

How Accurate Are Personality Assessments Really? Do They Need to Be?

POSTED: May 2023

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They don't need to be absolutely accurate, but they do need to be 100% useful.

There are hundreds – if not thousands – of personality assessments, frameworks and models. There are even silly quizzes and just-for-fun tests where for some entertaining insight into your personality, you can learn more about your handshake or drawing style, dominant traits according to your favourite animals or how food and drink preferences relate to your personality.

There are also hundreds – more likely thousands – of opinions on how accurate they are and if they're worth your time and money. Many experts warn you to be sceptical and critics point out that until they're tested scientifically, they might as well be pseudoscience.

Before you make your own opinion, let's take a step back

Long before modern psychology existed as a field of study, people have tried to understand what makes us tick. Many consider Hippocrates and the theory of the four humors (a typing system) as one of the first attempts to create the science that would become psychology 2 000 years later.

Galen elaborated on Hippocrates' theory and stated that a lack of balance between the four humors affected people's way of feeling, thinking and acting. He took this further to categorise people according to their temperaments and came up with a typology of different types of people.

Fast forward centuries to 1919, when Woodworth Personal Data Sheet – the first modern personality assessment, not just a typing system – was designed to help the United States Army during World War I try and predict which soldiers might be susceptible to shell shock, a type of post-traumatic stress disorder. This formed the root of the modern personality assessment.

Tests and typologies

Today, the personality assessment market is expected to grow from around US\$7 billion to US\$16 billion by 2028, according to Research and Market's Personality Assessment Solution Market Forecast to 2028: COVID-10 Impact and Global Analysis report.

Personality assessments are tests used throughout the employee lifecycle – recruitment, screening, onboarding, training and retention – and it is estimated that around 80 million people around the world complete one every year. Personality systems or typology frameworks, such as the Enneagram, are not personality tests, and are used for personal and professional growth and development.

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Absolute accuracy

Some personality assessments are recognised as the most scientifically validated and reliable psychological models to measure personality, but no test or framework can be 100% accurate. We are highly complex, volatile, unpredictable, emotional and frequently irrational creatures, which can't be classified in absolute terms.

However, when you are using a personality tool, it is important that you are able to trust it and its results, and reliably act on the conclusion suggested by the data. Integrative Enneagram Solutions explains that best practice validity and reliability guidelines enable product development houses and questionnaire designers to have confidence in the quality of the data that their instrument produces and therefore to minimise measurement error.

Ultimately, the purpose of a personality-typing framework such as the Enneagram, is how useful the data is. It is about understanding yourself, how you see the world and how you interact with the world, but it is also about what you're going to do with the knowledge you now have.

The power of the personality assessment is how real, relevant and relatable it is to you.

The Enneagram also provides friends, family, teams and organisations a common language which enables you to enhance your understanding of how others view themselves, and the world around them (and they can do the same with you). And rather than getting frustrated by someone that different to you, you can build stronger empathy to understand what they're driven by. You want to leverage this diversity of feeling, thinking and acting in your relationships, friendships, teams and workplace because together, you can create something even better.

Looking for something 100% useful?

Get in touch right now to find out your Type and start your Everything Enneagram Journey.

The Everything Enneagram team use the iEQ9 questionnaire. Considered by many Enneagram master teachers as the most comprehensive and detailed report on the Enneagram, the iEQ9 is a quantitatively researched assessment that used advanced algorithms and predicted analysis to produce an accurate and reliable Enneagram Report and Profile for individuals, teams and couples.

Recently validated again by research psychologist, Dr Liezel Korf, who has nearly 30 years of research and assessment experience, the data indicated that the iEQ9 offers a reliable, accurate reflection by psychometric standards. These most recent results indicate that Integrative Enneagram's ongoing efforts have effectively improved the validity and reliability of the iEQ9.