

Psychometrics – to test or not to test?



Chloe Collet of YPI Crew asks..... As a yacht looking for crew have you ever considered using a psychometric test in your selection process?

Why and what is a psychometric test you may ask? Well, in a nutshell it can be defined as a "standard and scientific method used to measure an individual's mental capabilities and behavioural style" (Institute of Psychometric Coaching).

So, why test? Psychometric testing allows for the person responsible for the hiring process, captain, head of department, management, to better match crew candidates to the role as well as to the other members of the crew team. These tests are frequently used in the corporate world to assess leadership qualities and team dynamics and are slowly being acknowledged in the yachting industry as a worthwhile recruitment tool too.

However, just the mention of a test can conjure up scary images and induce fear for both candidates and hiring managers alike. This may be linked to a distorted image associated with testing that has developed over time. Although psychometric testing may appear to be a modern practice today, its roots are nevertheless established as far back as 2200BC when Chinese Emperor Yushan tested for skills, intelligence and endurance for Official Public roles.

The origin of today's tests can be attributed to Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of English naturalist Charles Darwin. Sir Francis, an explorer, anthropologist, eugenicist and pioneer of human intelligence studies, was fascinated by individual differences and is considered as the first to have elaborated in the early 1880s an objective testing method based on examination and measurement of a candidate's physical characteristics as well as sensory and motor skills. More than 17,000 people were tested by Sir Francis and he demonstrated that objective tests could provide meaningful scores. Nonetheless, with eugenics treated as an expression of class prejudice and Galton

as a reactionary, one can indeed see why psychometric testing at its debut earned a negative reputation.

Following on from Sir Francis's work, the tests as we know them now have evolved from French psychologists, Alfred Binet, Victor Henri and Theodore Simon. They developed together in 1905 a standardised test that could help identify young children between 3 and 12 years old affected by mental deficiencies with the intent of classifying children as a means for them to receive special education. It was a ground-breaking assessment tool and over time developed into a measurement of intelligence for all children. The Binet-Simon test is still in use today! Another reason perhaps why testing can be perceived in a negative light as linked to mental retardation.

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From 1917 following the work of Robert Woodworth, an American psychologist, psychometric tests were designed for the US military to assess recruits for any neuroses or shell shock during enemy bombardment in World War I. Known as the Woodworth's Personal Data Sheet this testing was only published in 1919 and thus did not serve its original purpose. It did however become the blueprint for other personality inventories and questionnaires.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Big Five personality test was conceived after exhaustive analytical research to measure individual differences in personality, which to this day remains a well-recognised personality trait model. The Big Five personality or OCEAN model traits are Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. This test and the multiple tests developed thereafter have all received their fair share of criticism and acclaim.

No test is therefore perfect and should be viewed as an opportunity that can also provide an unbiased evaluation of a candidate and in the long term be a reliable predictor of job performance and enhance team cohesion. So why not take the plunge?