

By continuing to use this site you consent to the use of cookies on your device as described in our [cookie policy](#) unless you have disabled them. You can change your [cookie settings](#) at any time but parts of our site will not function correctly without them.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Home UK World Companies Markets Global Economy Lex Comment Management Personal Finance Life & Arts
 Business Education || Entrepronourship || Business Books || Business Travel || Recruitment || The Connected Business | Tools |

WORKING SMARTER

September 21, 2014 12:45 pm

FT
21/9/2014

Evaluating emotional intelligence can be testing

By Rhymer Rigby

Last year the head of Google's HR department – dubbed its “people operations” division – suggested that traditional interview scores and college grades were worthless when it came to predicting how potential employees would perform in their jobs. His comments have helped encourage a broader debate about how best to select candidates given the drawbacks of focusing only on easy-to-measure metrics such as qualifications and technical skills.

One indicator companies have shown increasing interest in over the years is emotional intelligence (EI) – the awareness of your own and other people's emotions and the ability to use this information to guide your thinking and behaviour.

Since its popularisation in the mid-1990s, EI has gradually become part of the business landscape. “EI is extremely popular in coaching and development contexts, and growing rapidly in recruitment,” says Dr Konstantinos Petrides, director of the London Psychometric Laboratory at University College London, which developed the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). This contains seven possible responses to each question, ranging from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”.

Matthew Owen, a partner at Sovereign Capital, a UK-based private equity house that uses the TEIQue tests, says that if it means you find someone who is 1 per cent better then it is worth it – though he stresses that the tests should be used in conjunction with other evaluations. “A lot of organisations do three interviews and they essentially do the same interview three times. We want to get as much evidence as possible.”

EI testing can also point to areas that need to be explored further in interviews. Mr Owen says that sometimes you do come across a piece of evidence that really makes a difference. For example, he recalls that when Sovereign was interviewing for a chief financial officer, one particular candidate cleared many hurdles but the interviewers had concerns they could not put their finger on. “EI tests showed the candidate was very optimistic and had a lack of self-confidence.” This, he says, was more or less the opposite of what they were looking for in a CFO.

Some, however, sound a note of caution. Dr Rob Yeung, director of the leadership consultancy Talentspace, says that while EI correlates quite well with job performance, the best reports of EI are usually still from peers and supervisors, and that self-reporting can be prone to error.

Dr Petrides notes that high demand for EI tests means assessments that should be carried out by skilled psychometricians are being done by managers and entrepreneurs. However, he adds that the TEIQue is well validated and has “algorithms that protect against dissimulation”.

In any case, he says, it is pointless to try to “game” or prepare for EI tests because there are no right answers – you would have to try to second guess what recruiters want, which is highly risky. Besides, if you succeeded in such efforts, you might wind up with a job that does not suit you.

workingsmarter@ft.com

Content recommended for you

Related articles

<p>Sir Andrew Likierman of London Business School on good leaders</p> <p>Real Time Gross Settlements fall at the BoE</p> <p>Apple Pay gears up for launch</p> <p>ExIm warns US of export risk from China</p> <p>Hardware and apps that make the most of Apple's HealthKit</p>	<p>Tory plans risk EU exit, warns Clegg</p> <p>Demographic shifts and old faultlines alter US political landscape</p> <p>Metro looks forward to Christmas as trading improves</p> <p>'Monster' outflows from European equity funds</p> <p>What Lenovo can teach us about making takeovers work</p>
---	--



Leader

The magazine for school and college leaders



St Benedict's Catholic School in Suffolk has used psychometric assessment to help improve the performance and behaviour of underachieving and disruptive students, as Sally Wells explains.

What lies beneath

Psychometric assessments are widely used in business and industry recruitment to sift candidates for key posts and also as part of professional development and career planning, particularly in upper and middle management. They assess someone's abilities and aptitudes, as well as behaviour, to give a rounder, more detailed picture of their strengths and their potential than can be gauged from an interview alone.

They are not commonly used with young people in education but St Benedict's, a Catholic upper school in Suffolk, has run a pilot scheme, using the tests to help tackle problems with one group of underperforming Year 10 students.

It was a mother who had children at the school who suggested the move. Sharon Ferguson, a consultant with psychometric testing specialists Thomas Education, had noticed a disparity between her own two daughters in their approach to school work. Using her professional knowledge, she decided to experiment by using psychometric assessments to profile her daughters.

"What I realised is that my youngest daughter was just as intelligent and talented as my eldest but processed information very quickly so was bored in lessons," she says. "As a result she was disengaged and wasn't applying herself."

Sharon thought other students might be similarly helped to gain a better understanding of their own approaches to learning, so she went to see the school's assistant head Andy Watts to suggest using the tests. Andy's focus was to reduce external exclusions, internal inclusions, removals from class and negative referrals by empowering students to understand their own behaviour.

Training for staff

The school identified 63 students in Year 10 who they believed would benefit from extra support and divided them into two groups: students with challenging behaviours; and underachievers who were disengaged. All 63 were invited to participate in the study, and letters were sent home to parents and guardians, requesting consent.

The first step in November 2011 involved six staff with different responsibilities, including the head of English, the head of year and the behaviour support manager. They had four days' training in how to administer the tests, interpret the results and give one-to-one feedback.

By January 2012, the students had completed several psychometric assessments, each ranging in length from a few minutes to an hour. All the assessments were completed during school hours. The assessments used were:

Personal profile analysis (PPA)

This takes each student about eight minutes to complete and provides an insight into his or her behavioural style. It gives answers to questions such as what are the student's strengths and limitations, how do they communicate and what motivates them.

General intelligence assessment (GIA)

This hour-long assessment measures a student's 'mental horsepower' and gives a prediction of their potential to grasp new ideas and processes and respond to training. It covers issues such as whether the students can think on their feet and whether they are problem-solvers. (Note, however, that the score doesn't indicate whether a student is 'clever' or not; the score concerns the pace of learning.)

Trait emotional intelligence questionnaire (TEIQue)

This is a 45-minute assessment providing insight into how well students understand their emotions, react to pressure and manage relationships.

Once the responses had been collected, staff sat down with representatives from Thomas Education to discuss the results. Staff were then assigned to particular students, based on their areas of expertise. Once feedback had been given to the students, staff were able to mentor the students on a one-to-one basis.

Coaching sheets were also produced for each student detailing their profile and their processing speed and providing advice on how a teacher should handle him or her and adapt his or her teaching methods to help the student. These sheets were available to all teachers.

The feedback to students had a swift impact, says Andy Watts.

"Once the students received it their behaviour quickly changed. Helping students become more self-aware empowered them to manage their own behaviour better and enabled them to resolve issues and problems themselves.

"For example, a student who was aggressive in class and spent a significant amount of time in the inclusion unit transformed his behaviour after receiving his assessment feedback. Understanding the reasons behind his anger helped him modify his behaviour and calm himself down."

Another student who tended to be disruptive in maths and science classes struggled with the GIA number speed and accuracy test, indicating that he had difficulty processing numerical concepts quickly.

"The student needed to slow down and give himself more time to assimilate numerical information," Andy says. "Once he and his teachers understood the cause of his behaviour they were able to deal with it more effectively, resulting in an improvement in his behaviour and his grades."

More realistic dialogue

Overall, the reports provided a common language between staff and students, "allowing students to talk in real terms about themselves, rather than in 'teacher speak'," Andy adds.

"It enabled a more realistic dialogue between the parties than would previously have been possible."

After seven months, when the Year 10 students were ready to take their GCSEs, St Benedict's evaluated the results and found a huge reduction (90 per cent) in external exclusions, internal inclusions, removals from class and negative referrals.

Positive referrals (when a student goes above and beyond expectations) were up from one referral prior to the study to 28 after. Among those with poor attendance records, attendance improved. St Benedict's also saw a significant improvement in GCSE results with a ten per cent increase in passes, making it the top-performing school in Suffolk.

The LEA were so impressed with the results from St Benedict's, they are now funding trials in two other schools over a two-year period, which will be independently evaluated.

As for St Benedict's, they will continue to use the process for their current Year 10 students. They also intend to make more student feedback available to all staff where the information is beneficial in classroom situations.

To maintain the impact of the assessments over time they are also reviewing a range of intervention strategies to ensure the students get maximum value from the process.

- Sally Wells is managing director of Thomas Education