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An old selection theory adage goes: “You can train a turkey to climb a tree but you're better off hiring a squirrel”. For employers this underlies how psychometrics can help us to identify the right type of candidates for the job.

For individuals exploring their career options psychometrics offer insights into personal strengths, style and motivations which in turn can be matched to a range of potential career. Once you understand that you're a squirrel you can focus your career planning on the options most appropriate to someone with a bushy tail and non-opposable thumbs.

As a business psychologist the advice we would give to both individuals and organisations looking to get the most from testing is the same. While tests and questionnaires offer answers their real value comes from the questions they can help you to ask.

A common misconception about psychometrics is that they measure one thing; personality. In fact, the term 'psychometrics' encompasses assessments that measure a range of psychological attributes including personality but also ability, potential, motivation, values and emotional style.

The type of psychometric you choose to use depends on your purpose, but the choice is determined by the questions you need to ask as an employer or potential employee. Whether you are looking to make a recruitment or career guidance decision, to be effective your use of psychometrics must help you explore 3 key questions:

#### **Can, How and Want:**

1. Can the individual do the job? - in other words do they have the abilities, potential and mental fire-power to learn the right skills, solve problems and make effective decisions
2. How will the individual do the job? - what is their personality and style? How will they work with their colleagues, treat our customers and approach getting their work done?
3. Does the individual want to do the job? Will they find the work satisfying, rewarding and motivating? Will they feel at home in the culture of the organisation?

Effective psychometric assessment works by assessing the individual against these questions. When employers use psychometrics to inform a recruitment decision they explore the level of fit between the personality, abilities, attitudes and values of the individual against the demands of the job, the values of the business and the culture of the working environment.

If you as an individual wanted to use information from psychometrics you must ask yourself the same questions:

#### **Question 1: Can you do the job?**

Or in career guidance terms 'what job can you do'. You should use the results of tests of specific abilities to understand where your strengths lie in terms of raw potential for solving problems, making decisions and effective performance on specific tasks, such as numerical analysis or proof reading. The results of the tests should be compared with the range of cognitive demands within the roles you are considering. A significant amount of work stress can be avoided by finding a job that places an optimum level of demands on your abilities. Jobs that are too hard or too easy will push you into the stress and eustress danger zones.

## **Question 2: How do you prefer to do the job?**

A personality questionnaire can provide you with insights about your preferred work approach. This information should be matched to the job. If the profile describes you as gregarious and extroverted you may be better suited to jobs that require you to work closely with others. If there is a mismatch between your preferred style and the nature of the job you will have to work harder to manage your personality while at work.

## **Question 3: What do you want from work?**

Perhaps the most valuable information that psychometrics can offer career guidance is insights into your values and motivations. It is critical when making decisions about career choices to match yourself to jobs that offer the range of rewards and activities that motivate you and that you enjoy performing. When people are unhappy in their work it is often because they are in a role that is inconsistent with their motivations.

Deeper still, psychometrics can offer advice about your emotional style; once again it is critical to explore the emotional demands of a role and consider whether you are likely to be able to sustain your emotional balance. Leadership roles can place emotional demands that require a degree of mental toughness. If you're considering moving your career in this direction it is important to consider the implications of your emotional style for sustaining mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

Finally, a personality questionnaire should enable you to consider your personal values and how they align with those of the business. When considering specific employers you should explore the fit between your attitudes, beliefs and values and the culture of the organisation. You will perform more successfully for longer in a culture that is right for you personally. A word of caution though, dig deeper than the description of mission, culture and values you find on an employer's website – those are there to attract candidates rather than offer unvarnished truths.

## **Advice for getting the most from psychometrics**

The following advice should be helpful when completing psychometrics as part of a recruitment process or for career guidance:

**Be yourself** – do not try and paint an idealised picture of yourself through the answers you give. It is not impossible to fake psychometrics but there are measures in place to detect candidate reposes that may be gilding the lilly. It is better to get the right job on the basis of your real personality, values and style.

**Practice** – your performance on ability tests will be maximised when you are familiar with the format and approach of testing. Develop your test sophistication to ensure that your test taking strategies enable you to do your best. There are a range of books offering help and advice but you should always look out for opportunities to sit tests.

**Unhappy in your current job?** - Use psychometrics to help understand why; is it a mismatch between you and the job in terms of rewards, demands or style? Is it a mismatch between you and aspects of the culture of the business, or your team or your boss?

**Looking for a career change?** - Use psychometrics to understand your 'can, how & want' profile and match this to a range of career options. A coach can be a useful resource and you can also approach employers directly for information.

**Which psychometrics will help you?** - Remember that to answer all 3 key questions you will need to explore ability, personality and values. Watch out for free psychometrics; they may have questionable reliability and accuracy. Find a trained user to help you select the right assessment for you and offer you guidance on the results. The British Psychological Society

can provide information about trained users and chartered occupational psychologists in your area.

Psychometrics can provide a rich source of insights for your career decision-making, but remember that rather than looking to them to provide easy answers you should instead draw on the questions that they pose through the results. Determining whether you are a turkey or a squirrel is the easy bit; the subsequent exploration of yourself and your options is where the answers lie.