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Upcoming Events

Tuesday 28th November
New Frontiers in Psychometrics
The annual event hosted by Dr. Hugh McCredie with
invited speakers talking about their work at the cutting
edge of psychometrics. This year Hugh will be talking
about connecting normal and dysfunctional personality
characteristics, Rainer Kurz talking about the interaction
between the person, their environment and how that
influences both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours,
Nigel Guenole talking about Team Personality and James
Bywater talking about what Situational Judgement Tests
can add when testing personality.

The New Frontiers event is followed by our Networking
Event with Mulled wine and mince pies plus the awards
to the winners of The Psychometrics Forum Excellence
Awards.

2018 events – Hold the dates
Thursday 8th March: Coaching and Neuroplasticity
and AGM
Thursday 17th May: Management of Change in Light
of Big Data
Tuesday 18th September: Leadership and Development
– The transition from middle to senior management
Wednesday 28th November: New Frontiers in
Psychometrics
Wednesday 28th November: Mulled Wine and Mince
Pies Networking following New Frontiers event
Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Psyche. In this edition we have reviews from our last two events as well as the latest installment in the series Pioneers and Landmarks in Intelligence Testing from Dr. Hugh McCredie (which appears here with kind permission of Assessment and Development Matters where a shorter version of this article appears). We have a few more tweaks to Psyche including publishing our dates for 2018 so you can get them into your diary with plenty of notice and a request for volunteers to take up committee tasks which are up for grabs.

Our event back in June saw 3 presenters and a panel discussion so a slightly different format from our usual events. Under discussion was the Test User-Occupational Personality training and we heard from Carl Francis, Tim Evans and Helen Baron, each taking a different perspective. Carl shared some of the history and aspirations behind the training, Tim talked about the method of delivery of the training and shared with us the results of some research looking at different delivery modes and Helen discussed the tensions that can arise when balancing ethics with practicality when using psychometrics.

Our September event continued the myth-busting theme into the realms of teams. We had two slightly different views on working with teams, Alan Robertson introduced us to his Voiceprint model, which although not strictly speaking a psychometric, had a rigour and utility about it that meant it was a very useful tool for bridging the gap between psychometrics and behaviour. The afternoon session saw a founder member of The Forum (when it was in it’s earlier incarnation as the 16PF User Group) speak to us under the fantastic title, Dark Matter in Organisations. Being married to a Nuclear Physicist I was delighted when Roy agreed to come and speak to us about Dark Matter! Roy explained how the usual approach to assessing teams falls short of explaining what really goes on between people in organisations and it is this relational lens which we need to consider in order to see the true value in an organisation.

With our New Frontiers event and mulled wine and mince pies networking event rapidly approaching (and perhaps passed as you read this), it’s left for me to say rather prematurely, enjoy the rest of 2017 and I look forward to seeing you at the events in 2018.

Kind regards,

Tameron
You may have noticed this year that the number of attendees at our events has been very variable and one event was loss-making for us. We are a not-for-profit organisation so any small profits we make from events are used to fund the rest of our activities such as hosting costs for our website and paying for the professional publishing services of Georgia Styring who supports me in creating Psyche.

We appreciate that different topics appeal to different people and many of our members have business commitments which mean that regular attendance at events is not always possible. The evaluation forms which we encourage you to complete at events has a space to suggest topics of interest and we have used these as well as the results of our survey earlier in the year to set the topics for 2018 so hopefully they will appeal to a wide range of you. We have also published the dates for the year (see contents section) so that you have more notice to plan around topics which may interest you. If you have any feedback or suggestions as to how we might better serve your needs and interests then we wholeheartedly welcome your views. Feel free to contact any committee member directly or our administrator Caro to pass on your suggestions. If you wanted to pass on your ideas or suggestions for improvement anonymously then you could write your comments and add them to our suggestions box which will be on the table with the badges at each event, or you could post them to Caro.

The committee volunteers all have ‘day jobs’ alongside their work for the Forum which means that after a ‘tour of duty’ some task needs to be passed over to others. An appeal then to our members for two opportunities to contribute to the Forum:

Blog Writers
Following Raj Chopra stepping down from writing and managing our blog we are hoping to try a new format where we have guest bloggers write on topics which are of interest to our readership. If you have an idea for a topic or even better, would like to volunteer to write a blog please get in touch directly with Lynne, Trish or Caro.

New Frontiers Annual Event Needs a New Coordinator
Hugh has decided that this year will be the last year in which he organises the New Frontiers event so we are looking for a volunteer to join us to allow Hugh to step back. This is our most popular event in the year and provides an amazing array of speakers on diverse topics. If you like the idea of coordinating a day of talks from speakers who are at the leading edge of our profession then get in touch with Hugh, Lynne or Trish. Hugh explains the purpose behind the event below to whet your appetite.

“I have been a member of TPF, and its predecessor the 16PF Users’ Group, since its start-up in the late 1980s. In its early years the user group focussed on exploring the constructs of 16PF and how these might combine to predict behaviour. The emergence of the consensus Big Five model of personality allowed us to relate to users of other personality psychometrics and explore a range of more focused measures addressing ‘hot’ topics such as leadership, coaching, emotional intelligence etc. Such topics proved appealing and now form the staple diet of TPF meetings. However, I saw a downside in that this was at the cost of neglecting the deep structure of psychometrics and offered to redress the imbalance via the New Frontiers seminars, reporting breakthroughs in the field.

I have hugely enjoyed chairing the 10 annual events for which I have been responsible but I am now well past pensionable age and my research focus in the last few years has been on the history of psychometrics. This will continue into the near future as long as editors will publish what I write. Pre-occupation with the past has meant that I have less time to spend at the frontier so I thought it was an appropriate time to pass on the torch.”

If you have any questions about the way we operate, what it’s like being on the committee, how we organise ourselves just come and ask one of the committee at any event or email us.

Kind regards,
Tameron
Pioneers and landmarks in intelligence testing:

4. Intelligence at war: Robert Yerkes and the US Army Alpha examination

DR HUGH MCCREDIE
TPF VICE CHAIR, INDEPENDENT CHARTERED PSYCHOLOGIST

On the 6th April 1917 the USA declared war on the German Empire and by mid-Summer of 1918 its armed forces arrived in large numbers on the Western Front. This action had a decisive effect on the outcome of the conflict and, simultaneously, a massive impact in the emergent field of intelligence testing. As we have seen, prior to 1917, Binet and Simon developed and standardised their measure on a mere 100+ subjects, whilst Terman and others tested 2000. All of these tests were administered individually. In contrast, those tested in the US Army prior to demobilisation approached two million and the principal psychometric was the group-administered Alpha examination.

Rising to the challenge
In 1917 the president of the American Psychological Association (APA) was Robert Yerkes (1876-1956). Influenced by the experience of the Canadian armed forces, the APA met on 21st April ‘for consideration of service in the war and appropriate action’ (Yerkes, 1921, p91). Shortly after, the recently formed National Research Council organised a committee comprised of the APA and others to study the application of psychological methods in the assessment of recruits. The committee convened at The Training School, Vineland NJ, as early as 28th May and remained in session until 9th June ‘when it adjourned for two weeks to make a trial of methods which had been devised’ (Yerkes, 1921, p9). From the start, the committee and its successor bodies seemed to have had in mind a suite of psychometrics comprising:

1. a measure of literacy
2. a group administered measure of general intelligence, which will be the focus of this article
3. an alternative group measure for those not literate in English
4. an individually administered intelligence measure to check very low scores from the group metric.

The preliminary trial
The preliminary version of the principal group measure (labelled Group examination $\alpha$) drew heavily on existing material. Of the 10 constituent tests, five were attributed to Arthur S. Otis whose ‘tests embodied certain ingenious devices which permitted responses to be given without writing, and made possible objectivity in scoring’ (Yerkes, 1921, p299).

(Adapted from Yerkes, 1921 pp124-8)

Each strictly-timed test consisted of 10 to 40 items, ranging from easy to difficult, for each of which there were several different forms to reduce coaching effects.

The materials were trialled first in an ad hoc variety of institutions and then, unofficially, at some army and navy stations. Yerkes (1921), who edited the detailed documentation of the entire project, commented on this stage:

The correlations...were high with outside measures of known value [0.73 to 0.87]; they were high enough with one another to indicate that all were reasonably good tests of general intelligence [avg. with total score 0.73]; at the same time the inter correlations of the tests were not high enough to suggest that the tests were only repetitive of one another. (p305).
Yerkes recorded (p20) that an order ‘requiring each company to report its best 50 men and its poorest 50; in most instances the individuals on these lists corresponded very closely with the highest and lowest of the psychological scores.’ Favourable reactions to the testing were received from 82 per cent of 250 line officers sampled (p22). This was despite the highly variable, and frequently unsatisfactory, conditions under which the tests were administered and the relatively low status (First Lieutenant) afforded to qualified psychologists supervising the administration.

**Extending the assessment programme**

Notwithstanding the impressive results from the trials, securing support for the full programme of testing with adequate staffing was not easily achieved. Yerkes recorded (pp46-7)

> It is noticeable that the higher ranking officers of long military service generally condemn the psychological test as unnecessary from the standpoint of an organization commander. This is due to:

(a) the fear of having a “hobby” saddled upon the Army.
(b) a lack of knowledge of the psychological examination and its uses.
(c) their ability from practice to judge their own men.

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**Table 1: Group examination α tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Example instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carrying out simple instructions</td>
<td>Make a cross in the largest square; Cross out the letter just before C and also draw a line under the second letter before H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Memory span</td>
<td>Recall from three digits up to nine digits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disarranged sentences</td>
<td>‘Morning the rises every sun’ If what it would say is true, draw a line under the word ‘true’; if what it would say is false, draw a line under the word ‘false’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arithmetical problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>People hear with the: eyes/ears/nose/mouth. The correct word is ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Synonym-antonym</td>
<td>If the two words of a pair mean the same or nearly the same, draw a line under same. If they mean the opposite, or nearly the opposite, draw a line under opposite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Practical judgment</td>
<td>Why do we use stoves? Because: [ ] they look well [ ] they are black [x] they keep us warm [ ] they are made of iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Number series completion</td>
<td>Look at the first sample 2, 4, 6, 8, 10. Each number is formed by adding 2 to the number before it, so the number after 10, on the dotted line, must be 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Analogies</td>
<td>Sky-blue: grass- grow/green/cut/dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Number comparison</td>
<td>Draw a line under the largest number and also under the smallest number in every column on the page</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Yerkes, 1921 pp124–8)
The sheer volume of those who completed the examination, its use of a group format enabling the testing of 400+ respondents by a single tester in a single day and the practical validity of it results set cognitive psychometrics on a new trajectory.

Reference
In June the Forum ran its second event of 2017 on the theme of psychological myth busting, this time looking at aspiration versus reality in testing in occupational personality. The topic was explored from the perspective of test standards, training provision and ethical issues.

**Carl Francis, Head of UK Operations, Psytech International**

Carl Francis, Head of UK Operations, Psytech International, was our first speaker, addressing the topic under the heading: ‘The Road to Competence? Reflections of a Training Provider’. He began by posing the question: ‘Should non-psychologists have access to psychometric assessments? Have we given away the family jewels?’. He took the view that it is good to have a range of people involved as long as they are properly trained; the nature and standard of the training provided the substance of his talk.

As a framework, Carl took the perspectives of the professional bodies who set the standards; the training providers; the test publishers; the test users; and last but by no means least, the test takers.

He began by covering the history of test user training in the UK, which prior to the 1980s was fairly piecemeal. In the late 1980s The Occupational Standards Project was established, led by Professor Dave Bartram, and in 1991 the British Psychological Society (BPS) launched Level A (Ability) and Level B (Personality), the first qualifications in psychological testing. About 6 years ago the first training courses were verified to the new European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA) standards. Now the International Test Commission and the EFPA are discussing global standards, which vary significantly from country to country.

Central to the BPS’s qualification scheme is the goal of improving standards in test use. This means providing clarity in the knowledge and skills needed for competent test use, to prevent the misuse of tests due to lack of understanding. Nationally recognised qualifications provide evidence which is transferable between training providers and between publishers and suppliers of test materials. The Register of Qualifications in Test Use (RQTU), with approximately 2,000 people registered, is the official record of all test users who have been awarded qualifications in occupational testing by the BPS.

Using Psytech as an example, Carl explored the stance training providers take in recognition of qualifications. At Psytech there is universal acceptance of the Occupational Test User Certificates, and RQTU membership qualifies an individual for registration with Psytech as a competent test user. Psytech also accepts equivalent qualifications from other countries. Alternatively, people can attend one of Psytech’s training options.

Carl reflected on whether the syllabus is getting it right. On the whole he thought it was, although he felt some of the content was somewhat arcane, and he questioned whether it went far enough. He felt training focused heavily on the use of assessments for selection, and further training in implementation skills would be helpful. He also remarked that the syllabus leads to a perception that the Test User Personality results are measured qualities rather than self-report opinion: that is, hard data rather than soft data.

There is an increasing challenge in convincing test users to train. There is a number of reasons for this, including open
access to certain tests, and open access to all tests in certain countries, and a perception that the computer does everything, so why bother to train? This makes test training an increasingly hard sell. There is less willingness amongst test publishers to support standards, and indeed certain publishers are trying to move towards not needing training at all. However, others see it as being in their commercial interests to train in each assessment. The Test Users’ Handbook states that the BPS cannot insist that publishers and suppliers of test materials be bound by the BPS standards; it can only encourage them to accept the appropriate qualifications as a basis for access to test materials.

The original intention behind the training course was to provide a course which would develop user competence in the use of psychometrics in general. Commonly now though the training is centred around competence in one specific tool and Carl suggested that this was not necessarily going to provide a broad base understanding of psychometrics. He suggested that training across a number of tests would be more instructive and equip candidates to make better judgements in the use of psychometrics in general. He also suggested that the awarding of a certificate at the end of the few days should be viewed as a beginning to any person’s training in psychometrics rather than the end of their search for competence. He also emphasised that one of the dangers in training in just one test is that the temptation is to then use it in all situations, without understanding or appreciating the full range of tests available or which is most appropriate for different contexts. He suggested that perhaps a postgraduate course covering the broader use of tests which also provided training across a number of instruments might address this. But what is the ideal length of a course? Carl said that Psytech provides a 5 day course because of commercial pressures, but that this is probably not long enough.

This was an excellent talk. Carl clearly highlighted the difficulties for test providers in trying to maintain high standards in the face of commercial pressures, including publishers who give access to tests with minimal or no training. Underlying this is the issue of trust, which Carl eluded to several times. The qualification process must be robust enough to be trustworthy, otherwise people will stop using it.

**Tim Evans, Director of Psysoft Ltd.**

Having discussed the framework for training in test competence, we moved on to the second session of the morning, which addressed the topic of test training provision. The presenter was Tim Evans, Director of Psysoft Limited. Tim founded Psysoft in 2009, which offers training in BPS Test User: Occupational, Ability and Personality alongside a range of other services. The title for Tim’s talk was: ‘Using Technology in Test User Training: developing both rigour and pragmatism’.

Tim explained that the overall purpose of test user training is to provide competence in psychometric testing. The BPS defines the assessment guidelines and leaves it up to the training providers to develop their own training methods to teach and share knowledge, and develop practical experience. Although the training materials are verified by the BPS, its focus is on the outcome of the process.

Like Carl, Tim referred to the commercial pressures to reduce the length of training, though he said that using technology can shorten it. He posed the following questions: ‘Is the use of technology just replicating the classroom experience or does it add value? What are the advantages and disadvantages? How do we know that we are measuring BPS competencies accurately? Do people learn as effectively by technological methods, and to what extent does this depend on their individual differences?’

Tim explored the pros and cons of different methods of training, evaluating classroom, webinars, self-study, e-learning and web chat, from the view point of collaboration, support, costs to both student and trainer and measurement of learning outcomes. Key factors in training, for example, might be the accessibility of training, cost, how much support the delegate might receive if they have questions, and how learning outcomes are measured.

In Tim’s experience, webinars work quite well. On one occasion, he has trained 16
people from 5 different countries using this method. It is of course dependent on how good the technology is at the trainee’s end. Webchat has the value of being able to ask questions but not in front of the rest of class! E-learning has the advantage that the session can be replayed as many times as is needed, with pop-up boxes to check understanding.

But how do you measure which methods are the most effective? This is the most important factor as the delegate is signed-off as a competent person. Tim presented an example of an end-of-course test for training in EQ-I certification in which there were 60 questions to answer, and a score of 70% needed to achieve a pass. The results from classroom and distance learning were compared, with the classroom average (N=133) being 89.6%, and the distance learning (N=58) being 90%. As there is no significant difference Tim suggested that we can feel confident in both methods of delivery.

Tim talked through examples of how e-learning and webinars are presented, indicating the amount of thought that needs to go into the presentation of each training method, particularly around the precision of the language used. He also referred to a study he conducted with Tony Walsh, which was presented at the BPS DOP conference in 2008. The study looked at the extent to which individual differences impacted on mode of learning. They used a representative sample of 80 SHL Level B intermediate training course delegates who completed the OPQ32i during the course. They then completed a post-course self report questionnaire designed to gather opinions about their previous experience of e-learning, and the perceived appeal of key factors of e-learning, such as:

- Self-scheduled learning times.
- Immediate feedback on learning progress.
- Self-determined learning pace.
- Learning without others present.
- Ability to monitor and review own progress/work.
- Self determined learning location.
- Learning without needing an instructor present.
- Learning autonomously.

The results indicated that, for example, self-determined learning pace correlated with a relaxed style, learning without others present correlated positively with persuasiveness, but negatively with affiliative, and ability to monitor own progress correlated positively with conceptual and negatively with outgoing.

In a second study conducted in 2009 and presented at the BPS DOP conference that same year, Tim, Rachel Herbert and Samantha Tomkinson researched the different learning methods of 2 groups on SHL’s Intermediate Level B training course. 87 took the blended course (delivery via traditional classroom methods and technology), and 198 the traditional course. All completed the OPQ 32i during the course, and they all completed the post-course questionnaire. Those who had learned via the blended method answered more questions successfully than those who learned via traditional methods. However, there were no significant personality differences between the 2 groups, and there were no personality differences associated with course test success.

In conclusion, Tim emphasised the importance of properly trained test users, that different training methods presented some advantages and some disadvantages, suggested that a combination of classroom teaching and technological methods is effective, and that there is some evidence for personality characteristics affecting preferences for e-learning, but not actual learning outcomes.

This was another high quality talk, in which Tim showed not only the importance of the content of psychometric training courses, but also the importance of how training is delivered and evaluated. He presented solid evidence showing how technology has increased options around delivery without compromising quality, and indeed there is some indication that a blended approach to delivery can enhance successful course completion.

Helen Baron, Independent Consultant
After The Naval Club’s excellent lunch, we regrouped for the afternoon session on the theme: ‘Ethical Issues in Questionnaire
Use in Occupational Contexts’. This session was presented by Helen Baron, who said that she has been described as a ‘personable techy’, and she certainly came across as someone who has a deep understanding of psychometrics, but also made them very accessible.

Helen is an independent consultant with over 30 years’ experience in the design and implementation of effective selection and assessment systems. She has a particular interest in equal opportunities policy and the promotion of fairness in selection and other areas.

Helen began the session by explaining that there are lots of ways to talk about ethics in psychometric testing, from the initial ‘Is it appropriate to test in this situation? If yes, what tests should I use?’ to deeper questions regarding unfairness and bias. She outlined some ethical principles, such as respect for an individual’s rights and dignity; professional competence; responsibility; equity; and integrity. These principles might apply in a number of settings.

More specifically, in occupational testing a number of conflicts might typically emerge. There might be tension between the standards the professional wants to apply and what the organisation is prepared to accept. Some of this might be around quality versus costs.

Another area of potential conflict is the proper use of test information, and also who the client actually is: the person being tested, the person commissioning the test, or the person who eventually receives the report. This forms part of the negotiations around the contract, and if is not established clearly at an early stage, can cause problems later.

Helen then turned to take a deeper look at the ethical principles she outlined at the beginning of her talk, taking each principle and exploring what it meant in the area of occupational testing. Starting with respect for a person’s rights and dignity, Helen emphasised the importance of the client taking an active part in the process, so they are free to give informed consent (or not), that they are aware of the risks and benefits of testing, and they will be given feedback on the results. Treating the client with courtesy was also important, and providing a friendly environment at, for example, assessment centres. Helen emphasised the importance of preserving the client’s dignity, by, for example, ensuring that they had the opportunity to ask questions. The client also needs to be aware of their right to see the information, how securely it is stored, who sees it, and how it will be used.

Moving on to competence, Helen discussed the importance of working within one’s area of competence and not beyond it, and also being aware of the limits of the assessments being used, thus avoiding issues such over-interpretation of results, or using a questionnaire in an area where validation has not been established. Working to current standards of practice was another area of competence, where CPD and supervision could address issues such as developing bad habits, using outdated assessments, and resolving ethical dilemmas.

Next Helen discussed responsibility, which included ensuring a high standard of service (this might mean referring a client to another professional if the issue is beyond one’s professional competence), and being transparent about any conflicts of interest (such as being paid by a test publisher for using a specific test).

Equity was next on the agenda. Distributive justice was discussed: were the outcomes of tests fair (did the best person get the job?); was the process transparent, and everyone treated in the same way? Was attention paid to removing biases, such as adverse impact? Procedural justice is very important in the use of questionnaires, with potential overweighting of a single instrument, not accommodating people with disabilities, or with a different first language.

Finally Helen addressed issues around integrity. All that she had covered during the talk was part of integrity, including what you might do when you see bad practice. If you don’t address it, then you could be colluding with the behaviour.

Helen’s session on ethics was another first-rate presentation, addressing areas that are discussed during training in test use, but not much thereafter – in fact probably
not nearly enough. For the final part of the afternoon, we spent some time with the 3 presenters discussing ethical dilemmas, including how to interpret results when the client’s first language was not English, mapping personality assessments on to competency frameworks, and access to tests and test results.

I found this an extremely valuable day, covering essential areas in our practice as psychometricians. The theme that came through most strongly for me was how important it is that both organisations and individuals can trust the provision of psychometric testing. It is vital that the structure of training aims at a high standard of competence, the quality of training provision ensures people are able to deliver psychometric testing effectively, and that ethical issues are recognised and addressed. We often discuss the psychometric properties of tests, and the degree to which we can trust the results; this event focused on the elements that must be in place to ensure that we can trust the psychometrician.

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**Voiceprint: How the way we talk shapes how we think and act**

**PRESENTATION BY ALAN ROBERTSON, BUSINESS COGNITION LTD.**

**REVIEWED BY JOHN JACKSON, FUSION LEADERSHIP**

**Overview**

Over the years the forum has looked at numerous tools for assessing many aspects of personality and ability. VoicePrint represents an innovative way of assessing our fundamental ability to talk and the ‘voices’ we employ in communicating with others, and indeed ourselves. Alan Robertson sees talk as being a crucial connector between personality and overall competence in dealing with the outside world. The VoicePrint tool can be used, in conjunction with coaching and training, to develop individual skills in the way we deploy our voices. It can also be used to help teams overcome problems and optimise the way in which they collaborate. VoicePrint continues to evolve through a programme of on-going research and enhancement.

**Introduction**

Alan Robertson is a Business Psychologist and Director of Business Cognition Ltd. He is a founder member of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology for the BPS and is a Senior Visiting Teaching Fellow at Cass Business School and in what was until recently the School of Applied Sciences at Cranfield University. Alan has drawn on his years of working in industrial relations and organisational development, facilitation and coaching to develop the VoicePrint diagnostic tool. This provides a way of enabling individuals and teams to improve the quality of their communication and interactions by creating in-the-moment awareness and skill in their use of talk.

In addressing the Psychometrics Forum on 20th September Alan made it clear he does not strictly see himself as a psychometrician and that he did not initially set out to make VoicePrint into a fully researched psychometric. Alan has a passion for usefulness and has brought this to his development of Voiceprint. For him, the overall aim when developing the tool was not to make it the best available psychometric, instead the focus was on making it useful and able to be easily used to improve the quality of a conversation, to improve communication in the real world and to help people become ‘talk-wise’.

However it also became clear during the workshop that Alan is currently working, both independently and with others, to

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"... there is some evidence for personality characteristics affecting preferences for e-learning, but not actual learning outcomes."
develop the formal underpinnings for this potentially valuable assessment and diagnostic tool. He referred to preliminary statistical analyses which were encouraging in terms of recognising nine voices as distinct and described the tool as an ongoing ‘work in progress’ in terms of its development.

The VoicePrint model

Alan conceives of VoicePrint as providing an important ‘connector’ between personality and competent behaviour in any setting and in that sense he saw it as bridging the gap between the world of psychometrics and the world of real-life behaviours and competencies. The vehicle of connection is that of ‘talk’. Talk is ultimately about action and the way in which we engage with the world. However Alan believes that talk is often used less consciously than it should be. This can create impacts that are unintended, unproductive, un-noticed (but not by the listener) and uncorrected. Building greater awareness in our use of talk can consequently significantly improve both our personal and inter-personal effectiveness.

Alan has drawn on the triarchic theory of Robert Keidel, and his proposition that the competing requirements for control, co-operation and differentiation represent three pervasive forces operating in the world.

![Figure 1: The VoicePrint Model](image)

The VoicePrint competence model is framed around three clusters of ‘voices’. These are Exploring, made up of Inquire, Probe and Diagnose; Controlling, made up of Critique, Direct and Challenge and Positioning made up of Articulate, Advise and Advocate giving a total of 9 distinct voices. VoicePrint is designed to make you more aware, more skilful and more consistently effective. It does this by exploring and developing how you use the nine distinctive forms of expression, all of which are required in order to be a truly effective communicator.

Alan borrowed the analogy of needing a full set of golf clubs to play the best round of golf. You not only need to have access to all of them but you also need to know how to use them at the right time and in the right circumstances and with the requisite skill. Alan’s belief is that we similarly need a complete range of voices if we are to be fully effective in the way we engage with others. Voices that are used in a dysfunctional way, in other words in a way that is inappropriate to the circumstances, have an alienating impact on others, who then typically either withdraw or oppose rather than collaborate.

The report generated after taking the questionnaire details both your preferred voices and your under-used voices. It describes the positive gains of using each voice as well as highlighting the negative impact if over-relied on or used in the incorrect circumstance. Alan referred to our preferred voices as being our ‘big guns’. Our Big Guns are the default voices we will typically draw on in most circumstances without always being aware of the impact this may be having on the people we are communicating with and seeking to influence.

Your Voiceprint profile also highlights which voices you are likely to use when you feel under pressure. These could be over-extensions of our preferred voices or they could be a completely different set of voices. Early statistical analyses and trends supported gender differences, job category differences and ethnicity differences, both for normal use of voices and when these are used under pressure. For example, it looks like women tend to use their exploring voices more generally whereas men tend to take up a position and then defend it and British people tend to use Probe less when feeling under pressure than non-Brits. More rigorous analysis was needed before any firm conclusions could be drawn.

VoicePrint in practice

Alan reported some key findings from his observations of the use of VoicePrint to date. There is a wide diversity in profiles we may use some of our voices inwardly in the form of introverted self-talk, and the adept use of the full available range of voices is rare.
so unsurprisingly we may find ourselves speaking at ‘crossed purposes’ with others, we may use some of our voices inwardly in the form of introverted self-talk, and the adept use of the full available range of voices is rare. There are strong preferences for many people and the use of our Big Guns can be habitual.

*Figure 2: An over-reliance on Preach*

While accepting the limitations of any form of self-report Alan’s experience is that the VoicePrint report brings ‘tendency into awareness’ for most individuals. This helps with reflection on intention and potential impact and as such is an excellent tool to accompany coaching and development conversations. A 360 degree version is available which can be used to get an objective view of an individual or combined to produce a Group Report which can provide instruction on say how a particular leadership team is being received by the wider organisation in terms of their communication style. Used together, typically with coaching support, these outputs facilitate the development of both skill and sensitivity.

There is a good combination of both narrative and graphical material in the 16-page VoicePrint report and it continues Alan’s theme of wanting to create a useable and simple tool. The report introduces the model and the nine different voices explaining the positive and negative sides of each voice. It provides a profile of the frequency of use of each voice and highlights which are the Big Guns and which are ‘silent’. It explains the pros and cons of each voice and looks at the ‘pressure profile’ – the voices that are predominantly used by the individual when they feel under pressure. There are also some valuable process questions aimed at promoting reflection and deepening awareness including:

- In what ways do you need to be able to interact and communicate with others?
- Which of your dealings with people do you find most difficult or frustrating?
- Which of the nine voices feel most important to you, and why?
- Which of the nine voices feel least comfortable to you, and why?

**Using VoicePrint in teams**

The VoicePrint model allows for some powerful graphics in collectively plotting the profiles of team members as an aid to understanding what is going on with the resulting voices within the team. Alan’s experience is that the senior teams can sometimes ‘get stuck’. As with individuals, sticking points typically arise from the unconsidered use of voices within the team, such as too many people spending too much energy using just one or more voices. Alan gave an example of a group over-using the Advocate voice (‘I think..., I think..., I think...’) and its over-use becoming preachy which had become the group’s dominant voice, and the frequent sticking point in its discussions, as illustrated in the model below showing the ‘dark side’ of the 9 voices and highlighting the dominance of Preach.

Alan worked through a range of talk dysfunctions he had come across in teams. These can be summarised as:

- Particular sticking points for the team (which could be in any voice).
- Diffusion of the team’s energies.
- Demonising the outlier voice.
- I/we can feel the problem but can’t name it or get a grip on it.
- ‘Blindness’- some teams don’t recognise their dysfunction any more; they simply accept difficult interactions as normal.

Alan went on to discuss successful teams. He suggested that gaps in a team’s repertoire of voices, while potentially a problematic limitation, can sometimes provide valuable ‘breathing spaces’ for team members, leaving energy available for listening and helping dialogue to flow better. He shared the example of an Humanitarian team he had worked with who didn’t have any Probe or Challenge voices in the members which meant very little interruption and lots of respectful listening to each other. Looking at the

A highly effective question for any team, especially one that has become stuck is ‘What voice or voices does this conversation need now?’
group profile it appeared that there was a lot of Critique in the team which could become Criticising if not handled well but on working with the team, he realised that much of the Critique voice was an internal dialogue which wasn’t externally verbalised and meant individuals critiqued themselves in order to maintain high standards and it didn’t manifest as Criticising in the team interactions. The team leader used Direct often but they were skilled in its use and it did not slip into the less helpful voice To Admonish.

A highly effective question for any team, especially one that has become stuck is “What voice or voices does this conversation need now?” and merely building awareness and recognition that something different needs to happen can frequently be sufficient to move things forward with the team finding more productive voices without explicit intervention.

Alan’s experience in working with teams in difficulties is that there is a general need for teams to spend more time in the ‘North’ side of the VoicePrint model, in other words in the Inquire, Probe and Diagnose voices which are less threatening. In contrast, Alan sees the voices in the ‘South’ of his model as more closed and more likely to be used when people are fearful. Direct, Challenge, Advise and Advocate can result in very ‘percussive’ conversations where people constantly ‘butt up’ against each other in their dialogue. Voices from the South of the model are less helpful in highly dynamic and ambiguous environments because they can have a narrowing effect which discourages the consideration of other possibilities.

This ‘north/south’ concept prompted an observation from the audience that in order to get to the top in an organisation a manager would need to start in the South of the model but then would need to shift into the North of the model as they became more senior and had more management responsibilities because the more senior they became, the less it would be about telling and directing and the more they would need to be coaching and asking questions.

This led to a discussion about how to help a team who is ‘stuck’ and Alan recommended any activities that can encourage the team to move North into the model as well as listening for the voices that are being missed. In his experience, the most common casualties when pressure rises are the voices of inquiry, articulation and critiquing, with a corresponding loss of open-mindedness in questioning, care and patience in explanation, and objectivity and balance in evaluation. Articulate and Critique in particular serve as a bridge to provide objectivity to conversations so if these two voices are missing from a team then they will be divided by a North South divide where they talk at cross purposes to each other or they get ‘stuck’ in one area repeating patterns of conversations.

Alan finished by sharing some correlations between his model and Belbin’s team roles questionnaire as well as with the Thomas Kilman Inventory. Future work will refine the questions and look at how his model maps onto Lencioni’s work as well as exploring the data set he has to look for gender and cultural differences. Early findings show congruence with the work on gender differences in conversational styles by American psychologist Deborah Tannen. By and large, women seem to use more Inquire in the way they engage with others. By contrast, men use more Advocate, Direct and Critique voices.

These links to both Belbin and Thomas-Kilmann would appear to bear out Alan’s guidance for teams that it is productive to spend more time in the North of their Voiceprint team profile and to be cautious about spending too much time in the Southern part of the model when the way ahead is not totally clear.

References
The VoicePrint website is https://letstalk.voiceprint.global and Alan Robertson can be contacted via alan@businesscognition.co.uk
The Dark Matter in organisations: recognising, understanding and working through relational aspects of teams

We were privileged to have Roy Childs talking to us in the afternoon. Amongst his many accolades, Roy was one of the founders of the 16PF User’s Group which later became The Psychometrics Forum so he was to some degree the reason we were all gathered together. He began with the statement ‘I believe in guerrilla warfare’ and that summed up his myth-busting approach to psychometrics in teams. He explained his guerrilla position in that too much of present day statistical methodology has got it wrong because by it’s nature it homogenises data and ignores the outliers and he argued, the outliers are where the interesting information is to be found. He shared a very simple story to illustrate: A man could be seen searching for the car keys he had lost in the pool of light cast by a streetlamp. When asked by a passer-by whereabouts he had dropped his keys the man replied, ‘Over the other side of the street but it’s dark over there and I can’t see so I’m looking over here instead where it’s light and I can see’. The drive towards evidence-based practice in modern psychometrics has led us to look for evidence of personality phenomena in the wrong place because it’s the easier place to look.

He shared an example from Malcolm Gladwell’s book Outliers about the health of the occupants of a small town in Roseto, Pennsylvania. The townfolk experienced higher-than-expected physical health so were outliers in terms of heart attack rates in particular. On closer inspection it was found that the elevated health was due to the very close-knit community and their relational support of each other because of their Sicilian heritage and not because of any physical protective factors. The relational way they lived was providing a health benefit.

Roy described his philosophical journey sharing books that had inspired his thinking (see the copy of his slide deck from the day for references) and how he found the traditional world of psychometrics falling short of describing the things he had observed about the relationships between people. This Dark Matter, the relational aspects between people that you can’t see is the focus of his work and his book The Relational Lens which was co-authored with 3 colleagues and written in a relational way rather than the more traditional way a book is created with various drafts and authors contributing comments working in isolation and then passing them over to the other author for their comments. Instead, the authors met regularly at each others’ homes getting to know each others’ families and then would discuss their ideas which were then captured and turned into the book.
So why is the Dark Matter of organisations so relevant now? The market value of an organisation is made up of its tangible and intangible assets. Intangible assets such as strategy, reputation and brand, supply chain, the stakeholder relationships and the knowledge within an organisation now contribute far more towards that market value than they ever have previously. Roy referred to the well-reported view that mergers don’t actually add value and explained that this was because organisations are not paying full attention to the intangible assets when they plan for mergers. Triple Bottom Line Reporting or PPP (People, Profit, Planet) goes some way to address this blind-spot and Roy argued that a Relational Balance Sheet as well as a Financial Balance Sheet is the way forwards when assessing a company’s market value.

The work of the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) embraces this idea and has many tips and tools to help take this wider view of value in an organisation where the human, social and intellectual capital is considered and intra- and extra-organisational networks are important.

Roy suggested we need to re-consider what we know about personality and rather than the Big Five we consider The Big Five of Relationships. A reconsideration rather than a new concept because Aristotle was already thinking along these lines as illustrated in this quote:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>Aristotle’s view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directness:</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>How to be angry at the right person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent to which presence is mediated and filtered, hence influencing communication and a sense of connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity:</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>How to be angry at the right time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent to which a series of interactions progresses to a relationship, hence enabling a storyline involving roots, momentum and commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplexity:</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>How to be angry in the right way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent to which people know and accept each other, hence fostering the appreciation of capabilities, challenges and salient contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parity:</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>How to be angry to the right degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent to which power (in its many forms) is used fairly in a relationship, hence building a sense of mutual respect and encouraging participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonality:</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>How to be angry for the right purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent to which there is an alignment of purpose and goals, hence fostering synergy, shared identity and the motivation to be involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The drive towards evidence-based practice in modern psychometrics has led us to look for evidence of personality phenomena in the wrong place because it’s the easier place to look.
“Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with: the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose in the right way….that is not easy.”

Roy then went on to describe in detail the work he has done in this space in terms of moving Type work more into the relational space with the use of his Team Mapping Tool and the development of the Relational Health Audit (RHA) which was developed specifically to measure the Big Five of Relationships which have ‘areas’ and ‘facets’ in each domain just as the traditional Big Five model has but instead of providing a profile of an individuals’ temperament, it is used to audit the quality of a relationship.

The model behind the RHA is the Relational Proximity Model summarised in the table below. Developed over 15 years integrating research and practice, the RHA is a psychometric scorecard that helps clients assess the quality and diagnose the state of relationships in the context of a group, an organisation, between organisations, or simply between individuals. Using it to understand the Dark Matter can lead to productive discussions on how to improve working relationships in a variety of contexts.

The model considers five broad interrelated domains: contact, time, information, power and purpose which are analysed through five corresponding dimensions: Directness, Continuity, Multiplexity, Parity and Commonality.


The RHA can be used in organisations to create a Relational Balance Sheet and Roy shared examples of how it works in practice and his attempts to convince Theresa May of the value of it’s use as he is a resident in her parliamentary constituency!

Roy ended his presentation with a quote by Robert F Kennedy which very neatly summed up the content he had covered:

“The Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages. In short, it measures everything except what is worthwhile!”

Robert F Kennedy, 1968.