

What Value Do Psychometrics Bring to Business Coaching?

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Psychometrics and their Relevance to Coaching

Coaching is the second fastest-growing business sector after IT, and its extraordinary pace of change is mirroring its bigger cousin.

Almost overnight we've seen the switch from anyone can to formal training being essential. And in the last year or two, coaching selection has been shaken up by the advent of structured assessment and development centres for coaches at Unilever and other leading companies.

One of the next big trends is psychometrics. Psychometric tools attempt to quantify the abilities, attitudes and personality traits of individuals. Today there are quite literally thousands of them.

With the flood of top-calibre people coming into business coaching, all looking to differentiate themselves, and with the the growing sophistication of clients and their increased expectations, psychometrics are an obvious contender to add value to coaching engagements.

At the simplest level, I believe psychometrics can strengthen the coaching process in two key areas:

First, psychometric tests can help the coach understand the client better up front. This means they can achieve better results by being able to work faster, and with fewer mis-steps. Although personality clues about the client are picked up along the way in any coaching relationship, psychometric tests can help short-circuit this process.

The second key benefit of psychometric assessments in coaching can be the single most powerful take-away for people who have never had coaching before.

This is when clients in coaching suddenly grasp that, while seemingly similar at the professional level, underneath other people can be quite profoundly different to themselves. Good psychometrics then take this further by giving them some insight into how these different other people tick. An increased ability to understand others, communicate, persuade, manage, lead, should follow. Ideally! This is where coaching comes in: the new information is often challenging for the individual to absorb. A coach can encourage them to take it on board, and find ways to test it out and apply it.

Choosing the Right Tools

So how does one choose from the plethora of tools on the market today? Some have a strong theoretical and scientific basis; others are worthless.

It's essential for a coach to use only soundly-based, valid tests. One market trend in the US that I haven't seen here yet, but will come, is diversity-based individual and class

action law suits against even very well-known tests, alleging bias against different sections of the population. So wacky little tests on the Internet are out, and reputable test publishers have invested heavily in demonstrating bias-free outcomes in their products.

In this light to safety+by far the most commonly used and well-known instrument is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

What are the MBTI's strengths and weaknesses in coaching?

Its strengths are well known. Its is readily understood. Once the client has had a *good* briefing from a qualified person (not just sat in a room while questionnaire results are handed out . failure to give individual feedback to check %Best Fit+is unethical), he or she seldom forgets it. It can be an anchor of insight as they navigate the choppy waters of organisational, career and life changes.

Less obviously, and unlike almost all other instruments or tests, the MBTI clearly describes what happens to each type under sustained stress, and gives specific guidance to coaches on how to get them out of it .

It is extremely useful when so many clients in this high-pressure world are at constant threat of stress, for coaches to have specific suggestions to offer, which they know are soundly based in research, and tailored to the individual's precise needs.

At a practical level, the MBTI offers the best applications for coaching of any tool, with excellent handout materials for clients and documentation for the coach such as the A4-sized booklet %Type and Coaching+which has two pages on how best to coach each preference, and %to the Grip+which details how each type is under stress, and how to coach them out of it.

Matching Coach and Client

Meyler Campbell research has found the MBTI offers pointers in *matching* the right coach and client.

In conducting recent experimental research with almost 120 standardised coaching sessions in eight different organisational contexts, and measuring the results, Meyler Campbell found that better outcomes were achieved between coaches and clients with *differences* on a particular combination of MBTI temperaments. Our hypothesis is this happened because the coach's personality difference causes them naturally to challenge or balance the client's preferences.

While this is just one piece of research and requires further replication, it's particularly interesting in showing how tools such as MBTI might provide useful guidance as to best practice in matching coach and client. (For details on this research, see The Coaching Psychologist [Paul please insert correct reference]).

Limitations of MBTI in coaching

It's important to remember, however, that no tool is perfect. Critics of the MBTI note the scientific consensus that there are five major personality scales making up the key components of individual difference, and the MBTI has only four. The missing scale measures emotional stability to neuroticism (and to psychoticism, and was deliberately left out.

This criticism is entirely valid, the fifth scale is indeed missing in the MBTI, and there are indeed clients where coaches think to ourselves, %s something else the problem here?!+

If, however, you do need to get to this kind of information, then there are ways of getting it through other tools, such as Hogan (see below.)

So MBTI is currently the entry point personality tool. What are coaches moving onto beyond that?

Going Interpersonal - FIRO-B

While MBTI is an *intrapersonal* tool . occurring within the individual - an important complementary tool is the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behaviouri (FIRO-B), an *interpersonal* tool that gathers critical information on an individual's interactions with others. While most coaches use MBTI, many are also now adding FIRO-B.

Developed by Will Schultz, FIRO-B determines an individual's needs for inclusion, control and affection, (I, C, and A) and splits the results into two categories: ~~expressed~~q behaviour - how much we express behaviour, or signal it to the outside world; and wanted behaviour . how much we actually want it for ourselves.

The key benefit of FIRO-B to coaching is that it helps you identify the interpersonal issues in a group of people very quickly. So if you are working with teams, it's invaluable to have the FIRO-B dataset on them. I have used the tool with large teams and the fault lines quite literally leap off the page.

Like MBTI, FIRO-B is also available to anyone who completes the training, which in the case of Firo-B is only a couple of days. The training also comes with good technical guides and support booklets, though not yet with specific support materials for coaches.

The Hogan Development Survey

Hogan Development Survey (HDS) is altogether more specialised.

Because of the issues it works with, it is only available to coaches with British Psychological Society (BPS) Level A and B qualifications, who have also done the specific Hogan accreditation.

There is a number of tools in the Hogan suite, but the interesting complement to the healthy intrapersonal and interpersonal tools described above, is the one that looks at the ~~dark sides~~q of our personalities.

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It is based on the premise that many characteristics which in their normal state are useful, can morph under certain circumstances into more extreme behaviour with a negative impact on performance and work relationships.

The HDS takes a number of categories from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM IV), the handbook used most often in describing mental disorders, and adapts them to the business world.

Each scale looks at qualities that are generally considered positive in business but can also turn negative. They are Enthusiastic/Volatile; Shrewd/Mistrustful; Careful/Cautious; Independent/Detached; Focused/Passive-Aggressive; Confident/Arrogant; Charming/Manipulative; Vivacious/Dramatic; Imaginative/Eccentric; Diligent/Perfectionist; and Dutiful/Dependent.

For anyone interested in strengthening their coaching with this more specialised area of psychological dysfunction in the workplace, Adrian Furnham's book, *The Incompetent Manager* is an excellent introduction, particularly Chapter 6 which gives more detail on the DSM categories, and how the Hogan categories relate to each of these, and also usefully sets out short lists of practical bullet points on how to handle each problem category in the workplace.

What Really Matters in my Career? - Schein Career Anchors

Surprisingly few coaches use the Schein Career Anchors: at our last Psychology for Coaches training course almost no-one had heard of it, yet it is a sound research-based tool which is cheap, and freely available. No prior training is needed to use it. It supports career coaching by asking the key question: When the chips are down, what really matters in your career? i.e., what is your **£Career Anchor?**

Career Anchors were developed by the famous Edgar Schein, based on longitudinal research with a select group of students from the Sloan School of Management, who were followed throughout their careers for more than 40 years.

Schein concluded that people are primarily motivated by one of eight **anchors** that define how they see themselves and their work.

Anchors vary from Technical/Functional Competence (where the content of the work is more important than the context); Autonomy/Independence (where an individual finds rules and procedures difficult) through to Entrepreneurial Creativity (where they like the challenge of taking on new projects); and Lifestyle (where the work life balance is of primary importance).

The results of the Schein Career Anchors can be another one of those **£Eureka** moments for the client - helping them clarify who they are and what they want out of their career.

It is freely available at around £6.50 from Amazon and every test is completely self-contained, with the questionnaire, self-scoring key, workbook to take clients through the

results either on their own or with the coach, and even script options for structured feedback sessions, all included in the pack.

A Look at Strengths

One emerging theme that should also be briefly mentioned is the benefits that can be achieved in coaching by discovering more about a client's *strengths*. Tools available include the VIA (Values in Action) Inventory of Strengths, which looks at 24 overall human strengths and virtues (See www.viastrengths.org), and can be taken free of charge on the Internet; a UK extension of this developed by Dr. Alex Linley at the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (CAPP) which looks at a uniquely British approach to strengths; and the Gallup StrengthsFinder® Instrument.

Most people in the workplace are long accustomed to assessment procedures and appraisals, even coaching, which focuses on their weaknesses. But as the new field of Positive Psychology points out, if someone is a minus 5 on a particular ability, investing effort to get them to a minus 3 is unlikely to help their or the organisation's output.

But the same effort invested in getting them from a plus 5 to a plus 8, might make quite a significant difference. For example, someone who was hired for their ability as a salesperson, and is currently quite good, will bring in significantly more sales if he or she moves from +5 to +8 . i.e. to excellent. The move from -5 to -3 on their paperwork will still however mean they're bad at paperwork; so it's perhaps better to get them a secretary!

But beyond a few obvious aspects, many people are not accustomed to thinking about their individual strengths. The strengths questionnaires help people articulate these.

As the strengths inventories are relatively new, they don't yet have the range of coaching-focused applications available on the open market, which some of the established tests have. But this field is moving very quickly, so coaching applications are likely to appear very soon.

Keep it in perspective!

Psychometrics can be valuable, and coaches are increasingly moving out from the obvious such as MBTI, to discover reputable tests covering other more specialised areas.

But it's important to keep their role in perspective. Psychometrics are simply an aide to coaching. They don't replace the basics of structuring sessions, setting objectives, listening, and quality questioning. It is also essential that the inward-looking tool of psychometrics be balanced by the input from the outside world gained from good 360 degree feedback, and briefing on the organisation's culture, structures and priorities.

But properly used, psychometrics and the ability they offer to know a little more about what makes an individual different, is becoming a key tool in a coach's toolkit and in taking business coaching to the next level.

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Key Learning Points

Psychometrics can help the coach understand the client better, and can help the client gain an insight into themselves and their relationships with others.

The traditional tool used in coaching, the MBTI, is increasingly being complemented by more specialised tools such as FIRO-B, Hogan and Schein. Chosen carefully and in conjunction with good coaching techniques, psychometrics are becoming a useful further tool for coaches.