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Blue Papers



Workplace Personalities

Cracking The Workplace

Personality Code:

How different personalities affect individual, team and organisational success

CV submitted - Tick

Application completed - Tick.

Interview sailed through - Tick.

Job at global marketing firm Acxiom secured?



Well ... not quite yet.

Psychometric assessments, as they are often called, are commonly used in the UK as part of the recruitment process as well as by large professional service firms like Eversheds solicitors when considering candidates for promotion and by global accountancy practice Mazars when conducting due diligence prior to a merger and as part of their team-building programmes.

Before an applicant becomes a team member at the U.S. marketing firm Acxiom, they must jump through one final hoop after a successful interview: [the Birkman Method](#) workplace personality test.

The company requires all applicants to take the 45-minute, 258-question test to ensure that they will be a good fit with their current employees, and will deliver on expected job performance standards.

Such testing has proved fruitful for not only Acxiom recruiters, but also the employees themselves. According to one new recruit, such testing has, "helped me to learn how to interact better with work teams and to leverage my strengths in the workplace."¹

The company has also applied individual test results to help staff to understand each other better. Each Acxiom team member wears their four-square colour matrix (representing their "personality colour," according to Birkman) on their name badge. This method has helped its staff to interact more effectively with each other in workplace situations.

"We see the assessment as an opportunity for our professionals to better understand themselves," said Debbie Pyle, human-resources training and development leader.

¹, Gutner, Toddi. "Applicants' Personalities Put to the Test." *The Wall Street Journal* 26 Aug. 2008. *The Wall Street Journal Online*. 26 Aug. 2008. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://online.wsj.com/article/sb121969346624670203>>.

And, Acxiom is not alone: According to The Wall Street Journal Online, more than 80% of medium and large companies use personality and ability tests for entry and mid-level positions as either pre-employment or new-employee orientation tools.²

Employers the world over are beginning to follow the notion that career excellence is multi-faceted, depending on not only skill level, but also cultural and team “fit” – a fit that depends highly on workplace personality type.



A balanced perspective

When considering implementing a workplace personality assessment, we recommend thinking of it as a “supplement.” Don’t stop asking for CVs and conducting interviews but instead use personality testing as another tool in your overarching “screening toolkit.”

There are many advantages to administering a workplace personality assessment within your organisation:

- **Reducing risk**

If used during the hiring process, employers are better able to find employees who will fit seamlessly into their organisation. Employers can also reduce the chance of hiring a poor performer, potentially dangerous or criminally inclined employee.³

- **Eliminating bias**

Valid, reliable personality tests are very objective, eliminating any personal bias toward test-takers. Similarly, they are less subjective than using traditional interviews and reference checks alone.

- **Diminishing turnover, saving money**

Scott Erker, senior vice president of development at human-resources consultancy Development Dimensions, has found personality testing to have an effect on an organisation’s bottom line, too. According to Erker, using workplace personality screening measures can reduce turnover rate by up to 50%! Not to mention, their implementation can save on time and money associated with recruitment and training of an employee who is later let go due to poor performance or fit.⁴

- **Attracting new generations**

² Ibid

³ Eisenbraun, Garrett A. “The pros and cons of personality testing in the workplace.” BNET Business Network. Feb. 2006. 19 Nov. 2008 <http://findarticles.com/plarticles/mi_m0ojxlis_4_30/lai_n25001715>.

⁴ Chulik, Amy. “Personality Testing Can Cut Your Turnover in Half?” The Hiring Site. 2 Sept. 2008. Career Builder. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://thehiringsite.careerbuilder.com/2008/09/02/put-employees-personalities-to-the-test-and-cut-your-turnover-in-half>>.

Personality testing offers great benefits in attracting Generation Y candidates who are very self-aware and self-involved. The chances are they will have already encountered similar assessment at college or university. According to Career Builder's The Hiring Site, such tests speak to this generation's need to grow and develop professionally and personally within the company.⁵

- **Fostering Leaders**

Many organisations are going beyond using personality testing for hiring purposes only, stretching their use into the realm of leadership. In America, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences is doing just that, using workplace testing to assess leadership readiness, as well as to help structure their leadership programs.⁶

Choosing the right test

Now that you know the benefits associated with workplace personality assessments, it's time to choose the one that's right for your organisation. In deciding which test is best for your new recruits, current employees or leaders-to-be, consider these three variables⁷:

1. What factors do you want to measure?
2. What test accurately tests those factors and is a trustworthy source?
3. Does the test predict job performance? According to recruiting industry giant ERE, university research has shown that it takes nearly 10 factors to predict job performance – does your chosen test measure up?

Answering question #1 will depend on the purpose of the test. For example, an assessment used to screen new recruits will differ from one used to put together the perfect project team. Decide what the most important factor is that you're trying to measure before moving on to select your assessment tool.

In answering #2 and 3, we've outlined the most commonly given workplace personality tests below, as well as their primary objective, to help jumpstart your research⁸. However, always remember: Validity must be confirmed. If the test or its administrator is not valid, trustworthy and reliable, its results will be of little or no use to you and your organisation.

That being said, here are a few of the most widely-recognised tests, in alphabetic order to avoid bias!

^{5,6} Chulik, Amy. "Personality Testing Can Cut Your Turnover in Half?" *The Hiring Site*. 2 Sept. 2008. *Career Builder*. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://thehiringsite.careerbuilder.com/2008/09/02/put-employees-personalities-to-the-test-and-cut-your-turnover-in-half/>>.

⁷ Williams, Dr. Wendell. "Validating a Personality Test." *ERE.net*. 18 May 2007. 25 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.ere.net/2007/05/18/validating-a-personality-test/>>.

⁸ Neill, James. "Personality & Psychological Profiling Instruments." *Wilderness*. 29 Oct. 2004. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://wilderness.com/tools/personality.html>>.



- **Adversity Quotient** – Used as an indicator of capacity to withstand and thrive on challenging circumstances specifically related to business and the workplace. Visit www.peaklearning.com for more information.
- **Birkman Method Personality Test** – Identifies an individual's unique work style and situational behaviours. Visit www.birkman.com for more information.
- **DISC Management Strategies** – Provides feedback and improvement tips in regard to self-management and team management in workplace settings. A widely used tool, DISC theory states that personality itself results from an individual's active or passive actions in a friendly vs. unfriendly environment.⁹ Visit www.discprofile.com for more information.
- **Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI)** – Provides thinking-style profiling based on left-right hemisphere and cognitive vs. limbic thinking preferences. This tool can also be used for team profiling and analysis. Visit www.hbdi.com for more information.
- **Human Synergistics** – Provides thinking-style and personality profiling and feedback on an individual, team or organisational level to assess strengths, areas of improvement and individual effectiveness. Visit www.humansynergistics.com for more information.
- **Keirsey Temperament Sorter** – Identifies 16 personality sub-types based on four main personality factors, derived from the psychological work of Carl Jung. Visit www.keirsey.com for more information.
- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** – Also identifies 16 main personality types based on four personality factors. This test is widely used in personality assessment in workplace settings, measuring preferred ways of thinking and behaving. More than 2 million MBTI assessments are given annually in the United States alone by Fortune 500 companies, smaller businesses, universities and non-profit organisations!¹⁰ Visit www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/ for more information.



⁹ Williams, Dr. Wendell. "Validating a Personality Test." *ERE.net*. 18 May 2007. 25 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.ere.net/2007/05/18/validating-a-personality-test/>>.

¹⁰ Storm, Paula, and Susann DeVries. "Personality Psychology in the Workplace." *MLA Forum* 5 (2006). *MLAForum.org*. 15 Dec. 2006. 19 Nov. 2008.

- **Team Management Systems** – Profiles the roles individuals play in groups and teams, used to help improve the quality of team performance. Visit www.tms.com.au/ for more information.
- **360-Degree Feedback** – Gathers feedback regarding personality and work styles based on observer and self-ratings. Visit www.360-degreefeedback.com for more information.

Want to narrow your list even more? The two most popular tests of those listed above are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the DiSC Dimensions of Behavior.¹¹ Start there, determine if they're a good fit, and then delve into further research if necessary (as a matter of interest, DiSC has proved quite valuable for the U.S. based part of 4imprint!).

Once you've selected the right test for the right purpose, we recommend hiring a third party to administer the assessment. This will guarantee that all test results are kept confidential and private. Certified personality assessment administrators are specially trained to:

- Ensure only applicable questions are asked
- Manage any necessary consent forms
- Inform all test-takers of the test's purpose, how its results will be used and its relative importance in the grand scope of the occupation or task in question.

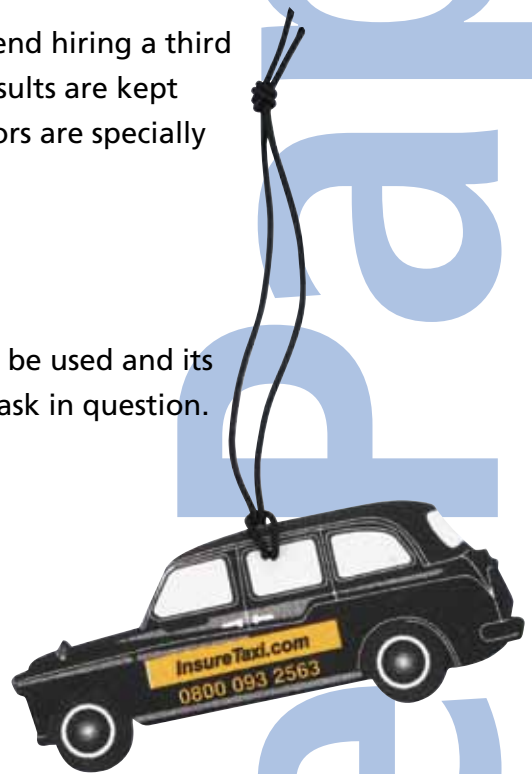
Fresh perspective

After reviewing the most common workplace personality tests listed previously, you no doubt recognised one or more of them. That's because they're oldies, but "goodies" – tests that have stood the test of time and are trusted worldwide to provide accurate, reliable data.

But, it's no secret that as the workforce evolves over time, so do workplace personalities and their roles within organisational culture.

In 2008, T-Mobile commissioned its annual [Workplace Motivation Report](#) to outline the evolution of workplace personalities, their impact on career motivations, and how they're affected by cultural influences (i.e. the state of the economy). The mobile phone giant believes that knowing what type you are, and where your colleagues fall, can ultimately assist in working better together and finding the right fit in your organisation.

¹¹ Ropella, Patrick B. "Understanding Workplace Personalities." *Pharma & Bio Ingredients*. Ropella & Associates. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.pharmabioingredients.com/articles/2007/01/understanding-workplace-personalities>>.



In this report, T-Mobile found there to be eight over-arching “office typologies” present in the 2008 workforce.¹² Let’s take a look at these updated personalities:

1. The Mother Hen – Nurturing, Warm & Approachable

The employee who everyone turns to for advice, the Mother Hen is a great listener. He or she is warm, kind, jolly and wise, while also being strict when necessary. Watch out for: Becoming an office gossip, or becoming weighed down with others’ problems.

2. The Joker – Sociable, Carefree & Witty

Using humour as his or her primary form of communication, the Joker thrives on lightening the mood and lifting team morale. He or she is widely liked and has a good social network. Watch out for: Not being taken seriously or as a professional.

3. The Dude – Unfazed, Calming & Relaxed

Laid back and relaxed, the Dude remains unflustered when things go awry and can have a calming influence on the rest of the team. He or she doesn’t transfer pressure onto colleagues. Watch out for: Being perceived as lazy or not understanding the gravity of a situation.

4. The Cheerleader – Enthusiastic, Optimistic & Motivating

A team enabler, the Cheerleader provides encouragement and motivation. He or she is always willing to hand out praise, is eternally optimistic and has a can-do attitude. Watch out for: Moving too quickly without taking time to reflect.

5. The Realist – Down to Earth, Pragmatic & Logical

Always able to see the truth through the spin, the Realist tells it like it is. He or she is great at thinking through the pitfalls or challenges that may lie ahead. Watch out for: Coming across as negative, pessimistic or de-motivating.

6. The Link – Sociable, Flighty & Connected

Cultivating as many relationships as possible, the Link believes success lies in who you know, not what you know. Watch out for: Being considered too shallow when not taking the time to foster deep relationships with others.

7. The Geek – Technically-minded, Fastidious & Quiet



¹² Lancaster-James, Honey. *T-Mobile Workplace Motivation Report*. Rep.No. Psychology, T-Mobile, Ipsos MORI. Autumn 2008 ed. *The Telegraph: Business Club*. Autumn 2008. 19 Nov. 2008 <http://www.telegraphbusinessclub.co.uk/t-mobile/files/other/motivation_report.pdf>.

With an exceptional attention to detail, the Geek is a perfectionist. He or she is conscientious, likes to retain control and always sees projects through to completion. Watch out for: Losing sight of the bigger picture and not delegating tasks appropriately.

8. **The Innovator** – Creative, Idealistic & Resourceful

Imaginative and quirky, the Innovator sees the big picture and loves dreaming up ideas. Watch out for: Not seeing projects through to their end and being perceived as fickle.

So, what does it all mean? And (bluntly) why should you care?

According to T-Mobile, by recognising where you and your colleagues fall, organisations are better able to create the perfect team of complimenting roles. For example, an entire staff of the same workplace personality would get nowhere. But, a carefully crafted team of balanced personalities will ensure each project is tackled effectively, production is on-target and leaders shine through.¹³

Also, the role each employee plays greatly affects his or her workplace motivations. While Barry from Finance may need to be surrounded by energetic team members to keep him going, Shelly in admin might need level-headed, more serious colleagues to keep her afloat. By understanding where teammates fall, you'll be able to better drive them into action – on their terms.

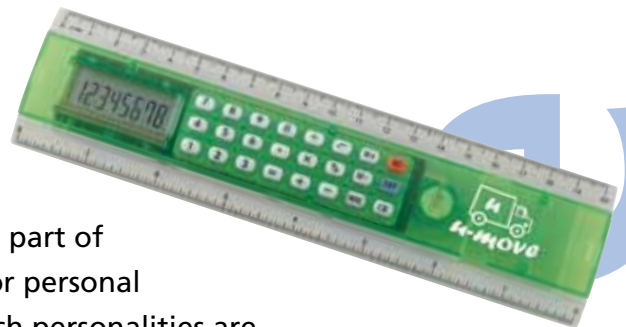
Cultural, social effects

Now, let's talk economy (because we know you haven't heard enough about its state lately!)

With a downturned economy acting as such an influential part of many industries, it's obvious that its effect on workplace or personal stress is undeniable. People are feeling the strain. So, which personalities are godsend during a time of economic crisis, and which can you most do without?

T-Mobile outlines its interesting research findings¹⁴:

- One-third of those surveyed (32%) identify with the Realist, which could be a red flag that tough economic times cause many to become more rational in their attitude and decision-making.



^{13, 14} Lancaster-James, Honey. T-Mobile Workplace Motivation Report. Rep.No. Psychology, T-Mobile, Ipsos MORI. Autumn 2008 ed. The Telegraph: Business Club. Autumn 2008. 19 Nov. 2008 <http://www.telegraphbusinessclub.co.uk/t-mobile/files/other/motivation_report.pdf>.

- The personality type found most motivating in harsh economic times is the Cheerleader (26% of votes).
- The personality type found most de-motivating in the current economic state is the Joker (15% of votes).¹⁵

The moral of the story? Optimism and cheer are more welcome than an always wise-cracking jokester (something to bear in mind when searching out your next new recruit, or putting together the perfect team for an important project).

Case in point: *Accomplish Moore*, with the help of Tamela Moore

Like T-Mobile, an American 4imprint customer [Tamela Moore](#) knows how strong the effects of workplace personalities can be on an organisation's success. Moore's Accomplish Moore programme puts personalities at its core to assess why individuals act the way that they do in workplace and team settings.

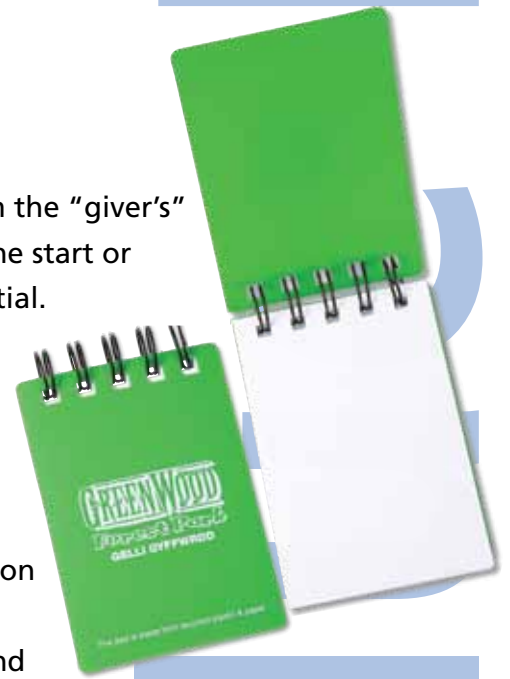
"I have discovered that it is so important for people to understand why they do what they do. It's amazing to see that first light bulb go on in their minds and then apply that knowledge to their personal and career relationships," said Moore. Her main focuses are on basic personality awareness through the True Colors® system (visit www.true-colors.com for more information on this system), internal communication and team building. The result? Increased productivity and improved communication within the organisation and a heightened sense of internal camaraderie.

On the flip side

Up to this point, we've covered workplace personality assessments from the "giver's" point of view. But, what if you are the one subject to such a test, and the start or growth of your career depends on it? In your case, preparation is essential.

It may seem peculiar to study or prepare for a personality test, but the amount of preparation you do is in proportion to the test's purpose.

If you are subject to a test as a current employee, for reasons of teambuilding or leadership assessment for example, the most preparation you can do is to be well-rested and have performed any necessary secondary research ahead of time. Go online and look at the background behind the test to find out the types of questions you will be asked. This may help



¹⁵ Lancaster-James, Honey. *T-Mobile Workplace Motivation Report*. Rep.No. Psychology, T-Mobile, Ipsos MORI. Autumn 2008 ed. *The Telegraph: Business Club*. Autumn 2008. 19 Nov. 2008 <http://www.telegraphbusinessclub.co.uk/t-mobile/files/other/motivation_report.pdf>.

relieve any feelings of stress and anxiety associated with the unknown nature of the test.

However, if you are taking the test in association with a job application or potential move within a company, your preparation should be slightly more in-depth. Just as with any interview or application, we recommend putting research into the scope of the job and the organisation. Know the position's duties and the organisation's expectations. The test's purpose and criteria will likely be linked to the position you are applying for, so the better your research, the greater the insight gained.

For example, if you are applying for a job that is based on customer service skills, the test taken will probably include personality questions related to how outgoing, friendly and personable you are.¹⁶ Assessing the job description ahead of time will allow you to decipher the test's purpose and, possibly, determine if it's the right career path for you.

In preparing, we do offer one caveat: Don't attempt to outsmart the test, or try to study answers that you think will land you the job. We assure you that such efforts will stand out like a red flag. These days, workplace personality tests are so common that certain questions within the tests have been specifically designed to sniff out impostors. And anyway, who wants to land a job that doesn't truly suit them?

For the greater good

Dr. L Alan Witt, director of the Ph.D. programme in industrial and organisational psychology at the University of Houston USA, believes that the greater understanding an individual has of his or her colleagues, bosses, etc., the more effective he or she will be on the job:

"HR often says 'treat everyone the same.' That's bad advice – you have to treat people according to the way they need to be treated."

Witt goes on to explain that one should also be aware of how his or her personality is perceived:

"You're not a good employee unless your boss thinks you are. You're not a good manager unless your subordinates think you are. It's not what you think about yourself, it's what other people think about you."¹⁷

¹⁶ Gutner, Toddi. "Applicants' Personalities Put to the Test." *The Wall Street Journal* 26 Aug. 2008. *The Wall Street Journal Online*. 26 Aug. 2008. 19 Nov. 2008 <<http://online.wsj.com/article/sb121969346624670203>>.

¹⁷ Schmelling, Sarah. "Panel Examines Extraversion (or Lack of It) and the Workplace." 27 June 2008. *National Institutes of Health*. 19 Nov. 2008 <http://nihrecord.od.nih.gov/newsletters/2008/06_27_2008/story3.htm>.



Personality Tests

We agree. Consider using workplace personality testing to your organisational advantage. It can be a great tool to assess new employees, internal teams and those individuals who are set for promotion. In the end, you'll have a greater understanding of yourself, your colleagues and how to make your organisation run more smoothly. And remember – there are no 'wrong' personality types – just right ones for that particular job or place in a team.



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