

BOOK EXCERPT

Turn to science to really understand your staff

By Dave Lahey

Business applications of behavioural science

Forward-thinking companies understand the value of these tools and seek to both quantify and qualify workers' individual characteristics. Leaders of these firms employ behavioral science in the following ways:

To make hiring decisions.

The hallmark of a successful hire is a powerful fit between an employee's natural abilities and the requirements of a particular post. Other key components of the selection process include performance criteria and specific experience, training, and skills. Data gleaned from behavioural assessments can also be put to work crafting ads to attract candidates to a particular opening, and even to develop key interview questions for the next stage. When companies have set up what I call a "true north" benchmark of the key behaviours and drives needed in a role, and validated them against the current mission and sound-checked them with a data tool like Predictive Index, predictable success in hiring A players is substantially elevated.

To motivate employees.

It's a given, and a constant, that employers need to light the particular fire under each of their staffers that'll get them sparked for what's required of the position. Such attention produces a higher-performing workplace and a more contented worker. A profound understanding of what motivates employees allows managers to act as interveners, muscling into the scene as needed with spot-on training, coaching, and mentoring. When you get into the world of your employees and coach from their behavioral drives, you become a better coach.

To provide job feedback.

It's long been understood that workers respond to managers' feedback with increased productivity and higher levels of on-the-job satisfaction. Knowing that his work has been acknowledged and appreciated boosts a staffer's sense of self-esteem and security. Alternatively, insufficient communication with subordinates creates a climate of fear and mistrust. Morale plummets and a culture of negativity takes root in the place. This is particularly so in times of upheaval or change. Ultimately, it's incumbent on a manager to bridge the divide between his own comfort level with such communication, and his workers' need for the same.

To manage conflict.

Throw a group of disparate personalities into the same space and stand by for disagreement. Behavioural assessment can provide vital objective information about what festers at its root. More than that, it offers a clinically-removed means of discussing difficult situations so that no one is threatened by the conversation. By bridging the conflict with data, both parties feel respected and heard, and thus are heartened by the prospect of resolving outstanding issues. Managers, meanwhile, can focus on the human analytics behind the discord rather than the issue itself. This kind of scientific approach also sets the organization up for tackling conflict in the longer term.

To team-build.

Effective teams – whether they exist in sports organizations or C-suites – share certain characteristics. They all value communication and have honed their proficiency with it. They understand that the better teams don't all look alike, that they include players who challenge the communication process and sidestep "group think." Everyone has a handle on decision-making, and they're all as productive

as they are positive. The key to unlocking such an idyll is an appreciation for how people work together. Behavioural assessment helps to provide objective information about the motivational characteristics and work behaviours of individual group members. Their revelations help a manager to account for the gaps and maximize the strengths of each of his team members.

To manage performance.

Performance-management is often about helping an employee to do more or less of a particular aspect of his role with a view to improving overall performance. With behavioural assessment, managers understand the motivators behind current behaviours and, thus equipped with real data, can look to impact change from an authentic base. Whether delivering tough feedback to an account manager or inspiring a sales rep to push harder, managers can use the information contained in behavioural assessments to approach the issue in a style that will be best received by their audience.

To coach.

One-on-one coaching is an important way that executive team members develop the skills that will cultivate stronger relationships among them. The data revealed by behavioural assessments throws wide a person's natural conduct and workplace preferences. Layer this with what a manager has uncovered about his own behavioural requirements and communication style and produce a perfect storm of contextual data points and laser-focused coaching.

To effect structural changes.

Mergers, acquisitions, and restructurings are all chapters inside a typical company's story. Thanks to the powers of behavioural assessments, data-based decision-making becomes a new reality. With it, organizations understand the natural ways, styles, and relational tactics of both current and potential leaders. At Predictive Success, we've used behaviour data from the Predictive Index to help many companies expedite the merger process. Most mergers fail. But introducing a Predictive Index people plan provides a robust, data-driven path for putting the right people in the right roles in the new organization quickly in what employees tell us is a fair, objective process.

To retain employees.

Along with talent acquisition, talent retention endures as a priority throughout the life cycle of each employee. By understanding the peculiarities of their existing work force, managers take significant steps to keep them engaged and happy on the ship. And the payout for such diligence is big and indisputable: reduced costs associated with high turnover, lost opportunity, productivity, and morale. Employees leave their supervisors, so those supervisors looking to retain their work force must get equipped with a process that spurs its members' drives and motivations.

To plan for succession.

A critical component of every organization's long view, succession planning can benefit meaningfully from the gifts behavioural assessments have to offer. In combination with experience, interests, and education, the data revealed in a behaviour assessment can identify those individuals primed for future promotion.

*Excerpted with permission of the publisher, Wiley, from Predicting Success by David Lahey.
©Copyright 2015 by Predictive Success Corporation. All rights reserved.*

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/management/turn-to-science-to-really-understand-your-staff/article22178620/>