



A holistic approach

Barbara Bates looks at matching a person to the work – not the work to a person – and how this can be used for team and individual progression

How many psychometric assessments have you taken in the course of your professional life? Perhaps you cannot count them on the fingers of both hands! And how useful have they really been? Do you come away with a heavy sense of ‘oh, not another area that I need to improve in’?

While certain strengths-based assessments can be helpful, in that they do focus on the positives of your skills and experiences, this may not be the case for every assessment.

Harrison Assessments is different. Developed by Dr Dan Harrison in the 1990s, it now operates globally, offering an unusual pairing of mathematics and psychology, focusing on the whole person.

It is a powerful analytic tool to acquire, develop, lead and engage talent at all levels across an organisation, but it starts with a particular respect and care for the wellbeing of the individual as a whole person, not just someone who goes to work. While primarily intended for organisations, it can provide very valuable developmental information on an individual basis. It is especially helpful for the person who may already be in post, but who feels their career has



Diagram 1: This is my graph for an equity mindset, showing a balanced and genuine strength



Diagram 2: This is an example of the same paradox across a whole team, revealing group dynamics and areas to address within a team

somehow stalled and they are not getting to that next level.

It is not so much what job you could possibly squeeze yourself into, but rather what is the place where you can make the most impact and feel that it is most right for you. There is a profound focus on personal wellbeing, which is crucial at all levels of the organisation and, indeed, in life.



Diagram 3: A visual example of a whole-organisation report. All names are fictional and part of demonstration materials

Positive development

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 a positive developmental tool at all levels, and it measures your interests, work preferences and behavioural tendencies on an individual, non-judgemental basis.

A report is produced showing your scores on 175 carefully defined psychological traits and the implications of your paradoxical strengths, with some guidelines on how to develop those that are unbalanced (and everybody has some unbalanced paradoxes). It’s quite a lengthy and complicated report, 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 (see Diagram 1).

Power in numbers

Harrison Assessments becomes even more 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. Reports can be run at any level of the organisation, so you can hone in on the information you really need (see Diagram 2).

The assessment is also efficient 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

“It starts with a particular respect and care for the wellbeing of the individual as a whole person, not just someone who goes to work”

that are going to fit with the culture of your organisation. This is sometimes not easy to see in an interview situation, and can be expensive and difficult to remedy once the person is in place.

People before jobs

From the initial smart questionnaire, reports can be compared 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, onboarding and development (especially in recognising and nurturing top talent) to succession and exit planning (see Diagram 3).

An 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 also links with the way that wellbeing issues can be flagged within the assessment, which is even more important in these days of hybrid and remote working, where staff may not meet in person often or at all.

Barbara M Bates is an accredited health, executive and personal coach, working mainly one to one with professional people under pressure to improve wellbeing, resilience and effectiveness. She provides a safe partnering space to really think, to work out what and how to do and be. In a nutshell, doing the right things better.

How it works

One of the main differentiators of Harrison Assessments 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, to have a genuine strength, you need to be strong on both parts of the paradox. A good example is the pairing of the

strengths of diplomacy and frankness. You can quickly see that if you are very, very frank, you might upset people and then you won’t get your message across. On the other hand, if you are too diplomatic, you are so careful not to cause any possible offence that you still won’t get your message across. Then the strength of communication is insufficient – or, as Harrison puts it, ‘unbalanced’.