



16PF User Group Newsletter

Dr Penny Moyle, Business Psychologist and Head of Research & Product Development at OPP[®], discusses her experience and involvement in the making of the Mentorn production, *'What am I Like? The Personality Test'*, screened on BBC1 in September 2004.

The Mentorn Idea

In April 2003, over a year before screening the programme, Mentorn, a television production company, approached OPP to help develop a programme idea based on personality. This followed an earlier successful programme, where they had used several tests to identify Britain's most identical twins.

They invited OPP to become involved in a consultancy capacity, advising on the psychological aspects of the show, and as members of the on-screen panel. The show's producers were particularly interested in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[®] (MBTI[®]) questionnaire and showed a keen commitment to learn more about it, to the extent that several members of their team attended MBTI training.

However, it was clear from the start that Mentorn were aiming this at a mass audience, on a prime time television slot, so we needed to ensure that the content was an introduction to personality, rather than an in-depth knowledge sharing of the MBTI types and facets. The key objectives were to raise awareness of the benefits that a deeper understanding of personality type can give you, whilst ensuring that the psychology was presented accurately and fairly. This needed to be done in a style and format that was entertaining, as well as informative.

Once Mentorn were happy with the concept, they approached BBC1 in the hope of securing a screening opportunity. The BBC were positive towards the idea, but had their own opinions of what would make good viewing. It was at this stage that the need for an interactive element came into the mix. The BBC was keen that the viewing public could connect to the programme in some way. They wanted it to be accessible through a variety of formats, including digital interactive TV and the BBCi website.

The Short Quiz

This request for an interactive format led to an increase of OPP's involvement. We suggested using a short quiz, so that the public could take part at home, which we subsequently devised, developed and validated.

We decided on a format where each question had four options, each answer dealing with one type dichotomy (E-I, S-N, T-F or J-P). In each case, answering A or B sorted the respondent towards I, S, T or J, and answering C or D sorted them towards E, N, F or P. This format brought a number of advantages: it would be easy to score the answers, it was clearly different from the MBTI questionnaire and, most importantly, it allowed for a level of sophistication in the questions. For example the four options in an S-N question might actually relate to Extraverted Sensing, Introverted Sensing, Extraverted Intuition and Introverted Intuition.

A large number of questions were written by our Research & Development team and then extensively reviewed by type experts, representatives of Mentorn and the BBC. We were keen that Mentorn reflected that the short quiz was just that, a taster of personality, and that is not, nor is intended to be, a substitute for the MBTI questionnaire. Ultimately, 42 questions were short listed for trialling and a trial questionnaire was administered to two groups:

- OPP community members and members of other type-aware groups were asked to complete the trial questionnaire, and also tell us their "best-fit" type, via an e-mailable form. We received 200 valid sets of data via this route.
- We were able to also analyse the results of a "type naïve" sample of 239 individuals gathered via Mentorn and the BBC, representative of applicants for the TV programme.

Data from the trials was analysed to ensure that the optimum set of five questions for each type dichotomy, twenty in total, were selected for the final questionnaire.

The 100 studio participants completed the full MBTI questionnaire and the short quiz. Amongst this group, the quiz matched all three or four letters of best-fit type 60% of the time, and the reported type from the MBTI, agreed on with all three or four letters of best-fit type 90% of the time. This was a good correlation, which would give the viewing audience an accurate taster of their own personality.

Development of the tasks

During a series of brainstorming meetings with Mentorn, we put forward suggestions of tasks and activities, which would demonstrate the different personality types. Mentorn were keen to make these tasks as interesting viewing as possible, so many ideas were suggested and built on. MBTI users will be familiar with the 'drawing a map' task, which explores the J-P and S-N preferences. The production team was particularly inspired by this exercise, and enthusiastically worked it up into the team driving activity, mixing the teams for enhanced incompatibility, and causing one team to get disastrously lost (but it made great viewing!).

We also needed tasks that would work both in a studio environment for a large number of participants, and for a smaller group on the weekend away. These two environments exposed their own challenges, and received refinements up until the last minute.

The Studio experience

The studio itself was very impressive, but working with over 100 members of the public and 18 Type practitioners in a contained space proved a challenge. Some of the tasks designed for the studio involved the participants giving their views and opinions. This included the 'picture test', which is generally 'foolproof' in the normal feedback environment. In this instance, other participants could often overhear each other, making it difficult to judge if we really got their personal thoughts. On reflection, further co-ordination with the set designer could have solved this issue, by using the sound proof booths! This in itself could have increased our prediction scores.

The level of interaction we were able to have with the participants also proved challenging. This was not the usual feedback situation, where the practitioner can ask probing questions of the participant. The psychologists were only allowed to observe the reactions, with no discussion or questioning. I was impressed by the BBC presenter Nick Knowles who was attuned to what we were trying to achieve, and asked educated questions to help the audience understand what we were doing.

We also needed to be mindful of the representation of the psychologists. We resisted a proposal for the panel members to wear white lab coats, as we felt it would trivialise the profession and inflate the attitude of psychologists as 'boffins'.

The tasks that were completed on the weekend away also proved insightful. We found that the participants were more relaxed than in the studio, and therefore more themselves.

Final Thoughts

Mentorn's confidence in getting the right equipment for the job was striking – there was no question in their mind that commandeering a local supermarket for the morning was achievable. They didn't fail to surprise us either, when instead of the hot air balloon we expected on the decision-making task, we arrived to a helicopter instead!

The participants also surprised us. The abject fear of flying for Laverne could not have been predicted, but was instrumental to the way her group handled the task. Felicity was overjoyed at predicting the fire alarm incident, which the rest of us were very proud of – it proved that looking into personality and using instruments like the MBTI questionnaire gives us a true insight into behaviour and thought process.

Overall, I felt that we were successful in our objectives – we walked the line between creating something that was entertaining to watch, but also demonstrated the credibility and practicality of psychology.

For more information visit the OPPcommunity at <http://community.opp.co.uk>



We are all familiar with the training courses that teach a particular skill. But what about courses that help you to find yourself? Our chairman, Belinda Smith and her colleague Chris Blakeley at Waverley Learning Ltd explained how they have been helping people of all ages in both their personal and professional capacities.

A few days at Waverley is an opportunity for reflection. Sounds dull? Navel gazing? Not a bit of it. And when did *you* last spend two or three days thinking about what you want to do, and your objectives in life?

Waverley Learning is based in the grounds of Waverley Abbey, Farnham, and was the first Cistercian monastery in the country. Their programme, set up about five years ago, is aimed primarily at organisations that wish to develop thoughtful employees who might become leaders – but who may need some guidance and encouragement if this is to become a reality. By encouraging reflection, they hope to turn raw experiences into a deeper wisdom, self-knowledge being of prime importance.

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recommended for the following types of organisational studies: (1) where participants' time is constrained such as when measures are completed during a test session or assessment centre, (2) pilot research to test hypotheses before investing financial resources in published instruments, (3) initial group or team profiling in relation to organisational culture, (4) large-scale organisational surveys, and (5) time-series research designs such as those that examine staff development over time. In summary, whenever the benefits of using a short measure are believed to outweigh the psychometric costs, then the use of the SIMP is recommended.

Stephen Woods, University of Surrey

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Dr. Ken Miller, 1946-2004

We regret to announce the death of Dr. Ken Miller, long-time member of the 16PF User Group and former Consulting Editor of this Newsletter. Ken had suffered ill health for some years and died on 13th October.

Ken was born in Geelong, Victoria, South East Australia. He trained initially as a teacher, and then studied psychology at Melbourne University, being a student on its first degree course in 1946. He came to Britain in 1950 and obtained his PhD from University College, London in 1954.

In 1968 Ken established the Independent Research Assessment Centre (IARC) and it was here that I first met him around 1973. He continued to run the IARC until 1990 by which time it had been taken over by Ashridge Management Centre.

After he retired from the IARC, Ken ran a consultancy with his wife, Barbara Tyler. He continued to attend 16PF User Group meetings. Although I have known Ken for around 30 years, I had no idea how varied his career in psychology had been. He returned to Australia almost yearly from 1975, and made scores of visits to the USA and Europe.

Neither did I realise how many "names" were familiar to me until I read a transcript of an interview he gave in 1996: Bernard Ungerson, Pat McDonnell, Mackenzie Davey, John Handyside, Gerry Randell, Edgar Anstey – they are all there together with many more that might be familiar to readers.

The transcript makes very interesting reading and a copy of it can be obtained by e-mailing Caro Leitzell at admin@leitzell.com

We extend our sincere condolences to Barbara and the rest of Ken's family.

By David Roberts

And finally...

We would like to wish all the members of the 16PF user group a very happy festive season. We look forward to seeing you again in the New Year.

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