



Are we using the wrong maps?

A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.

Alfred Korzybski

what should we do to go from current practice to where we need to be?

The confidence of maps

Daniel Kahneman tells the story of a group of Swiss soldiers who, on a training exercise, got lost in a blizzard in the Alps. After several days of anxiety, one of the soldiers realised he had a map of the region. The group followed the map and made their way back to safety.

At base camp they were asked by their commanding officer, "How did you find your way back?"

The soldiers explained: "We had a map." The officer checked the map and said, "You found a map all right, but it's not of the Alps, it's of the Pyrenees."

We feel more confident when we have a map, even when the map may be wrong.



This short article summarises how we use frameworks in assessment and development to outline how we need to improve our maps, and get better at reading them if we are to navigate to improved talent and organisational performance.

It's possible that there is simply no map of the Alps.

Daniel Kahneman

The fundamental problem: we're here but not getting there

On the one hand, the last two to three decades has seen the emergence of a substantial assessment and development enterprise. Psychometric profiling determines who is and isn't recruited, assessment centres shape decision making about who is and isn't on the fast track for rapid promotion, programmes of business education and executive coaching are deployed to accelerate development, and audits are conducted as part of succession planning reviews.

On the other hand, organisations remain keenly aware of the difficulties they face in employee engagement and trust, the lack of breadth and depth of professional and management capability within the talent pipeline, and significant succession exposure for key technical, professional and executive roles.

So, why do we have a gap between inputs and outputs, and a gulf between activity in assessment and development and the outcomes of capability?

Is it that organisations have raised their game and the competition is becoming more intense? This is the Red Queen argument: "we're running faster to stay in the same place"; employee expectations have risen and firms have become more demanding in their resourcing requirements.

Alternatively, we are getting it wrong. In the journey from here to there to identify and develop the kind of talent that builds future organisational capability, **the problem may lie with the maps we're using and how we use them.**

Maps are generally accepted as precise and accurate, which is true, but only to a point. A map of the entire world, without distortion of any kind, has yet to be produced, therefore it is vital that one questions where that distortion is on the map that they are using.

Review of **How To Lie With Maps**, by Mark Monmonier

The problem with our maps

Mapping is a powerful way to summarize and communicate data. Unfortunately mapping is also an excellent way to confuse them.

David Walbert

Cartography is the practice of constructing representations of our world. Everything from road systems, rivers and waterways, and underground stations, to shifts in tectonic plates, changes in climate and population patterns, and the expanse of the heavens has and is being mapped.

Maps summarise important information, indicating spatial relationships that help us make sense of the world. And in providing insights of “what goes where”, they help us get from where we are to where we want to be.

For talent management professionals, **our maps are the models** we use of individual and team performance, the processes of personal change, and the measures we deploy to identify and develop current and emerging talent.

Here we summarise the problems in assessment and development when:

- our map is **fundamentally wrong** and we become stuck
- our map is **out of date** and lacks precision
- Our map is **the wrong scale** and we lose perspective
- we **forget how to read maps** and become lost



The map is fundamentally wrong

The Flat Earth Society was founded in 1956 by Samuel Shelton who proposed that the earth is a flat disc centred at the North Pole and bounded by a 150 foot wall of ice at Antarctica. In the astronomical map of the Flat Earth Society, the sun is only 400 miles away and the stars not much further than the distance between Boston and San Francisco.

The map of the Flat Earth Society is an appeal to the ancient cosmologies that predated the Greek philosophers' early attempts at trigonometry and the astronomical observations that suggested the earth was a sphere.

Sometimes our maps are fundamentally wrong and the application of these maps can only create a distortion of realities. Like the Flat Earthers who maintain their belief system only through a complex set of conspiracy theories (e.g. the moon landings were scripted and filmed on a Hollywood set), some ways of thinking about assessment and development are simply wrong and can be defended only by appeals to faith rather than established by evidence and logic.

Faulty models of individual differences, personality and motivation and the process of personal change result in inadequate measures and interventions that are at best irrelevant, and at worst take organisations backwards rather than forwards.



To look around, the world does appear to be flat so I think it is incumbent on others to prove decisively that it isn't.

**Daniel Shenton, current
President of the Flat Earth
Society**

The map is fundamentally wrong

It is human nature to try to make sense of human nature and to find ways of explaining the causes of individual differences, and in turn, to use this knowledge to make predictions about who will or won't be more or less successful in future.

The history of assessment in the last century has been the promise of improved insight, better prediction and improved selection and promotion decision making. Great gains have been made, but some of this initial promise has failed dismally.

From the early days¹ of the projective techniques of graphology, the Rorschach ink-blot test, the Thematic Apperception Test based on quasi-psychoanalytical theory, to the more recent attempts to integrate pseudo neuroscience within personality testing, the recurring theme has been a mistaken theory that has created maps that are fundamentally flawed.

Similarly in the case of personal development² we can work to the assumption that we can be whatever what we dream, that the only barrier to the realisation of this dream are our self limiting beliefs, or accept "The Secret" and tap into cosmic forces that will "give if we only ask and believe".

If we're reverting to the equivalent of Flat Earth maps in the way we assess and develop current and emerging talent, we shouldn't be surprised if we end up hitting the "wall of ice at the Antarctic".



¹ "The Brain Watchers", Martin Gross; an account of the testing business in the period between the '40s and early '60s

² "Positively Misguided: The Myths & Mistakes of the Positive Thinking Movement" Steve Salerno; <http://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/09-04-15/>

*We can do, have, and be exactly
what we wish.*

Tony Robbins

The map is out of date

The first maps in early history were based on personal experiences of the immediate locality, and a way of recording routes to “where water, game, salt and other necessities might be found, and the locations of enemies and other dangers.” Nomadic life and excursions across deserts and mountains presumably motivated the development of more extensive mapping. Hence the appearance of maps of Mesopotamia as far back as 3800 BC.

But it was the discovery of the wheel and the ability to travel greater distances that prompted the beginnings of serious cartography. By 196 BC, the Greek scholar, Eratosthenes was charged with the task of mapping the whole world. It was astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy however who through a series of ingenious experiments, created the first world atlas: the “Geographia”.

When translated from the Greek into Latin an astonishing 1500 years later, the “Geographia” replaced the medieval maps, maps which had been drafted based, not on mathematical calculations, but on the principle that the more important a place was the bigger it appeared on the map.

A huge improvement on existing maps, the “Geographia” also incorporated a number of mistakes (Scotland was rotated by 90%) and omissions. When, for example, Columbus set sail for India using a Ptolemy map he was surprised to “bump into America”. The map said it couldn’t be there. It took until 1607 before “America” replaced “Unknown”.

Maps by their very nature are discarded when a new and better one comes along. Even their name suggests this, which means Latin for napkin.

Ray Talson



The map is out of date

The map is language, and this language is a system of assumptions.

Ray Talson



The early attempts of the cartographers were of course inaccurate. But these initial attempts to chart the world and map out countries and seas did make a practical difference for explorers and navigators. With scientific and technological progress, maps improved.

In the world of assessment and development we often navigate the complexities of individual differences and personal change by accessing maps that are now looking quite antiquated.

Examples here include the popular Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the range of DISC based instruments. It's not that they are "wrong"; they do provide an insight into personality. But assessments developed over 50 years ago have been superseded by a better "representation" of individual differences. Unsurprisingly, the navigational power of these "old maps" has been overtaken by more recent instruments¹.

In the world of management development, the Gallup perspective of "play to your strengths", for example, provides a useful counter-point to the conventional strategy for development. But it is not as Marcus Buckingham suggests "the one thing you need to know". As a map of personal change² it is already dated and a reliance on this map - identify and deploy your innate talents - lacks precision in designing the kind of development interventions that will help individuals face the challenges of the 21st century.

¹ A comparison of Big Five against other assessment models;
<http://www.usefulcharts.com/psychology/big-five-mbti-eysenck.html>

² "Did our strengths lead us to this point of weakness" Randall White, [Business Leadership Review, 2009](#)

The map is the wrong scale

A 1:25,000 map is ideal for walking, one of 1:190,000 works if we're driving, but if we want to see the whole world, a map scaled at 1:24,000,000 is the better option.

We lose perspective when we choose the wrong scale of map for our purpose.

The “big five” framework of personality provides an economical large scale map of individual differences, with well established correlations with an array of work and life outcomes¹.

But as Dan McAdams² points out these five factors “operate at such a general and abstract level of analysis they may not always be useful in the prediction of specific behaviours”. Here he argues that the Big Five gives us a first read on the “psychology of a stranger” and a guide to our future interactions with the person. But as we get to know that individual we need to shift our perspective to gain a better understanding of the “texture” of the individual's life in a way that goes beyond any mapping of five dimensions.

Here it helps if we move to a different scale of map and one that provides details of the “contours” of the individual; their past and the life experiences they have and haven't faced, the present and the current challenges they face, and the individual's fears and hopes for the future.



The Big Five makes me think of being in a spaceship, looking down at the planet below and seeing five continents. That's useful to know, but once you're back on earth it won't help you find your way home.

Annie Murphy Paul

¹ See for example, Ozer D J & Benet-Martinez V (2006), “Personality and the prediction of consequential outcomes”, Annual Review of Psychology, 57

² “The Person” Dan McAdams

The map is the wrong scale

In the review of organisational talent, we can rely on an overall evaluation of “potential”. We know what this means; it’s a summary of future contribution, or more typically a statement of “good egg-ness”.

We conduct that annual exercise in which we plot our people against the nine box grid of performance vs. potential. And a few months later we may wonder why nothing much has changed¹.

“Potential” is too big a scale of map to help us review the future contribution of our people. An evaluation of potential may filter those individuals who require organisational attention, but it doesn’t help us pinpoint the specifics that will inform the career development activity that makes a difference.

The “potential” word lacks the granularity to answer: potential for what (presumably not anything or everything), or what issue is helping or hindering current performance or readiness to progress?

Here we need a smaller scale gap to identify the specific career patterns that connect individual aspiration with experience and capability.

If you use a model that is the wrong scale, it will be very hard to make good decisions.

Tim Kastle



¹ Seven Battle Grounds to Fight and Win A New Talent War
<http://www.azureconsulting.com/files/1/30518455/TalentManagement-7BattleGrounds.pdf>

We've forgotten how to read maps



A woman on the verge of death was rescued after being stranded for nearly two months on the muddy back roads of a remote area of Nevada in the United States. Her husband is still missing. The “baffling part of the story: the couple had a GPS device. And they were following its directions when they got lost.”

Bill Borrie, a wilderness researcher at the University of Montana, said, “Armed with a GPS many people ignore ridgelines, stream routes and landscape contours. The scary thing is that people don’t even realise they have become so reliant. Anything that takes you away from paying attention to nature and instead has you paying attention to a gadget is going to get in the way of seeing, noticing and learning from nature. You wonder how people can stop thinking, but they do.”

Satellite navigation technology has transformed our ability to go from A to Z. But it has also made it easier to stop thinking about geographical realities.

You know when people have a Sat Nav on as they're not looking at anything; they've no idea where they've gone or where they are going.

Hugh Dennis

We've forgotten how to read maps

There is a real danger that in the world of on line technology, complex algorithms, expert systems and 50 page reports that “cut and slice” data from the permutations of analysis, we forget the realities of human nature, processes and constraints of personal change and development, and the dynamics of individual, team and organisational performance.

The sophistication of the output of the assessment report becomes our reality, and we forget the uncertainties and complexities of the input.

We forget:

- the limited predictive power of assessment. There are genuine gains to be made in selection, but they don't approach the over hyped claims of many assessment map makers
- the realities of personal change and the realities of “different strokes for different folks”
- there are no “no brainer” solutions in talent management and career development. The design and implementation of any effective intervention hinges on an insight into context and timing
- humility about our maps is a wiser strategy than confidence in any one map to guide us through the assessment and development challenges we face

*Use lots and lots of maps.
Use as many maps and as
many different kinds of
maps as you possibly can.*

David Walbert



Some alternative maps

4 C Leadership

Credibility, Capability, Character and Career Management

The image shows the cover and several content pages of a 'Four C Leadership 360° Feedback Report'. The cover features the AM Azure logo and the title. The content pages include a 'Leadership Character, Integrity' section with a 'Build for Success' bar chart, a 'Role Modelling Ethical Standards' section with a 'Building Trust' bar chart, and a 'Building Trust' section with a 'Leadership Trust' bar chart. Each chart compares the individual's performance against others and includes a 'Build for Success' section with a 'Building Trust' bar chart.

Business Challenges

8 patterns of strategic decision making

The image shows the cover and content pages of a 'Business Challenges Development Planning for' report. The cover features the AM Azure logo, a photo of tomatoes, and the title. The content page shows an 'Overall Profiles: Effectiveness Profile' radar chart with eight axes: Strategic Thinking, Innovation, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Teamwork, Communication, Influence, and Resilience. Below the chart are three bullet points: 'Look at the top profile, what is it a sign of?', 'What is the strength and depth of your experience?', and 'What is a sign of a high performer?'. The chart shows a yellow line representing the individual's profile, with a blue line representing the target profile.

Career Futures

6 tracks for career development

The image shows the cover and content pages of a 'Career Futures Personal Report for' report. The cover features the AM Azure logo, a photo of bread, and the title. The content page shows an 'Overall Summary' section with six tracks: 'Focus on Technical Excellence', 'Building Professional Mastery', 'Developing as an Organisational Problem Solver', 'Moving to Business Leadership', 'Maintaining Creative Options', and 'Planning an Early Exit'. Each track has a progress bar and a brief description of the track's focus.

Career Tactics

12 tactics for career progression

The image shows the cover and content pages of a 'Career Tactics Personal Report for' report. The cover features the AM Azure logo, a photo of beakers, and the title. The content page shows a 'Career Tactics: Overall Profile' section with 12 tactics: 'Building a Reputation', 'Preparing a Tailored Image', 'Establishing Thought Leadership', 'Managing Complex Relationships', 'Building Strong Business Connections', 'Opening Personal Energy', 'Focus on Practice', 'Continued Development', 'Managing Organizational Politics', 'Managing Complex Projects', 'Building the Art of Story', 'Strategic Self-Management', 'Playing to Strengths', 'Managing Your Executive', and 'Maintaining Existing Political'. Each tactic has a progress bar and a brief description of the tactic's focus.

About Us

AM Azure Consulting Ltd works with a broad portfolio of clients in the design and implementation of on line services in recruitment and selection; management assessment, development and career management; on line leadership tool kits, 360° feedback, performance management; and talent and succession management.

If you are interested in accessing our maps for assessment and development, or integrating customised versions within your talent management and career development processes, contact us:

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