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Court of Public Opinion in and for the State of Uncertainty

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**COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION
IN AND FOR THE STATE OF UNCERTAINTY**

THE PEOPLE

V.

Docket No. 01

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ABSTRACT

Our session has two goals. First, we aim to stimulate debate over a ubiquitous, yet largely unchallenged, instrument that purports to operationalize Jungian personality theory (the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). Second, we suggest a platform for teaching management theories, the mock-trial, which manifests active learning as well as critical thinking and has been successfully utilized in other disciplines. With contributors playing key roles in the trial and volunteers from the audience serving as potential prosecution and defense witnesses as well as the jury, we hope the discourse on substantive theory and teaching process will provide the jolt OBTC 2008 envisions.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Session Concept & Content

Our session aims to jolt participants in terms of substance as well as process—to invite them to rethink the merits of a ubiquitous, and largely unchallenged, instrument that operationalizes a well known personality theory while prompting them to consider a new platform for teaching theory in the classroom. We intend to place Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs on “trial” or, to be more precise, their brainchild, The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), before a “jury” of their OBTS peers.

The Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, theorized that human behavior is classifiable and predictable. He contended that mental functions relating to information acquisition and decision making are central to one’s personality and, in turn, that personality caused differences in an individual’s behavior (Wheeler, Hunton & Bryant, 2004; Coe, 1992). Jungian theory analyzes the whole person and views each individual as having a composite of six traits (two bipolar pairs of mental functions, sensing/intuition and thinking/feeling, as well as a bipolar attitude toward extraversion/introversion). Jung believed that people are predisposed to one of the traits in each bipolar pair and that the preferences interact to define a person’s characteristics (Wheeler, et. al., 2004). Inspired by Jung’s work, and fueled by their belief that the atrocities of World War II were caused by humanity’s failure to

understand individual differences, Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs developed an instrument to measure Jung's theory of personality types. They added a fourth bipolar attitude dimension, judging/perceiving (Coe, 1992) to those developed by Jung. Since its publication in 1962, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has grown to become the world's "most widely used non-clinical measure of personality" (Bayne, 2003:259) with over three million people completing the instrument annually (Michael, 2003; Welcome to the MBTI Type Today, 2007). The questionnaire is arranged in a forced-choice format that classifies people by first identifying each person's four preferences (i.e. extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling and judging/perceiving) that are then combined into a personality through a four-way interaction (Wheeler, et. al. 2003; Bayne, 1995). The MBTI is used—misused, some would contend—for myriad organizational purposes such as identifying leadership styles and development, training employees to work cooperatively, enhancing problem-solving capabilities, enhancing hiring decisions, resolving workplace conflicts, team building and career counseling (Coe, 1992; Michael, 2003; Sample, 2004).

Popularity and utility notwithstanding, the MBTI is flawed in several material respects. Criterion and construct validity are debatable (Gardner & Martinko, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1989). Myers and Briggs operationalized Jung's theory by adding a dimension he never envisioned and presented the notion of personality types in nonjudgmental terms (Myers, 1998)—a view at

odds with Jung's belief that overuse of a particular personality type could result in neurosis (Michael, 2003). Evidence of the instrument's reliability can be characterized as mixed at best with as many empirical studies undercutting the MBTI as are those supporting it (Gardner & Martinko, 1996). In addition, the MBTI gives no indication of an individual's values, is insensitive to pathology (i.e., sane and insane people can have the same psychological type), fails to measure how well the types operate and omits consideration, much less measurement, of one's shadow functions (Coe, 1992). Lastly, the allure of the MBTI renders the instrument prone to misuse as when it is used to stereotype individuals for purposes of selection, promotion or transfer (Sample, 2004).

Design for Actively Engaging Participants

Our session will showcase the strengths and weaknesses of MBTI through an examination and cross-examination of an expert witness (and those members of the audience who volunteer to serve as witnesses in a mock-trial setting). The contributors to this session will jumpstart the process by playing four key roles: the presiding judge, counsel for the defense (who will elicit supportive testimony through open-ended questions), an expert witness (who will provide the testimony) and a prosecutor (who will seek to expose flaws in the MBTI and its uses through leading questions). After each counsel has had the opportunity to question the expert, each will offer a brief closing statement to the jury. We will solicit volunteers from the

audience who wish to testify for the defense or prosecution (based on questions they script and would be prepared to answer) as well as those willing to serve in a six-person jury. The jury will deliberate the merits of the MBTI in a fishbowl format (i.e., participants and other members of the audience will observe and listen in on deliberations). After the jury completes a secret ballot, the verdict will be announced. Thereafter, everyone will be invited to engage in a relatively unstructured debriefing session to discuss the trial process, the substantive arguments and the utility of the mock-trial format in the classroom.

Contribution to Teaching

We believe that the mock-trial approach provides a platform for active learning built on a foundation of critical management education. Although our session will be shepherded by professors, most of whom have decades of research and teaching experience, we showcase the mock-trial for the utility it provides for students to role play as they wrestle with abstract theory in the classroom. Active learning is instructional activity that involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing (Sarason & Banbury, 2004). “Active learning emphasizes the application of theory and concepts by involving students in the learning process through the use of ‘problem-solving exercises, informal small groups, simulations, case studies, role playing, and other activities. [Citations omitted.] Through this application, students are able to gain both a comprehensive understanding of

course material and the skills they need to excel within dynamic business environments” (Auster & Wylie, 2006:334-335). In addition to being a more hands-on, interactive method of instruction, the active-learning manifested in the mock-trial would allow students to address theory from the perspective of critical management education (Reynolds & Vince, 2004) while developing their communication skills.

Relevance to the Conference Focus on Innovation

Our session will break ground in management education while, we hope, draw on the success the mock-trial has enjoyed in other disciplines. A keyword search of the term “mock w/3 trial” in the text of articles comprising two leading management education journals, the Journal of Management Education and the Academy of Management Learning & Education, yielded no hits. The mock trial has, however, produced stellar results in other disciplines: teaching liberal arts students about the Greek influence on Western civilization (Silvermintz, 2007), teaching nursing students about malpractice (Haidinyak, 2006), teaching ecology students about invasive species such as the Zebra Mussel (Beck & Czerniak, C. 2005) and teaching psychology students about euthanasia (Werth, Harvey & McNamara, 2002).

Proposed Session Length & Logistics

We propose that ninety (90) minutes be allocated for the session. In broad strokes, we anticipate that the trial will occupy forty-five (45) minutes, that jury deliberations will take up twenty (20) minutes and that debriefing

will last for twenty-five (25) minutes. A room capable of accommodating at least thirty people is preferred. No special furniture or equipment is required. Contributors will bring all necessary props.

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