

The pros and cons of using psychometric tests

Dr John Demartini, human behavioural specialist and internationally published author, discusses the role of psychometric testing in selecting employees' suitability.



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Psychometric tests, such as the popular Myers-Briggs test, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Five-Factor Model (or 'Big 5') or the Personality and Preference Inventory were inspired in part by Carl Jung's quadrant of personality types involving four dichotomies: Extraversion, (E) Sensing (S) Thinking (T), Judgment, (J), Introversion (I), Intuition (N), Feeling (F), and Perception (P) and resulting in 16 types.

Although such general psychometric and typological testing, and typing of individuals has a correlation with certain behaviours in specific and isolated contexts and settings, which could apply to working environments, such generalised typing can be misleading to individuals and organisations overall. This form of typing offers the perception that individuals are dominantly one dimensional with a fixed, predictable quadrant or type.

Most individuals can vary in their approach to being and personality under different settings or environments and display or demonstrate a full range or spectrum of traits and types. Though these tests can at times be entertaining, they are only partly useful and can even be misleading and lead to pigeonholing.

A series of questions

Psychometric tests have been designed to reveal how individuals respond to a series of questions. It presumes that they dominantly function under the assumed settings. However, such voluntary self-assessments can be misleading, as not all individuals will display honesty and true self-reflection, although they are expected to. Many individuals do not always see themselves the way they actually are. Psychometric tests cannot tell testers how an individual might react and respond to various work-related matters at certain settings. Their answers will depend on the hierarchy of the individual's values and their degree of congruency between their highest values and their attentions, intentions and actions in their environment. Individuals make decisions and respond according to their hierarchy of values.

Psychometric tests will only offer a general possible indicator of an individual's personality. How congruent the job description and mission of the organisation is with the individual's highest values or priorities is a much greater indicator of his resultant personality, work ethic, managerial potential, productivity and cultural fit.

Each individual who is an extrovert will be more fully engaged in those settings that are more in alignment with his highest values. If the individual is an introvert, he will be less fully engaged in other settings that are not in alignment with his highest values. The greater the congruence, the more intuitive and thoughtful individuals become and the less congruent, the more sensation- and feeling oriented they become. In fact, individual human values make more practical personality indicators.

However, Psychometric Testing has been used for many decades. There is nothing inherently immoral or unethical about voluntarily taking the test, or making such an assessment as long as it is put into context and does not pigeonhole the personality and talents of the individuals who are taking it. The test can be answered differently by someone even hours after first taking it, depending upon the person's mood, the setting and recent circumstances.

There have been numerous individuals who have attended my seminar programme, the Breakthrough Experience, who have taken psychometric tests such as the Myers-Briggs test repeatedly. In many cases they have been dominantly typed differently each time they took the test, even when they were taken back to back in brief periods of time. Although this type of test has been used for decades, it is wise to be put it into context of the whole human being, which demonstrates most all of the known human traits in different settings through space and time. Typologies are fading out in favour of trait-ologies and more concise value determination systems today.

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