

# Personality profiling – don't shoot the messenger



Personality profiles often get a lot of knocking, *"I'm not at all like this"*, *"this report doesn't represent me"*, *"who are they talking about?"* and the classic, *"they got my strengths right but completely messed up on my weaknesses"*

I have to say that in my over 35 years of using what people commonly call "personality profiles" I have had few denials; be it with Transactional Analysis, Belbin, MBTI, Insights, Social Styles or Mental Toughness.

One case I do remember, was about ten years ago; I started the coaching of the Commercial Director for a large corporate by getting her to complete an Insights Discovery inventory. According to her report she was a dominant "Green" which translates behaviorally into empathy, patience, listening, supportive, respect, consensus ....

I diligently read through the report and planned my kick-off with her; the instant I walked into her office I knew something was up.

The way she greeted me, her energy her demeanor all screamed, "not Green" at me. And then, when she said (I translate from French), waving her report at me, *"so you are going to tell me how this piece of shit is going to help me be a better commercial director"*, my suspicions were confirmed!

Being quick on my wits, I replied, *"congratulations", which seemed to take her back, "you are the first person in over 10 years and hundreds of reports whose report is completely wrong"*

To cut a long story short, she had answered the questions "back to front" and the report described everything she wasn't.

The reason I tell this story is because personality questionnaires do not analyze "us", they analyze the answers we have given to the questions posed.

Someone who had completed his MBTI twice, recently complained to me saying, *"the first time I came out as an extrovert and now they are telling me I'm an introvert"*. I tried explaining that is because you answered the questions differently the second time – but he seemed to think that this was irrelevant.

If you answer the questions exactly the same each time you will get the same results, the machine doesn't know you and doesn't take into account your mood or your mistakes in your answers.

However, there are sometimes questions that are "inverted" (that's why you have to read each question/statement very carefully before answering) and some questionnaires have questions to check you are not "lying".

Some personal profiling systems are "ipsative", i.e., you are asked to compare two or more desirable options and pick the one you prefer the most – this is sometimes called a "forced-choice" scale. Other systems are "normative" where questions/statements are answered on what is called a "Likert-type" scale, often from 1 to 5, with regards to how much you agree with the question/statement.

Normative measures provide inter-individual differences assessment i.e., you are "compared" with others, whereas

ipsative measures provide intraindividual differences assessment, i.e.; you are compared with “yourself”

Both ipsative and normative profiles have their virtues and if you answer the questions honestly you will get a report that will undoubtedly give you food for thought; however, vary your diet – don’t just rely on one inventory, try to complete a variety of inventories and pull together the common themes.

Self-awareness is key to effective relationships and personal profiles are clearly a good way of getting insights in to how you function and behave.

If you would like to work on your self-awareness do not hesitate to contact me at [boblarcher@boblarcher.com](mailto:boblarcher@boblarcher.com)