

The Evolution of the Art of MBTI® Feedback

Understanding the Art of Feedback from the Eight Function Perspective

Part 2 in a 3-part series



Cynthia Stengel Paris (ENFJ) is the owner and principle of The CSC Group, a company that promotes individuals, teams, and leaders by practically applying type theories through training and coaching. Paris served as the Volunteer Chair for the 2007 APTi International Conference, is Past President of DVAPT, and is the incoming Regional Chair of the Northeast Region. www.thescgroup.net.

The MBTI® is theory based. The accuracy of its interpretation is an art resting on the degree to which the practitioner understands the theory.

– Harold Grant

The MBTI® is based on the extremely complex theory of Carl G. Jung. Thus, the ongoing challenge is to give adequate and correct feedback to the layperson in a manner simple enough to understand. The development of feedback is almost as important to the understanding and the application of the MBTI as the well publicized ongoing developments of the instrument itself.

Only a few early practitioners remember the days of struggling to take an endlessly complex theory and framing it in language and simplicity that did not overwhelm the layperson, yet retained the integrity of the theory. This article is a summary of an interview with Katharine Myers.

Isabel Briggs Myers began developing the Indicator in 1942. For many years, she and her husband, Chief Myers, ran a cottage industry publishing and distributing the MBTI question booklets primarily for research purposes. Lawyer Chief handled copyrights. In 1944, Isabel Myers copyrighted *The Briggs-Myers Type Indicator*

Handbook which documented her work, but it was not available to the general public. In essence, there were no resources to help people give feedback to others.

In 1956, Educational Testing Service (ETS) took over the publishing and distribution of the Indicator. The *Manual* was published, computer scoring was instituted, and Forms E and F were developed, but very little else was accomplished in the following years. The Indicator remained a research instrument and it was not included in any publisher's catalog. Pockets of use did develop around the country by individuals, but people mostly found it by happenstance.

In 1969, Isabel Myers began to collaborate with Mary McCaulley. At McCaulley's recommendation, Myers wrote *Introduction to Type* (1970) which served as the first model for MBTI feedback. It was not until 1975 when CPP, Inc. became the publisher that the MBTI was available to the general public through a publisher's catalogue. That marked the beginning of the phenomenal growth in the Indicator's use and applications.

With the rapid growth in use, feedback in group settings was increasing. McCaulley realized the impact of this growing trend and discovered that practitioners in the Organizational Development area were giving MBTI feedback to groups using experiential exercises.

In 1979, she invited Alan Brownsword, Otto Kroeger, and others to a meeting to share their experiences in group settings. From this meeting, she created a very slim booklet of MBTI exercises to distribute to participants.

Practitioners who embarked on group feedback were struggling to develop delivery methods that were simple enough to be understandable to those who had never heard of Carl Jung, while maintaining the integrity of his theory. This was particularly difficult in a time period when Jung's terminology was not part of the colloquial language as much as it is today. Those that understood the theory struggled with how to convey it simply, especially the importance of the dominant and auxiliary functions. In fact, at a meeting in the 1970's of the early experts – Isabel Myers, Harold Grant, Cecil Williams, and Mary McCaulley – each demonstrated how they would convey the concepts!

It was around this time that the experts became aware of the great potential for superficial use of the Indicator. Practitioners needed to have taken a course in tests and measurement in order to use the instrument. However, the psychometric properties of the MBTI and Jungian theory were not being taught in these courses. Jack Black, then President of CPP, offered a solution. If a course were developed that included statistics, theory, and an exam, the publisher would "qualify" anyone who successfully passed so they could purchase the MBTI.

Katharine Myers approached Mary McCaulley at CAPT and Otto Kroeger at OKA to create such a course, since they were already teaching MBTI basics and application (they had seen the potential for superficial use and had created courses to fill the knowledge gap). Since McCaulley and Kroeger were too busy to take on additional work, Gary Hartzler urged Katharine Myers and Margaret Hartzler to create the course. McCaulley generously provided her materials and Gary Hartzler set up a not-for-profit organization called the Institute for Type Development. Under this umbrella, Katharine Myers and Margaret Hartzler created the first MBTI® Qualification Program. In creating the program, the women

focused on the minimum requirements needed for people to begin using the Indicator and giving feedback, knowing that real knowledge comes from practice.

As Katharine Myers and other leading type experts embarked on the development of the art of giving feedback, they became aware of the "missing four", or those functions which were not specifically outlined in Isabel Myers' type code hierarchy. Since this information was critical to type development, Katharine Myers attempted to talk about all eight mental functions at the first one-day conference held by the Washington-Baltimore APT chapter in 1980. Myers characterizes this as a "triumphant flop." Myers realized that she did not fully understand the eight functions, and the information was too complex to impart without a fuller understanding. Later, Type Resources (formerly the Institute for Type Development) began to develop more information on the eight functions, and other experts gradually weaved the eight functions into their delivery of the traditional feedback model.

Katharine Myers stated that as she gains insight and develops a deeper understanding of psychological types, she feels as though she is "floating down a river." As she looks around, she sees others coming up with the same insights, as if we are all being led by the stream of knowledge given to us by Jung and made practical to us by Isabel Myers. She paraphrased what Naomi Quenk once said: this never-ending exploration into the complexity of the theory is what keeps her from being bored, and she bores easily!

As type experts started to develop a deeper understanding of Jung's eight mental functions, they became aware of the need for the development of an alternative feedback model, one based upon the eight functions. The first eight-function feedback model was developed, extensively tested, and published by CPP in *Journey of Understanding: MBTI® Interpretation Using the Eight Jungian Functions Leader's Resource Guide* by Haas, McAlpine, and Hartzler (2001). We have begun to see the proliferation of eight-function texts, applications, and workshops, an important step in the on-going development of the art of feedback. ■

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