

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Background of the Issue

Teams are not a new phenomenon as Katzenbach & Smith report: “Teams have existed for hundreds of years, are the subject of countless books, and have been celebrated throughout many countries and cultures” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 11). Formal work organizations in the United States have increasingly relied on teams to accomplish work during the latter quarter of the past century. The prevalent use of teams in corporate America is evidenced by a survey conducted in 1982 by the New York Stock Exchange that revealed more than 80 percent of U.S. companies use teams for at least some parts of their work (Hammer and Huszczo, 1996). A more recent survey, conducted in 1993 by the American Society for Quality Control (ASQC) and the Gallup Organization, found that over 80 percent of the 1,293 respondents reported that their organization utilized some form of work-team activity, mainly problem-solving teams (Cameron & Whetten, 1998, p. 421). “In other words, teams and teamwork have begun to permeate modern organizational life. One reason this is the case is that increasing amounts of data show improvements in productivity, quality, and morale when teams are utilized” (Cameron & Whetten, 1998, p. 421).

Wellins, Byham, & Wilson (1991) elaborate: Virtually all companies have formed committees, task forces, problem solving groups, quality circles, total quality management teams and/or self-directed work teams for goals that range from cost cutting and enhancing organizational effectiveness to boosting the morale of employees. There is a general consensus about the advantages to teamwork. Teams are alleged to make better

decisions due to the diversity of skills, knowledge, and experiences among members (Hammer & Huszczo, 1996, p. 81).

Many organizations invest considerable resources in training and development activities in order to build and maintain effective teams. Given the trend for using teams to accomplish work, and the need for effective team training and development, a demand for effective team building tools exists. One tool frequently put to use for team development is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI).

The MBTI is a sorting questionnaire that measures eight personal preferences (see glossary for definition of preferences). The results provide individuals with not only an understanding of their own personality preferences, but also with an understanding of the differing preferences of others. The indicator offers information about preferences on four continuums.

- 1) The first continuum provides a measure of where people get their energy – by being with others or by being alone? (Extraverts Introverts)
- 2) The second assesses how people receive information – more through their five senses in a realistic, practical mode, or more through a sixth sense with the focus on possibilities? (SensorsIntuitives)
- 3) The third continuum measures how people make decisions – more through logic, focused on task or more through values, with a focus on people? (ThinkersFeelers)
- 4) The fourth indicates how people choose to live their lives relative to what is going on around them – in a more organized, decided manner or a more open-ended, spontaneous manner? (JudgersPerceivers)

An individual's four preferences are represented in a four-letter description referred to as "psychological type" (Myers, 1976).

Many books and articles are available that provide in-depth descriptive analyses of each type (see the glossary for "type"), but especially valuable are Introduction to Type (Myers, 5th ed. 1983) and Gifts Differing (Myers, 1980). Introduction to Type includes a discussion of the characteristics of each type, strengths of each type, how others may view each type, potential blind spots, areas for growth, and constructive uses of the differences in work situations and effects of preferences in work situations (Myers, 5th ed.).

The MBTI has been widely used for various applications such as career selection, personal and interpersonal growth, marital counseling, and more recently, as a tool for enhancing the effectiveness of individuals who work together as a team.

In 1994, Hammer published The MBTI® Team Report. The Team Report was created to assess "team type" in order to help members of intact teams learn how their individual types work collectively. The Team Report reveals the strengths and weaknesses of a work group, its problem solving process and its conflict management styles. The Team Report offers a 'personalized action plan' to improve team productivity. In addition, it provides important information about similarities and differences among the group members based on their individual types. The Team Report aims to help build an effective, productive, and satisfied team.

There is added value to utilizing the Team Report rather than just learning each individual's MBTI type. The Team Report helps the team members to understand not only how other individuals might behave in a situation, but what the dynamics of the

group will tend toward, because there are unequal preferences effecting the group. For example there might be five Sensors and one Intuitive on a team. This constitutes unequal preferences. This team would tend toward Sensing. If the Intuitive member understands this about the team, he/she can realize 1) why others on the team see things differently, and 2) why it is important to voice his or her view in order to help the team from potential blind-spots. “Teams are usually very interested in understanding the team functions because they have a stake in the outcome. The information is very practical and valuable to team members while helping them to understand the individual types better too” (W. Cascio, personal communication, February 2, 2000).

The validity of the MBTI® Team Report is currently untested according to the MBTI® Applications Guide (Hammer, 1996), and an internal leader at Consulting Psychologists Press (CPP). The Applications Guide is a review of the last decade of research in the field and CPP is the publisher and trademark-holder of the MBTI instrument and related materials. A test of the Team Report’s validity is needed, given its potential increased use as a teambuilding tool in corporate America.

Statement of the Issue

This study explores the validity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Team Report. It asks, “Does the MBTI® Team Report do what it purports to do?”

This descriptive research has three foci.

First, it seeks to establish the extent to which the *strengths and weaknesses* described in the Team Report are congruent with the strengths and weaknesses perceived by members of teams, and the extent to which the information in this section is useful, as perceived by individual team members.

Second, the study seeks to establish the degree to which team members perceived the information offered to teams about their *problem-solving process* as accurate and useful.

Finally, this research seeks to establish the extent to which information from the *personalized action plan* was perceived as useful to improve team effectiveness as evidenced by the team taking action on some of the suggestions.

Another research interest, beyond the internal focus of topics in the Team Report, is whether you can see a difference in the answers of leaders versus the non-leaders.

Therefore, the overall objective of this research may be stated as follows. Did team members perceive the results of the Team Report to provide accurate and useful information?

Normative Definitions of Relevant Variables

- 1. Accuracy** – Free from error, correct in its nature.
- 2. Usefulness** – Capable of being put to use / serviceable (usable) for a beneficial end.
- 3. Team Strengths / Weaknesses** – List of characteristics provided on the MBTI® Team Report that reflects things the team does well and areas in need of further development (Page 6 of Team Report).
- 4. Team Problem Solving Process** – The order of problem solving preferences (see glossary for definition of preference). The weakest problem solving preferences are the focus of the “potential weaknesses of your team problem solving style.” Suggestions to improve are offered (Page 8, 9 of Team Report).

5. Team Action Plan – Section of the Team Report that offers suggestions for a team to implement in order to improve overall effectiveness

(Page 12 of Team Report).

6. Leader – To direct the operations, activity or performance of a group of people.

7. Overall satisfaction – Whether or not the individuals perceive the information on the Team Report as accurate and useful.

Research Questions

The overall research question for this study is “Does the Team Report offer accurate and useful information about the team according to the team members?”

Three sections of the Team Report are targeted in this study: 1. Team Strengths and Weaknesses, 2. Problem Solving Process, and 3. Action Plan to Improve Team Productivity.

1. Does the Team Report provide accurate *Team Strengths*?
2. Does the Team Report provide accurate *Team Weaknesses*?
3. Does the Team Report provide useful *Team Strengths*?
4. Does the Team Report provide useful *Team Weaknesses*?
5. Does the *Problem Solving Process* portion deliver useful information for the team to make behavioral changes to aid their problem solving process?
6. Does the section *Personalized action plan to improve team productivity*, offer steps the team could implement and then see improved results?
7. Finally, overall: Do leaders answer differently than non-leaders?

Importance of the Study

This study is important to organizations and the field of consulting in training and development. Over 200 consultants have utilized the MBTI® Team Report spanning the three years of its existence. These consultants, as well as potential future consultants, have an interest in the results of this type of study. A validation of this report could offer more publicity for current MBTI qualified consultants to utilize the Team Report, as well as, for leaders to request the report be administered to their teams.

If the accuracy and usefulness is in question at the end of this study, this information could be helpful for the creator of the report to revise and update aspects of it. In addition, this study might motivate other researchers to further study the effectiveness of this and other team building tools.

Limitations to the Study

As a study that seeks to measure the extent to which the individuals of a team agree with the accuracy and usefulness of the MBTI® Team Report, several limitations are important to mention. These limitations are in the design, the sampling, and operationalization of the variables.

First, the study was limited in the design by the time constraints of a two-month timeframe to gather the data. Therefore, the sample size was limited to, at most, the number of people that receive the MBTI® Team Report in those particular two months. In addition, the potential participants contacted in these two months might not be representative of the population over a year or longer time frame.

A second challenge to the number of participants is found in the process of gaining contact (sampling) with them. The publishing company of the MBTI® Team

Report sends the questionnaire to their private consultants. These consultants choose whether or not to pass along the questionnaire to their client organization. Secondly, the leader of the team in the client organization that receives them from the consultant also has the choice whether or not they distribute the instrument to their team members. Finally, the team members also have the choice whether or not to fill it out. At any point along that path a potential participant could be lost.

Another limitation in external validity is in the design of the study. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire soon after receiving their MBTI® Team Report. The ideal timeframe for participants to review the results would be closer to a month because more analysis and digestion of the information could occur to maximize understanding. For example, if the preference of the team is considerably different from an individual's, then more analysis time might be needed for that individual versus someone who's type is more similar to the team type. Due to the time constraints (as well as participant forgetfulness), there was more concern with participants waiting four weeks than for them to complete the questionnaire as a course of activities from the consultant.

The design issue creates another limitation, where, due to confidentiality of the client organization and participants, the researcher had no access to the team members to "follow up". There is no second opportunity to encourage a potential participant to send in the questionnaire. Obviously this is also another reason for the previous limitation discussed. Since the researcher was unable to contact the potential sample group, there could not be a reliable source reminding the team members to fill out the questionnaire after four weeks. A cover letter would not be a sufficient reminder.

Another limitation is in the accuracy of respondents by virtue of the design not exploring the length of time a team was intact. Results could be weakened if the team members do not have much experience with each other. The more experience together, the easier the questions might be to a respondent.

A sixth limitation is the internal validity of the instrument that was developed and used for the study. There were no previous instruments available to utilize for this research. The created instrument was tested for ease of use in one pilot study and for face validity in a second pilot. However, with all such instruments, ultimate validity is not proven.

Finally, a limitation to the face validity (results) is that the information gathered is merely the opinions of the end users of the Team Report. The interpretation of language used in the questionnaire might vary by individual. In addition, an individual's reaction to his/her own MBTI and MBTI Team Report results may introduce a bias effecting the responses. This study does not provide a measure of concurrent validity, construct validity, nor reliability.