

WHEN IT'S TIME TO BEHAVE YOURSELF

Quickly choose one of these four words to best describe yourself — gentle, persuasive, humble or original — and then another that is the least descriptive of you. Then repeat that for another two dozen assorted adjectives (such as willing, eager, agreeable or high-spirited). Would you then want a prospective employer to use the results to make a decision on your compatibility with a new job?

Probably not, but “Personal Profile Analysis” is an American idea that is becoming ever more popular in Britain. It is used extensively by Marlow-based Thomas International, one of the firms specialising in systems that help employers in the processes of staff recruitment, selection appraisal, training, career development, team building and many other aspects of personnel management — or human resourcing as it is now known.

The personal analysis is key to Thomas’ systems. All 24 answers are mapped out on graphs under the four headings of Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance (DISC); then grouped in sections of “how others see you”, “behaviour under pressure” and “how you see yourself”; the overall shape then signifies an individual’s profile.

The DISC system was originally designed by four American students who spent a total of 15 man-years study on the idea. “The system has been used in America since the Sixties and in the UK for the past 15 years. It is a method of determining a person’s likely behaviour in the workplace, and how he or she relates to their colleagues,” said Jan Kaye, head of training at Thomas. “There are now several DISC systems around which are used as a valuable aid to pinpointing individuals’ work strengths and how to improve them, to the benefit of their own performance and that of the enterprises employing them. We now have 30,000 clients worldwide to whom our systems are essential in the effective handling of their most vital and often most

Terry Woodhouse, writer for The Business Magazine, discovered his working personality from a five-minute session with Jan Kaye, head of training at workplace management specialist Thomas International. “Friendly, verbal, communicative, primarily a people person; patient, methodical, considering all the options; and a stubborn streak . . .” Those were some of the best bits; the rest is probably not safe for public consumption. But many job applicants now have no choice but to bare their day-time souls in this manner before the potential boss makes a decision



Personal analysis: Jan Kaye

costly asset — their people — and therefore in virtually every aspect of the conduct of their business overall.”

Thomas does not use the word “test”, but describes the procedure as a “working behaviour inventory”. Kaye added: “There are no right or wrong answers. It is purely a method of scoring that makes it possible to trace these behavioural patterns, but feedback surveys have shown them to be 85% accurate.”

When used alongside the conventional job interview or appraisal, these are said to give a deeper insight into a person’s potential. A further process can be used to develop a more personal set of questions that will provide an even deeper look into “a person’s preferred way of working”, generating a complete self-image and a range of reports on the person’s likely style in management, sales, technical and administrative situations. Then there is a complementary kit — the Human Job Analysis — that will provide a standard for defining the behavioural needs of the job; a comparison of the two will then tell if the person and the post are a close match.

“The DISC system is based on the fact that we all have a basic fear of work, a fear that we strive to avoid,” said Kaye. “Imagine your worst week, then zoom in on the worst day in that week, and then the worst hour of that day. The brain works to stop that worst hour happening — that is the simple theory of it.”

The personal analysis is currently used by Thomas — which has a staff of 15 at Marlow plus four trainers and a team of 40 consultants — to assess some 50,000 people every month. There are also satellite operations in America and around the world. “We have clients of all sizes, from one-man bands up to multinationals, including many local authorities. I would think most sizeable companies are now using this kind of method,” said Kaye, a former personnel manager with a Masters degree in psychology who has been with Thomas for nine years.

The company also offers several other selection and training systems, including an aptitude test developed (originally for the Ministry of Defence) for the workplace that measures a person’s ability to respond well to training, and a Diagnostic Team Review to analyse management strengths and weaknesses. Training and personal assessment seminars are also held at Marlow or the client’s own premises.

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