

Harrison Assessments – a conversation

Synergy Performance Associates

Harrison Assessments – a conversation between Alasdair Miller and Barbara Bates, a Harrison Assessment coach.

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Barbara, welcome! I wonder if you could tell me a little about Harrison Assessments?

Happy to do so, Alasdair! Harrison Assessments is a powerful analytic tool to acquire, develop, lead, and engage talent at all levels across an organisation. It can also provide very valuable information on an individual basis, for example, to elicit one's most likely satisfying career.

Barbara, my, it sounds to be a very powerful assessment. Could you tell us what its main tenets are?

Yes indeed: there are a couple of underlying theories that govern how Harrison Assessments works. The first is Enjoyment Theory, which is a version of the virtuous circle. The idea is that if you enjoy doing something, you tend to do it more, you get better at it, you get praise for it, and therefore you carry on doing it. You can imagine that the vicious circle is quite the opposite.

We start from the assumption that we are supposed to enjoy our work - how radical is that! And that you will be most productive and fulfilled when your work matches your unique skills and experience. It is not so much what job you could possibly squeeze yourself into, rather, what is the place where you can make the most impact and feel that it is most right for you. There is also a big focus on personal well-being, which is crucial at all levels of the organisation.

The second theory is Paradox Theory. We're all familiar with the idea of a paradox, for example, Less Is More. Harrison uses this concept to group 24 of the main strengths that it identifies into paradoxical pairs, such that in order to have a genuine strength, you need to be strong on both parts of the paradox. A good example is the pairing of Diplomacy and Frankness. You can quickly see that if you are very, very frank, you might upset people and then you don't get your message across. On the other hand, if you are too diplomatic, then you are so careful not to cause any possible offence that you still don't get your message across. Then the strength of Communication is insufficient, or, as Harrison puts it, unbalanced. Harrison has 12 pairs of these paradoxical strengths, which are very revealing on a personal basis as well as an organisational basis.

That is very interesting, Barbara, and I can see how it is of value to the individual and their organisation.

How did Harrison Assessments come to be developed?

The system was developed by Dan Harrison in the 1990s. Dr. Dan is a most interesting man with a background not only in psychology but also in mathematics, so he has been able to create a really robust system.

This is indeed an unusual combination, Barbara, combining psychology and mathematics. As you mention, it makes for a robust system.

Would you tell me about the assessment itself?

The assessment is based on a 25-minute Smart Questionnaire, which looks at the things you enjoy doing and the things you are good at. It is not in any sense a test that you can pass or fail, nor is it used in disciplinary situations. It is a positive developmental tool at all levels, and it measures your interests, your work preferences, and your behavioural tendencies on an individual, non-judgmental basis. This bit about being non-judgmental is really important.

It comes out with a report showing your scores on 175 carefully defined psychological traits.

**My goodness, that is a lot of useful information to have in a report.
How do you use the report?**

It's quite a complicated report, and so whenever we give the questionnaire, we always provide a 90-minute debriefing and coaching session to make sense of it for the individual. The report comes in the form of 12 graphs plotting where you sit on each of the paradoxical strengths, and the coaching debrief explicates this and begins to look at what you would like to do about it given that information.

Where do you think the Harrison Assessment adds most benefit?

Harrison really becomes powerful when it is used across an organisation. You can quickly see from customisable graphical reports, where, for example, training might be helpful across a whole team, so that you don't waste money unnecessarily on sending people on training that they don't need. This can be scaled up to any level of the organisation with associated reports.

So it's not only useful for individuals but also for teams.

Yes indeed! Reports can be run at any level of the organisation, so that you can home in on the information you really need.

Can the assessment be used for recruitment?

Yes - it's also very powerful for recruitment, especially for higher-level posts that are more expensive to recruit. You can quickly see who has the kind of interests and behaviours that are going to fit with the culture of your organisation. This is sometimes not easy to see in an interview situation and very expensive to remedy once the person is in place.

I can see its value in minimising errors in recruitment.

What else can the assessment help with?

As well as organisational applications, Harrison has a career module which is really helpful in guiding individuals to the kind of career in which they are more likely to flourish.

What do you see as the Key Strengths of the Assessments?

Harrison measures about 175 psychological traits with a short 25-minute questionnaire. This is far more detailed than many other assessments on the market and gives a very detailed report.

Another important strength of Harrison Assessments is that they start with the person, not with the job. It is all about fitting the work to the person and not the other way around. This fits also with the way that well-being issues can also be flagged within the assessment. This is even more important in these days of hybrid and remote working, where staff may not meet in person often or at all.

The assessment is very flexible and can be customised to any workplace. From the initial Smart Questionnaire, reports can be run as is, or by comparing to hundreds of jobs on file to see if they are a good fit for the person concerned. It is even possible to have a customised job profile created by Harrison for your particular situation. Reports can also be used across the whole HR spectrum from recruitment, to onboarding, to development (especially in recognising and nurturing top talent), to succession, and exit planning.

Barbara – how well validated and reliable is the Harrison Assessment?

Because of Dr. Dan's mathematical background, he has been able to create an assessment that is robust and reliable. Detailed technical information about reliability and validity is available from Harrison on request.

Briefly, each assessment is given a reliability score based on how responses are cross-referenced in the background. This will pick up, for instance, situations where people have perhaps been distracted, not been fully paying attention, or perhaps trying to say what they think ought to be said rather than what is really true for them. If there is a low reliability score, then we invite the person to retake the assessment.

What do you feel the assessment shouldn't be used for?

Harrison Assessments is not designed to be used in disciplinary contexts. It is a person-centred developmental tool with the welfare, job satisfaction, and enjoyment of the person always to the fore.

