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Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

Using Assessments in Coaching

Many coaches use psychometric instruments such as personality profiles, skills inventories and others as a regular component of their coaching process. According to Annabel Harper, over \$100 million US dollars are spent each year on psychometric tests and inventories; over 3.5 million people around the world take the MBTI annually. Harper studied coaches' decision-making process regarding the use of assessments and the perceived value of accreditation. Her results offer practitioners some food for thought regarding their own use of psychometric assessments.

The literature review for the article begins with a soulful definition of "psychometric", tracking back to the Greek for "measuring the soul." This is followed by a brief survey of early theories of personality and the application of psychometric measures outside the corporate setting. These include offender profiling and sport. Harper suggests that the literature linking the use of tests to economic gain is inconclusive. Nor does there appear to be a definitive body of literature on the uses of psychometrics in coaching.

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview with six coaches who have "many years of experience between them" in one to one and team settings, in corporate and public sectors. All were credentialed to administer the MBTI (Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator) and at least one other instrument. These included the FIRO-B; Birkman, the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, the Enneagram and Belbin Team Roles. Interviews were taped and transcribed and the results analyzed for emergent themes.

The first theme presented three aspects of the role of psychometric tests for clients. The first of these was consistent with the literature suggesting that "using psychometric tests...can increase a coachee's self-awareness and self-development." Specifically, the assessments offer coach and client a common language and a means of increasing awareness of differences in the workplace. Despite the potential value, respondents were not consistent in their use of assessments. The remaining two aspects of this theme were (1) "mixed views about consistency of personality type on retesting over time"; and (2) the potential danger that a coach might stereotype a client's behavior based on

In This Issue

[Using Assessments in Coaching](#)

[Researcher's Haiku](#)

Researcher's Haiku

**Place the corner piece
First. Next the border right and
left.
Jigsaw puzzle cloud.**

(Readers are invited to e-mail their researcher's haiku - original or otherwise-for inclusion in future issues. Your feedback on this issue is welcome, too!)

References

Annabel Harper.
Psychometric Tests are now
a multi-million pound
business: What lies behind a
coach's decision to use them?
The International Journal of
Evidence-Based Coaching
and Mentoring. Special Issue
#2. Nov. 2008.

<http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/research/areas/coaching&mentoring>

results.

A second theme was concerned with the financial implications of assessments for the organization, and, concomitantly, fulfilling the company's expectations. Respondents had their assessment accreditation fully or partly funded by their employing organization; therefore, there appears to be some expectation of return on investment. The "glossy report" which is an outcome of assessment was regarded by some respondents as evidence of an outcome from the investment, especially in organizations with strong goal orientation and an emphasis on measure. Some respondents noted, however, that where coaching is offered as an executive perk, an assessment may be an expected part of the package but may not be especially useful or necessary.

The strongest theme appears to be concerned with the role of psychometric tests for coaches. Here, respondents emphasized the importance of understanding the psychological theories underpinning the assessment instruments they use. Furthermore, some considered that knowledge essential for the ethical use of assessments so as to not offer services outside the coach's area of competence. Respondents also reported that using psychometric tests increased their own self-awareness, enabling them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

Responses were mixed on the question of how important it is to be accredited in the administration of a psychometric test. All did suggest that supervision should be encouraged, although only two respondents were currently participating in formal or informal supervision.

Overall, the study offers practitioners food for thought regarding their own use of assessments. Specifically, questions for reflection might include these: (1) What is my purpose in using this instrument? (2) How well do I understand the underlying psychological theories used in this instrument? (3) How can I best convey the results for the benefit of the client?

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