



Most readers will be familiar with the Big Five – those personality factors developed from years of research that cannot be ignored in any new personality assessment. But have you heard of the Great Eight? Helen Baron, an independent consultant and former researcher at SHL addressed our meeting earlier in the year.

We all know that personality is an indicator of job performance. Don't we? Perhaps that question mark might signal some trepidation on the part of the reader as to what is to come. Are we about to say that it is all a waste of time? Are we about to blow the gaff?

Relax. But every user of personality assessments needs to be reminded that personality traits do not tell the whole story.

Helen outlined the ingredients of what she called OJP – Overall Job Performance. She started by reminding us that the models of personality assessment were well developed – the Big Five in particular dating from research in the 50s and 60s. But what about actual job performance? In particular, what is the relationship between behaviour, performance, and outcome? How do the variables of the person and the organisation interact?

COMPETENCIES

She reminded us of Boyatzis' definition of competence – an underlying characteristic which may be a trait, a motive or a skill, and which resulted in superior performance. Woodruffe said a competency was a set of behaviour patterns necessary to perform a task with competence. He signalled the need to move away from simple traits and suggested that they are trainable rather than heritable. Bartram referred to sets of behaviours but added that a competency concentrates on what a person does, rather than what they are or possess. Competencies are linked to observable behaviour and provide a common language for discussing jobs. Several researchers have organised competencies into hierarchical models, the most recent being Dave Bartram who found 110 components in 20 dimensions in what has become known as the Great Eight

Bartram compiled these from data submitted by researchers around the world and from databases in other countries. These are: Leading and deciding; Supporting and cooperating; Interacting and presenting; Analysing and interpreting; Creating and conceptualising; Organising and executing; Adapting and coping; Enterprising and performing.

Space precludes a detailed analysis of these but an example is:

Leading & Deciding > Deciding & Initiating Action (Competency Dimension) > Making Decisions & Taking Responsibility (Components). Leading & Supervising are also Competency Dimensions of the same Great 8 Factor, and its Components are Providing Direction & Supervising and Monitoring Behaviour.

PERSONALITY AS A PREDICTOR OF JOB PERFORMANCE

Early findings showed that ability predicted overall job performance and personality less so. More recently, it has been found that Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Extraversion (3 of The Big Five) predict OJP. Other scales less so.

Our common sense says that personality ought to be a better predictor of job performance – for example, shouldn't Agreeableness predict customer service?

Helen thought that one problem was that of defining "overall job performance". She posed the question as to which personality factors might be predictors of such things as quality and quantity of work; sales performance; absence of errors; attendance; being pleasant to customers, and job knowledge. In one study, Conscientiousness predicted 'performance' with $r = 0.09$. It also predicted 'promotability' with $r = 0.20$. Furthermore, results were different for different job types such as police officer, programmer, clerk, and sales person.

Our current state of thinking does not explain these findings, many of which are not in line with 'common sense' perceptions. Psychologists 'know' that personality profiles can help to predict job performance; line managers 'know' that the way in which people approach jobs is critical to success. We need a new paradigm that can explain these contradictions.

Helen's conclusions were that in comparing the Big 5 studies with OJP the results were similar to other studies, although the correlations were smaller. The jobs in her study were at a higher level, mainly managers, and they were European rather than US jobs. Of the Great 8 correlations with OJP, Leading and Deciding were $r = 0.44$ and Organising and Executing were $r = 0.40$. Supporting and Cooperating only reached $r = 0.26$! Competency ratings were capturing aspects of OJP.

Helen's presentation was very detailed and meticulous and this brief summary cannot do full justice to her work. Those interested further, can contact Helen at helen@hbaron.co.uk.

IDLE THOUGHTS IN A BUSY WEEK

In the first of a two-part series, we focus on some aspects of the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

My name is David. I am a psychometric-holic. I admit it. Showing me a test is like giving a hypochondriac a stethoscope and a thermometer. Irresistible. There is no cure, I'm told. So I must know a lot about myself, then? No, not really. A man of hidden shallows? Somehow, however many tests I take, and however 'accurate' they may be, they're never quite enough. Know what I mean? The complete personality evades capture. Let's call it the Osama Bin Laden factor.

No doubt many readers feel the same. But as we complete these seemingly endless questionnaires, with their three-letter acronyms, how often do we give a thought to the origins of these tests, to the principles in which they are grounded, and the school of psychological thinking on which they might be based? We say, "Let's give her the MBTI[®] and 16PF[®] questionnaires." Well, one is based on Jungian typologies and the other is a trait-based test. Does it matter?

I decided to dig. And in the process of doing so, I discovered some interesting facts. Not just about psychometric tests, but about other aspects of psychology, some of which may be familiar to any reader who has ever taken a course in management studies, let alone psychology.

Let's start with our old friend Maslow – he of the hierarchy of needs, from basic physiological needs to what he called 'self-actualisation' – 'becoming what you are capable of becoming'.

We all know about these needs - perhaps the atmosphere of a chalk-laden classroom comes flooding back to you as you read this - but we may not know so much about Abraham Maslow, the 'little Jewish boy' who grew up in "a non-Jewish neighbourhood", as he described himself. Could it be, I wondered, his own needs that drove him to consider so deeply the needs of other human beings? It seemed possible, so I dug further and found that he admitted publicly to hating his mother (he did not even attend her funeral), and that his relationship with his father was based on fear.

He described his mother as a schizophrenic, a woman who mercilessly punished him, and who once killed two stray cats that he brought home by smashing their heads against a wall.

See what I mean? How would you feel if *your* mum had done that? Is it any wonder that he started to think about – wait for it – Love Actually - which was the third level in his hierarchy, (and no, I haven't seen the film.)

LOVE

Maslow thought there were two kinds of adult love: *Deficiency* or D-love and *Being* or B-love. The deficiency is love out of a need for something that we lack. This might be self-esteem, sex, or just someone to prevent us from feeling lonely. Marriage, living with another, or just going 'steady' with someone, might satisfy this need. He thought this was a selfish love because it was concerned with taking and not with giving.

B-love is different. This is based on valuing the other person *as a person*. Accordingly there is no pressure to try to change that person or to use him or her in any way. So you love the 'being' of the other person regardless of any imperfections. It's concerned primarily with fostering in the other person a feeling of being worthy, of self-acceptance, and generating a positive self-image. Sounds good, doesn't it? It can change your life.

Maslow had little time for the Freudian concept of love, which had its origins in suppressed sexual instincts. He believed that love involves a loving relationship that encompasses mutual respect, admiration, and trust. Being loved and accepted was one of the foundations of a healthy feeling of worth.

As a 16PF user and perhaps psychometric-holic like myself, you might be saying, "But how can we test these ideas? How can you really test self-actualisation? Surely a scientific concept should be capable of measurement?" Well, Eureka! I have found such a test.

It is called the *Personal Orientation Inventory*, and has enabled researchers to test Maslow's self-actualisation theory – and no, I haven't completed it, but I know it consists of 150 forced choice items, and that for each pair of items, respondents choose that which they feel is most descriptive of them. (Yes, you're right; shades of the DISC system?)

But back to Maslow's B-love. If *you* feel OK you are likely to believe that others are OK as well.

At this point in my digging, something clicked. Ideas rolled around in my head like loose cargo in a shipwreck. I'm OK, You're OK. That was a book by Eric Berne in the early 70s, all about Transactional Analysis (TA). But he wrote about TA in the early 60s. So what else was going on, perverting the course of psychology, in the early 60s? Very quickly, you come across Carl Rogers, who like Maslow, was reacting against the psychoanalytic and behaviourist schools of psychology. They'd had their day. Sort of. (I say sort of, because behaviourism lingers on, not least in the form of assertiveness training.)

THE HUMANISTIC MOVEMENT

Maslow and Rogers were the leading figures in a group of psychologists that became the American Association of Humanistic Psychology. The humanistic approach to the study of personality is essentially optimistic, emphasising the positive and fulfilling aspects of life. Humanistic psychologists are interested in the potential of the human being, in personal growth and satisfaction.

In the first years of the 20th century psychoanalysis was king. Behaviourism followed closely behind. These were thought to be the crucial techniques for studying and understanding human behaviour. Their influence has been immense, but they came to be modified or watered down as a result of research or with changes in society.

In the next issue we look at the influence of Carl Rogers.

David Roberts

MORE IDLE THOUGHTS

My newspaper carried many column inches about a man who had an argument with his fiancée and then an altercation with a pub landlord. Well, a bit more than an altercation. He broke his arm.

Nevertheless, it's probably a common feature of almost every city in the UK on a Friday or Saturday night. Some job or other has too much to drink and whammm!!!

But this wasn't some job or other. This was a professor of Imperial College, no less

One of the country's most eminent heart surgeons. Chairman and major-domo of all sorts of good committees and life-enhancing initiatives.

Of course, that was the only reason it was newsworthy. Fred Bloggs, and we'd never have heard about it.

It got me thinking about stereotypes. Saves me hours of tedious thinking. French, Americans, Germans, second homeowners; footballers...and of course professors. I like to think professors all the same. Absent-minded naturally, glasses, balding, slightly stooped, 60s clothes. When I hear of one that isn't, like the heart surgeon, I have to start thinking. Yes, stereotypes are useful in every circumstance except one. Selection. Only a highly structured approach to interviewing is likely to save you from falling back on your stereotypical judgements – and selecting a very round peg to fit into a very square hole.

It can also help to overcome the primacy effect - you know, the phenomenon that seems to prevent us from changing those first impressions even when we have some 'evidence' that we might have been wrong. We're still reluctant to dump that initial impression.

ID cards are again topical. Some things never change. The fear now is that if they come into being, all sorts of other things will be loaded on to them. It is claimed that they will help to identify benefit cheats, and illegal immigrants. Trouble is that some of those responsible for 9/11 had ID cards.

What has this to do with psychological testing? Just this: bar coding. Are you with me? Personnel managers and some psychologists could be out of work if plans for ID cards materialise. As well as all the usual information as per the European Union driving licence, we are to have our personality characteristics encapsulated as well. Perhaps you have read about it? No? I'm sure you will.

The idea will be that our primary characteristics (and second order factors I think) are to be barcoded on to the ID card.

Those in the selection and assessment business will be issued with barcode readers. So you will just present your ID card, it will then be swiped (you know what I mean!), and the results will be available on a VDU.

It'll go something like this:

"Sorry, the target post requires an introverted male, self reliant and fairly vigilant. We're also looking for C+ and E-. Also plenty of Q₁. And B+++ That's not you, is it sir?"

"Well, I don't know, I'm fairly self reliant and vigilant."

"Well I'm afraid the MD has specified F- as well. You see he wants someone with plenty of ideas and openness to change, but certainly not dominant and argumentative or a threat to his authority."

"I doubt there is such a person."

"Oh, there is, I assure you. The company's full of them. They're easy to spot with my barcode reader."

"But that means you're missing out on diversity. And what about some healthy contention? You're filling the company with clones."

"Exactly."

"Where did they get you from, then?"

"Tesco."

BACK PAGE WITH LUBBOCK

Bill reminisces about his misunderstandings. Let's give him a hearing...

At our last meeting we practised the skills of giving feed back on profiles. One of the component skills is listening, but for those of us who are older this sometimes presents a challenge. People articulate so carelessly these days that it's sometimes difficult for oldies to understand what they're saying. However, our interpretations of what they have said can sometimes enable us to see them in a new light. My wife tells me I'm going a bit deaf, but that's not the problem. I admit I wear headphones whilst watching TV but that's so I can ignore her running commentary on every single programme, which I find distracting. And when she starts a sentence in one room and continues it walking along the corridor and into another it's unreasonable to complain when I don't hear. I've a lot going on in my head all the time, and when she breaks into my train of thought, even at close quarters, I invariably miss the first sentence or so while I tune in. Suggestions that I need a hearing aid are quite uncalled for. What she needs is a bit more consideration and an elocution tutor.

But other people too have begun to slur their words, and occasionally mumble. What's going wrong with

them all, or is this just the latest fashion I haven't yet caught up with?

Of course I have my 'off moments' like most other people, but I compensate for these by using common sense. I knew after a few seconds that the announcement on TV about President Bush's pregnancy couldn't be right, and that they were probably talking about his presidency. And I worked out that an announcement about 'the loneliest monk' was referring to Thelonius Monk. But the other evening I slipped up. I was listening to a woman describing how she'd spent the weekend, arms aching, covered in soot, and with a blackened face, while she undertook a BLASPHEMY course! Good God, I thought, did Satan really make a personal appearance with fire and brimstone? On closely questioning her, whilst making the sign of the Cross behind my back, it turned out that she had been on a BLACKSMITHY course, and she just didn't speak clearly. She had wanted an iron centrepiece for her garden and had decided to make one.

Perhaps I should welcome the mumblers and just place my own interpretations on what I think they're saying in a counselling and 16PF feedback context. After all, I'm beginning to discover the world's a far more interesting place than it could possibly be if everyone spoke distinctly.

Bill Lubbock is with Lubbock Associates

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