



If the face fits

Personality profiling is widely used by accountancy firms when recruiting and developing staff, but is it just a fad or a genuine way to get the best out of finance professionals?

Personality profiling dates back to antiquity. The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates defined four 'humours' – air, earth, fire and water – and argued that the interaction between these was what defined human temperament.

But the birth of modern personality profiling didn't occur until the 1920s, when Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung identified that people have a natural predisposition to act in a certain manner. This, he said, is based on whether they are extrovert or introvert, whether they rely more heavily on their intuition or on concrete information, and whether they base their decisions on empathy or on facts.

Jung's thinking has heavily influenced the development of personality profiling

methods over the years. In particular, it underpins the widely used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator – developed by Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers – as well as the Keirsey Temperament Sorter.

Today, personality profiling is used by organisations of all sizes as a way of improving business performance. The theory is that employers can help their staff to achieve more if they understand how they like to work and what they base their decisions on. So employers use profiling when they are hiring, building teams and developing their people.

Profiling also benefits individuals because it enables them to better understand both themselves and how they can interact with others to achieve positive results. And this applies as much

to finance professionals as it does to anyone else.

Pros of profiling

'When used correctly, profiling can significantly increase the success of the recruitment process,' says Karen Young, director at Hays Accountancy & Finance. 'And it can highlight any anomalies that can then be explored at interview to assess the motivations and cultural fit of the candidate.'

Another advocate is Hilary Cooke, director of HR consultancy Merlin Consultancy. 'A profile encourages employers to think about what kind of person they really want,' she observes. 'This includes the behavioural element that may not always be considered

thoroughly for finance positions, since the focus can tend to be on the candidate's technical competencies.'

Bev James, author and CEO of The Coaching Academy, uses DISC personality profiling (see box) as a means of recruiting, managing and motivating employees. She likes DISC because it is simple to use compared with other tools and it produces a personality profile report that is 90%-95% accurate. She also believes that it has a place in finance. 'Generally, in accountancy, you get many people who are reserved and risk-averse, prefer detail and like to stay in jobs for a long time,' she explains. She adds that while profiling is not about 'changing' accountants to be different, it can help them to understand how they can make short-term adaptations to their style so that they can better relate to other functions. It can also help them to identify and develop personality traits and techniques that they may need to be successful in the future. These may include selling techniques, the ability to build rapport effectively and adaptive communication skills, which can be vital to both career and business development.

Profiling in practice

Personality profiling is widely used at Grant Thornton. In particular, the firm uses profiling to help its people to build relationships with others and to develop their influencing skills. It has a programme called 'Instinct for Leadership' for would-be directors, and programme participants are asked to complete the Hogan Personality Inventory at the outset. This helps them to identify the roles in which they are most likely to thrive and any development areas that they need to work on. The Hogan Inventory focuses on personality traits such as ambition,

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Spinning the DISC

Bev James, author and CEO of The Coaching Academy, has used the DISC personality profiling system for over 15 years. DISC is based on the theory that there are four core personality groupings: dominant (D); influencing (I); steady (S) and compliant (C).

The style of a D person is mainly outgoing and task-oriented while those with an I style tend to be mainly outgoing and people-oriented. S-style people are mainly reserved and people-oriented while C-style individuals are mostly reserved and task-oriented.

- * **D-style** people are competitive, decisive and like to get results. They are direct communicators who prefer to be judged by results rather than methods.
- * **I-style** people tend to be friendly, creative individuals who thrive on recognition and are overoptimistic about what can be achieved within a certain timeframe.
- * **S-style** people like to complete one task at a time and see things through to completion. They are listeners and team players who desire routine and security.
- * **C-style** people are perfectionists who want to analyse and understand. They focus on facts, details and logic, and prefer to have adequate information before taking action.

interpersonal sensitivity, prudence and sociability. Results of the assessment are kept confidential.

The firm also uses the Emotional Capital Report system to help its leaders develop their emotional intelligence skills. This especially applies to partners, directors and participants on Grant Thornton's Exceptional Connections programme, which focuses on building deeper client relationships. It involves the individual completing a questionnaire and asking colleagues, clients, suppliers and family members to complete questionnaires too. Results are discussed in a group environment and coaching strategies are put in place to support individuals with development needs.

Finally, Grant Thornton encourages many of its people to apply the Insights Discovery model to personality assessment. This model uses a four-colour wheel to help individuals to gain a better understanding of their own behaviour and how they can work with others. 'Insights is very accessible,' explains Kathy Thompson, talent development specialist at Grant Thornton. 'People can understand the concepts quickly and work with them quickly. It is used widely in one-to-one coaching, and within teams, to improve performance and to build deeper relationships with colleagues and clients.'

Risks and rewards

On the surface, personality profiling is an intriguing concept, but is it really worth the investment that businesses make in it? The truth is, that while the returns can be

hard to quantify, that doesn't mean that they are non-existent. 'We are currently exploring what the return on investment is,' notes Thompson. 'We are having conversations with people in the business who have been involved in winning assignments to see if participating in business development programmes has been a factor in the win.'

She does, however, note that profiling certainly gets the thumbs-up from an employee engagement point of view. 'We hear people say: "What do I need to be aware of when I have conversations with clients so that I can identify where they may be on the model and adapt my own behaviour?"' she says. 'That's one of the instant benefits that I see.'

Besides the risk of potentially pouring money down the drain, personality profiling also presents ethical issues if it is not undertaken in the right way. 'It is important that assessments and benchmarking are made relevant to the specific role to ensure the profiling is accurate, and that it is undertaken by qualified assessors,' says Young.

On the whole, however, profiling does appear to bring benefits to finance teams – in the same way as it does to other business functions. 'What these instruments provide is heightened self-awareness and heightened awareness of the actions of others,' says Thompson. 'The organisations that have developed them ensure that they are fit for purpose.' ■

Sally Percy, journalist