

Trainee Line



Recently at dinners and other social occasions, your correspondent has been dazzled by the alphabet recipes flying round the room in competition with the soup. 'Oh, I'm an I-S-T-J' says one, and another replies 'Really? Well, I am an E-N-F-P, but it was touch and go on the TF'. To keep my end up, I say 'I'm a W-I-M-P'. But no one takes any notice, and I dive into the soup again, to read the noodles for better combinations.

I have now cracked the code. I attended an MBTI workshop and have been initiated into the mysteries. MBTI stands for Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and is one of many personality tests available. At present, the MBTI is enjoying great popularity in the area of management, judging by the advertisements appearing in the press. Its proponents argue that it is useful for team building, leadership training, career development and counselling, staff selection and organisation development.

The MBTI is based on the premise that the infinite variety in human behaviour is the result of observable differences in mental functioning, in the way people *prefer* to use their minds, specifically in the way they *perceive* and the way they make *judgements*. 'Perceiving' in this sense includes the processes of becoming aware of things, people, occurrences and ideas. 'Judging' refers to the processes of coming to conclusions about what has been perceived.

These two central functions are supported by two more — where people focus their attention, and the kind of lifestyle they adopt.

The four preferences are set up as four poles and alpha codes assigned to the ends of each pole. These are:

- Introvert — Extrovert
- iNtuitive — Sensing
- Feeling — Thinking
- Perceiving — Judging

Myers-Briggs terminology is somewhat confusing to start with, because ordinary words are assigned very specific meanings, and vice versa. It is worth pursuing fuller descriptions in the literature, if you are interested.

These eight descriptions provide 16 types. It is impossible to include detailed descriptions of each type in this small article. Within the 16 types, four characteristic 'temperaments' have been identified (shades of Elizabethan 'humours'). These are the -S-J: the stabiliser, consolidator, traditionalist; the -S-P: the negotiator, or trouble-shooter; the -NF-: the catalyst, spokesperson, energiser; and -NT-: the visionary builder.

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A great strength of the MBTI is the emphasis on the value of all the types. One type needs the others to provide balance. The most powerful teams are made up of mixtures of types. Respect for the gifts of others differing from oneself is the heart of the matter, a message worth cultivating, whatever our type or the test.

For personality tests there are some criteria for assessing their worth. MBTI has shown good results on reliability, consistency, and validity, both construct and predictive. It has been tested against other well accepted tests e.g. MMPI and 16PF.

In the field, over many trials, it has displayed predictive usefulness for career selection, conflict resolution, team building, and so on. And the final test of all, is whether the person doing the test is happy with the results. Its use often proves liberating, not confining.

Myers-Briggs even has a user group devoted to refining, improving and keeping it fresh, just like DDC.

At a personal level and in career terms I have found the test I did lots of fun and very helpful. With my curiosity whetted, I was intrigued to see what the MBTI has to suggest about the library profession.

There is a compilation of results from several large studies conducted in the US over the last 40 years.* From this, I have extracted the data on librarians.

The usual riders apply — these data may not reflect the Australian situation, or the changes that are occurring in the profession. MBTI is a tool and may or may not be appropriate. I present these findings.

As is typical for any professional groupings, all 16 personality types are present, but there is a 'clustering'.

Table of types in librarianship

N = 267

Type	Percentage
ISFJ	19.10
ISTJ	10.86
INFP	10.49
ENFJ	7.87
ESFJ	7.49
ENFP	7.49
INFJ	7.12
ESTJ	5.62
ENTP	4.49
ISFP	4.12
INTJ	3.75
ESFP	3.37
INTP	3.00
ISTP	2.25
ENTJ	2.25
ESTP	0.75

None the wiser? The description of the ISFJ type uses phrases such as 'friendly', 'responsible and conscientious', 'thorough', 'loyal, considerate, perceptive'. Does the cap fit?

For anyone interested in pursuing this topic further, I include some reading suggestions.

Carol Kenchington

* *A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, by Isabel Briggs Myers and Mary H McCaulley. 2nd ed. Palo Alto, Consulting Psychologists Press, 1988.

Further reading:

- Isabel Briggs Myers: *Gifts Differing* Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1980.
- Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jean M Kummerow: *Introduction to Type in Organisations*. 2nd ed. Palo alto: Consulting Psychologists Press 1990.
- Stephen Moss *Introducing type: an Australian handbook on Jungian Type theory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Brisbane: DMP Pubs, 1988.