

Psychometrics is a load of old tosh

Some thoughts from Steve Mullins

Two thirds of my personnel money is wasted, the problem is I don't know which two thirds (misquote)

Psychometrics don't work

It's generally recognised that appointments based on psychometric results are right about 35% of the time.

You can get a more accurate result by flipping a coin – which is right about 50% of the time.

In an attempt to overcome this iniquity where two people in three are given the wrong job (and are therefore unproductive and miserable) we might take a broader view of people types.

Some points to consider

Modern psychometrics have (in the main) been developed in high powered aggressive organisations¹ peopled by high powered aggressive individuals

Only about 20% of the working population actually want to manage, or are suited to management

Most psychometrics go down to about three layers of detail to create spurious accuracy (65% error), but enrich practitioners on the way and so perpetuated

Visit the ancients and save money

As a start point, let's divide people into those who want to actively manage and those who don't². This gives us about 20% of the workforce to consider; the other 80% are content to be left alone, play politics or are just not suitable to be managers.

Specifically for those who want to be managers the ancients and the people in the Middle Ages (who had lots of time to observe and think), identified four distinct types of person³:

¹ Isobel Briggs-Myers father was a senator where MBTI was first worked out; Belbin at Henley Management College, new stuff from Yale & Harvard etc. etc.

² A perfectly capable individual I know has spent many years very happy in a mundane job; things were subsequently seriously spoilt by 'Job Enrichment'!

³ See also David Kiersey *Please Understand Me* ISBN 1-885705-02-6

- **The Melancholic** (David Kiersey's *Rational* – using MBTI the xNTx) – A planner, sees the big picture, strategist and challenger of the status quo, sees new possibilities
- **The Choleric** (*Guardian* xSxJ) – Sees and overcomes problems, lives in the here-and-now, enjoys commerce; also Belbin's *Shaper*
- **The Phlegmatic** (*Idealist* xNFx) – Looks for significance & meaning, good with admin and routine, competent and steady (a 'safe' pair of [unimaginative] hands)
- **The Sanguine** (*The Artisan* xSxP) – Good publicist, charming, colourful, creative, good on stage; an observer and reflector.

And this is all the personal information we need in order to appoint an effective manager or a team leader – assuming, of course, that the individual has the basic competencies and skills.

In placing people in a post, a good analogy to consider is a stream, because streams flow at different speeds with different volumes so we can play to strength and aptitude – not put people in carefully labelled boxes.

How to put the right Manager in place

For example, consider the structure of the Board of Directors of a classic UK company of **any** size, it works well when:

- The CEO is someone taking that organisation into new areas of business and where, for that organisation, there are no rules or precedents; this is the Melancholic/Rational going against the flow of the stream.
- The MD is in the stream, making things happen; not too concerned about what has happened, or what might be, but very concerned about targets and delivery – the Choleric/Guardian
- The Company Chairman who goes with the flow, ensuring compliance, that best practice has been observed and controlling the audit – the Phlegmatic/Idealist
- On the banks are the observers and pundits, remaining distant but believing (like the football spectator) that they have a better view and understanding of the game than the players themselves – the Sanguine/Artisan.

Getting the second tier right

At the functional level, the same logic may be applied:

- The Marketing & Sales Director, going against the stream, always striving for an edge over the competition seeking new, interesting and engaging ways to improve sales and margins
- The Operations Director, in the stream, looking for improvements to efficiency, quality and delivery – very much in the present
- The Company Secretary, going with the flow, to ensure compliance, legitimacy and full and fair reporting.

An appetite for growth? – Check Finance & Personnel

Two posts are very telling in organisational structure: the Finance Director and the Personnel Director.

If these two posts report to the CEO the company is likely to be progressive: looking for the resources (money and people) to diversify into new areas.

If their reporting is primarily to the MD, the order of the day is for more of the same, and lots of it.

If the principal reporting line for Finance and Personnel is to the Chairman or Company Secretariat the organisation may well be mired in the past, possibly with a blame culture

The Non-Executive Directors may be positioned similarly: Nominations – looking forward, Remuneration – in the today and Audit – looking at what might have been.

Case Study

This approach was used on an organisation with just four people, which had been trying very hard to gain new business but as a consequence had lost focus somewhat and ended up by trying to serve two markets

The consultancy requirement was to identify just where the organisation should focus its energy: the more challenging creative private sector or the more traditional public sector, which had been much of their 'bread-and-butter' work.

In considering the Directors as 'people in the stream' it became evident that most of their strength lay in the creative private sector, but that one of the people was more comfortable with routine and certainty.

This supported a business structure where the sales person assumed the role of the CEO, the designer took the role of the MD (pleased not to have to go out and sell) and the third person was glad to pick up the admin, control and reporting as if Company Secretary/Chairman

And the others?

What about the 60% who don't want to be managers, and the 20% who are at their happiest playing politics. These also fit into the stream [although they haven't been properly psychometrically studied] and can be described briefly below⁴

The non-managers:

- The **Godzwill** – in a boat, going with the flow
- The **Jobsworth** – clinging to the bank by the fingernails
- The **Ah-but** – would like to get involved but hasn't quite got the intertesticular fortitude to do so
- The **Peter** – who has been promoted to the point of inefficiency and wants to get out of the flow

And the politicians, striving to maintain status and the status quo (supply your own examples)

- The **Dammer** – holds on to information, thinking that knowledge is power
- The **Flooder** – so much comes out, often in random order, that you're not sure exactly what has been said or what will happen – usually very little
- The **Diverter** – creates 'news' or other diversions to hide rash or unpopular decisions
- The **Muddier** – stirs up lots of activity but achieves little that's positive – lots of heat, little light.

Comments appreciated as always

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⁴ A more comprehensive dissertation will follow