

# A Critical Evaluation of the Jungian Approach to Personality Measurement and MBTI

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*Abstract: This paper takes a quick look at the evolution of the personality theories and personality test inventories from Sigmund Freud's approach based on his concept of unconscious mind to B. F. Skinner's approach based on behaviourism - and then focuses on the Jungian approach leading to the development of Myers Briggs Type Indicators (MBTI). Though not free from limitations and criticisms, MBTI remains one of the most popular and widely used personality inventories worldwide, adopted by the CAPT, USA and is still evolving.*

**Keywords:** Personality, MBTI

## INTRODUCTION:

There are practically as many definitions of personality as there are theories. Personality theories can be traced as far back in the history as the Vedic era in India's ancient Aryan civilization, such as Sankhya theory based on the three Gunas (Kejriwal, A. & Krishnan, V., 2004). Personality implies predictability about how a person will act under different circumstances or react to different stimuli. A few of the important personality theories are referred to in this paper.

## METHODOLOGY:

This paper is based upon the review of literature. Available authentic literature on MBTI was referred to (Jung, Adler and Hull, 1921/1976; Myers and Myers, 1980 & Myers and McCaulley, 1985). The review included an analysis of occupation-wise data from the MBTI data bank compiled from the sampled response sheets scored in the 1970's until 1984 (Appendix D in Myers & McCaulley, 1985). The results of the analysis is summarised in Appendix A.

## Personality Theories:

There have been numerous proponents of personality theories- Machiavelli (-1512-27 AD), Adler (-1870 AD), Freud (1856-1902 AD), Erikson (1902-63 AD), Bandura (-1965 AD), Jung (-1875-

1961 AD), Skinner and the list could go on to include a more recent and comprehensive but more complex to understand "Big-5" model proposed by Paul Costa and Robert Mc Crae of National Institute of Health and by Warren Norman of University of Michigan and Lewis Goldberg of University of Oregon - each an exponent in his own right and time. Approaches of each of these theorists were original and distinct from one another, emphasizing different aspects of personality and having divergent views about its organisation, development, and manifestation in external behavior.

According to Machiavelli, man is essentially evil, selfish, manipulative, cunning and cruel. According to Adler, lifestyle freezes in the first five years of life. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychotherapy and the founder of the analytical school of psychology, believed that unconscious processes direct a greater part of a person's behavior. Although a person is unaware of these impulses and drives, they strive to assert themselves. According to Erik Erikson, eight virtues develop in a man's life in eight successive stages and societal influence plays an important role. Albert Bandura proposed social cognitive theory, saying that man is both producer and the product of environment. B. F. Skinner, proponent of cognitive learning and behaviorism, sees personality as a composition of learnt pattern of responses and human behavior as determined largely

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by its consequences. If rewarded, behavior recurs; if punished, it is less likely to recur. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist, broadened Freud's psychoanalytical approach by interpreting mental and emotional disturbances as an attempt to find personal and spiritual fulfillment. Jung's approach is highlighted below in greater detail.

### THE JUNGIAN APPROACH:

The Jungian theory suggests that individuals differ in how they acquire data from the world around them and how they subsequently make judgments using this data (Cowan, 1989). Jung's theory is a typology derived from innate preferences regarding how humans receive and process information (Neubauer, 2004). The essence of Jung's theory is the belief that there are four basic mental functions used by everyone in varying degrees, which he identified as Sensing (S), Intuition (N), Thinking (T) and Feeling (F), and none of which can be related or reduced to one another" (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). He further classified sensing and intuition as "irrational" perceptive activities and thinking and feeling as "rational" judging activities. Jung also considered Extraversion (E) and Introversion (I) as complimentary attitudes or orientations toward life. Extroverted people seem to be drawn outward towards the objects and people in the environment while the introverted people are drawn inward. Thus he theorised three bipolar dimensions - extroversion-introversion (E-I), sensing-intuition (S-N), and thinking-feeling (T-F).

**Personality Tests/Inventories:** To evaluate the personality of an individual, various ways of assessment have been studied and developed over the last few centuries. The erstwhile widely used interview method of personality assessment is a means of eliciting from the subject a report of past, present and anticipated future responses. Most interviews are unstructured and needs to be administered by an experienced psychologist. Structured personality tests can be used in conjunction with, or as a substitute of the Interview method. Structured tests are of two categories – self-report inventories and projective tests. Self-report inventories, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and Myers Briggs Type Indicators (MBTI), pose questions about

personal habits, attitudes, beliefs, and fantasies (Lampe, 2004). In projective testing, the subject's responses to ambiguous or unstructured situations are assumed to reflect inner reality. The Rorschach test (Rorschach, 1921), for example, is a projective test consisting of a series of inkblots, about which the subject reports his or her perceptions; the assessor subsequently interprets these responses.

### THE MBTI:

As a psychometric instrument, MBTI was constructed by Isabel Myers and her mother Katherine Cook Briggs in the Post-WW II era. It is a tool that can be grasped and understood in a relatively short time to give a better understanding of people and their differences. The instrument has also been tested extensively for reliability and validity (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). A shortlist of historical milestones of MBTI is highlighted in Table-1 below.

Jung's theory covered three preferential dimensions, E-I, S-N and T-F. Though the importance of a fourth dimension, namely, that of the two kinds of lifestyle preferences-

Table-1: MBTI: Historical Milestones since 1920.

Year	MBTI: Historical Milestones
1920	Carl Jung publishes his intuitively conceived theory of psychological types.
1923	Peter Baynes, Jung's disciple, publishes the English translation.
Post-WW II	Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers design MBTI.
1956	Educational Testing Service agrees to publish MBTI.
1962	Isabel Myers publishes the first edition of the MBTI manual.
1962	Isabel Myers is invited to speak to the American Psychological Association (APA).
1969	Isabel Myers meets Mary McCaulley, and starts the typology lab at Univ. of Florida.
1972	The typology lab becomes Centre for Application of Psychological Types (CAPT).
1975	CAPT sponsors the first biennial conference on type-watching.

1985 Mary McCaulley publishes the second edition of the MBTI manual

Post-Y2K Revised MBTI Personality Inventory Form 'M' introduced (with 93 questions)

Source: Myers & McCaulley (1985), and telephonic input from Dr. J. M. Ojha, Manasayan, Delhi.

Judging and perceiving (J-P), were implicit in Jung's work, it was Myers and Briggs, who defined them explicitly while developing MBTI framework (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Thus MBTI, in its present form, has four bipolar dimensions, E-I, S-N, T-F and J-P, leading to sixteen personality "Types", as shown in Figure-1 below.

An individual's psychological type is the result of combination of preferences, which, for convenience, can be abbreviated by using the applicable four letters. For example, ISTJ would mean an Introvert with preferences for Sensing and Thinking, and with a mainly Judging attitude toward the world (Bostrom & Kaiser, 1981). Gardner and Martinko (1996) concluded from their review on the usage of MBTI instrument, that the instrument is a reasonably reliable and valid tool for research into relationships among managerial personalities, cognition, behaviors, effectiveness, and situational variables.

Appendix A shows the 16 MBTI types and their intrinsic career propensity at a glance, compiled from the MBTI manual by Myers & McCaulley (1985). It may be observed that 72% of people taking the MBTI tests showed extraversion and the overall tested population are almost equally divided between the 'J' and the 'P' types.

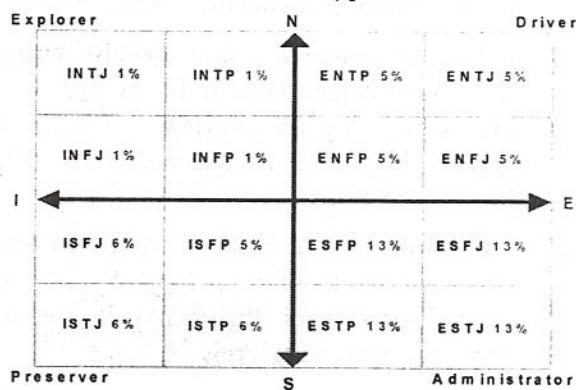


Figure-1: 16 MBTI "Types" distributed in four broad quadrants

### RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF MBTI INVENTORY:

MBTI, though a much tested and widely used personality inventory, cannot be claimed to be free from limitations and criticism. When tested on the test/retest reliability scale, it did not give totally consistent results indicating that an individual's responses to the MBTI inventory, tends to measurably change with time (Wheeler, 2001 as cited in Lampe, 2004). However, as cited by Gardner (1996), the split-half reliability exceeds 0.75 for continuous scales, for all four scales as per research findings of Carlyn (1977), Carlson (1985), and Myers & McCaulley (1985). The test-retest reliability exceeds 0.70-0.80 (Steckroth *et al*, 1980). While 47% respondents scored identically on all four scales on a retest after five weeks, the percentage exceeded 80% when only three scales were considered.

For dichotomous scales, both split-half and test-retest reliability scores estimated by the same researchers are relatively less, but they are still reported to be in the range of 0.60+ to 0.75 (except for Form AV). However, MBTI inventory itself has been evolving with time, the latest being Form 'M' with 93 questions, expected to give better reliability scores than the erstwhile Form 'F' with 220 questions – which is subject to verification in due course.

Regarding criteria validity of MBTI instrument, mixed results have been reported. Carlyn (1977), Carlson (1985) and in particular, Myers & McCaulley (1985) reported generally positive results, but Sippes & Alexander (1987) was not so appreciative of the criterion-based validity of MBTI, esp. while including the borderline clusters in both S/N and T/F dichotomies (Gardner & Martinko, 1996).

The MBTI instrument also has fairly acceptable predictive validity, if borderline cases of both SN and TF scales are kept out. Ott, Mann & Moores' study (1990), cited by Gardner and Martinko (1996) showed that computer-aided instruction (CAI) method of teaching was predictably more effective for N and F students, and class-room lecture or contact teaching (CLT) method was more effective for S and T students, if borderline clusters were excluded. Borderline SN students scored

lower in exams under both CAI and CLT methods, as compared to both extreme Ss and Ns; but borderline TF students outperformed extreme Ts and extreme Fs.

**CONCLUSION:**

Moore (1987), as cited by Cowan (1989, p.1), had observed, "In 1986 some 1.5 million people took the MBTI, according to its publisher, Consulting Psychologists Press in Palo Alto, California. It is almost certainly the most widely used personality test in the U.S. . . and the test whose use is growing fastest. . . The corporate world is by far the biggest user, and business accounted for 40% of test sales last year, double their share of three years ago. . . Most companies use the Myers-Briggs type Indicator primarily in management development programs, to help executives better understand how they come across to others who may see things differently. (p.74)".

To sum up, though the use of the Jungian theory for the assessment of the personality is not free from criticism and the dichotomous interpretation that Myers and Briggs made of Jungian theory may have unduly restricted its sensitivity thus making it prone to losing important information (Ramaprasad & Mitroff, 1984), Myers and Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Framework has survived the test of time through many decades and this much-debated instrument, accepted by the Centre for Analysis for Psycho Types (CAPT), USA right from its infancy, has always fascinated researchers studying personality traits of the individuals (Lampe, 2004), mainly due to its simplicity of concepts and ease of use.

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**Appendix A**

The 16 MBTI Types (with their symbolic career preferences and observed frequencies of occurrence)

Source: Myers & McCaulley, 1985

**The 16 Types at a glance**

Sr. No.	MBTI Type	Figurative Type	~ Percentage among the Tested Population
1	INTJ	Scientist	1%
2	INFJ	Author	1%

3	ISFJ	Server	6%
4	ISTJ	Trustee	6%
5	INTP	Architect	1%
6	INFP	Questor	1%
7	ISFP	Human	6%
8	ISTP	Artisan	6%
9	ESTP	Promoter	13%
10	ESFP	Entertainer	13%
11	ENFP	Journalist	5%
12	ENTP	Inventor	5%
13	ENTJ	Field Marshall	5%
14	ENFJ	Pedagogue	5%
15	ESFJ	Seller	13%
16	ESTJ	Administrator	13%

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