

My View of Psychological Tests

I have included a very brief test in the next chapter to help you get an idea of your particular Dynamics. You do not have to take this test but experience shows that most people who have an interest in personality and its measurement enjoy taking a test and seeing where they "come out" relative to others. Are they more assertive, more intelligent, more ethical, less opinionated, less rigid and in general above average on the good stuff and below average on the bad stuff. To a major degree, this book was based on a thwarted effort to find a Personality test that was robust enough and based on a normal personality that would help me better evaluate senior executives.

My quandary was that I had to determine if a particular executive "fit within a given corporate culture." I had two hours to sit in front of a person that I never saw, interview that person and then tell management that the person was like such and such and would fit in because... but you had better consider ... Like many people in the psychological profession, I was aware of testing and did use some standard personality tests (e.g., 16 PF[®]) but I discovered that they were lacking on several dimensions.

First, it was helpful to find that someone was "Y% on X" (e.g., 85% aggressive) but I didn't know why he was "X" (e.g., aggressive because he liked to control people or was it defensive because he felt inadequate). Secondly, I didn't really know when "X" would or would not appear. For example, a very political person with 85% aggression may not display that trait in front of his superiors but he might display it in front of his subordinates. So do I report he is aggressive and his boss says that he doesn't seem to be. Or do I report that he is not and the boss calls me back and wants to know why all of his subordinates are coming to him and complaining that he is too aggressive! Incidentally, these were concerns that became manifest after a person was hired. Before, I started to develop a "theory" of the normal personality, I used the available testing for licensed psychologists but I was "missing things" that I wished I knew. Below, are the types of psychological tests and the theory that drives these instruments.

What Tests are out there? - (Trait Analysis)

The most popular tests are based on a dominant personality theory (it is not a real theory but a description of hypothetical "personality factors"). These tests quantify factors or **Traits** and are typically used by research psychologists (who write journal articles that only their peers see). The tests are constructed by using the responses of college students and no professor or graduate student gets paid or loses a client by being wrong. Matter of fact, no one is really interested in any particular person since they usually collect a lot of data and look for correlations among factors. Eventually the "best tests" are published (because there is so much data) and become standardized tests that are used in some psychological practice (e.g., by a therapist doing marital therapy who needs to find out about the differences between a husband and wife).

These tests (e.g., Neo P-I-R[®], CPI[®] and 16 PF[®]) are indeed very helpful and produce scores for "typical traits" (e.g., assertion, extraversion) like those mentioned above. Clearly, if I had no other data beside my interview, I would want to have the data from one of these instruments. They are all basically based on a "theory" that is called

the Big-5 Factors that state that the personality can be broken down into 5 major factors (i.e., Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraverted, Agreeable and Neurotic). However, academic psychologists do not want to understand Ralph or Mary but they do spend a lot of time debating how many factors really exist and how can we better define (e.g., using subfactors) those factors. For example, the Neo P-I-R[®] conveniently has 6 subfactors for the 5 major factors producing a total of 30 subfactors.

The advantage of these tests is that you can see that Mary is more assertive and extraverted than Ralph, so she may do better in sales. Or in therapy you may find that the husband is very aggressive and not agreeable while the wife is passive and very accepting. This is good information but it is descriptive only. There is no theory. Usually the therapist tries to talk to the husband and find out why he is so aggressive and talks to the wife to find out about her passivity. The therapist uses the description from the test but fills in all the particulars by "doing therapy" and finding out why.

It is like saying that some elements are liquids at room temperature and others are gases. You could have several "chemical traits" like whether or not they respond to electricity (e.g., Neon), burn easily (e.g., carbon), smell bad (e.g., chlorine) or anything else but there is no theory. It is helpful because if an unknown gas does not smell and doesn't light up or explode; it might be nitrogen. But it doesn't tell me why! However, the periodic table of elements is based on a theory of valence electrons and I know why the noble gases have similar properties. So a trait theory is a description and not a theory.

You see academic psychologists work at universities and write papers. They are usually very intelligent and can develop "theories" and do all kind of research but rarely do they concern themselves with actual people. They are good scientists but maybe they are not such good technicians. A scientist can tell you about internal combustion but he may not be able to fix your car. My clients do not care if I have a psychological theory, know anything about experimental design or can even write a paper. They just wanted to know if Mr. Smith will have any problems working at Acme Products, could he work with the other team players and what are his weaknesses. If you are mostly right and you predict his behavior; you can send them a bill and they pay you. If you are wrong and miss a big issue (e.g., sneaky aggression), you have to find another client.

What Tests are out there? - (Psychopathology)

The second group of tests is based on theories of psychopathology because early test development centered around diagnosing patients so they could receive the proper medication or psychotherapy. Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Karen Horney, to name a few, have very complex theories about why Ralph gets screwed up and then needs medication. Classic psychological tests such as the Rorschach[®], Thematic Apperception Test[®] and MMPI[®] are based on pathology theories and usually measure "degrees of psychopathology" in a person (e.g., usually a patient). I used these tests when I worked with a clinical population who either needed treatment or you had to do a diagnosis for a psychiatrist who often prescribed medication. Amazingly, some of the best and most powerful personality theories are based on pathology and not on a normal personality. You never look at a normal person but you look at the disease entities and classify the patients! Indeed, the DSM-IV lists the "psychological diseases"

and tells you their symptoms and how to differentiate one from another. This whole set of theories is based upon "non-normal" people who usually don't apply for top senior or executive positions. Now, if I have to distinguish between Ralph and Mary and I use this theory I can say neither one of them has any significant psychopathology. It is like giving a couch potato and a marathon runner a blood test and saying they are both healthy.

Take the MMPI[®] for example. It is a fantastic clinical instrument and is based on criterion groups such as Depressives, Hysterics and Schizophrenics. You would give the test to a client and if his/her scores were above a certain percentage in certain constellations of scales, you could put a diagnosis on that person. There is a well-developed theory of psychopathology behind this testing because Schizophrenics do share things in common and may have similar early life experiences. Hence, unlike traits that just describe, you can predict certain life experiences and even responses to medications that were not part of the test (e.g., a Schizophrenic that has hallucinations usually gets better on antipsychotic medication and hallucinations go away).

Now sometimes these tests are "backed off" for normal people and you use a similar sounding name based on their "pathology." For example, a person that is almost a Schizophrenic may be called Schizotypal. Another person may tend to get depressed (but not clinically where they require antidepressant medication) so we can call that person pessimistic. Of course one of the all time favorites is the OCD or the Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder that is always bandied about when a person seems rigid and too organized. You need enough OCD to get you through school (i.e., a normal amount for time management) but not so much that you have some sick ritualistic behavior (e.g., hand washing 10 times after eating to rid yourself of germs). So do you take the MMPI[®] and since a score of 85% on the Pt scale makes you a severe OC (70% is the cutoff for a clinical diagnosis) does a score of 60% makes you a perfectionist? So do I use these tests and "back off" and report the results to my clients. I will tell you that if I gave normal executives these tests, they would tell my clients and I would be gone.

This is way beyond the scope of what we are trying to do but the bottom line is these theories and tests are based on psychopathology and we are just "backing off" a little and calling the person a "normal" type. It does not seem to be the best approach. It is like having a little of a disease makes you a "normal type." Why isn't there a theory for the normal personality? There are some good mini-theories like moral development but there is not a "normal personality theory." Going back to the internal combustion engine analogy; assume we have a car that doesn't run so we find it has fowled plugs. Now another car runs, but runs poorly in a jerky start/stop fashion and it has "lightly fowled plugs" but it does run. We can call this car an "inadequate plug type" but the plain truth is that it is just less broken and it seems the theory is backward. The theory of internal combustion does not rely on "engine pathology" to define how an engine works. The theory tells you what you need to have in a normal engine (e.g., combustion chamber with ...) and if the "normal parts" have problems, the engine has problems.

This whole approach was always a major problem for looking at normal people. In looking at patients who come and say they are "broken" and need help, this approach makes a great deal of sense (just like a blood test makes sense). However, in looking at normal people, the tests and theory is much less helpful. Again, if I had no choice I would take a MMPI[®] over nothing and do the same thing. I would "back off" from the

clinical diagnosis. At least it is based on a theory (albeit one of sickness) and it would give me some good ideas. However, it is a moot point since the government eliminated the option of using any of those "pathology words" (e.g., Depressive). Now if you tell your client company that you should not hire Bob because he is "almost Depressive", you have violated the Americans with Disability Act. That is, you cannot hire or fire based upon these protected pathologies (that seems equally strange but that's the law). So now I didn't even have to worry about the MMPI[®] because I can't use it!

What Tests are out there? - (Psychological Types)

This is a theory that states people can be classified into major Personality Types. It does have some utility but it is the weakest of the three types of tests covered so far. Maybe this works for dogs or cars or vegetables but it is not very good in my business. A really good psychological type test is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[®] which is based on Jungian Psychology and measures a person on four dimensions (i.e., Extraversion, Sensing, Judging and Perceiving) and a person falls somewhere along a continuum on each dimension and then gets some letters to designate his type. For instance the person may be an ENTJ and now he can look up his type (1 of 16) and find out what he is like. A moments reflection will point out a major weakness with "type theory." Take the first letter of the type which is an "E" for Extraverted or an "I" for Introverted. When you take the test you get a score on this dimension and if you are close to either end you are almost a pure "E" or "I" but what do you do if you are in the middle? They tell you to read both types (e.g., ENTJ and INTJ) and see what you think.

Think of psychological types like any other type. It does serve a purpose and narrows down what you are talking about. I can say I live in a ranch type house rather than a mansion and you have a primitive idea of where I live. However, I don't think you would buy a brick colonial house without seeing it. I think before you spent your hard earned money you would want a better assessment of what the house was "really like." In essence, types are really groups of traits (similar to Labrador Retrievers and Boxers being dog types) put together and given a name. Hence, it is a lot like the trait theories which are not really theories at all but are descriptions. For example, one ENTJ may be anxious, prone to depression and assertive and have problems with authority. Another ENTJ may be calm, laid back, optimistic, passive and very accepting of all authority. Hence, psychological type tells me something but it is not very robust and it is not really a personality theory (my reading of Jung suggested it was never meant to be).

However, Personality Type is really good stuff for team building or some group exercises but it is too simple for my line of work. A team setting is really where Types are best used and that is to point out to psychologically naïve people the obvious. That people are different and more importantly the differences are neither good nor bad. Typing people is similar to wanting a dog and a Labrador retriever seems to sound like a good type of dog. The type prevents you from looking at collies but I'll bet that you just don't order one from a breeder and I'll bet that you ask "psychological type questions" (e.g., is he good with kids) when you visit the breeder. If you want a sales person an "E" is usually better than an "I." My clients could find out if Bob was an ENTJ but they don't want to move him from Iowa and pay him \$120,000 a year based on four letters.

The net result of all this "theory" and test availability was I needed to develop my own test if I was going to improve my service to my clients and remain within legal limits. I wanted to base the test on a normal personality because that is who I usually interview and help my clients hire. I did eventually develop my own test but before I could I needed a theory of the normal personality. You know what, there really is no good theory of the normal personality. So I had to develop my own theory based upon ten years in a clinical practice (psychodynamic theory is an excellent start) and fifteen years of seeing, interviewing and working with normal executives. Without a theory of the normal person, I would not know what to ask in a test. This book is the result of that effort and I will tell you that the **MAP** that I use has made my life much easier.

Murray Appraisal Process[®] or MAP

The actual test is more complicated than what follows in the next chapter. In actuality, the MAP is sent on a floppy disk or by email and the test is controlled by a computer program. The program spits out questions which the person responds to by clicking with his mouse (he can go back one question if he messes up). The test does ask questions about dynamics just like the ones that follow (actually the questions are a similar subset from the test). Additionally, it asks about defenses used, three of the five major traits (good descriptors and it is important to know that a person is aggressive) values, locus of control and a few other things.

It is also different from tests and does things that academic psychologists may not like such as asking people different questions. For example, if it establishes that you are average in assertion it drops further questioning (i.e., PsychThresh[®]). But if you are passive or aggressive it establishes why you are that way (this only illustrates the process). It also "stops at a point and gives feedback" (i.e., PsychFdbk[®]) in an attempt to correct a response bias (saying only nice things). The data is down-loaded from the disk and analyzed by a complex program based on over 630 executive profiles (those taking the latest version). There are all kinds of statistics such as "denying motivations" where certain very astute people claim traits (usually seen as better attributes) and deny the underlying motivations (i.e., dynamics). I also use a person as their own baseline (an idiopathic rather than nomothetic approach) on the dynamics and have some fantastic correlations for the dynamics. The "final test" took 9 years to develop.

Doing the actual MAP

If you are interested in taking the full **MAP** or you are an academic psychologist who has an interest in the **MAP** for your research, I welcome your request (send to murray17@iserv.net). I'll send an email with your options for feedback and the costs.

If you are doing research in an academic setting, I would be very interested in you putting this instrument to work and perhaps either improving (or even refuting) part of the theory or certain aspects of the **MAP**. Just as I have "taken on" the other theories and psychological tests, it is only fair that I get my comeuppance. For this type of effort, I will do all that I can to support you and your research effort for good or bad. If you (or someone else) want (s) to take an "abbreviated **MAP**", please continue.