Profiling Personalities, Self Tests, Quizzes and Predictions — beyond the horoscope and crystal ball.

By Brian Van der Horst
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Some people like crosswords, Sudoku, or those IQ tests scattered through women's publications. Most like to learn something about themselves, to be the center of attention, so magazines and websites are filled with self-tests to find out if they are good lovers, leaders, alcoholics, anxious, disordered by attention deficit, fortunate or just make the grade for any human endeavor.

You don't have to be egocentric to want to know more about yourself, but it is satisfying to hear about your qualities. And some pessimists are comforted by knowing their worst in character or fate. Ergo, the enduring popularity of astrology, dating tests, handwriting analysis, enneagrams, and profiling.

It probably starts with recognizing we are divided in to types like male and female, happy and sad, bold and timid, ying and yang. Human beings think in binary polarities. You can't have light without darkness, good without bad. Without into different types, you can't make evaluations or decisions. It's how the mind works.

Patrick Merlevede, 41, a Belgian cognitive scientist/entrepreneur, has long been fascinated by these patterns of thinking. In 2000, he invented a psychometric test called iWAM (**I**nventory for **W**ork **A**ttitude & **M**otivation) to try to integrate the hot paths of emotion with the cold signposts of logic.

He was educated in an uncommon combination of Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive, and Computer and applied Economics at the Catholic University of Leuven -- often referred to as the oldest university in Europe – or the world. Merlevede has created an impressive empire of business management and recruiting techniques around his iWAM invention. Most of them are detailed on his site "jobEQ."

Probably the kind of person that would be classified as type A+++, he also holds diplomas

in a flock of psychological disciplines, which lead him to write two books, "7 Steps to Emotional Intelligence" (2001) and "Mastering Mentoring & Coaching with Emotional Intelligence" (2004), that might seem to contradict his intellectual occupations.

He describes his philosophy as "Make sure today as "fun" as possible! Life is too short to remain stuck in negative emotions. Always remember that today could be your last day, so make sure you don't regret it when you time has come." Patrick mentioned that his father, another workaholic, had decided that he needed to postpone "enjoying life" until after he would retire—unfortunately he died from cancer at the age of 54.died young without ever stopping to smell the roses, or take time for vacations.

One day a colleague and I were discussing types of people. He was arguing that there were morning, afternoon and night people. I suggested there are only two types: the attractive and unattractive—the later don't last for long in the gene pool. My 12 year old son was listening to us, and said there was only one type of person: the kind that categorizes other people into types. A word describing the Buddha's first noble truth about life is "dukkha" ----- often mistranslated from Sanskrit as "suffering." Some scholars have told me a better synonym in English would be "separating, uneasy, disquieted or unsteady," or the process of dividing life into categories instead of seeing how everything fits into a whole. You could call it the original profiling. Sociologists and psychologists call it psychometrics.

Patrick's original idea was to marry the cognitive and the emotional, and to profit from business applications. Some business authorities claim that there are around 2000 psychometric tests commonly used, and that 70% of large companies use psychometric quizzes in employee recruiting, training and development. So much in use are these tests that there are now scores of

companies teaching people how to fool these tests.

Psychometrics probably started millennia ago with the shamanic and oriental categories of fire, water, earth and air. In the West, these kinds of tests all started with Hippocrates in 400BC his four humors of blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. It was Sir Francis Galton in the 19th century who first used questionnaires to measure how individuals respond to different scenarios, allowing him to investigate mental imagery in different groups of people. Enter the IQ test in France during La Belle Époque from psychologist Alfred Binet –which spawned a century of quantitative tests about qualitative behaviors. Then in the 1920s, Carl Jung suggested that behavior and personality were ruled by categories of consciousness. He described four basic types of personality processes: feeling, thinking, intuition and sensation, translated in terms of two polarities: introversion/extraversion and yin/yang. The vast majority of all business psychometrics are based on variations of this model.

Patrick Merlevede decided to do something a bit more challenging. After studying the field of psychometrics, he decided to combine various models of cognitive thinking and values motivation with the new approach called Emotional Intelligence. His iWAM model utilizes such characteristics as self/other, time, decisions, feeling style, and values orientations into a fiendishly complex but fairly easy to used system of self evaluation, statistical analysis and comparisons from thousands of others who have taken the tests. He alos holds seminars to train consultants in using his method for organizational development projects.

Psychometric tests are only as good as the data base upon which they evaluated answers. By analyzing the behavior of groups of individuals that answer the same questions in the same way, testing can predict how people will think, feel, and act – in general—always leaving room for unique circumstances.

So how good are Patrick's tests? He runs a website that allows mangers and employees to take his tests over the internet, and receive their evaluations by e-mail. He also trains people to administer his quizzes in person. I recently talked with five of his partner consultants.

Wim Thielemans is a cofounder and CEO of Dynamo, an international training & development organization, which is one of jobEQ's Belgian partners. Wim has used the iWAM with a Mobile Phone Operator, an oil company, a Call Center, an international furniture chain, and the Chamber of Commerce of Flanders. "Since we Started dynamo 5 yrs ago, we have had wide variety of projects. I have not found the necessity to find something else besides iWAM. We measure individuals, add up the results, and decode a team or culture. I have been able to use this one single tool to do everything I need."

His first project with Merlevede's tool was for Pioneer Electronics.   Wim's job was to help organize an outplacement project that was necessitated by the demise of one of Pioneers branch factories in Belgium. "I was coaching human resources managers, when during a coaching session; I had problems with people who we help in finding new jobs. They were getting jobs, but they kept returning to Pioneer." Most of these people were technological specialists. While they were finding jobs at other companies, they were returning in droves to outplacement, after a month or so.

"Why was this happening? We said it was probably the culture. Some had worked with Pioneer for 20 years. The culture was different at other companies." After measuring Pioneer's culture with "VSQ" (Value Systems Questionnaire—an intercultural metric derived from iWAM.)
"This gave ways for us to teach candidates how to measure the culture of their target companies."

Herman Vandenbranden , the Human Resources manager of   Pioneer at Erpe-Mere said,
"This is so interesting, if I would have gotten this information when I started this job, I could have accomplished many other projects, or knew why some would not work."

This project ,and other missions using IWAM for companies such as in the Norwegian merger of Hydro Oil with Stet oil were so successful that Dynamo has published a series of video on job security, change management, mergers and

acquisitions and training on the internet's YouTube site.

Carl Harshman, 65, is another iWam partner is a St. Louis consultant that opened the Institute for Work Attitude and Motivation in North America has worked with such companies as Ford Motor, John Deere, Boeing and various government agencies such as the State of Washington and the city of Seattle. A jovial, avuncular and self-effacing man, he holds a PhD in management, and has been a college professor dean, and director of academic planning. He began to work in the business world two decades ago. The author of four books on leadership and training, he reports using iWam for developing leadership and recruitment for a global energy company specializing in processing uranium mining and processing. A former government agency in transition to the public sector, they understandably held the profiles opposite to modern corporate management. "The top patterns of leaders in conventional business were not what they wanted," said Harshman, recalling the project. "They wanted conservative thinkers, oriented to the past, procedural managers. The needed more competitive, tolerant, and flexible executives. Now the have been able to predict where people might derail, and have predicted correctly. They are paying close attention to the results of our studies now."

Hashman and Associates helped institute a major reorganization. One of the iWam applications was to assess 90 of their top leaders, with which they built a plan for leadership development, succession planning and recruitment. Today the company is a 3 billion dollar publicly traded enterprise.

Wendy Wu runs one of the biggest assessment center operations in China. Working with such clients in Beijing as General Elictric, IBM, and 2008 Olymics Committe she is ccurrently the Chief Organizational Behavior Consultant & Chief Operating Officer of the New Leaders Group, is now iWam's China representative, having published research about using the method to profile Chinese business leaders that was publishing in Fortune Magazine China. "We find iWam an easy-to-use and administer testing too that provides an objective and reliable method to measure an individual's behavioral

patterns—it profiles and predicts leadership potential."

Sarah Ainsworth, an executive with the Change Agency in London, and at Intervention Space in Edinburgh. She has applied the iWam method to Blue Arrow, a division of British Airways, helping them to increase call center sales through modeling top performers, and training people how to employ their behavioral qualities.

A psychologist with over 20 years experience of qualitative and quantitative research, Ainsworth is well situated for evaluating the efficacy of the method. "I Think iWAM is great tool, always surprising accurate. In terms of doing mass profiling with such accuracy and speed, we don't use any other tool.

"At Blue Arrow, We increased revenue by 33 percent." She reports.

"We've used iWAM with six different businesses with a wide variety of employees from senior medical consultants to part-time waitresses."

With Egg, an internet banking organization, Sarah and her partners used iWAM for 2000 members of their staff. "We profiled their staff to inform their management. We got them to rethink their assumptions that everyone would be the same."

After translating iWAM to Polish, Alina Ty, another psychologist, started the Intensive Development Institute Global (IDI Global) three years ago. She now splits her time between Australia, the Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Europe and her native Poland. Their main operations comprise open training, company-focused (closed) training, improvement workshops, as well as individual and corporate advisory services.

Alina uses iWAM with one of biggest training departments in the world especially for introducing products into new countries.

"At a traditional development center you need to define competences, and job descriptions often incomplete. We didn't just work with documentation. We designed exercises to define competences. What are the behavioral indicators? Is this competence present or not?

Use iWAM; initiative on high level. People could asses people were not active during exercises. The purpose of a development center is to teach. You have to base judgments on facts. *When we use iWAM we know the true reasoning of the 'why' of people.*

"We often modeled the best person doing a job, from 200 to 500 people in middle and top management, depending on the branch, and sometimes 1500 people in a given factory.

"It's most important if people can *show* us the competence. One of the most important qualities was precision. Their peak performers had different thinking styles—a least one that helped them was precision. We taught people to use their own profile to develop competence and to avoid stereotypic limitations.

"After seeing our results, our client is not using any other company for our assessment tools.

People did not how to develop competences like strategic thinking, building relationships, initiation. We taught them how develop through coaching sessions, and training using iWAM."

While these 'success stories" are fairly impressive, what seems notable is that Merelvede's personality profile is so little-known in the world of business, and practically unheard of in the general media. Perhaps it is intentional.

If there are now thousands of profiles being used in business—and the majority seem to be used for recruitment- maybe much of their effectiveness lies in their anonymity. The more potential employees know about these psychometrics, the more they can prepare themselves succeed in passing these tests. The iWAM seems a bit different, as it claims to be based on modeling performance and personality types. If one isn't a good match for a job, one could appreciate knowing sooner than later.

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