

The Clifton StrengthsFinder® and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®

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Overview

This document serves as an overview of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Clifton StrengthsFinder, and research on the relationship between the two tools. Both tools are self-assessments that provide individuals the opportunity to learn more about themselves. The process of categorizing people can be challenging and somewhat artificial, as patterns of thought and behavior are unique to the individual and often difficult to measure or articulate. However, self-assessments are valuable means to self-discovery and can foster the discussion and awareness of preferences and talents within groups and organizations.

The primary difference between the tools is that they are designed to measure different dimensions of an individual: The Clifton StrengthsFinder measures talent that generates performance, while the MBTI measures preferred modes of psychological processing. In general, the MBTI provides information about how an individual experiences and makes sense of his or her surroundings, while the Clifton StrengthsFinder provides insights into recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that can be productively applied for optimal performance and success.

Theoretical Foundation, Instrument Design, and Intended Outcomes

The MBTI classifications of individuals are based on an adaptation of Carl Jung's theory of conscious psychological type. The MBTI groups individuals into one of sixteen personality types by measuring distinct polarities of preference: Extroversion or Introversion, Sensing or Intuition, Feeling or Thinking, and Judging or Perceiving. The middle two categories are considered "psychological functions" — how individuals naturally prefer to take in information (Sensing or Intuition) and the basis on which they evaluate that information (Thinking or Feeling). The first and fourth categories are considered "orientations" that determine how the psychological functions are exhibited. These categories indicate how individuals gain energy and focus attention (Introversion or Extroversion) and how they deal with the outside world (Judging or Perceiving). The resulting four-letter personality type represents the individual's preference of the two opposite poles in each category.

The dynamic interactions between these four preferences indicate basic personality types. This information gives insight into how individuals gain energy, process information, and act upon their conclusions. For example, an "introverted thinking" type may spend much time internally processing ideas, while an "extroverted thinking" type may also spend much time in the world of ideas, but "think out loud" while exploring the ideas' value and meaning. Individuals can build skill and competency in the opposite of their type, but are most comfortable operating within their preferred orientation.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder is founded in Dr. Donald O. Clifton's research into what individuals do best. The American Psychological Association named Clifton the "Father of Strengths Psychology" for his work on the talents of individuals. Talents are defined as an individual's naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior. Research shows that one's greatest talents, when productively applied, are that person's greatest opportunity for the development of a strength — the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance in a specific task.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder measures the presence of talent in 34 areas called "themes." After an individual sorts through 177 sets of paired statements, he or she receives a Signature Themes report, which presents his or her five most dominant talent themes, as indicated by responses to the instrument. One's Signature Themes are unique to the individual: 278,256 combinations of five themes are possible, and when you consider the order of the five themes, the number jumps to more than 33 million different sets of Signature Themes.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder offers an opportunity for talent discovery and a language through which individuals can express their unique talents. The precision afforded by the depth and language of the strengths concept

moves beyond that of “people person” descriptors, which offer relatively surface insight. Knowing (for instance) that a person naturally recognizes and cultivates the potential in others and derives satisfaction from watching others grow (Developer) is a substantial asset when considering how an individual might interact with others. The Clifton StrengthsFinder identifies talents that an individual routinely demonstrates, revealing powerful areas of potential that will yield the greatest investment value. When that depth of discovery is shared within organizations, employees become intelligently and intensely focused on maximizing what they and their teammates naturally do best.

Comparison Study

Gallup Senior Scientist Phil Stone, a psychology professor at Harvard, recently examined the relationship between the MBTI and The Clifton StrengthsFinder. Stone had 206 of his students complete assessments through both instruments. The study showed some expected correlations between the two assessments. For example, if the Clifton StrengthsFinder shows that Analytical is one of your top five areas of talent, the MBTI is likely to identify you as Thinking (MBTI). If Empathy is in your top five, you are likely to be Feeling (MBTI). Likewise, if Discipline is in your top five, you’re probably also Judging (MBTI).

Stone’s students reported the Clifton StrengthsFinder as both more applicable and more accurate than MBTI. An analogy: Imagine a house and the rooms within it. MBTI indicates the room in which an individual is most comfortable residing. The Clifton StrengthsFinder represents the furnishings, functional pieces, decorations, and other details inside that room, thereby helping us understand the individual’s unique innate abilities. Both the MBTI and the Clifton StrengthsFinder reveal valuable information about an individual’s personality, and both may aid individual and organizational development strategies. However, recognizing the fundamentally different measurement objectives of the two will yield a more productive use of each.