



Developing leaders is something that needs care. Psychometrics can help – if you know what you’re measuring.



Mind your profile

“Organisations tend to recruit people for their technical skills, but fire them for their personalities,” says Raymond Walley, managing director of recruitment firm Success Dynamics. “Psychometric profiling can help those organisations identify the right personalities at the selection stage and avoid those costly and unfortunate errors.”

Walley has been using psychometric profiling since the 1980s. Over many years he developed a profiling tool called ‘Personality Survey’, which uses a questionnaire designed to elicit subjects’ subconscious knowledge of themselves.

From the questionnaire, Success Dynamics produces a report on character, management techniques, strengths and weaknesses, decision-making style and other features.

More accepting

Walley says companies have become much more accepting of psychometric profiling. In particular, he believes that companies are increasingly keen on using it to identify leaders. At a senior level, technical skills are often less important than personality, and so psychometric profiles can be invaluable.

But they are fraught with difficulty. There are many tools to choose from, and potential for significant problems if they are used incorrectly. So, any organisation that is determined to recruit the right leader should invest time in getting to grips with psychometrics.

Psychometric profiling or testing describes a wide range of activities. David Bevan, director of communications at IT recruitment firm InterQuest, says:



Lucy McGee,
OPP

“The questions are designed to provide information about predicted behaviour in different circumstances. This in turn reflects character and emotional standing. The findings can be used to indicate a person’s aptitude for certain activities, how they would react in a working environment, and whether they work better individually or within a team.”



Raymond
Walley,
Success
Dynamics

Gwyn Rogers, head of executive assessment at human capital management consultancy Penna, says psychometrics should be considered as risk analysis tools. “Organisations need to understand the underlying causes of behaviour of their leaders, especially when you consider that about 40-50% of senior management appointments fail and that the direct cost of replacing a senior person is up to six times their annual salary.”

Despite these potential benefits, psychometrics has a bad name in many quarters, primarily because there is no regulation of the market. As Caroline Beard, from business psychologists Xancam, says: “Anyone can devise their own test and stick it online for people to buy. It may sound obvious, but anyone getting into this area for the first time should always seek expert advice, whether from a qualified business psychologist or the British Psychological Society.”

Gold standard

Often, these tests are most effective when used in combination to highlight different aspects of an individual’s personality. Mike Guttridge, from Oakridge Training and Consulting, says: “The 16PF (16 Personality Factors model) is for many occupational psychologists the

gold standard, and I usually include it. Robert Hogan’s development survey, or Dark Side questionnaire, is good at identifying the traits, such as being narcissistic, sociopathic or manipulative, which most of us have and don’t even notice, but can get out of control under stress.”

Guttridge continues: “I also like to include an emotional intelligence questionnaire, preferably a 360-degree version such as the BarOn EQi. This measures overall EQ and 15 subscales, including resilience and self-assurance. Finally, The WAVE questionnaire has some interesting features in it. These measure talent, motivation gaps and also look at how a person fits into an environment and culture.”

As well as choosing the right tool, you need to use it properly. Ian Newcombe, head of assessment operations at human capital management consultancy Kenexa, says: “Your starting point must always be to work out what good leadership in your organisation looks like. Some qualities, such as extroversion and empathy, are relevant to all organisations, but each role requires specific qualities. If you don’t start out with a clear idea of what you’re looking for, you’re unlikely to find it.”

Also, you cannot just buy a psychometric tool and run it yourself. Lucy McGee, head of marketing at business psychologists OPP, says: “We don’t sell our tools to anyone who hasn’t been through the necessary training. They need this, not only to run the assessment properly, but to conduct the post-assessment discussions. Psychometric profiling should be the start of an in-depth conversation about a person’s character and how it fits a role. It is a highly sensitive issue and should be approached as such.”

The poor reputation that psychometric testing has stems partly from organisations choosing low quality tests, and partly from poor implementation.

by Alex Blyth

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