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**MBTI**

- distorted reflections of personality?

**Department of Management**

**CREDO**

# **MBTI**

## **– distorted reflections of personality?**

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2006

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*Or, as philosophers, who find  
Some favourite system to their mind;  
In every point to make it fit,  
Will force all nature to submit.*

*(Jonathan Swift)*

### ***Bumps on the head***

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became popular to determine the character, personality and probable criminal dispositions by means of the new science of phrenology as developed by the German physician Franz Joseph Gall. Phrenology claimed that there was a correspondence between the shape of the bumps on a person's cranium and that person's moral character or faculties.

Actually Gall's theory was a little more sophisticated in that he claimed that the brain was the seat of all a person's propensities, sentiments and faculties, a thought which seems to be taken seriously by neuroscience today. More problematic was his assertion that the shape of the cranium somehow made it possible to deduct what these propensities, sentiments and faculties might be.

Phrenology became so popular that an instrument to perform cranium measurements was invented in the shape of the so-called Automatic Electric Phrenometer.

Phrenology also made its way into literature as in Thomas Love Peacock's "Headlong Hall"<sup>1</sup> in which Mr. Cranium, an expert on phrenology, deals out good advice on how to use the science of phrenology to judge characters and find suitable occupations for the different personalities.

"I would advise every parent, who has the welfare of his son at heart, to procure as extensive a collection as possible of the skulls of animals, and, before determining on the choice of a profession, to compare with the utmost nicety their bumps and protuberances with those of the skull of his son. . . . If he show an analogy with the jackal, let all possible influence be used to procure him a place at court, where he will infallibly

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<sup>1</sup> Peacock, T. L. (1815). *Headlong Hall*.

thrive. If his skull bear a marked resemblance to that of a magpie, it cannot be doubted that he will prove an admirable lawyer; and if with this advantageous conformation be combined any similitude to that of an owl, very confident hopes may be formed of his becoming a judge.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course phrenology has long since been ridiculed and discredited as a science, though vestiges of such ideas seem to have lingered on in the racial theories well up into the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>.

Today we know better that to judge a persons character on the shape of the bumps on his skull. Today we have much more sophisticated theories and methods for measuring personality and character, like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Enneagram and Belbin tests. Or have we?

### ***Components of personality***

In 2004 U.S. News and World report estimated that the MBTI test was taken by more than 2,5 million people a year in the US, and that the personality testing industry was growing at an estimated rate of 10 percent a year.<sup>4</sup>

Hsu describes how personality tests have become a short cut. “There are now such large numbers of people in our schools, corporations and legal system, we need a way to screen them, and these tests ask what we’er all like as people and provide a neat tidy label.”<sup>5</sup> Hsu also describes the controversial use of personality tests in high stake situations, in job interviews, parole hearings and court cases in the US.

One of the most well-known and widely used of these tests is the so-called MBTI, or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.<sup>6</sup> MBTI was developed by one Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers during World War II.

Myers and Myers assert that variation is not due to chance but is related to a few basic mental characteristics. It is supposed to be based

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Quoted from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12803/12803.txt>

<sup>3</sup> In “The Mismeasurement of Man” gives a critical account of the methods used to collect racial and social data in the 19th and 20th century. See Gould, S. J. (1981). *The Mismeasure of Man: The definitive refutation to the argument of The Bell Curve* (1996 expanded edition ed.). New York: W. W. Norton

<sup>4</sup> *U.S. News and World report* 9/20/2004 vol 137, issue 9, p 68-69

<sup>5</sup> Hsu, Caroline (2004). *U.S. News and World report* 9/20/2004 vol 137, issue 9, p 68-69

<sup>6</sup> Myers, I. B., & Myers, P. B. (1980). *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Types* (1995 ed.). Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing.

upon the work of Jung<sup>7</sup> on personality and psychological types. Psychological type referring to the inborn individual preferences.

According to Myers and Myers one essential difference is related to our different preferences in the perceiving and judging. Activities we have to carry out all the time. Perceiving the world around us, and making judgements about what we have perceived in various ways.

Using what I perceive to be vague and precarious arguments supposedly based upon Jungs' types Myers and Myers explain that there are two ways of perceiving, based upon the pair Sensation (S) – Intuition (N). The Sensation – Intuition pair concerns perception, or the way one takes in information. Sensation emphasises a preference for sensory data or the five senses, while intuition stresses a preference for imagination, the unconscious and insight.

There are also two ways of judging. Here Myers and Myers use the pair: Thinking (T) – Feeling (F). Thinking – Feeling is about judging, the way one makes decisions. Thinking stressing a preference for the objective, analysis and logic, while Feeling relies on a value and a person centred approach.

They stress without proof that SN preference is entirely independent of the TF preference. Thus giving them four categories.

They also use binary categories, thus the preference is either for S or N, T or F. So we are talking about division into separate boxes, not a continuum, though it may be difficult to prove that the binary version is valid.

Continuing the binary classification scheme they state that another basic difference in the use of perception and judgement, is related to the pair extravert (E)<sup>8</sup> – Introvert (I). The pair Extravert – Introvert concerns direction of one's energy, the focus of one's attention. Extraverted meaning a preference for focusing on one's surroundings, the outer world of people and things, while Introvert means having a preference for focusing inwards on one's innerworld of thoughts, ideas and impressions.

And no surprise here, the EI preference is said to be completely independent of the SN and TF preferences.

Finally they assert without any form of proof that one more categorisation is important in the classification of personality types. This time

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<sup>7</sup> *Psychological Types (Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol.6)* (Paperback) by C. G. Jung, Gerhard Adler, R. F.C. Hull

<sup>8</sup> Jung apparently used Extravert instead of Extrovert.

using the pair: Judgement (J)– Perception (P). The Judgement – Perception pair is about the way one deals with the outer world. Judgement refers to an attitude in which a methodological step by step approach and reliance on rules is dominating, where life has to be planned and organised in an orderly way. While perception refers to a spontaneous and flexible attitude, not wishing to miss anything.<sup>9</sup>

Now, creating at least in this author a certain confusion, because all these pairs are used to categorise the way we are perceiving and judging the world around us, Myers and Myers use this pair to categorise people as having a perceptive attitude or a judging attitude. Confounding the whole thing by stating that “Although people must of course use both perception and judgment, both cannot be used at the same time. So people shift back and forth ...”<sup>10</sup>

They also introduce the concept of auxiliary process, apparently meaning that for “people to be balanced” an auxiliary preference is needed. If Judging is the dominant preference, Perception will be the auxiliary preference, and so forth and so on.

Based upon these pairs and focusing on the function categories, Sensation (S) – Intuition (N), and Thinking (T) – Feeling (F), Briggs categorised people into 16 types, using the letters to designate each category as follows<sup>11</sup>:

Types		Sensing		Intuition (N)	
		Thinking	Feeling	Feeling	Thinking
Introversion	Judging	ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
	Perceiving	ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
Extroversion	Judging	ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
	Perceiving	ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP

In the four letter type code the two middle letters indicate the favoured mental function, even though all functions are presumed to be present in a person. The first letter indicates whether the favoured mental function is

<sup>9</sup> See also I.S. Briggs book *Gifts Differing*

<sup>10</sup> Myers, I. B., & Myers, P. B. (1980). *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Types* (1995 ed.). Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Redrawn after table found at:

<http://www.16types.com/Request.jsp?hView=DynamicPage&Content=The16Types>

used extroverted or introverted, while the last letter indicates which mental function is preferred. If P then Intuition, if J Feeling.

Thus ENFP prefers Intuition first and Feeling second, while Thinking comes in at a third place and Sensing is the least preferred. E indicates that ENFP's use their favoured mental function, Intuition, in an extroverted manner in the world surrounding them. While their second most preferred function, Feeling, is used introverted in their innerworld of ideas and impressions.

While we have to jump over the finer points of the four letter categories, we get an idea how one goes about interpreting these categories by looking at some of these.

According to a sample report presented by CPP<sup>12</sup> ENFP's are

- Warmly enthusiastic and imaginative
- See life as full of possibilities
- Make connections between events and information very quickly, and confidently proceed based on the patterns they see
- Want a lot of affirmation from others, and readily give appreciation and support
- Spontaneous and flexible, often rely on their ability to improvise and their verbal fluency

More fanciful interpretations can be found at Typelogic.com. ISTJ are called "inspectors": "They have a keen sense of right and wrong, especially in their area of interest and/or responsibility. They are noted for devotion to duty. Punctuality is a watchword of the ISTJ. The secretary, clerk, or business- (wo)man by whom others set their clocks is likely to be an ISTJ."<sup>13</sup>

ENFP are seen as champions "both "idea"-people and "people"-people, who see everyone and everything as part of an often bizarre cosmic whole. They want both to help (at least, their own definition of "help") and be liked and admired by other people, on both an individual and a humanitarian level. They are interested in new ideas on principle, but ultimately discard most of them for one reason or another."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cpp-db.com/samplereports/#mbti>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.typelogic.com/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Typelogic.com has even made a list of famous persons for each type. Famous ENFP people include Buster Keaton, Franz Joseph Haydn, Mark Twain (Samuel Clements), Sandra Bullock and strange fictional characters.

How this is done remains a mystery, but it may indicate that there is an astrology like slant to the description of types, and it seems to be almost as popular, although MBTI may have a more serious and problematic impact on our lives than the horoscopes of astrology.

### ***The uses of MBTI***

MBTI is seen as a tool that may help individuals and organisations in many ways. It may help people to understand their preferences and behaviour. It may enhance communication. Identify potential sources of conflict. Help individuals identify careers that match their preferences. Optimise the use of the respective individual preferences in an organisational setting. Help us to understand how the different personalities react to different situations, like crisis or stress.

Popular is the use MBTI in relation to management. For instance relating MBTI types to management effectiveness, decision-making, conflict management and of course to leadership quality. Businesses are using MBTI and other tests in connection with team building and the creation of groups.<sup>15</sup> Zemke describes how team members who must work closely together “are given copies of the instrument to fill out. Then, as a group, they are led through exercises and explanations that impress upon them how the panoply of psychological types on the team can be both a barrier and an asset to working together effectively.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a selection of studies see:

Moore, T. (1987). Personality tests are back. *Fortune*, March 30: 74-78.

Nutt, P.C. (1986b). Decision style and its influence on the strategic decisions of top executives. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 30: 39-62.

Kilmann, R.H. & Thomas, K.W. (1975). Interpersonal conflict-handling behavior as reflections of Jungian personality dimensions. *Psychological Reports*, 37: 971-980.

Mills, J., Robey, D. & Smith, L. (1985). Conflict-handling and personality dimensions of project-management personnel. *Psychological Reports*, 57: 1135-1143.

Barr, L. & Barr, N. (1989). *The leadership equation: Leadership, management, and the Myers-Briggs*. Austin, TX: Eakin Press.

Lueder, D.C. (1986a). Psychological types and leadership styles of the 100 top executive educators in North America. *Journal of Psychological Type*, 12: 8-12.

<sup>16</sup> Zemke, R. (1992). Second thoughts about the MBTI. *Training*, 29(4)

These uses indicate that MBTI categorisation can influence careers, leadership selection, creation of teams, conflict resolution etc. All presumably in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Recently the MBTI has also been used by online dating services for a kind of matchmaking. PerfectMatch.com's CEO argues: "We developed a Myers-Briggs type of indicator focusing on relationships. It's called the Duet Total Compatibility System. We have a 15-20 minute test on the site – it's comprehensive, not exhaustive. It gives us a snapshot of whom our members are, personality-wise, and how they might relate to others based on these factors. Over the past year, many dating sites are launching these types of tests. What we want to do is also to take the next step and search for individual matches based on the information they give us."<sup>17</sup>

### ***Mirrors distorting personality***

With all these potential uses it is no wonder that MBTI has come to be regarded as a kind of Swiss army knife for psychometric testing. No wonder that it has become an important element of the arsenal of tools used by consultants all over the world.

Still the widespread use does not guarantee that this is a serious tool. In fact there may be cause for alarm. Taking a look at the fanciful verbal descriptions of the different types one is immediately reminded of the descriptions found in a horoscope. There is something in there that seems to fit any individual in a very glib way. One just has to focus on the parts that one recognises as fitting. This type of personal validation fallacy in which a person finds meaning in descriptions that could apply to many people is known as the Forer or more popular the Barnum effect.<sup>18</sup>

Case and Philipsson<sup>19</sup> argue that Jung's types "actually inherited and reproduced concepts of astrological and alchemical cosmology" due to his interest in alchemy and astrology. Thus "contemporary users of the MBTI are inadvertently conducting a form of astrological character analysis."

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.perfectmatch.com/>

<sup>18</sup> After the psychologist Forer who showed the effect in a personality test, in which the same analysis was given to all subjects afterwards. Still the subjects saw it as applying to themselves. The name Barnum effect is after P.T. Barnum of Barnum's circus, who used to say "we have something for everybody."

<sup>19</sup> Case, P., & Phillipson, G. (2004). Astrology and alchemy – the occult roots of the MBTI. *European Business Forum*(17).

Scientifically the problem is that MBTI does not seem to have any serious supporting theory behind it. Even Jung seemed cautious about the typology upon which the MBTI is created. It “is only a scheme of orientation. There is such a factor as introversion, there is such a factor as extraversion. The classification of individuals means nothing, nothing at all. It is only the instrumentarium for the practical psychologist to explain for instance, the husband to a wife or vice versa.”<sup>20</sup>

According to Michael<sup>21</sup> research has questioned the validity of MBTI and also criticized its use far beyond Jung’s original intent.

Rings writes: “[T]he great challenge in the development of the MBTI, designed to ascertain as correctly as possible the true personality preferences of an individual, is that its validity is based upon the validity of the very constructs of type it seeks to identify. For the one who does not accept the basic assumptions inherent in the theory, no amount of data, however vast, will be sufficient support for the instrument’s validity.”<sup>22</sup>

One may thus question whether such “true preferences” exist, whether they are inborn “natural” and constant over time, or whether they are in some way related to “nurture” and individual development, meaning that they can change over time, depending on circumstances.

Then there is the assumption of dichotomy. The individual is always presented with a forced choices format. This forces individuals into clear categories. It raises the question of whether a more true picture would have to be based upon a continuum. It is evident that the division into dichotomous groups may easily place individuals with slight preferences into false categories.

After looking into a series of studies Garden concludes that “evidence for the 1) dichotomous and opposing preferences, 2) dominant and auxiliary functions, and 3) interactive effects and composite types proposed by Myers, is equivocal at best.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> From McGuire, W., & Hull, R. F. C. (Eds.). (1977). *Jung Speaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 305.

<sup>21</sup> Michael, J. (2003). Using the Myers-Briggs type indicator as a tool for leadership development? Apply with caution. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*(Summer)

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, R. M., & Saccuzzo, D. (1997). *Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues*. New York: Brooks/Cole. Quoted here from <http://members.tripod.com/~PersonalityInstitute/Myers-BriggsTypeIndicator.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1996). Using Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to study managers: A literature review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 22, 45-83, p. 51.

Then there is the problem related to self-reporting aspects of the test. Walck<sup>24</sup> reports that some subjects may attempt to report preferences that are seen as desirable for instance in relation to managerial positions. “This finding is disturbing with regard to construct validity since it suggests that the MBTI may be tapping impression management behaviors rather than basic psychological preferences.”<sup>25</sup>

To illustrate some of the problems with MBTI think for a moment of the flawed, distorting mirrors that may be found at a fun fair. One mirror may show a person as small fat individual with a bulging middle part and very short legs, while another mirror may show the same person as a thin individual with a long lean body, albeit perhaps with a very large head, or some other part made prominent.

Now if the MBTI works a little like the house of mirrors it may reflect a rather distorted picture of the individual, indicating that its validity would be low. In a house of real mirrors this might pose no real problem. We know how we can identify a mirror that could be assumed not to be distorting, and thus used to correct the reflections shown by all the distorted mirrors. In a test of personality type it would prove much more difficult to guarantee that a mirror is not distorting.

It would not help that the same mirrors, or in this case the tests, showed the same picture every time the test was used, that might indicate a reliable test, but would not help us in finding out how the person would look in a flat non distorting mirror, or a valid test.

Next problem. How does the reflection a mirror provides influence the view of that individual? If I can only see myself in distorted mirrors, will I not come to have a distorted view of myself? A view influencing my whole life. Even more problematic, other people might begin to trust the mirror reflections, seeing and reacting to my reflection instead of the original.

Might not something like this happen when the dichotomies of the MBTI test paints a certain picture of a person, characterising the person as being an ENFP, thereby pigeonholing that person into precisely one of 16 pigeonholes. The individual in question may believe the picture painted and begin to act in a way that would confirm the picture, ignoring aspects that the test could not catch. Others would help to put the individ-

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<sup>24</sup> Walck, C.L. (1992). The relationship between indicator type and "true type": Slight preferences and the verification process. *Journal of Psychological Type*, 23: 17-21.

<sup>25</sup> Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1996). Op. cit., p. 59.

ual in the ENFP mould, by acting as if the ENFP interpretation was the picture of the person, leading perhaps to stereotyping or even stigmatisation, and a reductionist view of how to relate to this person.

The National Research Council Committee on Techniques for Enhancement of Human Performance has carried out a study on the use of MBTI and other techniques in training programs for army officers. The study concludes: “MBTI had a very different effect on respondents than all the other instruments: on memory, on self-insights, and on short- and long-term planning and actions (although the specific behavior changes were not identified).”<sup>26</sup> With regard to memory the study found that of the 5 instruments used in training programs MBTI was remembered best. Individuals were able to recall their four letter type designations and what they meant.

With regard to self-insight the results of the MBTI were seen as true and valuable. Thus 84% reported that it confirmed what they already knew about themselves. Here it has to be remembered that this perhaps may come as no surprise as the aspects they thought they knew may have coloured their answers.

“Eighty percent of the respondents indicated that the MBTI had either “very much” or “some” impact on their behavior.” They also believed that the feedback in connection with the test was valuable in their work, reporting that MBTI caused them to changes in relation to others. Although not able to indicate what those changes were.” In the study this raises some doubt as to the meaning of this great impact. If the MBTI test for the most part already confirmed what the respondents knew about themselves, why would it have such an impact?

Perhaps this should come as no surprise. The recognition and confirmation of some personality traits in the mirrors of the test may convince the individual that these features are important. Strengthening the belief that they might serve as something on which to base action. “I am doing this, because it fits my ENFP type.” If that were to be the case it would confirm our fears that the pigeonholing might serve to enhance and enlarge features almost like a caricature might do. Tests like the MBTI may indeed have become all things to all people. There is always something in there that one can recognise, something that can confirm what one already knows.

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<sup>26</sup> Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. (1991). *In the Mind's Eye: Enhancing Human Performance (1991)*: The National Academies Press, p. 95.

Overall the conclusion of the report with regard to MBTI was:

“The evidence [...] raises questions about the validity of the MBTI. However, many users of the instrument have claimed that its value lies not in its diagnostic accuracy, which is problematic, but in its probative guidance. Respondents often emphasize the increased sensitivity gained from the discussions generated by MBTI feedback. It would seem that such gains could contribute to enhanced performance. Unfortunately, neither the gains in sensitivity nor the impact of those gains on performance have been documented by research. Nor has the instrument been validated in a long-term study of successful and unsuccessful careers. Lacking such evidence, it is a curiosity why the instrument is used so widely, particularly in large organizations.”<sup>27</sup>

Yes indeed, and one’s curiosity may become even greater when looking at the effectiveness or rather the lack of it in for instance managerial applications. Gardner mentions that only a few studies can actually point to any relation between the effectiveness of managers and their personality types. Most of the relations found are with the Sensing-Intuitive or SN categorisation, but they are pointing in different directions. Thus one study found that retail managers categorised as Sensing scored higher on performance measures than managers categorised as Intuitive. Other studies reported by Gardner point in the opposite direction.<sup>28</sup>

These studies do not answer the question whether different managerial positions might be better served by people with different personality types, nor do they tell us which type would be most effective.

In spite of this, tests are used to create groups with members whose types are supposed to fit optimally together, like the single pieces of a puzzle. The problem is that we do not know whether we in fact get a suitable puzzle for the task at hand.

The issues are further complicated by the fact that the managers and groups are placed in a complex web of relations with other people and may find themselves in situations that may vary wildly over time. Meaning that even if we could depend on the categorisation done by the MBTI test or something similar, we would hardly be able to predict the suitability of the different types over time.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1990). The relationship between psychological type, managerial behavior, and managerial effectiveness: An empirical study. *Journal of Psychological Type*, 19, 35-4

This raises the larger issue of the consequences of using MBTI and other tests like Belbin, Ennea, or even stranger tests to help select people for job positions, whether managerial, or as members of teams. Or as a help in career planning and personal development. In fact we do not know what the effect will be on organisations, teams and personal careers.

It is of course possible that widespread belief in and use of test like these might lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. A self-fulfilling prophecy in which “a false definition of a situation [is] evoking a behavior which makes the originally false conception come true.”<sup>29</sup> Like the self-fulfilling prophecies of other theories of behaviour.

In a scathing critique of personality tests and especially MBTI Paul writes:

The reality is that personality tests cannot begin to capture the complex human beings we are. They cannot specify how we will act in particular roles or situations. They cannot predict how we will change over time ...

But perhaps the most insidious effect of personality testing is its influence on the way we understand others—children, coworkers, fellow citizens—and even ourselves.<sup>30</sup>

Still it is evident that personality testing and self-assessment tools have become all the rage, and one can really choose an instrument suiting one’s temper and Wallet among a surprising array of tests with exotic names and more or less occult underpinnings.

Individuals can be cast into one of 16 roles as it is done in the MBTI test. Or the 9 team roles of the Belbin test, adorned with names like Plant, Monitor, Shaper Completer and so forth. Or choose to use the even more fanciful Enneagram types like Caretaker, Suceeder, Devil’s advocate, Adventurer, Peacemaker etc.

None with much in the way of scientific psychological evidence. Perhaps the really important task today is not to validate this or that test. The really important question to answer is: Why have such tests become so popular?

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<sup>29</sup> Merton, R. K. (1948). The Self-fulfilling Prophecy. *The Antioch review*(Summer), 193-210. p. 193.

<sup>30</sup> Paul, A. M. (2004). *The Cult of Personality - How Personality Tests are leading us to miseducate our children, mismanage our companies and misunderstand ourselves*. New York: The Free Press. p. 221.

In fact using such tests to categorise people's suitability as managers, team roles, specific career choices or partner matching, may destroy the effectiveness they are supposed to promote. The individual who relies to any serious degree on such test may be seen as lacking confidence in himself and his abilities to judge people using the most complicated instrument he has at his disposal, his own reasoned judgement, and that of people he believes in. Perhaps the widespread use of such tests points to a growing degree of individual uncertainty, perhaps even anxious neurotic behaviour.

We might in fact need to examine seriously the individuals who decide to trust in such tests, especially of course if they make decisions about others based upon them. "However, the MBTI does not directly measure neuroticism (a factor implicated in its popularity) and hence it is expected to show less overlap with the personality disorders."<sup>31</sup>

The intangible aspects of personality, the impossibility of hearing, seeing, tasting or feeling it, create excellent possibilities for cunning tailors to create tests that demand the "expertise" of exactly those tailor's or at least their certified apprentices in order to administer and interpret.

Perhaps all these attempts to disassemble the individual into discriminate elements of sensing, intuition, thinking, feeling will contribute to dissolution of the individual. As if the individual consisted of different assemblies of psychological LEGO bricks. Bricks that would be individually replaceable, making it possible to build a designer personality. Although further developments in this direction will prove amateurish until genetic manipulation has made it possible.

### ***On the popularity of pointed shoes and personality tests***

Why do we act so foolishly? Supposing that others can see that there are serious problems with the personality test we have just been discussing, one may wonder like the psychologists reporting on the use of MBTI "why the instrument is used so widely, particularly in large organizations."

Why do intelligent people invest so much trust and effort in tests like the ones we have just been describing?

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<sup>31</sup> Furnham, A., & Crump, J. (2005). Personality Traits, Types, and Disorders: An Examination of the Relationship Between Three Self-Report Measures. *European Journal of Personality*, 19(167-184), p. 171.

Reaching further back one may ask why people have become so obsessed with the “because I am worth it” activities, rearranging and streamlining as it were their bodies to the same stereotype?

Or one might quite simply wonder why so many women in westernised societies today (2006) are buying and walking around in shoes with pointed tips that seem to reach 10 centimetres or more in front of their toes. Almost like 15<sup>th</sup> century beak shoes with pointed tips bending backwards. The immediate answer to this question is of course that “fashion dictates.”

From Fashion.about.com we learn that for the spring of 2006 the fashion dictate for women’s shoes sounds like this: “Forget about delicate heels and dainty soles: the hottest footwear trends feature a thick footbed (or platform) and/or wedge heels. From rope-wrapped espadrilles to sexy evening platforms, these shoes are the perfect balance for spring's romantic blouses and dresses.”

Now if women trying to get a little ahead of the rest were to follow this dictate they would to their dismay discover that many had the same idea.

Is it a similar mechanism that dictates that we invest in personality tests categorising us by four letter words? Four letter words that we can wear proudly on our T shirts, print on coffee cups or have made into a charm.

Or makes us use the paraphernalia of instruments and tools found for instance in management and in organisations? Like balanced scorecards, which look like a miniature version of a command economy, or knowledge management, even though we barely know what knowledge is, much less how it is brought about, or incentive systems focusing on the individual, even though it may destroy cooperation among individuals. What is the cause and source of this infatuation with tools whose contribution to efficiency and effectiveness may seem very doubtful?

Today trends and fashions, whether of shoes, psychological tests, management tools, or beliefs in general are becoming world wide synchronised phenomena. That this is possible may be easy to understand, given the reach of modern media and communication devices and the intense interconnections between almost every part of the world, or at least the economically developed parts of the world.

Still, that does not explain why we, the individual decision makers, jump the band-wagon. Where has the independent and self-confident

individual gone? On the surface this personality may seem to have been reduced to a kind of stereotype, stamped with the same fashion element that everyone else is showing.

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