The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® and Everything DiSC® assessments

A comparison guide

Justin Arneson, PhD, The Myers-Briggs Company Research

The intent of this guide is to provide potential assessment users with the information they need to make an informed decision about the assessment best-suited to their specific needs.

Overview of the MBTI® assessment

Since its inception in 1942, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment has been administered to millions of individuals worldwide, and it's currently one of the most popular and widely used personality-oriented assessments on the planet. The MBTI tool has achieved this level of popularity in large part due to the meaningful insights it provides about individuals and how they interact with others. The instrument provides an intuitive personality framework that allows all individuals—not just psychologists and experts in the field of personality assessment—to better understand the differences that characterize themselves and those around them, and to leverage this understanding to enhance their work and personal lives. Further, a multitude of organizations have recognized the value of the MBTI tool in providing a common language for describing their workforce and heightening individual and team effectiveness in the workplace. These organizations have used the MBTI tool in numerous applications, including addressing change and conflict, improving communication and team functioning, innovating, making effective decisions, and leading others.

Due to its visibility and pervasive application, the MBTI assessment receives substantial attention—and often criticism—from competitors in the personality assessment domain. The goal of this paper is to provide some of the history and theoretical underpinnings of the MBTI tool, describe what it measures and how it goes about this measurement, and compare it to a competing assessment available in the marketplace, the *Everything DiSC®* assessment.

Theoretical origins and practical applications

The MBTI assessment was developed within the framework of Carl Jung's theory of psychological type (Jung, 1971). Jung's theory, developed on the basis of years of clinical observation and the exploration of various philosophical traditions, suggests that individuals have inborn preferences (characterized as opposing sides of a preference pair) for how they take in information, how they make decisions, and how they orient themselves to the outside world. These preferences are relatively stable and consistent over time and across situations. Jung explicitly identified three preference pairs in his writing and broadly referenced a potential fourth. He is probably most known for introducing the concepts of extraversion and introversion into the general lexicon. These two terms describe how we orient ourselves to the world: either we are energized by the world outside of us, or we gain energy from our inner world of thoughts and ideas. Jung goes on to describe how individuals take in information (the perceiving process) through a preference for Sensing or Intuition, and then make decisions and come to conclusions (the judging process) based on a preference for Thinking or Feeling. These preference pairs are described in more detail in Table 1 and below. The richness of Jung's theory comes through in his descriptions of how the various preferences interact with one another to shape how individuals see and interface with the world around them, a concept referred to as type dynamics.

Clearly, people are able to, and often do, change their behavior based on the demands or expectations of a given situation. Additionally, typical or preferred behaviors may change as their experiences accumulate over long periods of time. In fact, the insights provided by the MBTI assessment specifically address such situations. In addition to providing guidance on how to develop and utilize individuals' preferred type, Jung (1971) describes how our nonpreferred psychological resources can be developed to further improve our ability to deal with a complex and ever-changing world.

Inspired by the work of Jung, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, sought to develop a tool that could efficiently and systematically describe the basic personality characteristics he offered. Further, Briggs and Myers incorporated a fourth preference pair that explicitly operationalized the judging and perceiving processes referenced above. They believed that once individuals have gained an understanding of their type makeup, they are subsequently able to interact more effectively with the world around them.

The four preference pairs defined

The Extraversion–Introversion preference pair pertains to people's orientation to the world and the preferred sources from which they draw their energy and drive. According to Jung's theory, Extraverts draw energy from the outer world of people, activities, and things, whereas Introverts draw energy from their inner world of ideas, emotions, and impressions.

The Sensing–Intuition preference pair encompasses how individuals take in information. Those with a preference for Sensing take in information

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Table 1 | The four preference pairs

MBTI® preference		Preferences in action
Extraversion	**Introversion**	**Example**
Directing energy mainly toward **and getting energized by** the outer world of people and objects	Directing energy mainly toward **and getting energized by** the inner world of experiences and ideas	In a group of people, individuals with a preference for Extraversion may be energized by joining the talk of the group as a whole, while those with a preference for Introversion may be most energized by talking individually with those they know best.
Sensing	**Intuition**	**Example**
Focusing mainly on what can be perceived by the five senses	Focusing mainly on perceiving patterns and interrelationships	In doing something that many other people do, individuals with a preference for Sensing may be more likely to do it in an accepted way, whereas those with a preference for Intuition might prefer to use a novel approach to the task.
Thinking	**Feeling**	**Example**
Making decisions and basing conclusions on logical analysis with a focus on objectivity and detachment	**Making decisions and** basing conclusions on personal or social values with a focus on understanding and harmony	When making an important decision, individuals with a preference for Thinking are likely to put more weight on the available facts, while those with a preference for Feeling are likely to weight more heavily other people's feelings and opinions.
Judging	**Perceiving**	**Example**
Preferring the decisiveness and closure that result from dealing with the outer world using one of the judging processes (Thinking or Feeling)	Preferring the flexibility and spontaneity that result from dealing with the outer world using one of the perceiving processes (Sensing or Intuition)	When going somewhere for the day, individuals with a preference for Judging may be inclined to plan out what to do and when to do it, whereas those with a preference for Perceiving are likely to want to "just go."

Note: Adapted from the MBTI® Manual (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

through the five senses—paying attention to facts and details. Those who prefer Intuition take in information through abstractions and general

The Thinking–Feeling preference pair deals with the ways in which individuals make decisions and come to conclusions. A preference for Thinking suggests that an individual organizes and structures information to decide in a logical, objective way, whereas a preference for Feeling suggests that an individual organizes and structures information to decide in a personal, values-based way.

Finally, the Judging–Perceiving preference pair pertains to what is presented to the outside world— the lifestyle a person adopts (Myers & Myers, 1995). Individuals with a preference for Judging often prefer living a planned and organized life. In contrast, individuals with a preference for Perceiving tend to prefer living a more spontaneous and flexible life.

While the above discussion focuses on the nature of each individual preference pair, even greater value is realized from the assessment when considering how these preferences interact with each other to create an overall picture of an individual's personality. The possible combinations of the eight preferences yield 16 distinct personality types (e.g., ESTJ, INFP, etc.). An individual's MBTI results are accompanied by a detailed and holistic description of their "whole-type" personality, which goes beyond a simple summation of the specific components of the preference pairs. Identifying an individual's preferences and four-letter type is the first step in MBTI personality assessment (thus known as MBTI Step I™). It is worth noting that even further depth of understanding can be gained by completing an extended version of the assessment—the MBTI Step II™ assessment. This version expands on preference pairs by describing facets of each to provide a more nuanced description of personality.

Table 2 | The *Everything DiSC®* assessment

| *Everything DiSC®* style	Description	Example
Dominance (D)	Direct, strong-willed, and forceful	Individuals scoring high on this dimension are likely to seek control over situations and people in the workplace through force, with less concern for the preferences of others relative to their nondominant counterparts.
Influence (i)	Sociable, talkative, and lively	Individuals scoring high on this dimension are likely to be highly energetic and interpersonally positive.
Steadiness (S)	Gentle, accommodating, and softhearted	Individuals scoring high on this dimension have a relatively low level of observable energy. However, they are generally interpersonally warm and are patient and accommodating with other people.
Conscientiousness (C)	Private, analytical, and logical	Individuals scoring high on Conscientiousness are likely to be interpersonally reserved and cautious. In their work tasks, they tend to be analytical, systematic, and precise.

Source: Scullard & Baum, 2015.

The *Everything DiSC®* model of personality

In contrast to the MBTI assessment, which grew out of Jung's theory of psychological type, the *Everything DiSC* assessment can trace its origins to the work of William Moulton Marston (1928). Marston took an emotion-centered approach to describing people and suggested that people manifest their emotions using four distinct behavioral styles. The styles he identified have come to be known by the DiSC acronym—which stands for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness—as described in Table 2.

While a large number of conceptually related instruments have been developed to measure the characteristics subsumed by Marston's DiSC model, the current discussion focuses on the *Everything DiSC* assessment, published by Wiley & Sons. Similar to that of the MBTI assessment, the goal of DiSC and its resulting feedback reports and developmental guidance is to provide insight into individuals' behavior, the behavior of others, and how to effectively apply this knowledge in their life. Unlike the MBTI tool, which is viewed as applicable across all aspects of people's lives, *Everything DiSC* is designed expressly for use in the workplace. Organizations have used *Everything DiSC* for purposes such as leadership development, management training, sales training, conflict management, and team building.

As noted, *Everything DiSC* focuses primarily on the four main personality attributes composing the DiSC acronym. These four "styles", as they are described, can be understood by first envisioning two independent intersecting dimensions. The first dimension (oriented vertically) describes an individual's outward activity level and is anchored by moderate-paced at the bottom and fastpaced at the top. The second dimension (oriented horizontally) relates to an individual's propensity for valuing cooperation and social harmony. It is anchored on the low end by a skeptical viewpoint and on the high end by an accepting viewpoint. The four quadrants defined by these two intersecting dimensions give
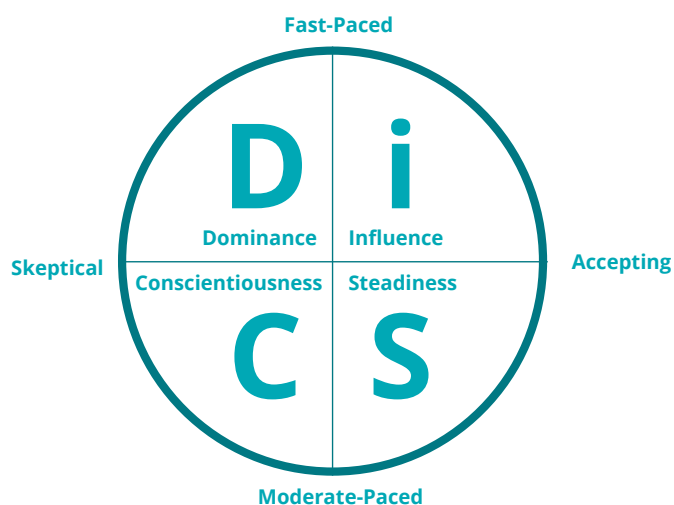
Figure 1 | *Everything DiSC®* model

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rise to the four components of the *Everything DiSC* model, shown in Figure 1.

Individuals' placement on the two axes determines their *Everything DiSC* style. Those with a dominant style tend to score toward the skeptical and fastpaced poles. Those with an influential style score toward the accepting and fast-paced poles. Those with a steady style tend toward accepting and moderate-paced. Finally, those with a conscientious style tend toward skeptical and moderate-paced. Similar to the MBTI model, the *Everything DiSC* model asserts that these styles represent only the most predominant or likely sets of behaviors and preferences; however, individuals are expected to exhibit behaviors associated with the other styles on occasion, often due to the demands of a particular situation.

Unlike the MBTI assessment, which reports individuals' standing on each of the four preference pairs, as well as their overall four-letter type, *Everything DiSC* reports only an individual's singular placement in the quadrants outlined in Figure 1 (the quadrants are further parsed so that they characterize eight different styles). For instance, individuals who score as skeptical and fast-paced will be characterized by the assessment as a D, indicating that they have a tendency to be direct and forceful when dealing with others. Thus, while the MBTI tool measures four distinct variables, *Everything DiSC* derives its descriptions of test takers based only on the two variables of moderatepaced/fast-paced and skeptical/accepting.

The science behind the assessments: Reliability

Two basic characteristics often used to evaluate the soundness of any psychological assessment are reliability and validity. The focus of indices of reliability is whether the instrument measures an underlying, invisible psychological construct in a consistent and dependable manner. Two meaningful perspectives of reliability include internal consistency and test-retest. From an internal consistency standpoint, the extent to which items composing a specific scale or measure (such as the E–I preference pair on the MBTI tool) overlap or relate to each other is evaluated. For example, if you have two measures (one related to E–I and one to J–P), and responses to an item on the E–I measure correspond more strongly to responses to items of the J–P measure than responses to its partners on the same measure, that measure is not internally consistent. The statistical index often

Table 3 | Internal consistency reliabilities for the MBTI® and *Everything DiSC*® assessments

MBTI® scale	Reliability	*Everything DiSC*® scale	Reliability
E–I	.91	D	.84
S–N	.92	i	.88
T–F	.91	S	.82
J–P	.92	C	.80

Note: MBTI national sample N = 2,859; Everything DiSC sample N = 39,607.

used to evaluate internal consistency is Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951). As a general rule of thumb, internal consistency reliabilities of .80 and above are considered acceptable in the psychological assessment domain. Table 3 provides the internal consistency reliabilities for the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* assessments as reported by their respective manuals. While both assessments demonstrate acceptable levels of reliability, the table makes clear that the lowest MBTI scale reliability is still higher than the highest *Everything DiSC* scale reliability.

In contrast to internal consistency reliability, which focuses on interrelationships among items, testretest reliability provides a measure of the likelihood of receiving the same or similar score on two independent assessment occasions. Table 4 shows test-retest reliability ranges for three different samples, each with a four-week interval between administrations, as reported in the MBTI® Manual (Myers et al., 1998).

These results indicate that the characteristics measured by the MBTI assessment remain relatively stable over time, and the assessment itself is able to measure these underlying concepts consistently. From a practical perspective, this means that any insight gained from taking the assessment will remain useful to individual takers of the assessment long after they have completed it.

With respect to the *Everything DiSC* assessment, Table 5 shows test-retest reliabilities in a sample of 599 respondents, with a two-week interval between test administrations, as reported by Scullard and Baum (2015). In general, the reliability results observed in the *Everything DiSC* sample (over a shorter time period) are not as strong as those found in the various MBTI samples. Consequently, *Everything DiSC* assessment results

and any associated developmental priorities can be interpreted as being more likely to change over time.

Table 4 | Test-Retest reliability of the MBTI® assessment

MBTI® scale	Test-Retest reliability range
Extraversion (E) – Introversion (I)	.93–.95
Sensing (S) – Intuition (N)	.89–.97
Thinking (T) – Feeling (F)	.83–.94
Judging (J) – Perceiving (P)	.90–.95

Note: N = 424. Test-retest interval = 4 weeks.

The science behind the assessments: Validity

In contrast to reliability, which focuses inwardly on the items of an assessment, validity refers to how an assessment relates to other, independent measures (often, but not always, of similar constructs). Stated differently, validity refers to the extent to which an assessment measures what it was intended to measure. In the personality assessment domain, the focus of measurement is on psychological characteristics that cannot be directly observed. Since we cannot see and verify these attributes like we can with attributes such as eye color, or easily measure them like we measure a characteristic such as height, we have to gather an abundance of evidence indicating that we are indeed measuring our intended personality construct accurately.

Individual MBTI users, after completing the assessment and receiving their results, often remark on how accurately the MBTI tool describes the way they take in information and interact with the world. Even further, many talk about how friends, family members, and co-workers can see in them the very same characteristics described by their MBTI results. While this anecdotal information provides powerful testimony to the value of the MBTI assessment and offers some evidence of validity, we conduct extensive, systematic research to further ensure that the assessment meets stringent psychological standards for accuracy (i.e., validity) when applied across a large, diverse group of people.

Evidence of validity can take many forms (e.g., construct, convergent, divergent, criterion-related), and a complete picture of the validity of an

instrument is generated through the accumulation of many different types of data from a variety of studies and applications of the assessment results. A full treatment of the validity of the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* instruments is beyond the scope of the current discussion (see the respective manuals for a more comprehensive discussion of validity); however, a direct examination of the relationship between the two instruments provides a worthwhile data point regarding the validity of each assessment, as well as a useful illustration of the amount of overlap in the characteristics they measure.

A study cited in the *Everything DiSC® Manual* (Scullard and Baum, 2015) presents correlations between the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* assessments. This study was based on an earlier version of *Everything DiSC* and consists of only 209 participants. Nonetheless, it can give a general idea of the ways in which the two assessments overlap. The expected relationships between the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* assessments can be hypothesized based on the descriptions and data provided for each of their scales (refer to the scale descriptions presented above).

Table 5 | Test-Retest reliability of the *Everything DiSC®* assessment

Everything DiSC® scale	Test-Retest reliability
Dominance (D)	.86
Influence (i)	.87
Steadiness (S)	.86
Conscientiousness (C)	.85

Note: N = 599. Test-retest interval = 2 weeks.

Accordingly, Extraversion (E) should relate most strongly to the Influence (i) scale, and Introversion (I) to the Conscientiousness (C) scale. Indeed, these relationships were borne out in this study. The E–I scale had a .75 correlation with the i scale (higher E corresponding to higher i) and –.73 with the C scale (higher E corresponding to lower C). Note that for the present purposes, the signs of these correlations were reversed from those reported in the *Everything DiSC* manual so that high scores on the E–I scale would correspond to Extraversion.

Similarly, the T–F scale of the MBTI assessment should relate to the skeptical–accepting dimension, with higher Feeling scores corresponding to higher

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accepting scores. The study found a .48 correlation between T–F and skeptical–accepting, suggesting a moderate relationship between the two scales.

As expected, no significant relationships were observed between S–N and J–P and the *Everything DiSC* dimensions. This result is particularly useful for potential users evaluating each assessment. If a particular application of an assessment would benefit from the measurement of preferences for Sensing vs. Intuition or Judging vs. Perceiving, then the MBTI assessment would provide the most utility. In contrast, the MBTI tool does not directly measure the construct of dominance, which is reflected in the *Everything DiSC* assessment. Thus, an application benefiting from the assessment of this construct would be better informed by *Everything DiSC*.

So, which assessment is right for you?

Each assessment in the marketplace naturally attempts to differentiate itself from its competitors and emphasize its utility. Ultimately, it is up **to individual users to determine whether the assessment is right for them and their unique set of circumstances**. What follows are some key questions that should be answered when identifying the proper assessment for your needs.

1. What will this assessment be used for?

Examples include developing specific behaviors with the goal of improving individual, team, or organizational performance; improving relationships outside the workplace; and selecting employees for specific job roles. Neither the MBTI nor *Everything DiSC* assessment is intended to be used in a personnel selection context. However, both assessments are directly suited to the training and development of employees. Both the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* models are positive in their orientation, meaning that they view each preference or style as having value—that is, none of the preferences or styles is inherently detrimental. This orientation allows developmental discussions to be framed in a positive, nonthreatening way. In contrast, some models of personality (often associated with the selection domain) may incorporate "negative" personality characteristics, which are stable personality traits that may be counterproductive in a given context. While such assessments may still be useful for developmental purposes (if the implications of assessment results are conveyed appropriately), they are generally less well suited for group learning and development interventions.

One point of difference between the MBTI and *Everything DiSC* assessments is their relevance to life outside the world of work. The *Everything DiSC* assessment, and the results and developmental guidelines associated with it, are most directly applicable to the workplace. In contrast, the MBTI assessment offers developmental guidance for both work and nonwork contexts.

2. What are the characteristics measured by the assessment, and are these characteristics meaningful to me and applicable to my current situation?

One might ask, when reading the descriptions associated with each personality characteristic (e.g., Sensing), "Does this resonate with me? Does this characteristic, as described, appear to meaningfully impact how I interact with the world?" For example, the preference for either Extraversion or Introversion is one that makes conceptual sense to most people, and it is easy to envision situations in which behaviors associated with the Extraversion orientation may be advantageous, and conversely situations in which behaviors associated with the Introversion orientation may lead to better results. Similarly, HR and learning and development managers may ask whether the assessment addresses those characteristics most important for individual and team performance in their organization.

Given the relative lack of overlap of the two assessments, practitioners may see the value of focusing on S–N or J–P, which are constructs that are not covered by *Everything DiSC*. Alternatively, if a training professional finds value in the Dominance style, then *Everything DiSC* might be a better fit. Such decisions about the appropriateness of specific assessment scales might be driven by perceived overlap with a talent management framework being employed by an organization. If an assessment describes characteristics that have already been laid out as part of an organization's competency language, then that assessment may be particularly advantageous to the organization.

3. How reliably does this assessment measure these characteristics?

As described above, it is important to understand whether assessment results are likely to remain consistent over time. While both assessments have demonstrated generally acceptable reliabilities, those of the MBTI assessment were marginally stronger than those of the *Everything DiSC* assessment. This has implications for the potential value of individuals' assessment results. Smaller

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reliabilities are associated with greater error in measurement—meaning that the assessment is not providing a clear picture of the underlying psychological constructs. Consequently, any developmental interventions targeting the constructs may be misguided.

4. Do assessment results correspond meaningfully to relevant aspects of my work or personal life?

Whenever possible, users will want to determine whether an assessment has demonstrated relationships with specific outcomes of interest to them. While the validity discussion above provides some guidance, the more detailed validity evidence often provided in technical manuals can be used to determine whether an assessment has been related to meaningful outcomes.

5. Are the assessment results clear and easy to understand?

Although similar to question 2, this refers to the specific results and feedback provided to individuals who have taken the assessment and those who will use the results for training and development purposes. To the extent that these results are clear and actionable, they can be better leveraged to achieve a desired outcome. Users may be well served by requesting sample reports and making self-comparisons between various assessments to determine which are the most user-friendly. Further, users should investigate the support materials surrounding an assessment. Such materials are instrumental to answering the question "What now?" A simple reporting of assessment results isn't particularly meaningful if users don't know what to do with them.

6. How likely am I (and others) to utilize the information obtained by the assessment moving forward?

In our experience, people are often initially excited to receive their assessment results, and in that moment they are anxious to apply their newfound self-knowledge to enhance various aspects of their life. However, as individuals return to their daily activities, the consistent and useful application of this knowledge may wane. Consequently, individuals and organizations may benefit from supplemental materials and reminders about the value of assessment results and their utility in daily life.

About the author

Justin Arneson
Research Scientist
The Myers-Briggs Company

Dr. Justin Arneson is a research scientist with extensive background in psychological assessment. He has published research in journals such as Psychological Bulletin and Psychological Science, and has presented research findings at multiple professional conferences. Currently, he conducts psychometric research supportive of The Myers-Briggs Company's assessment offerings. Further, he engages in consulting activities as needed and supports The Myers-Briggs Company's product development and Professional Services efforts. Justin earned his PhD in industrial/organizational psychology from the University of Minnesota.

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