

# **Using psychometrics & psychological tools in coaching & development conversation**

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## **Introduction**

Coaches have an expanding range of psychological assessment tools from which they can draw to assist coachees build the self-awareness that is necessary to identify new career and life goals, and to enhance their performance at work. The burgeoning psychological testing industry has produced a myriad of measures enabling coaches to support coachees to better understand their behaviour, their preferences and their capabilities as they relate to work and life. Personality tests, aptitude tests, and questionnaires assessing values, interests, leadership and motivational needs represent some of the kinds of tests currently available on the market internationally. Many of these psychological tests have made a positive contribution to coaching and have been rigorously tested to ensure their reliability and validity (terms we will explore later). There is however considerable variability in the level of research undertaken and the reliability and validity of these tools.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the background information that will help coaches to choose technically sound tests that are appropriate for the situation in which they intend to use them. First, we present the various kinds of tests that are available to coaches, what they measure and their role in the coaching context. Second, we describe the psychometric properties of tests and the standards that are required for test reliability and validity. Third, profiling and criterion-oriented approaches to assessment are compared, highlighting the need for coaches to broaden their perspective beyond the skills, knowledge and personal attributes of the coachee by also taking account of the demands and the rewards of the environment in which the coachee lives. Fourth, the benefits of psychological testing for the coach and the coachee are explored and, in the last part of the chapter, ethical guidelines and best practice in psychological testing are presented.

## **Psychological tests**

A psychological test is a standardised measure of one or a number of psychological attributes. The attributes of an individual that are most commonly of interest in the coaching context include personality (attributes such as conscientiousness, interpersonal confidence, sociability), career interests (for example, preference for working with people or engaging in artistic activities), values (such as altruism or protection of the environment), motivational needs (that is, what drives the person such as money, status, autonomy) and cognitive ability (for example, numerical or verbal problem-solving abilities). Here, we briefly describe the kinds of tests that measure each of these attributes.

### **Personality questionnaires**

There is an abundance of personality questionnaires on the market, each measuring a broad or narrow domain of individual behaviour and personal preferences. Here, we

look at four kinds of personality measures that may be used in work-related coaching: multidimensional measures, measures of the Big Five personality factors and measures of personality type and competency based tools. Examples of these include WAVE, OPQ32, and MBTI.

*Multidimensional measures* of personality assess a wide range of personality attributes or traits such as achievement drive, sociability, self-control, flexibility, or empathy, to name just a few. The results of personality testing should provide comparisons of an individual’s personality attributes with those of others from a “norm” group, such as others in the general population or other managers. The validity of multi-dimensional personality measures as predictors of performance is enhanced when the test is carefully chosen to measure the attributes that the coachee requires, or will require, on the job or in their personal life. As an example, if interpersonal confidence and achievement drive are required in a role, the personality test should be able to measure these same constructs or attributes in the person as closely as possible.

Multi-dimensional measures of personality are particularly helpful in the coaching relationship to build the coachee’s awareness of their preferred style of thinking and behaving across situations. This kind of assessment can help to explain why some people are well suited to some kinds of work environments or situations while others are not. They can also help to explain why some situations or tasks are more stressful than others.

*Measures of the five factor model* of personality are based on the accepted premise that all personality attributes are represented in five core, broadband attributes, commonly referred to as the “Big Five” (Goldberg, 1990). The five factors are: Conscientiousness; Extroversion; Agreeableness; Openness to Experience; and Neuroticism (Emotional Stability). The five factors are defined in Table 1.

**Table 1: The five factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987)**

<b>Big Five Factor</b>	<b>Description</b>
Conscientiousness	Careful, reliable, hardworking, well organised, punctual, disciplined, ambitious.
Extroversion	Sociable, fun loving, affectionate, friendly, talkative, warm.
Agreeableness	Courteous, selfless, sympathetic, trusting, generous, acquiescent, lenient, forgiving, flexible.
Openness to Experience	Original, imaginative, creative, broad interests, curious, daring, liberal, independent, prefer variety.
Neuroticism (Emotional Stability)	Worrying, emotional, high-strung, temperamental, insecure, self-pitying, vulnerable. (Emotional stability: Calm, at ease, relaxed, even-tempered, secure, hardy)

Although there is considerable research showing the generalisable validity of some of the five factors, a measure of the five factors alone may be too parsimonious to be

practical in the coaching context. In selecting an appropriate measure based on the five-factor theory, those that provide facet scales or subscales can offer finer definition to the broader five factors and, as such, can enable more detailed information and finer definition of the coachee's personality. Examples of facet scales or subscales of Extroversion include being friendly, sociable or assertive. It is possible that an individual may be friendly and sociable without being assertive, or vice versa. Understanding these facets can be more informative for the coachee than simply knowing their result on the broader trait of Extroversion.

Measures of *personality type* provide a categorisation of the individual into a personality typology that defines a specific set of behavioural tendencies, reflecting broad differences in attitudes and orientation. While multi-dimensional measures of personality profile individuals across a range of individual attributes, measures of personality type profile people according to a cluster of attributes that represent their preferences. These kinds of personality measures are very popular with coaches as they often provide a more succinct description of the individual across a manageable number of dimensions.

In addition to the kinds of personality tests discussed above, coaches may draw from a range of special purpose tests that are designed to measure specific aspects of behaviour such as leadership style, team orientation, sales orientation, and emotional intelligence. Examples include MSCEIT, which measures emotional intelligence, MTQ48, which assesses mental toughness and TLQ, which measures leadership competence. These kinds of measures of personal attributes can have value in specific contexts. For instance, a measure of leadership style could be relevant for those coachees who want to better understand their preferred way of leading and managing others. On the other hand, a measure of team orientation can offer insights into the way in which a coachee prefers to contribute in the work environment.

### **Vocational interests**

The assessment of vocational interests can be useful in the coaching context by providing insights into the fields of employment and the range of occupations that are attractive to the individual. Career interest assessments ask people what they enjoy doing, not just at work, but also in other domains of their lives such as school, university and leisure.

Generally speaking, vocational interest theories categorise jobs and careers into those that involve working with people, those that involve working with data and those that involve working with things (Fine, 1955). Occupational preferences are also closely linked to personality style (Holland, 1997). To illustrate, while artists often describe themselves as creative, expressive and independent, accountants tend to describe themselves as stable, organised and dependable. By comparing an individual across a broad range of occupations and vocational fields, interest inventories are particularly useful with those coachees who are considering a career change. They can enable insights into occupational areas that may not necessarily have been previously considered by the coachee.

### **Motivational needs and values questionnaires**

The assessment of motivational needs and values is possibly the least defined aspect of the assessment, particularly in view of the multitude of motivational theories upon which motivational assessment tools are based. Most questionnaires and tools that assess

motivational needs and values focus on one or a combination of four areas: sources of motivation; how the person likes to be rewarded; the kind of management style that brings out the best in the person; and the kind of work environment that the person prefers.

The assessment of motivational needs and values may be of benefit to coachees who are dissatisfied with their current role or work environment and who want to be clear about the kinds of environments and reinforcers that are particularly important to them. They can also be useful with coachees who are weighing up some alternative job options. In this instance, the coachee can evaluate each option in terms of the extent to which their needs and values are likely to be satisfied, thereby helping their decision-making around employment options.

### **Cognitive ability tests**

Cognitive ability tests assess aspects of intellectual functioning such as numerical, verbal and conceptual problem-solving abilities. In the work-related coaching context, cognitive ability testing offers the potential to determine the extent to which an individual's performance on the job is related to their learning, problem-solving and decision-making capabilities. The cause of under performance or lack of confidence in a coachee in a management or professional role, for example, may be explained by difficulties they are experiencing in managing the more complex conceptual problem-solving aspects of their role. Alternatively, cognitive ability testing can provide an indication of an individual's potential to progress to a more senior position and to quickly acquire the specific knowledge and skill they will need in order to perform effectively.

Cognitive ability tests are perhaps the least utilised form of assessment in the coaching context. While cognitive ability tests are one of the best predictors of overall job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), cognitive functioning is less amenable to change than other individual attributes such as motivational needs or the behavioural manifestations of personality. There may, therefore, be greater risks associated with the use of these kinds of tests as coachees may feel powerless in addressing and improving performance in areas in which their performance is not as strong as those of their peers.

### **The psychometric properties of a psychological test**

It is the standardised administration and scoring of a psychological test that differentiates it from other kinds of assessments that coaches may use with coachees such as structured interviews, behavioural observations, checklists or questionnaires. A good psychological test is one that meets three criteria. First, it must be an accurate measure of the attribute of interest. Second, it should help the test user differentiate between those individuals who have more of the attribute of interest from those who have less of the attribute. Third, it needs to be a good predictor of an outcome of interest such as job performance or success in training.

A well-constructed, valid and reliable psychological test is one that has been subjected to a comprehensive and scientifically rigorous process of development. Readers are referred to Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2004) or Hinkin (1995) for information on test development. As best practice, publishers will make available to accredited users the test's technical

manual that outlines the extent to which it reliably assesses the attributes of interest (referred to as *reliability*) and the normative data against which test takers can be compared. Some test developers will also show how the test compares with other tests that purport to measure the same attribute or set of attributes (referred to as *construct validity*) and how effectively the test predicts an outcome of interest (referred to as *criterion-related validity*). See Table 2 for a summary of definitions of reliability and validity.

## **Reliability**

No psychological measure is absolutely perfect. There is always an unavoidable margin of error in the measurement of psychological attributes. The aim of the test developer is to maximise the reliability of the test so that, regardless of when the test is administered, the results are consistent across time (*test-retest reliability*). In addition, the questions used to measure a particular personal attribute should be consistently and predictably related to each other (*internal consistency*). Reliability is expressed as a correlation coefficient. The more reliable the test, the closer the correlation coefficient will be to 1.0. Murphy and Davidshofer (1998) suggest that reliability values over .80 are good while those less than .70 have limited applicability and should be interpreted cautiously.

*Test-retest reliability* refers to the stability of test results over time. That is, the results of a test administered today should be similar to those for the same person tomorrow, next week or at some later date, assuming no actual change in the attribute is expected as a result of some other influence such as normal growth and development, training, aging, illness or disability. Test-retest reliability is calculated by correlating the results obtained from the test on the first occasion that it is administered with the results obtained on the test when it is administered on the second occasion.

*Internal consistency* refers to the extent to which test items are related to each other and, by inference, measure the same personal attribute. To illustrate, assume a measure of Extroversion comprises ten questions, each tapping some aspect of this particular attribute such as sociability, social self-confidence or assertiveness. If the measure of Extroversion has adequate internal consistency, all ten items will be correlated. That is, if a person scores high on some of the items that measure Extroversion, they are likely to score high on the other items and vice versa.

There are a number of possible sources of variability in test scores including a) those related to the test taker at the time of testing such as fatigue, concentration or poor motivation; b) those related to the test administrator such as giving inconsistent or incomplete instructions to test takers; or c) an inadequate testing environment such as that which is noisy or poorly lit.

## **Construct validity**

Construct validity refers to the extent to which a measure accurately assesses the attributes it purports to assess. In testing construct validity, two questions are asked: to what extent are scores on the test related to scores on tests that measure the same attribute (*convergent validity*) and to what extent are scores on the test unrelated to scores on tests that measure different attributes (*discriminant validity*). That is, a test with adequate construct validity will show higher correlations with alternative measures of the same attribute or constructs than it does with measures of different constructs (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Thompson & Daniel, 1996). Take, for example, a test of

assertiveness. If the test has adequate construct validity it should show higher correlations with other measures of assertiveness than with measures of other conceptually unrelated attributes such as attention to detail or achievement drive.

### **Criterion-related validity**

For a test to be useful in career coaching, it needs to not only be a reliable and valid measure of the constructs or attributes of interest, but it also needs to bear some relationship with a criterion or outcome of interest. The relationship between scores on a psychological test and an outcome is referred to as *criterion-related validity*. In the coaching context, the outcome or criterion might be improved job or life satisfaction, career advancement, or improved well-being. Criterion-related validity varies according to the correlation between an individual's scores on a test and their scores on the outcome measure. When the outcome data is gathered at a later point in time, the correlation between test score and outcome measure is referred to as the test's *predictive validity*. *Concurrent validity* refers to the correlation between test and outcome measures that are collected at the same point in time.

Criterion-related validity is expressed as a correlation coefficient that shows the strength and direction (positive or negative) of the relationship between scores on the test and the criterion. Correlation coefficients for criterion-related validity that are greater than .35 are considered very beneficial; those from .20 to .35 are likely to be useful; while those less than .11 are unlikely to be useful (Murphy & Davidshofer, 1998).

### **Normative data**

Amongst the attributes of a psychometric test that differentiates it from other forms of assessment is the ability of the test user to compare an individual's results with those of others in a relevant sample or *norm group*. The norm group is that sample of people who participated in the development and validation of the test and whose test results provide the average distribution of scores against which future test takers can be compared. The norm or comparison group may be as general as working adults or as specific as engineering graduates from a particular country.

All well developed tests offer normative data and clearly state the demographics of the norm group. The norm group needs to be of an adequate size for the test user to be confident that it is sufficiently stable. The ideal sample size will depend on a number of different factors including the number of items in the test, the sampling method used (random or representative), the size of the population from which a sample can be drawn, and the method of test development. Test users should, as a rule of thumb, be very cautious of norm groups below 100 participants and ideally look for sample sizes in the hundreds.

**Table 2. Definitions of the psychometric properties of tests**

<b>Psychometric property</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Reliability</b>	The stability and consistency of test results.
Test-retest reliability	The stability of test results over repeated administrations of the test.
Internal consistency	The extent to which test items that measure the same attribute are related with each other.
<b>Construct validity</b>	The extent to which a measure accurately assesses the attribute it intends to assess.
Convergent validity	The extent to which test scores are related to scores on alternative tests or measures of the same attribute.
Discriminant validity	The extent to which test scores are unrelated to scores on alternative tests or measures of different attributes.
<b>Criterion-related validity</b>	The relationship between test scores and a measure of an independent outcome e.g., job performance, job satisfaction, tenure.
Predictive validity	The correlation between a test score and an outcome measure that is gathered at a later point in time.
Concurrent validity	The correlation between a test score and an outcome measure that is collected at the same point in time.
<b>Norm group and normative data</b>	The sample of the population that participated in the development and validation of the test and whose test results provide the average distribution of scores against which future test takers can be compared.

## **Approaches to psychological testing in coaching**

A psychological test can be used in two ways, namely, to measure an individual attribute or set of attributes in a person (*a profiling approach*) or to predict a certain outcome (*a criterion-oriented approach*). The two approaches are applied in different contexts, depending on the referral question.

### **Profiling approach**

In a profiling approach to psychological testing, the emphasis is on building awareness and understanding of the coachee's attributes such as their abilities, interests, and personality style compared with those of a relevant norm group. Here, the referral question may be "How do the coachee's leadership skills compare with those of other managers?" or "What kinds of occupations interest the coachee?"

Psychological testing can provide insights into a number of areas. First, a profiling approach to psychological testing can provide insights into the coachee's relative strengths and areas for development. For example, testing may show that the coachee's numerical skills are better developed than their verbal abilities and that they prefer creative work activities to those that are routine and procedural. Here, attributes are compared *within* the person, highlighting the individual's relative capabilities, preferences, personality attributes, or motivational needs.

Second, a profiling approach can enable insights into how an individual's personal attributes compare with those of others in a particular reference or norm group. For example, the testing may show that the coachee is more numerate, outgoing and energetic than most other managers, but less organised and task-focused. These are *between*-person differences may be expressed in ranges (above average, average or below average) or as a standardised score (such as a percentile ranking that shows the proportion of the population that scores higher or lower).

The profiling approach can be valuable in clarifying the coachee's development needs, future personal and career goals, or simply understanding why they think and behave in the way they do. The profiling approach is most commonly applied with those clients who are looking for a new direction or to resolve a particular issue that is impacting on their life or career.

### **Criterion-oriented approach**

Many coaches, particularly those engaged in work-related coaching commissioned by the coachee's employer, are required to consider not only the individual coachee's profile but also the job and organisational context. These kinds of referrals may be for the purpose of assessing the employee's potential for career progression, their fit with their current role, or their development needs in the context of the capabilities required in their current or future roles. In these instances, there is a *criterion* against which the individual's assessment profile is compared. The criterion typically relates to actual or potential performance on particular aspects of a job, potential for training or job satisfaction.

Person-job and person-organisation fit are fundamental to the criterion-oriented approach. That is, the coach is not only interested in profiling the coachee, but is also concerned to understand how the coachee's profile relates or *fits* with a particular context. Coaches taking a criterion-related approach should build the skills of analysing jobs in terms of the demands they make on the incumbent's knowledge, skills and attributes (KSA) and ensure that they gather data relevant to the coachee's current or future jobs. Such data may be gathered through job descriptions, job analysis interviews with those who know the job, or through structured job analysis questionnaires. Readers are referred to Brough and Smith (2003) for a useful overview of job analysis techniques.

If job performance is the criterion of interest in the coaching relationship, those tests that best predict job performance, or aspects of it, should be selected. In order to select the appropriate tests, however, coaches need to be able to define the performance domain. There are some well-established models that coaches can draw on to guide their analysis of the performance domain. Campbell (1990), for example, identified eight dimensions of performance including job-specific task performance, non-job specific task performance, demonstrating effort, written and oral communication, maintaining personal discipline, supervision/leadership, and management/administration. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) subsequently narrowed the performance domain down to two

dimensions: task performance (the core technical activities of the job) and contextual performance (helpful, constructive and cooperative behaviours that management values). More recently, researchers have expanded models of the performance domain to take account of the adaptive performance requirements of the changing work environment (Allworth & Hesketh, 1999; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan & Plamondon, 2000; Griffin & Hesketh, 2003). Further references to job performance models for specific occupations can be found in Viswesvaran and Ones (2000).

By taking a criterion-oriented approach to assessment, coaches must also rely on a model of person-job or person-environment fit. For example, the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) describes people and work environments in terms of the demands that they impose on each other and what each can offer, or supply to, the other. On the one hand, the work environment requires that certain tasks be performed and the individual brings skills to perform the tasks. In exchange, the individual requires the work environment to reward and satisfy his or her needs, interests and values. Both individuals and organisations adjust to meet each other's requirements. The outcome of work adjustment is tenure which results when the individual is satisfied with the rewards of the role and the organisation finds their performance satisfactory.

## **Benefits of psychological testing for the coach and the coachee**

There are many reasons why assessment can be useful in the coaching relationship. Not only can the results of the assessment provide a valid, reliable and efficient profile of an individual that can help the coach gain insight into the coachee's capabilities and preferences, it also provides some indicators of the coachee's potential. In this section, we explore some of the benefits that both the coach and coachee can derive from psychological testing.

### **Valid prediction of job performance and other work-related outcomes**

Assessment can add value in the coaching relationship through the capacity for some measures to predict performance in work and training. For example, there is consistently strong evidence of the validity of cognitive ability tests as predictors of job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), occupational level attained (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004) and career success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Although a better predictor of performance in more complex roles, than in lower level, more routine roles (Ackerman, 1992; Hunter & Hunter, 1984), cognitive ability is nevertheless predictive across all jobs and settings.

The Big Five personality factors of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability have also been shown to predict performance across most jobs (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001). Although the relationships are not as strong, Openness to Experience (being curious, inquisitive) seems to predict success in training, while Agreeableness (getting on with people) and Extroversion predict performance in roles where these attributes are required such as team environments, sales, management.

In general, personality tests can effectively predict job performance if the attributes they measure are required on the job (Robertson & Kinder, 1993). For example, the ability to persuade is more likely to predict performance in sales and management than in clerical or accounting roles where attention to detail may be more important. Conceptually

relevant personality factors can also predict leadership (Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002) and teamwork (Morgeson, Reider & Campion, 2005). Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki and Cortina (2006) provide evidence of the ability of facets of Conscientiousness (dependability or achievement) to provide higher levels of validity in predicting job performance in specific occupations.

Although the selection research indicates that values, needs and vocational interest assessments are not necessarily good predictors of job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), these are useful tools to assist individuals in the process of job or occupational change to explore alternative career options. Hansen (1994) reports numerous studies that have shown 60-75% accuracy in predicting occupational choice.

### **Raised awareness of individual style, preferences and capabilities**

Normative data enables the coachee to gain insights into their relative strengths and preferences (or areas for development) and examine them in relation to others in a relevant comparison group. The skill of the coach, however, is required to ensure that the results of the assessment are given meaning in the context of the coachee's life. For example, it may or may not be relevant to a coachee's satisfaction, performance or life to know that they are less outgoing, less ambitious and less interested in artistic activities than many of their peers. It is the impact they have on the individual's life, in a positive or negative way, which gives them their relevance and makes them important in development and career planning.

### **Open up new avenues for exploration**

Some aspects of the assessment can help the coachee explore possibilities that may not otherwise have been considered. Mastie (1994) points out that psychological testing in the context of career assessment is used to empower the coachee. The information gathered from the assessment is used to inform their exploration of possible options. In considering career possibilities, the coachee may be limited by their own experience and the level of exposure that they may have had to alternative career options.

### **A platform for feedback, goal-setting and planning for change**

Psychological testing provides coaches with a valid basis for feedback, counselling and development planning. Psychological tests should not be seen as an alternative to other forms of assessment that can contribute to the coaching relationship such as interviewing, behavioural observations, or information from managers and employers. However, the results of psychological testing can be used for planning the coaching approach and for development or career planning on the part of the coachee. The results of psychological tests can also highlight strengths from which the coachee may leverage change and areas for development that may be points of focus for change.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

Herr (1994) suggests that assessment in the coaching or career counselling context can also have the benefit of monitoring an individual's progress and the effectiveness of career interventions. For example, the coachee may use psychological testing to track their progress by re-evaluating opportunities, and reassessing their skills, interests and

motivational needs or values. The coach may use psychological testing to evaluate and ensure the accountability of the coaching programs.

## **Ethical guidelines and best practice in testing**

Finding a good test that has been well developed and shows the technical capabilities that are required to justify and support its use is just one part of the challenge for test users. Just as important is the need to use the test in an appropriate and ethical manner. Test users should be familiar with issues of privacy and their duties of care as they relate to the jurisdiction in which they work. Coaches who are not covered by a code of practice should refer to the International Test Commission's (ITC) Guidelines for Test Use (2000) which provides a framework from which specific local testing standards, can be developed. In this section we examine some of the principles that underlie ethical and best practice use of psychological tests. A summary checklist is provided in Table 3.

### **Testing should be evidence-based**

Users of psychological tests need to be able to differentiate those tests that have been developed through a program of rigorous, scientific research from those that are based on a loose conceptualisation of the attributes measured with inadequate research backing. Ideally, tests should be linked to plausible theory and, if not, they should at least be able to demonstrate an empirical or statistical relationship with an outcome of interest, that is, they should be evidence-based.

### **Tests should be carefully selected to address the referral question**

The test user needs to be clear about what they want to find out about the individual and, as such, will be guided by the referral question. If the referral question is "What kind of career will best suit me, the coachee?", the tests used should be able to provide results that will help the coachee answer this question by profiling their needs, interests, values or abilities. A different set of tests may be relevant if the referral question is "What are my development needs if I am to achieve my current career goals?" Here, the coach needs to have a good understanding of the coachee's career goals and ambitions, and tailor the assessment to assess the coachee's capabilities against these.

### **Only tests with adequate psychometric properties should be used**

All good tests should have an accompanying manual that documents its technical properties and that outlines the method of test development. Although test developers are justified in protecting their intellectual property, they need also to be transparent in providing details of the method of test construction, the reliability and validity of test scales, the demographics of the normative samples, and guidelines for administration and interpretation. Care needs to be taken by the test user to ensure that the claims made about test results can be justified on the basis of the psychometric properties that are known.

**Table 3. Checklist for ethical and best practice psychological testing**

- Define the purpose of the assessment, for example:
  - To explore future career options
  - To explain low job satisfaction, stress or poor performance
  - To identify development needs for a target job
- Determine the kinds of tests that will best address the purpose of the assessment:
  - Personality profiling to raise awareness of preferred ways of behaving
  - Vocational interest assessment to explore career and occupational preferences
  - Motivation assessment to identify factors that drive the coachee's performance
  - Values assessment to determine the kind of environment that best suits the coachee
  - Cognitive ability testing to determine potential for advancement or training
- Select the best test for your purpose:
  - Ensure each test is based on a well researched model or theory
  - Check the reliability and validity
  - Ensure it offers norms that fit the coachee's demographics and that the sample size is adequate
- Select only those tests with which you are competent and trained to administer and interpret
- Gather relevant collateral information (such as job descriptions, competency data, coachee's resumé) to better understand the context in which the assessment is being conducted
- Consider who will receive feedback and a report of the assessment and gain informed consent from the coachee
- Ensure the coachee understands the purpose of the assessment and how the results will be used
- Make adequate arrangements to ensure standardised administration
- Take account of any factors that may impact on the coachee's ability to complete the assessment e.g., disability, illness, language
- Be aware of your ethical and professional responsibilities, and the rights and responsibilities of coachees who undertake psychological assessment

### **Test users should be competent to administer and interpret tests**

Most publishers and owners of psychological tests require users to be accredited in the administration and interpretation of their tools. For some tests, this accreditation may be automatic by virtue of the test user's professional qualifications such as in psychology or education. Test users who do not have a professional background in psychometrics or psychology should be aware of the boundaries of their competence and ensure that they undertake the relevant training and development that will enable them to use tests in an appropriate and professional manner. Tests should be administered under standardised conditions and the results should be interpreted and reported accurately.

### **Test users should respect the privacy of the test taker**

Before conducting a psychological assessment, the test user should advise the test taker of their rights and responsibilities, the purpose and nature of the testing and the limits of confidentiality. Informed consent should be gained. The test user should avoid causing harm or distress through the testing process and should be aware of the fairness of testing for those coachees whose gender, cultural background, language, education, ethnic origin, physical capabilities or age differ from those for whom the test was developed.

### **Summary**

Good psychological tests used appropriately can be useful tools for coaches to support their clients in building awareness through self-exploration and understanding. In assuming a test user role, coaches need therefore to be very aware of the theoretical and psychometric background to testing and use comprehensive models to guide their choice of tests. In a world in which test users are confronted with a plethora of tests of varying reliability, validity and value in the coaching context, coaches should ensure that they are adequately trained, informed and knowledgeable about the limitations and capabilities of the tests they use. Test users should also be aware of the ethical issues that impact on the use of tests in coaching and ensure that they apply only the highest standards of test usage. As the legal and ethical requirements of test users and the rights of test takers can vary across countries, test users have a responsibility to ensure that they operate in accordance with those that are relevant to their jurisdiction. While the inappropriate and unskilled application of psychological testing can have damaging effects on individuals, used wisely, ethically and with the required knowledge and accreditation, the benefits to coaches and coachees can be substantial.

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