

Tired of Myers & Briggs?

*A Critical Assessment
of the Venerable MBTI®
and the Case for Replacing It With Mindex*



By
Dr. Karl Albrecht

Karl Albrecht International

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Tired of Myers & Briggs?

Maybe It's Time to Move On to Mindex

Many consultants, trainers, coaches, counselors, and learning managers are familiar with the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (widely known as the "MBTI") as a self-assessment tool. But many are less familiar with the *Mindex Thinking Style Profile*, which many practitioners consider a superior instrument in a number of ways.

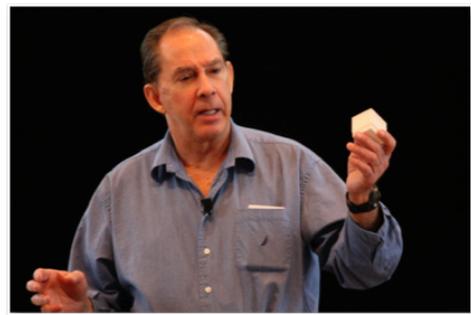
This brief discussion compares the rather antiquated MBTI with the Mindex Profile, and promotes the advantages of the Mindex Profile from the practitioner's point of view.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator



ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ

Mindex Profile



Dr. Karl Albrecht

Abstract
Concepts



Concrete
Experience



Left Brained

Right Brained

Deficiencies in the MBTI: Theoretical and Practical

The MBTI, developed in the 1940s by two marriage counselors, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers, is more properly classified as a personality profile

rather than a thinking styles profile. Briggs and Myers studied the work of Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung, and his theory of *psychological types*.

Over the many years since the MBTI was created, two parallel conversations – largely contradictory – have been going on. On one hand we have the MBTI publisher’s promotional story, reflected in statements like,

“The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment is the best known and most trusted personality tool available today. Its positive approach to understanding differences is appreciated by the two million people who complete the questionnaire globally every year.”

But simultaneously, psychologists and researchers have long been questioning the basic design of the assessment, its scoring mechanisms, as well as claims for validity, reliability, and internal measures of consistency. According to a report by *Financial Times* magazine:

“In 1962 Educational Testing Service (ETS) — publishers of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the standardised exam taken by most US teenagers heading for university — published Isabel’s test, having persuaded her to change its name to Myers-Briggs in recognition of her leading role in its creation. However, a number of ETS’s own psychologists, according to [psychologist Annie Murphy] Paul’s account, “derided [the test] as unscientific rubbish,” and sales were not pushed hard by the company.

“Then in 1975, the California-based publishing company Consulting Psychologists Press — now called CPP — picked up distribution rights to the test and heavily marketed it to American businesses. Isabel died at the age of 82 in May 1980, just as sales were taking off. By 1983, 750,000 people were taking the MBTI annually. In 1993, three million took it. To this day, Myers-Briggs is CPP’s biggest earner. The privately held company, founded by two psychologists in 1956 to publish psychometric tests and career guidance tools, does not reveal financial details but reports suggest revenues related to the test are about \$20m each year.

“A partner firm founded in the UK in 1989, Oxford Psychologists Press, began translating the questionnaire into a dozen other languages, and continues to market translations worldwide.”

Theoretical Concerns

Doubts about the MBTI’s theoretical basis and practical value have dogged the product and its parent company ever since its commercial launch in 1975. According to Wikipedia.com:

“Although popular in the business sector, the MBTI exhibits significant psychometric deficiencies, notably including poor validity (i.e. not measuring what it purports to measure) and poor reliability (giving different results for the same person on different occasions). The four [polarity] scales used in the MBTI have some correlation with four of the Big Five personality traits, which are a more commonly accepted framework.

“Criticism

“The validity (statistical validity and test validity) of the MBTI as a psychometric instrument has been the subject of much criticism.

“It has been estimated that between a third and a half of the published material on the MBTI has been produced for the special conferences of the Center for the Application of Psychological Type (which provides the training in the MBTI, and are *funded by sales of the MBTI*) or as papers in the *Journal of Psychological Type* (which is edited and supported by Myers–Briggs advocates and by sales of the indicator). It has been argued that this reflects a lack of critical scrutiny.

“Many of the studies that endorse MBTI are methodologically weak or unscientific. A 1996 review by Gardner and Martinko concluded: ‘It is clear that efforts to detect simplistic linkages between type preferences and managerial effectiveness have been disappointing. Indeed, given the mixed quality of research and the inconsistent findings, no definitive conclusion regarding these relationships can be drawn.’

“Psychometric specialist Dr. Robert Hogan wrote that, ‘Most personality psychologists regard the MBTI as little more than an elaborate Chinese fortune cookie.’ Similarly, psychologist Dr. Larry Stricker notes, ‘We think of the MBTI as failing to pass the ‘smirk’ test. That means that two psychologists can’t discuss the product for more than a few seconds without smirking.’

“No Evidence for Dichotomies

“Isabel Myers considered the direction of the preference (for example, Extravert vs. Introvert) to be more important than the degree of the preference. Statistically, this would mean that scores on each MBTI scale would show a bimodal distribution with most people scoring near the ends of the scales, thus dividing people into either, e.g., an extraverted or an introverted psychological type.

“However, most studies have found that scores on the individual scales were actually distributed in a centrally peaked manner, similar to a normal distribution, indicating that the majority of people were actually in the middle of the scale and were thus neither clearly introverted nor extraverted.

“Most personality traits do show a normal distribution of scores from low to high, with about 15% of people at the low end, about 15% at the high end and the majority of people in the middle ranges. But in order for the MBTI to be scored, a cut-off line is used at the middle of each scale and those scoring below the line are classified as one type and those scoring above the line are given the opposite type.

“Thus, psychometric assessment research fails to support the concept of type, but rather shows that most people [fall] near the middle of a continuous curve.

“Although we do not conclude that the absence of bimodality necessarily proves that the MBTI developers’ theory-based assumption of categorical ‘types’ of personality is invalid, the absence of empirical bimodality . . . of MBTI scores does

indeed remove a potentially powerful line of evidence that was previously available to 'type' advocates to cite in defense of their position."

"Validity and Utility

"The content of the MBTI scales is problematic. In 1991, a National Academy of Sciences committee reviewed data from MBTI research studies and concluded that only the Introversion-Extraversion (I-E) scale has high correlations with comparable scales of other instruments and low correlations with instruments designed to assess different concepts. In contrast, the Sensing-Intuiting (S-N) and Thinking-Feeling (T-F) scales show relatively weak validity.

"The 1991 review committee concluded at the time there was 'not sufficient, well-designed research to justify the use of the MBTI in career counseling programs.' This study based its measurement of validity on 'criterion-related validity (i.e., does the MBTI predict specific outcomes related to interpersonal relations or career success/job performance?).' *There is insufficient evidence to make claims about utility, particularly of the four-letter type [code] derived from a person's responses to the MBTI items.*

"Terminology

The terminology of the MBTI has been criticized as being very 'vague and general,' so as to allow any kind of behavior to fit any personality type, which may result in the *Forer effect*, where people give a high rating to a positive description that supposedly applies specifically to them. [Comment: Some of the descriptive summaries provided by the publisher for the various two-letter 'styles' read more like popular horoscopes rather than as tools for serious investigation.]

"Reliability

"The test-retest reliability of the MBTI tends to be low. Large numbers of people (between 39% and 76% of respondents) obtain different type classifications when retaking the indicator after only five weeks. In Fortune Magazine (May 15, 2013), an article titled: 'Have We All Been Duped by the Myers-Briggs Test?' stated that:

'The interesting – and somewhat alarming – fact about the MBTI is that, despite its popularity, it has been subject to sustained criticism by professional psychologists for over three decades. One problem is that it displays what statisticians call low 'test-retest reliability.' So if you retake the test after only a five-week gap, there's around a 50% chance that you will *fall into a different personality category* compared to the first time you took the test.'

"The consequence [of the forced-choice question scales] is that the scores of two people labeled 'introverted' and 'extraverted' may be almost exactly the same, but they could be placed into the two different categories since they fall on either side of an imaginary dividing line.

“Utility

“Isabel Myers claimed that the proportion of different personality types varied by choice of career or course of study. However, researchers examining the proportions of each type within varying professions report that the proportion of MBTI types within each occupation is close to that within a random sample of the population. Some researchers have expressed reservations about the relevance of type to job satisfaction, as well as concerns about the potential misuse of the instrument in labeling people.

“The MBTI is not a useful predictor of job performance. As noted above, the MBTI measures preferences, not ability. The use of the MBTI as a predictor of job success is expressly discouraged in the Manual. However, the MBTI continues to be popular because many people lack psychometric sophistication, it is not difficult to understand, and there are many supporting books, websites and other sources which are readily available to the general public.”

As a more general concern about the conceptual structure of the MBTI, its designers seem to have been trying to fuse together a model of personality – introversion vs. extraversion – with a model of cognitive function – thinking vs. feeling and intuiting vs. sensing. This attempt to – metaphorically – “stuff too much baggage into one suitcase” makes for a more complex experience for both practitioner and client.

While we’re discussing the theoretical foundations, it’s also important to note that the MBTI was designed many years ago, before the breakthrough research at Caltech revealed the significance of the “left-brain / right-brain” differences — known as *hemispheric lateralization*. In this respect, it’s well to remember that Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and their contemporaries formed their theories without the benefit of this new biocognitive understanding of human mental process, which came many decades later.

Advantages of the Mindex Model and Profile

The Mindex model, by comparison, is theoretically sound, and the instrument has been well validated. The concept of *hemispheric lateralization* has stood the test of time, even though some journalists and lay critics like to claim that it is “oversimplified,” “pop science,” and “scientifically debunked.” The cognitive patterns Mindex portrays are readily recognized in the conversation and behavior of individuals. Because Mindex uses a more straightforward and robust conceptual model, and especially because it uses linear scales instead of forced-choice dichotomies, validation is less problematic.

A More “Friendly” Model

Your thinking style is your characteristic way of processing information. It’s the way you acquire your knowledge, organize your thoughts, form your views and opinions, apply your values, solve problems, make decisions, plan, and express yourself to others. Mindex offers a simple and easy-to-understand model that quickly makes sense of those patterns.

The most commonly used elements of the Mindex model are the four primary patterns formed by the left-brain / right-brain dimension and the abstract-concrete dimension, i.e. left-brained and concrete; right-brained and concrete; left-brained and abstract; and right-brained and abstract. Although all 20 dimensions are useful, most users and most participants seem especially fascinated with these four primary habits of thought.

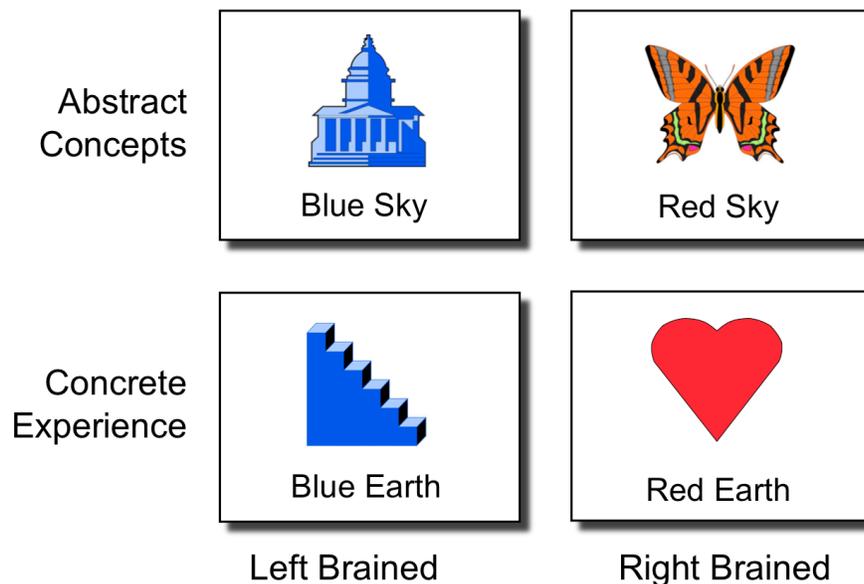
To make these four thinking styles easy to understand and remember, Dr. Karl Albrecht has given them simple metaphorical names, in terms of colors. We can call the left-brained mode of thought “blue” thinking, because we tend to think of analytical people as – figuratively, at least – having relatively “cool” temperaments, represented by a cool color like blue. We can call the right-brained thinker a “red” thinker, because we think of intuitively inclined people as having “warmer” temperaments, as suggested by red.

Similarly, we can give simple metaphorical names to the other dimension — the concrete and abstract levels. We can call them “earth” and “sky” respectively. “Earth” thinking is concrete, immediate, and results-oriented. “Sky” thinking is imaginary, hypothetical, and conceptual.

Using these metaphorical names for the four key styles, we have:

- A. *Red Earth* (right-brained & concrete)
- B. *Blue Earth* (left-brained & concrete)
- C. *Red Sky* (right-brained & abstract)
- D. *Blue Sky* (left-brained & abstract)

The figure shows these four styles in the convenient form of a two-by-two matrix diagram.



More Comprehensive Scales

In addition to the four primary scales of *Red Earth*, *Blue Earth*, *Red Sky*, and *Blue Sky*, which correspond to some extent to the MBTI model, Mindex includes 16 additional scales, dealing with aspects of mental process that are useful for self-insight and self-

understanding. For example, Mindex has scales for *Sensory Mode Preference* (Kinesthetic, Visual, & Auditory), four scales dealing with *Structure Preference* (Time Orientation, Detail Orientation, Technical Orientation, and Goal Orientation), seven scales dealing with *Mental Flexibility* (Tolerance for Ambiguity, Opinion Flexibility, Semantic Flexibility, Positive Orientation, Sense of Humor, Investigative Orientation, and Resistance to Enculturation), and two scales dealing with *Thinking Fluency* (Idea Fluency and Logical Fluency).

KAI asserts that the Mindex model has high *construct validity*, meaning that the four primary components of the model match up well with generally accepted concepts of human mental preference, such as the analytical-intuitive dichotomy and the concrete-abstract dichotomy. With regard to *face validity*, i.e. "Does my Mindex profile seem to be an accurate portrayal of my thinking style as I perceive it?" a population of 2,000 participants rated it as an average of 4.08 on a 5-point scale. Fewer than 2 percent of participants rated it below a 3 on the scale. Mindex also qualifies in terms of *internal consistency* of the questions that form the sub-scales, with coefficients on the Cronbach "alpha" test of .60 or higher. Similarly, *test-retest variability* over several months is also quite low.

Practical Concerns

Many trainers and counselors who have used the MBTI feel that it can be very revealing and helpful in giving people insight into their behavior patterns and their interactions with others. However, it is a rather complex model, consisting of four polarities that interact with one another to produce some 16 style variations. Most people find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand their profiles without the assistance of a trained workshop leader or counselor. And, *most people have difficulty recalling their patterns or interpretations* after a few months have gone by. ("Let me see, I think I'm an I-N-T-J; or is it E-N-T-J? Or I-N-F-J? Anyway, it's one of those, but I don't really remember what she said it meant.") And very few people can recall or explain the overall model after leaving the training session.

In contrast, many practitioners have found it quite easy to grasp the simple theory behind the Mindex model, and to begin applying it confidently in their workshops and counseling sessions. They also report that the Mindex model is much easier to explain than the MBTI; that participants grasp it more quickly; and especially that participants can retain the model over a long time and apply it in their interactions with others. This last point is highly significant: while the MBTI tends to be useful in a particular training or counseling situation, the Mindex model is much more "portable," i.e. people can easily remember the simple color metaphors that identify the patterns, and apply them confidently every day.

Another significant advantage of the Mindex profile product is that it's a *self-contained educational tool*. It does not depend on any collateral material such as scoring templates, overlays, or other documents that explain the concepts. Not only does it contain the basic 100-item questionnaire and scoring system, but it also provides a clear explanation of the various scales and what they mean. Participants can take the booklet with them and study it later to refresh their understanding of the concepts. With the online version, participants

answer the questions on screen, receive their scores instantly, and download a personal workbook that is essentially the same as the printed profile version.

User Inertia: Is MBTI Living on Borrowed Time?

The U.S. Federal government is one of the largest users of the MBTI profile. Over the years, so many civilian and military people have taken the MBTI instrument that it has reached a point of near-saturation. Many of these people, having attended a number of training and development programs, have taken the MBTI repeatedly. Rather than “run them through MBTI one more time,” with little value received, trainers can add Mindex to their tool kit of learning and insight resources, providing a novel alternative to the “MBTI fatigue” syndrome.

The Mindex Profile has been used in business, education, and research since 1985, in the U.S. and abroad. Thousands of students, professional people, managers, and executives have used the insights it provides to understand themselves better and to improve the way they think, solve problems, decide, plan, and communicate with others.

The American Management Association, for instance, has used more than 15,000 Mindex profiles in its public seminars and on-site training programs. AMA affiliates such as Canadian Management Centre and Japan Management Association have also used Mindex. Verizon Wireless has used Mindex to train over 7,000 of their key employees, worldwide.

Other well-known firms, such as FedEx, Wells Fargo, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Parsons Engineering, Daimler-Chrysler, and the Mars Company have used Mindex in their professional development programs. Columbus State Community College has used Mindex as a key resource in its “capstone” course for finishing students. Del Mar College in Texas has used Mindex for staff development.

Government agencies such as the U.S. Veterans Administration and the National Defense University have used Mindex; agencies such as the National Credit Union Association and the Conference of State Bank Supervisors use Mindex regularly to train their field consultants; and the Federal Housing Finance Agency have use Mindex as well.

And, of course, many consulting firms, large and small, use it as a part of their offerings for training, coaching, team building, and organization development.

The Practitioner Perspective

Some typical comments by experienced practitioners exemplify their enthusiasm for Mindex.

“I’ve used a wide variety of assessment tools, including MBTI and five factor assessments, with a large population of managers and ‘HiPo’ professionals. Of all the tools I’ve encountered, Mindex offers superior value for the time and resources invested in it. It provides a core model that is valid, compelling, and – above all – easy for participants to grasp, assimilate, and apply every day.

“Mindex is an easy instrument to work with and easy to administer – participants understand their scores quickly. There’s no complicated “alphabet soup,” such as with the antiquated Myers-Briggs scheme. That allows me to get right down to business in helping them apply their new insights to their professional and personal lives.

“Best of all, Karl Albrecht International, the creator and publisher of Mindex, makes it easy for you to evaluate its possibilities, and easy to get started if you decide to adopt it. To help you assess the product, there’s a “test-drive” option, in which you take the actual online version, get your scores immediately, and download a personal workbook that’s exactly what your participants will be working with.

“Unlike the expensive, multi-day certifications most assessments require, there’s a quick and easy online course, which takes about 2 hours to complete. No travel required! It gives you everything you need to get started.

“KAI provides a handy user page on the website that lets you update your user profile, download additional resources, and order profiles online. I’ve used both print and online versions, and both work very well.

~ **Dr. Sherryl Dimitry**, Talent Development Director, Global Construction Firm

“Karl Albrecht's Mindex Profile is a versatile instrument. It's easy to understand, administer and interpret.

“Mindex can be a valuable addition to any organization's training and development efforts. It provides the participants a useful approach to understanding and embracing the differences in relating to others.

“I have used both Mindex and Myers-Briggs, and I find that Mindex is much more easily understood and more readily embraced by the participants. Its greatest impact begins – rather than ends – as they walk out the door.”

~ **Don Mizaur**, CEO of Strategic Perspectives, Former senior executive with U.S. Federal Government, Executive Fellow / Board member, Center for Transformation and Strategic Initiatives

“I discovered Mindex when I was creating a development program for my managers, supervisors, and team leaders. We used Karl Albrecht International's "Brain Power" course, and the Mindex component went over big with my staff – and me.

“The new insights were valuable to all of us, and this new knowledge has definitely affected the way our people interact, cooperate, manage, and work with our users.”

~ **Elizabeth Bennett**, CIO, large Public Service Agency

“I like using Mindex in training situations and teambuilding activities, particularly when working with federal employees. The self-scoring aspect is a definite strong point.

“By now, countless federal employees have been ‘MBTI-d’ to death. Mindex affords a fresh perspective that is focused on straightforward concepts that enable participants to flex their thinking and behavioral styles without getting ensnared in MBTI’s confusing ‘alphabet soup.’

“Alphabet soup does not hasten behavioral change. Far from it: It could be argued that MBTI hardens styles rather than promoting flexibility.

“If you’re tired of MBTI, maybe it’s time to move on to Mindex.”

~ **Ron Gunn**, CEO, Strategic Futures

“Is the Mindex Profile a powerful leadership development tool? Absolutely!

“Many assessment tools show us personality traits. So what? The Mindex reveals our preferred thought patterns – how we THINK – and how we can expand our thinking capacities.

“Leaders in a variety of industries – automotive, government, and even military – have told me that that discovering their Mindex profile has improved both individual AND team thinking. The result? Better decisions. Better teamwork. Better employee engagement. Try getting those results with other assessments. Not happening!”

~ **Colin K. Dunn**, Col. USA (Ret.), Director of Colin K. Dunn & Associates

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