USING PSYCHOMETRICS AS TEAM AND PERSONALITY PROFILING TOOLS

What are psychometrics?

The field of psychometrics, originally defined as “The art of imposing measurement and number upon operations of the mind”, is “concerned with the objective measurement of skills and knowledge, abilities, attitudes, personality traits, and educational achievement”. Psychometrics are widely applied in various disciplines including education, learning and development, organizational psychology, clinical psychology, medicine, etc.

In the University we use psychometric ‘profiling tools’ for individual and team development. Most people’s experience of psychometrics is through an ‘instrument’, such as a questionnaire, used to discover aspects of the personality. For example, OPP (one of the companies used by the University) describe their psychometrics as “designed to surface unique personality preferences and help people to understand what makes them different to others. By highlighting an individual’s strengths and areas for development, they enable people to improve interpersonal relationships, build resilience and become more effective at work and in their personal life.”

A selection of psychometric tools

Feedback consultation (which may be delivered one-to-one or in a group) is free if conducted by the OLI, although there may be a charge if another consultant is used. All costs are indicative and subject to change.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Use this for individuals and teams, to increase self-awareness and mutual understanding by discovering the differing preferences in how people perceive the world around them and make decisions. The underlying assumption is that we all have specific preferences for how we interact with other, the information we choose to trust and use, how we make decisions and live our lives: these preferences “underlie our interests, needs, values, and motivation”. The Step 1 ‘Interpretive Report’ (which we usually use) costs £43.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) Use this conflict management tool to “help people reframe and defuse conflict” by identifying distinct conflict styles and exploring “alternative ways to handle different situations”. It can be used for individuals or groups. The self-administered TKI questionnaire costs £19 for an e-book or £140 for ten paper booklets.

Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) This is a theory of interpersonal relations, used to help improve relationships by showing “how individuals can shape and adapt their individual behaviours, influence others effectively and build trust among colleagues.” It is good for group relations and issues about inclusion, control, openness and feedback. The FIRO-B (for Behaviour) ‘Interpretive Report’ (which we usually use) costs £44.

Team Management Profile (TMP) ascertains preferences for ways of doing and being (similar to MBTI) and then overlays preferences for taking a particular role or roles in a team: it is good for teams, providing individuals with “constructive, work-based information” about their work preferences, and the team with an overall picture of its strengths. The cost of the (highly personalised) report is £135.

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2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychometrics
3 https://www.opp.com/en/About-OPP
5 https://www.opp.com/en/tools/TKI
7 http://www.tmsworldwide.com/tmp.html
How could they help you?

Psychometrics, properly used, can be transformative and may provide real ‘light-bulb moments’.

For individuals: psychometrics are often used as a means of self-development, to increase self-awareness and understanding. A coach or mentor may work with a coachee or mentee to use psychometrics, usually to help participants to reflect upon their development needs, or individuals may take their own steps to get a profile. MBTI is the most commonly used for this purpose.

For teams: a manager may wish to use psychometrics to develop their teams. A psychometric profile will give the manager information about the team, and the exercise can be used as part of an away-day or other team-building event. Team members will not only increase their self-awareness but also become aware of differences in the team, with consequent improvements in understanding, communication and working together. MBTI is often used for team development, and TMP has a specific team-profile component. A team development event is also an opportunity to use very specific tools: for instance, a team which is struggling to overcome disagreements may benefit from using the TKI to examine how they deal with conflict; a team which needs to focus on building trust may find FIRO-B useful.

On programmes: Oxford Learning Institute programmes may include a psychometric, to enable participants to develop their self-awareness and consider the implications of what they have discovered for them and their colleagues. In the case of MBTI, for example, we use this understanding in our programmes as a tool for thinking about how we work, in particular how we learn and how we manage people and activities.

How should you use psychometrics?

The precepts below were developed for the ethical administration of the MBTI® but could be usefully applied to psychometrics more widely. All psychometric tools should be:

- **Voluntary:** Compelling anyone to undergo a psychometric would be considered unethical; the process should always be voluntary.
- **Confidential:** The results of psychometrics are confidential between the individual and administrator, and not for disclosure without permission. In team work, individuals are often asked to share aspects of their results and this should be on a voluntary basis.
- **Not used for selection:** psychometrics which aim to measure skills, knowledge, and abilities are sometimes used in selection processes. (If you have ever asked candidates to complete a test, or answer a fact-based question, and scored the results, you have carried out a very simple kind of psychometric test.) However, selection and psychometrics are both complex, and it is not recommended that any kind of psychometric is given too much emphasis, or used as a ‘deciding factor’ in the process. In particular, some psychometrics (MBTI, for example) are not to be used for selection because they hold that all types are valuable and there is no ‘right’ or wrong’.
- **Accompanied by proper feedback:** For many psychometrics, feedback from an accredited practitioner is a requirement; it may be delivered one-to-one or in a group setting. In any case, psychometrics are an opportunity for development, and they are unlikely to be helpful unless they involve a feedback discussion along with the results. Psychometrics entail personal engagement and personal information, so there is the potential for individuals to be distressed; it might also be necessary for someone who is familiar with the psychometric to help to clear up any misunderstandings.

What to do next

A number of University employees are accredited to use psychometric tools, and the Oxford Learning Institute will be able to advise you. In the first instance, contact services@learning.ox.ac.uk.