

TDI[®] versus MBTI[®]: (Roy Childs replies to Rowan Bayne)

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Introduction

I welcome Rowan taking the time to comment on my article 'So you want to be an ENFJ' in SDR (Vol 21, No 1 Feb 2005). The article was written to highlight some fundamental issues involved in identifying Psychological Type. I hope it will fuel a healthy debate, which I believe is long overdue. There is a large community of people who know and use MBTI[®] but who may be a little uncritical of how effectively it identifies type. In Rowan's reply he makes some good points but I would like to clarify areas of misunderstanding or misrepresentation of my arguments.

There are 2 main points in Rowan's reply which deserve further debate. In order of importance they are as follows:

- *does TDI[®] encourage a more profound exploration of preference?*
- *what is the accuracy of MBTI[®] type identification?*

Does TDI[®] encourage a more profound exploration of preference?

Rowan correctly states that this is a central claim for TDI[®]. He also recognises that a key mechanism (but not the only mechanism) used for this is to invite people to answer the TDI[®] with a particular mindset concerning preference. This involves separating preference into two elements. The first is a person's perceived natural preference in the way they express themselves (the way it is). The second is the person's internal image of what they would like to be (the way I want). He argues that this is a known issue and that you could answer the MBTI[®] twice to extract the same information. In principle this is true although I am not aware of anyone who uses MBTI[®] in this way. However, even if it were, I believe there are two reasons why this would not be as profound:

1. Researched items: the TDI[®] uses items that were specifically researched and selected on the basis of their sensitivity to IS versus WANT differences. The TDI[®] items were chosen from almost 300 items trialled on nearly 700 people. Rowan states that it is hard to get good Type items. From experience I can affirm that it is even harder to get ones which work robustly across the Is/Want mindsets. Since the MBTI[®] was not developed with this in mind it is unclear whether the items would work as effectively as those in the TDI[®]. Furthermore, the Is/Want element used by the TDI[®] is not simply a 'good idea' - it links fundamentally to Jung's theory of type, development, individuation and the role of the conscious mind for understanding ourselves.

2. Changing the process: Bayne also fails to recognise the fundamental effect of adopting a mindset when completing any questionnaire. Good administration of MBTI[®] asks individuals to focus on preferences based on some generalised underlying 'natural' orientation. My contention is that this generalised notion can be superficial. Introducing the Is/Want mindset does not seem dramatically different until it is recognised as to how it engages the person to think in a different way. By using more precise instructions, the TDI[®] introduces a different mindset at the time of completing the questionnaire. Bayne states that you could do it with MBTI[®] - the point is that people don't, whereas they do with the TDI[®]. Of course one can explore the concept of ideal type during feedback but the credibility of established questionnaires sometimes constrains this exploration - the tendency to agree is a well-known phenomenon. By inviting people to consider different parts of themselves before getting the results does encourage a more exploratory process. It is also worth mentioning that many people who have completed TDI[®] with the Is/Want mindset often say that they cannot conceive of giving a simple generalised response. It seems that, once the question is asked, it is hard to go back to the generalised mindset used by MBTI[®]. People also report being more thoughtful whilst completing the questionnaire, being more comfortable with the process and intrigued by the results which acknowledges the complexity of personal identity.

In summary, people can respond to questionnaires with a generalised personal stereotype of themselves, but this is not always the most useful. The TDI[®] sets up a more searching mindset at the time of completing the questionnaire and this is what makes it more profound.

What is the accuracy of MBTI® Type identification?

Bayne takes issue with the figure that 30% disagree (i.e. 70% agree) with their reported type. He quotes a figure of 75% from the later MBTI® manual. Whilst I do not think it is worthwhile to debate this 5% difference, I do believe readers are in danger of confusing his statements about 'agreeing with Best Fit Type' and his assertion that 'the reliability data are stronger than Childs suggests'. I would therefore like to clarify the points:

1. Best Fit Type – the concept of 'agreeing with an Indicator'?

The process of feedback (in my language this is called 'the review') should involve an exploration of how this fits with the person's self image. However, it must also be recognised that people have been known to agree with a profile even if it is not their own! We should not be over cynical about this since Type theory acknowledges that all elements of type exist within us to some degree. Our type is simply a reflection of the unequal balance of the preferences and there is no part of Jung's theory which states that this balance will be unchanging. The concept of Best Fit Type can be very useful to help people explore the concept of natural preference and can prevent over-dependence on questionnaire results, but it is still heavily dependent of self-awareness and for this we have no measure. We are therefore in the dark concerning whether the published research on Best Fit Type reflects genuine enlightenment or tendency to agree. Therefore we need to be cautious in interpreting figures of '90% agreement between an Indicator and Best Fit Type'. I certainly do not find it compelling evidence in the debate concerning the accuracy of MBTI® or any other indicator (in which I would include the TDI®).

2. Reliability Data

Bayne claims that 'the reliability data are stronger than Childs suggests'. My argument is based on the largest published test re-test data available, which are for MBTI® Form G. The proportion of people who change their letter formula is clearly over 50%, although I am not concerned whether this is 30%, 40%, 50% or 60% because I believe this is something that will be strongly affected by the individual's life experiences and the mindsets established at administration (such details are clearly not reported in these studies and so give us only a top level indication with little understanding of the reasons why). However, the point of substance is that the number of people who change their letter formula is substantial (see footnote below). In fact I find it is much more in accord with the Jungian model that people will experience a shift in the balance of their preferences as they mature (move towards individuation) and they will explore their 'other side'. The underlying type may not change but our experience of it will.

I regard all personality questionnaires as reflecting 'the story I currently want to tell'. No self-report questionnaire can get away from the fact that results are affected by self-awareness (which can change), by experience (which also changes) and by the nature of the audience (a coach and recruiter may get different stories). If questionnaire results do not change they may be insensitive – a view that may challenge one of the pillars of traditional psychometric theory which has made stability a key indicator of questionnaire quality. However, a dynamic theory of personality should not be constrained by the more static model on which psychometric orthodoxy is based.

The fact remains that substantial numbers of people change their letter formula when they complete a type indicator again. With MBTI® Form G this was in excess of 50%. With MBTI® Step 1 there is no test re-test data presented. The TDI®, by using an Is/Want mindset, has highlighted how mindset affects reported type. It implicitly recognises that type and preference is more complex than is often acknowledged. TDI® embraces the concept of different personal stories about preference and type and I would encourage people to explore these issues further and not to be seduced by getting 90% to agree with their reported type. My experience is that these conversations are richer, making this a key reason for developing the TDI®.

Footnote: Furthermore, it should be noted that changes in letter formula over time can be viewed positively. A Jungian view of type development suggests that, whilst the underlying type might be natural and fixed (even innate), personal growth means that we experience different aspects of ourselves as we develop. The conscious mind does not necessarily read our genetic code; instead it reads these many experiences.