16PF V. Sport: If you don’t want to know the score, look away now...

This autumn, in Sydney, a starting pistol will fire. Around 10 seconds later seven or eight superbly fit and well prepared young athletes will know that their efforts over the last four years have ended in failure. Someone else will have won the Olympic 100m event. At this level of competition there will be very little physical difference between the competitors. So what will be the ingredients of success?

Even those who have little interest in sport must have been intrigued at times by the ‘human’ stories behind some of our sporting heroes and their successes. Go on, you must have done... Didn’t you ever wonder about the mental processes of Seb Coe and Steve Ovett during their famous middle distance clash? Didn’t you ever wonder what drove Daley Thompson, the most successful all-round athlete the world has ever seen - the man who said that one day he knew he would be really good at something; he just didn’t know what... the man who would train twice on Christmas Day because he thought his competitors might only train once? Thompson was asked where he would place his confidence and self-belief, on a scale of 1-10. He said 11. What was it that set Mike Brearley apart and made him the best cricket captain that England has had in post-war years? It certainly wasn’t his cricketing talent. What did he do differently? What about Geoff Boycott’s concentration for hours on end at the wicket? The legendary Stanley Matthews was so competitively successful at football and yet so modest! What about André Agassi? What about Muhammad Ali and his famous affirmation - “I am the greatest”? (And which came first - the actualité or the affirmation?)

Feedback

You say you’ve never liked performance appraisals? Scared of negative feedback, eh? In sport you get instant feedback. Not written up in a cosy confidential document, of course, but in screaming tabloid headlines. “Stewart fails again”. “England are rubbish.” “A gutless performance.” Or as the Financial Times said on 15th April, regarding the England cricket team “11 bats - no balls”. (Yes, you did read correctly. It was the FT.)

How does this affect the mindset of the player? Just think about it. You’ve trained all winter, worked your socks off for the team, then you’re out first ball to a bad umpiring decision. Your third duck in a row. All those people you’ve let down.

People who believed in you. You go back to the dressing room and bury your face in a towel. You’re still ‘visibly upset’ as the newspapers are bound to say, an hour later. But you have to pull yourself together for the next innings. They’re counting on you.

Sport psychology is still a relatively young science, emanating from around the mid-sixties, although some studies date back to the 1890s and the early 1900s. What is it that interests sport psychologists? Well, confidence, anxiety, stress, arousal, attribution theory, relaxation, leadership, motivation, aggression, and of course our old friend teamwork. We’d be nowhere without that. Cohesiveness is the post word.

For my own part, I have long had an interest in the ‘human’ aspects of sport, wondering why some athletes did well and others not, and also why some did well in adverse conditions. Roger Bannister broke the sub-four-minute mile barrier in 1954, on a damp evening in Oxford, whilst recovering from a heavy cold. There was a 15-mph crosswind and gusts of up to 25 mph just before the race. It was widely believed to be physically impossible to break the four-minute mile. By 1957 16 other runners had done it. Why hadn’t they done it before? Because success breeds success. And David Henry our former Olympic hurdler says that before it could be done, someone had to conceive that it could be done. If you don’t believe it is humanly possible, you won’t be able to do it.

Fighting pain and fatigue

Older readers will recall the feats of Emil Zatopek in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, when he won both the 5,000m, and the 10,000m. Three days later, he won his first ever marathon. Could the 16PF have identified the characteristic that enabled him to fight pain and fatigue? In 1948 the Dutch runner Fanny (Fransciska) Blankers-Koen won four gold medals at the Wembley Olympics. She was then 30 and the mother of two children. What psychometric test could have predicted that she had the mental toughness to set twenty world records in her athletic career? It was either Blankers-Koen or Zatopek. I’m not sure which, who said that at the Wembley Olympics, she/he had lodgings somewhere in North London, and had to catch a bus to get to Wembley Stadium! No comfortable Olympic Village then...

These are just a few of the sporting facts and memories that must surely fascinate anyone interested in psychology. If this is

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

1. 13th June AM New Styles of Leadership
2. 13th June PM Sport Psychology and the 16PF
3. 3rd October Job specifications. Back to Basics
so, one wonders why psychologists did not take more of an interest in sport long before the mid-1960s when it began to develop as a separate specialization.

The literature on sport psychology is far greater than I had imagined when I set out to write The Cricket Coach's Guide to Man Management. However, the vast majority of the literature is American, and it seems that almost every university in the USA has its department of sport psychology. There are British books on the subject but they are in the minority. We have many biographies and autobiographies of course, but they only deal with personality in an anecdotal way. Interesting as they may be, they don’t do much to help you understand what might lie behind sporting success.

16PF dominates

The 16PF is by far the most frequently used personality assessment in sport psychology. There are however literally hundreds of other tests dealing with specific aspects of sport psychology such as anxiety. There is in fact, a very thick directory detailing them in all their three-lettered acronymic brevity. Other tests used are the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS), the California Personality Inventory (CPI), and the Macaulay Psychological Inventory (MPI).

What is the purpose of all these studies? Well, there is a long-held belief that some characteristics are related to sporting success. When athletes have equal talent, how do you define that 'little bit extra' that leads to success. Can you define it? Psychologists have shown much interest in the personality of successful athletes, trying to find similar or identical traits within a single sport and across other sports. Is there a 'cricket type' or a 'swimming type'? Are there basic differences between team players and individual players? If it could be shown that there was definitely a 'sport-specific' personality, then coaches could select those likely to be successful at a given sport. Of course, at the 'common sense' level, we could say that there is certainly such a thing as a sport-specific personality. It is 'obvious' that gymnasts are different from footballers, that cricketers are different from boxers, that wrestlers are different from tennis players. But then there are those who seem able to bridge two sports: Donnie Compton was a professional footballer and a professional cricketer. Liam Botham was a professional cricketer who turned to rugby. Bill Athey played cricket for Yorkshire and England having previously played football for Bristol Rovers.

Cattell's definition

Cattell defined personality as 'that which tells what a man will do when placed in a given situation.' Cattell recognised both hereditary and environmental influences in the theory of behavioural consistency. He defined behaviour as a combination of biological drives, which he called ergs, and acquired attitudes, which he called sentiments. From his research, he found that intelligence was influenced by heredity whereas surgency (being happy-go-lucky and lively), and tough-mindedness, were largely derived from environmental influences. This latter point is most interesting, as we shall see.

Cattell's definition of personality concerned prediction. This incorporated not only what a person would do in a given situation, but also what he might become in a given environment. Much of sport psychology literature has been concerned with what a person might do. Psychologists have been trying to predict success from personality characteristics. It is more interesting to speculate as to what a person might become. Let's take an example from cricket. England's performances have been poor in recent years, winning only 27 of the 109 Test matches and eight of the 28 series it has played in the last ten years. The England cricket team, we are told, needs to be more tough-minded. The argument seems to run: Australians are tough-minded and they win. South Africans are tough-minded and they win. The English are not tough-minded and they lose.

Is it possible for England's cricketers to become more tough-minded? If Cattell's definition of personality were correct, it would seem to be a possibility. They may not have the inborn personality traits that combine to make for tough-mindedness, but we know that behaviour can be copied and learned. We can of course debate what is meant by tough-mindedness, but I take it to mean a coalescence of characteristics and attitudes such as determination, not knowing when you're beaten, refusing to give up when things get tough, and all this coupled with strong self-belief.

If we are interested in what a sports person might become, then we need some longitudinal studies of the character formation of successful athletes, starting in childhood or early adolescence, and continuing through until the end of a sporting career. To my knowledge, no such studies have been undertaken. Some psychologists believe that in personality studies undertaken, the reported personality traits bear little relevance to actual sport performance. The questions are not even sport-related. Is this very different from personality assessments used for occupational purposes? A quick look through the 16PF will show very few questions directly related to industry or commerce, but quite a lot about going to parties and socialising generally. Nevertheless this does not inhibit us from using the instrument for predicting occupational success, and it is undeniable that some people are far better than others at drawing meaningful conclusions and predictions.

A sport-specific personality?

In the 60s and 70s J. E. Kane published the results of a number of studies which he had undertaken in soccer. He concluded that "there was little doubt that at least a football type exists." He studied the personality structure of 100 young professional footballers by factor analysis. These footballers were rated as the most talented in England at that time. It was reported that the major characteristics were a high capacity for emotional control and high persistence. There was support for the belief that there is a link between athletic excellence and extraversion. They were "enthusiastic, happy-go-lucky, surgent personalities." They were "tough-minded, no nonsense persons who were especially free to express realistic aggression." They had "self-sufficiency and a tendency to be reserved and cool."

A number of studies were carried out in the 80s: on karate students (advanced students were higher on intelligence, emotional stability, and relaxation); on ice hockey players (67 junior players and 69 older student players - older students were the most self-confident, juniors higher in intelligence); on 100 black college females (successful and unsuccessful basketball players were more tough-minded than non-athletes; and unsuccessful basketball players were more trusting than successful ones). The literature goes on and on. And yet... and yet... are we nearer to predicting sporting success from personality characteristics? It seems not. For every study that points in one direction, there seems to be another that points in a different direction.

And that only refers to the personality characteristics. Studies on relaxation, arousal, anxiety and confidence each has its own story to tell. Like the tennis boxer at the Mexico Olympics who, after relaxation sessions, came out of his corner with his hands at his side, and with a big smile on his face. Ninety seconds later he was horizontal - and still smiling. Like the Australian cricketer playing for Leicester who was so relaxed he fell asleep on his feet at third man.

But these are stories for another day...
Pen Portrait
The idea is that members of your committee say something about their background. First In the series is Wendy Lord, our Events Organiser, and former Chief Psychologist at ASE...

I have been self-employed since August 1999. I offer consultancy services related to the assessment and development of people at work. These services include training and product design as well as service delivery. My route to occupational psychology was somewhat circuitous. After my first degree in psychology I completed a PGCE with a view to becoming an Educational Psychologist. Then I took up a research position investigating the relationship of social skills to 'bully' and 'victim' behaviours in children. This experience led me to decide to qualify as a Clinical Psychologist. I worked as a Clinical Psychologist within the NHS specialising in Adult Mental Health and splitting my time between a psychiatric hospital and a Health Centre. I moved into Occupational Psychology in 1989 when I joined ASE, the business psychology division of NFER-NELSON. (NFER-NELSON supply assessment products and services to the educational and clinical markets as well as to industry). My brief when I joined ASE, was primarily to develop training services to support the division's products, and also to contribute to consultancy activities. As ASE grew, my people-management responsibilities increased and so too did my interest in the contribution of HR management to strategic business development.

In 1995 I took up a position in N-N's Central Services division where I had responsibility for enhancing the link between business goals and HR procedures for selection and development. My publications include; 'Capitalising on People', (a multi-media training package focused on how to manage and improve staff performance), a handbook on testing people with disabilities, (in association with Disability Matters Ltd), and two textbooks for 16PF users.

LIBIDO, SUCCESS, AND THE 16PF
Bill Lubbock proposes a tongue-in-cheek 17th Factor...

It has always seemed to me that in describing or assessing the personality of really top business people, as distinct from mere senior executives or directors of successful plc's, that there is an element missing. There is such a large proportion of those headline characters (mainly male but not exclusively so) whose libido drives them into liaisons with several different partners at once, that one wonders if their success in life and their sexual appetites are connected in some way, and both are expressions of the same personality characteristic or gene. One has but to start running through the list of the significant figures of our time to see that many of them have in common this particular feature.

Goldsmith, Maxwell, Halpern, Mitterand, Clinton, Eisenhower, all the Kennedys, all come readily to mind before one starts listing several MPs apart from Norris, most of the members of our Royal family past and present, and people in showbiz, sport and the Arts like Jacqueline Dupré.

If we had a libido measure as the seventeenth personality factor, would this not give an even more complete picture of the people being tested, and about whom better predictions of achievement could be made for the benefit of business psychologists?

If Ray Cattell had been researching today and asking the right questions, he might have included this in his list of factors. Perhaps he considered it, and only the somewhat inhibited media climate of the fifties and sixties (when lots of people 'swung' but such affairs were not extensively broadcast) inhibited him. Or is this now a case for a 'specification equation' similar to the one for predicting success in marriage? I imagine it would only be a year or two before our combined databases could provide a usable libido measure and then we could validate it in various interesting ways.

Let's all be a bit bolder, and in feedback sessions ask the questions that would put this hypothesis to the test. After all, I am quite sure that numbers of people faced with a real psychologist have already been anticipating they would be asked questions about their sex life, and we surely don't want to disappoint them, do we?

Bill Lubbock is with Lubbock Associates

16PF Through the Mind of the Assessor:
The ABC of Interpretation
The following is an extract from Wendy's presentation last autumn to mark the 50th anniversary of 16PF

The 16PF turns 50 this year. When ASE invited me to put together a presentation to mark this anniversary, I naturally turned my mind to thinking about the kind of content that would be relevant to such an auspicious occasion. At first I thought the content should be a reflection of the way the 16PF has developed over the years and where it's likely to go in the

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.
future. I thought of several possible titles: 16PF: This is your life! Good title but a bit dry in terms of content. The history of the 16PF is well documented and you can be sure that ASE will keep you informed of where it’s going in the future. So then I thought about drawing attention to the highlights in the life of this instrument. One highlight in particular came to mind, a highlight that gives rise to another rather catchy title: 16PF goes to Hollywood! Yes the 16PF was invited and accepted the invitation to appear in a major Hollywood production: "The Haunting". There is a scene in the film where someone is completing a personality questionnaire. The camera zooms in to focus directly on the questionnaire. It is the 16PF and this is acknowledged in the credits. Exciting but hardly enough to base a presentation on. But there are other less usual uses of the 16PF which are interesting to hear about. And that led me to my third title: The Secret Life of the 16PF! The work of the psychologist and indeed the work of the HR professional who is concerned with the assessment of people, is not that far removed from the work of the novelist: both are concerned with understanding and communicating the nature of individuals. One of the most creative uses of the 16PF that I have come across is one that merges these two disciplines. Bill Lubbock, an experienced user of the 16PF who is also a core member of the 16PF users group employed the instrument as a tool for helping aspiring novelists develop their skills of characterisation. Inspired! Creative! Unusual! But perhaps too far removed from the world of the HR professional to provide a presentation that might be useful to their usage of the instrument.

Closer to home but still on the theme of less usual uses of the 16PF, I could have chosen to talk about the application of the 16PF to sports psychology. I could, for example, tell you about the work of David Roberts who is using the 16PF to try and contribute to the success of English cricket by ensuring that our teams have the best coaches. David is investigating the relationship between the temperament of the coach and the success of the team. That research is just beginning so, no results to report as yet but another example of a less usual application of 16PF.

16PF: Some surprising statistics! Thinking about less usual uses of 16PF led me to consider the possibility of a presentation filled with less publicised statistics about it. I could tell you that there are more potential 16PF profiles than there are people in the world, and we could speculate about the implications of that. I could tell you that studies show that only 1% of the general population show profiles that have no negative scores - and we could speculate about what it means to be 'an average person'!

All these things are interesting but they do little to promote the effectiveness of the practitioner. The 16PF is a practitioner's tool, its effectiveness depends on the skill of the practitioner. The practitioner can make or break it. It is down to the practitioner to fully realise the potential richness of assessment by 16PF. What we are marking here is not just 50 years of the existence of the 16PF; we are marking a 50 year relationship between the 16PF and the people who use it to promote their understanding of those whom they assess, and it is the dynamics of that relationship that I want to focus on.

The practitioner's role is to work with the information provided by the 16PF; to analyse the test scores and use that analysis to come up with an interpretation of what the person is like.

Analysis of test scores - consequent interpretation of the person. Sounds simple, if you know the instrument; if you understand the constructs being measured; if you have administered the instrument in a way which encourages the right mental set in those who are completing it; then it seems you have provided yourself with a foolproof way of getting to the heart of how an individual understands the world and operates upon it.

Except it isn't that simple. In between the initial analysis of the test scores and the consequent interpretation of the person lies the mind of the assessor, and the mind of the assessor can complicate the process. I have called this presentation "The ABC of Interpretation". The A stands for the initial analysis of the test scores. The C stands for the consequent interpretation. In between the A and the C exists the B which stands for the beliefs and the baggage which exist in the mind of the assessor; beliefs and baggage which can lead to a distorted assessment process.

I have borrowed this title from a psychologist called Albert Ellis. He put forward a theory which he called the ABC of emotion. I'm sure that when he was developing this theory, nothing was further from his mind than psychometric tests but still I think what he said is highly relevant.

Let's have a look at some of the things that can intervene between the initial analysis of the test scores and the consequent interpretation of the person.

- Belief in the inherent 'goodness' or 'badness' of certain score positions
- Belief in the meaning of certain scores that go beyond the validated meaning of the constructs
- Belief in the omnipotence of the expert
- Belief that staying neutral means sitting on the fence
- Belief that the test-taker will be difficult

What I've tried to emphasise is that the extent to which the potential richness of the 16PF as an assessment instrument is fully realised depends on the capacity of the assessor to interact properly with it. The 16PF has been around for fifty years. It has proved itself but it still needs us, the practitioners to ensure that it continues to be all that it can be. I wish the 16PF many happy returns, and wish you all every success in the use of the instrument.

Wendy Lord is an independent consultant

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