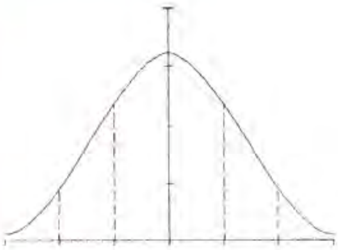
January 2000 Number 23

16 PF Newsletter

WE WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR



End of the line - or new beginnings?

Reflections on our November meeting

It has been a long journey, but now, your destination is in sight. Lights glimmer in the distance. You have seen no traffic on the road for at least half an hour. The last turning was miles back; miles back along this single-track road. You're glad that the car is warm and comfortable. You now see that the lights you are aiming for are the other side of a river. In front of you is a bridge, but something about it makes you feel uneasy. A lone figure, that of a man, stands by the side of the road. He comes towards you. You wind down the window, cautiously.
"Is this bridge safe? you ask.
You do not want to have to turn back along the narrow, winding, dark, road.
"Is it safe?" you ask again.
He says, "This bridge was designed, built, and maintained, by professionals who were selected, trained and developed the way professionals have always been selected, trained and developed."
You decide not to cross the bridge.

I first read something like the passage quoted above, many years ago. The underlying truth of it struck me then, and no less so today as we start a new century. These random thoughts were sparked in part, by our November meeting, which dealt with aspects of selection, coaching, and ethics. In today's business - not to mention political - climate, anyone who speaks about ethics is at risk of being a lone voice amongst the tumult of e-commerce invocations, management-of-change hype, and financial irregularity @ dot com. Know what I mean squire? Let's deal with the three topics mentioned above, in reverse order, i.e. ethics, coaching and selection.

Timothy St Ather talked about ethics and one of his points was that many clients seem to use psychometrics inconsistently, in that they will use this as an aid to selection for one appointment, but not for another. Are we just an optional extra, he said? He had tried to get to the bottom of this but had been unsuccessful, and wondered if this phenomenon had been investigated by the test publishers. He quoted examples of clients with whom he had an excellent relationship, but who did not always use the services that he had to offer. Even a manager who said in a flush of enthusiasm, We ought to test everyone, "did not always do so. As St Ather said," Even those that love us, don't always use us."

Selling skills

Does it say something about how we sell ourselves, he wondered? Do we use technical jargon unnecessarily? Are we so concerned with professional "ethics" that we are inhibited from doing a solid, old-fashioned sales pitch? (Or do our personalities not lend themselves to this approach? Ed.) Should we be saying: this is what we can offer; we can provide you with data that would be impossible to collect through a normal interview; we can *supplement* your interview rather than *supplant* it; we can provide information on people management skills, emotional stability, innovation and creativity, not to mention confidence, self-esteem and empathy. (I could go on, but you get the general drift.) St Ather thought that ethics were overstated. For example the importance of confidentiality issues was often exaggerated. Predictably, not everyone agreed with these points.

Isabelle Orlando spoke about the core values and beliefs of an organisation and we discussed the extent to which employees might mirror these. Her main point was that organisations need to give thought to the core values by which they want to run their affairs. These core values need to be made known to employees, who themselves need to be aware of their own values. When the organisational values are properly linked to individual values, performance is likely to be high. Many organisations have espoused values that differ from those that they put into action on a daily basis. For example quality of product or customer service, might be espoused organisational values, but the daily experience of staff might suggest otherwise. Staff will be unhappy and less effective when their own core values are violated.

Three core values

Isabelle runs courses for senior managers during which they have the opportunity to identify their own core values, and we tried doing the same at the meeting. We were asked to think of three core values, and to decide how important each one was. It seemed that we were fairly typical of other managers with whom Isabelle worked - honesty, achievement (growth), and trust, were important. When we are able to act in accordance with our core values, we feel that we are being true to

NEW VENUE - The Naval Club, 38 Hill St Mayfair, W1

1. 19th January AM Emotional Intelligence
2. 19th January PM Management Style Measures
3. 13th April To be finalised

ourselves; we might feel liberated, proud, and relieved. When our values are being violated we feel shameful, cheap, compromised and angry, with a dislike of self and a loss of control.

Isabelle quoted the well-known example from 3M where innovation is high on the list of core values. A researcher developed glue that didn't have the right adhesive properties - it just didn't stick well enough. Was he fired? Was he disciplined? Did he have an adverse appraisal? Was his future blighted? No - the invention was adapted to produce Post-It notes. The rest is stationery history.

The meeting was reminded of the advantages of an organisation making its values known to new employees as early as possible. My own experience in recruitment confirmed this. One client had what amounted to a self-selection policy. Potential recruits were shown a video at the end of which they knew that if they had no wish to attend regularly and to arrive punctually, to co-operate with others, and to come up with new ideas, - then perhaps they should look elsewhere. Only about a third went through from that stage to the next. The advantages are obvious. The organisation ends up with a committed workforce whose core values fit well with those of the organisation itself. It becomes a "unitary" organisation in which everyone is facing the same way.

This leads us neatly to selection, the subject of Brian Sullivan's talk. Brian talked about the importance of going beyond the personality profile, quoting Dan McAdams who said in a 1995 article, "What do we know when we know a person?" With this enigmatic phrase in mind, Brian challenged us to either stay at the personality profile level or probe further into that person's strivings, motives, and deeper concerns.

He started by reminding us of some of the theories of personality advanced by leading psychologists such as Gordon Allport who proposed a scheme emphasising traits. But personality is difficult to understand from any single vantage point and this has led psychologists to employ multiple approaches and methodologies.

The Big Five

The Big Five is one approach. This comprises extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. However this may be insufficient because these are synonymous with traits. Cattell's approach was to develop a system of scientifically derived surface and source traits. He believed that by capturing the personality traits, in a "Specification equation", that one could predict a person's behaviour. Other frameworks were those of Murray (1938) and McClelland (1951).

He went on to say that personality could be described at three different levels: Level 1 traits; Level 2 - personal concerns; Level 3 - personal identity.

Level 1 - Traits

These are broad characteristics but they do not go much beyond what is known as "the psychology of the stranger".

Level 2 - Personal concerns

These refer to personality descriptions that invoke personal strivings, life tasks, defence mechanisms, contextualised motives, and coping strategies. They include tasks, goals, projects, tactics, values, and motivational concerns that put the person's life in context.

Moving from level 1 to level 2 lifts the "Psychology of the stranger" into a description of a flesh-and-blood person who strives to do things over time and in particular circumstances.

Level 3 - personal identity

This identity is expressed through a sense of unity and purpose of someone's life and psychologists can explore the identity as an "internalised and evolving life story". This inner story integrates the reconstructed past, the perceived present, and the anticipated future to provide a life with unity, purpose, and meaning.

Brian said that there are many issues in understanding the personality of "the self". Amongst these are the concept that the personality is not "given, or conferred", it is made. One's identity is fashioned and sculpted, creating a "Me" for which the "I" must accept responsibility. The self is multi-layered, possessing inner depth, and it develops over time, constantly growing and changing.

This was indeed solid stuff and made us realise that in selection at least, if we simply remain content with the surface traits of a profile, we are doing the candidate a disservice and mistaking the shadow for the substance.

However, there is a problem. My mind goes back to around early 1997 when we heard Dr Chris Ridgeway from the Centre for Change Leadership talk about his approach to personality assessment. One of the key points raised by those who attended that meeting concerned the extent to which we had a right to probe deeply into another's personality. "After all, I only applied for a job, not for counselling," might sum up a legitimate complaint from the candidate. "Are we therapists in an occupational setting or are we trying to fit people to jobs?" was another comment.

These thoughts bring us full circle. If we share the doubts reflected by our lone traveller at the beginning of this piece, in other words, if we believe that selection and related issues are skimped and conducted unprofessionally, which course will we adopt? To continue at a "safe" but shallow level, or wade in more deeply and be prepared to justify the extent of our intrusion?

Don't ask the audience; don't phone a friend; don't go 50-50. Make up your own mind.

David Roberts
Editor

Optional Extras or Bolt-on Goodies?

Continuing the train of thought sparked by Timothy St Ather's talk reported above. . .

The comment that our clients are often inconsistent in their use of our services rang a very loud bell for me. I wondered what the experience of others might be and if any had probed deeper for a solution. Have the test publishers any ideas? It seems to have nothing to do with previous success or failure. Let me tell you what happened to me just before Christmas.

I visited a client to give feedback to a successful external candidate. Although it is early days, he seems to fit the job very well indeed. The ensuing discussion with the personnel director confirmed that the company was happy with the candidate - and with me, since I have completed a number of such assignments for this client. I learned during the discussion that the company had recently interviewed for another senior appointment and had made an offer. Why, I wondered had I not been asked to assess him? The following points occur to me:

1) He was thought to be too senior to be tested.
2) He refused to be tested.
3) Another independent consultant tested him.
4) He may have been introduced via an agency that had already tested him.

5) The candidate was so patently transparent that they believed they could read him like a book and almost write their own 16PF report.
6) They didn't want to spend money unnecessarily on people they were fairly sure about. (OK, about whom they were fairly sure.)

The first three points can be dismissed since they are either inadequate or improbable reasons.

Number 4 is a possibility but if true, what assessments were used and how does the final report compare with mine? For better or worse? For richer or thinner? I often use four or five tests in a battery. What do they use? If this hypothetical report were significantly better, no doubt they would switch to this consultant permanently. If it is not true, i.e. the agency did not test him, was it because they thought their client might pick on some slightly negative characteristic and reject the candidate? Aha! I recall a partner of a well-known agency saying that he had a client who would reject a candidate at the first whiff of a supposedly "negative" comment.

Number 5 is highly improbable - my client knows that many 16PF characteristics would be impossible to gauge during a conventional interview.

Number 6? Possible but unlikely. I don't know whether head-hunters brought in this candidate. (One of the members attending the meeting said that he was told many years ago by a top headhunting agency, that they believed their role was to provide "good chaps for blue chips." Sounds horribly blokeish and old school tie-ish. Wonder if they're still in business? Have they heard of e-mail and the Internet? Do they even have computers?) The fee most independent psychometric consultants might charge is as nothing compared to the 10% or 15% of salary invoiced by a head-hunter. These days, that might easily amount to more than £10,000.

So: I have come to a full stop. I can think of no more solid reasons why our services, once used to the client's complete satisfaction, should not be used in perpetuity. There is only one thing left to do. I shall have to develop my N- (Fourth Edition) characteristic and ask the client direct.

David Roberts

Specification Equation for Learning

The learning organisation was recently referred to as "an HR dream". This led me to think about learning in general, particularly as I had just read that Cranfield School of Management had undertaken research that "proved" that owner/managers who attend training events grow their businesses faster than do those who do not participate in any form of training or development. Eureka! So that's the answer! What are the 16PF5 ingredients of a willingness - and ability - to ream? I thought perhaps B+; F-; Q1+ might be a good starting point. I also recalled two learning related incidents: The first occurred during an interview. I had been conducting behavioural interviews and one of the questions related to the willingness and ability to learn new skills. "When did you last learn something new?" I asked the middle-aged man in front of me. He frowned, and then his face lit up in recognition of that memorable event. "When we went decimal," he said. The second occurred last October when I attended the World Judo Championships in Birmingham with an 83-year-old friend who still goes on the judo mat every week. My own playing days had finished in the 70s. OK, the 60s. We were treated to marvellous displays of skill. As we headed home I fumed to my friend and said, "What did you think of it then?" "Excellent," he said. "And I picked up a couple of things I can put into practice."

THE 16PF AND CAREERS GUIDANCE

Paul Bennett reminds us of the relevance of 16PF primary factors to career guidance

When I first started to use the 16PF in assessment I began to think more about how the tool could be utilised for careers guidance as well as recruitment and selection.

As a careers adviser with many years' experience I was well aware of how important personality is to our likely performance in education, training and work. The self-knowledge which could be gained from taking some personality assessment, would be invaluable when considering types of courses or occupational settings in which we are likely to succeed.

Initially I considered where the information gained from a client undertaking the 16PF would fit into a traditional model of career guidance. The model I used was a 5 stage contemporary one that many career guidance practitioners will recognise:

Stage One:	Self-Awareness
Stage Two:	Opportunity Awareness
Stage Three:	Decision Making
Stage Four:	Implementation
Stage Five:	Transition

It seemed that **stage one** was the obvious point at which use of the 16PF would be of value. This stage of the model deals with knowing yourself and the obvious questions 'who am I?' or 'what sort of person am I?'

Information gained from the 16PF enables the client to consider these questions, to reflect on their experience so far, and to help make some sense of the things that have gone well and less well at work in the past.

By exploring some of these areas during feedback the client develops an awareness of issues for future development.

The typical category of mature client who may benefit from assessment and with whom it has been used, has been the career changer or career developer, women seeking to return to work after a break and the short-term unemployed (typically those who have been made redundant). They usually wish to find out about their potential or aptitudes for different occupations, or need help in making decisions about a possible future career. Some simply wish to identify potential strengths and weaknesses.

One interesting feature of testing individuals in a career guidance context as opposed to recruitment and selection, is that scores on the Impression Management Scale are usually much lower. Logically, this can be attributed to the notion that candidates are much more likely to be honest with the questionnaire when it is their decision to undertake the assessment rather than be obliged to take it as part of a

Trust = L1 or L-1

A pest control company in the USA specialising in the domestic market advertised their services to get rid of the millennium bug. They were swamped with calls from householders.

SUBMISSION OF MATERIAL

The Editor welcomes contributions from members either as letters or as articles on the use of the 16PF.

Case histories, unusual assignments, as well as unusual profiles are welcome.

When submitting material, please enclose a 3½" disk together with the printed copy. This saves re-typing and minimises the risk of mistakes.

recruitment exercise. They have nothing to gain by falsifying their responses apart from being dishonest with themselves. The very fact that they have agreed to take the test to help their own development seems to lessen their desire to deliberately answer the questionnaire in a way which presents them in a more favourable light. In my experience, typical Impression Management scores in a guidance context are in the 1 to 5 range, whereas in selection they are more likely to be between 6 and 10.

In structuring a written report for the client I have found the model used on the ASE feedback profile to be helpful (also advocated by Wendy Lord in her book 'Personality in Practice'). This covers style of relating to others, style of thinking, consistency of behaviour and management of pressure. However, in career guidance certain primary factors are worth particularly close consideration because of their vocational implications.

Factor A:
This will give an indication of interaction with people at work. To what degree will the client seek to make close personal relationships? Although high levels of warmth can be an advantage in certain occupations it can be a disadvantage in others if it leads to overaffiliation. Consider managers who make close personal relationships with a worker and subsequently have to convey a hard decision to them.

Factor E:
This is an important factor in the workplace - particularly for managers and supervisors of people. The E+ person is usually more effective at asserting themselves over subordinates - often skilfully when combined with other traits. The E average person may be more suited to a co-ordinating role where results can be achieved by a more consultative approach. They may, however, have difficulty asserting themselves over subordinates at times.

Factor F:
This factor is useful in considering a client's potential task orientation. F+ types are likely to have a low boredom threshold and may be more suited to short term projects and work that is less routine. F- types will tend to be effective on long term projects or occupations that require high levels of sustained concentration and a cautious approach.

Factor G:
Another important factor in the workplace. When considering suitability of occupations, G+ individuals will tend to succeed in organisations where there is a clearly defined hierarchy, strict rules and regulations and where adherence to systems and 'going by the book' is important. G- types, because of their expedient and flexible style are likely to perform more effectively in organisations in which they can adopt a more autonomous approach and are not constrained by too many rules. It is important that these issues are discussed with them during feedback and when considering possible work settings.

Factor I:
This factor can be useful when considering degree of feeling shown towards others. When linked with Factor A it is possible to get an idea about the client's suitability for certain people oriented jobs. For example, I+ individuals with average A may possess the empathy with detachment required for effective Counsellors or Trainers.

Factor M:
This factor gives us an indication about how the client processes information and gives us further insight into thinking style. It provides a useful indicator of the degree to which the client pays attention to detail in their approach to tasks.

Factor M should be considered along with Factor I to give an insight into style of decision making. An interesting combination is I- M+ - the rational decision-maker who can use abstract ideas. The profile of a typical Research Engineer, perhaps?

Factor Q1:
So many organisations are now undergoing change or are reporting that change is now the norm. Factor Q1 will give an indication of how the client feels about change. The Q1 + individual will feel comfortable in a work culture that encourages new ideas and experimentation. Combined with E+ the client may be an effective manager of change if their organisation is seeking to introduce new working practices.

Factor Q2:
The phrase 'must be a good team player' is commonplace today in job advertisements. An exploration of the client's Q2 score during feedback will give an indication of preferred work setting. The Q2- client may prefer occupational areas where there is the opportunity to work closely with others, whereas the Q2+ individual may be more suited to careers which offer the opportunity for lone working.

These are some of the more significant factors on the profile that I find helpful when counselling individuals in a career guidance context. Interpretation of the whole profile including the global factors is obviously important. When feedback is handled in a skilful and non-judgemental way, with areas to be covered prepared in advance, I have found that clients feel that they have greater self-awareness which helps them to move on to the next stage of the careers guidance model.

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Acknowledgement

The 16PF User Group gratefully acknowledges financial support from ASE NFER - NELSON, directed at defraying the production costs of the Newsletter. The Newsletter remains independent, and views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of ASE NFER - NELSON, or the Editor.

NEW VENUE

The November meeting was the first at our new venue – The Naval Club at 38 Hill Street, Mayfair, W1. The general view of members attending was that this was a good move. Join us on the 19th January.

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