

TDI versus MBTI: a further reply to Roy Childs (by Rowan Bayne)

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I think Roy's reply clarifies some of his views well, especially on why he sees the TDI format and results as encouraging a deeper exploration of preferences. I found him less clear on the accuracy question. On a minor point, I'm aware of the importance of 'mind set' when completing questionnaires. In my 1995 book on the MBTI I wrote about creating a trusting and open 'atmosphere' in workshops, in part through participants doing the handedness exercise before completing the MBTI.

Roy didn't reply to my criticism of the term 'dynamics' in the TDI's title. A direct measure of type dynamics, like a measure of type development, would be very useful for applications and for testing major assumptions in type theory. However, the main purpose of the MBTI and TDI is the less threatening one of measuring preferences.

I agree with Roy's rationale for the TDI format encouraging a deeper exploration but I think that whether it actually does this or not, and how valuable it is generally, remains to be seen. This is because the depth of exploration typically associated with MBTI feedback may be enough for most purposes and most people. Greater depth can come later if desired.

I found Roy's discussion of reliability and validity less clear, with echoes of the disenchantment phase (1960s to 1980s) in research on accuracy in judging personality which followed Cronbach's (1955) methodological critique. David Funder's work (e.g. Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Funder, 1995) has moved this issue on considerably and I think decisively. He and many other leading personality researchers now see traits as real and people as generally more self-aware than self-deceptive.

Roy writes that use of Best Fit Type is 'heavily dependent on self-awareness and for this we have no measure' (p.4). But we do! At one level there's construct validity: if the MBTI relates to other measures and behaviours well then that's evidence that it measures what it says it does and that, therefore, people are generally sufficiently self-aware to complete it accurately. I think 75 per cent agreement between MBTI results and people's judgement after review/feedback is an impressively high figure given the number of influences on answering the questionnaire. At another level there's the Private Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheir & Buss, 1975), used in numerous studies in the last 30 years, and attempts to measure elements of 'emotional intelligence'. There are problems with these but they are measures of self-awareness.

Roy writes that he regards all personality measures as reflecting people's stories. I imagine that this position reflects his more Jungian orientation and wonder if it is a source of confusion. In contrast, I see the MBTI as measuring central, stable characteristics of personality (which is why the MBTI's respectable reliability matters) and judge Jung's writing on type (and generally) to be of mainly historical interest. I also find McAdams' framework helpful though his meaning of stories may not be the same as Roy's. McAdams (e.g. McAdams et al., 2004) suggests that personality can be described at three levels:

1. Traits;
2. Personal concerns;
3. Integrative life stories.

McAdams sees different kinds of measure as most appropriate for each level. His framework implies that Roy's aim to help people explore their stories may well be achieved more directly and effectively with a different kind of measure and not the TDI.