

Answering Type's Critics & Defending the MBTI

Presentation Summary

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While statistics are objective—correlations, reliability coefficients, self-selection ratios—their meaning and what they suggest or prove is wide open for debate. Due to these ever-present debates, answering critics well rarely means providing them with statistics. Defending the MBTI and best serving those who would be its users requires understanding the root of their unease or complaint and addressing that.



That said, the following links will take you to two written pieces—different, but both excellent at unfolding a traditional validity and reliability argument in favor of the MBTI. If those data are of interest, either or both of these pieces will serve you well:

- Leadership Performance Systems' Roger Pearman's *Type's Critics-Responses and Responses*: <http://www.personalitypathways.com/mbti-criticism-pearman.html>
- CPP's Rich Thompson's *The Myers-Briggs Assessment is No Fad—It's a Research-Based Instrument That Delivers*: <http://www.cppblogcentral.com/cpp-cont/the-myers-briggs-assessment-is-no-fad-its-a-research-based-instrument-that-delivers-results/>

Reasons critics push-back against or dislike the MBTI assessment:

- A. Financial interest in competing tool
- B. Don't like psychometrics of the tool or the underpinning theory
- C. Negative past experience with someone using the MBTI

A. Financial interest in competing tool

- Many people have invested time and money in an attachment to another tool.
- Many have created their own tools—even Type tools to capture their own voices (and more money).

What do I say?

Some people's bread is not buttered by the Myers-Briggs Assessment, so let it go. If someone is invested in another tool, no discussion of validity or instrument features will change that.

B. Don't like psychometrics of the tool or the underpinning theory

- Most criticism of the MBTI is rooted here.
- Some people know the tool and theory and just don't like them, but most criticism of the MBTI is rooted in ignorance.

Someone asks what the MBTI is/does-- What do I say?

- Model allowing me to understand my own cognitive tendencies
- Vocabulary enabling me to ask the world for what I want and need
- Framework to allow more effective development, leading, teaming, and communication
- Greater self-awareness leading to better self-management

MBTI does NOT:

- Measure Skills or Abilities
- Predict Success
- Denote Amount or Degree of Behavior
- Diagnose Dysfunction or Mental Illness
- Prescribe Career Paths
- Suggest Compatibility

Most Type and MBTI push-back comes from people wanting to use the tool to measure, select or evaluate in a way it was never intended and psychometrically cannot support.

The Big 3 Misuses of Type/MBTI

1. Believing Score Denotes Amount or Intensity of Type
2. Assuming Type Predicts Behavior
3. Using Type as a Matching Tool (Person to Person or Person to Job)

1. Believing Score Denotes Amount or Intensity of Type

- Many, if not most, believe scores denote the amount, degree or intensity of Type or its development.
- MBTI allows you to sort yourself into one bucket (category) or the other.
- The score denotes only the confidence we have that the sort was accurate.

What do I say?

There are no “amounts” that matter and no scores upon which decisions should be made.

2. **Many, if not most, people assume not only that Type predicts behavior, they believe Type and behavior are the same thing.**

Someone says, “I do both. Why do I have to choose?” What do I say?

- “I do both” – of course you do, but Type is about preference, not behavior.
 - Sometimes you may even “do” more of a non-preference than a preference.
 - Knowing your preference allows for even better self-management and more deliberate behavioral choices.
3. **Too many people use the MBTI as a compatibility tool, reducing people to codes and trying to match sames together—in jobs and relationships.**

What do I say?

- MBTI-related career stats show what careers tend to attract and repel different Types.

- Your knowledge of Type lets you know what duties or behaviors may come easily and which may be more challenging—leading to more informed choices and better self-management.
- You don't hire letters, you hire skills, abilities and experience—none of which are indicated by MBTI results.
- The MBTI should never be used to encourage, discourage, or certainly select for a career.

Most criticism of the MBTI is rooted in people trying to overlay or over-interpret the scores. This practice makes the focus the indicator, not the individual.

What do I say?

- If you are looking for a tool to select, evaluate or diagnose, the MBTI is not for you.
- The psychometrics do not support your needs, and the underpinning model contradicts your efforts.
- If you are looking for a tool to empower the individual to gain self-awareness leading to better self-management—in all areas of his life, no tool is better than the MBTI . . .
In the hands of a competent and caring trainer, counselor or coach.

C. Negative past experience with someone using the MBTI

- The tool gets the blame when we as trainers fail.
- Tools don't intervene; tools don't learn; tools don't make choices.
- Training and coaching testimonials are about people, not tools.
- Trust (or blame) trainers—not the tools they use.

A great trainer can facilitate deep learning and activate great change with nearly any tool (or no tool at all). The best tool in the world (and the MBTI is in the running) can't save an incompetent trainer.

What do I say?

- While the MBTI is a great tool, what matters more is how engaged as a group we will be with it and how we put our learning to work.
- Success comes from interactive training designs leading to implemented action plans.

Remember: the MBTI doesn't do the work. We do, and the MBTI is a tool we choose to help us.

For more information on OKA, Hile Rutledge, visit OKA's website and blog at www.oka-online.com.