

# Type and Culture

Using the MBTI® Instrument in International Applications

TYPE PRACTITIONER SERIES



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# Introduction

Let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy  
American University, Washington, D.C., 1963

**E**nter the word “globalization” into the Google Internet search engine and you will get more than 53 million hits (in .07 seconds). The top result at the time of this writing defines the term as “the driving force of our era.”<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and government agencies report the phenomenon, with statistics showing dramatic increases in world exports of goods and services, travel and tourism, international investment flows, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and Internet usage.

Clearly the current economic revolution—fueled by developments in communications and technology—is creating an interconnected world. Robert House, the lead researcher of a major, ongoing study of culture and organizations, states that the need is great for “international and cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and cooperation, not only for the effective practice of management but also for the betterment of the human condition.”<sup>2</sup>

Recognition of the interconnected world and the growth of multinational organizations have made clear the importance of negotiating cultural differences. Leadership, management, and employee training have expanded internationally to help organizations accomplish two goals: first, to use teams effectively to organize their work and, second, to focus on retention and training of employees. Not surprisingly, organizations with global and culturally diverse workforces seek quality assessments to anchor their training programs in scientifically sound research.

## **International Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Instrument**

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) instrument has long been viewed as a powerful tool for self-understanding, individual development, and improved employee relationships among its many users in English-speaking, Westernized cultures such as those of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Now use of the MBTI® assessment is spreading rapidly to dozens of other countries and cultures—from Japan to India, Brazil to Sweden—as companies

observe its demonstrated effectiveness in employee and organizational development activities.

International administrations of the MBTI instrument increased sixfold between 2000 and 2005, and international sales of MBTI materials nearly tripled, according to the assessment's publisher. In continental Europe and the United Kingdom, 3,800 companies used the MBTI instrument in 2005, a 12% increase over the previous year, and the European distributor estimated that the MBTI tool was administered to 250,000 people in that region.<sup>3</sup>

Practitioners report using the MBTI instrument in virtually every country. Sam Voorhies, who delivers leadership development programs for the nonprofit religious organization World Vision, reports that the group has used the MBTI instrument in these programs in 74 different countries in the past four years. Voorhies and workshop participants attest to the relevance and value of psychological type concepts.

As global use increases, so do the number of approved translations. The MBTI tool was commercially available in more than 20 languages—including Bahasa Malay, Cantonese and Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, and 12 European languages—when this booklet went to press. The number of support materials for professionals and their clients is constantly growing also, with the *Introduction to Type*<sup>®</sup> booklet available in all of the languages listed above.

MBTI qualifying training programs for professionals are now available in many languages including Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Professionals may attend MBTI qualifying programs in China, continental Europe, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and North, Central, and South America.

This rapid expansion in the use of the MBTI instrument in countries outside of the United States, where it was originally developed, is exciting for MBTI practitioners—and raises some important questions for all those who would continue its expansion.

## Psychological Type and Culture

One question is whether psychological type is a useful way to understand human personality outside of Westernized cultures. Carl G. Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist who developed the theory on which the MBTI questionnaire is based, believed that psychological type is universal, an innate predisposition, part of human nature. In *Psychological Types*, Jung explains and supports his personality theory by examining Eastern and Western art, the major religions of the world, and writers and philosophers of different cultures. It's clear that he saw psychological type as part of the basic structure of the human mind, as did Katharine C. Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, who developed the MBTI instrument to identify Jung's psychological types.

Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede, a leading authority on culture, referred to culture as the “software of the mind.”<sup>4</sup> Using Hofstede's analogy, then, psychological type is the hardware, the physical structure of the mind, which is used and expressed through culture. According to this picture of personality, type and culture are inextricably intertwined in the development of an individual.

It is tempting to assume that cultural values will determine the distribution of types in a culture or that type distributions in a country create the observed differences in cultural values. Type enthusiasts have sometimes yielded to this temptation, hypothesizing that a culture that places a high value on social skills, such as the United States, will have a majority preferring Extraversion. However, the available evidence indicates that type does not cause cultural differences and cultural differences don't determine the distribution of type preferences within a culture.

Instead, the best hypothesis at present is that type defines inborn predispositions for using one's mind, while culture establishes the ways in which those preferences can be expressed appropriately in behavior. Thus, in the United States, with its culture that clearly values and supports extraverted behavior, people who prefer

Extraversion have been encouraged to develop, use, and place value on their natural preference. Conversely, people in that culture who prefer Introversion have received messages from parents, teachers, siblings, and friends that people who are quiet and reserved are probably suffering from lack of self-confidence or lack of social skills. Introverts are encouraged to develop social ease and may work to acquire culturally appropriate interpersonal skills. In contrast, in Finland, conversation for its own sake is regarded as a waste of breath. People who interrupt, finish others' sentences, or react instantly rather than pausing to reflect are seen as disrespectful and rather superficial. In such a culture, Introverts find their natural approach supported, and Extraverts are encouraged to develop a restrained and self-possessed communication and interpersonal style. Despite the profound differences in culture between these countries, it is likely that the ratio of Extraverts to Introverts in both the United States and Finland is 50:50.

When studying the development of individuals, it is important to recognize the need to consider both their type and the culture in which they have developed their type.

## Professional and Ethical Issues in Global MBTI® Use

Though experience supports the relevance and value of psychological type in a wide variety of cultures, ethical practitioners have appropriate concerns about using the MBTI instrument in cultures with values, norms, and beliefs different from their own. How appropriate is it to use the instrument in cultures different from those in which it was developed and normed with national representative samples?

At present, just two countries have MBTI forms with selection of items and scoring based on such nationally representative samples, the United Kingdom (MBTI Step I and Step II in European English editions) and the United States (Forms M and Q). However, many translations of the MBTI instrument have been carefully tested and developed with groups within the cul-

tures for which they are intended. Best professional and ethical practice is to provide a translation of the MBTI instrument in the client's first or second language when a valid translation is available. Regional distributors of the instrument are the best resource for appropriate translations; these are identified in the Appendix.

Reports from practitioners in the field indicate that, when valid translations are not available, the English-language forms work remarkably well to provide an initial indication of clients' psychological type preferences. That said, practitioners need always to be aware of the possible limitations of using a psychological instrument in cultures divergent from those in which it was developed.

The ethical principles regarding use of psychological assessments apply, whichever language version one is using and regardless of where one is administering and interpreting the instrument. These general ethical principles are summarized in the following box.

### Key Ethical Concerns in Global Use of the MBTI® Instrument

- Completing the MBTI instrument is voluntary.
- MBTI results are confidential and belong to the respondent; individual results may not be communicated to someone else without client permission.
- The client is the best judge of his or her type preferences; MBTI results are a beginning hypothesis to be verified or modified by the client.
- MBTI results are not an appropriate basis for selection or promotion.
- Practitioners must honor copyrights on MBTI materials. Protection of copyrights is particularly important in parts of the world where laws or practice may differ.
- The practitioner should work through the CPP-licensed distributor of the MBTI instrument and materials in the region in which he or she is working.



In addition to applying the general ethical principles, practitioners who use the MBTI assessment in a country other than their own must respect the territory of the CPP-licensed distributor of the MBTI instrument in that region. This includes working with the distributor to access translations of the MBTI instrument and interpretive resources such as the *Introduction to Type*® booklet, where appropriate; checking technical data such as instrument reliability and validity; and determining whether there are particular issues and concerns related to using the assessment in that region.

Distributors are responsible for ethical use of the MBTI instrument in their regions. They are required to apply the laws and professional standards of their countries regarding use of psychological instruments. Distributors also have the most current information about MBTI instrument translations, available MBTI materials, and training within their regions.

## Using This Booklet

*Type and Culture: Using the MBTI® Instrument in International Applications* provides a beginning guide for MBTI practitioners who are using or want to use the instrument and psychological type in cultures other than their own or with multinational and cross-cultural groups. The information and suggestions in this booklet are based primarily on our work with the MBTI instrument in a wide variety of cultures: we have led MBTI qualifying training, MBTI Step II training, and MBTI applications programs in many countries and have researched the expression of type in different cultures.<sup>5</sup>

We also draw on the experience and research of selected colleagues who have extensive experience using the MBTI instrument in more than 75 countries and cultures. The few published materials available on

the subject—a chapter in the *MBTI® Manual*, a chapter in *MBTI® Applications*, and papers presented at conferences—have enriched our understanding as well.

Because publications in this area are scarce, many of the conclusions here will be tentative. As this field develops, some will be questioned, some affirmed, some modified. We hope to encourage expanded professional and appropriate use of the MBTI instrument and psychological type theory internationally and to provide a frame for dialogue as use increases.

The sections of this booklet are organized as follows:

- “Culture” summarizes two widely disseminated and respected approaches to understanding cultural differences and offers suggestions on how to relate these approaches to use of the MBTI instrument and psychological type.
- “Cultural Expressions of Type” discusses how individuals’ type preferences may be expressed through different behaviors in different cultures. It includes cautionary examples of possible misinterpretations related to using the lens of one’s own culture to evaluate the meaning of behavior within another.
- “Type, Culture, and Training Styles” illustrates eight type-related facilitation styles based on the dominant functions. It also explains expectations other cultures may have about trainers and training styles.
- “Practical Adaptations for Training Internationally” is enriched by the expertise of consultant colleagues who use the MBTI tool in cultures very distinct from the one in which the tool was developed.
- “Understanding Type Distributions” presents two national representative samples of type and samples of type distributions from managers in other countries and cultures. This section also provides the context for ethical and appropriate use of type distribution information.

## Use of MBTI® Preferences in Cross-Cultural Training

### **E** Extraversion helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Seek the stimulation of new experiences
- Attend to the external world to orient themselves
- Make contact and connect with others
- Communicate externally

### **I** Introversion helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Reflect on what has been seen and heard
- Process what has been experienced
- Uncover the questions behind the different behaviors and values shown: What happened? Why did it happen? What does it mean? What will I do if I am ever in the same situation again?
- Recover from experience fatigue

### **S** Sensing helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Take in new factual information and remember key details
- Notice their own internal state (e.g., stress)
- Use sensory information to notice the state of others
- Consciously control and modify behavior and nonverbal communication

### **N** Intuition helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Gauge mood and atmosphere
- Pick up on patterns of behavior and responses
- Explore meanings
- Respect the possibility that cross-cultural situations may have meanings that are completely different from their culture

### **T** Thinking helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Mentally step out of situations in which values clash and view the discord impartially
- Objectively evaluate their strengths and weaknesses
- Look for the logic behind different behaviors
- Critique their own cultural heritage

### **F** Feeling helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Find common ground and build rapport
- View a situation from another's point of view, develop understanding
- Accept differing value systems while remaining clear about their own
- Use data from the emotional level to better understand the context and content of interactions

### **J** Judging helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Come to conclusions about the meaning of experiences
- Categorize new experiences
- Structure learning
- Remember time zones when calling home

### **P** Perceiving helps cross-cultural practitioners

- Be adaptable, go with the flow
- Keep generalizations and stereotypes open to modification
- Stay open to new experiences
- Take advantage of unexpected opportunities

Source: Adapted from Alan Cornes, *Culture from the Inside Out* (2005).

## **A Note About Type Knowledge**

We assume that most users of this booklet will be type practitioners well versed in psychological type theory and ethics. Should you need a review of core concepts, refer to the *Introduction to Type*<sup>®</sup> booklet, which provides a refresher on the definitions of the eight preferences and an understanding of the differences and similarities among the 16 personality types. If you are new to type, we strongly recommend that you complete an MBTI qualifying program recognized by the authorized distributor in the country in which you live. For information about distributors and recognized MBTI qualifying programs, see the Appendix or contact CPP, Inc.

## **The Rewards of Cross-Cultural Training**

For the three of us, training with the MBTI instrument in cultures other than our own has been an important route for increasing and sharpening our understanding of psychological type and our appreciation for the instrument. The experience has challenged our traditional Western view of the behaviors typical of each of the 16 types, requiring us to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of type. We have seen that type can provide a bridge of commonality and understanding between people from different cultures.

Further, we have learned that working successfully in different cultures requires us to use all of the preferences identified by psychological type.

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
29.6% n = 359	5.5% n = 67	1.0% n = 13	6.6% n = 80
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
8.1% n = 99	4.8% n = 59	1.5% n = 19	3.3% n = 40
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
5.7% n = 69	2.5% n = 31	1.9% n = 23	4.6% n = 56
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
17.6% n = 213	3.7% n = 45	0.3% n = 4	2.6% n = 32

Note: N = 1,209 Korean managers in a large sample of convenience.

Source: Myungjoon Kim, Korea Psychological Testing Institute Data Bank, January 2006. Used with permission.

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
22.8% n = 136	2.7% n = 16	1.3% n = 8	9.0% n = 54
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
1.2% n = 7	0.2% n = 1	0.7% n = 4	1.8% n = 11
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
2.5% n = 15	0.8% n = 5	1.5% n = 9	1.5% n = 9
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
34% n = 203	2.2% n = 13	2.5% n = 15	15.2% n = 91

Note: N = 733 managers in Indian business organizations.

Source: C. S. Mahesh and Janaki Venkat, Asianic Psychologists Press India, 2006. Used with permission.

of a representative sample (similar to the CAPT Data Bank samples reported in the *MBTI® Manual*).

Korean MBTI users have consistently found higher percentages preferring Thinking and Judging in their clients than are found in similar samples in Western countries. However, since there is no national representative sample of Koreans, this is simply a fact to be noted.

**India.** The representatives of Asianic Psychologists Press in India are C. S. Mahesh and Janaki Venkat. They have been using the MBTI instrument with managers in Indian companies for several years and report interesting information about the types of managers and the influence of organizational culture on managers' responses to the MBTI Form M.

As Mahesh and Venkat note, Indian managers apparently see their organizations and responsibilities as requiring the kinds of behaviors characteristic of ESTJ. When they receive an interpretation and choose their best-fit type, they move away from ESTJ (from 34% reported type to 24.6% best-fit type).

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
25.3% n = 151	4.0% n = 24	1.8% n = 11	9.9% n = 59
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
2.8% n = 17	0.8% n = 5	2.3% n = 14	2.5% n = 15
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
4.0% n = 24	2.2% n = 13	2.8% n = 17	1.7% n = 10
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ
24.6% n = 147	2.8% n = 17	2.0% n = 12	10.2% n = 61

Note: N = 597 managers in Indian business organizations.

Source: C. S. Mahesh and Janaki Venkat, Asianic Psychologists Press India, 2006. Used with permission.



**Table 14. Best-Fit MBTI® Types Among Japanese Managers**

<b>ISTJ</b> 9.4% n = 123	<b>ISFJ</b> 6.6% n = 87	<b>INFJ</b> 2.4% n = 32	<b>INTJ</b> 2.4% n = 31
<b>ISTP</b> 3.7% n = 48	<b>ISFP</b> 6.9% n = 91	<b>INFP</b> 3.7% n = 48	<b>INTP</b> 4.6% n = 60
<b>ESTP</b> 8.6% n = 113	<b>ESFP</b> 6.7% n = 88	<b>ENFP</b> 7.0% n = 92	<b>ENTP</b> 10.3% n = 136
<b>ESTJ</b> 12.2% n = 161	<b>ESFJ</b> 8.5% n = 112	<b>ENFJ</b> 2.9% n = 38	<b>ENTJ</b> 4.2% n = 55

Note: N = 1,315 managers in large Japanese business organizations.  
Source: © 2006 by Yuki Sonoda, IPDS Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan. Used with permission.

**Japan.** The type table of managers from Japan is different from those presented previously because it is based on best-fit type rather than reported type.

Note that the type distributions are different as well, with many more selecting Feeling Judgment than in samples of managers in other cultures. At this point in data collection, the difference raises interesting questions that cannot yet be answered.

### Leaders in a Multinational Company

The following data are based on the results of more than 1,200 managers who attended MBTI workshops in Asia-Pacific, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. The managers work for a multinational electronics manufacturer headquartered in the United States with facilities in 20 countries. The managers completed the MBTI assessment between June 2004 and May 2005. Most participants completed Form M from CPP's SkillsOne® Web site. The company used the MBTI Step I questionnaire from OPP in various European languages for participants in those countries and the Japanese translation of Form G for participants in Japan.

**Table 15. MBTI® Types Among Asian-Pacific, Canadian, European, Latin American, and U.S. Managers**

<b>ISTJ</b> 23.2% n = 289	<b>ISFJ</b> 2.1% n = 26	<b>INFJ</b> 1.0% n = 12	<b>INTJ</b> 5.1% n = 63
<b>ISTP</b> 6.4% n = 80	<b>ISFP</b> 1.8% n = 22	<b>INFP</b> 1.5% n = 19	<b>INTP</b> 4.1% n = 51
<b>ESTP</b> 6.8% n = 85	<b>ESFP</b> 1.5% n = 18	<b>ENFP</b> 2.4% n = 30	<b>ENTP</b> 4.9% n = 61
<b>ESTJ</b> 27.6% n = 343	<b>ESFJ</b> 2.3% n = 29	<b>ENFJ</b> 1.0% n = 12	<b>ENTJ</b> 8.4% n = 104

Note: N = 1,244 managers from a multinational electronics manufacturer.  
Source: Electronics manufacturer, 2006. Used with permission.

As in other type distributions of managers, the STJ combination is prominent in this group of managers, accounting for about 50% of the combined group.

### Practical Application of Type Distribution Data

Type distributions of managers and leaders follow a very consistent pattern in the countries from which we have data. While the STJ percentage varies among the countries, the two types are the most frequently occurring in every country.

Professionals working with managers cross-culturally can begin with the hypothesis that their organizations are likely to fit within the familiar STJ characteristics. At the same time, it's crucial to keep in mind that the cultural factors discussed previously influence how that familiar type pattern may express itself.

Additionally, remember that samples of convenience do not give information about more general type distributions within a culture and type professionals must generalize carefully from any type data.