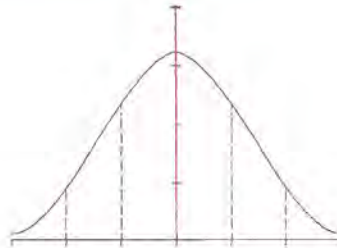


16 PF Newsletter

On-line testing: the fast, cheap and foolish route to staff selection

16PF User Group member
Linda Whittern, responds to the editor's request for a debate on the topic of on-line testing.



"Candidates can apply on-line, anytime, anywhere" say SHL about their Internet Recruitment System (IRS).

IRS is not an on-line psychometric testing system but few candidates and recruitment managers will realise this. The message most will pick up is that SHL supports the practice of on-line psychometric testing.

SHL argues that on-line recruitment systems increase the pool of applicants, reduce costs and provide faster matching of people to jobs. I'd agree. The problem is that the price we'd pay for these benefits is too high.

It's the risk to candidates' well-being that most worries me.

Candidates have the right to receive information about their psychometric results - automated testing systems will feed back these results without input from human beings trained and experienced in test interpretation. The consequences will be that:-

- * Candidates already stressed by physical ill-health, depression, victimisation at work, etc., will be given negative feedback that destroys their morale and may nudge some towards suicide
- * They will be given false images of themselves because computerised analyses can't take into account the impact of special factors (eg medication) on test scores

Employers ought to worry too. On-line testing systems are so much easier for candidates to sabotage.

Let's look at the tactics SHL use to stop on-line cheating. These include:

- * controlling access to tests through the use of passwords
- * producing unique tests by randomly selecting material from a huge databank of problems
- * (for timed tests) "blinking out" the screen display of test items when time is up

And what's the easiest way to defeat these precautions? Ask a best mate who's a whiz at numerical problems (say) to answer the test for you. I can imagine students huddling around the computer, pooling skills to help their friends onto interview shortlists!

SHL's publicity admits this risk. They say "it is essential to include in your on-screen administration a message that you will check the same attribute at the assessment event, and any discrepancy in scores will be investigated".

Are harried, cost-conscious recruiters likely to carry out such checks? Do pigs fly?

The risk of selection decisions being distorted through failure to

control candidate behaviour increases where untimed tests are taken on-line.

Imagine, for example, your candidate is taking the 16PF on-line. We know some candidates complete this questionnaire in 27 minutes while the slowest may need 50 minutes. Accordingly, we don't worry when our on-line candidate finishes the questionnaire in 45 minutes.

If we'd been present, however, we'd have listened to the candidate's friend telling him what sort of a person we want in this vacancy and picking the "right" answers for him. We'd have listened to arguments about the precise meaning of some questions. With a particularly suggestible candidate, it's quite possible we'd have more information about his friend's views than his own!

One day technology may solve some of these problems. The on-line testing program will use its own "camera" to identify the test-taker sitting at the computer and stop interference from "helpers". It'll be able to sense when candidates are particularly vulnerable and will adjust its feedback accordingly.

Until that time, I believe on-line testing produces an unacceptably high risk of mistakes and harm, both to individuals and employers.

Linda Whittern is with Careers Partnership (UK)

QUESTIONNAIRE

Our Joint Chairmen, Jane Wilkinson and Belinda Smith, are keen to find out what you, the membership, want from the 16PF User Group. Accordingly, a questionnaire is included with this Newsletter. Please find time to complete it and return it to Ali Fox, 16PF User Group Coordinator, 20 Green Street, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex, TW16 6RN.

Thank you.

Gosh! Really?

The Times recently carried facsimilies of the signatures of Osama bin Laden and George Bush on its front page. Inevitably, perhaps, a graphologist was asked to describe the characters of each. He said that George Bush is a determined man. Bin Laden was a man who has a lot on his mind - someone who has bitten off more than he can chew.

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

- ① 28th November. Cognitive Process Profile: One day workshop. A groundbreaking new technique from ASE.
- ② 7th February 2002: On-Line Testing

Managerial Hypocrisy?

Not for the first time, this column highlights those laudable managerial characteristics which seem to be at odds with what we actually support in practice. It may be all right in practice but does it work in theory?

I was sitting with a co-presenter, and hearing, not for the first time, of the managerial characteristics that were likely to improve the motivation of subordinates. The source was impeccable - Harvard Business School, no less. (Unfortunately I haven't got the full reference.)

The accompanying handout was called How The Manager Sees His Boss. Space will not allow me to reproduce it complete with a percentage scale, but essentially it was this:

- Highly motivated managers see their boss as being easy to talk to even when under pressure
- The boss tries to see the merit in your ideas even when they conflict with his own
- He tries to help his people understand company objectives
- He tries to give people all the information they want
- He is consistent and has high expectations of his subordinates
- He tries to encourage people to reach out in new directions
- He takes your mistakes in his stride as long as you learn from them
- He tries mainly to correct mistakes and find out how they can be prevented in future
- He expects superior performance and gives credit when he gets it

Have you got all that? Where is this paragon of virtue? If you find him, ask him to give me a ring, because I think I might just be able to place him.

OK. We've had some fun. Clearly one person is unlikely to possess all these admirable attributes. Perhaps if we found just two or three of them in a manager we would be happy.

But what is more interesting is the list of qualities seen in the boss by poorly motivated managers.

These are:

- You have to pick carefully the time when you want to talk to him
- Because he's the boss he tends to assume his ideas are the best
- He lets his people find out for themselves how company objectives apply to them
- He only provides his people with as much information as he thinks they need
- His expectations of subordinates can vary widely from day to day
- He tries to protect his people from taking big risks
- He allows little room for mistakes especially those that embarrass him
- When something goes wrong, he tries to find out who was responsible
- He expects you to do an adequate job, and doesn't say much unless something goes wrong

You will see that these are the opposites of those listed above. And my point?

Well, imagine you are the interviewer of such a person. I believe that if you elicited several of these latter responses from your candidate you would be very happy, not to mention your new-found ability to jump over the moon. Your candidate tells you that he is keen on time management (organised, Q3+). He does his best to limit the unexpected distractions that might prevent him from achieving his objectives (focused, I-; M-). He believes in having the courage of his own convictions (assertive E+, bold H+, confident O-; high self-esteem) and advancing his own ideas for testing in the white heat of the workplace (attracted to new ideas Q+); he wants to find out who, in his department, is sufficiently keen to read the company literature,

mission statement and all, and thereby to find out what objectives he should be working to. ("Don't believe in mollycoddling 'em, you know". Gives it to them straight, (N-). He doesn't bombard them with information they don't need. 'Information overload', is the phrase he likes. Expectations varying? Well, a good manager has to keep his people on their toes, doesn't he? (spontaneity, F+). And of course he won't let them take big risks, which might jeopardise the company's interests (G+). He hates mistakes, and tries to arrange things so that they are kept to the absolute minimum (G+). And when there is a mistake, he will use his reasoning skills to seek out the culprit (B+). And of course, he doesn't waste time in idle chitchat as long as you are doing a decent job, (management by exception, focused and grounded, I-)

Sounds good doesn't it?

But do we, as selectors, espouse one set of attributes and work to another? I think so. I believe many of those attributes would land him the job.

Maybe that's why we have so many demotivated people in our workplaces.

David Roberts - Editor

Bill Lubbock is again relating his knowledge of the 16PF to one of his off-beat experiences This time he learns to beware of Greeks bearing, er - not gifts exactly, but cups of tea... He's called it:

A RUDE AWAKENING or AN OLD GREEK CUSTOM?

16PF doesn't purport to measure all aspects of personality, not as far as I can ascertain from the hand books. It doesn't seem to measure innocence and naively for example, and yet those characteristics can determine behaviour, or lack of it, in unfamiliar situations. As a 20 year old, being innocent, naive and inexperienced I was quite confused when confronting what may have been a straightforward Greek custom. The other party involved was certainly H+, L-, F+, and O- and although my own profile is similar I didn't know how to respond.

In 1948 Britain gave up its mandate to administer Palestine and withdrew all her troops. Our unit was relocated to Salonika in Greece, where other British troops were already stationed and waiting to go home. I was sent in advance to prepare for the arrival of a further fifty soldiers from our unit who would follow in a month or so.

One beautiful morning in May my ship arrived in Salonika and I was taken to the Mediterranean Hotel which had been requisitioned by the army as a transit hotel for officers who were due to be posted on elsewhere. Staffed by Greeks, it was managed by a senior British officer assisted by a Greek liaison officer cum interpreter.

I was allocated a room on my own with two single beds, and a door that wouldn't lock. Lack of security didn't bother me as I had nothing of value with me, but I later discovered a lock would have come in useful.

I was told the routines, a morning call with tea at seven, breakfast at eight, lunch at one, and dinner at six thirty, and then I set off to make contact with the unit we were going to relieve. The day was fairly tiring and I went to bed at about 10.30 and fell into a deep sleep. The night was hot and all I needed to cover me was a thin sheet.

Next morning I was roused by the chambermaid who had already quietly placed a cup of tea by my bed. She then proceeded to slip her hand under the sheet and grope me. It took a few seconds before I was sufficiently awake to appreciate what was happening and when I sat up in bed she let go of me, took a pace back, smiled, and silently left the room to go on her way with the tea trolley.

I was somewhat bemused by the experience. I wasn't shocked, just surprised. Any possible interest in this unusual greeting was tempered by the fact that although probably in her mid-forties she looked aged about 60, was all in black in a peasant costume, and needed some extensive dental work on her front teeth, those that remained. To me she was just an unattractive old lady.

At breakfast I pondered what, if anything, to do about it. I

decided it might have either been a normal friendly Greek greeting, or a gesture made on the spur of the moment. I hadn't stayed in a hotel before and perhaps it was just part of the culture I hadn't been prepared for. I also wondered whether she might have simply fancied me, a very young officer, reasonable looking, and fair haired, but I didn't want to think she might have had any romantic intentions towards me. I finally decided to forget about it, but next morning she did it all over again.

Now I was in a quandary. I thought of asking one or two of my fellow officers if they too were awakened by a similar friendly gesture and whether that was just a Greek custom. But they were all older than me and looked rather stuffy. I decided I would just be laughed at and the joke would quickly be all round the hotel.

I of course spoke no Greek so I couldn't complain verbally and I and the chambermaid could only communicate by sign language, and seemingly by touch. I contemplated asking the Greek Liaison Officer what was the Greek for "Please take your hand off my private parts" but he would have asked why I wanted to know, and the chambermaid might have been sacked. I surmised, correctly, that unemployment was high in Greece at that time, and I didn't want an old lady like her to lose her job on my account. In any case he might not have given me the correct translation, might have suggested something else as a joke; I might not have remembered or pronounced it correctly; and I might have landed in worse trouble.

I decided to say nothing, but to try to wake up next day before the morning call and forestall her, but I didn't rouse myself in time and again suffered the same indignity. By the end of the week I was becoming quite paranoid about her behaviour, but felt unable to share my problem with anyone else. Then salvation presented itself by way of a newly arrived Major who had to share my room with me. Her morning friendliness then ceased. Shortly afterwards I moved into our more permanent quarters, a magnificent villa about two miles out of the town, set in the midst of vineyards and bordering on a pine forest - and with no elderly Greek chambermaids.

I have been back to Greece several times since then and stayed in hotels, but I have always taken the precaution of travelling with an alarm wrist watch and a Greek phrase book. The book I have doesn't cover all situations, especially for those as naive and innocent as I once was, and I've considered making a suggestion for inclusion in the next edition. You can never tell about those old Greek women, especially those who are H+, F+, L- and O-, but how do you identify them while you're half asleep?

Bill Lubbock is with Lubbock Associates

SPORTING SUCCESS AND 16PF

A brief look at two recent sports results Will we ever know why we fail or win?

We all know that success breeds success. Don't we? Is this a truism or just another piece of homespun psychological nonsense that we trot out when the occasion suits us, and forget when it doesn't? In the Newsletter of April 2000 we featured a piece on 16PF and sport and recent sporting events have reminded me of it.

Sport psychologists have been fascinated with the psychological make-up of sports men and women for years. If only they could isolate the qualities likely to lead to success, they ponder. The 16PF has been used extensively for this purpose. We do know that the personalities of footballers, athletes, boxers, cricketers, and so on, vary. It is even more complex to isolate the factors that might lead to team success.

Even non-sporting readers must have heard that the England football team beat Germany 5 -1 in Munich in September. The German team had never lost a World Cup qualifying match on their home ground. But only a couple of weeks beforehand England had been beaten by Holland 2 - 0 in a match they were expected to win. So what happened? We don't really know, but the day after our win over Germany, the newspapers were full of praise for the England team manager, and listed the qualities Sven Erikson had bought to football management. According to one paper, he said he had used techniques that were valued

in business and industry. (What can they be, I thought?) They turned out to be things like motivation, and the discriminating use of praise. Oh, and our old friend teamwork. Teamwork, I hear you say? Surely industry borrowed that from sport? Well, yes. And some teams have been successful even when teamwork was almost nonexistent. No, I'm not being difficult. It's true. There have been plenty of examples of this in both football and cricket. And industry. But back to the win over Germany and success breeding success. What happened at the next game? Why, we played Albania, a team we should have beaten easily. And we just about scraped a 2 - 0 win. "Funny old game..." as they say.

Individual Success

What about success at the individual level? Is that more likely to breed further success? This summer we played five Test matches against Australia for The Ashes. We lost. But one of the highlights that gave us a ray of hope was the innings of Mark Butcher in the fourth Test. He won the match for England almost single-handed, scoring a brilliant 174 not out. Even the Australians clapped him off the field. He achieved this in spite of personal troubles, and a previously bad spell early in the season in which he was even dropped by his own county. So having scored 174, did success breed success? No. He scored only 25 in his next innings.

Managerial Success

So what are we to make of all this? Is it any different from a manager say, doing well in one organisation and being fired in the next? A colleague recently told me of a candidate who met all the selection criteria for a managerial position - track record, references, personality, ability, competencies, assessment centre. Unfortunately, he was sacked. Why? His boss didn't like him. The chemistry was wrong.

Many of us will have learned that even careful assessment is not - cannot be - a solid guarantee. Let us not be like Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens's *Hard Times*. Dickens described him as having "a rule and a pair of scales, and a multiplication table always in his pocket, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature and tell you exactly what it comes to." Good bloke, Dickens.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

In the first of two articles, we take a brief look at a new assessment which aims to identify these characteristics, and we look at these well-worn words and examine their meaning.

The characteristics of innovation and creativity are much sought after, but how do you identify those who might have them? The 16PF can certainly give some indications, and other tests have been developed dating back to the 1950s.

There is now a vast amount of research but much of it has been hampered by the lack of a precise definition of the words 'innovation' and 'creativity'. Most writers on the subject use the words almost interchangeably, but more recently there appears to have been an acceptance that creativity refers to something that is original, and that innovation refers to the application of an original idea to an existing problem or set of circumstances.

A test has recently been devised by Fiona Patterson of Sheffield University, called The Innovation Potential Indicator. This identifies what the author believes to be at least some of the ingredients that are likely to lead to innovation. They are Motivation to Change, Challenging Behaviour, Adaptation, and Consistency of Work Styles. Innovative people are more likely to seek change and stimulation; they are more likely to be assertive and to challenge the status quo; they are more likely to seek originality and they welcome variety.

Creativity in Broadcasting

I have used this test with two main groups. The first was a small group of freelance writers none of whom proved to have a high level of innovation. The second, and much larger group, were middle managers in broadcasting. Many of these had begun their careers as newspaper, radio, or television reporters and then progressed to being presenters, producers, or editors. You may think that since they are obviously creative people anyway, there is little point in giving them such a test. This is not the case. I have administered it to thirty of these people so

far with perhaps another twenty or thirty to go. Of course it has been useful to the candidate in so far as it might confirm his or her own estimate of ability in this area, but it has also been useful as a diagnostic tool. Some for example have a high motivation to change, but lack the challenging behaviour that might bring this about; some have a high level of challenging behaviour with not a lot else to go with it!

It might be argued, from Patterson's definition, that within industry and commerce, innovation is more likely to be in demand, and that creativity - genuine creativity - will always be in short supply. Further, it is one thing to be able to identify a candidate as having innovative potential, but how do we manage him or her? (Very poorly, you might say.) To be able to manage creativity and innovation it would seem helpful to try to understand it a little better.

Our starting point is to look at a few names of those whom most people might regard as creative: Beethoven, Constable, Charles Dickens, Picasso, Mozart, Henry Moore and Tolstoy. When these names are mentioned, many might feel that creativity is God-given. It is mystical, unfathomable, and incapable of being fully understood. We may see creativity as a sudden flash of insight, a leap from one idea to another that somehow gels and produces something new. Perhaps we are just grateful that some have this gift even if we don't.

Here is another list of creative people: Sir Frank Whittle, Sir Alexander Fleming, Thomas Edison, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, and Charles Darwin. You will readily see that whilst these might all be regarded as creative, their achievements are very different from those in the previous list. Whereas those in the first group produced something that we might all regard as creative, those in the second group have used their creativity to solve problems. They may have done this through close observation as in Fleming's discovery of penicillin, or through extraordinary powers of deductive reasoning, as with Einstein. A friend of mine, a geneticist and Fellow of the Royal Society, strongly believes that his discoveries have been the result of simply applying logical, deductive reasoning to a problem. He refutes the idea of bisociation - two discrete ideas combining to produce a new solution - as contributing to his own work.

Rickards (1999)¹ notes that "creative thinking and creative problem-solving are repeatedly placed in opposition to rational thinking and problem-solving." He goes on to say that the distinction is between ordinary and everyday solutions to problems, and exceptional or creative thinking and problem solving.

Are we all creative?

Some psychologists hold that all of us have some creative ability, but that only in the most creative people is this apparent - that is when the outcome takes the form of something generally recognised as creative such as a painting or a piece of music. Cattell (1970)² states: "Creativity can exist at all levels from scrubbing a floor to discovering scientific laws, and conceivably the personality characteristics are similar for all. Empirical results, in fact, show that the creative personality traits remain much the same in science, literature, and the arts." He includes data that does in fact show that writers and artists have similar personality profiles, and that these profiles agree strongly with those of a group of scientists. So Cattell and others, take a very broad view of creativity, believing that it is in each of us and that we solve our day-to-day problems using our creativity. They liken it to intelligence, which we all have, but to varying degrees.

The layman often takes the view that creativity is something that only artists, musicians, writers and painters can demonstrate. (A broadcasting technical manager told me that he was unable to offer any examples of creativity or innovation in his department because "they are all technical people." He clearly thought that only producers, directors, playwrights etc., possessed this quality. But what about the invention of stereo, the video, DVD, and quadraphonic sound, I thought.)

Wednesday 28th November 2001

Please note that the next meeting of the User Group is on Wednesday 28th November and not as printed in the last Newsletter.

Specificity

If writers, musicians, and scientists have similar personalities, and these are proved to be conducive to creativity, can a creative scientist, for example, show equal creativity in another field? Apparently not. All may be regarded as creative, although each in different fields. It does not follow that a scientist who produces creative solutions will be equally as creative as will be a painter. A writer may have no understanding whatsoever of mechanical matters, and so his chances of creating anything mechanically original would seem to be nil. Mozart, regarded as a musical genius, told his father: "I cannot write Poetically: I am not a Poet. I cannot arrange my words so artfully that they reflect shadow and light." Creativity appears to be specific, therefore, and many researchers hold this view.

Others, however, believe that there are broad skills that can be applied across many different types of situation. Certainly, the motivation in each area of creativity will vary, but the notion that there might be some common denominator across these creative applications is appealing.

What about the quality?

Additionally, one wonders about the qualitative differences in creativity between the genius and the also-ran; between Beethoven and the writer of a pop song or musical comedy; between a great painter and a cartoonist, Shakespeare and the writer of a farce. Clearly, there are many influences other than those of personality characteristics: different skills, aptitudes, and motives, for example. We are not able to answer these questions at present - perhaps we will never be able to - but there is value in posing them as a reminder to the business manager of the complexity of creativity - and to a lesser extent innovation - and hope that this may bring a degree of realism to discussion of the subject.

In Part Two we will look at other tests of creativity and discuss the management of creative and innovative people.

¹Rickards, T., (1999). Creativity and the Management of Change. Oxford: Blackwell.

²Cattell R. B. (1970) Handbook for the Sixteen Personality Questionnaire, I PAT

David Roberts

Adapted from a forthcoming book - 'Managing Creative People'

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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 3 1/2" disk together with the printed copy. This saves re-typing and minimises the risk of mistakes.

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