



APT*i*

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Empowering a world community to understand, value and respect differences

APT*i* Ethical Standards for All Users of Psychological Type

1. Present personality types, preferences, styles, temperaments, etc. as normal differences. Avoid bias or stereotyping; demonstrate a balanced respect for all types.

Bias is an unavoidable part of being human. Our natural modes of perception and judgment frame what we consider important. When others focus their attention differently, we may think that they are approaching things “the wrong way.” One of the gifts of using a type framework is that it gives us the ability to recognize and appreciate such differences. However, our own perspective easily colors the way we think and speak about the different types. For ethical use of psychological type and all associated assessment tools and methods, we must make the effort to own our biases and to provide fair, balanced and evidence-based descriptions of type patterns. Without such care, we can easily convey that some types are better than others.

2. When you are seeking an introductory psychological type experience for yourself, for acquaintances, or for professional clients, obtain or provide an interactive experience conducted by a trained professional. Obtaining a report from the Internet is not enough. Ethical use of psychological type, and of related type assessments and appraisal methods, requires that people be able to evaluate the accuracy of assessment results and come to their own conclusion about which type pattern fits them best (their “Best-Fit Type”). The effectiveness of every type application depends on people having verified their Best-Fit Type.

The fundamental goal of every type identification or assessment process must be to help individuals determine their own Best-Fit Type pattern. No questionnaire and no expert is accurate enough to substitute for a person’s own knowledge of how they experience life. Few of us find that descriptions of our Whole Type (4-letter type) fit us like a glove, so each of us must come to a nuanced understanding of how our mind functions, and how our behavior reflects what comes naturally to us and what doesn’t. Ethically minded trained professionals guiding the process will aim to reach this sort of understanding.

To illustrate the harms of failing to verify type results, here is a typical scenario:

An organizational decision maker elects to hold a type-based team-building program for a work group. Employees are directed to a particular website to take a questionnaire that will tell them their type. At the end of the questionnaire, the website informs the employee of their four-letter type result, providing a paragraph or two of description. The decision maker’s administrative assistant collects the individual type results and forwards them to the consultant conducting the workshop. (This procedure contributes

to the misidentification of type - see Standard #9 concerning the ethical requirement that taking a type instrument be voluntary and the results confidential.) The consultant is told, "Everyone knows their type," and plans the program on the assumption that these types, and the group type distribution, are a good representation of the makeup of the team.

In fact, some proportion of the group will have been misidentified. As a result, they will not respond to exercises and interventions in the ways that are typical of their assumed types. The consequences of this are non-trivial.

Implications for organizations and consultants using type:

- Exercises and interventions will be less effective than the consultant expected, and may fail entirely.
- Mistyped participants will find that program content is inconsistent with their own view of themselves and others. As a result, they may decide that the type framework is not helpful, and that using it is a waste of time. Negative views of the training will likely extend to the consultant who provided it, and perhaps to the decision maker who contracted for it.
- Repeated such experiences across an organization can lead to significant numbers of employees discounting the type framework entirely and resisting its use.

Further implications for program participants:

- When the identified type pattern is not a person's Best-Fit, there is a chance that they may give credence to the authority of the expert or the instrument, and assume they should try to behave more like the identified type. They will then live a falsified type, and when that causes discomfort they may assume there is something wrong with them.
- Even when the identified type matches the Best-Fit Type, if the person has not verified it for themselves, they will not know that they are the final authority. They will likely have a simplistic view of what psychological type is about, and may miss out on the exploratory journey of increasing self-understanding that type can stimulate.

3. Remind yourself and others that psychological type doesn't explain everything about personality, and that people may not behave in accordance with their Best-Fit Type pattern for a variety of reasons, including culture, personal development, contextual adaptation, etc.

A person's type does not predict their behavior. Our type pattern can describe our most natural, or preferred, ways of responding to life, but we are not limited to the behaviors typically associated with a specific type. We can intentionally use less-preferred parts of ourselves, even though doing that may be slower, require more concentration and effort, and produce less polished results than our natural modes. We can also acquire skills in less-preferred areas through practice and development. Many people also can naturally and effectively use one preference at some times and the opposite preference at other times. What we do when may depend on, among other things:

- External expectations to behave in a particular manner, such as family, social, cultural or work expectations
- Specifics of the situation that make it more effective to use some responses

rather than others, for example, an emergency where flexibility and quick action are needed

- Growth periods in which we are trying additional ways to function

4. Type attributes are not the same as skills or competencies, and type information by itself is not an appropriate basis for selecting, weeding out, or promoting individuals.

Having a preference and having a type pattern are not the same as having skills. Like talents or muscles, type attributes need to be exercised and developed before we can use them skillfully. Our life circumstances may or may not have supported developing our Best-Fit Type. Also, our type pattern does not prevent us from having “atypical” skills. For example, demands of work, or personal interests, can lead us to develop skills outside those usually associated with our type. Because of these factors, psychological type is not predictive of competencies or skills.

5. When sharing type information, distinguish between research and anecdotal experience. Avoid unverified speculation; stick to the actual data. When you use stories to bring psychological type to life, clearly describe them as anecdotes or observations that illustrate certain aspects of type-related behavior.

We all use our own and others’ personal experiences to learn about and draw conclusions about psychological type. We also speculate about connections between type patterns and various behaviors. Just keep in mind that these observations and interpretations are based on limited data and may not reflect the general case. There is a large and growing body of researched and validated type information. (The Isabel Briggs Myers Memorial Library at CAPT has an extensive collection available to anyone at <https://www.capt.org/MILO/>) Ethical users of psychological type learn about and stay up to date on what is factually known – and add their own rich examples when they are sure of their applicability.

6. Use materials created by others in an ethical way.

Legally you may make one copy of copyrighted materials for your personal use. When you need multiple copies, purchase them or use them with permission of the author; do not distribute “bootleg” copies of MBTI® items, or of booklets and other resources developed by type experts, etc.

Do not appropriate the work of others and let people think it’s yours. It’s easy to copy something from someone else’s blog or website and post it on your own. Just remember to indicate where you got it. Even better, include a link to the original source.

7. Model ethical use of type in your own behavior.

Whenever you talk about psychological type, be careful with your language. Communicate that all types are valuable. Treat instrument results as a “working hypothesis” to be checked out by other means. Clarify that we are more than our type, that type patterns don’t limit what we can do, and that psychological type is not a set of rigid “pigeonholes.” Avoid blanket statements; instead of saying, “ENTJs do X,” say, “Many ENTJs do X” or “ENTJs tend to do X.”

Take time to give feedback when you encounter people misusing type. Take the generous position that their misuse is inadvertent. For example, you might help them

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rephrase what they are saying to communicate their thoughts in a non-pejorative way. You may want to suggest resources to help people clarify their understanding of psychological type.

Remind yourself and others of the value of opposite points of view, and of the harms caused by oversimplifying type theory, stereotyping, and other forms of misuse.

We all have biases. Make it a goal to be aware of your own biases, and be prepared to acknowledge them when someone points them out to you.

Additional Guidelines for Type Practitioners

8. Use psychological type assessments and information for the benefit of the person you are helping or teaching. Make clear the purpose of using a type model.

Type information can be used to manipulate people, put them down, or deny them opportunities. It is against APTi's ethical principles to use psychological type information in ways that are detrimental to people. Use type models appropriately to promote self-understanding, support personal effectiveness and growth, further the understanding of differences among people, and facilitate better teamwork and relationships.

9. Use psychological type instruments and explorations only in a voluntary context. Maintain confidentiality of instrument results; sharing of type information must be up to the individual.

Individuals and organizations are poorly served when type assessments and interventions are not voluntary and confidential. Most people with a rudimentary knowledge of type can skew their questionnaire answers to produce a result they think will be more desirable than their natural responses. Requiring people to take a type assessment, and sharing type results without their consent, can generate mistrust about how results will be used. People may be motivated to "try to look as good as possible" rather than to identify their most natural responses and Best-Fit Type.

When you facilitate group type explorations, make it safe for people to say they are still sorting. When you put people into type-alike groups, tell them not to assume that joining a certain group means that is definitely someone's Best-Fit. These kinds of activities are in part for "trying on" the type pattern or preference.

10. Be clear that individuals are the final authority on their own type pattern.

For introductory sessions, provide clients/participants with an interactive overview or interpretation process in which they can evaluate the accuracy of instrument results, have an opportunity to read narrative descriptions of type patterns other than the one their results indicate, and verify what seems to be their Best-Fit Type. Acknowledge that it can take some time to come to a final conclusion about this, and that they may want simply to come to a "best guess for today." Provide/suggest resources – books, articles,

websites, programs from APTi and other reputable organizations – so people can explore psychological type on their own and deepen their understanding.

When clients tell you they already know their type pattern, inquire about the process that led them to that conclusion. Remind people that they are the final authority, and explore how confident they are that they have found their Best-Fit Type. You may find it useful to begin your session with a brief review of the elements of psychological type, and to invite people to notice what fits for them and what doesn't.

When conducting exercises in type-alike groupings, allow people who are unsure to use the exercise for clarification. One technique is to have them be “observers” rather than participants in a discussion and, if possible, to sit in on different groups. During the exercise debrief you can call on observers to share what they noticed.

11. Clearly identify the assessment tool, survey or method being used and how it is different from other frameworks.

Psychological type frameworks and their associated assessments are different from most personality models and instruments used by psychologists and organizational consultants. Psychological type is not based on traits.

This fact generates much confusion.

Most personality assessments are designed to measure traits - behavioral characteristics that are assumed to be a part of everyone's makeup but which vary in amount. A high score indicates the strong presence of a trait, and a low score indicates a lack of the trait; if the trait is considered a good thing to have, then a low score may be labeled as a deficit. In this perspective, personality differences among people are explained as differences in the amounts of different traits. The trait model is concerned with answering the question, “**How much?**” Because amounts are important for understanding personality, the numerical scores on these assessments are the focus for interpreting results.

Psychological type is based on different ways that people use their minds to experience and respond to life, specifically, different dynamic patterns in their use of the mental processes involved in perception and judgment. Personality differences among people are explained as differences in which pattern people favor most; type categories are seen simply as different approaches to life, with none being better or worse than the others. Type assessments are designed to identify which pattern is an individual's best fit, that is, to answer the question, “**Which one?**” Numerical scores indicate **how probable** it is that a certain pattern is the one a person favors. (With some instruments, scores can also indicate variations of functioning within a type pattern; however, identifying the Best-Fit category is still primary). Finding the best fit necessarily requires that the person verify whether the indicated pattern actually does fit, or whether a different pattern describes them better; this is the focus of interpreting type instrument results.

Type patterns – preferences, Myers-Briggs types, temperaments, interaction styles, function-attitudes, etc. – are dynamic and complex. They cannot be boiled down to simple traits or sets of traits. However, type patterns are **expressed** in associated

behavioral traits. In other words, types are not the same as traits, but traits **correlate** with particular type patterns. Traits and behaviors can be an indication of a type pattern, but they do not define it.

When people don't understand the actual meaning of MBTI® and other psychological type assessment scores, and when they treat type categories as though they were sets of traits, they can make some mistaken assumptions. They may think there are "normal" or "good" scores, or they might assume that they should be "more balanced" between opposite attributes. This can lead to people attempting to suppress their type.

12. When contracting to use psychological type with individuals or organizations, clarify the purpose and desired outcome. Consider whether type is an appropriate tool for accomplishing their aims.

Sometimes clients have misunderstood what psychological type can and cannot do. When an organization indicates that it plans to use type results for hiring or promotion you can explain that having a type is not equivalent to having skills, and that selection strictly on the basis of type patterns is not likely to produce the results that the client wants. Many criticisms of the MBTI® and other type approaches stem from disappointing outcomes of this specific misuse.

Sometimes clients believe that new perspectives offered by understanding a type model will "fix" a "problem person," or get everyone to agree to a particular point of view. You can remind the client that psychological type is ethically used to help people understand themselves and others as they are – which can certainly include their impact on others – but that it can't be expected to change people.

Sometimes clients do not understand the depth and richness of type models and want to use them in trivial ways, for example, as an "ice-breaker" or "fun" diversion. Often such requests also involve inadequate time to present the framework in any substantive way. When presented with such a request, you might consider whether there is something limited that you could do to offer value to the group in the proposed time frame. For example, you might explore an important type-related difference, while making it clear that this is just one aspect of type and not the whole story.

If you object to the way a prospective client wants to use the type framework, the client may say they'll just find someone else. To uphold your obligation to use type ethically, you must decline the contract. If the client does replace you, at least they will have been told that what they want to do is unethical, and you won't be the consultant who is misusing type.

13. When working in other countries, or with people from other countries, keep in mind that while type is universal, culture has an effect on how type patterns are expressed.

While it is always the case that the more you understand about a client population the more effective you can be as a facilitator, this is especially true in cross-cultural

situations. Read about and research the cultures you work with, and stay open to ongoing learning from your clients.

Use assessments that are valid translations in the client's native language whenever possible. Research indicates that people are more likely to agree with their instrument results when this is done.

Use examples that reflect how type tends to be expressed in the client's culture.

Be aware of how your own cultural background affects the way you look at psychological type. For example, a consultant from the "individualist" U.S. culture might emphasize the value of the model to empower a client, while a client from a "collectivist" culture (countries in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East) would find more value in using their enhanced knowledge of themselves to empower their group. Different cultures also value self-reflection differently; people who are less practiced in this may find taking a self-report instrument and verifying a type pattern to be uncomfortable or difficult experiences.

Some people have mixed cultural identities as a result of having lived in more than one culture. Many of us behave differently in different environments, for example home vs. work. The addition of cultural complexity, such as speaking different languages at home and at work, can make identifying Best-Fit Type a longer and more complex process.

14. Represent your expertise accurately.

Know your limits and do not go beyond them.

Psychological type is a tool that is useful in many settings, including organizational consulting, psychological counseling, career exploration, life coaching, education, and spiritual direction. Each of these professions has its own rules about who is qualified to practice; training and licensing requirements vary from state to state.

Because type touches on virtually every aspect of life, if you are known as someone who "uses type," you may be asked (or tempted) to apply your knowledge outside your area of expertise. Ethical professionals know their boundaries and are prepared to recommend a variety of resources, including other professionals, when people make such requests.

15. Abide by state and federal laws regarding use of psychological instruments.

A central principle of professional use of psychological instruments is that individuals should use only those assessments for which they have the appropriate training and expertise. Publishers of these assessments set qualification standards; the aim is to ensure responsible use and accurate interpretation. Some materials can be used by anyone. Some, like the MBTI®, have some restrictions. Some are available only to people with advanced training, for example assessments that are used in diagnosing psychological problems. Publishers that handle restricted materials sell them only to people who demonstrate that they meet the qualifications. Ethical users of type obtain

proper instruction for the assessments they choose to use, and do not attempt to administer instruments for which they are not qualified.

16. Use correct references to psychological type assessments.

Refer to any assessment associated with psychological type as an instrument, assessment, inventory, questionnaire or survey, but do not call it a “test.” The word “test” implies that there are right and wrong answers, or normal and abnormal results, or some sort of “best” outcome.

Do not refer to other instruments as the MBTI®. Instead, refer to them by their names.

Honor copyrighted and trademarked intellectual property by using the appropriate ® or ™ symbol. In printed materials, you need only use it for the first mention of the instrument, publication, etc. However, online the custom is to use the symbol with every mention.

17. Model ethical use of psychological type.

Whenever you are using psychological type in a professional capacity, you will be seen as a representative of the type community at large. Anything that you tolerate in the way of mistaken assumptions, misleading or incorrect language, stereotyping, etc. can be taken as accurate or permissible unless you correct it.

This doesn't mean that you have to consider yourself “the type police.” As stated in Standard #7, it is helpful to assume that the other person's misuse is inadvertent. You can frame your response as a “Remember that...” statement, or say something like, “It's my understanding that...” When you correct factual errors, it is helpful to cite sources for your information, such as the manuals for assessments, tools or methods, or other reputable references. If the person insists on their point of view, you can agree to disagree – for example, “You seem very sure about this, so perhaps I'm mistaken. I will check into it and find out what's really the case.” When you state an intention to seek out the facts of the matter in the interest of accurate understanding, you model that for others. (And don't forget to follow through – you may in fact be mistaken.)