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## COMMENTS

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# Comment on Cowan's Interpretation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Jung's Psychological Functions

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Concerned with the increasing popularity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in the assessment of executives and managers in corporate America, Cowan's (1989) research with a "modified" MBTI has produced findings consistent with the mainstream MBTI research literature (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). He reaffirmed the statistical independence of the two pairs of Jungian functions (Jung, 1921/1971), sensing (S)-intuition (N) and thinking (T)-feeling (f),<sup>1</sup> and again demonstrated the preponderance of T preferences among management personnel. Unfortunately, he also seriously misinterpreted the MBTI and Jung's constructs, dampening hope that his work might lead to a "more sensitive

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<sup>1</sup>References to introversion, extraversion, sensing, intuition, thinking, feeling, judging, and perceiving are to definitions stated by Jung (1921/1971) and operationalized by Myers (Myers, 1962; Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Extraversion and introversion refer to attitudes and a preference for acting before reflecting and directing perception toward the outer world (E) or for reflecting before acting and directing perception toward the world of ideas (I).

Sensing and intuition refer to two opposite perceptual functions and a preference for gathering information through the senses in terms of observable facts (S) or for perceiving information in terms of relationships, potentials, and alternatives (N).

Thinking and feeling refer to two opposite decision-making functions and preference for coming to conclusions about the information gathered in a step-by-step, cause and effect, objective manner (T) or for making decisions based on values, priorities, and effects on individuals involved (F).

Judging and perceiving refer to attitudes and a preference for living one's extraverted life in a planned, orderly manner (J) or for a lifestyle that is spontaneous and responsive to immediate information (P). Full explanations of the variables and the consequences of the 16 possible combinations of the variables are in the manual (Myers & McCaulley, 1985).

measurement technology" for two major reasons. First, the MBTI is not an either-or assessment instrument. Second, Jung's personality maturation concepts are something more than skill development and something other than group-think interaction.

On the basis of Jung's theory of psychological type, Myers and Briggs formulated dichotomous, forced-choice questions in developing a preference-assessment device to provide information useful in understanding personality (cf. Myers, 1962; Myers & McCaulley, 1985). These questions posed ordinary rather than extraordinary options to serve as "straws in the wind" for eliciting type-related responses (McCauley, 1988). The straws were designed to assess unguarded, natural preferences that reflected the instinctual or habitual dominance in each pair of Jung's rival functions (S vs. N; T vs. F) but were never intended to measure competence or strength of skill (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Although skill can and does often follow from preference, liking-and-doing do not guarantee effectiveness or efficiency. Personality maturation depends on gaining competence with preferred functions, strengthening less preferred functions, and achieving function synthesis and flexibility (Hall & Nordby, 1973).

Jung's rival attitudes, extraversion (E) and introversion (I), are also assessed by the MBTI. According to Jungian theory, the E-I preference is the most influential personality dynamic in determining which functions are expressed or internalized. A second set of rival attitudes, judging (J) versus perceiving (P), was formulated by Myers and Briggs to clarify which function will be extraverted (expressed). When the four preference pairs are interpreted together (attitudes E-I and J-P; functions S-N and T-F), it is possible to identify an individual's *dominant* and *auxiliary functions* and how they are expressed. MBTI results indicate the clarify of preference among dynamic personality variables and which preferences are most likely to be expressed. Extraverts extravert their *dominant* function for all to see and recognize, whereas introverts express their *dominant* function in thoughts and feelings where only a special few may realize its role in the personality.

Individual MBTI preference patterns permit formulation of hypotheses about probable success or difficulty associated with Jungian type descriptions. But using the MBTI in performance appraisal, or in the assessment of collective competence, moves away from the intention of Jung's theory and the MBTI and requires more than a giant leap of thinking-plus-intuition. Cowan might approach his concerns more directly by supplementing MBTI results with measures of IQ, aptitude, and/or achievement.

Cowan is to be commended for his initiative in using the MBTI to assess fundamental personality dimensions, his desire to improve assessment technology, and his effort to prevent a fast assessment "Big MBTI Attack." However, rather than contributing to "more sensitive assessment technology," the use of

his "modified" nuggets of undigestible MBTI may lead to acute theoretical heartburn and nausea.

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