mbti® strong®

CPP author and assessment expert Jeff Prince, PhD, answers questions from the webinar **"Increasing Employee Engagement and Retention Using the MBTI® and Strong Instruments."**

Q: If time is limited and administering both the MBTI® and Strong assessments is not an option, what is the recommended sequence for administering the assessments?

This decision largely depends on what brings clients to you and what the goals are. Generally, you should start with the instrument that addresses clients' most pressing interest or need so you can strengthen the clients' trust in the assessment process and provide a more effective session. For example, if clients are anxious to receive feedback about the type of work they might prefer in the long term, I would start with the Strong instrument. If clients are interested in understanding the types of daily work tasks or environment that fits their work style, I would start with the MBTI assessment. Alternatively, after first providing a brief description of how each instrument can be helpful, you could ask clients directly which one they would prefer to begin with. This approach engages clients in a collaborative working alliance with you that can be invaluable.

Q: As a career development specialist, how can I reach out to companies to work with individuals or teams for career coaching or consulting?

Start by providing concrete examples of what you can offer, illustrating the value you can add to the organization and describing how you can meet a need that has already been identified. Establish your credibility by, for example, emphasizing your areas of expertise and documenting your experience doing similar work. Use your certification in and experience with assessment tools such as the Strong and MBTI instruments to demonstrate some of the specialized skills you offer. Additionally, highlight example reports you could use to help meet the organization's needs.

Q: Does people's experience influence their Strong results? For instance, would the results they received in their 20s differ from those they receive in their 40s?

Yes, definitely. As we get older and gain experience, we tend to become clearer about what we like and what we don't like, so that our inventoried interests become more distinct and reliable. For example, the profiles of 16- to 18-year-olds often show either little interest in anything or interest in almost everything. People in that age group may not yet have the breadth of life experiences to distinguish strong interests, disinterests, or dislikes. Patterns of interests tend to stabilize at around age 30 for most individuals.

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Q: As a career counseling professional, do you use other assessment tools?

I have used a number of other assessment tools, but the Strong and MBTI instruments are my favorites because of their ease of use and the large body of research supporting their use in multiple settings across a wide range of populations. I sometimes add the CPI 260® assessment, particularly when clients need to look at their leadership and interpersonal strengths and style.

Q: Have you ever worked with a team in which everyone knew one another's MBTI personality type? Was it helpful for the training session?

Usually when I work with teams, the members share their type with each other openly. Almost always there are some surprises—either people are surprised by some aspect of their own results or colleagues are surprised by something they learn about one another. These provide wonderful opportunities for discussion and for delving deeper into the complexity of personality type. Often this discussion leads to increased appreciation for the individual differences among team members who are doing a similar job within the company but approach it and get satisfaction from it in different ways.

Q: Is there ever a risk in the manager knowing employees' assessment results?

Ethically, Strong and MBTI results are confidential (i.e., results belong to the respondent, who can choose to share them or keep them private). If a manager wants to be able to view employees' results in order to participate in a training session effectively, the employees must be informed—before they complete the instrument—how their results will be used.

Sometimes employees who take assessments in a workplace setting will respond as they think they should rather than according to their true preferences. This is especially likely when they know a supervisor will be viewing the results. With regard to the Strong tool, employees know which styles their particular work environment rewards and appreciates, and therefore they may respond to the assessment differently than they would if they were guaranteed confidentiality.

Q: How do you treat the Strong themes when scores are within a point or two of each other and clients say they are not interested in the top occupations triggered by the theme?

I rely on the Occupational Scales (OSs), not the General Occupational Themes (GOTs), to identify occupational interests. The GOTs are shorter, more general scales, and the items are highly transparent to the client in terms of what scales they belong to. If clients disagree with a GOT score, I need to question them about why they responded "like" to items relevant to that content area.

Scores within a few points of each other on the GOTs and on the OSs should not be treated as being meaningfully different; they are essentially scores at the same level of interest. When clients say they have no interest in their high-scoring interest areas, it presents an opportunity to investigate why those scores are so high. Often it is because, although clients do have interest in what the scale is measuring, they misinterpreted what that scale measures and what a high score means.

For example, clients may score high on the OSs of Photographer and Architect but tell you they have no interest in either occupation. The scales are actually measuring the degree to which the clients share likes and dislikes in common with people working as photographers and architects. Some questions you could ask include: Do they have family or friends in these occupations? Have they thought of jobs that would put them in work environments with these people? If they answer yes to these questions, they are likely to discover how much they have in common and develop rapport as colleagues/clients/managers of these individuals. To extract the underlying interests, it is important to look at the GOTs and common work factors that describe typical individuals and work environments in these occupations—in this case, for example, there is a strong Artistic theme and a technical commonality.

Q: Where can I find research material on the "Theory of Work Adjustment"?

The Theory of Work Adjustment is a classic career theory. Here is a resource that provides thorough detail:

> Dawes, R. V., & Lofquist, L. H. (1984).
> *A psychological theory of work adjustment.*
> Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

This theory has had significant research attention over the past 40 years. Current versions of it are referred to as person–environment fit theories. In fact, Holland's theory is derived from some of the basic components of this theory.

Q: How can I use the MBTI and Strong assessments with executives who are relatively advanced in their job, risk averse, and working for a smaller company?

First, look for ways to redefine the job inside the company so that the tasks and colleagues are a better fit. If there is little leeway to change the current job, given the small size of the company, then I would encourage clients to draw on their Strong and MBTI results to develop questions for informational interviews with people in other organizations. The focus would be on helping clients build their confidence by taking small risks a step at a time, moving in the direction of leaving the company for one that better fits their needs.

Q: Regarding the Strong instrument, what is the size of the normative sample, and what does "successful" mean?

The normative sample for the Strong assessment consists of 2,250 individuals (an equal number of women and men) from the U.S. workforce. Individuals in the sample were selected as representative of the workforce by age (not newly entered into the job market and not about to retire), satisfied with their work, doing their work in a typical way, and intending to stay in that line of work for the foreseeable future.

Q: What do you do if the Strong results don't give any clear direction and clients aren't sure what they are interested in?

When a client's results are so undifferentiated that no interests are apparent, I look to the Occupational Scales (OSs), where there is usually some differentiation even when the rest of the profile has none. My goal is to see which OS scores are the highest for that person, even if they are not high compared to the reference sample or the labels given to them.

I then work with the client to focus on those highest OS scores. Also, I try to understand why the Strong results have resulted in such a pattern, looking for factors such as very little work experience, possible depression, and the client's desire to appear interested in very little for some reason.

Sometimes I ask the client to retake the Strong assessment, this time making an effort to choose stronger like and dislike response options when he or she has a preference.