

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ENFJ?

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In this article Roy Childs reveals recent research that questions the accuracy of current questionnaires that try to identify Type. He argues that the concept of preference is much more complicated than is often recognised and that we need more sophisticated methods to help people find the real type that sometimes lies buried deep within.

What is Typology:

People have been identifying and labelling each other as particular 'types' since the dawn of time. We can all recognise aggressive or gentle or energetic types (to name but a few) in the world around us. In fact literature is riddled with references to a popular model used by the Ancient Greeks – the Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholic or Phlegmatic types. This article is not concerned with whether type is a better way to represent individual differences than traits. Instead, it addresses some key issues which arise from questionnaires attempting to classify people according to the most popular type model in use today which is based on Carl Jung's theory of Psychological Type(1).

Important assumptions in Jung's Typology:

Jung's model of the psyche has several pervading themes, one of which is 'the counterbalancing of opposites.' In personality terms this means that we live with and reconcile opposite tendencies within us. For example, we can all make decisions based on either logic or on values. However, Jung believed that there is a dynamic interplay between these different approaches and that each individual learns to trust one approach over the other. More fundamentally Jung believed that we all have an underlying natural preference which is largely constitutional. Learning to trust this preference, in spite of life's varied pressures and experiences, is an important part of becoming more self-aware, more effective, more energised and of realising our full potential.

A simple analogy:

Consider the preference we all have for using either our left or right hand (ignoring the few truly ambidextrous people for the time being). This preference is understood to be 'hard-wired' but we may still learn to use both. On those occasions where we need to use our non-natural preference it can feel awkward, frustrating and usually tiring. Life sometimes coerces people to use their non-preferred hand and, especially if this happens early in life, such people can become very skilled and even consider themselves to be other-handed (usually left-handers forced to become right-handed). This also happens in terms of people's style and personality. Jung proposed that we all have a natural preference but life does not always help us to exercise and appreciate it. Imagine a naturally introverted child constantly being told to "do something, go out, make friends, be active" etc. You ask such a child what they would prefer to be and they will often say their preference is to be more outgoing and extravert. Given the variability and subtlety of environmental influences, it is not a surprise that our perception of ourselves and of our real preferences can be variable, divided and confused.

Using questionnaires to identify type:

It is clearly possible to ask people directly to judge (or guess) their natural preference. However, it can be difficult for them to let go of certain stereotypes, habits and personal histories. From an early age people are often encouraged to be 'different' – to be someone else. For example, most of us can identify with pressures such as "my father always wanted me to be an engineer" or "my sister was always so much more popular than I was." Growing up with these messages makes it difficult to separate natural preference from environmental influences. The use of questionnaires offers a way through some of these difficulties – and the best ones add value because they pose questions from different perspectives which reflect the full range and depth of the constructs involved. Unfortunately, the 'answer' revealed sometimes gets used over zealously – as if the questionnaire must be right. It is clear to me that even using the best known of the Type Indicators, the MBTI®(2), does not always identify a person's true natural preference. The evidence for this assertion comes both from the MBTI® manual and from my own experience of coaching and developing people over 20 years:

- more than 50% of people report a different type (by at least one letter change) when invited to complete the indicator again (see MBTI® manual)
- more than 30% will disagree with their reported type (see MBTI® manual)
- individuals identify their 'best fit type'(3) and then later realise that this was not their real preference (evidence based on the author's coaching and development work).

The uncertainty and changes in reported type does not invalidate Jung's theory – in fact Jung would have predicted that working with people's conscious mind will access stereotypes which have been built up over a lifetime. To get at the underlying natural preference sometimes requires a long process of growing awareness, which comes from exposure to many different circumstances and challenging long held beliefs about ourselves – a process often called maturity! We learn by being open to feedback and, used well, that is what good questionnaires like MBTI® offer – feedback on the current self-perception. A key lesson, however, is that the type reported from any questionnaire is simply an indicator of what the person believes about themselves at this point in time.

Can we expect more from a Type Indicator?:

In the light of the above it becomes clear that we are not using questionnaires as instruments to 'measure True Type'. Rather we are using them to crystallise the person's view of himself or herself. Questionnaires therefore complement other methods – they are part of an awareness development process rather than being the answer to the question. This has been recognised and incorporated into the thinking behind a new questionnaire called the Type Dynamics Indicator or TDI. The development of the TDI has taken 5 years of trialling items designed to:

- be as true if not truer to Jung's constructs than other indicators
- be psychometrically rigorous, providing a statistical foundation for its construction and interpretation
- provide a clear alternative to other questionnaires such as MBTI® by demonstrating comparability but also by adding additional value
- reduce ambiguities found in other questionnaires.

The final published version has a norm base of over 1200 people. More data is being constantly collected. And most important of all – it has allowed people to explore the concept of preference in a more profound way.

How does the TDI enhance the exploration of preference?:

The concept of preference is complicated. By analogy, if you asked someone whether they would prefer the orange or the cake imagine what could be going on inside their head:

"the orange is good for me and I prefer to be healthy and I need the vitamins and so can I have the cake please!!!"

What people prefer and what they do does not always tie up. Exploring this difference has proved to be fascinating. In questionnaires like MBTI® people indicate a preference which reflects a mix of current circumstances, historical baggage and underlying type. Sometimes it can get quite close to True Type – in people who are relatively self-aware and who do not have lots of conflicting messages. However, it is the others, the people who have had a lot of different experiences and pressures, who have got most to gain from exploring type. The TDI gives these people an opportunity to express some of the confusion by allowing them to indicate preference in two ways:

- how they feel most natural in their current world (called preference 'the way it is')
- how they might ideally like to be (called preference 'the way I want'). People who do not experience dissonance between these two elements end up reporting the same type. People who do experience dissonance may report different types.

The TDI allows people to express some of the inner conflict about what preference really means to

them which MBTI® and other type indicators do not. When people do report different types it makes it very clear how the questionnaire is not 'an answer' but an aid to 'the process'. In our experience this is much more comfortable for many people. Many who had previously done MBTI® have said "I was ready to accept my 4 letter type but this makes so much more sense to me".

What has the TDI discovered:

The results from our data collection of the TDI are striking. At least 50% of people show a difference between their "IS" type and their "WANT" type (a figure uncannily close to the number who change their type when asked to do MBTI® again!). This dramatic split between two approaches to preference makes it clear that the way current type indicators use a single model of preference leaves an enormous area unexplored. The TDI has helped to reveal some key issues (during a sample of 1200 collected during 2003) reporting each type using both the 'IS' and the 'WANT' mind sets. The difference between the 'IS'/'WANT' preferences can be summarised using a 'Desirability Index' (DI). To illustrate, 8% of the sample reported ESFP (Energiser) when asked for their "IS" preference and 4.3% when asked for their "WANT" preference. Less people 'WANT' to be an Energiser than actually report that preference and the DI is 0.54 (4.3/8.0). DI's above 1.0 would indicate 'more popular' types.

What is the most popular type?:

The ENFJ (Adviser) is the most popular type! Nearly 4 times as many people 'WANT' to be an Adviser than report it as their "IS" preference – and our data tells us that the "IS" reported type correlates more highly with the MBTI®. In fact the data suggests that the TDI "IS" version provides a good alternative to MBTI® for identifying type, produces comparable results and may be closer to Jung's original constructs. However, the real power of TDI comes from using the 'IS'/'WANT' version. For example, the data show a particularly strong difference between the 'IS' and the 'WANT' preference for Extraversion-Introversion – the direction is clearly towards people wanting to be more extraverted. Is this such a strong social value that introverts find it hard to accept their natural style? This is part of what makes the feedback using TDI so much richer – and exploring why differences between the 'IS'/'WANT' have occurred becomes extremely meaningful and thought provoking for the individuals concerned.

Clearly talking about 'most popular type' can be misconstrued and misused. We do not see it as in any way pejorative. However, the questions raised by TDI are interesting and important for all who use this model for exploring the concept of type. For those who are interested, Team Focus has an on-going research into type and the TDI. The TDI is in fact part of a 6-step process into the wider elements of Jung's typology covering Learning Style, Jungian Type and Archetype.

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If you have questions or would like to contribute, you are invited to indicate your interest by contacting us at teamfocus@teamfocus.co.uk.

(1) Those who are familiar with the Psychological Type model will know that it uses 4 key, bi-polar constructs as follows: Extraversion versus Introversion (E-I), Sensing versus iNtuition (S-N), Thinking versus Feeling (T-F), Judging versus Perceiving (J-P). By asking people which of each pair they prefer 16 types can be constructed from the 16 different letter combination. For example a preference for E and N and T and J becomes known as the ENTJ, sometimes called the Executive. For more on the basics of Type go to www.teamfocus.co.uk/Type.

(2) ®MBTI is the registered trademark of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Trust.

(3) 'Best fit type' is the type chosen by an individual feels best reflects their natural preference after they have taken a questionnaire.

References

Briggs Myers, I. & McCaulley, M.H. (1985): *Manual: a Guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. CPP

Jung, C. (1923): *Psychological Types*.

Team Focus Limited (2004): *TDI Manual: A guide to the development of the Type Dynamics Indicator*.

Team Focus Limited (2004): *The Essential Guide to Type*.