A common issue raised during MBTI feedback sessions is, “I would have come out differently if I had answered the way I am at home (or at work).” Participants routinely question the validity of the Indicator based on the mind-set they were in when completing it. This raises at least two questions. The first, “Is there a ‘job Type’ and a ‘home Type’?” The second, “How do you respond to participants’ belief that these are different?”

One of the premises of psychological Type is that preferences are innate or “hardwired.” As such, Type preferences are thought to be robust, pervasive cognitive processes that mediate behavior and span across situations. It is important to remember that Type preferences are preferences for cognitive processes, not behaviors.

We believe that Type is an open system and, as such, is influenced by its environment. Even if we are “hardwired,” as Jung and Myers believed, there is enough evidence to suggest that environmental factors have an influence on a person’s actual development. For example, if a person spends 20 years in a job that requires extensive use of the sensing function, it is likely to have some influence on how that person responds to questions on the Indicator. We have had numerous executives report ENTP only to validate ESTP a short time later. Job role—long-range planning, strategy development, creativity and entrepreneurial work—may have influenced their responses on the Indicator.

One reason people may think they are different at home than at work is the dynamical aspect of the Type system. Jung described the psyche as a self-regulating system. If one spends more time extraverting than preferred, energy builds up in the introverting preference, resulting in an overcompensation in this area at the first opportunity. For example, if a person has an extraverting preference and exceeds his or her level of desired extraverting while at work, he or she may be in an introverting mode at home that evening. If this is happening on a regular basis, he or she might see this pattern of behavior as indicative of a different “personality” at home than at work. This compensation effect may occur with any of the preferences. In a similar vein, Kurt Lewin (1935) described behavior as a function of personality and environment, b=f(p x e).

With the help of Jamie Johnson and Charles Martin, we conducted a review of the Center for the Application of Psychological Type’s literature data base and found one empirical study on this topic. Parham, et. al. (1984) had participants complete the MBTI twice within a four-week interval using a set of job and home instructions. They did not find statistically significant differences on any of the preference scales. Their conclusion was that “Type preferences appear to be quite consistent between work and the rest of life.”

Howes and Carskadon (1979) tested the impact of a person’s mood when completing the Indicator and did not find a difference based on the person’s mood. They concluded that the Indicator was robust enough to override a person’s mood and produce consistent results.

Despite the findings of the above studies, the MBTI Manual suggests that reported Type may be influenced by external factors. One factor is The respondent may feel torn between demands of work and his or her own preferences (p.120). Additionally, the Manual states, Some people have trouble finding the right mind-set for answering the MBTI. The setting in which they answer the questions may influence them to report their “work self,” “school self,” “ideal self,” or some other self that is specific to external demands (p. 108). Is it possible that a person’s mind-set when completing the Indicator influences the results?

One of the authors had a client who was an INFP mother who had reported ISFJ on three different occasions only to be hit in the middle of the night by the realization that as a mother she had to engage in SJ behaviors around the totally P home (husband and four children). She had taken on the mind-set of the “good mother” until the children left home.
Method

The participants were 356 male and 401 female participants in introductory MBTI training sessions in New Zealand. Their ages ranged from 14 to 85 with a median of 36.

Participants completed the MBTI Form K twice using a different mind-set each time. In the “home” mind-set they responded to the questions as they saw themselves in the non-work environment, i.e., their personal and social life. In the “job” mind-set they answered the questions as they saw themselves in the work/professional environment.

During the training session, each participant “validated” a Type preference. This validated Type was included in the data analysis along with their response to how satisfied they were with their job.

Results

Table 1 shows a frequency distribution of Types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISTJ</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>ESTP</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISFJ</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ESFP</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFJ</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>ENFP</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTJ</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>ENTP</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISTP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>ESTJ</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISFP</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>ESFJ</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>ENFJ</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>ENTJ</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Type Frequency Distribution

Table 2 shows the means for the continuous scores for both job and home preferences for the total group as well as by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI-Home</td>
<td>100.71</td>
<td>103.48</td>
<td>98.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN-Home</td>
<td>100.96</td>
<td>99.48</td>
<td>102.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF-Home</td>
<td>94.93</td>
<td>86.44</td>
<td>102.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP-Home</td>
<td>100.47</td>
<td>102.21</td>
<td>98.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI-Job</td>
<td>100.85</td>
<td>102.26</td>
<td>99.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN-Job</td>
<td>89.04</td>
<td>89.56</td>
<td>88.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF-Job</td>
<td>70.14</td>
<td>65.65</td>
<td>74.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP-Job</td>
<td>77.76</td>
<td>80.46</td>
<td>75.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Home-Job Preference Scores

An analysis of the differences between the job and home preference scores revealed that EI preferences remained relatively stable across mind-sets and SN, TF and JP preference scores were significantly different between mind-sets and also between genders with women reporting a greater difference between job and home Types than men. (see Table 3).
Table 3

Home-Job Change Scores

Table 3 also shows that:

- EI scores remain relatively stable across environments
- SN scores shift toward the S end of the continuum at work
- TF scores shift slightly toward T at work
- JP scores shift slightly toward J at work

When looking at the data grouped by Type and gender, the greatest overall change was ISFP males and INFP females. The least overall change was ESTJ females and ISTJ males.

Table 4

Score Changes by Type by Gender

Another area of interest was validation of Type preferences. As part of the introductory session, participants were assisted in validating a “best fit” Type. Table 5 shows the percentage of participants validating their job and home Type.
### Table 5

Percentage of Best Fit Type by Home and Job Type  
(The first number in each cell is home percentage)

The left column in each cell represents the percentage validating their home Type, the right column represents the job Type validation, the first row of numbers in each cell is male and the second row is female.

Home Type correlated with best fit Type at .96 (p<.05); job Type with best fit Type at .53 (p<.05) and home Type with job Type at .54 (p<.05).

Table 6 shows the correlation between preferences.

### Table 6

Home-Job Preference Correlations

Work satisfaction was measured by the participants’ response to Block 10 on the EIR. The sample was divided into two groups, happy and unhappy, based on their response to this question. Table 7 shows that the happiest people were the ones who reported the least difference between job and home Type.

### Table 7

Work Satisfaction and Preference Change
For purposes of analyses the sample was broken into six age groups (see Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EI</th>
<th>SN</th>
<th>TF</th>
<th>JP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>13.26</td>
<td>38.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td>22.75</td>
<td>19.71</td>
<td>50.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>24.84</td>
<td>25.51</td>
<td>61.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>14.53</td>
<td>27.53</td>
<td>26.54</td>
<td>69.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>9.91</td>
<td>25.94</td>
<td>20.13</td>
<td>58.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>23.65</td>
<td>41.41</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>88.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8
Preference Change by Age Group

The least change was in the less than 20 age group and the most change in the 40-49 age group.

Discussion

If the MBTI is measuring a robust and pervasive cognitive process, we might expect the influence of the job or home life to have a minimal effect on reported Type.

Our overall findings suggest that the environment has little effect on the reported EI preference. That is, people seem to change very little on this dimension. The MBTI Manual reports a test-retest correlation of .84 on this dimension over a period of less than nine months. Our results showed a correlation of .61 after three days with different mind-sets. The difference on this dimension was not statistically significant.

The SN preference tends to shift more toward S in the work setting, even for people with a preference for S. This could be a result of most work environments requiring (or giving the perception of requiring) a greater focus on S than N. Stability correlations reported in the Manual for this dimension are .81 compared to our finding of .41. Our sample had a very different perception of how they are on the job versus at home.

The TF preference scores shifted strongly toward T on the job. People may perceive T as a requirement for success at work, and, consequently, feel pressure to use T. Stability correlations reported in the Manual for this dimension are .77 contrasted to our finding of .42.

The JP preference scores shifted strongly toward J at work. As with S and T, J may be perceived as a requirement in the work place. Stability correlations reported in the Manual for this dimension are .82 contrasted to our finding of .46.

The results suggest a significant gender effect with women changing more on each scale than men. The greatest overall change was ISFP males and INFP females. The least overall change was ESTJ females and ISTJ males.

Based on the above findings, a working hypothesis might be that if people are shifting the use of their cognitive processes (preferences) at work, then there may be a relationship between the magnitude of the shift and the degree of job satisfaction. Our initial exploration of this hypothesis was an analysis of preference shifts and block 10 on the EIR answer sheet (“If you are currently employed, indicate how you feel about your work.”). The data suggest that the greater the difference between “job” and “home” Type, the more dissatisfied participants are in their job.

Ware et al., (1994) found that when people placed themselves into a “stressed” mind-set and completed the Indicator, their scores moved toward I, S, and T. From their findings we might infer that the participants who are shifting their “Type” in the work place might also experience stress due to a lack of satisfaction with their work.
The data suggest that a person’s mind-set (job vs. home) at the time he or she completes the Indicator may influence scores on the S-N, T-F and J-P preferences. If this hypothesis is correct, it suggests that practitioners might want to consider the following.

In responding to participants, remember that the Indicator is just that—an indicator. It is a starting point, a working hypothesis for exploration of one aspect (Type) of the personality. Environmental factors can have a significant effect on self-report instruments such as the MBTI. If a person says he or she is different at home than at work, they may well be. Our data emphasize the importance of assisting a person in discovering his or her “true Type.” The expression of that Type may adapt to the immediate demands, but that does not change the person’s underlying, innate Type.

When working within the organizational setting, especially in a stressful environment, it would be prudent to take into consideration the possible impact of the job setting on reported Type. Our experience (Thompson, 1997) working with executives in organizations supports our hypothesis of a temporal Type change under stress.

This is only one study on job and home Type. Much more research needs to be done to validate and further explore this area.

References


