

# Contents

## **Introduction 1**

- International Use of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® Instrument 1
- Psychological Type and Culture 2
- Professional and Ethical Issues in Global MBTI® Use 3
- Using This Booklet 4
- A Note About Type Knowledge 6
- The Rewards of Cross-Cultural Training 6

## **Culture 7**

- Cultural Differences at Three Levels 7
- Culture's Origins 9
- Models of Cultural Differences 9
- Cultural Models and Individuals' Psychological Types 16

## **Cultural Expressions of Type 19**

- Culture's Valuing of Certain Preferences 20
- Cultural Values and the Effect on Individuals 20
- Culture's Effects on Type Development 21
- Filters That Hinder Type Practitioners' Understanding 22
- Effectiveness Despite Cultural Filters 24

## **Type, Culture, and Training Styles 26**

- Your Type's Training Style 27
- Training Styles in Your Culture 27
- Expectations in Other Cultures About Training Styles 32
- Issues to Consider Before Training in Another Country or Culture 34

## **Practical Adaptations for Training Internationally 36**

- Adaptations for Training in Collectivist Cultures 36
- Adaptations for Training in High Power Distance Cultures 38
- Adaptations for Training in High and Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures 40
- Creative Ways to Explain the MBTI® Preferences 41
- Helping Mixed Cultural Groups Use Differences Constructively 41
- Handling Language Issues 42

# 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.