

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLAINING OUT OF PREFERENCE RESULTS ON THE MBTI® STEP II, FORM Q REPORT

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Frequently, new users of MBTI® Step II, Form Q products call to say something like: “We have a client whose Step II results suggest she is... [T or F, or S or N, etc.], but three or more of her facets in that dichotomy are in the mid-zone or are clearly in the opposite direction. Is there some mistake? How do we explain this to the client?” The complete answer to these questions has two parts. The first part is rather mechanical and deals with the science of how this can occur (at the item level). The second part covers strategies for exploring such results with clients and deals with the “art” of the type practitioner.

PART 1: HOW DOES THIS STEP II RESULT HAPPEN?

For starters, in the results referred to above, there is probably no mistake. To understand how clients can have several facet scores in the opposite direction of their underlying preference, let’s briefly examine how the MBTI Step II scales are constructed.

Recall that Form Q consists of 144 items. Embedded within those 144 items is the complete, intact 93-item Form M version of the instrument. These 93 items are devoted to providing the client’s four-letter type. The remaining 51 items (144 minus 93) power the twenty Step II facets. But 51 items are not enough to adequately fuel the twenty facets (even though facet scales are short, made up of between 5 and 9 items), so some of the original 93 items are used a *second time* but with *different scoring weights*.

Some facets are made up almost entirely of items that do double duty, both on the facet scale and on the corresponding preference scale. For example, the Concrete–Abstract facet scale consists of nine items, seven of which are also on the S–N preference scale. It is not surprising, therefore, that this facet correlates highly with S–N, that is, clients who score toward Sensing will likely also score toward Concrete. Similarly, clients who score toward Intuition will likely also score toward Abstract. Compare this with the Questioning–Accommodating facet scale in the T–F preference scale. This facet contains just five items, but none of them is on the T–F preference scale (or any other scale, for that matter). It is thus clearly possible for clients to express their T–F preferences independently of

their aspect of Questioning–Accommodating. A similar scenario exists for the Critical–Accepting facet scale.

With examples such as these, it is not surprising that S–N is the least likely preference scale on which clients will have three or four facets toward the opposite pole—it happens only about 4% of the time. The T–F preference scale is the most likely to have this “out-of-preference” (OOP) facet result, with between 6% and 7% of clients expected to have three or four facet scores in the opposite direction. Data hounds can find all of these fascinating data reported in the *MBTI® Step II Manual* (see pp. 104–105).

To summarize, both sets of MBTI scales (the set of four main preference scales and the set of twenty facet scales) can operate independently of each other. It’s just that this occurs with some facets more than others. In other words, facet results don’t just “add up” to the preference scale result.

PART 2: HOW CAN I EXPLAIN THESE RESULTS TO MY CLIENT?

Now let’s get to part 2 of the answer: how to handle this confusing result with your client. The best approach is to recognize that OOP results for four of the five facets do happen (about 4% to 7% of the time, depending on the facet) and head off this issue *before* it trips up your feedback session. Take the time to verify type by conducting a thorough “best-fit type” exercise with your clients early on in your meetings with them, before they see or read their reported type. Ideas for doing this effectively are presented in several MBTI resources cited at the end of this article. This best-fit exercise will take you straight to a useful exploration of those dichotomies for which your client split her or his vote. Dichotomies without clear preferences are where OOP results usually occur.

Having clarified best-fit type, while exploring such topics as type development, the particular demands of the client’s workplace, and the “what,” “so what,” and “now what” of key interpersonal relationships, you need to give your client several assurances in discussing OOP results:

- OOP results do not in any way suggest abnormality
- Neither the client nor the MBTI instrument made any error

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- Though the differences between Step I and Step II results may initially suggest inconsistencies, in fact they represent valuable opportunities for the client to gain insight into the nuances of his or her personality type
- Facet results represent the client's unique approach to expressing his or her whole type; a specific set of facet results enable us to see how, for example, this ENFP is like all other ENFPs, is like some other ENFPs, and is not like any other ENFP at all

Several MBTI resources will be helpful in understanding OOP results and formulating your own explanation. The *MBTI® Manual* is a great source of helpful background on the preference clarity index and verifying type (see chapter 6). The *MBTI® Step II Manual* adds further explanation and essential detail; table 3.1 (p. 24, "Content Outline of the Facets") is particularly helpful, as are the data on facet scale construction. Tables 6.5 and 6.7 (pp. 104 and 105) speak volumes, especially with those who want to "see the numbers."

The *Using the MBTI® Tool in Organizations* and *MBTI® Teambuilding Program* binders contain valuable exercises and workshop masters that will help with understanding type and determining best-fit type. *Finding the Fit*, a new resource, can also help with this important topic. The new

Understanding Your MBTI® Step II Results offers clients clear explanations of the Step II Interpretive Report and Profile, along with practical exercises to guide and reinforce comprehension, all wrapped in a succinct takeaway resource.

The newly released "Working with the MBTI® Step II Results" is a comprehensive facilitator binder that guides you through four training modules.

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