



Continuing our series looking at coaching tools and techniques, *Coaching at Work* road-tests **PRISM brain-mapping**

WHAT ARE YOU LIKE?

1 The tool What is it?

PRISM brain-mapping draws on developments and findings in neuroscience and psychology. Its aim is to provide a tool that acts as a light shining down on the brain of an individual. It highlights where behavioural activity and focus is highest and lowest, allowing coaches to help clients explore their strengths and how their experience relates to the reported evidence.

Sound familiar? That's because the principles, approach and values are very much like those of some other personality and type inventories.

The fundamental difference is in how the tool encourages us to think of the blending of behaviours, where individuals display strong preferences in opposite quadrants. This is reinforced by the illustration of four colours in the brain map, suggesting the mix of a palette of colours that act to alter or soften the opposite behavioural style.

Other inventories create a dynamic or forced choice to give us the final analysis, with little room for manoeuvre if there is no clear preference. PRISM also recognises two different types of activity, or dimension, within each quadrant, giving us a 'prism' to view behaviours.

How does it work?

This tool has a widely used job benchmarking questionnaire for

organisations, which means it fits neatly into the recruitment process, serving as a final analysis of whether the job and candidate are likely to be a beneficial fit for each other.

However, the value of PRISM extends to offering coaching clients a springboard to explore their strengths, untapped potential, stressors and areas for growth through their own unique brain-map.

Clients are invited to complete an online inventory of their personal profile. They can also receive a job inventory questionnaire to consider commonalities and gaps between their working environment and behavioural strengths.

A report is sent to the practitioner to consider before taking the client through some targeted questioning to explore where their focus lies in the quadrants of: expression, stability, drive and analysis.

These quadrants are represented simply by the colours: gold, red, blue and green.

2 The administrator Using the tool

I found the tool useful for establishing rapport at the beginning of a coaching relationship by allowing my client and I to build up a simple picture of brain function and personal preferences.

It can also prove invaluable when clients are considering career choices, or improvements to their performance,

where they can gain insight into areas to develop or exploit.

My colleague uses PRISM with teams of people to identify similarities and differences through a shared language. They find that PRISM allows a level of flexibility that other instruments do not always provide. I find the language is accessible and memorable and the robust reporting profile gives it a well-researched validity.

The PRISM framework helps me to lead the client gradually from the general 'human condition', with its

The pros and cons of PRISM brain-mapping

UPSIDE

- Its methodology is based on thorough neuroscientific findings and ongoing research
- It has flexibility in interpretation that is sometimes missing with psychological instruments
- PRISM brain-mapping provides an ongoing level of support for its practitioners

DOWNSIDE

- As with many tools, the value of the approach relies on the skills of the facilitator
- The report, though robust, is a snapshot in time and may be inaccurate if the client is going through a stressful situation
- It is not a simple model and requires a qualified practitioner to question and guide through it



amazing capacity and allowable frailties, to the specifics of their own unique humanity. My experience is that this helps the clients achieve more insight into and acceptance of their less helpful behaviour patterns.

What I am mindful of is that I need to challenge any thinking around using the profile to excuse certain overdone behaviours because the client is a 'red, gold, green or blue'.

Ros Soulsby is a coach and principal director of Soulsby, specialising in leadership development and communications

3 The client The experience

My main reason for working with a coach was to explore some ideas I had for making changes in my career and business. I was keen to analyse those choices and see where I could capitalise on my strengths and assess what I might have overlooked.

When Ros suggested we use PRISM as a way to initiate our discussions I was

interested, although uncertain as to whether this would be the best route to consider my strengths.

What I found was that the tool, with different aspects of human characteristics displayed against images of the brain, was more revealing and useful than other inventories I had completed.

Having the representative colours and charts made it illustrative and tangible – the visual metaphor helping me create meaning and link clearly to my personal and professional styles.

I was able to visualise using my strengths in different work situations. Through guided questions and build-up of explanations Ros and I used these maps and my experiences to analyse my behaviours and preferences.

What I then realised is how I could have been overplaying my strength for explaining complex information with some customers. I had also sometimes been making assumptions that they would ask if they had

questions and that their silence signified understanding.

I have also been able to apply my learning to make a small, but critical adjustment to my next steps in diversifying my business. While my choice about the area I was going into made perfect sense, what I became aware of was that the environment would demand behaviours from me that were counter-intuitive and stressful. With this awareness I am able to adapt my decision to suit my style and provide the quality of service that I consider so important.

The verdict

I was surprised by how accurately the session and the report captured my characteristic behaviours in a way that was easy to understand. The approach, together with the final report, helped me to feel assured of PRISM's basis in scientific rigour.

Tony Hughes is owner of Leedryte Services, a TV and audio installation service