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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), developed by I. Myers and K. Briggs (1940s) to assess personality type. Based on Jungian theory, the MBTI has become a tool for identifying the 16 different patterns of action into which every person fits. The 16 personality types are based on patterns of: (1) extraversion-introversion; (2) sensing or intuitive preferences; (3) thinking or feeling personalities; and (4) preference for structure or spontaneity. This paper reviews the evidence for reliability and validity for the MBTI and discusses administering the instrument. Uses and applications are also described. (SLD)

A TECHNICAL REVIEW OF THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR™

Curriculum and Program Planning

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE INVENTORY

The human personality instrument, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, can help us better understand the similarities and differences among individuals. C. G. Jung invented the notion of “psychological types” and published his work in the 1921 book, Psychological Types. Kiersey and Bates in their book, Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament (1979), note that, “Swiss-born psychiatrist C. G. Jung said that people are different in fundamental ways even though they all have the same multitude of instincts (archetypes) to drive from within. One instinct is no more important than the other. What is important is our preference for how we ‘function.’ Our preference for a given ‘function’ is characteristic, and so we may be ‘typed’ by this preference” (p. 3). Jung suggested that human behavior was not random but was in fact predictable and therefore classifiable. Starting in the 1940s, Isabel Myers and her mother Katherine Briggs devised the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI™) based on Jung’s theory. In 1962, Educational Testing Service published the first MBTI™ Manual, but it was not until 1975, when publication of the instrument was transferred to Consulting Psychological Press, that the MBTI™ experienced dramatic growth and interest. Refined and improved over the years, the MBTI™ has become, according to theory, a tool for identifying the sixteen different patterns of action into which every person fits.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING THE SIXTEEN PERSONALITY TYPES

It is not a test with right or wrong answers: it allows individuals to declare the degree to which they express preferences for four areas of the participant’s personality. In each of the four areas there are two dichotomous choices, that when combined, give sixteen four letter types: ISTJ, ISFJ, ISTP, ISFP, INFJ, INFP, INTJ, INTP, ESTP, ESTJ, ESFP, ESFJ, ENFP, ENFJ, ENTP, and ENTJ. First it measures how we interact with the world and where we direct our energy: We show an inclination for either **Extroversion** or **Introversion** respectively. Second, the MBTI™ determines our preference for the kind of information we naturally notice and remember: We are either **Sensing** or **iNtuitive** types. How we make decisions is the third aspect of the inventory: We are either **Thinking** or **Feeling** types. Finally, the fourth area of measurement is whether we prefer to live in a more structured or more spontaneous way. We are

either **Judging** or **Perceiving**. “According to typological theory, each of us is born with a predisposition for certain personality traits,” notes Kroeger and Theusen (p. 12).

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The MBTI™ is a highly reliable and valid personality inventory. Judith Provost in her 1990 book, Work, Play, and Type: Achieving Balance in Your Life, states that, “The MBTI is one of the most reliable and valid tools for personality assessment” (p. 15). In chapter 10 of the MBTI™ Manual (1985) it informs us that the reliability of the results is dependent on several factors including gender, age, education, achievement levels and on the strength of the individual preferences; for example, the stronger the score of the preference, the higher the reliability. In his book, True to Type (1990), William Jeffries states “a personality indicator should be 70% or higher to be considered reliable. Taking all things into consideration, the MBTI™ is about 85% reliable – that’s impressively high reliability.”

The validity of the Myers-Briggs is determined by its ability to demonstrate relationships and outcomes predicted by theory. Chapter 11 of the MBTI™ Manual states, “Type distributions presented throughout this Manual provide evidence for the construct validity of the MBTI™” (p. 176). In addition chapter 8 contains strong validity data in education and other aspects of teaching and learning.

ADMINISTERING THE MBTI™

The MBTI™ can be administered by a wide array of helping professionals, including counselors, psychologist, teachers, ministers, and organizational consultants and anyone else who has completed an approved MBTI™ certification course. Organizational development consultant, William Jeffries, suggests that the “MBTI™ ought to be administered to adult populations and older high school students (above the 10th grade)” (p. 49). The inventory takes approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete the 126 questions with pencil. Results are then either manually scored or computer scored and then graphed on a report form. A copy of the instrument is included in Appendix A.

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF THE MYERS BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR™

There are a few basic rules that govern the administration of the MBTI™. Myers-Briggs participants should be informed ahead of time of the purpose and intended use of the results so the

participants are not misled. For confidentiality reasons, type results should not be shared with others without the permission of the participant. A trained MBTI™ administrator should interpret the results face-to-face with the participant and in a sensitive and educational manner so in an effort to clarify any confusion or questions.

“The scores show how consistently you chose one preference over its opposite – how much you voted for one side over the other. Higher scores generally mean a clearer preference,” states Isabel Briggs-Myers in her work, Introduction to Type (1962) (p. 7). She goes on to say that an individual’s “type” is the interaction of the four preferences an individual selects when completing the inventory” (p.7). Only the individual can decide if the MBTI™ report is an accurate representation of his or her type. If type does not comfortably fit, the participant is encouraged to find another one that does.

USES OF THE INVENTORY

Provost notes that the MBTI™ is “commonly used in individual counseling, career and life planning, marriage and family counseling, conflict resolution, organizational consulting and team building, teaching, the ministry and spiritual counseling, and general self-exploration” (p. 15). As noted in Type Talk at Work (1992) by Kroeger and Thuesen, Consulting Psychological Press declares that every year more than two million people take the MBTI™. Kroeger and Thuesen have used the MBTI™ with their clients, including Fortune 500 companies, AT&T, IBM, Ford Motor Company, government agencies, the armed forces, and entrepreneurial firms (p. 9).

APPLICATION OF THE MBTI™ IN CAREER COUNSELING

The Myers-Briggs is an important self-assessment inventory for improving management practices, teaching, learning, career development and relationships. A popular example of how the MBTI™ has been applied in the higher educational setting is in career services. At the Siena College Career Center, the MBTI™ in concert with the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey™ is used regularly to assist students in the first stage of the career development process: Self-assessment. The skills, values, interests and personality inventory are then used to generate career options and ideas for both students and

alumni and begin to move them toward the second stage of the career development process: Career exploration.

More than a million copies have been sold of the most popular book that addresses the relationship between the MBTI™ and careers, Do What You Are (1992) by Tieger and Baron-Tieger. The authors claim that by unlocking the secrets of personality type, you can truly find a fulfilling job that enhances the quality of life (p. xii). Briggs-Myers (1980) adds, “A good way to begin the search for a career is to look at the occupations that appeal to most people whose best-like perception and judgment are the same as yours. Do not discount other fields; but if most people in that field are opposite to you in both perceptive and judging processes, they are unlikely to lend you much support” (p. 207). This inventory is a mission critical tool in the operations of a career center for helping students become more focused with their career plans. The additional reference books and information on the subject of type allow students to become more aware of their career choices. Finally, The MBTI™ can be used in educational settings either in groups or individually including staff development, Residential Life training, stress management, team building, goal setting or improving leadership skills.

SUMMARY

There are a few key points worthy of emphasis about the MBTI™: 1) There are no “good” or “bad” types. We use all of the functions and attitudes of all the types at different times, but we prefer a certain “style” most of the time, and that is what makes up our “type.” Your type taken to the extreme can become a liability, therefore when we are dealing with the MBTI™ the important goal is to seek a balance between our types functions. The MBTI™ does not measure abilities, intelligence or success, nor does it explain everything. Earle C. Page, author of Looking at Type (1983) reminds us that, “‘Type’ is helpful in understanding yourself and other people, but remember, everyone is an individual” (p. 3).

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