

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Using MBTI type to explore differences and the implications for practice for therapists and coaches: Are executive coaches really like counsellors?

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This study investigated a relationship between personality types and preferred methods of coaching. A total of 278 UK-based coaches completed an on-line survey, with 212 completing the section on Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) data. The results indicated that coaches were significantly more likely to have an intuitive (N) preference than a sensing (S) preference when compared to the wider UK population. Coaches were significantly different from UK counsellors in the balance between thinking (T) and feeling (F) preferences, with coaches being guided more by thinking preferences and counsellors using feeling preferences more often. Investigation on differences on the use of coaching models and MBTI types revealed that differences were not statistically significant. Statistically significant relationship between MBTI type and career roles: coaching or counselling, were found. The article highlights the implications of personality preferences for the selection and training of coaches.

**Keywords:** coaching; MBTI; coach career choice; coach training; coach selection

#### Introduction

The coaching market has grown significantly over the past decade and is estimated to be worth some US \$2 billion globally (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006) and some £150 million in the United Kingdom, although a precise estimate is difficult to make due to the fragmented nature of the coaching market in the United Kingdom (Passmore, 2008a). During the early phase of development of this new domain, coaches operated from outside of the organisation as consultants. Many were individuals with a background in therapy (Peltier, 2001) and as a result therapeutic models have dominated coaching practice (see Passmore, 2006; Whybrow & Palmer, 2007). However, as coach training has become more widely available, the coaching market has started to shift. An increasing number of coaches now work within organisational settings. These individuals have backgrounds in personnel or general management. They undertake coaching as part of internal coaching pools with the aim of driving performance and aiding the development of colleagues within their organisation or sector (examples include NASA, the BBC, and the UK's National Health Service).

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While over the past decade there has been a slow growth in the coaching literature, much of this has been small-scale studies, individual case studies and proposed coaching models for the field (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). A comprehensive review of the literature suggests the total number of coaching impact studies remains small. The first published peer-reviewed paper on coaching was published in 1937 (Gorby, 1937). Between 1937 and 2008 there have been a total of 428 published papers. In the 62 years between 1937 and 1999, there were only a total of 93 articles, PhDs and empirical studies published. In contrast, between 2000 and 2008 a further 335 articles, PhDs and empirical studies have been published. Of the 77 outcome studies published since 1980; 26 case studies, 39 within-subject studies and 12 between-subject studies. Of the between-subject studies, only eight were randomised controlled trial (RCT) studies (Grant, 2008). The speed of growth since 2000 suggests this gap in the literature is beginning to be filled, although the domain is still significantly behind other areas of practice such as appraisals, training and change management where between-subject designs and random allocation to groups have become well established as a standard research design (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010).

Even more significant than the lack of impact studies is the lack of research about individuals engaged in the coaching process. What types of individual are they and how might this understanding provide us with an insight into their work? Such research has been undertaken over the past decade in therapy with some interesting insights for both counselling practice and training (Bayne, 2004). One such insight is that while counselling has seen a proliferation of models, the one issue, which appears to be more significant above all others is the therapist's self. The hypothesis is that coaching may follow this route (Kilburg, 2004). But as yet there is no published evidence to support these claims. The lack of research into this aspect of coaching may be at one level surprising, but given the wider lack of significant scientific-based research within coaching, it is not surprising at all.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a widely used and understood instrument in exploring personality difference in the workplace (see, e.g., Boyd & Brown, 2005; Bradley & Hebert, 1997). The instrument thus provides a useful starting point to begin exploring the nature of the coach as a tool in the coaching process.

A second argument for using MBTI as a starting point is the wide reference to it within the coaching profession on coaching websites. Many coaches offer clients MBTI as a means to better understand themselves as a leader in the workplace. Writers too have offered MBTI as a useful instrument to use within coaching (Carr, Cooke, Harris, & Kendall, 2008). It is also interesting to note that whilst the websites of many personnel, HR and coaching organisations mention the use of the MBTI, there appears no published data on the MBTI types of coaches.

## **Overview of MBTI**

MBTI theory is a type theory, based on a belief that we all have innate personal preferences. The MBTI is an assessment developed by Isabel Myers and based on Carl Jung's theories of personality differences. Myers sought to take this aspect of Jung's work and make it accessible to normal, healthy adults via a self-report questionnaire with the aim of providing enhanced self-awareness (Myers & Myers, 1980;

Myers & Myers, 1995). The questionnaire describes four bipolar type preferences that generate 16 four-letter types.

While most will be familiar with the questionnaire, others may be interested in finding out about its application (see: [www.opp.eu.com](http://www.opp.eu.com)). To help put the results into context, a brief summary of the four pairs of preferences are provided here.

The first pair of preferences concerns where the individual gathers energy from, either the outer world (Extraversion “E”) or the inner world (Introversion “I”). So for instance those with a preference for Extraversion gain energy from taking action in the world and interacting with others, whereas those with a preference for Introversion tend to gain energy from reflection and quietly thinking things through.

The second pair of preferences concerns how the person takes in information; Sensing (S) or Intuition (N). Those with a preference for Sensing take in information through their five senses focusing on the specific and factual. Those with an Intuitive preference focus on the big picture and on associations and underlying meaning.

The third pair of preferences concerns how a person structures their decisions; Thinking (T) or Feeling (F). Those with a preference for Thinking tend to make decisions through an objective approach with a focus on logic and reason. People with a feeling preference tend to place an emphasis on personal values and personal needs.

The fourth pair of preferences concerns how people live their lives; Judging (J) and Perceiving (P). Those with a preference for Judging prefer to live a planned life, which is organised and structured. Those with a preference for Perceiving prefer a more flexible and spontaneous approach to life.

Myers and Myers (1995) claim that the combination of thinking and judging functions determine what is noted in any given situation, whether people think (T) or feel (F) and then what action is taken, whether they judge (J) or perceive (P), so that differences in perception or judgment should result in differences in preferred behaviour (Myers & Myers, 1995). The permutations of these two functions combined with introversion (I) or extroversion (E), sensing (S) or intuiting (N) functions amounts to a total of 16 distinct personality types. Myers and Myers suggested that each of these combinations produces a different kind of personality type, characterized by the interests, values, needs and habits of mind that naturally result from the combination (1995).

A key aspect of MBTI theory is that while individuals have a preference for one of each of the four preferences and will be most comfortable and energised when they can approach life and work using these parts of themselves, this does not mean that they are unable to develop behaviours associated with their non-preferences. People can become effective at using their non-preferences, it just takes more time and energy to do so, and are more likely to defer to the preferred type when under pressure or stressed. The four preferences do not operate independently. Indeed, a unique and powerful aspect of type theory is the description of the dynamic interaction of the preferences within each of the 16 types. This dynamic interaction enables a depth of interpretation that is of immense value in coaching.

### **The use of the MBTI in organisational research**

The MBTI has been used before to investigate the influence of “type” on occupational choice, on the effect of personality type on team performance and

Table 1. Summary of Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI).

| Guiding question  | MBTI term and shorthand letter | Brief description   |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| “Where do you prefer to focus your energy and how are you energised?” | Extraversion (E)               | Preference for drawing energy from engaging with the outside world.           |
|   | Introversion (I)               | Preference for drawing energy from the inside themselves.                     |
| “What information do you prefer to use to make sense of the world?”   | Intuition (N)                  | Preference for seeing the big picture.  |
|   | Sensing (S)                    | Preference for seeing the individual elements those make up the picture.      |
| “How do you prefer to process information and make decisions?”        | Thinking (T)                   | Preference for stepping outside a problem, to be rational and logical.        |
|   | Feeling (F)                    | Preference for getting inside an issue and use values or feelings.            |
| “How do you prefer to live your life?”                                | Judging (J)                    | Preference for having a plan and sticking to it.                              |
|   | Perceiving (P)                 | Preference for letting the plan emerge and not closing down options too soon. |

whether people who choose the same profession are of like personality (Bradley & Hebert, 1997; Järnlström, 2000; McPhail, 2002). It has also been used to examine coachees’ self-perceptions on the effectiveness of workplace coaching (Bell, 2006). However, an in-depth search of the literature indicates that it has yet to be used to investigate the personality types of those choosing to work as coaches within organisations or how personality type may influence coaching style or the adoption of coaching models by practitioners.

### Comparing workplace coaches and counsellors

Summerfield argued that individuals walk a thin line between coaching and counselling (2002). She argued the practices share many common features, although also important differences. Others too have commented on the similarity of the two domains and suggested that it may be possible for counsellors and therapists to cross the line to work in organisations, although care needed to be taken particularly around organisational language and knowledge (Peltier, 2001). While this study did not seek to explicitly explore the boundaries between workplace coaching and counselling, it recognised that the personality type of the practitioners may influence their behaviour and thus provide a further insight into the coach and coachee relationship, as well as help organisations to reflect on the training of internal coaches.

Previous studies conducted by Dodd and Baynes’ have explored the influence of personality type on selection of method by counsellors. They claimed that type preferences influenced strengths and approaches to counselling (see Bayne, 2004).

Churchill and Bayne (2001) identified the most popular preference type among counsellors. The single most popular type being NF's at 56% (based on a sample of 123). However, there are variations between counsellors depending on their reported primary counselling style, with cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) counsellors being dominated by SF at 52%, while having only 17% NF. For humanistic counsellors, the comparable figures were 42% for SF and 56% for NF (Bayne, 2004).

The research has also identified some marked differences between counsellor preferences and the wider population. For example, counsellors showed a bias towards Feeling (F) and Intuitive (I) preferences. It was argued that these preferences resulted from a tendency for counsellors to focus on exploring meaning and using empathy in their approach to the world and their clients. Counselling research has identified the use of empathy and encouraging hope by the therapist as the most influencing interventions (Duan & Hill, 1996). A further important factor is the client–counsellor match. Bayne suggests that the preference type of each counsellor is a factor of their comfort and effectiveness with the various approaches and skills (Bayne, 2004). Counsellors with certain type preferences, may find the core skills of empathy, accepting, genuineness and listening more comfortable and thus arguable may be more predisposed towards displaying these behaviours more consistently across their counselling relationships, with a subsequent positive effect on client outcomes.

These preferences for Feeling and Intuition are not the whole story. Some types may be more flexible than other types, which suggest that these individuals are able to change their style more easily: An example is the ENTP preference. This preference may enable the individual to more easily adapt to the situation and their client. We would argue that a more flexible approach would enable the therapist to match the client and more effectively establish a working alliance earlier in their relationship.

While MBTI theory may help explain differences in counsellors', it may also contribute towards an understanding of why individuals select counselling or another role as their career choice. Clear relationships have been found between occupation and MBTI type in the United States and other countries, with wide differences between different professions (Mayes & MaCaulley, 1985). For example; professional artists had only 5% of its membership from SF's types, practising counsellors had 25% of its members with an SF type. Bayne went further to claim the similarities between coaching and counselling would mean that coaches were likely to display similar preferences to counsellors, with a preference for Feeling over Thinking and a preference for Intuition over Sensing.

The use of 16 types, however, can be difficult to track. In order to establish the ability to "typewatch," Keirsey (1998) reduced the 16 types into four main groups. These four types were based largely on Myer's original MBTI and cross-correlated to ensure that both instruments measure the same underlying traits (Quinn, Lewis, & Fischer, 1992). These are: sensing perceiving (SPs), sensing judging (SJs), intuitive feeling (NFs) and intuiting thinking (NTs). Keirsey claims similarities with the MBTI and suggests that there are "obvious observable differences in the way that each of the groups differ from each other" (Keirsey, 1998, p. 16). He acknowledged subtle differences existed within each group, for example, in SPs although "they may be different in their attitude to tough-mindedness (T) and friendliness (F), some are more socially expressive (E) and some reserved (I), all of them make sure that what they do is practical and effective in getting what they want" (Keirsey, 1998, p. 18).

Keirsey gave each “super-type” an overarching “title.” He titles the SPs as Artisans, the SJs as Guardians, the NTs as Rationals and the NFs as Idealists.

The question may be asked: do differences in personality types, as assessed by MBTI or Kersey’s four types, exist among coaches? If so, how do these impact on the behaviours and the effectiveness of coaching working within organisations? Furthermore, what implications are there for organisations when selecting managers for coach training, and in pairing coaches with managers?

The study proposed the following four hypotheses:

*H1: Executive coaches are most likely to have an Intuition (N) preference more than a Sensing (S) preference.*

*H2: Executive coaches are most likely to have a Feeling (F) preference more than a Thinking (T) preference.*

*H3: Executive coaches using cognitive behavioural coaching as their primary coaching style are most likely to have a Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F) and Judging (J) versus Perception (P) preference based on the MBTI typography than those using more humanistic styles.*

*H4: There is a significant difference between MBTI type and Keirsey type for counsellors and workplace coaches.*

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

An invitation to participate was sent to all on-line discussion members of the British Psychological Society’s Special Interest Group for Coaching Psychology and on-line discussion members of the Association for Coaching (AC), a predominantly UK and Ireland coaching body. A total of approximately 1500 people were invited to complete the questionnaire. Experience of working as an executive coach was considered an essential criterion for acceptance. Participants were required to complete a biographical section and participants with less than 50 hours coaching experience were not invited to complete the second part of the survey.

### ***Instruments***

The MBTI type inventory has been extensively tested for reliability and validity including tests such as those examining: preference scales, type and type dynamics, whilst rigorous confirmatory factor analyses provide even stronger support for the model (Wheeler, 2001). Participants were asked whether they were aware of their MBTI type, those that answered positively were invited to select one from each of the four descriptors: E (Extraverted) or I (Intraverted), N (Intuitive) or S (Sensing), T (Thinking) or F (Feeling) and J (Judging) or P (Perceiving). These results were then combined in the data-spread sheet to produce a full MBTI code, such as ISTJ. This was done by coding each box, as either 1 or 0 for each descriptor.

This approach was used in preference to inviting participants to complete the full questionnaire for reasons of completion time for participants and the wide awareness of MBTI types among coaching practitioners.

## Measures

The study was designed as a within-participants design study, with two independent variables; the MBTI and the self-report of executive coaches as to their primary method of coaching. Two dependent variables were also used; the responses from completing the MBTI and responses received from participants in the executive coaching practice questionnaire (Passmore, 2008b).

## Procedure

The first task was the completion of a practice questionnaire. Participants were invited to respond to the questionnaire via an on-line link that was sent to all members of the AC and the British Psychological Society Special Interest Group. The responses to questions 7, 8 and 14 of this questionnaire provide the primary data analysed in this article.

## Results

A total of 288 self-selecting, English speaking executive coaches volunteered to participate. However, it was noted that some participants had not completed all (or a majority of) the questions or in other cases had scored all items as 1 or 7. The data were cleaned to remove these cases and a total set of 261 cases was used for the analysis, although this was reduced for some questions such as MBTI, which is the focus for this paper.

The practitioners appear to be a generally representative sample based on the member from the two organisations, with a bias towards more experienced coaches, due to the 50 hours plus screening question. A brief summary of the sample is set out in Tables 2–4.

Of the 261 participants in the clean data set, 212 participants were able to recall their own MBTI preference from previously having completed the tool for other non-research purposes. This represents 81.2% of participants.

Table 2. Gender.

|       | <i>N</i> | %    |
|-------|----------|------|
| Men   | 101      | 38.7 |
| Women | 160      | 61.3 |

Base: 261.

Table 3. Age.

|       | <i>N</i> | %    |
|-------|----------|------|
| 18–29 | 3        | 1.1  |
| 30–49 | 144      | 55.2 |
| 50–64 | 112      | 42.9 |
| 65+   | 2        | 0.8  |

Base: 261.

The data gathered in relation to the MBTI hypotheses were categorical frequency data. Results are set out under the heading for each hypothesis. The chi-square statistic was used to test hypotheses. UK population norms for MBTI types (Table 10) and also for counselling populations in particular (taken from the MBTI test manual) were used to benchmark the findings.

The results population show some interesting results when compared against norms for the UK population. One is the relatively high ISFJ preference among the wider UK population; 13%, compared with 0.9% for coaches, while in turn ENFP preferences were more strongly represented among coaches; 19% for the coaching population, compared with 6% for the UK population. In overall terms, while 43% of the coaches were Introverts, 47% of the wider UK population report Introversion as their preference. For coaches 45.9% identified their preference as Judging, in the way they manage their lives. This contrasts with 59% of the UK population.

The results from the survey can be usefully benchmarked with results from the wider UK population, which are set out in Table 10 in the discussion section below.

*H1: Executive coaches are most likely to have an Intuition (N) preference more than a Sensing (S) preference.*

For the first part of this hypothesis (H1), the focus is on how coaches gathered information. People who have an Intuitive preference prefer to take in information through a “sixth sense” with a focus on what might be. They are more content to tolerate ambiguity and prefer the big picture. This type contrasts with those who seek to take information in through their five senses and have a preference for the concrete, detailed and practical.

Table 4. Hours of coaching experience.

|          | <i>N</i> | %    |
|----------|----------|------|
| 50–99    | 64       | 24.5 |
| 100–199  | 44       | 16.9 |
| 200–499  | 64       | 24.5 |
| 500–1999 | 51       | 19.5 |
| 2000+    | 38       | 14.5 |

Base: 261.

Table 5. Percentage of executive coaches Myers Briggs Type Inventory types.

|      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ |
| 0.9  | 0.9  | 7.1  | 11.4 |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP |
| 0.9  | 0.9  | 11.4 | 9.5  |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP |
| 0.5  | 1.9  | 19   | 10   |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ |
| 5.2  | 4.3  | 8.5  | 7.6  |

Base: 212.



To test H1, chi-square test was performed (Table 6). The results supported the hypothesis ( $\chi^2 = 451.79$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Coaches in the current study displayed stronger intuition than sensing preferences.

*H2: Executives coaches are most likely to have a Feeling (F) preference more than a Thinking (T) preference.*

Turning now to how individuals make decisions, individuals with a Feeling preference make decision through an emphasis on personal values or emotions and taking peoples' needs into account. This contrasts with a preference for making decisions through a structured process that seeks objective balance and a focus towards reason, logic and truth.

Table 7 presents the expected and observed values for Feeling and Thinking preferences. Chi-square did not, however, support the hypothesised preference for Feeling (F) among the current sample ( $\chi^2 = 0.25$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.62$ ).

*H3: Executive coaches using cognitive behavioural coaching as their primary coaching style are most likely to have a Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F) and Judging (J) versus Perception (P) preference based on the MBTI typography than those using more humanistic styles.*

Of the executive coaches who identified using a CBT style as their primary coaching style (Table 8), 68.2% identified a preference for Thinking and 59% of this group identifying a preference for Judging. These preferences can be usefully benchmarked against norms for Humanistic coaches with 33% expressing a Thinking (T) over a Feeling (F) preference and 33% expressing a Judging (J) over a Perception (P) preference.

Due to the small numbers who expressed preferences for both CBT and humanistic styles; 22 and 3 participants, respectively, it was not possible to conduct any power analysis to ascertain statistical significance. Descriptive data are available for the CBT approach and this reveals an NT preference.

*H4: There is a significant difference between MBTI type and Keirse type for counsellors and workplace coaches.*

The third part of this article explores the relationship between choice of role (whether counsellor or coach) and MBTI type. Figure 1 summarises the results from

Table 6. Chi-square: Sensing and intuitive preferences.

|          | Sensing (S) | Intuitive (N) |
|----------|-------------|---------------|
| Expected | 63          | 49            |
| Observed | 33          | 79            |

Base: 212.

Table 7. Chi-square: Feeling (F) and thinking (T) preferences.

|          | Feeling (F) | Thinking (T) |
|----------|-------------|--------------|
| Expected | 116.6       | 95.4         |
| Observed | 113         | 99           |

Base: 212.

Table 8. Percentage of cognitive behaviour therapy coaches: Myers Briggs Type Inventory.

|      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ |
| 0    | 0    | 4.5  | 18.2 |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP |
| 0    | 0    | 4.5  | 18.2 |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP |
| 0    | 0    | 9.1  | 9.1  |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ |
| 9.1  | 4.5  | 9.1  | 13.6 |

Base: 22.

Table 9. Percentage of humanistic coaches: Myers Briggs Type Inventory.

|      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ |
| 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP |
| 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP |
| 0    | 33.3 | 0    | 33.3 |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ |
| 0    | 0    | 33.3 | 0    |

Base: 3.

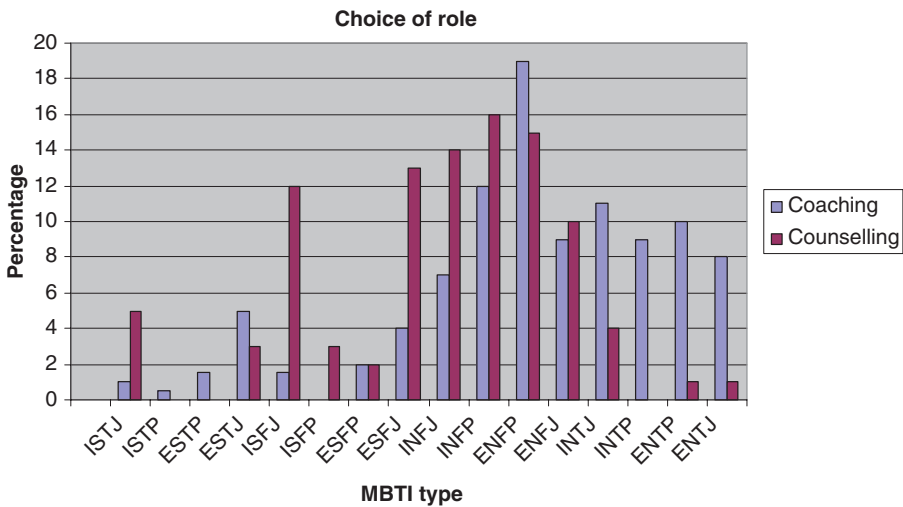


Figure 1. Workplace coach sample compared to counsellor sample. The Source of the counsellor sample was drawn from Bayne (2004).

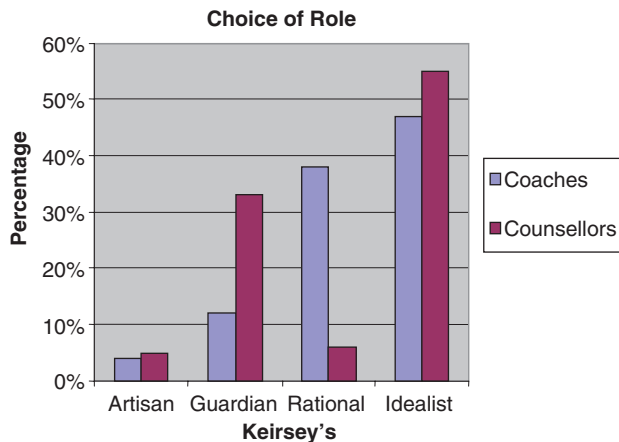


Figure 2. Distribution of workplace coach and counsellor roles in Keirsey's. Source of counsellor statistics Bayne (2004).

the comparison between coach and counsellors and the 16 MBTI types. This reveals some interesting differences; such as the ISFJ and ENTJ, where counsellors and coaches are dominant, respectively. Figure 2 presents the data from coaches and counsellors against the Keirsey four types. The differences of Guardian and Rational are contrasted most sharply in this comparison.

A two-way backward elimination log-linear analysis was performed on the frequency data, which were produced by combining frequencies for group and MBTI type. The one-way effects were significant, likelihood ratio  $X^2(2) = 320.954$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; two-way effects were significant, likelihood ratio  $X^2(2) = 96.421$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ . The final model had the generating class of MBTI type  $\times$  group. The results show that there was a direct relationship between an individual's MBTI type and whether they work as a workplace coach or a counsellor.

The results indicate that, according to Keirsey's theory executive coaches, are predominantly Idealists (NF, 47%) and Rationals (NT, 38%) whilst counsellors are predominantly Idealists (NF, 55%) and Guardians (SJ, 33%).

## Discussion

The results from the hypotheses provide a start in gaining an insight into the personality preferences of coaches. In H1 and H2 coaches, based on the reported MBTI preferences, appear not to be being significantly different to the UK population in their Feeling (F) preference, but different in this respect to counsellors who do have a stronger feeling preference to the UK population. This questions the claim made by Bayne that coaches may share this Feeling preference with counsellors. While this may be true for coaches working in health-based environments, the indication from this study is that may be less true for coaches working in business environments. The reason for this may reflect the requirements of workplace coaching, where relationship and empathy are important features but only alongside providing challenge to the manager to help them reflect on alternative ways of addressing the workplace challenge. Jones and Spooner (2006) drew attention to this issue, suggesting the workplace coach needs to be friendly without

Table 10. Percentage of UK population: Myers Briggs Type Inventory ( $n = 1634$ ).

|      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ |
| 14   | 13   | 2    | 1    |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP |
| 6    | 6    | 3    | 2    |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP |
| 6    | 9    | 6    | 3    |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ |
| 10   | 13   | 3    | 3    |

Base: 1634 (Kendall 1998).

being the manager's friend. Other researchers too have drawn attention to the importance of challenge and asking probing questions, which can stimulate the coach to over their "stuckness" in their workplace role (Gonzalez, 2004; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Passmore, 2010). This balance between the two may explain the difference with the counselling population.

The results also suggest that coaches are significantly more likely to have a preference for inferring meaning (Intuition) over using facts (Sensing). This matched Bayne's (2004) own findings regarding counsellors, which again inspired the hypothesis in this study. This intuition preference is higher than for the UK population norms. The stronger preference for intuition may also reflect the nature of the workplace coaching role, although there is less reference to this in the literature. The evidence suggests that executive coaches have a preference to understand the bigger picture and making sense of the situation rather than using evidence or facts to form their opinion. This may reflect the nature of coaching where evidence is biased, with data often coming from only one source; the coachee. The coaches thus need to balance what they hear with other data to make a "judgement" about what they believe or not, and thus decide upon the level of challenge or support to provide within the coaching session. This matches the situation for the counsellor. Coaches, like counsellors, need to listen beyond the words, for patterns and make connections between different themes (Hawkins & Smith, 2007). Coaches, like counsellors who are able to do this are possibly more likely to make successful coaches, or are more likely to continue in their role. These similarities and differences suggest that a move from counselling to coach may require an adaptation of approach and that some counsellors may be more flexible in adjusting to the different demands of the coaching relationship.

In the second part of the study, an attempt was made to explore potential differences within primary coaching styles, matching the work of Bayne in counselling. Bayne's findings suggested that different reported primary counselling styles had their own preferences; humanistic, CBT and psychodynamic. The results from this study suggested differences too. However, the sample sizes were too small to conduct meaningful analysis. The assumption, based on Bayne's work, was that CBT coaches would have a stronger thinking and judging preference, represented as TJ's. The sample of 22 coaches who identified CBT as their primary coaching style 40.9% did have a TJ type. The results for coaches with a humanistic primary coaching style were less powerful, with only three coaches identifying this style.

This too highlights differences in coaching, where the humanistic style while recognised of value in forming the relationship may be used alongside other styles such as CBT or behavioural styles like GROW to achieve client goals (Passmore, 2007).

The results suggest this area is worthy of further research. If supported, the implications may be that coaches with different preferences should be offered the opportunity to train in a methodology, which suits their personality preference, as opposed to an alternative model, which they may find less “natural.”

The practical implications for coaching from these results are two fold. Coaching performance may be enhanced by self-awareness, with the coach adjusting their innate preference to meet the needs of the coachee. For example, the coach with an extraversion preference should be encouraged to be aware of their natural tendency to talk rather than listen, to intervene with a question rather than hold the silence.

A second implication relates to coach selection. We are not advocating using MBTI for the selection of individuals for coach training using personality traits or a type instrument as part of coach training may be of value. However, such an instrument can help the coaches to think about the career choice that they have made, the use of different models and how they might maintain the energy for working in coaching relationships when working with individuals who may have different preferences.

Furthermore, the results help us to begin to explore some of the potential differences between the areas of coaching and counselling, which has in the past focused on the knowledge requirements of executive coaching at the expenses of potential personality differences.

The results of third part of this article show that there is a direct relationship between an individual’s MBTI type and whether they work as an executive coach or a counsellor. As predicted by Järnlström (2000) the statistics prove the existence of a relationship between the psychological type drawn to specific occupations, such as coaching or counselling. However, the results should be treated with some caution as the participant count in some of the MBTI types were very low and were therefore neither recognized or utilized by the statistical analysis software.

Initial results indicate that according to MBTI theories executive coaches are predominantly NF (47%) and NT (38%) whilst counsellors are predominantly NF (55%) and SJ (33%).

Initial results indicate that according to Keirsey’s theory executive coaches are predominantly Idealists (NF, 47%) and Rationals (NT, 38%), whilst counsellors are predominantly Idealists (NF, 55%) and Guardians (SJ, 33%).

In-depth analysis, examining each of Keirsey’s four groups in turn (Tables 2–4) shows that in the first, the Artisan (SJ) group, the difference between coaching and counselling roles is so slight (only 1%) that no definite influence of type can be observed. What is clear is that not many Artisans (SJ) choose to work either as executive coaches (4%) or counsellors (5%).

There is, however, a significant difference between the preferences expressed by executive coaches and counsellors in Keirsey’s second group, the Guardians (SJ): executive coaches (12%) and counsellors (33%). The proportion of counsellors is closer to that expected if the sample was representative of the general population. Further examination within the Guardian (SJ) group shows that 25% of the counsellors express a preference for F, which correlates with Bayne’s (2004) claim that there is a “marked bias in counselling and perhaps in coaching towards

preferences for F (dealing with people).” These claims do not appear to be supported by executive coaches’ Guardian (SJ) data where responses are almost equally balanced between F (4.5%) and T (6%). However, with such small data sets it is unwise to state that Bayne’s claim does not hold true for executive coaches.

In the third of Keirsey’s groups, the Idealist (NF) results indicate that there is a significant tendency for people who express this preference to work as counsellors (55%) rather than as executive coaches (47%). It is interesting to note that although both professions have an equal percentage (31%) of NFPs (regardless of whether I or E), there is a significant difference when considering whether executive coaching NFJs are I or E. The Es are similar in percentage (9%) to counsellors (10%) whilst the Is are significantly different: executive coaches (7%) and counsellors (14%). This may be explained by considering Keirsey’s definition of the INFJ type whom Keirsey himself titles “the counsellor” (1998, p. 126). It appears that Bayne’s (2004) participants have responded exactly according to type theory. However, there is also a higher proportion of executive coaches (47%) in the Idealist (NF) group (Table 3, chart 2) than in any of Keirsey’s other classifications. This is positive news for those who would be coached, as Idealists (NF) are defined as diplomats who use “their personal empathy and interpersonal skills to improve relations between people” (Keirsey, 1998, p. 124). The tendency to think strategically, logically and to be cooperative in their interactions serves Idealists (NF) well in the role of executive coach. According to Stern (2004) “the coach must be perceived...as competent, confident, independent...credible, trustworthy, confidential and genuinely interested in the leader and the leader’s business” (Stern (2004), p. 155). The role of Idealist (NF) demonstrates all of these skills although the degree to which any of these skills are developed will vary from coach to coach.

In the last of Keirsey’s four groups, the Rationals (NT), 38% express a preference to work as executive coaches, whilst only 16% work as counsellors. Again, it seems that those who define themselves as “I” are more likely to work as counsellors (14%) and that if “E” are more likely to work as executive coaches (18%). With a relativistic attitude, Rationals (NT) are ideally suited to taking the learning gained from the coachee’s past without making value judgments on the coachee’s experiences. In recognizing the subjective nature of life, they hold the belief that “autonomy is the basis of self-respect” (Keirsey, 1998, p. 185). With this worldview Rationals (NT) are able to deal well with the complexity of coaching interventions.

Overall the results appear to support Kilburg’s claim that by far the most developed and used model of change is from a systems perspective regardless of the specific method chosen, by identifying recurring patterns and addressing the underlying issues rather than focusing on the minutiae of any given situation. With the Idealist (NF) and Rational (NT) approaches, executive coaches are able to “have the patience to step back from day-to-day business and also dive into the moment” Stern (2004) when necessary.

## Conclusions

This research, which has explored coaches’ preferences is, we believe, the first attempt to begin to explore the nature of the coach. If, as we suspect, the key factor in coaching, like in therapy is the coach, we need further research to better understand the factors, which may contribute to what makes one individual more

effective than others. This article suggests some important similarities between personality types of coaches and counsellors but also some important differences.

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