



Smelting an Ore
of Change in HR

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Psychometric &
Personality
Assessments

mettl

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Introduction

The vast and unexplored field of Human Resources is akin to a game of choices. Hiring, promoting people for a position of specificity, ensuring the right tools and procedures are followed, a professional in the realm is at constant war, at the forefront of decisions. These are of high stakes, and ones to be held accountable for to stakeholders.

In such an environment, a wrong choice not only affects the professional in question, but the company he or she represents. We are but humans, prone to mistakes. And yet, there are those of great success and horrifying failure in the HR profession. What separates the bad from the good, and the good from the great?

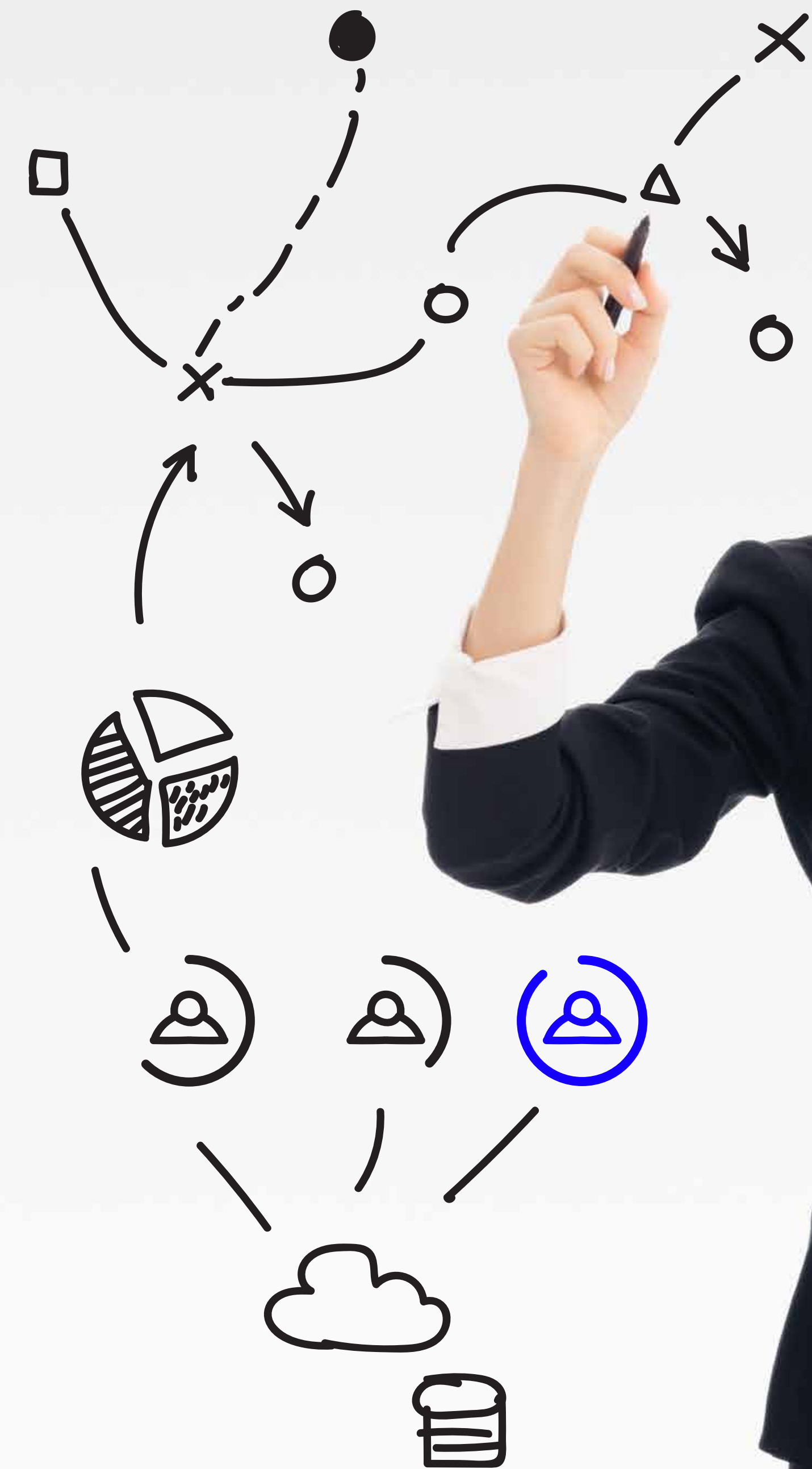
Information, of course.

With HR systems and processes becoming increasingly complex, the once profession dominated by strong human instinct is transforming into one with greater reliance on tools and tests. This, to help aid decisions and practices.

One among them, however, has grown to greater prevalence in the last few years than most. We now call them Psychometric Tools. By how much, you ask?

Well, per a study by the Tata Strategic Management Group, the use of psychometric assessments in Indian companies is expected to go as high as 87% by the end of 2016. [1]

But to understand the purpose of this article, let us dissect the core into pieces until satisfied.



Psychometric Assessments

The First **Dissection**

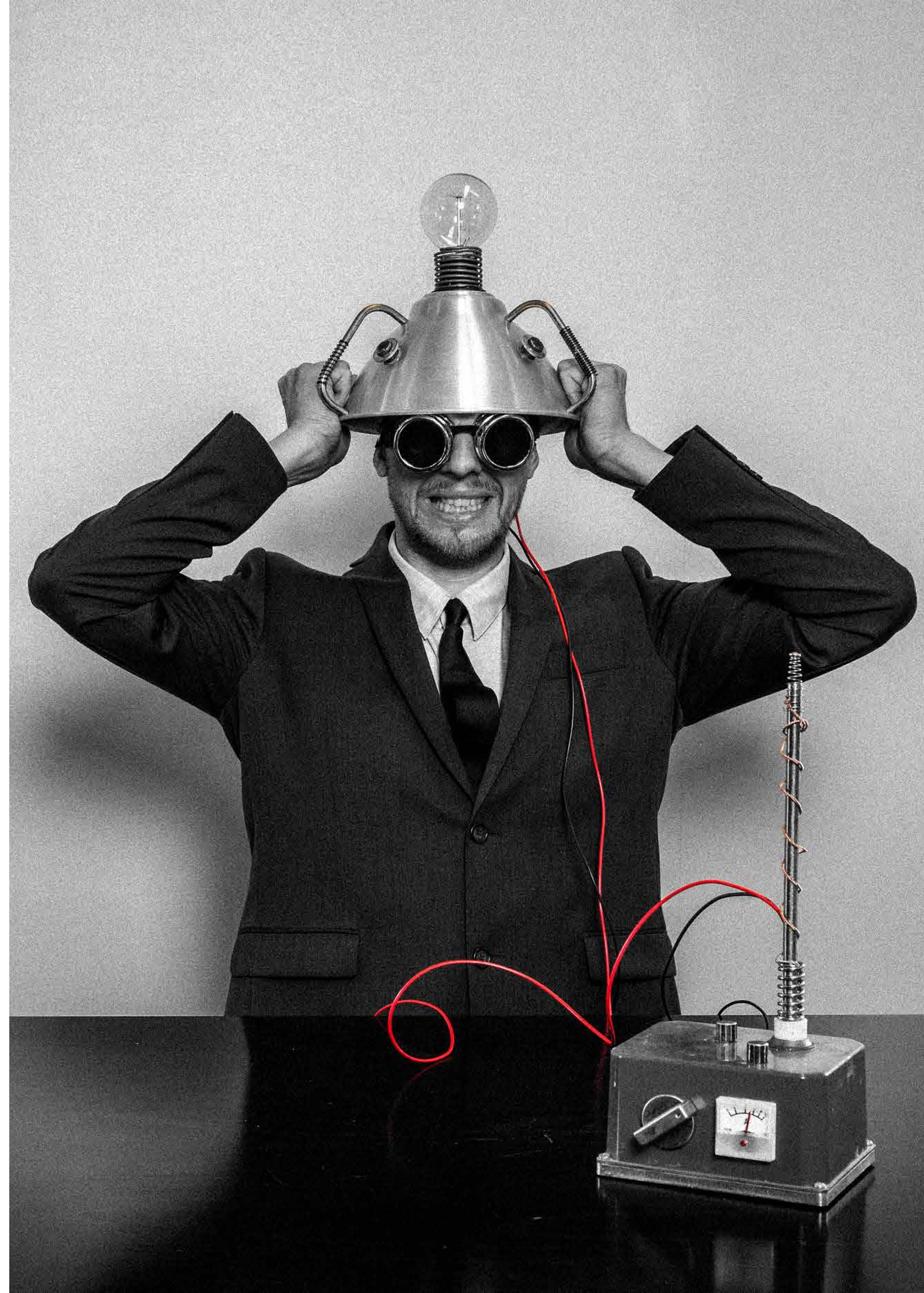
In simple terms, the field of psychometrics is concerned with psychological measurement, or rather, the design of assessments and processes to help measure psychological factors.

This includes the measurement of innate traits such as personality or values, skills such as strengths in numerical or verbal abilities, and attitude – opinions on a variety of matters and office policies.

Considering our stance on the matter, we found it appropriate to cite a research that suggested a **24% improvement** in hiring decisions via Psychometric Testing. [2]

Our claim could perhaps be further bolstered with an example of hiring and rehiring, especially for skilled positions, where even a marginal improvement in quality of decision could help in the reduction of organizational expenses.

Of course, a continued reliance on cognitive assessments could reveal a candidate's potential for an organization, but personality assessments continue to make a steady stance when it comes to high stakes decisions in the workplace.



Personality in the Workplace The Second Dissection

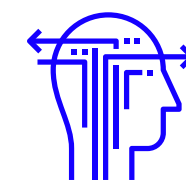
The Society of Human Resource Management once suggested that the popularity of using personality assessments in hiring increased by about 10-12% on an annual basis. Then again, research on personality is about as old as humanity itself. [3]

Theories run amok, from what makes men and women different in terms of personality to how various bodily enzymes contribute to who we are as an entity, from how we feel and react to the world around us to considering the effect of the larger universe in determining the traits and behaviours shown by individuals born at different times of the year. Zodiac signs, we tell you.

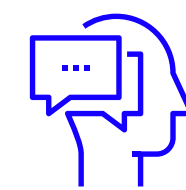
Speculations and hypotheses on personality have encroached into the field of psychology as well, but only recently has it found scientific use in organizations to make better and more informed decisions.

This was brought to highlight in World War II, when a considerable amount of focus and effort was put to choosing the right kind of people for victory in the battlefield. It paved way for newer ideas and tools, most of which proposed to measure personality and human behaviour.

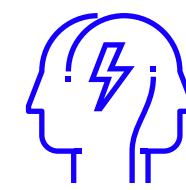
One of high popularity, and in current recognition is the 5 Factor Model of Personality, also known as the Big 5 Theory. It suggested the following elements:



Openness to Experience



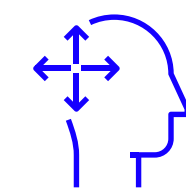
Conscientiousness



Extraversion



Agreeableness



Emotional Stability



The same elements, in varying degrees, is what makes an individual different or unique – shaping what’s come to be known as character. In fact, this theory was further proposed and researched upon by organizational psychologists to understand if the mentioned factors as whole or in a subset affected behaviour in the workplace.

Research over the course of 50 years supported that claim just as we are doing right now, adding evidence that the five factors do indicate to being organized or structured, an ability to work in teams, stress management and more – all pointing to, you guessed it, workplace behaviour. [4]

But the most important dissection is yet to come; one that could in tandem with the other parts help demystify psychometric assessments in its entirety.

The Nature of Personality Assessments

The Third Dissection

Personality assessments used in organizations are normally self-rated with several statements presented on a strongly agree to disagree response format – the Likert Scale. And while this format makes them popular and easy to use across different levels in the organization, it has historically led to problems that could provide poor or inaccurate information.

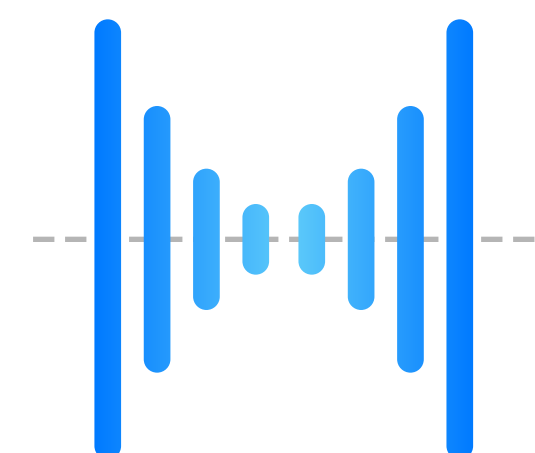
Given that these assessments are self-rated, there is a great probability that candidates would try to present themselves in positive light to look desirable for the role – social desirability bias. Yes, they are easy to cheat.

Additionally, Likert formats also lead to responding errors such as:

Extreme Responding: Choosing extremes, i.e. a high frequency of responses as either Strongly Agree or Strongly Disagree.

Central Tendency Bias: Staying neutral to most statements.

This only shows to prove that no solution is 100% fool proof. Information from these tests serve more of a guiding purpose to decisions than the actual decision making. So, what can we conclude from what we have learned so far?



Conclusion **Unearthing** **a Treasure of Changes**

Progress is often what sets us apart from other animals. People thirst knowledge, people thirst advancements. In a way, the folks here at Mettl struggle and succeed on a regular basis to mitigate some of the inherent problems with personality assessments. One especially, is a move away from the Likert scale, making it a considerably difficult test to cheat or answer in a socially desirable manner.

Of course, HR professionals are presented with multiple psychometric tools to choose from today, but to find the right fit for the right decisions is what matters most. Which of the many tools could be used to gain the most appropriate and relevant information about candidates? That is the question to ask.

In this article, we managed to cover a brief insight into personality assessments, their evolution and their nature at present. We thank you for having made it this far, for you are now amid a fabric of change.

Stay tuned for more insights and information on assessments. We plan to keep in touch for the next couple of months. Godspeed.



References

- 1 P. R. Sanjai. Behavioural Assessments: Using Psychometric Tools for Leadership Development (2014). Live Mint (published on 22nd September, 2016 - E-paper).
- 2 Clarkson, M. 5 Reasons Hiring Managers Use Psychometric Testing (2013). SmartRecruiters Blog.
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- 4 Barrick, M. R. & Mount, M. K. The Big Five Personality Dimensions and Job Performance: A Meta-Analysis (1991). Personnel Psychology, 44.



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