

Edition 76
Autumn 2016

Psyche

The newsletter of The Psychometrics Forum



Visit our website at www.psychometricsforum.org

You will find information about forthcoming events, speakers, the origins of the group and much more.

Want to add something to the website? Contact our Administrator

– **Caro Leitzell: admin@psychometricsforum.org**

Also keep up to date with developments by signing up to

The Psychometrics Forum Affiliates Group on LinkedIn

Follow us on **Twitter @TPF_UK**

Contents

Heroes, landmarks and blind alleys in personality assessment	5
9. Arriving at the frontier <i>Dr Hugh McCredie, TPF Vice Chair</i>	
Uses & abuses of Assessment Centres	9
<i>Nigel Povah, Chairman & CEO at a&dc Ltd., speaking at TPF Event – 23 June</i> <i>Review by Dr Jane Pollock, Research & Business Psychologist, Psychometrician</i>	
AC Wash-up Poster	14
<i>Presented at TPF 23rd June Event</i> <i>Dr Kate Hammond, Business Psychologist & Associate Lecturer</i>	
The challenges faced by 21st Century CEOs and how Korn Ferry Hay Group assess CEOs using real-life leadership simulations	15
<i>Dr Charles Bethell-Fox, Senior Client Partner at Korn Ferry Hay Group London, speaking at TPF Event – 23 June</i> <i>Review by Trish Guthrie, Independent Consultant</i>	
The application of Strengthscope® to facilitate career coaching	19
<i>Dr Paul Brewerton – Strengths Partnership Ltd., speaking at TPF Event – 23 June</i> <i>Reviewed by Helen Haynes, Global Head of Professional Development at Fidessa</i>	
Headstuck - Why so many of us get stuck in career paralysis – and what to do about it?	22
<i>Rob Archer, Chartered Psychologist, speaking at TPF Event – 10 March</i> <i>Reviewed by John Jackson, Senior Consultant at Inspired Partners</i>	
Saville Consulting's WAVE Training	25
<i>Dr Josephine Storek, C.Psychol.</i> <i>Honourary Fellow and Research Associate, University College London (UCL)</i>	

A few words from your editor

Adrian Starkey

Dear colleagues

Those of you who have been watching closely will know that this is my last time out as editor of **Psyche**. It has been a rewarding 6 years and 20 editions, but in best Olympic tradition the time has come to hand over the baton. I am delighted to be able to leave **Psyche** in the capable hands of Tameron Chappell who is already making a significant contribution to TPF committee activities. I am sure that she will bring some fresh perspectives and renewed energy to take **Psyche** to the next level.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all contributors who have appeared in the pages of **Psyche** during my time as editor. Their efforts chronicling the activities of TPF and providing additional copy on all manner of psychometric subjects is what has made Psyche possible. In particular, I would like to thank TPF Vice Chair Dr Hugh McCredie who has consistently provided well-researched and thoughtful content – not to spare his blushes Hugh is a true hero of psychometrics. I would also like to give special thanks to Georgia Styring who has been responsible for delivering the look and feel of Psyche in recent years.

I think that you will find this edition to have some very interesting content. Dr Hugh provides us with his final (for the moment) piece in his heroes, landmarks and blind alleys series. To my mind a very well assembled summary of what has been and provides us with a glimpse of what might be for the future. References to Colin DeYoung from the University of Minnesota feature highly – in my opinion one of the leading lights of modern day personality psychology research.

In other articles we are treated to some very interesting pieces describing proceedings at our 23rd June event on the theme of assessment centres. Discussion was wide-ranging, but there was particular energy around the recent BPS best practice AC guidelines that clearly favor the actuarial approach to decision-making over a more discursive approach. Delegates at this event were treated to perspectives from some of the leading practitioners in the field.

There are also two pieces harking back to our 10th March event recording the session on coaching for career development. The theme here was broadly aligned with positive psychology and delegates were introduced



Adrian Starkey

to the Strengthscope® tool for development and insights from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) designed to help clients to reflect constructively on their careers.

To close we have a piece summarising the delegate experience at a TPF sponsored Saville WAVE training program that took place earlier this year. TPF's involvement in training is a newer initiative that we hope will bring mutual benefits to TPF members and training providers alike. Consistent with TPF's core aim of enhancing knowledge and understanding of psychometrics we hope to be able to expand the range of training opportunities that we are able to make available to our membership. Details of forthcoming TPF sponsored training events can be found on our web-site: <http://www.psychometricsforum.org/news-and-events/news-and-events-2/>

I think that I have said enough – Enjoy!

Adrian@xlr8talent.com

Copy deadlines

Winter – October 31st

Spring – January 31st

To book a place on forthcoming TPF events, please contact our Administrator **Caro Leitzell** on **01962 880920** or email her at **admin@psychometricsforum.org**

Details of membership are available on the Forum website:
www.psychometricsforum.org

Heroes, landmarks and blind alleys in personality assessment

9. Arriving at the frontier

Dr Hugh McCredie, TPF Vice Chair



Dr Hugh McCredie

The journey so far

In previous articles, we have:

- Asserted the utility of dimensional over categorical measures of personality (Articles 1 and 8)
- Traced the emergence of the Big Five personality factors from studies of everyday language (Articles 2 and 4).
- Explored the emergence of personality factors and their neurological underpinnings from clinical data (Articles 3 and 5)
- Discovered what lies in the space between each of the Big Five factors in circumplex models of personality (Article 6)
- Identified how measures of affect (feelings) relate to the Big Five (Article 7)
- Found dimensional continuities between normal and dysfunctional personalities (Article 8)

In the course of this journey, we have encountered heroes (e.g. Galen, Allport, Cattell, Eysenck, Gray, Goldberg, Costa & McCrae), landmarks (e.g. the emergence of the Big five) and a few blind alleys (e.g. Phrenology) together with other more ambivalent contributions.

Where to next?

This final article in the series explores two major topics which are still being debated: (1) alternative models of personality structure around the Big Five Model; (2) further exploration of the neurological underpinning of personality. We shall end with an insight into how the Big Five Model validates the four temperaments postulated by Galen 1800 years ago and featured in our opening article.

Higher order factors of personality

The reality that the Big Five factors are not strictly independent should almost guarantee the emergence of a higher-order structure of personality. However any valid model must represent something more than the results of factor analysis; going beyond mere description and towards explaining

how it impacts on the human condition. Ideally it should map onto the brain's structures systems and circuits, its psychoactive substances or its genes.

Two-factor models

Digman (1997) factored Big Five correlations from 14 published studies and reported two factors, provisionally labelled α (alpha) and β (beta):

Factor α was typically indicated by Big Five factors A (Agreeableness) and ES (Emotional Stability), and generally also by C (Conscientiousness).

Factor β was indicated by E (Extraversion) and I (Intellect/Openness) in all studies. (p. 1248)

He suggested that factor α possibly reflected 'the socialization process itself', adding:

if all proceeds according to society's blueprint, the child develops superego [C] and learns to restrain or redirect id impulses and to discharge aggression in socially approved ways [A]. Failure of socialization is indicated by neurosis [N] by deficient superego, or by excessive aggressiveness. (p.1250).

He continued:

Factor β may be interpreted as... Personal growth versus personal constriction... This is the perspective of personal growth theorists, such as Rogers and Maslow (p. 1250)

DeYoung *et al.* (2001) suggested that Digman's alpha and beta factors might be better labelled 'Stability' and 'Plasticity':

The shared variance of Emotional Stability... Agreeableness and Conscientiousness... suggests an underlying connection in the processes through which humans maintain stability...mediated through the... ascending rostral serotonergic system['s]...vital role in the regulation of emotional, motivational and circadian processes (p. 535)

The shared variance of Extraversion and Openness, by contrast, appears to reflect the tendency to explore or to engage voluntarily with novelty...The two related traits...might be considered different aspects of a more basic disposition—one associated with the function of the central dopaminergic (DA) system... [which]

mediates approach behavior, positive affect, and incentive reward sensitivity (535-6)

Both Extraversion and Openness have been linked to reductions in latent inhibition...extraverts are more likely to explore or investigate novelty in the concrete, behavioral sense...while individuals high in Openness are more likely to explore abstractly (536)

Thus, the stability factor has a hypothesised relationship with the production of the neurotransmitter serotonin, associated with inhibition and control, whilst the plasticity factor might be linked to dopamine, associated with reward motivation. DeYoung *et al.* (2001) factored Big five and other responses from student and adult community samples and successfully extracted the two hypothesised factors which accounted for more than 60 per cent of the total response variance.

Just (2011) reviewed the literature on a putative 'General Factor of Personality' (GFP) arguing, from DeYoung *et al.* (2001) that the stability and plasticity factors might be complementary, for a single overarching factor; (i.e. N-, A+, C+, E+, O+) . She cited:

- Rushton (1985) who attributed humanity's evolutionary success to its ability both to compete (E) and co-operate (A).
- Mueck (2007) who 'was the first to empirically find a GFP, using different personality measures of the Big Five' to explain 60% of the source variance
- Rushton and Irwing (2008) who re-analysed Digman (1997) and found his alpha/beta factors loaded on a GFP which explained 45% of the variance.
- Rushton, Bons, and Hur (2008) who reported twin studies indicating a very high level of GFP heritability.
- Erdle and Rushton (2010) who concluded that people high on the GFP were also high on approach, self-esteem, positive affect, and generalized expectancy of reward, and low on inhibition, negative affect, and generalized expectancy of punishment.

Rushton and his associates have received criticisms regarding support for the GFP inferred from specific instruments (e.g. Donnellan *et al.*, 2012) and particular data sets (e.g. Muncer, 2011). Woods & Harvey (2012) demonstrated mixed GFP support from Hogan

Personality Inventory, Occupational Personality Questionnaire, 16PF5 and Profile Match Inventory data. They noted that the GFP extracted from the Personality and Preferences Inventory (PAPI) 'is most likely rotated towards dominance or leadership...leading to the negative overlap with affiliation [A].' The latter finding is interesting as managerial applicants (Bartram, 1992), SME directors (McCredie, 2011), International CEOs (Peterson et al. 2003) and US presidents (Rubenzer et al., 2000) have all been characterised by 25th percentile or lower mean A scores.

A useful lower order structure

DeYoung et al. (2007) noted 'the possibility that one or more of the Big Five might subsume two separable sub-domains has been raised in a variety of contexts' (p. 881) and is supported by behaviour genetic twin studies (Jang et al., 2002). DeYoung et al. conducted an oblique analysis of NEO-PI-R and AB5C-IPIP responses. They reported that 'Each of the Big Five was found to contain two distinct, though correlated, factors' (p. 883) These were as follows:

Domain	Sub-domains	
Extraversion	Enthusiasm	Assertiveness
Agreeableness	Compassion	Politeness
Conscientiousness	Industriousness	Orderliness
Neuroticism	Volatility	Withdrawal
Openness	Intellect	Openness

They replicated their initial results with a specially developed instrument, the Big Five Aspect Scales (BFAS), derived from the IPIP public domain items. The balance of parsimony and aesthetics reflected in this model appeals to the current author.

The neurobiology of personality

We were introduced to the neurobiology of personality in Article 3. This reported Eysenck's association of cortical arousal/inhibition, with E and that of visceral brain activity, concerned with emotion, and N. In Article 5, we learned that Gray located, the roots of N, more specifically, in the septo-hippocampal system, the sensitivity of which was likely to have developed via early conditioning. We also noted, above, the association of the neurotransmitter serotonin and higher-order Stability centred on low N and dopamine with Plasticity centred on E.

DeYoung et al. (2010) used structural MRI to locate the correlates of the Big Five factors in the brain. They did this by comparing the scans and NEO-PI-R profiles of 100+ healthy right-handed participants with those of a reference case with average Big Five scores. They found a more specific association of E with medial orbito-frontal cortex, 'which appears to reflect sensitivity to reward'. N related to right dorsomedial pre-frontal cortex (PFC) and in portions of the left medial temporal lobe implicated in 'brain systems governing sensitivity to threat and punishment'. C was associated with the medial frontal gyrus possibly implicated in 'effective self-regulation at multiple levels of complexity'. Factor A related to the posterior cingulate cortex and, negatively, to the superior temporal area

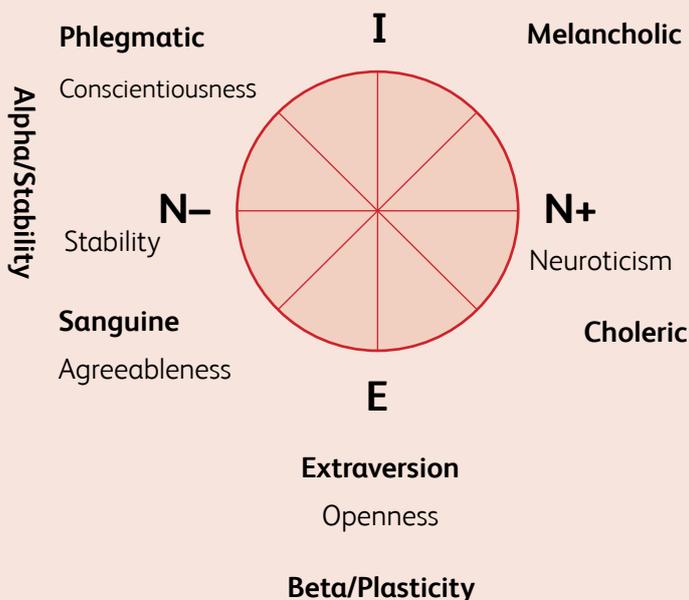
'associated with the social information processing that enables and motivates altruistic behavior'. These are useful contributions 'toward the integration of individual differences research in psychology and neuroscience'.

It would be premature to evaluate the findings reported in this article in terms of our categories, but DeYoung's contributions are well-worth noting and I shall continue to follow the debate on the GFP.

Squaring the circle

Robinson (2001, p.1257) represented various models of personality as a circumplex. A variation of his diagram serves to draw this series to a close and celebrates Galen as our super-hero.

Figure 1: Relating models of personality



After Robinson (2001)

I-E and N = Eysenck's broad dimensions; **Phlegmatic, Melancholic, Choleric, Sanguine** = Galen's temperaments; Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism/Stability, Openness = Big Five factors; Alpha/Stability and Beta/Plasticity = Digman (1997) and DeYoung et al. (2001) higher order factors

References

Bartram, D. (1992) The personality of UK managers: 16PF norms for short-listed applicants, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 65, 159–72.

Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality inventory and NEO Five-factor inventory*. Professional Manual. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

DeYoung, C. G., Hirsh, J. B., Shane, M. S., Papademetris, X., Rajeevan, N., & Gray, J. R. (2010). Testing predictions from personality neuroscience: Brain structure and the Big Five. *Psychological Science*, 21, 820–828.

DeYoung, C. G., Peterson, J. B. & Higgins, D. M. (2001) Higher order factors of the big five predict conformity: Are there neuroses of health? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33, 533–552

DeYoung, C. G.; Quilty, L. C. & Peterson, J. B. (2007) Between facets and domains: 10 aspects of the Big Five, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(5), 880–896.

Digman, J. M. (1997). Higher-order factors of the Big Five. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 1246–1256.

Donnellan M.B., Hopwood C.J, Wright A.G. C. (2012) Reevaluating the evidence for the General Factor of Personality in the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire: Concerns about Rushton and Irwing (2009) *Personality and Individual Differences*. 52(3):285–289.

Erdle, S. & Rushton, J. P. (2010). The general factor of personality. BIS-BAS, expectancies of reward and punishment, self-esteem, and positive and negative affect. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 48. 762–766.

Jang, K. L., Livesley, W. J., Angleitner, A., Riemann, R., & Vernon, P. A. (2002). Genetic and environmental influences on the covariance of facets defining the domains of the five-factor model of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33(1), 83–101.

Just C. (2011) A review of literature on the general factor of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50(6):765–771.

McCredie, H (2011) Do managers need to be agreeable? *Assessment & Development Matters*, 3, 3

Muncer, S. J. (2011). The general factor of personality: Evaluating the evidence from meta-analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and evolutionary theory. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 51(6), 775–778

Musek, J. (2007). A general factor of personality: Evidence for the Big One in the five-factor model. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41.1213–1233.

Peterson, R.S., Smith, D.B., Martorana, P. V. & Owens, P.D. (2003). The impact of chief executive officer personality on top management team dynamics: One mechanism by which leadership affects organisational performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5).795–808.

Robinson, D. L. (2001). How brain arousal systems determine different temperament types and the major dimensions of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31, 1233–1259.

Rubenzon S. J., Faschingbauer T.R., Ones D. S. (2000) Assessing the U.S. presidents using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory. *Assessment*, 7(4), 403–20.

Rushton J. P. (1985). Differential K theory: The sociobiology of individual and group differences. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 6. 441–452.

Rushton J. P., Bons, T. A., Ando, J., Hur, Y.-M., Irwing, P., Vernon, P. A. et al. (2009). A general factor of personality from multitrait-multimethod data and cross-national twins. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*. 12.356–365.

Rushton J. P. & Irwing, P. (2008). A general factor of personality (GFP) from two meta-analyses of the Big Five: Digman (1997) and Mount, Barrick, Scullen, and Rounds (2005). *Personality and Individual Differences* 45.679–683.

Woods, S. A., & Hardy, C. (2012). The higher-order factor structures of five personality inventories. *Personality and individual differences*, 52(4), 552–558

Uses & abuses of Assessment Centres

Nigel Povah, Chairman & CEO at a&dc Ltd., speaking at TPF Event – 23 June

Review by Dr Jane Pollock, Research & Business Psychologist, Psychometrician



Dr Jane Pollock

Nigel Povah is the CEO and Founder of a&dc, a company specialising in assessment centre methods. Nigel is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist with over 30 years' experience, and assisted with the production of the new BPS standards in ACs, published in 2015. Nigel is also the Founder and Chair of the UK Assessment Centre Group (UK-ACG) which runs an annual conference in May. We were delighted to welcome someone with such a wealth of experience and expertise to our meeting.

Origins and history

Nigel began with an interesting and knowledgeable discussion about the origins and history of Assessment Centres – their use for large-scale recruitment in organisations such as the Forces and the Civil Service way back in the '30s and '40s, and then the US adoption by organisations such as Merrill Lynch and GE. In the UK, the use of Assessment Centres took off in the early '70s with AT&T using this methodology for large-scale management development, and another surge in the 1990s when Development Centres were more accepted as a tool for development.

Immediately then, we begin to see that the uses of Assessment centre methodology have been (at least) two-fold: both for selection and development purposes.

Reliability and practical utility

Can it be said that the AC method offers enhanced reliability and accuracy over single assessment methods? Nigel is convinced that it does. The multi-assessment principle shows enhanced reliability and practical utility over single assessment techniques (Robertson & Smith 2001; Meriac, 2008). In terms of the accuracy of predictive methods, ACs come in just above 0.4 (better than unstructured interviews at around 0.2, or personality tests alone at just under 0.4). Of course, there is also a lot of variability between assessment centre methods (See below for some tips for success). Whilst one might hope that some assessment centres are able to match the predictive ability of work sample tests at 0.6, there will be others still showing much lower values. This is key, since if we want to make the case for AC methodology, it has to be shown to be demonstrably better than other, less expensive methods.



Nigel Povah

More than that, Nigel is keen to stress that simply throwing together a mix of personality and ability tests does not constitute an Assessment Centre and it is the addition of one or more simulations that creates such an event. He cites Dilchert & Ones (2009) who show that '...a composite of dimension scores offers useful levels of incremental validity when compared with scores of cognitive ability and personality tests.' However, he points out that there are several key features that distinguish the good AC from the others.

Key features of the successful AC method

The most successful (and those with highest utility/ROI), are those which include simulation tasks focussed on job-related competencies. Candidates should be required to demonstrate appropriate, job-related behaviour in at least one task. Although this task may be placed alongside other measures of ability and personality, it is the presence of these kinds of task which discriminate between good and poor AC outcomes.

So what can we expect from a good AC outcome? A well-defined job analysis is key from the beginning, which is then translated into a set of job-related competencies and associated simulation task(s). Other measures, such as those for personality or ability should be similarly focussed, to achieve maximal validity and predictive accuracy. Best practise would also insist that well trained assessors, adhering to pre-defined

principles, combine to yield best ROI for clients. Benefits to users of this approach have been found to include a realistic job preview, targeted feedback, perceived fairness and high face validity.

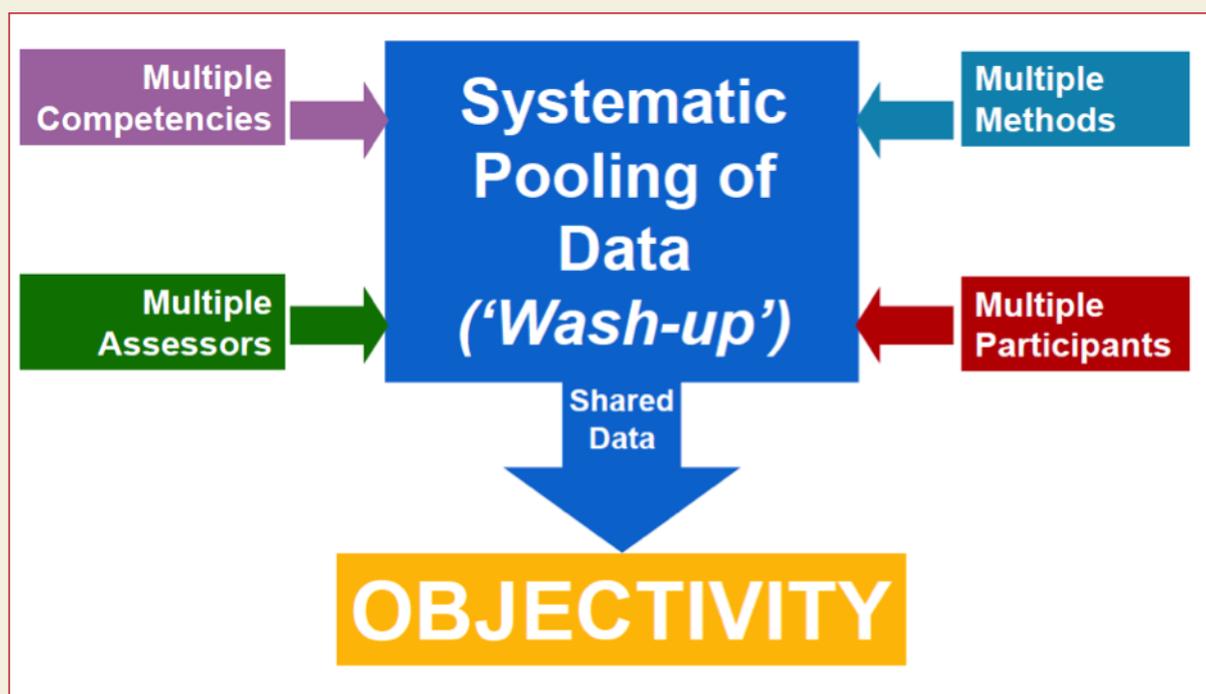
The future and the past

Nigel is keen to point out that AC methods can be used to achieve a variety of purposes, and that in this increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world, predictive validity is hard to achieve. Many assessment methods assess past performance (Interviews, References, Technical tests and Appraisals) whereas what we are looking to predict is future success. Nigel describes this as the difference between Job motivation and Career motivation, and insists that the flexibility and specificity of the AC method offers a potential solution.

Components of the AC: strengths and weaknesses

The aim of any AC from a scientific point of view has to be an objective assessment of each candidate. Fairness and equality of candidacy are essential in fulfilling the 1978 Equal Opportunities legislation. More than this, client and candidate perceptions are important in determining the future benefit of the method: it is a two way appraisal process.

Nigel insists that the strengths of the method lie in the detail. Thorough scoping and job analysis, defining competencies (both effective and ineffective



performance) in measurable behavioural terms, and relating this to knowledge, skills and attitudes, are the key to underpinning the task content.

Multiple competencies and multiple methods:

The tasks themselves should be selected on the basis of the job analysis, and include (preferably) more than one simulation task in combination with other methods such as interviews and Psychometrics. Multiple simulations are useful because they allow for many aspects of the future role to be assessed: complex jobs require assessment of multiple skills. Nigel suggests that the reliability of the assessment of each competency is enhanced by the use of multiple methods, another strength of the AC method.

Multiple assessors:

Assessors are often given to be the weakest link in the AC process. However one of the advantages of multiple assessors is the reduction in the effects of subjective bias. Furthermore, Assessors are required to justify their ratings, and thus multi-faceted observations can be discussed. Crucially, Nigel reminds us that other stakeholders can be party to these discussions, adding to the breadth and depth of the experience for the client organisation.

Multiple participants:

Typically, AC methods are used to assess a number of candidates together: group tasks can also then be

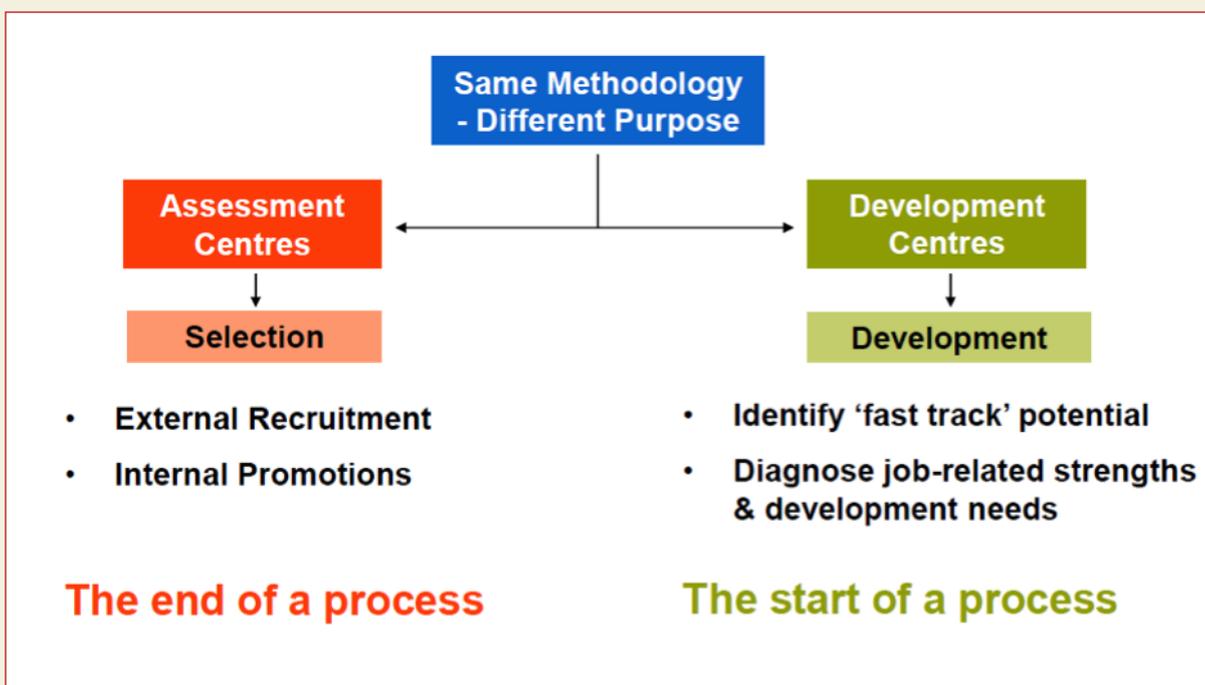
used to assess interpersonal characteristics. There are occasions when smaller numbers participate, e.g. senior management roles. Although clearly greater efficiency is achieved with more participants, there are some senior roles where the use of single candidacy AC is justified, and in these cases Nigel suggests that the use of confederates may be required.

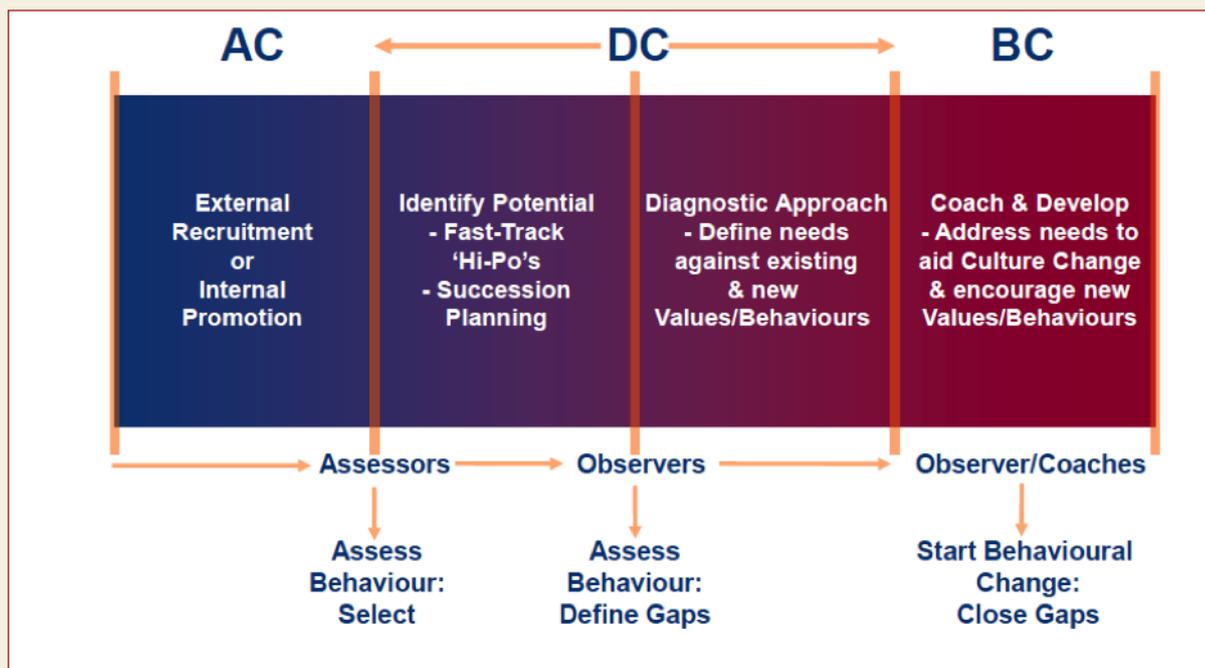
Each of these elements have their potential vulnerabilities: competencies need to be carefully designed; tasks need to be well-chosen to accurately reflect the key elements of the role; multiple assessors need to be well trained and highly skilled to stick to the brief.

Perhaps the most contentious element of the AC method however, is the 'wash-up' session. Recent BPS guidelines suggest that this can be an unreliable element of the process and that replacing it with a mathematical calculation can help to mitigate. This is currently the BPS best practice advice, but there is significant debate amongst TPF members with this idea!

Assessment vs development centres.

Nigel points out that the AC and DC methods may well be the same, but for the unsuccessful candidates, often the majority, the AC is the end of the process (and this is sometimes handled badly). In the DC situation, often the centre experience is the beginning of the process: participants often have access to the data, and the onward development process needs to be planned. Nigel has termed this the ABC continuum.





Development centres can transform talent by identifying potential, facilitating succession planning, developing leaders and encouraging self-development. Nigel is keen to point out that in these circumstances the DC is not a stand-alone event: feedback and development can begin on the day, but the path for future development of individuals should already be planned, with most of the development activity inevitably taking place after the event.

Common abuses of ACs.

The research here is drawn from a survey of AC practise (see below), and 'abuses' are classified into four areas:

- Attempts to measure too many competencies: 51 % ACs have been found to measure >7 competencies, and 17 % more than 11. Nigel suggests sticking to Miller's magic number 7 +/-2
- Too many competencies measured simultaneously by one exercise. 22 % ACs measured >5. The BPS standard suggest maximum of 4.
- Inadequate assessor training: 34 % of ACs surveyed used assessors who had received 1 day's training or less. Nigel suggests at least 2 days is required for adequate assessor standards to be established.
- Too many participants per assessor: 24 % ACs were found to have a ratio greater than 2:1. Nigel suggests 1:1 is ideal, 2:1 is given as best practice - and widely accepted, whilst 3:1 is almost certainly too many.

(Data from 'Global survey of AC practices', 2012. By a&dc and Colorado State University)

Pressures for change

The main pressures are the expected ones: to lower costs, increase speed and reduce inconvenience. The temptation is to move towards more psychometrics, more use of online technologies – for both remote assessment and feedback, more use of automated feedback. There are risks for taking this approach though: it may be less objective and reliable, can be a de-humanising process, and increases the potential for adverse impact of participation. Here Nigel is clear: the lack of, or reduction in simulation exercises threatens to diminish the legitimacy of the AC method completely.

Used carefully however, there are up-sides to increasing the use of technology: tasks can look and feel 'contemporary' (e.g. e-mail), the option to use remote assessors, and more effective data capture for use with talent analytics might be beneficial.

If 'best practice' is not feasible Nigel recommends at least a 'best endeavour' approach:

- accuracy of assessment of job related competency is essential,
- the use of technology should be chosen to add value, rather than be used simply because of time and convenience
- at least one simulation exercise is essential
- adequate time for interaction and feedback with participants is crucial

Best practice for AC?

There are new standards for the design and delivery of Assessment Centres (2015) and they can be found here: www.bps.org.uk/dop/acswg.

These standards have been based on the research evidence for effectiveness and ethical considerations. They describe good practice reflecting minimum standards, and acknowledge that best practice is aspirational.

Here we do find some real contention however. The new BPS standards indicate that 'arithmetic approaches shall be used to determine overall rating.. in selection decisions'. This direction is based on a meta-analysis carried out by Kuncel et al (2013) where mechanical calculations were found to have increased validity over clinical decisions (the 'wash-up'), for a number of criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1: mechanical vs Clinical validity for a range of performance criteria

Criterion	Holistic/ Clinical Validity	Mechanical validity
Job Performance	0.28	0.44
Advancement	0.36	0.42
Training Outcomes	0.16	0.31
Educational	0.48	0.58

As mentioned previously, there was some contention in the room about this part of the new BPS standards in particular. However, as evidence-based practitioners the data do seem self-evident.

In conclusion, Nigel made some poignant remarks in reference to the Standard: we need to have some benchmark of good practice, and that good practice represents benefits in both ethical and tangible ways. Good practice increases the validity of the results, and reduces the risk of unfair assessment. Holding to standards increases the defensibility of practice, and provides a framework when making hard decisions about cost, time and resource constraints. The external perception of ACs may become tarnished by poor practice. Publication of, and adherence to evidence-based standards will increase the validity, utility and value of the process. This in turn should improve the quality of the AC experience and the brand image of those psychologists adhering to the Standard.

Our thanks go to Nigel for an incredibly well-informed and knowledgeable presentation.

References

- Dilchert & Ones (2009). Assessment centre dimension: individual differences correlates and meta-analytic incremental validity. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*.
- Kuncel, Klieger, Connelly & Ones (2013) Mechanical vs Clinical data combination in Selection and Admissions decisions: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98 (6), 1060–1072.
- Meriac, et al (2008). Further evidence for the validity of assessment centre dimensions: a meta-analysis of the incremental criterion-related validity of dimension ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5).
- Robertson & Smith (2001) Personnel Selection. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 74, 441–472.



Dr Kate Hammond PhD MSc

Aims and Objectives

The main purpose of this research was to explore whether the standardisation procedures that are very important in assessment centres (ACs) could become less effective in the final end of day (EOD) discussion. Previous research compared statistically-integrated overall assessment ratings (OARS) with OARs agreed through an EOD discussion and found that the latter, while costing more, did not raise and could lower validity (eg Sackett and Wilson 1982; Pynes and Bernardin 1992). While these findings have fed into a revision in the latest International Task Force Guidelines (2009) on ACs, they are rarely cited and recent studies show the continued and unquestioned use of an EOD discussion in both practice and research. In addition, while several studies identify group dynamics as worthy of exploration (eg Searle 2003), very little research has been conducted. This study therefore sought to re-establish interest in this area and to fill the gap by considering the role of group processes in explaining these outcomes, drawing on social identity theory, groupthink, conformity studies, and Tuckman's team development model.

Assessment Centres

Assessment centres typically include a range of individual and group exercises (Woodruffe 2007). This AC included an icebreaker, a practical group task, a series of dilemmas, an interview, and a presentation. Seven competence dimensions included 'sensitivity', 'commitment to learning', and 'working with others'. Ratings were 0 (low) to 3 (high) and an assessment day manager (ADM) chaired the EOD discussion.

Mercer's Dialogue Framework

- **Disputational:** contradictory, non-constructive comments (eg Monty Python argument sketch; 'storming')
- **Cumulative:** less critical agreement, prioritising team unity (group cohesion links with SIT and Groupthink; 'forming')
- **Exploratory** talk: constructive talk, building on prior comments (group 'flow'; protective against groupthink; Tuckman (1965) 'performing')



Method

Six end of day discussions were taped and transcribed. Analysis followed the discursive psychological approach of Potter and Wetherell (1987). This allows for conversation analysis (eg turn-taking), consideration of relational management techniques such as prospective display sequences (Silverman 2001) and changes of footing (Goffman 1981), and more identity-related practices such as subject positioning (Wetherell 2001). Mercer's (eg 2008) dialogue framework was also used to analyse the quality of the talk.



	Competencies						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Group task		1	2		2	2	
Dilemmas	2			3	3	1	1
Interview	2	2	1	2	2	1	2
Presentation		2			3		
OAR	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Findings

Group norms identified included:

- consensual decision-making: 'So let's, shall we, is everyone agreed then?' (cumulative/exploratory)
- evidence-based decision making: extensive quotation and examples of relevant behaviours (exploratory)
- protecting positive identity by lack of challenge 'I think it's "sensitivity" because [ADM: yeah]' (cumulative)
- 'now you mention it' selective bias (cumulative)
- avoiding low and high scores: 'hard to give a 1' discourse and 'a 2's fine discourse' (cumulative)

'It's always painful isn't it, giving people low marks' 'so it's a one. Erm unfortunately'

Assr3: Yeah, well, I'm happy. Assr2: I mean, a 2 is fine. Here. Assr3: Yeah, I'm fine. ADM: A 2 is all he needs.

Discussion and Implications

There were clear signs of group-based behaviour, notably the consensual language emphasising the 'we' and the group production of OARs. With the participative leadership approach of the ADM, undue influence of the chair (eg Lowry 1992) was much tempered; assessors were empowered and groupthink protected against (Chapman 2006). Discussion was also largely dyadic (ADM/assessor) ('the wheel'), showing the need for research using AC simulations to match these elements. When norms promoted exploratory talk, discussion was constructive. Even cumulative talk could serve important group-forming and identity needs: In conclusion, a purely 'deficit' model is inappropriate for group dynamics in ACS.

Acknowledgements: This research was conducted under the supervision of Dr Emma Russell. I also would like to thank the charity for providing access.

The challenges faced by 21st Century CEOs and how Korn Ferry Hay Group assess CEOs using real-life leadership simulations



Trish Guthrie

Dr Charles Bethell-Fox, Senior Client Partner at Korn Ferry Hay Group London, speaking at TPF Event – 23 June

Review by Trish Guthrie, Independent Consultant

We were delighted to welcome Dr Charles Bethell-Fox from Korn Ferry Hay Group, continuing the topic from the morning session of 'Uses and Abuses of Assessment/Development Centres'. Nigel Povah (a&dc Ltd) had given us an overview of the Assessment Centre process – background, strengths and weaknesses – Dr Bethell-Fox then focused on high potential assessment at senior levels, in particular CEO's. We were given insights into the Korn Ferry Assessment of Leadership Potential, which uses real-life leadership simulations, based on careful job analysis research. Dr Bethell-Fox began his studies in experimental psychology and was then awarded a PhD in Educational Psychology and Measurement from Stanford University. He went on to work for the Royal Navy in selection, where, as Senior Psychologist (Naval), he focused on improving officer selection methods. He now has many years of experience, helping firms to assess, develop, and select senior executives, in particular CEOs. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to hear from someone with considerable knowledge gained from broad, international experience across business sectors.

It was a hot and humid afternoon, a recipe for an afternoon nap in the close quarters of the Naval Club. However, as the post-session feedback confirmed, Dr Bethell-Fox was able to hold our attention by giving an informed perspective on the assessment requirements of CEO roles in complex, global organisations. Unfortunately, as we go to press, we have been unable to secure the necessary confidentiality and copyright permissions to directly use material from the talk. However, I have referenced the Korn Ferry Assessment of Leadership Potential (KFALP) – Research Guide and Technical Manual at the end of this review.



Dr Charles Bethell-Fox

Areas covered during Dr Bethell-Fox's talk included:

- The challenges faced by modern day CEO's
- Why and how CEO selection must improve?
- The changing context of assessment

Challenges faced by modern day CEO's

Dr Bethell-Fox started his talk by reminding us that the role of the CEO has changed. The VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) aspects of the CEO role in the 21st century have increased locally and globally. The speed of information sharing means for the CEO today, there is no place to hide. This can be one of the hardest parts of the job and is often overlooked. It is also important to consider that in the current context of potentially slow growth opportunities; rapidly changing technology; cyber security threats and the ability to hire and retain key talent, the role of the CEO is more complex than it was even 5 years ago. This level of complexity requires rigorous assessment processes to match.

In addition, as CEO, an individual now has to collaborate with (and have trust in) others – their senior executive team. Many decisions are, by necessity, in the hands of people closer to day-to-day operations. In some cases 'CEOs often end up knowing less about the operational details of their companies than they did in their previous positions, adjusting to this can be difficult' (Harvard Business Review, 2014). The CEO is more likely to be concerned with strategy, investor relations and regulatory affairs.

Why CEO selection must improve

As Dr Bethell-Fox identified, some organisations may have relied on the market reputation of a CEO in the past, if they worked for 'X' company they must be good. Recruitment might have been an informal process, based on past achievements and subjective judgements, before potentially millions are spent on an individual, only to have to let them go a year or less later. There is (unreferenced) data from Price Waterhouse Cooper (2014) that the financial loss to companies from high CEO turnover due to poor decision making, is likely to be \$1.8bn per year. This not only hurts the organisation, it can do damage to the confidence and mental well being of the individual, whose fall from grace is typically closely monitored by business and social media.

How can improvement be made?

Korn Ferry's global research on CEOs, undertaken over the past 47 years has identified which behaviours are critical to CEO success. The same research base has also established the importance of identifying potential CEO's within an organisation early in their career, developing individuals into the role.

Improvements have been made from the use of targeted assessment of leadership potential using validated models. Whilst the fundamentals of leadership have not changed, the operating framework has. Certain aspects of personality, motivation and experience may help CEO's succeed,

but what matters most is the CEO's ability to think and behave in ways that create an effective direction for the organisation, whilst winning team members' and key stakeholders' motivation and commitment. An important aspect of the assessment process is to provide supportive feedback to make it a learning and developmental experience.

The assessment process

Korn Ferry have produced a model of leadership to assess participants against the researched behaviours, using a series of real-life leadership simulations that mimic – in detail – the core challenges faced by 21st Century CEOs. The Korn Ferry assessment focuses on the future potential of the individual – what they can become, rather than what they are capable of today. Key signposts for assessment are:

When asked about weighting, Dr Bethell-Fox explained that all were



considered to be important and that some, such as Self-Awareness, may act as mediating factors.

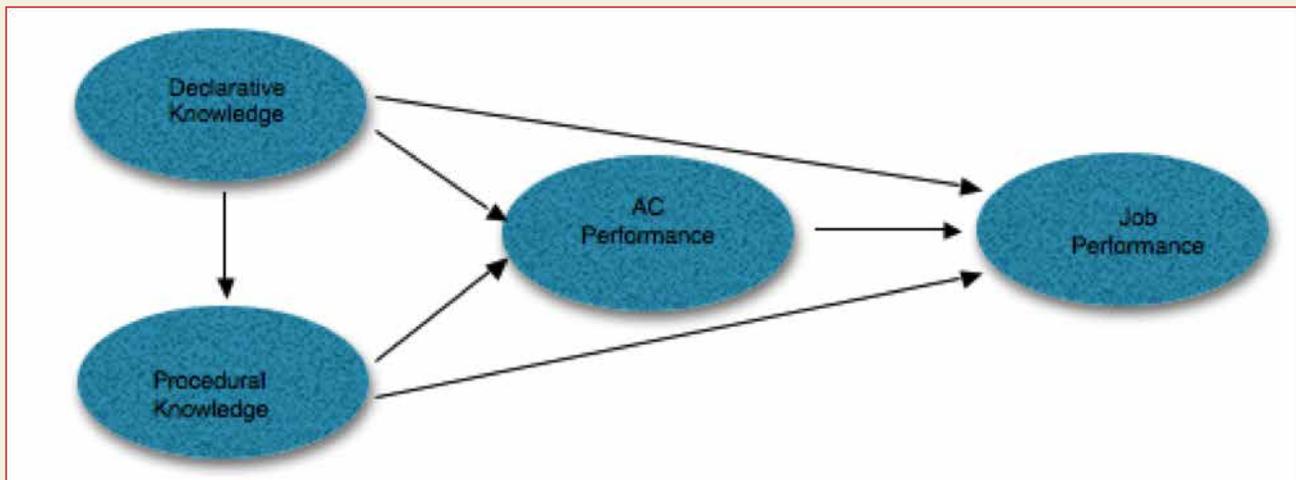
Dr Bethell-Fox stressed that one of the key determinants of success for this process is the understanding of what the CEO does. This concurred with what we had heard from Nigel Povah in the morning, that the starting point of any Assessment Centre must be the job analysis. However, it is still something that organisations may not have the knowledge, or ability to complete.

The Korn Ferry approach is to interview Directors and ask them not just about the skills which will be required for the role, but also about the short and long term organizational strategy, the culture etc. Information gained from these interviews is then translated into a Success Profile describing which aspects are *mission critical*, *important* or *less important*. Such profiles are then used to create a bespoke assessment process. Korn Ferry have found that irrespective of the organisation or the position, the desirable competencies fall into the same psychological clusters: Thought Leadership, Leading Results, Leading People and Leading Oneself.

Dr Bethell-Fox cited the model of Lievens F & Patterson F. (2011) and how their work showed that situational judgement tests (SJT) and assessment centres (AC) had incremental validity over knowledge tests. In a sample of 196 applicants they found that both the SJT and the AC had incremental validity over the knowledge test and the AC had incremental validity over the SJT. Model tests showed that the SJT fully mediated the effects of declarative knowledge on job performance, whereas the AC partially mediated the effects of the SJT.

The Korn Ferry Multi-Faceted Assessment is structured to incorporate this research. It ideally takes 1.5 days and comprises elements of declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and assessment centre performance:

- A leadership competency-based interview



- Cognitive tests (such as Watson Glaser, Ravens APM)
- Korn Ferry's own Global Personality Inventory (which includes Derailers)
- A career history questionnaire
- 5 in-depth leadership simulations*
- Optional workplace 360

*Note: the In-depth leadership simulations are followed by immediate feedback to stimulate developmental thinking.

During the presentation the workplace 360 degree feedback was discussed with some scepticism, but it was noted that some clients insisted that it should be part of the process.

The online assessment includes forced choice item responses and is measured against norms at different managerial levels. Each candidate is assigned a composite percentile and for group administrations summary reports are provided describing aggregate candidates profiles (e.g. shared blind-spots, organizational fit etc).

Leadership simulations are chosen to provide a wide range of realistic, on-the-job situations that provide opportunities for candidates to showcase themselves in each of the 4 psychological clusters identified earlier. Example scenarios might include:

- A CEO Town Hall Webcast
- Motivation of a direct report, who is leading the biggest business unit and has been overlooked for the CEO position
- A live TV interview with a financial analyst
- Participation in a Board Meeting

Reporting ROI on successful CEO appointments

particularly challenging because of the varied nature of what constitutes success for a CEO. As a consequence Korn Ferry measure success through the length of tenure of candidates comparing those they had judged as 'not ready' for the positions with those they had judged as 'ready' for the position. The former staying in post on average 3.6 years and the latter 6.1 years. Given that the average tenure for a Fortune 500 CEO is around 4.9 years this, argued Dr Bethell-Fox, showed an admirable ROI for their services. In particular Korn Ferry highlight four competencies as being associated with tenure:

1	Addressing and Solving Complex Issues
2	Inspiring People, Engaging the Workforce
3	Driving Alignment
4	Building Trust (transparency, consistency of words and actions)

Again, these mirrored the four psychological clusters identified in many leadership models.

The changing context of assessment

In the past assessment centres had the notion of authority putting up hurdles and seeing how high participants could jump. It was very much a power model, the assessment expert being in control, with the candidate as the weaker party. Dr Bethell-Fox argued that there is now a more collaborative approach in which a good working relationship with the CEO benefits the assessment process. Feedback is given at every stage and candidates are encouraged to use outcomes for development. Participants are provided with motivating insights into what they can use to their advantage and what they may benefit from changing.

In this way participants are placed in a strong position to implement an accelerated learning plan to support their future success.

And finally...

Where are the women? This was an issue Dr Bethell-Fox raised as a concern, but was not discussed in detail. It appears that the number of women being identified as high potential is increasing, but that too few are going through the CEO assessment process. From a brief Google search the percentage of female CEO's in the US Fortune 500 list dropped to 4.2%, according to Fortune magazine (June 2016). In the UK 6% of FTSE 100 firms have female CEOs (International Business Times, March 2016). Interestingly, women appear to stand a better chance of obtaining the top job if they are joining from the outside of a company.

Thus, it is when organisations are looking to widen the recruitment net that women tend to benefit.

References

Korn Ferry Assessment of Leadership Potential: Research guide and technical manual (2015) downloadable from the Korn Ferry website:

http://static.kornferry.com/media/sidebar_downloads/KFALP_Technical_Manual_final.pdf

Lievens F & Patterson F. (2011) The Validity and Incremental Validity of Knowledge Tests, Low-Fidelity Simulations and High-Fidelity Simulations for Predicting Job Performance in Advanced-Level High-Stakes Selection. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. September 2011. Vol. 96: Issue 5, p927–940.

Porter, Michael E.; Lorsch, J W.; Nohria, Nitin. (2004) Seven Surprises for New CEO's *Harvard Business Review*. October 2004. Vol. 82: Issue 10, p62–72.

Zarya, Valentina (2016) The Percentage of Female CEOs in the Fortune 500 Drops to 4%. *Fortune Online*. June 6, 2016

The application of Strengthscope® to facilitate career coaching

Dr Paul Brewerton – Strengths Partnership Ltd., speaking at TPF Event – 10 March

Reviewed by Helen Haynes, Global Head of Professional Development at Fidessa

Dr Paul Brewerton, joint Managing Director of Strengths Partnership, spoke during the morning session. He opened by explaining that when people first started talking about a 'strengths based approach' it was thought of as being very left field and US-centric. Nowadays, he says, people usually 'get it' at a conceptual level, instead asking questions about its practical application: either, "How can I actually apply it?" or, "How can I plug it into what I already use?" (e.g. a pre-existing performance review process). He believes that the approach is more mainstream now than ever before, and describes his organisation as a global leader in strengths based development - but admits, there aren't many in the field!

He is clearly very passionate about the subject, telling us that strengths based career coaching is liberating and enlightening for people – truly life



Helen Haynes

changing. It's about propelling someone forward and enabling those 'light bulb moments'.

Paul provided his own definition of 'strengths': "What energises you?" and "What are you drawn to?" This led to an interesting debate from the audience...

He then asked us to have a chat about the benefits and risks of a strengths based approach, in small groups. He described the benefits as 'helping people re-discover their mojo' and find their 'true north'. The risks were identified as people overplaying their strengths, leading to a fixed mindset, and, in an excellent turn of phrase, "continuing to do the same, but louder". The standard Strengthscope does not assess overdriven strengths, although the 360 version does.

He talked to us about the difference between 'limiting weaknesses' and 'allowable weaknesses', at which point he introduced a lovely boat metaphor to help explain this.



Figure 1: Dr Paul Brewerton and his boat

Your limiting weaknesses will sink your boat, your allowable weaknesses won't. He suggests that we plug the holes that will sink us, and learn to deal with the things that won't. Most importantly, we have to invest time, effort and energy plugging the right holes. Our strengths in this model are the sails – as a strong sail enables you to push forward and head in the right direction. He emphasised his belief that a strengths based approach encourages working on strengths, versus a more typically habituated behaviour of working only on weaknesses. He argued that the latter approach does not build excellence, but does help to prevent failure.

He was very keen to emphasise that it's not all 'happy clappy' and certainly not about ignoring problems or

performance standards. According to Paul part of the conversation should be around reducing performance risks, at which point he introduced the 4 Ds:

- Dial up a strength
- Dial down a strength
- Draw on others' strengths
- Develop strengths

We then had another interesting debate about the fact that although you may be aware what it is that you find energising you might not be good at it, yet. Other people (via the 360 version) will be able to provide an indication as to how good you are at different things. I found this particularly interesting as it's the first time I'd considered the idea that a 'strength' could be something that you're not actually good at. I suppose I had always thought about strengths in terms of behaviour and success, rather than innate values and drivers. For example, I'd previously thought of 'detail' as a strength of mine, because I'm good at it, but, I certainly don't feel energised by it. Similarly, I love dancing, but don't think I'm very good at it at all so I would never previously have thought of this as a 'strength' (granted, "dance" isn't one of the strengths on the list!). Although it initially seemed counter-intuitive to me (and very different from the dictionary definition), I slowly found myself warming to this way of thinking about and defining a 'strength'.

There are various versions of the Strengthscope tool available. There's the standard one (which we all completed), as well as a 360 version, which is multi-rater (up to eight people). They also offer a Strengthscope leader version, which is more comprehensive. Finally there's the team version.

Strengthscope is purely a work-related tool, unlike broader motivation models. This led to further debate from the group around the difference between Paul's definition of 'strengths' as distinct from 'motivators' or 'values'. Paul didn't want us to get too caught up in the semantics of the definition, but rather to focus more on the practical applications.

What I liked about the profile was that it provided your top seven strengths in an alphabetical, rather than numerical, order. This encouraged people to look through the strengths and to evaluate them for themselves, rather than being given their 'top three' based solely on sten scores. I like this approach as I feel it is less susceptible to the self-fulfilling prophecy effect.

I must admit, when selecting my top three strengths I immediately fell into the trap of selecting the three things that I'm best at (or do most often), rather than the three things that most energise me. Going back to the earlier boat metaphor, Paul then asked us to consider whether our smaller bars were 'boat sinkers' or 'allowable weaknesses', which was an interesting exercise. Paul gave a nice example of this within a coaching context: asking the respondent whether their weaknesses are "above or below the waterline". For example, "Does your low 'Results Focus' get in the way of delivering what you need to succeed?" It was also refreshing to hear their stated preference for using the word 'weakness', rather than 'development area' or other such euphemistic term.

Strengthscope is a fairly simplistic tool, not linked to or grounded in any other models (such as the big five). It is loosely statistical, but not perfect. Paul argued, "Is anything statistically perfect, really?" Without seeing the technical manual, it's difficult to comment on how perfect, or imperfect, it is.

He uses standard sten normative scoring – based on a UK general population of 394 – which he stated the BPS are 'happy with'. He was keen to point out that, whilst normative, he encourages people to look at their own scores and how each strength compares, rather than comparing to other people's scores. The score or length of line does not relate to how strong or skilled a person is in that area, which is why he discourages comparison.

Alongside coaching and development, Paul mentioned that the tool can be used in a recruitment context. A few in the room questioned the validity of using it for recruitment, as it seemed obvious what the questions were assessing and therefore easy to fake responses in order to fit in with the perceived culture of the recruiting organisation. Paul said that he hadn't observed this being problematic in practice, as it's merely an exploration tool, used by trained interviewers. However, there were clearly a number of people in the room who were not entirely convinced.

For me, Strengthscope is a nice 'food-for-thought' tool, rather than a mathematically complex or scientifically sophisticated instrument. It provides a starting point from which to hold an interesting conversation – Paul was keen to emphasise that not every bullet point will resonate with everyone, and that's ok. It's about discussing what you do and don't identify with under your identified 'strengths', and what this means to you in your world. He even described it as a blend of art and science, which is an interesting way of putting it and, for me, somewhat refreshing.

Finally – Paul has kindly provided an excellent offer for members of The Psychometrics Forum to complete the accreditation masterclass, with significant discount of 35%. This training gives you access to the standard Strengthscope; the 360 version; the leadership version and the index.



John Jackson

Headstuck – Why so many of us get stuck in career paralysis – and what to do about it?

Rob Archer, Chartered Psychologist, speaking at TPF Event – 10th March

Reviewed by John Jackson, Senior Consultant at Inspired Partners

Summary overview

This interesting and interactive workshop provided a lively opportunity for participants to take a fresh look at why people frequently struggle to chart and then achieve a new direction in their careers, despite them knowing that their current career is no longer for them. Rob presented four powerful and common causes of this apparent ‘career paralysis’. He then went on to outline a carefully structured process aimed at helping people to free themselves of their paralysis and to move forward with purpose.

Rob’s approach is underpinned by some sound and very current psychological theory. He draws on decision science and Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) as his primary influences.

Participants were able to work together to try out Rob’s approach and techniques. These were made all the more impactful by the personal disclosures Rob made in framing the exercises.

Introduction

Rob Archer is a Chartered Psychologist and coach with 18 year’s board-level experience in both public and private sectors. He is an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (AFBPsS) and a member of the BPS Divisions on Occupational and Coaching Psychologists.

Careers counsellors will be familiar with the client who has become stuck in their career for some unknown reason. Rob’s workshop explored why people get stuck in the first place and went on to explore a framework and process for freeing people so that they can move forward with real purpose. His session included an introduction to the application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to career coaching. Participants were taken through a number of interactive exercises and metaphors drawing on ACT. They were also able to reflect on their own career using two key ACT components.

Reasons for getting stuck

Rob referred to his own personal experience of landing an apparent dream job as a management consultant from a background of mass unemployment in his hometown of Birkenhead. He soon grew to hate the role, but experienced real difficulties in making a move away from a well-paid position with all the personal costs and risks that change involved.

Rob suggested there were four common reasons behind people becoming stuck at a time when they are aware they should be making some changes in a career that has become unsatisfactory for them. These were:

- 1 Choice overload
- 2 Short-term versus long-term considerations
- 3 Brain thinking in patterns
- 4 Experiential avoidance

Rob positioned choice overload as a seeming 'Paradox of choice'. There are so many career options out there nowadays it can be very difficult deciding on a single option when another one might be even better. It's the problem of understanding 'what might have been' without that actual experience. Monkeys appear to be happy to accept the healthy reward of celery sticks for their behaviour until they see their neighbour enjoying grapes for the same effort.

The balancing of short-term against long-term considerations really comes down to the 'marshmallow test' for Rob. Children find it demonstrably - and sometimes hilariously - challenging to resist the short-term temptations of that marshmallow, but we carry that dilemma into our adult lives too. When it comes down to long-term career choices we can sometimes lack the will to take 'short-term pain in the interest of long term gain'.

Brains tend to think in linear patterns and a key aspect of this can be a form of 'functional fixedness' in the way a person thinks about their career options. It can be very hard, without some form of external support, to take a step back and see things afresh and with new eyes.

In Rob's view 'experiential avoidance' from the domain of clinical psychology is a crucial and valuable concept, which helps explain why some people seem able to take some initial stumbling steps in the direction of a new, more satisfying career only to relapse back into that comfortable old armchair they previously occupied (for all its faults). If we consider ourselves occupying

a position where we can either move away from a setting that is painful; or towards one that is seemingly more attractive, anxieties can set in as soon as we start disturbing our current equilibrium. We may then start to question our decision-making or our ability to follow-through with the change. In either case the temptation can be to revert to type, with all the negative implications that this has for our mental well being.

Rob painted a stark and highly personal picture of his own experience of experiential avoidance as he made the challenging journey from the role of management consultant to that of chartered psychologist. Career paralysis led to a significant degree of personal despair as he compared his career progress to that of his friends, and contemplated a somewhat uncertain future.

Getting unstuck

In his own practice Rob has drawn on 'decision science' and has developed a structured, five-stage process aimed at helping people to free themselves from the comfy but unsatisfactory armchairs with which they have become familiar. The five stages, in order, are:

- 1 Understanding stuckness – how did you get stuck?
- 2 Weighted decision criteria – what do you want?
- 3 Identifying your options – where could you go?
- 4 Evaluate options, choose a direction – which direction will you choose?
- 5 Make a plan, get into action – how will you get there?

Rob's has linked this process to Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT); part of the 3rd wave of CBT. Rob believes the evidence for ACT is substantial, with over 100 randomised control trials showing it to be effective in everything from alleviating depression and anxiety to improving workplace performance. The technique has been shown to be highly effective in various settings (see Bond and Flaxman references below). In summary, the ACT literature points to developing 'psychological flexibility' as the key to its success. Knowing why ACT works enables targeted training and coaching to help clients to address some of the psychological blockers associated with career paralysis and thus to realign their behaviour towards their personal values.

Psychological flexibility was presented as being comprised of three inter-related components:

- 1 A person's ability to focus sharply on their current situation
- 2 The ability to do this even in the presence of difficult thoughts, feelings and sensations
- 3 Taking action towards achieving important goals and values.

During the session TPF delegates had the opportunity to try out a couple of exercises designed to help shift 'stuckness' for people contemplating a career change. The first of these was about countering the short-term bias or 'marshmallow test' challenge. How best to maintain a focus on the long-term benefits of a chosen course of action, when we are so often pulled towards short term goals such as promotions and bonuses?

Rob's advice here was to ensure that, in setting any long-term goal for career change, the individual also needs to clarify how this new direction will help deliver against the person's own values. Rob used an exercise called the 'Sweet Spot' to help participants mindfully explore one or more of their deeply held values. Accessing values when the temptations of short-term outcomes arise appears to be a highly effective way of helping people deal with longer-term change.

The second exercise was focused on countering experiential avoidance. At a surface level it looks as if life should get easier as we connect to our values and move towards a new, more promising future. Unfortunately experiential avoidance suggests the opposite can be true, so we need strategies that will help us to overcome these difficult thoughts and emotions. By finding ways to change our relationship to these thoughts and emotions we can avoid getting locked into a struggle to defeat them. Rob took TPF delegates through a series of exercises designed to help clients to move towards move values driven and fulfilled lives.

References

- Bond, F.W., Hayes, S.C., & Barnes-Homes, D. (2006). Psychological flexibility, ACT, and organizational behaviour. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 26, 25–54.
- Bond, F.W. & Bunce, D. (2000). Outcomes and mediators of change in emotion-focused and problem-focused worksite stress management interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(1), 156–163.
- Bond, F.W. & Bunce, D. (2001). Job control mediates change in a work reorganization intervention for stress reduction. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6, 290–302.
- Bond, F. W. & Bunce, D. (2003). The role of acceptance and job control in mental health, job satisfaction, and work performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88 (6), 1057–1067.
- Bond, F.W. & Flaxman, P. E.,(in press). Learning is a mediator by which job control and psychological acceptance affect job performance and mental health. A reanalysis of Bond, F. W., & Flaxman, P. E. (2006). The ability of psychological flexibility and job control to predict learning, job performance, and mental health. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 26, 113–130.
- Bond, F.W., Flaxman, P.E., & Bunce, D. (2008). The influence of psychological flexibility on work redesign: Mediated moderation of a work reorganization intervention. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93 (3), 645–654.
- Donaldson-Feilder, E. J., & Bond, F. W. (2004). The relative importance of psychological acceptance and emotional intelligence to workplace well-being. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 33(3), 187–203.
- Flaxman, P. E., Bond, F. W., & Livheim, F. (May - 2013). *The mindful and effective employee: An acceptance and commitment therapy training manual for improving well-being and performance*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J., Bond, F., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Model, processes, and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44(1), 1–25.

Saville Consulting's WAVE Training

Dr Josephine Storek, C.Psychol.

*Honourary Fellow and Research Associate,
University College London (UCL)*



Dr Josephine Storek

It's hard to resist a great bargain, especially when combined with an opportunity for personal growth and skill set enrichment. Once again, I benefited from the negotiation prowess of the Psychometric Forum, who managed to secure a very attractive participation rate for its members. Learning happens to be one of my favourite pastime activities and since research shows that good old-fashioned learning is one of the most effective ways to train one's attention, the decision was quickly made. Armed with a healthy dose of shoshin or learner's mind as Zen Buddhists call it, I dived into the world of WAVE and can report the following:

Format

- One-day training organised by Saville Consulting at their London offices in Holborn.
- Pre-course work consists of completing the WAVE measure and reading background information that is provided electronically. The content of the personal report is shared during the training day to maximise knowledge transfer and minimise misunderstanding.
- Participants are assumed to have basic understanding of (business and applied/individual) psychology and test theory. Experience with talent management, career development, coaching/mentoring, performance management as well as with using psychometric tools is beneficial.
- The course is intensive; lot of information is presented, digested and tested during the eight hours.
- The course has the right balance of theory, examples and practical exercises.
- The set-up is not unusual – theory blocks with short Q&A sessions and practical examples understanding of own reports – yet designed to maximise content retention through the hands-on assessment exercise.
- Plenary group session throughout most of the day. Break-out groups of four for the assessment exercise, supervised by Saville's WAVE professionals.
- Expect the feeling of well-deserved accomplishment at the end.
- BPS accreditation (after meeting further requirements)

5/5

Theoretical background / content

- Like with any psychometric tool that is grounded in comprehensive theory and has rigorous psychometric credentials, the degree of utility for the user will depend on whether there is a 'fit' with the user's own preferences. In another words, what makes one choose to use one instrument over another, is the degree to which the instrument fits with one's own philosophy, personality, values and beliefs.
- The WAVE instrument is built around an integrated model of personal motives, talents, competency potential and preferred culture.
- Motives and Talents are central to the structure and have tangible implications for individual development, career planning, recruitment/selection and performance management. Motives reveal what an individual is driven by and are assessed through 'need' items of the questionnaire. Talents measure an individual's self-perception of the behaviours that they demonstrate and are measured by the 'effectiveness' items.
- There are similarities with the Big Five Model of Personality and other psychometric tools such as OPQ32, 16PF, Hogan or MBTI. As such WAVE offers a dynamic approach to individual styles and a means to achieve a deeper understanding of work-based personality. It also addresses the criticism of the Big Five model as being too broad to successfully capture the complexity of people and jobs.
- WAVE model has several levels in its hierarchy – there are 4 clusters that further break down into 12 sections, 36 dimensions and 108 facets.
- WAVE utilises both rating and ranking formats and works out relative rankings from ratings.
- Normative-Ipsative splits are used to help the practitioner to identify areas that are over-rated or under-rated; such data is most useful during feedback situations.
- The resultant report contains an Executive Summary profile, Full Psychometric profile, Summary Psychometric profile, Competency Potential Report profile and Predicted Culture/Environment Fit. The profiles/reports are presented graphically to ease interpretation and application.

4/5

Facilitation

- We were a challenging group to say the least – lots of practitioners and psychometricians equipped with annoyingly detailed statistical questions.
- Our facilitator Tom handled our group most admirably and managed to get us through a full-on day without major traumas.
- The assessment exercise was, aside from anxiety-inducing, most useful and a natural culmination of the day. We worked in pairs, each conducting a feedback session of our own reports, under the scrutiny of observant Saville professionals. The atmosphere was relaxed and non-judgemental; it encouraged learning.

5/5

Application

- Self-knowledge & individual growth
- (Executive) Coaching
- Talent management
- Career development and planning
- Organisational culture – value and competency mapping
- Team work
- Recruitment
- Job design and analysis, competency modelling
- Professional styles
- Performance management

4/5