

# The Evolution of the Art of MBTI® Feedback

Understanding the Art of Feedback from the Eight Function Perspective

*Part 1 in a 3-part series*

The MBTI® is based on Carl Jung's complex theory of psychological types. The complexity of the theory has presented challenges to type practitioners in giving adequate and understandable feedback to people being introduced to type. Over the years, step-by-step, the art of feedback has improved. Within the last decade, there have been substantial developments in our collective discernment of the eight mental functions which are the crux of Jung's theory. The eight function model has been the subject of numerous texts, articles, conference sessions, and advanced applications within the MBTI community (see References). Jung's eight mental functions are becoming increasingly commonplace vocabulary among type practitioners (Haas, McAlpine, and Hartzler, 2001).

Along with the continual refinement of our understanding of Jung's eight mental functions, there has been parallel development in the framework for providing MBTI feedback in introductory sessions. The purpose of this series of articles is twofold: (1) to introduce the eight function model as an option for providing MBTI feedback, and (2) to show its place in the history of the art of interpreting MBTI results in a meaningful and accurate way.

## Jung's Theory and Myers' Indicator

As a student of Jung's theory of psychological types and an avid user of the MBTI, I am continually amazed at the insights I gain as I navigate my journey through life using the lens of type. I am acutely aware of the old adage, "I don't know what I don't know." Jungian analyst Daryl Sharp (1998) speaks of the complexity of the theory eloquently in his preface to *Personality Types* by stating, "... Jung's model is not a system of character analysis, nor is it a way of labeling oneself or others. Much as one might use a compass to determine where one is in the physical world, Jung's typology is a tool for psychological orientation. It is a way of understanding both oneself and the interpersonal difficulties that arise between people."

Jung's theory is not a simple behavioral theory, but is based upon what he described as patterns of psychic energy and the way people prefer to orient themselves to the world. Through his observations and study of more than 20 years, Jung identified two basic orientations, extraversion and introversion, and four functions or modes of orientation (ways in which the functions are expressed). Two functions are for perceiving (sensing and



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intuition), and two are for judging (thinking and feeling). He noted that whether a person prefers the extraverted or introverted orientation could only be detected in combination with those four function modes (Sharp, 1998). Thus, Jung identified eight mental functions or tools – the extraverted and introverted forms of sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling. Jung said that people are innately different in how much psychic energy they have to devote to each of these mental functions and they develop visible personality patterns characteristic of those functions (Myers and Kirby, 1994).

At the outbreak of World War II, Katharine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, decided to create an instrument that would help the lay person take advantage of Jung's theory. Briggs and Myers regarded his theory as so important for interpersonal understanding that they thought it could lead to world peace. In light of the complexity of the theory, instrument construction was a daunting task. Myers' solution was to add a fourth dimension to Jung's theory, the J/P dichotomy, which led to the four-letter type code and the 16 types.

The MBTI type code serves as a key to unlock the complexity of whole types. Myers' genius and razor sharp understanding of all eight functions is evident in her descriptions of each of the 16 types which go far beyond the simple addition of the four letters into characteristics, or visible patterns of behavior, arising from the interaction of the preferences. She also used her knowledge of the mental functions in naming the types; for instance, ENFJ was Extraverted Feeling with Introverted Intuition. Understanding her formula for "breaking the code" allows us to unleash the power of psychological types.

### **Comparison of the Four Preference and Eight Function Feedback Models**

Traditionally, the model used for feedback has been the one introduced by Myers which focused on the four dichotomies of E/I, S/N, T/F and J/P. After taking the MBTI assessment, workshop participants self-select their type after

receiving descriptions and other information about the four dichotomies. They experience the opposite poles of the four dichotomies through explanations, exercises, and questions. They select their type code by identifying their preferred preferences and then compare these four letters to their MBTI reported type. They read through the appropriate whole type descriptions to select or affirm their best-fit type.

In this model, it has been incumbent upon workshop leaders to explain the fundamentals of type dynamics during the feedback session. Knowledgeable practitioners weave their understanding of the dynamic nature of type through the workshop, explaining that we tend to spend more energy on our dominant function, which is supported by our auxiliary function, etc. It is through looking at type dynamics that the eight mental functions are revealed; defining the eight functions is not an explicit part of the session.

However, delivery of feedback through the eight function model requires participants to build their four-letter type code by experiencing each of the four functions in their mode of orientation as they go through the MBTI dichotomies. For instance, with the perception dichotomy of S/N, they will learn about sensing generally and then they will experience, through exercises, the aspects of sensing particular to the extraverted form (Se) as well as the introverted form (Si). This process is repeated for Intuition and only then do participants select their preferred data gathering process from the four perceiving functions presented (Se, Si, Ne, or Ni). The same process is followed for the Judgment dichotomy of thinking and feeling. In other words, participants select their preferred form of each function and build their type code based on these preferences. The eight function experience helps people to understand how their energy preference (E or I) works to flavor the functions they are using. Trainers help participants select best-fit type by looking at Myers' whole type descriptions. For example, if I select Extraverted Feeling as my favorite function with Introverted Intuition as my second favorite function, I am an ENFJ.

## Conclusion

In delivering an introductory session using the eight function model, I have found that people walk away knowing that the MBTI is a multifaceted system. They understand the code is simply a doorway into the world of the more complex theoretical construct of psychological types. People comprehend they are sometimes introverting and sometimes extraverting, sometimes perceiving and sometimes judging. The rigidity surrounding the four letters falls away, and they gain an appreciation and respect for the Indicator because they do not feel boxed in. Even budding MBTI practitioners in qualifying programs are surprised to find that the Indicator has so much depth and complexity after learning the definitions of, and experiencing, the eight mental functions. Using this model can help trainers lay the foundation for more advanced type development work at the onset.

The eight function feedback model is an alternative to use, given the appropriate audience and an adequate time frame. Yet, we know that an instrument will only be as effective as the trainer is responsible and knowledgeable. As Roger Pearman (2007) explained in a recent article:

*It depends. In the hands of a competent practitioner, the MBTI is a viable tool. When its dynamic is understood, the MBTI's viability and lasting value is at its zenith of utility. ...It is likely the MBTI is ... the most under-used tool. Too many facilitators provide a 'drive-by' introduction to the basic concepts and never really tap into the results in a way that promotes individual development and understanding of group behavior.*

No matter what feedback model you use, it should be our continued commitment as type professionals to deepen our knowledge of Jung's theory of psychological types and the eight mental functions so that we use that knowledge in our work. If we increase our competency in the art of delivering feedback, we will increase the credibility of the MBTI and psychological type. It is what we as practitioners need to do to combat the

worrisome amount of superficial use that continues today.

If, as a practitioner, you do opt to deliver an introductory workshop using the eight function model, it will require that you learn what is common to each of the four functions, and what is specific to each function in its attitude. It also requires advanced training and continual reading and study. This model has been extensively tested and used, and is now a viable and practical framework that is available to any practitioner, and it is still evolving.

As I write my next iteration of the eight function workshop, I am reminded and inspired by Myers' fierceness and dedication to continually improving and making the instrument a valid and reliable tool, and her wish for the information it provides to help people recognize and enjoy their gifts. Look for Part 2 in this series of articles in the next *Bulletin*.

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