

USING ASSESSMENTS IN TALENT COACHING

Despite a lack of sound longitudinal research studies showing a clear return on investment, executive coaching continues to increase in popularity. Most coaches have favorite assessments they tend to pull out of their “tool kit” when appropriate for coaching engagements.

A recent study on coaching impact by Coach Source, which included 68 companies and 152 coaches, revealed most coaches have the greatest influence on the type of assessments they utilize in the coaching engagement. Results of the study suggested interviews were still the most popular type of assessment used by coaches and organizations supporting coaching, followed by 360-degree feedback, personality/style tools and emotional intelligence measures.

Internal and external coaches should attempt to strategically match the type of assessment they are using with the unique issues and desired outcomes associated with the talent they work with. Assessments can be conceptualized in four distinct areas — each strongly associated with specific emotional and behavioral outcomes. These four assessment domains can serve as a useful guide to coaches trying to determine the most appropriate tool to use in their engagement.

- **Abilities/Skills:** These assessments focus on providing talent feedback on critical skills and competencies such as cognitive abilities. These assessments are commonly used in assessment centers because they demonstrate competence and performance in specific areas. Measures of skills/abilities have the strongest

predictive validity with future performance. Examples include simulations, cognitive ability tests, performance role-plays and competency-based 360-degree feedback instruments.

When the goal of coaching is to enhance specific skills or performance, assessments measuring specific abilities can help facilitate behavior change and increase awareness. When an employee needs to better understand how his/her behavior impacts others, there are no better types of assessments than

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those comparing self and other perceptions in the form of multi-rater feedback measures.

- **Personality/Style:** In general, personality measures are only modest predictors of future performance across all job levels. The two “universal predictors” of personality that are most predictive of future performance are conscientiousness and emotional stability.

Style-based tools are often used to assess specific coaching areas of concern, including decision making, learning, leadership, conflict and communication style. These are often the popular “organizational marriage counseling” tools used frequently to complement other coaching processes such as interviews.

- **Interests/Values:** Although not intuitive, interests are actually very poor predictors of future

performance. However, they are strongly associated with job satisfaction, engagement and retention, so they are important to measure in coaching engagements.

- **Health/Well-Being:** Research by Envisia Learning found that 40 percent to 60 percent of all talent report very high levels of stress caused by both work and home pressures and challenges. It should not come as a surprise to hear in most coaching engagements talent share perceptions of heavy workload, work/family balance challenges and work stressors.



About the author

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Consultation regarding stress, health and lifestyle behaviors typically has been seen as the domain of physicians, psychologists and other health professionals. But helping employees deal more effectively with work and life balance, find their legacy in life, and facilitate physical and psychological well-being can be a major focus across executive, life, career or health coaching.

Assessing talent for development can involve a wide variety of approaches and tools — each with differential predictors of future success and performance. Those being asked to develop talent should carefully consider what outcomes they are trying to achieve and select the assessments that best match their goals. **TM**