

The MBTI® versus the TDI®: a reply to Roy Childs (by Rowan Bayne)

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I agree strongly with some of the points made by Roy Childs (2004) but think he overstated both his criticisms of the MBTI® and his central argument for the superiority of his own measure, the Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI®).

I agree with Roy Childs' opening discussion of the concept of preference and that the MBTI questionnaire 'does not always identify a person's true natural preference' (p.4) but not with his figure of 'more than 30 per cent' disagreeing with their reported type. The source he cites for part of his evidence for this assertion is taken from the second edition of the MBTI Manual (Myers and McCaulley 1985). However, the third edition of the Manual (Myers et al 1998) reviews studies showing that an average of about 75% of people confirm their MBTI results and about 95% confirm three of the four preferences (p.116). Kendall (1998) also cites the 75% figure (p.23) but found a 90% match for the latest UK version of the MBTI questionnaire. These figures are far more positive than Roy Childs' choice and even the second edition of the MBTI Manual includes a 75% figure, for clients 'in counseling situations' (p.52). The reliability data are also much stronger than Childs suggests (Harvey 1996; Kendall 1998).

Similarly it's true, as Roy Childs says, that some people identify their best fit type and later decide that it's not their real type. However, the reverse also happens (there aren't any data on the frequencies of these two situations as far as I know) and in any case it's not the most important evidence for the validity of MBTI theory for the MBTI questionnaire (Bayne 2004).

I agree with Roy Childs about the complexity of the concept of preference. Neither it nor 'type' have been discussed in depth or defined formally in the MBTI literature. I think an adequate definition of preference will include statements about 'most easily' and 'with most interest and energy' but energy is not necessarily easy to detect - sometimes preferences are taken for granted. I've recently tried to spell out what preference means in terms of real self, genetic influences, basic characteristics of personality and constructivist versus realist conceptions of personality (Bayne 2005).

Childs' central claim for the TDI® is that it allows people 'to explore the concept of preference in a more profound way', (p.4). I like the TDI but the 'more profound way' is simply that it asks respondents about each preference in two modes: as it is for them (IS) and as they would ideally like it to be (WANT). Thus it's possible to report the same type or different types in the two modes. The MBTI questionnaire attempts to measure each preference in the IS mode but can easily be completed in the WANT mode as well, so this isn't a profound difference between the two questionnaires. Rather, the TDI pays explicit attention to a problem that's been widely discussed in the MBTI literature on verifying type (Bayne 2005). The TDI's two modes may work well in practice but that remains to be seen.

In contrast, Childs' data on the WANT mode are of great interest, and appropriately emphasised in the title of his article. The marked popularity of the ENFJ type mirrors the positive ends of those Big Five factors which are close parallels of the preferences (Bayne 2005) and seems worth exploring further. However it's not a new aspect of type theory and practice and I don't see it as making TDI feedback 'so much richer' (p.6) than MBTI feedback.

Overall I see the TDI as a considerable achievement - finding good new items to measure type is extraordinarily difficult (Kendall 1998) - but not, on this evidence and reasoning, as an advance on the MBTI. Moreover, I think the term 'Dynamics' in the title of the TDI is misleading. It suggests a direct measure of dominant and auxiliary functions etc. when essentially the TDI seeks to measure the preferences, just like the MBTI.

References

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