The concept of personality has for a long time attracted the interests of psychologists. As a result there are numerous theoretical approaches to the measurement of personality. This report will present two of these approaches and further discuss, compare, and contrast a personality measure of each approach. The personality approaches and measures under focus are the well known trait model, Big Five and its widely used measure, the Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory Revised (NEO-PI-R) (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and the also commonly applied, but at the same time often criticized, Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers, 1962), which is based on Carl Jung’s type theory (1921, as cited in Jung, 1971). In this paper, a brief description of the personality concept and the usefulness of personality measures are initially presented. Following this, a general discussion of the Big Five model and the MBTI will be presented. In the following sections, the NEO-PI-R and MBTI measures are described in more detail, concluding with a comparison between these two measures.

**Personality and the usefulness of personality measures**

According to Funder (2007), “Personality refers to an individual’s characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour, together with the psychological mechanisms, hidden or not, behind those patterns” (p. 5). There are many reasons why psychologists are interested in developing measures that classify individual’s personalities. For example, to help psychologists better understand and help their clients (Funder, 2007), assist human resource managers in making successful hires (Hossam, 2007), helping individuals to choose suitable occupations (Sharf, 2006), and assist the military in recruiting and placement (Funder, 2007). There are several
different approaches to the study of personality, such as the psychoanalytical and biological approaches (Funder, 2007), however, this paper will focus on the trait and type approach.

**Big Five model**

According to trait theories, traits define the nature of personality as well as determine the actual operation of personality (Carducci, 1998). According to Westen, Burton, and Kowalski (2006) traits “are emotional, cognitive and behavioural tendencies that constitute underlying personality dimensions on which individuals vary” (p. 421). Even though thousands of traits have been identified, Costa and McCrae suggested that five traits are central to personality: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. This led to the development of the Big Five model (McAdams, 2006). The selection of these five traits was based on studies (e.g., Fiske 1949, cited in Funder, 2007) that demonstrated that the five traits were the most useful and recurrent when rating personality.

One strength of the Big Five is that the model has shown cross-cultural consistency in studies in which measures based on the model, such as the NEO-PI-R, have been developed within one culture and validated in other cultures. In addition, research has generally supported the stability of the Big Five (De Raad & Perugini, 2002). One major criticism of the model, however, is that it does not provide any theoretical explanations for personality development; rather it is more of a description of personality traits possessed by individuals (Carducci, 1998). The NEO-PI-R is the measure that is most often used to measure personality according to the Big Five (De Raad & Perugini, 2002).

**Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: The theory**

In contrast to the Big Five, which focuses on personality traits, the Myers-Briggs Type Theory focuses on types, which are “a difference in kind” (Bayne, 1997, p. 12). Rather than focusing on traits directly, this approach focuses on the patterns of traits that characterize whole persons. By doing so MBTI acknowledges both qualitative and quantitative individual differences rather than focusing only on quantitative differences (Funder, 2007). The concept of “type” originated from Jung’s theory of psychological types, but was further developed in the early 1940s by Briggs and Myers (Quenk, 2000). The main focus of the MBTI is to measure individuals on four dimensions consisting of opposite pairs; Extraversion-Introversion (E-I), Sensation-
Intuition (S-N), Thinking-Feeling (T-F), and Judgment-Perception (J-P), resulting in 16 possible psychological types (Carducci, 1998).

Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory Revised (NEO-PI-R)

Although numerous instruments have been developed to assess the Big Five traits, the NEO-PI-R, is the most commonly used. The NEO-PI-R is a revised version of the Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), which was developed to measure three out of the five personality traits (De Raad & Perugini, 2002). The NEO-PI-R comprises 240 items and was primarily developed through factor analytical methods. Subscales for each of the Big Five traits have been designed to measure six subtraits, which the measure developers named facets (De Raad & Perugini, 2002). The NEO-PI-R contains both a self-report questionnaire (S form) as well as an observer rating form (R form) for peers to complete, allowing for the collection of dyadic data (McAdams, 2006). High agreement between the two forms have been demonstrated in previous research (McCrae & Costa, 1990, as cited in McAdams, 2006).

The reliability and validity of the NEO-PI-R is well established. In terms of reliability, research produced internal consistency coefficients that ranged from .86 to .93 and from .56 to .87 for the facets. Two-year test-retest reliabilities ranged from .83 to .91 for domains and from .64 to .86 for facets (McCrae, Yik, Trapnell, Bond, & Paulhus, 1998, as cited in De Raad & Perugini, 2002, p. 62). According to Costa and McCrae (1992, as cited in De Raad & Perugini, 2002), the validity is also a strength of the NEO-PI-R as the measure has been used in over a thousand published studies and has demonstrated longitudinal stability and consensual validation. The NEO-PI-R has been translated into most western languages, as well as Arabic, Persian, Thai, Malay, Filipino, Shona, Xhosa, Sothern Sotho, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Marathi, Telegu, and Korean. The generalisability of the measure has been demonstrated across cultures (McCrae, 2001, as cited in De Raad & Perugini, 2002).

The application of the NEO-PI-R is quite flexible as it can be used in both community and clinical populations (De Raad & Perugini, 2002), as well as in industrial/organizational psychology (Costa, 1996). In addition the NEO-PI-R measure has been shown to be useful in research such as trying to identify personality profiles of drug abusers and to develop drug treatment programs based on these profiles (Brooner, Schmidt, & Herbst, 1994, as cited in Carducci, 1998).
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): The measure

The MBTI is a self-report inventory designed to identify an individual’s location on the four personality-type dimensions, and originated from Jung’s typological theories (Carducci, 1998). The MBTI assesses four unique dimensions: Extraversion-Introversion (E-I), Sensation-Intuition (S-N), Thinking-Feeling (T-F), and Judgement-Perception (J-P) (Carducci, 1998). MBTI assumes that individuals prefer certain ways of behaving, which reflect the four dimensions. In this sense, the MBTI does not measure aptitudes of individuals as there is no right or wrong answer, but rather indicates for one preference over another in regards to the main behaviours (Quenk, 2000). The inventory is made up of 126 pair of items, which each contains two statements that reflect one of the four dimensions. An example question from the test is “I am someone who is generally able to express my feelings”. Respondents are then asked to indicate whether this statement is true or false. A true response would indicate that the individual prefers to behave in an extraverted way and a false response would indicate that the person prefers to behave in an introverted way. When scores for the different dimensions have been calculated, the individual can be classified into one out of 16 possible types (Carducci, 1998).

Although widely used, the MBTI has received substantial criticism. For example it has been noted that the measure and the results it provides can be quite unclear and confusing; in addition, it only provides vague type descriptions (Bayne, 1997). The reliability and validity of the measure has also been questioned. For example, Pittenger (1993) argued that the MBTI has a low reliability as people who have completed the inventory twice often get different types. Bayne (1997), on the other hand, argued that the MBTI is reliable with an average of over .80. Inconsistent evidence for the measure’s validity has also been provided: Pittenger (1993) suggested that although it has been widely used for a substantial period of time, its validity has only recently been demonstrated, whereas Quenk (2000) and Bayne (1997) argued that substantial evidence supports the validity of the MBTI. For example, Bayne (1997) argued that the MBTI is related to other personality measures, especially the Big Five. Despite its criticisms, the MBTI is still a commonly used instrument for assessing personality (Quenk, 2002).

The MBTI has been utilised in a number of diverse fields for many purposes, such as education, team development, and organizational behaviour, where it has been used to help individuals gain a better understanding of their personality traits.
understanding of themselves and to help promote team work (Wurster, 1993). In addition the MBTI has become popular with career counsellors as the classifying of an individual according to a typology can assist both the client and the counsellor to solve career issues (Sharf, 2006). There are some concerns regarding the cross-cultural application of the measure, however (Wurster, 1993), as the measure was originally developed for and has mostly been applied within western individualistic cultures (McCaulley & Moody, 2001, as cited in Sharf, 2006).

Conclusion

From the material presented, numerous similarities and differences can be noted between the NEO-PI-R and MBTI. A major distinction between the measures, is that the NEO-PI-R assesses personality traits and the MBTI assesses types. The NEO-PI-R assumes that there are five universal qualities, so called traits, and that individuals vary in the degree to which they possess those traits. As a result the NEO-PI-R is focused on measuring individual's amount of each trait. MBTI on the other hand rather focuses on different qualitative categories, so called types, where individuals prefer one category over the other and where MBTI classifies people in to one of these categories (Quenk, 2000). Some observed similarities, are that both measures are limited to simply describing personality and not actually explaining it, which has been criticized from different sources (Carducci, 1998). Also both inventories have showed to be useful in many and quite diverse areas (Costa, 1996; De Raad & Perugini, 2002; Wurster, 1993).

References


