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# MBTI types and executive coaching

## Introduction

MBTI<sup>®</sup> is one of the UK's most popular psychometric questionnaires. It is often used by coaches as part of the process to help coachees reflect on their personal traits and encourage reflection about working styles and relationships. This paper is drawn from data collected from members of the British Psychology Society (BPS) Special Interest Group in Coaching and Association for Coaching members during Autumn 2005. The paper looks at the other side of the coaching relationship, the preferences of coaches.

## Aim of the study

The full study aimed to explore the coaching relationship from both the perspective of the coach and their coachee. The two parts involved a series of interviews with executives about their coaching experiences and what they valued in the relationship. The second study, from which these results are drawn, was based on coaches' responses to an on-line survey conducted during Autumn 2005.

The survey aimed primary aim was to identify the most frequently used coaching behaviours, and identify their relationship with a range of variables including experience, training, BPS chartership and coaching methodology. One of the sections invited coaches to identify their MBTI<sup>®</sup> type, from the four preferences. From the total 228 participants were able to indicate their preferred types.

## MBTI theory

MBTI<sup>®</sup> is a classification system developed by Isabel Myers from Carl Jung ideas about personality. Myers sought to take Jung's writings on personality to apply these to a real world setting (Myers with Myers, 1980). The system uses four types and 16 classification to help individuals think about their personal preferences in life.

MBTI<sup>®</sup> theory is a type theory, based on a belief that we all have innate personal preferences. While most readers will be familiar with the questionnaire, other may be interested in finding out about its application from its European publishers; OPP. To help put the results into context a brief summary of the four dimensions is provided here.

The first pair of preferences concerns how the individual gathers energy from the outside world; Introversion (I) or Extroversion (E). The first preference gathers energy from within, the second extraversion gathers energy from interacting with others.

The second pair of preferences concerns how the person takes in information; Sensing (S) or Intuition (N). Sensing preference takes in information through the five senses. An Intuitive preference takes information in through the sixth sense, with a preference for the big picture.

The third pair of preferences concerns how a person structures their decisions; Thinking (T) or Feeling (F). Thinking preferences make decisions through an objective approach with a focus on logic and reason. People with a feeling preference place an emphasis on personal values and personal needs.

The fourth pair of preferences concerns how people live their lives; Judging (J) and Perceiving (P). Judging preferences prefer to live a planned life which is highly organised. Perceiving preferences prefer a more flexible and spontaneous approach to life.

A key aspect is that while individuals may have a preference for one or the other, it does not mean that they cannot learn behaviours which mean that they can operate effectively in a similar way to the other preference. However, doing so just takes more energy.

**Table 1: Four pairs of preferences**

Extraversion (E)	_____	Introversion (I)
Sensing (S)	_____	iNtution (N)
Thinking (T)	_____	Feeling (F)
Judging (J)	_____	Perceiving (P)

### **MBTI and counselling**

Some work (Baynes, 2004) has been conducted into counsellor preference types. As part of wider doctoral research into behaviours in coaching, the MBTI<sup>®</sup> was selected as one area in which to gather data from coaches.

Like counselling, coaching is beginning to move towards a position where we can claim that coaching does have a positive impact on people and their performance at work (Passmore, 2006a). However, we are less clear about how it works though factors such as empathy, developing problem solving skills, disputing irrational thoughts and encouraging goal setting probably all play a part.

One of the interesting conclusions to emerge from the counselling research is the role played not by the therapy but by the therapist. MBTI<sup>®</sup> thus provides an interesting way to begin the process of thinking and talking about different ways of being with the coachee.

Counselling research (Bayne) has identified some marked differences between counsellor preferences and the wider population. There is a bias towards Feeling preference and meaning preference (Intuition).

Our work looked at this (Table 1). The results show for coaches who completed the survey a similar, almost echoed the wider population, with 53.8% expressing a Feeling preference, compared with 55% for the wider UK population. However, this overall position marks some interesting contrasts. One is the relatively high ISFJ preferences among the wider UK population (13%, compared with 0.9% for coaches. While ENFP preferences were a stronger preference for coaches (18.9 % for the coaching population, compared with 6% for the UK population).

Stronger preferences were revealed for perceiving and for intuition among the coaching population in contrast to the UK population; 53.5 to 41 % for perceiving and 17% for Intuition for the UK population compared to an Intuitive preference of 84.2% among coaches. The introversion and extraversion preferences showed a preference for extraversion in the UK population at 53% UK population and a slightly stronger preference among coaches at 57.4%.

We can speculate from these results that coaches are more concerned with the big picture rather than taking a detailed approach to evidence, as evidenced by the strong preference for intuition. A second was the less marked but still significant difference for introversion-extraversion, with coaches being more slightly more extravert than the UK population. This may reflect the need to engage with others, and constantly to form new relationships as part of the work.

**Table 2: UK population (n=1634)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

(modified from Kendall, 1998)

**Table 3: Coaches overall % (n=228)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
0.9	0.9	7	11
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
1.3	0.9	11.4	9.2
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
0.4	1.8	18.9	9.6
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
5.7	3.9	9.2	7.9

(Passmore, 2006)

Data was also collected on psychological training, and a review (Table 4 & 5) reveals some interesting differences between coaches who classified themselves as psychologist coaches and non-psychologist coaches. The Intuition preference was higher among psychologists at 89.8% compared to 81.2% for non-psychologists. A second interesting difference was in the preference for Feelings with 47.7% psychologists indicating this preference compared to 57.2% for non-psychologists. The differences here may be accounted for by the training offered in psychology, with a desire to use evidence as the basis for decisions rather than to use personal values. This echoes our own beliefs that one of the key differentiates of psychological coaches to non-psychological coaches is a desire to use an evidence based approach and to contribute towards practice develop through research.

**Table 4: Chartered psychologists & non-chartered psychologists % (n=78)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
0 (1.3)	0 (1.3)	6.4 (7.3)	16.7 (8)
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
2.6 (0.7)	0 (1.3)	7.7 (13.3)	16.7 (5.3)
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
0 (0.7)	0 (2.7)	24.4 (16)	6.4 (11.3)
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
6.4 (5.3)	1.3 (5.3)	7.7 (10)	3.8 (10)

(Passmore, 2006b)

**Table 5: Non-psychologist coaches % (n=150)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
1.3	1.3	7.3	8
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
0.7	1.3	13.3	5.3
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
0.7	2.7	16	11.3
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
5.3	5.3	10	10

(Passmore 2006b)

Data was also collected in the survey on coaches preferred methodologies, with 12 different approaches to select from. These included humanistic, cognitive behavioural, integrated, psychodynamic, and solution focused. The coaching preferences were widely spread among the twelve options. In table 6 and 7 we have summarised three methodologies and the MBTI<sup>®</sup> responses for that methodology.

Baynes (2004) reviewing counsellor preferences that there was some evidence that psychological type was associated with choice of counselling model, with T's preferring cognitive models and F's affective models. These results appear to support this view. Coaches who described their dominant coaching style as coaching had a preference for Thinking, while coaches who expressed a preference for a humanistic style had a preference for Feeling. Caution should be shown give the sample sizes for the humanistic group.

**Table 6: CBT Coaches % (n=22)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
0	0	4.5	18.2
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
0	0	4.5	18.2
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
0	0	9.1	9.1
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
9.1	4.5	9.1	13.6

(Passmore, 2006b)

**Table 7: Humanistic counsellors & (n=3)**

<b>ISTJ</b>	<b>ISFJ</b>	<b>INFJ</b>	<b>INTJ</b>
0	0	0	0
<b>ISTP</b>	<b>ISFP</b>	<b>INFP</b>	<b>INTP</b>
0	0	0	0
<b>ESTP</b>	<b>ESFP</b>	<b>ENFP</b>	<b>ENTP</b>
0	33.3	0	33.3
<b>ESTJ</b>	<b>ESFJ</b>	<b>ENFJ</b>	<b>ENTJ</b>
0	0	33.3	0

(Passmore, 2006b)

### **Understanding MBTI and taking action**

The results provide coaches with an insight which can help them, as much as it can help the coachee, to reflect on their own style of work. As coaches we need to continually return to the question how does this intervention help my coachee to move forward? Knowing our preferences can help the coach to manage the natural basis that we all have within our style of being.

When the coaches knowledge of themselves through an instrument like MBTI<sup>®</sup> is combined with awareness of the coachees preferences, the coach can beginning to work in a more helpful way, managing their own preferences to both build rapport through empathy and providing challenge through contrasting their style with the coachee's.



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