001).

Use of MBTI in Clinical Settings

The MBTI is a perfect test that can be used for improving poor, or misunderstood communication that may be affecting or slowing down a work environment. The first example of a scenario that the MBTI was able to help fix was at a fire department. The Fair Labor Standards Act came to the fire department and told them that organizational changes had to be made. Problem was that the senior managers at the fire department were 85%

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sensing judgers and by trade felt threatened by this idea of change and were strongly opposed. After taking the MBTI and discovering that these managers were sensing judgers the apprehension was able to be decreased by implementing a controlled strategy to help facilitate these changes. The changes to the fire department were made much easier with the knowledge that had been provided by the MBTI (Coe, 1992).

Another example of the MBTI at work actually occurred at a counseling center focused on reducing family violence. The head of this counseling center was an unknown perceiver who by nature took his time making decisions and always wanted to make sure he had all the facts before hand. Alas, the six counselors under his supervision were judgers and could not stand the fact that it took their boss what seemed like forever to make a decision. Consultants who were brought in used the MBTI to identify those differences, and plan was implemented to help resolve any future conflict that may result due to their personality differences (Coe, 1992). These two examples are very similar because the MBTI was able to solve what may have mounted into a much bigger issue. In both these situations once the co-workers and managers were able to understand themselves and those around them better the problems were simply solved by implementing a simple plan of action. Unfortunately, as the next section will explain, relevant information like this from the MBTI may be the exception as opposed to the rule.

Strengths and Weakness of the MBTI

The strengths of the MBTI are not as many as the reader may think based off the immense popularity the test has with the public. However, there are

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some strengths that can be derived from the MBTI. First, the test happens to be very simple to administer, and scoring can be done by a computer so it requires little work of a trained professional. The interpretation of the different levels of the MBTI also is simple to understand, and although it is recommended that the test taker have at least a little background in Jungian Therapy it is not necessary for basic comprehension (Mastrangelo, 2001). In addition as noted from the examples of potential uses the MBTI can be a great source for co-worker relations and can give employers a better understanding of what makes their employees tick (Coe, 1992). Finally, the reliability and validity can also be seen as a strength as long as continuous scoring is being implemented (Mastrangelo, 2001).

Unfortunately, the reliability and validity can also be seen as a very detrimental weakness to this test. As stated early, the MBTI is meant to be looked at as a whole and not a sum of its parts. Basically, the purpose of this test is to measure a person's whole personality, so if the reliability and validity are only looking at the test broken down into parts then the test is not being examined properly (Mastrangelo, 2001; Edwards, Lanning, & Hooker, 2002). This change from having very high reliability and validity to not is a big concern, and because of this many psychologist disregard the MBTI altogether (Pittenger, 2005). Also according to some research, the different personality typologies in the test are not adequately defined and many of the personality traits cluster together (Pittenger, 2005; Edwards et al., 2002). A big concern that some people also have with this test is the fact that it does not discriminate for any person. An example of why this is a problem is because based on that claim a person with a severe psychological

pathology, such as schizophrenia, can take this test and be classified as having the same personality as a “ normal” person (Pittenger, 2005). Pittenger (2005) also believes that there is very little evidence showing the MBTI’s usefulness in a counseling setting. In conclusion, the MBTI is best served being used for self awareness of personality traits, and should not be used to make significant decisions about the makeup of a person (Mastrangelo, 2001).

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