

MC Expert

A series of expert briefings on key coaching topics for the Meyler Campbell network

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS IN PRACTICE

We use a variety of tools to find out about our coaching clients and help them understand themselves. Some are relatively technical psychometric tests (the background to these is dealt with in another *MC Expert*), whilst others are much more informal techniques ranging from surveys, structured conversations and quiz type lists of questions. 360° questionnaires are quite common; these compare the views of colleagues, managers and subordinates about a person with that person's view of themselves.

The words 'test' and 'assessment' are used below to indicate any tool or technique, however informal, designed to investigate a person's psychological make-up. Where a more formal technique is indicated it's referred to as a 'psychometric' test.

HOW ARE TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS USED IN COACHING?

Some coaches do not use tests or use them rarely. There are a number of reasons for this. They:

- feel tests get in the way of establishing authentic human relationships;
- are suspicious of tests' accuracy;
- think tests imply coaches have specialist knowledge, thus unbalancing the power within a relationship.

However, formal tests and informal assessments can be used for a number of purposes. For example:

- Less formal lists of questions help to set the organisational or team ecology within which a client works before coaching starts.
- A personality test is a useful element in your opening coaching tool kit. It will suggest to you how the person might like to be coached, and provide some feedback to the person which might help them to refine a goal.

- Depending on the goal that emerges, tools like Strengths Inventories and 360° assessments offer useful information on which to base discussions and action planning.
- In team coaching, tests and assessments provide a common vocabulary to discuss issues which otherwise might risk misunderstanding.
- Tests help overcome reluctance to disclose information. Research suggests people find it easier to disclose on a screen than initially to someone's face.

But there is one golden rule of testing and assessment. They are purposive activities so only use them if you know WHY you're using them and then choose a tool or technique which is designed for that purpose. Never use a test or assessment if you're unclear why.

HOW TO GET TRAINED IN ASSESSMENTS

The British Psychological Society (BPS) provides qualifications in psychometric and psychological testing. It runs courses as well as licensing certain courses to provide the nationally recognised qualification. Holders of this qualification get membership of the BPS 'Register of Qualifications in Test Use' (RQTU), free online access to reviews of over 150 psychological and psychometric tests, access to psychological and psychometric tests that would otherwise be restricted and other benefits.

<http://ptc.bps.org.uk/bps-qualifications-test-use> gives detailed information, including downloads, on what is a rather complicated but widely-used training system. Some companies (and particularly their HR staff) demand proof of registration with the BPS before appointing suppliers who are going to use tests.

Some assessments are available without training (for instance the Strength Inventories you can buy in book form). In other cases, individual companies provide training which provides access to their specific test. Many of you will have trained in using MBTI with their publishers OPP.

TESTING RED LIGHTS

- As mentioned above some coaches feel tests get in the way of coaching relationships or unbalance power in a coaching relationship.

- Costs of entry into the testing market are low and there are a lot of bad ones available.
- Tests and assessments tempt to certainty and labelling. The label then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Labelling is prevalent in modern business ('psychopathic bosses'/'introvert creatives') and is damaging. All measurement contains an error factor and if you are to use tests and assessments you must treat their findings as provisional, welcoming conversation and disagreement. They are rich openings for talk, not inarguable truths.
- The Barnum Effect. Put any piece of random description in front of people and many will say it describes them to a tee. This is how astrology has retained its popularity. Bad tests depend on the Barnum Effect.
- Tests have been misused badly. They have also, at times, been overused so you'll rarely meet someone in business who can't trot out some sort of psychological profile.

TESTING GREEN LIGHTS

- Testing and coaching are the two areas of applied psychology that have been most readily accepted in business. They need less justification than other social science interventions.
- Despite the received opinion, people love doing personality tests. They enjoy having feedback about themselves and a good test report creates energy, excitement and trust.
- They create a lot of information in a short time and provide personal information in a form which makes it easy to discuss.
- Good reports describing someone sometimes create the sorts of 'A-HA!' moments that feature in great coaching. Clients see something and it suddenly makes real sense to them.
- Many tests ask clients to answer questions about themselves (these are known as 'self-report questionnaires'). In other words, a test report reflects the client's views and beliefs, not the coach's. Such

testing and assessment approaches reflect non-directive coaching methodology.

- Good tests and assessments come with information about how and why they were developed, how they work and what they're for. Demand this. Bad tests don't have this information.

WHERE TO FIND OUT SOME PRACTICAL INFORMATION ABOUT TESTS AND ASSESMENTS

Web Sites	
http://ptc.bps.org.uk/	The British Psychological Society's information centre for testing. Note that this covers use of tests in a variety of areas beyond business coaching. It has good reviews of testing which will help you to choose the tests you want.
www.opp.com	Publishers of MBTI/ FIRO-B and other tests mentioned on Meyler Campbell's course.
www.hogrefe.co.uk	A small selection of the companies offering tests for talent measurement, ranging from the pioneer UK company to global companies based in the US, Australia and Germany.
https://www.cebglobal.com/shl/us	
https://www.savilleconsulting.com/	
http://www.facet5global.com/homepage.html	
www.pantesting.com	
Books	
Testing People at Work: Competencies in Psychometric Testing: Smith and Smith: BPS Blackwell	Rather old (2005) and difficult to find but follows the BPS competencies for test use and is one of the best introductions to psychometrics and testing if you want to get into the area in more depth.
Psychological Assessment in the Workplace: A Manager's Guide: Mark Cook and Barry Cripps: Wiley	Out of date but a good introduction.

LINKS IN THE NETWORK

If you would like to be put in touch with someone in the network who could tell you more about psychometrics, please let the office know.

OTHER BRIEFINGS IN THIS SERIES

BACKGROUND TO THIS DOCUMENT

Version 1.1. 11.15. All content ©Meyler Campbell 2015

To comment, contribute, suggest amendments and addition to this and other MC Expert Briefings, please contact info@meylercambell.com

Meyler Campbell, Unit B4, Peills Courtyard, 16-18 Bourne Road, Bromley, Kent, BR2 9NS

Tel: +44 (0)20 8460 4790 Fax: +44 (0)20 8460 4760 Email: info@meylercambell.com

Web: www.meylercampbell.com