



# The Benefits of Using a Holistic Approach in Behavioral Assessment Interpretation

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## **Abstract:**

*Dependence on single Psychometric assessments is likely to give a partial view about an individual. Use of a Battery of Psychometric Assessments not only provides a holistic view of – Heredity, Upbringing, Environmental and Situational influences, but also highlights the significance of the role that each play. This paper describes a phenomenological study to investigate of how an objective battery of psychometric analysis of an individual's inherent strengths and capabilities ensure progress and growth in all arenas of life. The aim of the study was to explore the holistic approach by scientifically measuring the hidden strengths and discovering opportunities for self-progress and immediate growth possibilities through the Battery of Psychometric Analysis. The findings, derived from practical experience and research, suggest that the background of psychological knowledge obtained, helps individuals make better choices in the course of one's life and career. This paper is into the advantages of the well-researched application of multiple psychometric assessments and interpretation to gain an unbiased total analysis.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The use of psychometric assessments has grown into a multi-million-pound industry. There is growing evidence indicating that the use of psychometric tests has increased over the years (Jenkins & Wolf, 2002) and continues till date. The growth has been significant in the last two decades (Jenkins, 2001b); reasons range from Increased Regulation and Legislation, HR Policies, Increased Training Costs, Large Candidate Pools to screen and Loss of confidence in academic qualifications. All of the aforementioned factors are likely to encourage further growth in psychometric testing in the immediate future.

The traditional methods of getting to know one's strengths and weaknesses carry the high risk of individual bias. Such methods are outdated and subjective. They are not comprehensive and hence undermine the effectiveness of people performance. Psychometric Assessments will go beyond decisions made on the basis of chance to make a real impact on the talent and success quotient of any business.

According to Industrial Psychological Consultants (2011), a private firm in Zimbabwe, the principal reason for the growth of Psychometric test use in the

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corporate world is that a valid testing system takes the guesswork out of building a pool of talented candidates. Carefully developed and administered psychometric tests provide organizations with a way to decide systematically and accurately individuals who have the ability to perform well on the job, can be trained to develop for filling higher positions and will not engage in counterproductive behavior

These scientific tools have become an increasingly important part of an organization's HR tool-kit, assessing the personality and attitudes, and has now achieved mainstream acceptance. People are no strangers to the application of psychometric testing in order to understand, select, train, motivate, coach and develop individuals for various purposes with respect to work and life.

### **Reasons behind using Psychometric Assessments**

Psychometric tests are carefully developed for specific purposes and need to be utilized for the purpose for which they were intended. According to Van Der Merwe, one of the key elements that ensure an excellent organizational performance is the proper selection and development of staff (Merwe, 2002). The reason assessments are valuable is that they can uncover information that is not easily found by other traditional methods. For instance, assessments are good at uncovering a person's aptitude for a particular job for which he has no experience. Psychometric tests do not and should not stand alone as the only selection method. The tests used in the selection setting are purpose designed to help fit a candidate's talents, personality and attributes to suit a job. They are not designed to reveal innermost secrets or uncover confidential information about the individual. Well-designed psychometric assessments are objective and accurate predictors of individual behavior and preferences. Psychometric Testing brings science to the art of recruitment (Clarkson, 2013).

In addition to the above, Psychometric Assessments also provides Objectivity and Validity. Objectivity across a wide range of demographics and age cohorts which otherwise may not be evident. Its validity and predictability for future job performance is better than interviews, academic achievements and reference checks (Cohen et al, 1996). On the cost front, Psychometric Assessments help to minimize costs while maximizing potential fit between the candidate and the job. The cost of a bad hire can be staggering. According to a white paper released by Taleo Corporation (2004), having made the wrong hiring decision, a company may seek to cut its ongoing losses by replacing the worker. Replacement costs, including sourcing costs, administrative and processing costs, and lost productivity for the hiring manager, all become part of the cost of a bad hire (Taleo, 2004). Fernández-Aráoz et al (2009) argue that a good assessment yields more than a good candidate—it can actually

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improve the company's bottom line and market value in a very significant way (HBR, May, 2009)

A new hire isn't to blame for a bad hiring decision, but will shoulder much of the burden when a role doesn't fit (Gallo, 2010). According to a study by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM, 2013), it could cost up to five times a bad hire's annual salary. Higher the person's position and the longer they remain in that position, the more it will cost to replace him or her (Gallo, 2010)

Current Psychological articles and researches (O'Connel, 2009) suggest people to get more introspective in the application of psychometric assessments to suit the vast complexity of modern people development endeavors in life. However, opinions are polarized as people's personalities are far more complex to suit a "one size fits all" approach. It is therefore important that Human Resources departments and other areas of life adopt the best techniques to select, retain, train and develop the best people.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research has demonstrated that psychometric assessment can play a significant role in improving the selection process for both new entrants and internal promotions. Effective psychometric assessments can also play a key role in staff development processes – an important challenge globally today. One of the major reasons for HR Departments' purchase of psychometric and other tests is the belief that test use will strengthen their position and influence within the organization. The role of HR as a tangible revenue generator is highly discussed in corporate circles. Making use of assessment tests available and reaching a precise decision on candidate selection and bring down turnover rates will find appreciation. More probably, it will be phrased in terms of how best to achieve high quality results. It may, nonetheless, be quite important in explaining test take- up. There is ample of literature available in which professional and semi-professional groups consistently attempt to use their professional knowledge to strengthen their overall influence in organizations and in society, and increase their financial and other rewards (Cohen and Pfeffer, 1986; Dobbin et al, 1988; Baron et al, 1986; 1988).

An article by Mittner (1998), also mentioned that if psychometric tests are handled with insight and sensitivity, they remain the most effective way of predicting behaviour. Kemp (1999) highlights the value in stating that tests are an aid in the selection process and if used properly, supply invaluable information which is not easily gleaned in interviews. According to Van der Walt (1998), experience has proved that tests are generally much more reliable and more valid than other techniques. He

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also mentioned that studies in trade and industry have indicated that psychometric tests are about four times more effective than screening interviews.

Similarly, Sam Kris et.al. (2013) in their paper describe how an objective battery of psychometric analysis of an individual's inherent strengths and capabilities ensure progress and growth in all arenas of life. The aim of their study was to explore the holistic approach by scientifically measuring the hidden strengths and discovering opportunities for self progress and immediate growth possibilities through the Battery of Psychometric Analysis.

To understand and make right choices in the course of one's life and career it is imperative that one cannot depend on only a single Psychometric Assessment. It is likely to open just one window of one's life. From valuing the holistic approach of applying the Battery of Psychometric Assessments it is vital to open many influencing windows made up of – Heredity, Upbringing, Environmental, Situational, and more as each one plays its critical role. Thereby it was reported as an objective tool in assisting people from various endeavors to gain awareness in optimizing and capitalizing on the strengths and powers of individuals/teams, to progress in life and career.

### **Pitfalls of using a Single Instrument for Assessments**

There are several series of psychometric instruments that harness the power of psychology to help and understand others in building on their strengths to unlock their potential. MBTI, 16 PF, OPQ32, Thomas Personal Profiling System (DISC), Gordon's Personal Profile Inventory, Rorschach Ink-Blot Test, FIRO-B, Picture Frustration Test, Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT) are some of the most widely used single instruments that have been around for a number of years. Some focus on measuring a specific skill or aptitude, while others look to create a profile on a subject's particular traits. They have their own advantages and disadvantages. For example, research has shown that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test (MBTI) doesn't really measure what it purports to measure (Pittenger, 2013). Though MBTI has been used for years, on the reliability front it has been found lacking and that the standard error of measure for each of the four dimensions is fairly large. It classifies people into a rigid dichotomy. Thus, two people could have raw scores that are close to one another but that define different classifications. MBTI has been found wanting on the face validity front too (Sartori, 2010). Because the MBTI uses an absolute classification scheme for people, it is possible for people with relatively similar scores to label with much different personalities. As MBTI has grown in popularity, it has attracted increasing critical scrutiny. There is worry about the tendency of managers to see any personality test as an easy answer to organizational problems. Best research available shows a very weak relationship between personality and performance. That means there are a lot more important factors to be concerned with. More often, critics say, the instrument

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becomes a way of pigeonholing people and even giving them type-based excuses for substandard performance (Zemke, 1992). Kline (1993, 1998) notes that high face validity coincides with a high probability that subjects guess what tests try to measure. This makes subject taking the test lie and distort their responses, especially in case of personnel selection. Honest answers are compromised to gain selection advantage. This has undesirable effects, for example in case of inquiry on personality traits.

There is no evidence to show a positive relation between MBTI type and success within an occupation (Druckman & Bjork, 1991). Simply said, there is nothing to show that ESFPs are better or worse salespeople than INTJs are. There is also no data to substantiate that specific types are more satisfied within specific occupations than are other types, or that they have a tendency to stick longer in a particular field. Finally Pittinger (1993) concludes MBTI attempts to cramp the complexities of human personality into an artificial and limiting classification scheme. The focus on the "typing" of people reduces the attention paid to the unique qualities and potential of each individual.

According to Gluck (2013) some advantages of using FIRO-B in group settings include increasing the group's collaboration, making sure the work is evenly distributed, adding new viewpoints to discussions, and helping the group evaluate where it stands. Potential disadvantages include trying for fairness at all costs, seeing commonalities where none exists, putting people under pressure to contribute, and attempting to keep a team together that no longer serves a purpose and needs to disband. In closing we can conclude that FIRO-B assessment would be ideal for use in one-on-one coaching, small groups only (Schnell et al, 1993).

Lastly, according to Coull & Eary (2001) research has demonstrated that some independent tests show a bias of ethnicity in many multiple-choice-based questions in favor of Western males. A reason forwarded is that European males are more prepared to take risks than women and ethnic minorities. In the United Kingdom; major organizations like the British Rail, the London Borough of Brent and the Coventry Healthcare Trust have been involved in legal cases in which their use of psychometric testing was perceived to have discriminated against candidates from ethnic minorities.

Citing here the advantages and disadvantages of using these tests in isolation to measure a single factor or a variety of factors is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important thus for the HR community and also the recruiters to adopt sound techniques to segregate the good from the not so good. It is good to pick and choose tests from multiple offerings and come out with a true non-biased holistic interpretation of an individual. An article published in the HR Network Scotland (January, 2009) reporting on psychometric testing remarks that "existing tools are

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unsuitable for recruitment and that new thinking was required.” Existing psychometric personality instruments typically measure a limited number of behavioral traits. Due to the lack of a discrete number of traits, and because some use ‘norms’ of behavior, they only determine a ‘type’ of individual for a certain ‘type’ of job”. (O’ Connel, 2009)

### **Benefits of a Battery of Psychometric Assessments**

The world of Psychometric Analysis is made of several good instruments. But most of them are single instruments, meaning they are likely to throw light on only one aspect of life. Single instrument provides - amazing insight into the personality, providing tremendous input about their habits, preferences and strengths. But it still carries an incomplete and partial view of the individual. Needless to say, all assessment, not just personality tests is subject to distortion (Krug & Cattell, 1971). Criticisms occasionally surface showing self-report measures and are of little use in predicting behavior. In addition, ratings by peers, a procedure widely accepted in corporations lately, are themselves subject to considerable distortion (Krug, 2013). Assessing people for complex positions is challenging. Reasons, among many others, include the unique and changing characteristics of many jobs, the challenge of assessing intangible traits, and the time constraints of many candidates (Fernández-Aráoz et al, 2009).

Use of a combination of several tests (called a battery of assessments) is advisable. The benefits are manifold. Rather than rely on single battery, multiple tests packaged into one, evens out absolutes and thus provide a deep insight and significance by uncovering all aspects of individuals. (Sam Kris et al, 2013). It can also provide a holistic understanding of individuals when compared to the similar inputs obtained about an individual from various single psychometric instruments. Human beings are unique and thus their behaviours cannot be confined to a few traits. It is a combination of heredity and environment that determines how they react (Jason et al, 2006). A combination of tests can assist individuals to explore their “blind spots” provided validity and reliability norms are proven and consistent. Also providing an objective measure of often hidden abilities can and forms a robust foundation for making career decisions. It can also provide an insight into personality and highlights strengths and weaknesses. Individual have multiple strengths and multiple weaknesses (Thompson, 2014). A battery of tests also helps in negating bias. The expenses are minimal when compared with the costs of high-turnover of people, under-performance, personality and behavioural upheavals, interpersonal challenges in terms of individual stress and non-performing teams, not to mention disruption in the flow of scheduled activities.

In a holistic interpretation of the assessments one can experience the full power of the science of Psychometrics. Therefore, it can be discussed that the battery

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of assessments provides a comprehensive, time assessment, proven scientific and objective measurement tools. These tools are specifically designed to give a kaleidoscopic insight into behaviors, attitudes, motivation and perceptions which have a major impact on the bottom line performance across profile. The outcomes offer actionable insights into areas of improvement. Every individual is a bundle of strengths and weaknesses. Only a minority of the world's population makes use of their inherent strengths, and learns to win. But the vast majority of people unknowingly and unintentionally tend to use their weaknesses and end up on the losing side in their career, life and relationships (Sam Kris et al, 2013). Each one of us needs an objective evaluation of our inherent strengths and capabilities so as to ensure progress and growth in all areas of life

Psychometric battery of assessments not only highlights an individual's strengths and weaknesses but show pointers to his or her ideal work style and career from a holistic perspective. The battery of assessments correlates on the thought of providing a psychometric horoscope for the test takers with varied areas of improvement to be identified and dealt. Indeed the multiple assessments combine to form powerful tools for being a Strength Finder and Enabler. It also summarizes **psychometric** difficulties and potential new directions for assessment of career development constructs (Swanson, 2013).

According to Bonner (1961) the systematic holistic **approach** to the psychology of personality can be conceived as a single, unified point of view. Taking this approach does not blind us from the possibility that other points of view may also be valid. The reason is obvious as there is no true theory, but only more or less dependable proposals. Whether the test is used in a high- or low-stakes setting, the principal message is that its technical qualities must be shown to be adequate across the languages and cultures in which it is deployed (Burke et al, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

It is obvious that one cannot depend on just one single psychometric assessment. It is likely to give a partial view about of one's life. From valuing the holistic approach of applying the Battery of Psychometric Assessments it is vital to give a aerial view of – Heredity, Upbringing, Environmental and Situational influences, and more as each one plays its critical role. Ultimately, all psychometrics present a useful starting point for discussion. The resulting data provides a basis against which people can be compared objectively and with which respondents can be scrutinized in a specific and deeper way. No self-assessment should ever be used or claim the ability to predict human behavior accurately on its own. Thus, a limited view does not help in understanding an individual, regardless of whether one wishes to recruit, retain, train or develop people. This said however, as people's personalities are far more complex

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a “one size fits all” approach may not hold good. A comprehensive and detailed Psychometric Analysis of different combinations of assessments will provide a scientific interpretation to make vital decisions about people. Perhaps this is a platform for all researchers, professionals and individuals to learn and gain from the holistic approach that well-designed Battery of Psychometric assessments will render. Therefore, it could be stated that the single assessment tools were used more as a support rather than the developmental tool for people management endeavours.

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