

# The MBTI<sup>®</sup> Instrument as an Organisational Development Tool: A Singaporean Perspective

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# Agenda

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- Background
- Objectives & Methodology
- Previous research in Singapore
- Some characteristics of Singaporean culture
- Research findings

# Objectives

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1. To investigate to what extent organizations in Singapore are using the MBTI, and what they are using it for;
2. To identify cultural issues with the instrument's use in Singapore; and
3. To arrive at an overall assessment as to whether the instrument can usefully be employed in a Singaporean organizational setting, and whether there are any potential limitations to its usefulness in this context.

# Methodology

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- Academic literature review
  - History & outline of type theory;
  - Summary of literature on potential uses of MBTI in an organisational context;
  - A review of academic criticisms of the MBTI; and
  - A summary of previous research in Singapore.

# Methodology

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- A research survey of 40 organizations in Singapore;
- Interviews with 7 Singapore-based practitioners

# Previous Research in Singapore

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- Ditzig, H. & You, P. S. (1988), 'In search of the Singapore managerial style', Singapore Management Review, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 35-51.
- Tan, N. T. & Tan, V. (1997), 'Personality types of Singapore managers', Today's Manager, Singapore Institute of Management, pp. 20-24.
- Tan, V. & Tan. N. T. (1999), 'Personality type and the Singapore manger: Research findings based on the MBTI', Singapore Management Review, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 15-31.
- Tan, V. & Tan. N. T. (2000), Personality and effective management: MBTI profiles of Singapore managers, Singapore Institute of Management, Singapore.

















# Previous Research in Singapore

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- Lim, T. K. (1994), 'Personality types among Singapore and American students', Journal of Psychological Type, vol. 31, pp. 10-15.
- Teo, C. T. & Quah, M. L. (1996), The relationship between perception and academic achievement of teenage pupils in the gifted education programme in Singapore, Paper presented at the First Education Research Association, Singapore and Australian Association for Research in Education ERA-AARE Joint Conference, Singapore Polytechnic, Singapore.

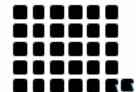















# Previous Research in Singapore

Ditzig & You (1988)

<b>ISTJ</b>  27.4%	<b>ISFJ</b>  4.9%	<b>INFJ</b>  2.5%	<b>INTJ</b>  8.9%
<b>ISTP</b>  2.1%	<b>ISFP</b>  1.4%	<b>INFP</b>  2.0%	<b>INTP</b>  2.2%
<b>ESTP</b>  2.7%	<b>ESFP</b>  0.8%	<b>ENFP</b>  2.2%	<b>ENTP</b>  3.1%
<b>ESTJ</b>  25.9%	<b>ESFJ</b>  3.3%	<b>ENFJ</b>  2.0%	<b>ENTJ</b>  8.6%

n = 2,248

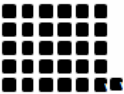















Tan & Tan (2000) - Managers

<b>ISTJ</b>  31.0%	<b>ISFJ</b>  8.0%	<b>INFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>INTJ</b>  6.2%
<b>ISTP</b>  4.7%	<b>ISFP</b>  1.9%	<b>INFP</b>  1.4%	<b>INTP</b>  5.1%
<b>ESTP</b>  2.8%	<b>ESFP</b>  1.6%	<b>ENFP</b>  2.1%	<b>ENTP</b>  4.3%
<b>ESTJ</b>  18.4%	<b>ESFJ</b>  3.7%	<b>ENFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>ENTJ</b>  6.0%

n = 914

















# Previous Research in Singapore

Tan & Tan (2000) - Managers

<b>ISTJ</b>  31.0%	<b>ISFJ</b>  8.0%	<b>INFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>INTJ</b>  6.2%
<b>ISTP</b>  4.7%	<b>ISFP</b>  1.9%	<b>INFP</b>  1.4%	<b>INTP</b>  5.1%
<b>ESTP</b>  2.8%	<b>ESFP</b>  1.6%	<b>ENFP</b>  2.1%	<b>ENTP</b>  4.3%
<b>ESTJ</b>  18.4%	<b>ESFJ</b>  3.7%	<b>ENFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>ENTJ</b>  6.0%

n = 914

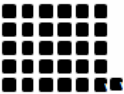















Tan & Tan (2000) - Students

<b>ISTJ</b>  4.9%	<b>ISFJ</b>  6.3%	<b>INFJ</b>  3.5%	<b>INTJ</b>  7.7%
<b>ISTP</b>  0.7%	<b>ISFP</b>  4.2%	<b>INFP</b>  11.3%	<b>INTP</b>  10.6%
<b>ESTP</b>  3.5%	<b>ESFP</b>  2.8%	<b>ENFP</b>  12.0%	<b>ENTP</b>  5.6%
<b>ESTJ</b>  7.7%	<b>ESFJ</b>  2.1%	<b>ENFJ</b>  4.9%	<b>ENTJ</b>  12.0%

n = 142

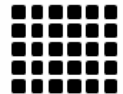















# Previous Research in Singapore

Tan & Tan (2000) - Managers

<b>ISTJ</b>  31.0%	<b>ISFJ</b>  8.0%	<b>INFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>INTJ</b>  6.2%
<b>ISTP</b>  4.7%	<b>ISFP</b>  1.9%	<b>INFP</b>  1.4%	<b>INTP</b>  5.1%
<b>ESTP</b>  2.8%	<b>ESFP</b>  1.6%	<b>ENFP</b>  2.1%	<b>ENTP</b>  4.3%
<b>ESTJ</b>  18.4%	<b>ESFJ</b>  3.7%	<b>ENFJ</b>  1.3%	<b>ENTJ</b>  6.0%

n = 914

Kroeger et. al. (2002) - US Middle Managers

<b>ISTJ</b>  29.6%	<b>ISFJ</b>  2.6%	<b>INFJ</b>  1.5%	<b>INTJ</b>  10.1%
<b>ISTP</b>  4.2%	<b>ISFP</b>  1.0%	<b>INFP</b>  1.4%	<b>INTP</b>  3.2%
<b>ESTP</b>  3.3%	<b>ESFP</b>  1.1%	<b>ENFP</b>  1.3%	<b>ENTP</b>  6.0%
<b>ESTJ</b>  19.9%	<b>ESFJ</b>  2.8%	<b>ENFJ</b>  1.8%	<b>ENTJ</b>  9.9%

n = 4,789



# Singaporean Culture

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- ‘We might say that the STJ profile is the national personality type. The characteristics of this type are: being factual, thorough, systematic, dependable, practical, organized, realistic, duty-bound, sensible, reliable, efficient, decisive, impersonal, structured & conscientious.’

Ditzig & You (1988)

- ‘[ISTJ managers are] systematic, practical, factual, realistic and dependable... [they] are also steady workers and are thoughtful, cautious & conservative.’

Tan & Tan (1999)

- ‘Sensing managers ... are predisposed towards practical, conventional, detail-oriented and systematic behaviour. This typifies the Singaporean management context as well as the highly organized and efficient Singaporean society.’

Tan & Tan (1999)

# Singaporean Culture

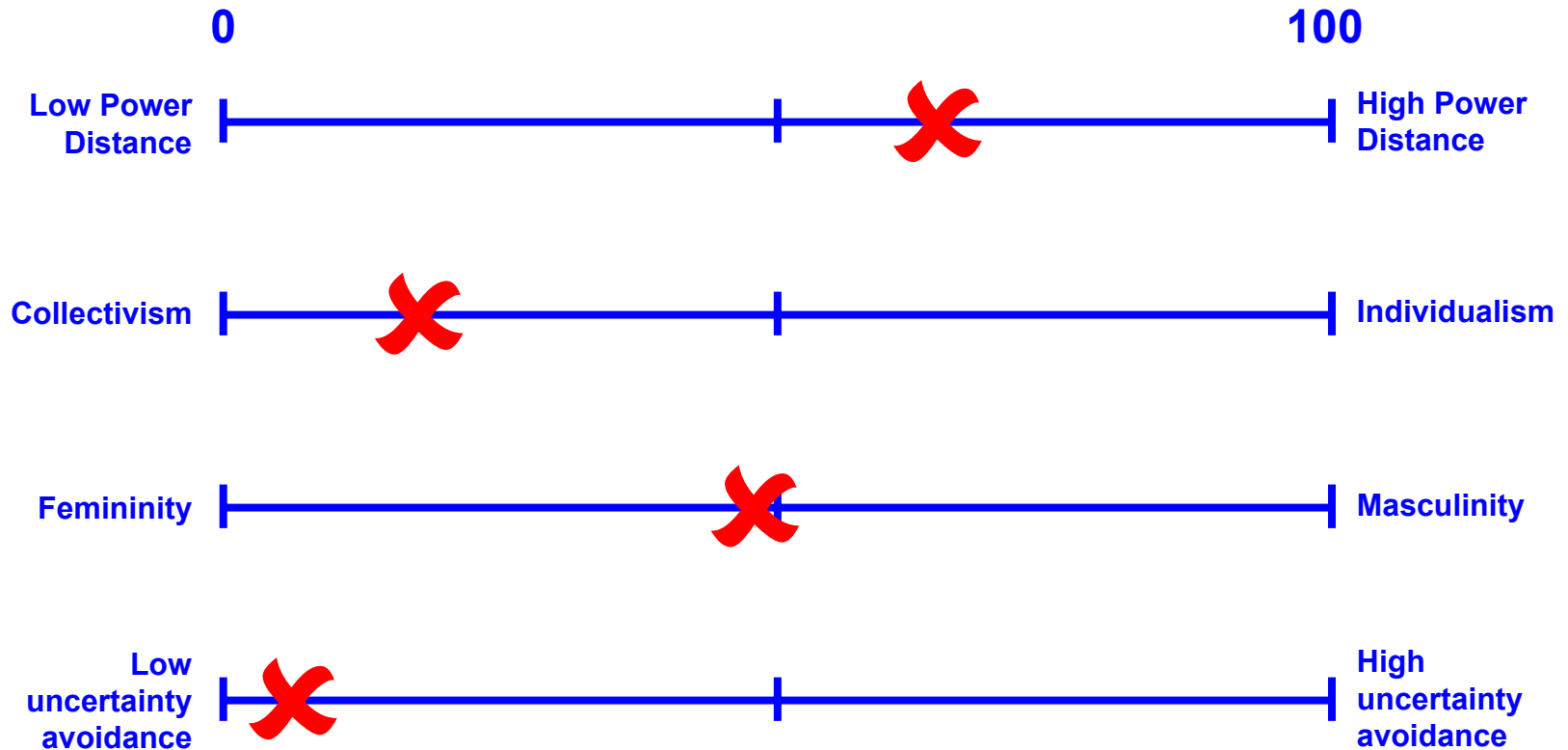
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- ‘The T majority is perhaps a reflection of our general rational approach in this society, and the pragmatism of Singaporeans is reflected in the high proportion of Ss.’

Tan & Tan (2000)

# Singaporean Culture - Hofstede

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# Questionnaire - methodology

	Type of Organization							
	Government		Local Companies		MNCs		Total	
<b><u>Industry</u></b>								
Accountancy				1	5%	1	3%	
Automotive				1	5%	1	3%	
Aviation		2	13%			2	5%	
Banking		3	19%	5	25%	8	20%	
Energy				1	5%	1	3%	
Finance		1	6%			1	3%	
Government	4	100%				4	10%	
Healthcare		2	13%			2	5%	
Hospitality				1	5%	1	3%	
Insurance		1	6%	2	10%	3	8%	
Land		2	13%			2	5%	
Logistics				1	5%	1	3%	
Manufacturing:								
<i>Electronics</i>				4	20%	4	10%	
<i>Food</i>		1	6%			1	3%	
<i>Household products</i>				1	5%	1	3%	
Publishing		1	6%			1	3%	
Retail		1	6%	3	15%	4	10%	
Telecommunications		2	13%			2	5%	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>
	<b>10%</b>		<b>40%</b>		<b>50%</b>		<b>100%</b>	

# Response Rate

	Government			Local Companies			MNCs			Total		
	No of Organizations	Response Rate	Organizations using MBTI	No of Organizations	Response Rate	Organizations using MBTI	No of Organizations	Response Rate	Organizations using MBTI	No of Organizations	Response Rate	Organizations using MBTI
		%	%		%	%		%	%		%	%
<b>Organizations which:</b>												
Do use the MBTI	1		33%	1		10%	4		29%	6		22%
Do not use the MBTI	2		67%	9		90%	10		71%	21		78%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Declined to Participate				1	6%					1	3%	
No Response	1	25%		5	31%		6	30%		12	30%	
<b>Sample Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>	

# Positive Responses - Analysis

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- Years of Experience
- Extent of use within the organization:
  - Staff Levels
  - Number of employees who had taken the MBTI
  - Frequency of use
- Internal vs. external facilitation

# Positive Responses - Objectives

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- 'Self-awareness'
- 'Personal impact & effectiveness'
- 'To understand the personality types of staff in their workplace'
- 'To identify employees' strengths and unique gifts'
- 'To enable supervisory staff to appreciate their unique strengths and personality type differences'
- 'Part of training designed in-house to let participants better understand themselves in order to manage others'
- 'Teambuilding'
- 'To use this information in teamwork and collaboration.'
- 'To help employees understand themselves and their team'
- 'To enable supervisory staff to understand type differences of their direct teams as well as cross-functional teams'

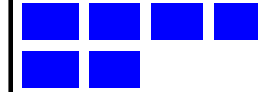
# Positive Responses - Applications

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## A. General Uses

Basic half-day introductory workshop

As a diagnostic tool in OD interventions



## B. Specific Applications - Individual Level

To improve problem-solving/decision-making skills

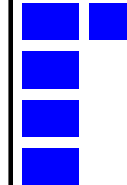
As part of a coaching/mentoring programme

As a form of feedback within the employee performance review process.

As part of a suite of psychometric tests used for recruitment purposes.

Individual employee counselling

As a tool for stress management



## C. Specific Applications – Group Level

As a tool to improve intra-group communication

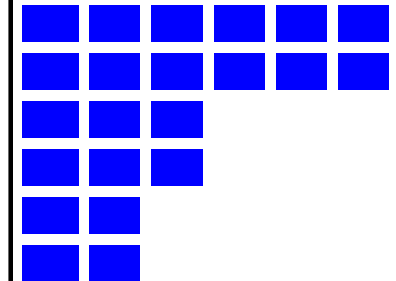
As a tool for teambuilding / improving understanding within existing teams

As a tool to analyse and resolve intra-group conflicts

As a tool for leadership / senior management team development

As a basis for assigning staff to teams

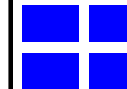
As a basis for task allocation within teams



## D. Specific Applications – Intergroup Level

As a tool for Improving inter-group communication

As a tool for analysing and resolving inter-group conflicts

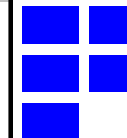


## E. Specific Applications – Organizational Level

As a tool for analysing organizational culture.

As a basis for tailoring training to suit different learning styles

As a tool for managing organizational change



# Negative Responses

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## Reasons cited by organizations for not using the MBTI:

Other instruments are used instead	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lack of awareness of potential applications	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Budgetary constraints	■	■	■	■				
Lack of relevance to organization	■	■	■	■				
Inability to justify in cost/benefit terms	■	■	■					
Reservations about its validity & reliability generally	■	■						
Reservations about its validity and reliability in the Singaporean context, for cultural reasons	■							
Unfavourable experience with instrument in the past	■							
Other reasons	■	■						

# Key Survey Findings

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- Lower than expected rate of usage (22%) – most likely due to the small sample size used.
- Ad-hoc usage rather than as an integrated part of training programmes
- Group level applications were most popular
- The most common reasons for not using the MBTI were the use of alternative instruments and a lack of awareness of its potential applications

# Practitioners and their Backgrounds

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Andrew Bell

Hemisphere Consulting Pte. Ltd.

Jacki Nicholas

InsideOut Consulting Pte. Ltd.

Rie Rumito

Credit Suisse

Nicola Supka

Smart People Solutions

Noel Tan

Trailblazer Trainers Pte. Ltd.

Dr. Robyn Wilson

Praxis Management  
Consulting Pte. Ltd.

Steven Yong

Blue Dot Learning Pte. Ltd.

# Practitioners' uses of the MBTI

<b>A. General Uses</b>	
Basic half-day introductory workshop	■ ■ ■ ■
As a diagnostic tool in OD interventions	■ ■ ■
<b>B. Specific Applications - Individual Level</b>	
As part of a coaching/mentoring programme	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
To improve problem-solving/decision-making skills	■ ■ ■
Individual employee counselling	■ ■
As a form of feedback within the employee performance review process.	■ ■
As a tool for stress management	■
As part of a suite of psychometric tests used for recruitment purposes.	■
<b>C. Specific Applications – Group Level</b>	
As a tool to improve intra-group communication	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
As a tool to analyse and resolve intra-group conflicts	■ ■ ■ ■
As a tool for teambuilding / improving understanding within existing teams	■ ■ ■ ■
As a tool for leadership / senior management team development	■ ■ ■ ■
As a basis for assigning staff to teams	■ ■
As a basis for task allocation within teams	■
<b>D. Specific Applications – Intergroup Level</b>	
As a tool for Improving inter-group communication	■ ■ ■
As a tool for analysing and resolving inter-group conflicts	■ ■ ■
<b>E. Specific Applications – Organizational Level</b>	
As a tool for analysing organizational culture.	■ ■ ■
As a basis for tailoring training to suit different learning styles	■ ■ ■
As a tool for managing organizational change	
<b>F. Other uses</b>	
Cross-cultural training	■

# Discussion of Singaporean Culture

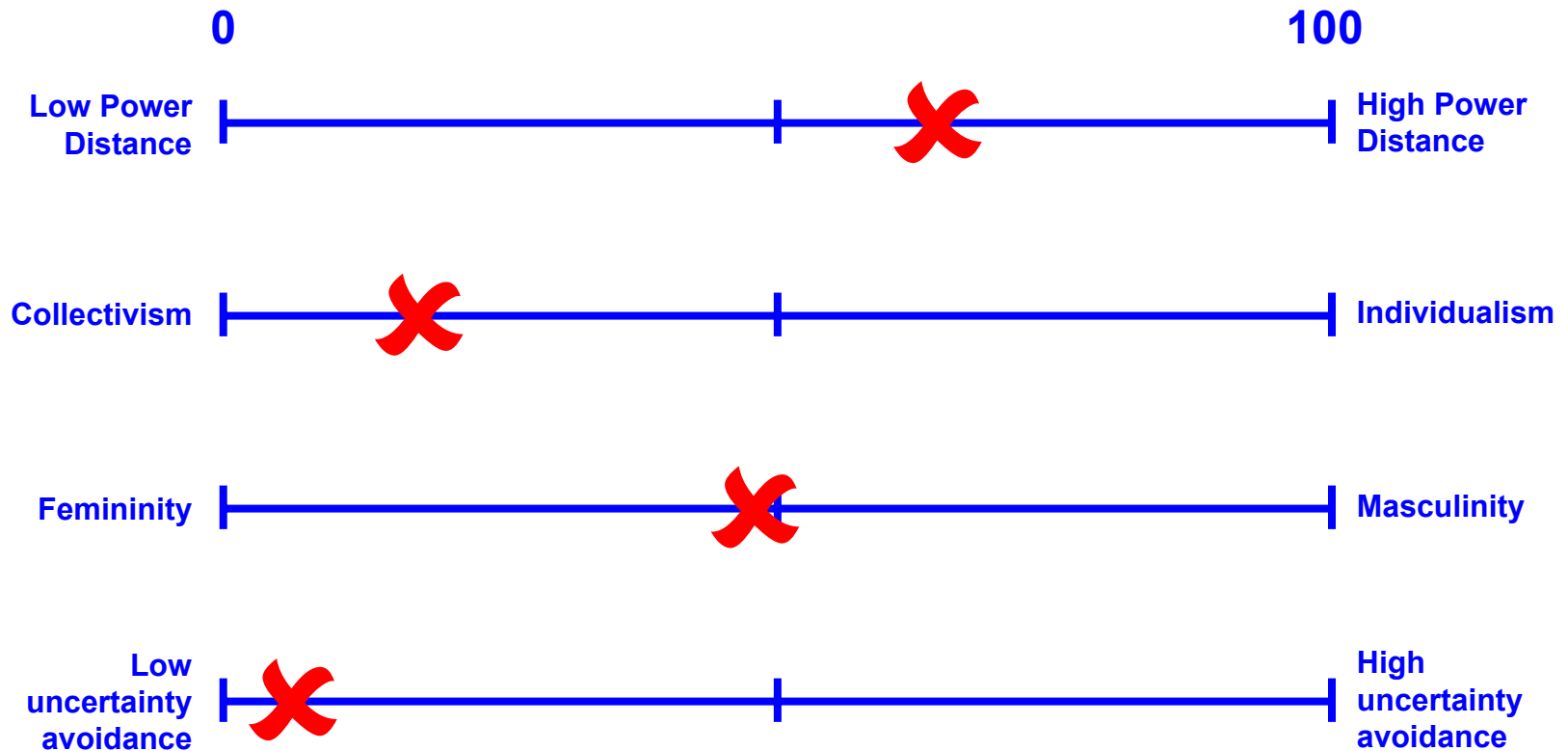
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- Predominance of STJ preferences was consistent with the practitioners' experience
- Specific observations illustrating 'Singaporean managerial culture':
  - Poor skills in engaging staff;
  - Promotion based on technical competence;
  - Managers' motivations for using the MBTI
- The influence of the school system
- Gender roles in Singaporean culture

# Discussion of Singaporean Culture

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## Hofstede's cultural dimensions:



# Views on Previous Research

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- Three possible explanations for the high instance of STJ preferences in previous research findings:
  - ❑ Real differences in the distribution of psychological types between different cultures;
  - ❑ Typological preferences manifest in different behaviours in different cultures and the instrument needs to be adjusted to take these into account;
  - ❑ There may be problems with the way the instrument is administered in Singapore.

# Views on Previous Research

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- Singaporean manifestations of type
- Social desirability issues
- Practitioners did not believe adjustment to the instrument is necessary because:
  - They emphasize the MBTI as a framework for discussion & self-understanding;
  - Their work was conducted mainly in an MNC environment;
  - Cultural issues can be adequately addressed and mitigated by appropriate administration procedures.

# Administration Issues

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- Consensus that following administration procedures is crucial:
  - **Preparation:** The importance of ‘mindsetting’
  - **Administration:** Procedures for having subjects complete the instrument
  - **Feedback & discussion:** The importance of the self-assessment process to identify ‘best fit’ type
- Language problems

# Usefulness of the MBTI in Singapore

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- No concerns over validity & reliability of the instrument in a Singaporean cultural context
- Usefulness of type theory as a framework within which to discuss both personality-related and cross-cultural issues
- Hesitancy to use the MBTI with subjects other than university graduates/professionals

# Conclusion

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The MBTI can safely be used in the Singapore corporate environment, provided that the practitioner is mindful of the potential cultural issues involved and adapts their administration procedures to take them into account.

# Final Thoughts

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- Importance of using best-fit type.
- Research to date has been very limited in scope – Singaporean culture encourages STJ behaviours, but it would be premature to suggest this represents the innate preferences of the majority of Singaporeans.
- Analysis of a national representative sample is needed.



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