

Book Review

Psychometrics in Coaching

Edited by Jonathan Passmore (2008), London: Page.

The recent publication of Psychometrics in Coaching has brought a welcome addition to the expanding number of texts aimed at the coaching profession. Published with the Association of Coaching it provides a valuable overview of a number of psychometric instruments which are increasingly used in the coaching field.

It should be stated at the outset that the principle underlying this book is that psychometric measures are of value when used in the appropriate context by suitably qualified individuals. There is no debate on the value of psychometrics per se within the coaching relationship. However Jonathan Passmore does seek to highlight some of the potential issues in the use of psychometrics in coaching.

The aim of the book is to provide background information to enable coaches to select 'technically sound tests that are appropriate for the situation in which they intend to use them' (Passmore, p8). It includes an overview of both well established assessment tools and newer additions to the field with discrete chapters on each instrument contributed by key authors and experts in the respective instrument. The instruments covered are:

- Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
- Team Management Systems (TMS)
- Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ)
- Motivation Questionnaire (MQ)
- Saville Consulting Wave®
- Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)
- Hogan Development Survey
- Engaging Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ™)
- Mental Toughness Questionnaire (MTQ48)
- Using archetypes
- Values in Action Institute Inventory of Strengths (VIA)
- Stessscan
- Coaching for Cultural Transformation (CTT)
- FIRO Element B
- Life Styles Inventory™(LSI)

Each chapter includes four main areas:

1. Theory and research behind the instrument
2. Overview of the instrument
3. How the tool can be used to deepen self awareness of the coach
4. How the instrument can be used with coachees

Despite this focus the target audience is not only coaches, consultants and human resource managers, but also, as Passmore says, 'anyone who uses psychometrics for development in organizations, for students interested in personnel development, coaching and psychology, and those interested in human behaviour' (page 2). It is stated as being of value to anyone developing individuals in the workplace and outside.

The book does give a useful overview of the instruments listed however it would be most useful to those with some knowledge of the psychometric field or to those with a desire to engage with psychological perspectives. Providing the theory and research behind each instrument gives a thorough and valuable perspective but makes it less accessible for an inexperienced reader with no knowledge of psychological assessment. While the introductory chapter by Passmore does explain a number of key concepts such as Construct Validity, Criterion-related validity and Reliability, the reader would need to have an interest in these concepts in order to make best use of the book.

Many of the instruments focus on a working context so those working in an organisational setting may find it most useful as it includes various leadership models and references to team working, although some of these are licensed to the specific provider. While those in life-coaching can still gain value from each chapter and from a number of the tools, many of the examples given are based in an organisational setting. Within this focus, the book does allow for, and encompasses a number of alternative perspectives. No specific model of coaching is endorsed and it is clear some writers have a far more performance based model than others. However this may help readers select the tools which demonstrate a better fit to their own model of coaching.

As coaching evolves we have seen a plethora of books on coaching with many treating coaching in a superficial way as a checklist of activities. This book aims to bring more depth with a good introductory chapter defining many of the key terms relevant to those aiming to use psychometric tools. There is also a research based chapter on 'Using Feedback in Coaching' which provides a detailed treatment of feedback from an empirical research base within communication theory. This makes a valuable addition to the area by going well beyond the usual 'do's and don'ts list we often see.

The book is stated as having two aims, 'first to contribute to improving coaching practice in psychometrics in general and in their favoured tool in particular, and second to widen coaches' understanding of the diverse range of instruments which are available'

The second aim is undoubtedly met. Despite the restrictions imposed by any publisher on the coverage of such a book, Chapter 18 goes on to list and give a brief description of alternative tools not covered in depth. Publishers and websites are listed giving the reader a good resource for any further research or contact. While practical in nature and approach, it is far more than a pure practitioner guide. For most instruments the authors give an overview of the key dimensions measured allowing potential users to assess the value of that instrument for their particular coaching approach and context. Overall the book provides a good reference source with further reading identified but it should not be not be considered a 'light-read' as it provides a

broad research and academic focus. The theoretical underpinnings of each instrument are summarised as well as the main application.

In terms of improving coaching practice this book will allow psychometrics to be accessed by a wider audience who are not already qualified in psychology and allows those seeking to qualify in a particular tool to gain an overview of some of the most well known instruments. For those already qualified in one or two instruments it provides a valuable summary of other approaches and may be best suited to these individuals who already have some knowledge of the basic principles of psychometrics. What the book does do is draw a direct and explicit link to the use of these instruments in a coaching context which expands the focus for instruments which may have been available for some time. However the style of the book does make comparisons of the instruments difficult. Since each discrete chapter is written by a key advocate of that tool, any critique is limited in nature. There is very little a coach can use to compare and contrast the respective instruments when looking for a tool to use in a particular context. It is left to the coach to decide if any particular instrument would add value to their practice. The one addition which would have been valuable would be an independent assessment of which tools are most useful in which context or for which objective. Having said this, each author does give examples of how the tool can be used with coachees and this will give potential users some basis on which to make a decision.

One notable inclusion which I think does contribute to coaching practice is the strong focus on the self awareness required of the coach. Throughout the book each instrument is applied both to the coachee and the coach. So for each tool the author attempts to draw out what the coach can learn about themselves through use of the instrument. While this is often little more than increasing self awareness and familiarisation with the instrument use, it does serve to highlight the importance of coach development and that the coaching role can be seen from many perspectives. Each instrument highlights slightly different aspects of the coaching role.

It should be highlighted that the book will not qualify the reader to administer the instruments covered. While some assessments are more easily accessible than others, many require extensive training and qualification with often an annual fee or unit cost attached to their use. Ethical practice clearly defines the need for appropriate qualifications when using any psychometric tool so readers should not assume a single chapter will be any more than an introduction. However if you are a coach looking to increase your portfolio of tools this book will give you a valuable insight into alternative ways to work with and address aspects of personality.

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