

**The Chartered Management Institute's Short Course Programme  
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## **He asked me to take my clothes off** *Stripped naked by the selection process*

**Philip Moon**

Shocked? So was I, particularly as my friend was telling me about a recent job interview she'd attended. 'The worst thing was' she continued 'that without demurring, I complied.' No, my friend wasn't the victim of the casting-couch approach to recruitment. Fortunately she was only speaking figuratively, relating how she felt having been subjected to a series of psychometric tests and an indepth interview with a psychologist. She explained 'It was like standing there naked; they wanted to see my all and I felt I was left without any privacy.'

My friend may have been overreacting, but her feelings do raise an important issue relating to use of psychometric techniques not only in selection but also in management and career development.

This is a rights issue - the right of the individual to privacy and the limitation of the rights of the organisation to know all there is to know about its potential or actual employees. Even though one can appreciate an employer's desire to gather information on as systematic a basis as possible, ignoring the rights and sensitivities of individuals may be counter-productive. Certainly one company I know alienated a whole tier of its management by putting it through a barrage of personality tests to determine potential and development needs.

There is a clear dilemma here. If personality affects performance, then it must be appropriate for recruiters and developers to assess that personality. As a management developer myself, I'm always keen to help people develop insights into their own personalities so as to help them perform and communicate more effectively. And, of course, even without psychometric testing, managers are always assessing and judging people's personalities without the benefit of a systematic or scientific approach and all the dangers of crude stereotyping that might involve.

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**Short Course for Management & Professional Development**

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But it is, perhaps, with the very power of 'scientific' tests that the problem lies. When 'scientific' methods are used they are given greater authority and paid greater deference than mere 'gut feeling'. Because conclusions are 'scientifically based' they must be 'right'.

Challenging scientific validity is difficult for the layman. For, while there are many schools of psychology, and psychologists may differ as to basis of personality and even whether personality really exists, few professional organisational psychologists welcome contributions to the debate from the 'outsider'. This is understandable as much of the criticism may be naive or ill-informed. It is also understandable that psychologists should wish to ensure that the tools they have devised are handled with care and subtlety and only used by those qualified to use them. This is one of the most frequent responses to criticism of psychometric testing - 'Psychometric testing is alright in the right hands - our hands'. But the layman needs to be wary of a technocratic conspiracy. The question must be asked 'Isn't psychology too important to be left in the hands of psychologists?'

Be that as it may, whatever the validity of psychometric techniques (and that is not being challenged in this article) their use by organisations emphasises the power imbalance between the employer and the employee. The organisation is able to mobilise huge resources to determine whom it will recruit, promote and develop. Individuals are at a disadvantage which may in fact work to the detriment of the organisation.

If one accepts the value of psychometric tests, then surely it makes sense for potential employees to be able to apply tests to their prospective managers. After all, performance isn't just a matter of personality; it's more often dependent on the interaction of two personalities - boss' and subordinate's. However I've yet to hear of the employing organisation which provided potential recruits with a psychological profile of the manager they might end up working for!

And my friend? Well she didn't get the job, but I was left thinking about how that particular organisation had handled the recruitment of its executive chairman - a former cabinet minister. Was he subjected to the same psychometric testing and interview by a psychologist? I wonder what he looks like in the buff!

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