



Psychometric models have long been used to help leaders understand their communication style. But how effective are such models for improving communication? Are they just a grand self-awareness exercise with little productive impact?

LEARNING TO AUTHENTICALLY INFLUENCE OTHERS IS A JOURNEY FEW OF US ARE PREPARED TO MAKE

THE PSYCHOMETRIC JUNGLE

Over the last 25 years psychometric tools and models have flooded the commercial marketplace - MBTi, MMPi, PAI, PAPI, DiSC to name a few. Executive teams, aspiring leaders and client-facing personnel have all been subjected to online evaluators that cough up surprisingly detailed reports on their communication style. Their potential strengths and limitations are laid bare and with subsequent self-analysis and reflection, the proffered 'coaching' tips should lead to significant changes and improvements in inter-personal effectiveness. Or does it?

THE SELF-AWARENESS ILLUSION

The presumption since the 1990s is that knowing ourselves better and recognising our idiosyncrasies is the sure path to determining more appropriate behavioural choices in the battle to influence and motivate others. The logic is irresistible but it is highly dependent on the individual's capacity to perceive and accept their limitations, assess their specific effect and forge a communication plan to significantly alter future outcomes - a rare occurrence. Faced, then, with poor or non-existent implementation, wildly inconsistent results and intangible measures based mainly on hearsay, this self-awareness truism partially lost its glitter. In the ensuing decade, organisations attempted to correct the implementation gap and began to demand communication skills training that provided practical advice and methodologies supported by a relevant psychometric. Why did this also fail?

THE KNOWLEDGE CONUNDRUM

Personality theories and models explain how we use behaviour and develop 'preferences' that reflect our

'style'. Training courses on communication espoused the use of these models to enable greater understanding of the needs and goals behind these preferences and to enhance our capability with the behavioural choices we make. However, three factors came into play.

The first issue was the false assumption that understanding the model in more detail would facilitate greater adaptability and proficiency in handling the different styles people commonly adopt. Many course participants would often convince themselves that with such knowledge they could naturally implement any new approaches seamlessly. Others remained either unconvinced by the model's efficacy (rejecting the over-use of 'psycho-babble') or believed that their existing intuitive awareness of behaviour might have benefited from this additional information, but that it would not require too much effort to incorporate these ideas into their existing *modus operandi*.

Not surprisingly, the second factor became one of authenticity. When we change or add greater variety to our preferred style it can create confusion. We can temporarily lose our sense of who we are and how we like to operate. This can create a crisis of confidence, which coupled with inconsistent outcomes encourages a relapse - better to rely on our preferred style, be grounded in the comfort of learned automatic responses and, in doing so, maintain our credibility.

The final factor to compound the lack of improvement was the eternal tension existing in most organisations, between productivity and learning. The pressures of time, budget and competing developmental needs would repeatedly lead to 'short-cuts'. The trend pre the 2008 economic crisis of 3-5 day programmes was replaced by the resort to one-day programmes - provide knowledge and information, and if the

participant is talented enough, progress will happen. Even those programmes with the time for role play and discussion, would often do no more than give some useful pointers for how to adapt but no time or follow-up to inculcate real change and confidence-building outcomes. So can this type of behavioural training really work in the influencing arena? Is there an expedient method to achieve the holy grail of getting it more right, more often with more people?

THE SYNERGY5 SOLUTION

The answer is definitely yes! It requires a number of aspects to be addressed.

1. The psychometric tool of choice must be practical and suitable for both commercial and everyday application. It should reflect the complexity of how we operate yet allow for a straightforward means of adoption and implementation. Insights Discovery is such a model. It uses colour to designate behavioural preferences (a simple yet highly memorable and intuitive format) and encourages focus on actual behaviours being used rather than 'pigeon-holing' an individual to one or two particular traits that define their decision-making - although for reasons all ready stated, even training initiatives using this tool fail to transcend this.
2. The training content should include creative skill development that focuses on explaining and practicing congruency in communication while also sharpening the person's antennae to identify different types of behaviour and quickly process 'best' alternative responses.
3. An accurate tool for 'profiling' selected stakeholders is vital. The format and criteria for this must be easy to use and sufficiently robust and extensive to clearly identify the stakeholder's preferences.

Distinguishing between hard evidence (observed behaviour) and assumptions is critical.

4. Participants need to set specific and viable communication goals and plans based on a proficient interpretation of the 'stakeholder profiler' outcomes. (See coaching follow-up in point 5 below)

5. A minimum of 3 separate group training days, with coaching calls in between, is required over 2 months to ensure:

- a. quality feedback on personal psychometric reports
- b. transference of knowledge and understanding
- c. skills development and confidence building
- d. goal setting and application,
- e. Review, coaching and re-direction

But is this enough to guarantee success?

THE INNER JOURNEY

The Four Stages of Learning* is a well-known model for transformational learning. Its significance cannot be ignored with this type of initiative. Adapting and refining our behaviour to find ways of achieving elegant results is a serious challenge for most of us. It requires thoughtfulness and sincere reflection, coupled with creativity and commitment to change. Positive intention is not sufficient. The Insights model is just a tool; a very effective one, but it will only serve the user when they are prepared to fully appreciate both how they function and the dynamics of how they and others exhibit the different preferences. Their personal report will do much to enable this journey. Ultimately, the new pathways of behaviour we create, must be firmly allied to our authentic self; achieving this involves not only practice but the willingness to identify credible behavioural alternatives that may stretch us but will also 'fit' with how we genuinely wish to acknowledge and respect someone else's needs and goals.

The consultant trainer involved must have the capacity to present the behavioural model in a manner that will inspire this level of adoption and commitment. The quality of guidance in the learning process is critical to enable a sound bridge to be built between who we are and how we need to be.

The benefits of aligning this training to specific business initiatives and outcomes are substantive. Where leaders are championing desired results and providing additional supportive coaching, the environment for change and successful implementation is notably enhanced. New behaviours become properly entrenched as success encourages repetition and the dedication to continuous improvement.

With the right coaching and training experience, an individual's competence, confidence and credibility can be properly managed and fostered in the use of this tool, raising their emotional intelligence as they seek to effectively connect with others and forge more trusting and productive business relationships.

* *The Four Stages of Learning*

- *Unconsciously Incompetent*
- *Consciously Incompetent*
- *Consciously Competent*
- *Unconsciously Competent*

CLIENT COMMENT

"The project management team manage complex projects, liaising with many different individuals from a range of scientific, engineering and business backgrounds. Some skillsets of the people come with a reputation for having certain characteristics that may conflict with 'completing and finishing' projects. The Project Management group were interested in how to increase their engagement skills with their wide and varied team member group. These workshops enabled them to change their behaviour to better engage with the individuals and enhance communication and trust. In some early examples, when operating with key staff with whom they had previously failed to engage, there were immediate improvements. Anyone wanting to increase their team engagement, behavioural awareness and, more importantly, learn how to adapt behaviour to promote a happier working environment, should give this a go!"

Mike Gale – Synergy5