

# Off the shelf

## A look at books



### Rowan Bayne *Psychological Types at Work: An MBTI Perspective*

(Thomson, 2004: ISBN 1-86152-990-2)

#### Reviewed by **Betsy Kendall**

This book is part of the *Psychology at Work* series that interprets and explains people's work behaviour, drawing together academic research and practitioner expertise, emphasising the role of the individual's workplace experience.

A key difference between this and other books on type (with the exception of the technical manuals!) is that it contains a good deal of exciting research data: not just the usual type tables, but also a great selection of fascinating research findings that relate the MBTI to the world of work.

It's refreshing to read a book that presents and highlights this kind of information in a way that is engaging and relevant. Some overlooked but important studies are given a much-needed airing—such as Harrison and Lawrence's work on how far people of different types look into their personal futures, and Hammer and McDaid's elegant 1992 study supporting the importance of the functional pairs in career choice.

With its remit to be research-based, the book also tackles the difficult issue of evidence-based practice (EBP) head-on in the first chapter. Rowan Bayne rightly disputes the applicability and feasibility of EBP in the human resources context.

In its place he proposes the framework developed by Anderson, which uses the dimensions of *relevance* and *rigor* to distinguish four different approaches to science:

*Popularist* (relevant, but not rigorous);  
*Pedantic* (rigorous, but not relevant);  
*Puerile* (neither relevant nor rigorous);  
*Pragmatic* (both relevant and rigorous).

This book thankfully contains a good deal of research in the Pragmatic category, but it is so lightly woven into the discussion that it never feels like a lecture on statistics!

As with many books about type aimed at a general readership, the book provides a chapter giving an overview of type for the uninitiated. To my mind, this section would have been better positioned as a quick reminder of the core concepts for someone who has taken and received feedback on the MBTI, since it does not give enough 'meat' to provide a comprehensive feel for the preferences to someone with no prior knowledge of type.

I particularly liked the section summarising the ways in which we (MBTI practitioners as well as those taking the Indicator) can increase the accuracy with which we analyse our own or others' psychological types, each point a worthwhile reminder.

Temperament theory, type dynamics and type development are touched upon in this chapter but at a very high level: it would be hard to grasp or use these concepts to understand one's own type without referring to other material. This is frustrating, but I imagine the wide scope of the book and a limit on length made it impossible to go into depth in all areas. To balance this, one of the strengths of this chapter is the set of references that has been assembled for the interested reader to pursue.

The book has chapters on *careers*, *selection*, *time management*, *communication*, *health*, *counselling and coaching*, and *leading and managing*. An enormous number of ideas are presented, again supported by an impressive list of references that show Rowan's depth of knowledge.

Fascinating research findings relate the MBTI to the world of work

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## An excellent reference for MBTI practitioners

Some of the material is similar to that presented in most books about type and work, so, in the chapter on managing and leading, decision-making and goal-setting are covered.

In most chapters there is interesting additional material, such as the attitude each dominant has to managing money (from Ray Linder's work), and a review of Sharon Fitzsimmons' work on the characteristic difficulties each type has with time and the least likely solutions for them.

It is perhaps a sign of the times that there is a whole chapter devoted to health in an MBTI book aimed at individuals in the workplace. The relevance of the MBTI instrument to stress, physical illness, eating and exercise is explored, and includes an interesting creative writing exercise for coping with stress.

The chapter on counselling and coaching is also excellent, and a great practical resource for both type practitioners and counsellors.

When I first read the title of chapter 4, '[Using MBTI in] Selection', I was concerned that Rowan Bayne had gone over to the dark side. I shouldn't have worried.

In fact, he sets out the various ways in which the MBTI can be helpful in selection, from how to use the framework of type to design an application form (referencing some fascinating research along the way), through enhancing interview skills training, to the central issue of whether the MBTI questionnaire should be used in selection.

Rowan proposes that 'MBTI results with skilled feedback could play a central and very positive role' in selection. This is different from APT's and OPP's positions: both recommend that the MBTI *not* be used in selection.

Rowan acknowledges the key points that we all agree on: 'the MBTI is not designed to measure ability, or development of type, and at best does not measure them well', but he feels the MBTI can form part of a larger battery of selection procedures.

One further danger of using the MBTI in selection is acknowledged: its use by an organisation in selection may well have a

negative impact on how comfortable staff felt about its use in development.

There is a further danger, not addressed, that there could be grounds for legal dispute if there is no data linking the MBTI to competence in performing tasks central to the role being selected.

There are several features of this book that make it an excellent reference for MBTI practitioners.

Firstly, throughout the book, frequently-asked (and difficult) questions that people have about the MBTI are addressed in a concise, elegant and clear manner. For example, 'Is everyone a type?'; 'Isn't type theory just like astrology?'; 'Can type development be speeded up, should it be speeded up?'

Secondly, the book does an excellent job of putting the MBTI in the context of other personality tests and theories, as well as linking it with frameworks from areas such as careers. For instance, we are shown how the MBTI is congruent with McAdams' three levels of personality (traits, personal concerns and integrative life experiences), and with Savickas' six innovations in his post-modern view of career counselling.

To my mind, the ideal reader for this book is a reasonably well-informed MBTI or HR practitioner who wants the MBTI put into a wider psychological and social sciences context, with enough relevant and rigorous research data to support the main points covered—and a healthy reference list to guide further reading.

**Off the Shelf** is a regular column in the *Australian Psychological Type Review*.

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