

Why are you?

Different individuals have different personalities, and testing how these character traits mesh could determine the make-up of a team. Jessica Fino looks at the thinking behind the tests

We are now familiar with the idea that, as well as being unique individuals, we all also fit into a personality type. And it's more common than ever when looking to build a new team, or recruit into an existing one, to think about personality team fit and how the personality dynamics will work out. Every episode of *The Apprentice* provides plenty of evidence that picking people able to work well together is often more important than picking teams purely on the basis of individual talent.

It makes sense, therefore, for organisations to place emphasis on finding people who will fit best within a team or organisation. This explains the glut of services and consultants providing personality tests for both team building and recruitment. Getting the right mix of personalities can not only improve a team's atmosphere, but help create and drive a positive culture throughout the organisation. Such tests can also help organisations identify shared values and compatible personalities.

One of the most well-known and commonly used tests is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which places the candidate into one of 16 different personality types. According to Adam Grant, professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania, 89 of the Fortune 100 companies use MBTI, to assess tendencies towards extraversion or introversion, intuition or sensing, thinking or feeling, judging or perceiving.

Another popular test is the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), which is designed to predict performance and is arguably better for both team building and hiring. The MBTI is often used for conflict resolution, leadership development, as well as fixing dysfunctional teams and other workplace and career development objectives.

According to Petra Merne, director of global marketing at CPP, a company specialising in administering personality tests, the MBTI is not designed for selection purposes: "It should be used to help companies make the best use of the talent they have," she says. "By helping people understand tendencies and inclinations, the Myers-Briggs assessment and others allow individuals and organisations to optimise talents and abilities based on what they have already."

The company's research points out that 71% of businesses that purchase CPI aim at improving group coaching and only 28% buy assessments to select talent for leadership roles. Moreover, only 15% use the tests to refine selection strategies for making hiring decisions.

TALENT LIFECYCLE

Aberdeen Group, a research organisation that specialises in human resource management, argues it is important to continue to use assessments throughout the talent lifecycle. The theory is, that to be effective such tools should be used to inform an individual's longer-term career path.

According to Aberdeen's research, 87% of "best-in-class" organisations use assessment data as part of the criteria for promotion to leadership roles,



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as opposed to 73% of others. While skills and knowledge can be learned and developed over time, an individual's personality traits tend to remain the same. Insights from these assessments can be used again and again throughout the talent lifecycle to guide decisions around team building, assigning work and helping managers and peers work with an individual to achieve the most positive results.

DIVERSE PERSONALITIES

One of the advantages of the assessments is that they can provide a plan for how an individual may best learn and develop, which is vital to understanding their long-term value to an organisation. And research backs up the common sense idea that there are considerable benefits to having a diverse personality types within a team.

For example, a team built entirely of those rated as ISTJ under MBTI (which stands for introversion, sensing, thinking and judging) would be a team of what might be called quiet types. They would probably get on well, as thinking types all rely on objective advice and want just and fair leadership. This harmony and agreement might produce positive results. But it might be the case that adding in some people at the other end of the scale (ENFP types - extraversion, intuition, feeling and perceiving) might lead to even better results. There would be differences as the ENFPs seek supportive advice and compassionate leadership.

There are both positives and negatives to single type and diverse teams. The key to success is that team leaders are aware of the personalities they have in a team and can therefore offer appropriate style of leadership and can intervene in the right way to resolve conflicts that may arise. While having



CREATING A PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT THAT IS VALIDATED FOR ACCURACY AND MEETS ALL THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS TYPICALLY REQUIRES A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF RESEARCH

different personalities runs the risk of tensions, such tensions can be harnessed for a positive outcome. It's also true that conflicts can arise for lots of reasons other than a clash of personalities and filling a team with the same type is no guarantee of avoiding conflict.

PROBLEM SOLVING

While a more diverse team might start to appreciate different approaches to tasks and new points of view, a single-type team will need to be aware of the potential danger of groupthink, where everyone is in agreement the whole time and there isn't enough constructive challenge or debate. This can lead to complacency in problem solving and a loss of quality in decision making. Groupthink can also lead to a team missing obvious challenges.

Diverse teams can learn to capitalise on the strengths of all of their members, with different people providing important alternative perspectives. In many cases, they'll find that one is able to cover another colleague's "blind spots".

The International Personality Item Pool test, better known as IPIP-NEO test, is commonly used to understand if a candidate has the ability to fit within a multicultural environment. This test assesses someone's openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism and agreeableness.

If you want to work at and succeed in a global business, being open-minded, flexible and able to communicate with all kinds of people will be important for your career.

TRUSTING THE TESTS

There are many different personality tests available and but not all are of equal substance. Creating a

genuinely useful personality assessment tool, which has been validated for accuracy and meets the requirements for educational and psychological tests takes a lot of research. Twenty years of research preceded the initial publication of the MBTI, for example, and updates have been documented in four technical manuals since.

As Merne points out, unfortunately there are a lot of free online assessments that aren't based on any sort of research, and people often use them under the mistaken impression that they're using the MBTI, which can be problematic. Moreover, while these tests can be really helpful for some businesses, many believe there is not enough scientific proof that they should be used at all to make business decisions.

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

There is a school of thought that considers such tests are destined to fail before they're ever taken. Psychologist Walker Mischel published *Personality and Assessment* in 1968, and his argument was antithetical to the idea of personality tests. Mischel claimed in his book that personalities are not fixed, but rather change and develop depending on circumstances and contexts.

While many big firms use personality tests as part of the process of building a successful team, there are health warnings to be heeded as to when and how they are used, both in selecting which tests to use and when making important decisions based on the results. As Annie Murphy Paul pointed out in *The Cult of Personality Testing*, when tested a second time, three quarters of participants achieved a different personality type than they did when they were originally tested. ●