Myers-Briggs Test Has Been Debunked Time and Again. Why Do Companies Still Use It?

[1] When Alan was interviewing at a start-up last year, he noticed an odd task in the interview process: taking the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a personality assessment. "The founder was a strong believer of this test to deduce … what type of people I would work best with and to align the team members accordingly," explains Alan. While the test results were not a "deal breaker," the traits showcased in the results did unofficially influence the decisions made by management for the employee in the entire span of their employment.

[2] Although the MBTI, which categorizes people into 16 personality types, has been widely debunked as having no scientific basis, it continues to be used extensively in professional settings today. Consulting firms like McKinsey famously use the test during the application process. The MBTI is currently a massive industry, reportedly making $20 million annually from public and private institutions, universities, charities, and even the military. Why an unscientific measure like the MBTI continues to be so commonplace and seen as a legitimate filter of people's abilities is not just a massive question, but also one that reflects deeper problems with the systems that use it.

[3] One part of the puzzle comes from capitalism and the need to extract productivity out of someone for them to be valuable.

[4] The link between the MBTI and its supposed end goals of efficiency was first formed back in the 1940s. The assessment was developed in the same decade by Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers – a mother and daughter duo – during the second world war to boost recruitment. Briggs Myers built on her mother's work and decided to contribute to the war effort, matching women in the area to "suitable jobs" with the help of the type indicator.

[5] The test is based on the idea that people are born with a preference for either extroversion or introversion, intuition or sensing, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. The various combinations of these four binary categories gave way to the 16 personality types the MBTI comprises today.

[6] Arguably, MBTI is not alone in its quest of telling people who they are. There has always been a desire to categorize people since the dawn of civilisation. This cultural desire was amplified around the 20th century, with the influx of office workers after the industrial revolution, a time that coincided with the rise of personality tests. Slowly and surely, work culture increased the incentive to categorize people, typecasting them by way of binary traits.

[7] "Companies cannot deal with the volume of applicants and so they're looking for ways to legally reduce applicants," says Tim Travers Hawkins, who directed a 2015 documentary on the dark side of personality testing. There is also an assumption at play here: because people know who they were courtesy of a personality test, they would be more efficient in the workplace.

[8] In corporate settings, "the type indicator emerges as this incredibly useful tool for convincing people that they are doing exactly what they are meant to do — and that they should gladly bind themselves to work," wrote Merve Emre in The Personality Brokers, a book about the history of assessments.

[9] In 2017, a management consultant noted that people routinely discussed their scores during meetings at Bain & Company. He lists some examples: "'I'm a strong E (extrovert) and so sometimes I need to leave the team room to really focus on work, otherwise I will get caught up inside conversations.' These are usually not studied at length but rather used as a sort of springboard for teams to discuss team expectations and preferences."

[10] For individuals in the workplace, the value of using the test goes deeper than simply understanding their working style. A lot of the test's popularity "has to do with the idea that you need control over life, especially when life is very unstable and not in your control," explains Mathangi Krish, an associate professor of anthropology who has researched the history of work culture.

[11] It gives people a way forward, almost acting like a lighthouse in the dark seas. Krish likens the MBTI to the Oracle of Delphi; if it says it's going to rain tomorrow, you will act accordingly. When Harleen Kaur, 18, took the test, she realized she was an INFJ, which meant she was suited to a career in writing or anything that involved less social interaction. She now works as a content writer. "The [result] was like an additional push to my study and career decision."

[12] The test tells you not only who you are, but who you want to be. Zelam, 22, used "it to personally validate things I already felt about myself. It helped me navigate my career and live more authentically."

[13] However, despite the test's benefits in individualistic use, anything that is monetized to such a degree warrants caution, especially when there is little science and evidence of productivity attached to it. On multiple occasions, organizations like the U.S. Educational Testing Service (that regulates the SATs), have concluded that the MBTI was "without merit." Moreover, "there is scant evidence that MBTI results are useful in determining managerial effectiveness, helping to build teams, providing career counselling, enhancing insight into self or others, or any other of the myriad uses for which it is promoted," noted writer Annie Murphy Paul.

[14] The test has also been critiqued for its inconsistent and incoherent results. According to data, more than half the people who take the test a second time tend to get a different result. For instance, when Meryl, 26, took the test multiple times, there were occasions where she apparently changed personality types "almost overnight."

[15] Further, Krish notes how using the MBTI within the workplace creates a "cult of toxic positivity." The MBTI focuses on crafting an efficient and productive worker, with little regard for people's individuality. People aren't people but types, who are supposed to behave and act and emote in a certain way. Deliberately, personality tests like MBTI become sites of manufacturing the perfect worker. People become "products to be branded, marketed, and

always shown in the best light with the best filters with a golden glow always on." These products are then sold to companies and the world, with the human within erased. It catalyses the process of binding the worker to their work identities, further separating people from intimately understanding who they are. Merve Emre calls these tests "among the silliest, shallowest products of late capitalism" in her book.

[18] "As a culture, all these tools indicate intellectual laziness," says Krish.

[19] If people were to stop and ask, they may realize a radical truth that could undo much of what they know and understand: that this relentless focus on our own selves may itself be the problem, preventing us from questioning the way the world functions.

[20] The continued use of personality tests doesn't allow us the flexibility to think that we are perhaps not the person we thought we were. The bottom line is, that personality tests is not to be understood as gospel truth and that we all fit somewhere on a spectrum.

Questions

1. When did Alan encounter the MBTI assessment?
   A. Chatting with team members
   B. On his first day of his new job
   C. When he was meeting with his manager
   D. During the job interview process
2. What did Alan think of the MBTI during his experience with his job?

_____

3. Did the MBTI assessment play a significant role in helping Alan secure the job offer?

_____

4. Which of the following words does 'traits' have the closest meaning to?
   A. Characteristics
   B. Weaknesses
   C. Strengths
   D. Hobbies
5. Fill in the following table which gives some basic information about the MBTI test.

MBTI Personality Assessment	
Personality types	(i)
Scientific basis	(ii) Yes/No
Organisations using MBTI	• Consulting firms • Universities • Charities • (iii)
Yearly earnings	(iv)

6. From paragraph 2, which of the following best describes the writer's view on the MBTI test?
   A. Approval
   B. Sceptical (or US English: Skeptical)
   C. Anger
   D. Indifferent

7. Using the information from paragraph 4, fill in the following summary.
   The MBTI assessment was developed in the (i)_____ by Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, (ii)_____. The original goal of the MBTI test was to boost (iii)_____ during the 2nd world war. Briggs Myers helped matching (iv)_____ to suitable workplaces by using a (v)_____ indicator.

8. (Hard) What does "binary" (paragraph 5) suggest about the categories of the MBTI?

---

9. Determine if the following statements are true, false or not given using the information in paragraph 6.
   a. Personality tests were first created to categorize office workers
   b. The MBTI personality test peaked in popularity during the 20th century
   c. The MBTI is the only personality test

10. What is a potential way that the MBTI personality test can be abused according to paragraph 10?

---

11. Fill in the following sentence with the correct word **taken from the article.** You may need to change the part of speech of the word for your answer to be grammatically correct.

Companies think that worker _____ can be improved after employees know more about themselves through a personality test.

12. What is the main use of "type indicators" as seen in paragraph 8?
   A. Telling people who they should be friends with
   B. Splitting up into teams
   C. Telling people more about themselves
   D. Reassuring people that their behaviour is completely normal

13. What is the occupation of Merve Emre according to paragraph 8?

---

14. According to paragraph 9, which of the following **IS NOT** something that an extroverted person would normally do?
    A. Chat with others when given the chance
    B. Put aside work to talk to others
    C. Leaving the group to focus by themselves
    D. Sit alone inside a room

15. Are people's personality types rigorously dissected in paragraph 9? If not, what is the use of personality types at Bain & Company?

_____

_____

16. Find a word in paragraph 9 that can be replaced by the phrase 'a jumping point'.

_____

17. Which of the following statements best describes the people who find the MBTI test useful?
    A. A worker with a packed work schedule
    B. A retired person spending most of their time at the beach
    C. A child on school holiday
    D. A person who has enough resources to make decisions for themselves

18. What is the simile used to describe the MBTI test in paragraph 11?

_____

19. What does 'it' (start of paragraph 11) refer to?

_____

20. Which of the following college majors would Harleen Kaur most likely take?
    A. Mathematics
    B. English Literature
    C. Business
    D. Computer science

21. What is the writer's opinion on the amount of money that MBTI is used to make?

_____

22. What does 'scant' (paragraph 13) mean?

_____

23. Fill in the following information sheet about the MBTI test according to paragraph 13

Uses promoted for	e.g. Determining managerial effectiveness (i) (ii)
Evidence showing usefulness	(iii) Sufficient/insufficient
Advisory conclusion	Users should be (iv)_____ when using the MBTI personality test. (**use a word from the article;** _you may need to change its form_)

24. Which of the following words has the closest meaning to 'myriad'?
    A. Limited
    B. Niche
    C. Practical
    D. Countless

25. Complete the following summary on paragraph 15

With the MBTI personality test, people lose their sense of (i)_____ but are instead split into distinct groups. This is deliberately done so to help companies create a (ii)_____ worker. People are (iii)_____ like products, showing only their good qualities. This helps to (iv)_____ the worker to a pre-defined work identity instead of understanding who they are. Merve Emre criticised such personality tests as silly and (v)_____.

26. According to the writer, what is the problem of focusing too much on ourselves?

_____

27. (Hard) Using information throughout the essay, how does "we all fit somewhere on a spectrum" indicate that the MBTI is not an appropriate way to categorize people?

_____

_____

_____

28. Match the following quotes with the person who is most likely to say it. One quote is not used. One example has been done for you.

A: The MBTI test does not give me the same result every time

B: I created this test to help fight World War II

C: Companies are receiving too many applicants nowadays

D: I certainly did not expect seeing the MBTI test in the interview

E: The MBTI test can explain my actions

F: People are less unique if we group them using personality tests

G: The MBTI test is the most pointless thing ever.

e.g. Krish - F	
i.	Alan -
ii.	Isabel Brigg Myers –
iii.	Tim Travers Hawkins –
iv.	Zelam -
v.	Meryl -

-End-