



the psychology of career tactics:

the drivers of success in the real world

Key Words

Career management - tactics – effectiveness - progression - psychology - personality - cognitive - motivational - CPP -HBDI - MBTI - Emotional Intelligence

“Analysing what you haven't got as well as what you have is a necessary ingredient of a career.”

Orison Swett Marden

John McEnroe's Nightmare

John McEnroe, ranked second best tennis player in the world is playing the Masters in New York, in front of his loyal fans. And he's losing. And he's losing to "a guy he didn't like and whose game he despised." He's losing to Brad Gilbert¹.

On a changeover, McEnroe shouts: "Gilbert, you don't deserve to be on the same court with me! You are the worst. The _____ worst!"

McEnroe lost the game to Gilbert and went on to retire. A tennis genius, McEnroe's peers believed he could have gone to win the Grand Slam.

So, how did Brad Gilbert, a player described as having "No forehand. No backhand. No volley. A weak serve" win?

"I've used whatever talents and skills I do have in a calculated way that maximises their potential; that gives me my best chance to win. It's why I've been able to beat players who are "better" than me. Make the most of what you've got."

Brad Gilbert



Success as defensive tactics:

- a recognition of personal limitations
- a shrewdness into the competition and their strengths and shortcomings
- working to a game plan that manages around personal limitations and minimises the strengths of rivals

¹ From "Winning Ugly" Brad Gilbert & Steve Jamison

Andrew Carnegie's Libraries

Andrew Carnegie was born in 1835 into an impoverished family. Before his retirement, he had sold his steel fortune for \$480 million dollars (the equivalent in today's money of \$120 billion dollars!).

Carnegie devoted the rest of his life to a series of philanthropic activities, not least the funding of over 3,000 libraries worldwide.

A career that began as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory, then a messenger in a telegraph office, Carnegie moved into the railroad and steel industries, and then through a series of bold moves in new ventures and acquisitions, became a major industrialist in corporate USA in the 1890s.

Intelligence and a ferocious ambition no doubt helped. But there was no shortage of business rivals as talented and motivated. What made Carnegie succeed?

"Carnegie's genius was an ability to foresee how things were going to change. Once he saw something was of potential benefit he was willing to invest enormously in it."



Success as proactive tactics:

- an awareness of shifting trends and a recognition of the possibilities
- the willingness to take personal risks in taking on new challenges
- a commitment to learning, a passion for education and ongoing self improvement and reinvention

Background

Career Tactics was developed in 2002 to complement competency-based approaches to assessment, talent management and leadership development. Its focus: to measure those self management, organisational and political stratagems that help individuals advance in the world of career realities.

Career Tactics grew out of our realisation in facilitating succession reviews that talented individuals were often being overlooked by organisations. Highly capable individuals who were making a significant impact on organisational performance, were being out-gunned by their more savvy peers - those individuals with a shrewd sense of how life is, and how organisations operate.

Since its launch Career Tactics has been widely used across a range of sectors and applications, most notably in high potential programmes and executive coaching.

Career Tactics is not the endorsement of “The Way of the Rat” and other exercises in the expanding market of techniques in cynical exploitation. Career Tactics represent that perspective to conduct a mature debate with your professionals and managers about life “as is” and how to operate with talent and character in surviving and thriving in the real world.

Initial findings were highly positive:

- **speed of progression:** individuals deploying Career Tactics (and specific tactics in particular) reach higher organisational levels and attain higher salaries than their age cohort peers.
- **management impact and performance appraisal:** tactics are associated with more favourable evaluations of effectiveness by line managers, peers and team members (although the pattern shifts across the different stakeholder groups; the Career Tactics endorsed by line managers are different to those endorsed by peers and team members).
- **meaningful biodemographic differences:** differences emerge by age and gender in consistent ways.
- **career satisfaction:** Career Tactics, contrary to the popular myth of the self-seeking but unhappy machiavellian, support positive attitudes towards careers.

The Career Tactics assessment

Career Tactics is a forced-choice questionnaire incorporating 48 trios of statements. Respondents are asked to identify the statement that has helped most and least in their career.

The results generate a profile against the twelve dimensions of the Career Tactics framework as well as a detailed analysis of the opportunities and risks against different career “pressure points”.¹

The Career Tactics Framework



¹ For sample reports of Career Tactics and details of access and costs, go to: www.amazureconsulting.com

Career Tactics and the underlying psychology

Career Tactics “work”. They:

- are associated with stakeholder perceptions of current effectiveness
- improve predictive power in the evaluation of potential and progression
- make for a more fulfilling and enjoyable career

Why?

This analysis looks at the psychological profile of each tactic by exploring the correlates with other measures of cognitive, personality, emotional aptitude and operating style. The results provide an understanding of each tactic and how they work¹.

¹ Note the correlational analysis identifies trends over a management/professional population. The pattern therefore is indicative of general themes rather than providing an explanation of individual results.

Career Tactics and psychometric assessments

Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)



This is a computer based based test, loosely based on the work of Eliot Jacques, to assess different thinking processes and styles. Although there are no time limits, the assessment can take on average 90 minutes to three hours. Using simulation exercises, individuals are evaluated on their “ability to explore, link, structure, transform, learn and clarify information”. Fourteen cognitive capabilities are identified in a move away from the concept of IQ. However, with the exception of one scale, the 14 dimensions are highly inter-correlated, indicating a general factor of cognitive aptitude is probably being measured.

Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI)



HERRMANN
INTERNATIONAL

A questionnaire to explore thinking preferences based on Sperry’s theory of left and right brain functionality. A largely forced choice instrument based on 120 questions, the HBDI identifies four dominant styles:

- Quadrant A (analytical and facts based thinking)
- Quadrant B (sequential and structured thinking)
- Quadrant C (interpersonal and emotional thinking)
- Quadrant D (imaginative and conceptual thinking)

The analysis also generates scores on:

- Cerebral and Limbic (organisation, control and emotions) thinking
- Left (analysis) and Right Brain (holistic) Thinking

Career Tactics and psychometric assessment

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)



The MBTI is a popular personality instrument, used in personal and team development, based on Jung's theory of psychological types, generating the familiar four letter type (e.g. ENTJ) based on an analysis of the themes of:

- Extraversion-Introversion
- Sensing-iNtuition
- Thinking-Feeling
- Judging-Perceiving.

BarOn EQ – I



This is one of the first measures of Emotional Intelligence. The 125 item inventory examines emotional and social strengths and weakness. As well as generating an overall EQ score, it identifies fifteen dimensions grouped within composite sub scales:

Intrapersonal

- Self Regard
- Self Awareness
- Assertiveness
- Independence
- Self Actualisation

Stress Management

- Stress Tolerance
- Impulse Control

Adaptability

- Reality Testing
- Flexibility
- Problem Solving

Interpersonal

- Empathy
- Social Responsibility
- Interpersonal Relationships

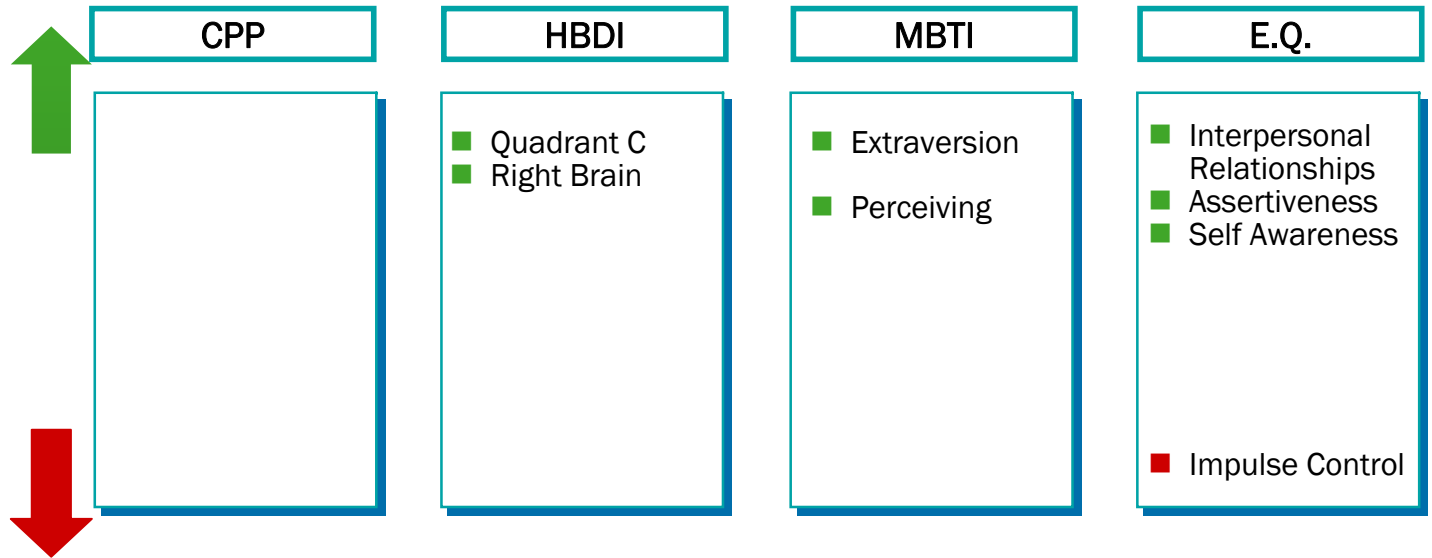
General Mood

- Optimism
- Happiness

Projecting Confidence

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Confidence inspires greater confidence. Often confidence is taken at face value. Self belief indicates capability and credibility. And the failure to project confidence and the suggestion of doubt - no matter underlying talents and skills - creates questions about effectiveness and contribution.



“The world more often rewards the appearances of merit than merit itself.”

Duc de la Rochefoucauld

Comments:

This tactic, predictably, seems to come easier to outgoing extraverts who enjoy social interaction. Projecting Confidence is not a tactic that is linked to intellectual aptitude, but it is connected to a thinking style that values interpersonal relationships.

To work as a tactic, Projecting Confidence needs to engage others and that requires a degree of emotional intelligence: self awareness to recognise the impact on others and assertiveness to make personal views known. It also seems to involve a degree of expressiveness and flexibility to make a sustained impact.

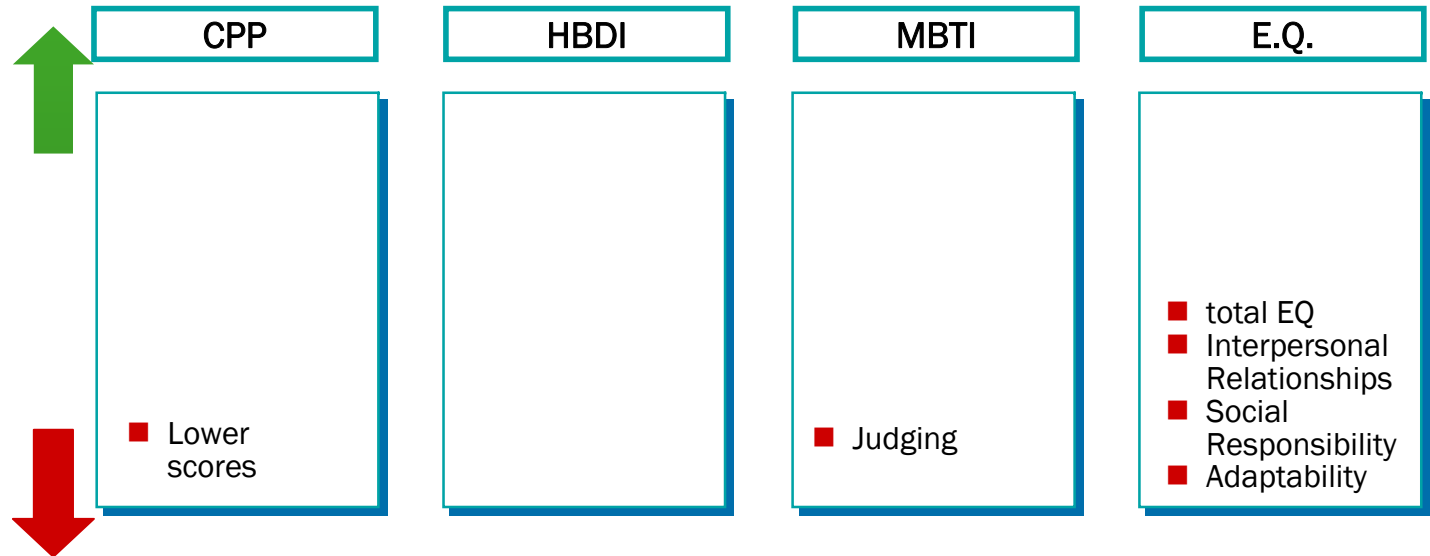
Gravitating Towards Success

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

The power of association is significant. Failure can be awkward and embarrassing for organisations and individuals to discuss and address. Success is appreciated and valued; it reassures others of a credible track record that can be expected to achieve more in future. A reputation for success also commands greater organisational attention.

“Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success.”

Christopher Lasch



Comments:

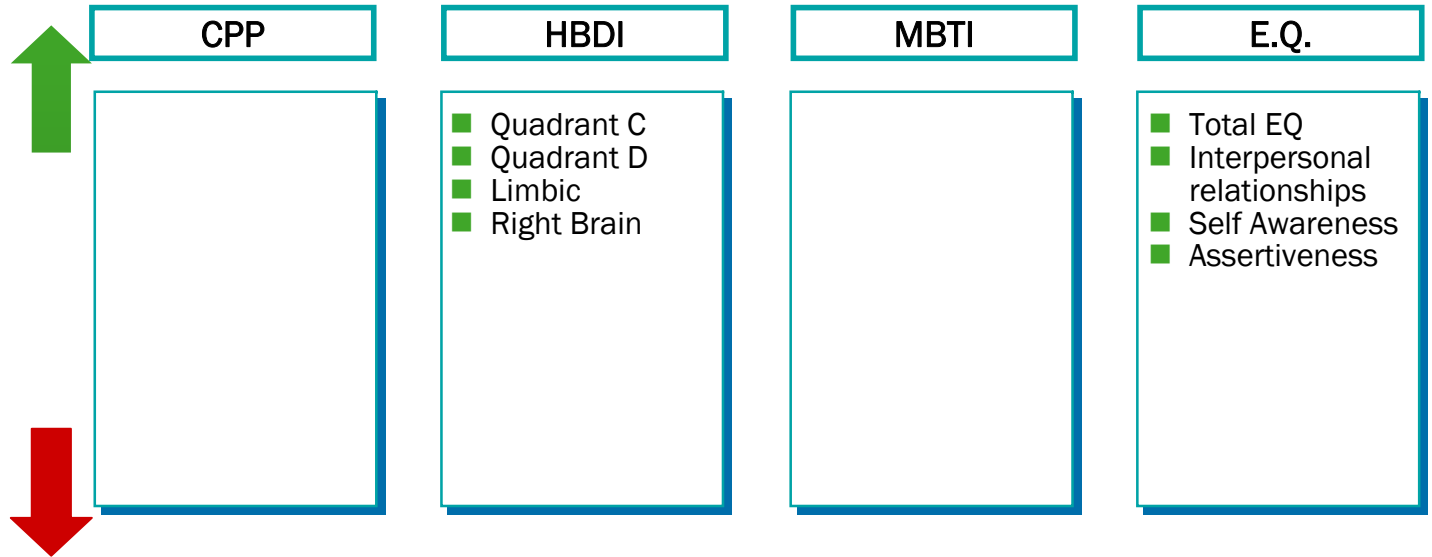
From this psychological profile, Gravitating Towards Success appears to operate as a mechanism to protect current achievement rather than adapt to push for further advancement. Individuals deploying this tactic tend to be lower on cognitive aptitude and overall EQ. This tactic is also associated with a lower concern for others and less flexibility.

Gravitating Towards Success seems to be a tactic that emerges as a possible response to intellectual and emotional shortcomings. This tactic looks to find a comfortable niche based on what is currently working now. A sensible game-plan in the short-term to maintain a positive reputation, it possesses risks for the longer-term.

Balancing Stakeholder Groups

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

We operate within a complex network of interpersonal relationships and we need to manage the expectations of different work groups. But there is a need to assert personal interests and resolve any disagreements. Failing to manage these different expectations will constrain effectiveness and lessen impact.



“It is important to build alliances and networks of friendship by getting along. People who are able to develop great power often seem to have the knack of changing their behaviour according to the needs of the occasion.”

J Pfeffer

Comments:

Balancing Stakeholder Groups is not linked to cognitive aptitude. But it is connected to a thinking style that is more interpersonally orientated and open minded.

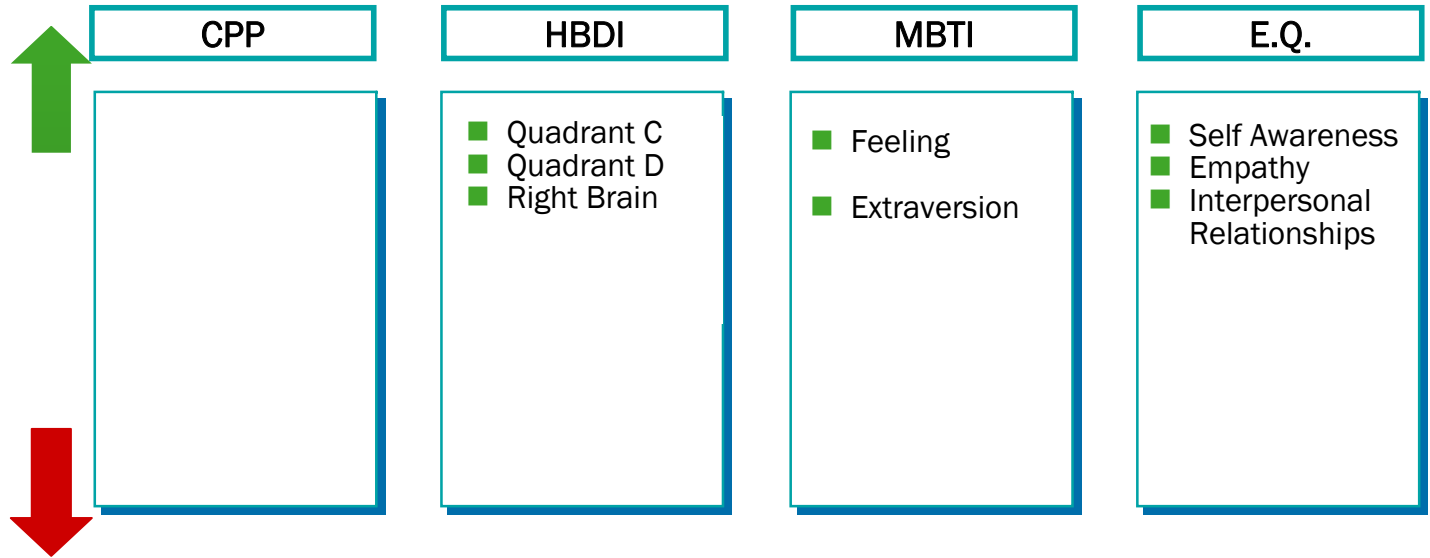
There is a significant underpinning of emotional intelligence. Unsurprisingly the theme of interpersonal relationships emerges. But it also involves self awareness (an alertness to personal impact on others) and assertiveness (ensuring that personal interests are advanced).

The effective deployment of Balancing Stakeholder Groups requires an openness to others and their needs and to avoid being exploited, an element of forcefulness to negotiate sensible compromises.

Building Broad Based Commitment

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Advancing an agenda is easier when in tune with the informal communication flow of the organisation and connected to different networks. This keeps us in touch with those developments likely to impact on our position. Positive relationships - across different levels and functions - also provide the opportunity to gain the loyalty of those whose career paths we may encounter in future.



Comments:

Building Broad Based Commitment as a tactic doesn't depend on cognitive aptitude. But it is associated with a more open minded and interpersonally aware thinking style. This is reinforced in the MBTI and EQ assessment. An empathic feeling towards others makes the deployment of this tactic much easier. Cultivating positive relationships through interpersonal warmth is important in making this tactic work.

The risk for this tactic is that in responding to and accommodating others' needs, personal interests are sacrificed.

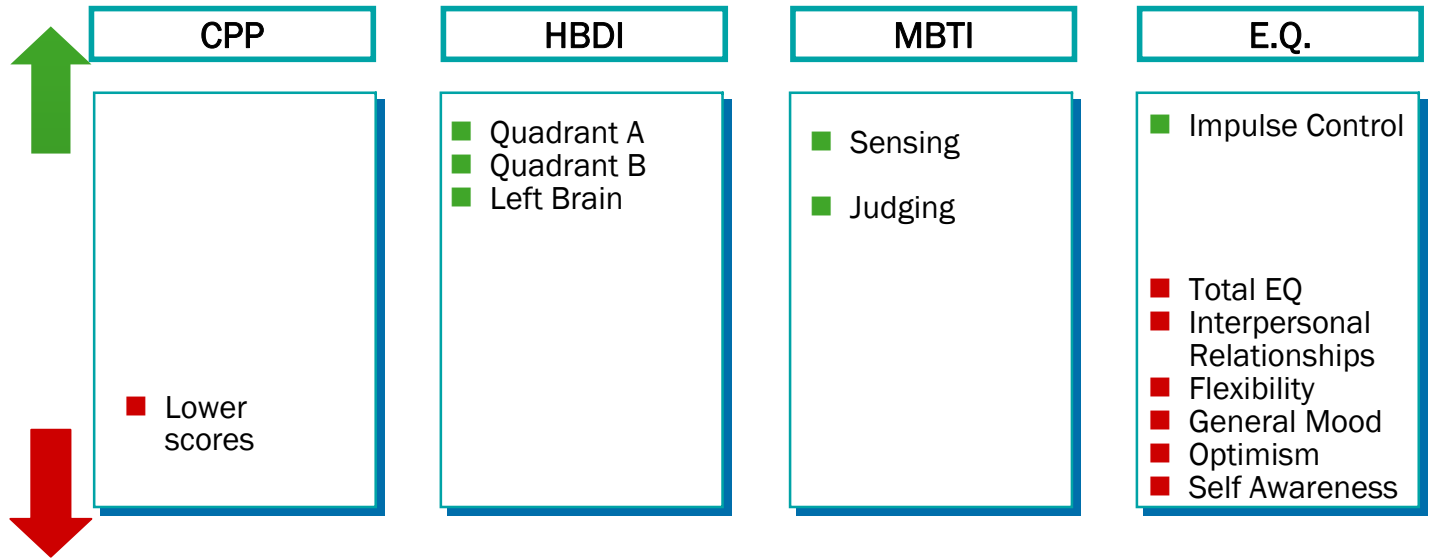
"A prince can never secure himself against a disaffected people, their number being too great."

Niccolo Machiavelli

Focus on Priorities

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Not everything can be achieved at once. The 80/20 law applies: 80% of our outcomes will be attained by 20% of our efforts. Being ruthless in directing our time and energy towards a few key issues will have much more impact than attempting to take on the full range of potential challenges within a role.



"Beware of dissipating your powers; strive constantly to concentrate."

Goethe

Comments:

This is a tactic associated with an analytical and sequential thinking style and an operating approach based on facts and order. It is also linked to lower cognitive aptitude and lower emotional intelligence. A degree of pessimism also seems to underpin Focus on Priorities.

Focus on Priorities appears to be a tactical response to limited personal resources - cognitive and emotional, and a motivation to avoid future threats. Faced with the volume and complexity of work demands this tactic helps to make the organisational world more manageable. The risk of course lies in getting priorities wrong and in missing opportunities that are "off the radar screen".

Controlled Delegation

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Contribution ultimately depends not on our individual efforts but our effectiveness in coordinating work activity with others. Knowing which issues require our personal attention and which should be passed on to others is a critical activity in maximising our value to the organisation. Effective delegation not only frees up time for the key decisions, it enables our work colleagues to develop greater skills to take on additional responsibility and improve our productivity."



CPP

■ Lower scores

HBDI

- Quadrant A
- Left Brain

MBTI

- Judgement
- Sensing

E.Q.

- .Assertiveness

"The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what they want done, and self restraint enough to keep from meddling while they do it."

Theodore Roosevelt

Comments:
 A tactic of analytical fact based thinking that wants to establish structure and order. For Controlled Delegation, assertiveness and the desire to take control, seem to win out over that openness that encourages fluid and creative thinking. This tactic seems to be an effective response for those forceful individuals who may be more constrained in their intellectual power.

Controlled Delegation allows individuals to maintain control in planning and decision making. But it may also appear inflexible in responding to the unexpected.

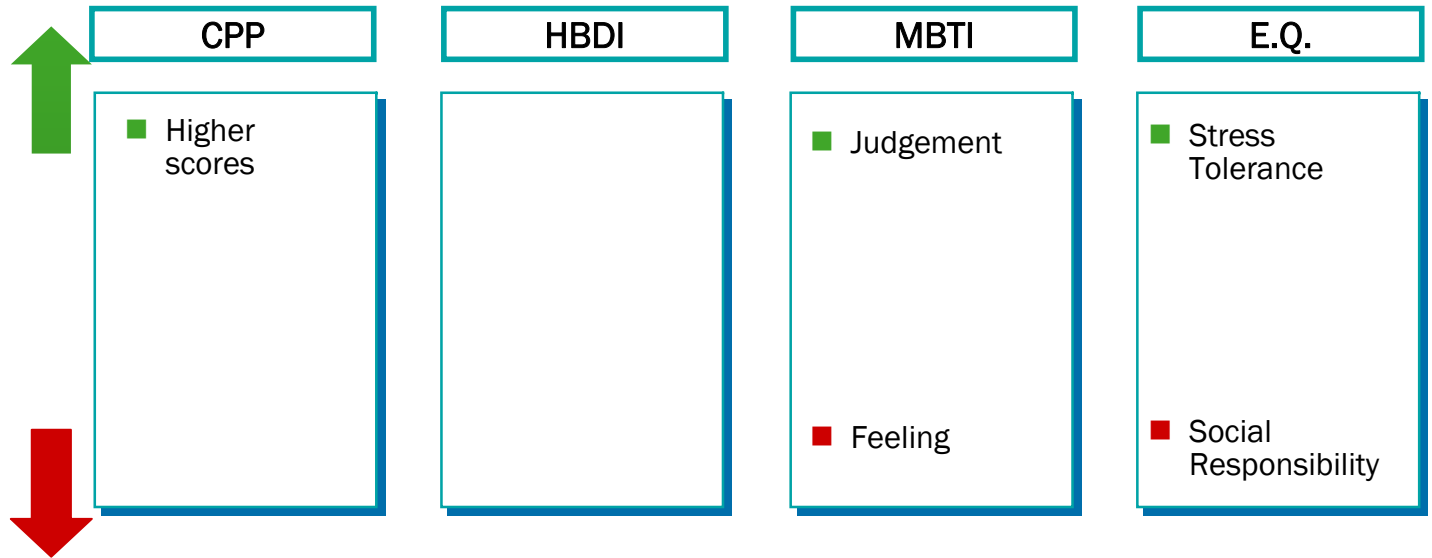
Managing Corporate Politics

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

The realities of organisational life are based on the dynamics of power and the battle for corporate resource. Within this perspective, talent, effectiveness and contribution can be less significant in career advancement than one's positioning within the political network. An insight into the political process and the knowledge when to engage and when to disengage opens up options to strengthen our position.

"Power, the basic energy to initiate action translating intention into reality, the quality without which leaders cannot lead."

Bennis & Nanus



Comments:

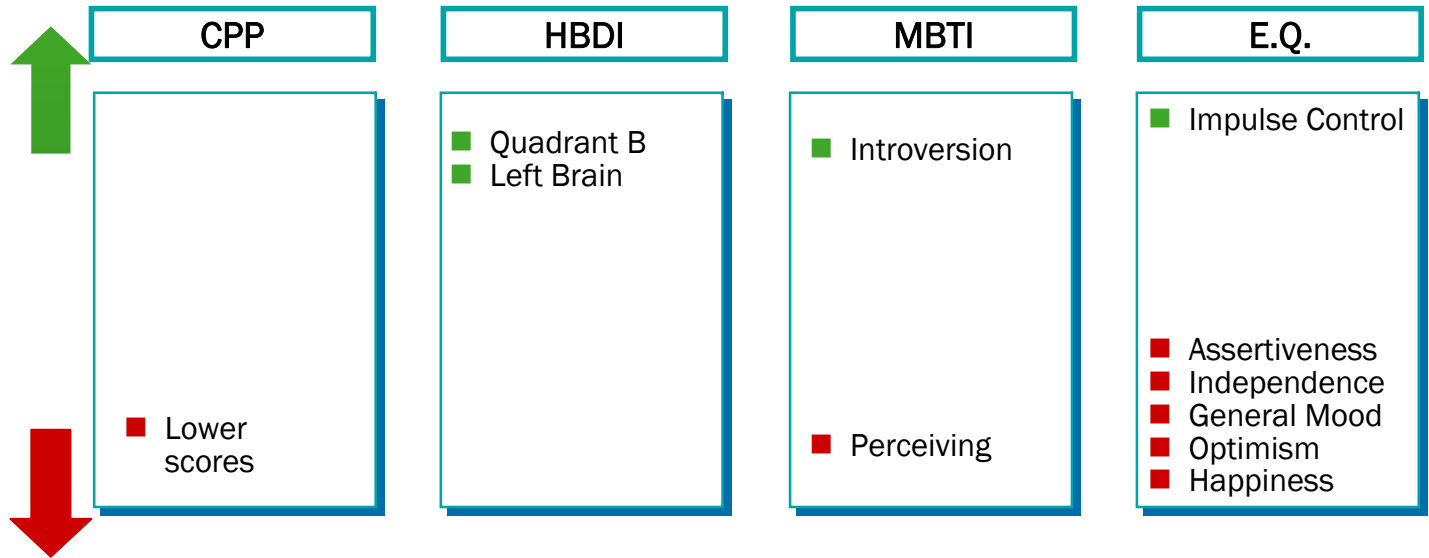
Managing Corporate Politics is associated with higher cognitive aptitude and with the EQ theme of Stress Tolerance; a combination of insight and shrewdness under pressure. Not a bad combination in coping with the realities of organisational life. But this is a tactic that may appear to others as somewhat cool, calculating and self centred, being concerned more about advancing personal interests than responding to others' concerns.

A potentially double edged sword. At best, intelligence and coolness maintains a distance to read events objectively and work out how best to overcome organisational resistance in getting things done. At worst, Managing Corporate Politics is a tactic that is perceived as a tough minded self seeking operating style.

Mastering the Art of Timing

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

There are moments when we should “push forward” and advance our ideas and plans. There are also times to hold back and await developments before committing ourselves to a course of action. Knowing when to move quickly and when to delay is critical in managing the “art of the possible” within the realities of organisational life.



“I am aware that success is more than a good idea. It is timing too.”

Anita Roddick

Comments:

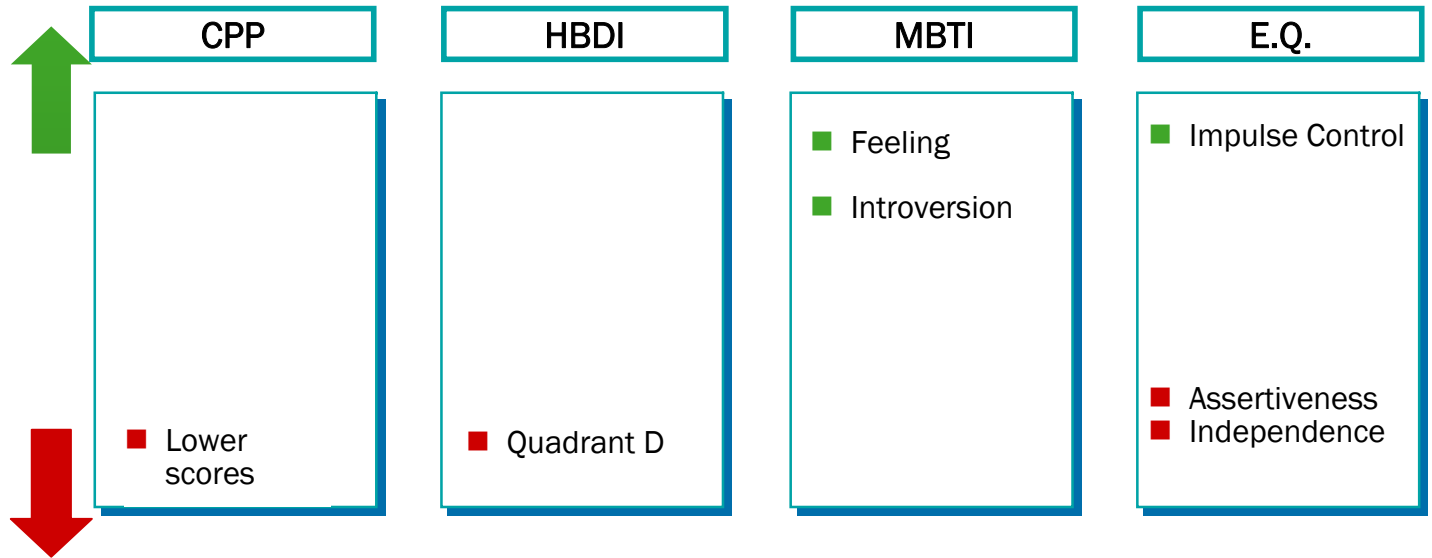
Mastering the Art of Timing is associated with lower cognitive aptitude, a sequential thinking style and lower emotional intelligence (with the exception of Impulse Control). This tactic may manifest itself in a controlling work style that others find overly cautious. Certainly the lack of assertiveness and optimism may indicate a somewhat hesitant outlook.

At its best this tactic is able to stand back and think systematically about the issues and pinpoint any potential risks and hazards. At worst, Mastering the Art of Timing lacks the cutting edge to exploit opportunities quickly and set an agenda for change.

Playing to Strengths

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Our fundamental talents allow us to acquire new skills, demonstrate specific competencies and with experience, excel and make a substantial organisational impact. Whilst major flaws need to be acknowledged and overcome, working on our limitations will never make the gains that exploiting our strengths will.



"Focus on each person's strengths and manage around weaknesses. Don't try to fix the weaknesses. Don't try to perfect the person."

Buckingham & Coffman

Comments:

Playing to Strengths is associated with a lower imaginative thinking style, lower independence and assertiveness, but higher impulse control.

Playing to Strengths as the Gallup research has demonstrated is a tactic with advantages. But as this pattern indicates, only for some. Playing to Strengths works as a tactic in getting "more from less", in optimising limited personal assets. For those with greater cognitive power, imagination and assertiveness, this tactic may miss opportunities to explore the range of work and career possibilities.

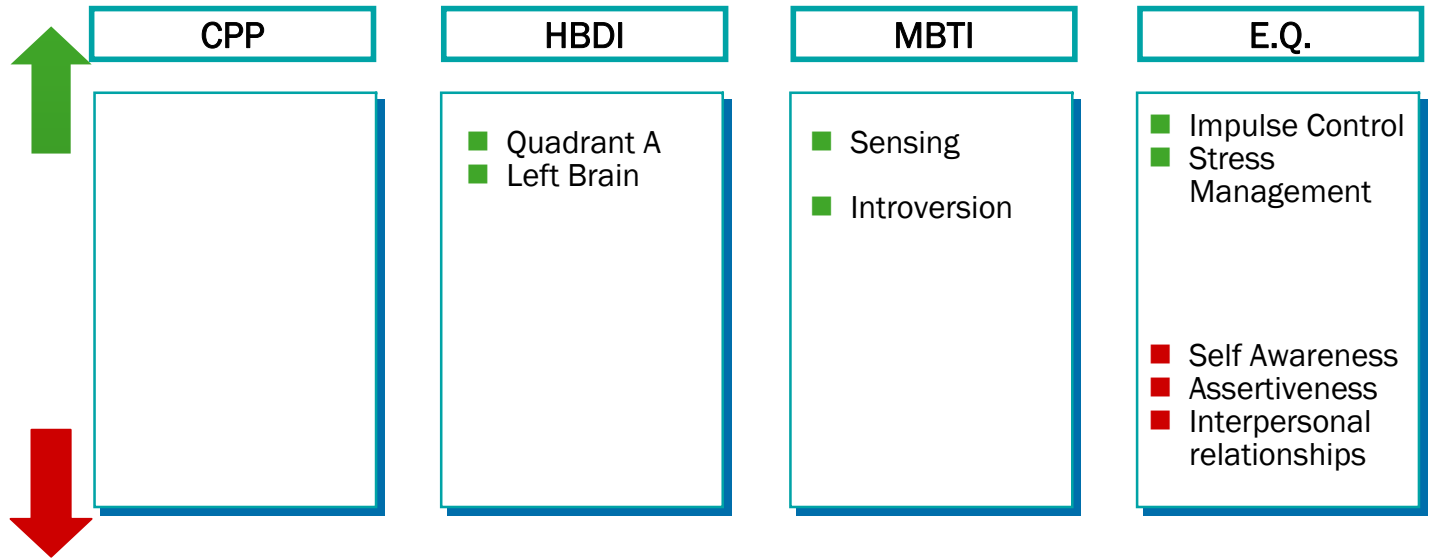
Managing Ego Emotions

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Organisational life has its ups and downs, its trials and tribulations. When emotions run high, a cool head which keeps a sense of proportion and displays “grace under pressure” is a valued asset. Rising above petty rivalries or dealing with crises in a mature manner reassures others that we can be trusted to rise to a challenge and take on greater responsibility.

“The person who gets angry at the right things and with the right people and in the right way and at the right time and for the right length of time is commended.”

Aristotle



Comments:

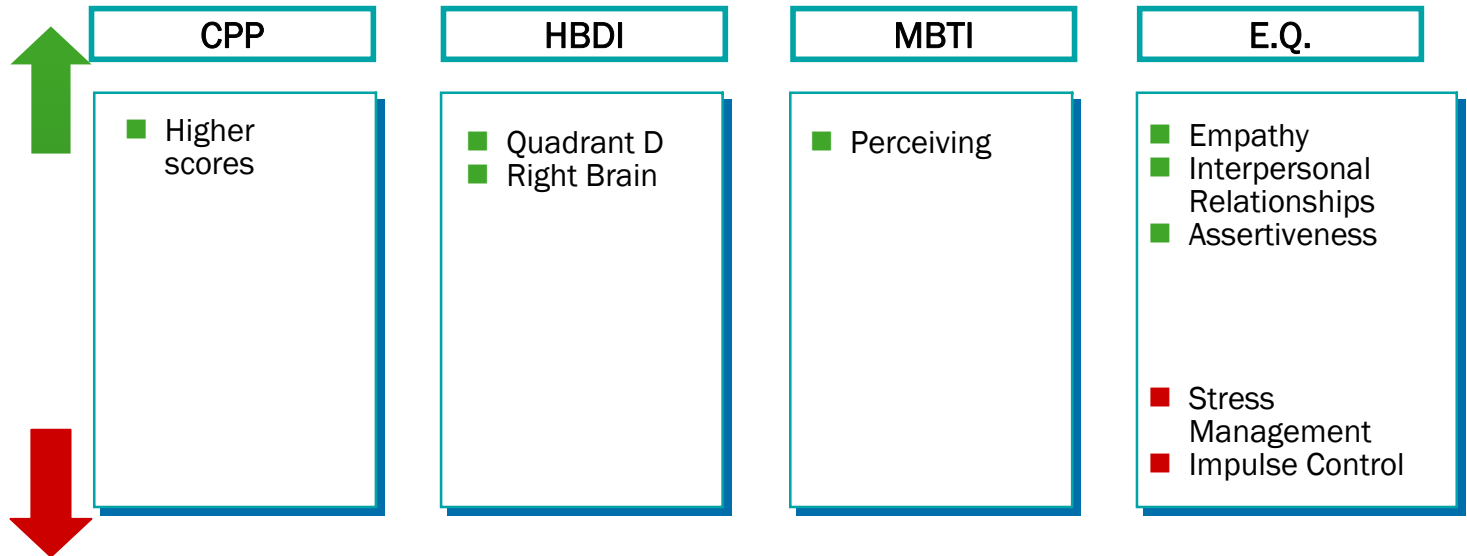
The pattern of correlations with EQ suggests a profile of emotional control and restraint rather than the open expression of feelings. It is also associated with a more reserved interpersonal style. Managing Ego Emotions as a tactic appears to work best in establishing and maintaining order in stressful situations; a kind of defensive response to problems that looks to establish calm.

The risk for this tactic seems to lie in its lack of proactively to draw on emotional intelligence to build positive working relationships.

Flexible Curiosity

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Business life evolves and moves on. Current skill sets may become out-dated and redundant during major shifts in technology, working practices, etc. An alertness to emerging trends and developments will keep us aware of our “employability” and “marketability”. It will also create a broader and more varied set of life experiences to draw upon in establishing ourselves as credible players.



Comments:

This tactic is associated with greater cognitive power and the imaginative thinking style of Quadrant D of the HBDI. Flexible Curiosity has a complex EQ profile, correlating positively with empathy and assertiveness, but negatively with stress management and impulse control.

Flexible Curiosity seems to possess an intellectual and emotional maturity that is open and alert to new thinking and ideas. But it also appears motivated by an element of emotional tension. Maybe a fear of boredom is the trigger. In any event this tactic emerges as a powerful tactic in managing personal and organisational change, albeit one that may involve a degree of emotional pressure.

“Go around asking a lot of damfool questions and taking chances. Only through curiosity can we discover opportunities and only by gambling can we take advantage of them.”

Clarence Birdseye

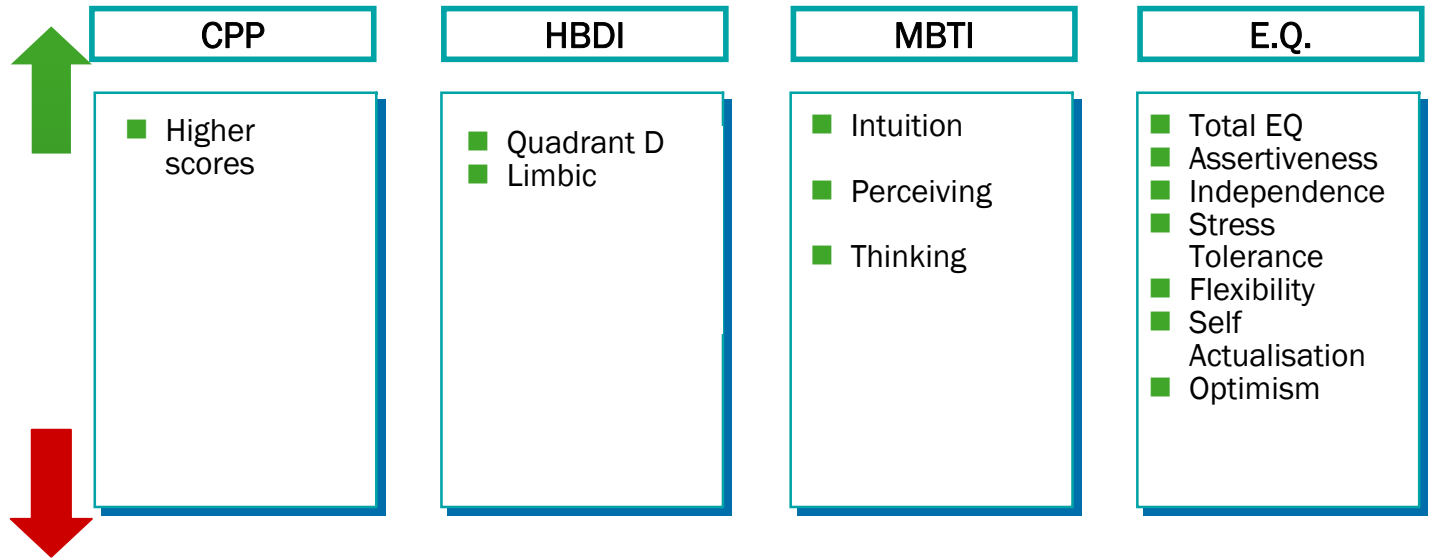
Using New Challenges to Speed Development

WHY THIS TACTIC MATTERS

Life is unpredictable and throws up unexpected problems. For some, these represent risks to be avoided; for others, these are opportunities to be exploited. Although these challenges can be uncomfortable, with the potential to expose any shortcomings, they do provide momentum to acquire new skills and knowledge.

“Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out”

Bruce Levin



Comments:

Using New Challenges to Speed Development is linked to greater cognitive power, an imaginative thinking style and emotional intelligence. This is a tactic that can draw on an array of personal resources to keep advancing into new areas..

A positive outlook, combined with cognitive capability, and interpersonal effectiveness, has the confidence to explore novel challenges and to utilise working relationships to support the learning process.

Key themes and implications

Career Tactics make a difference - in how stakeholders perceive current effectiveness and how organisations evaluate potential and progression. This analysis indicates why:

Some tactics are associated with greater **cognitive power**, for others, intellectual capability makes little difference.

Thinking style is linked to most tactics, sometimes Left Brain thinking is important, for others, Right Brain thinking is more relevant.

Different **personality** patterns in the MBTI emerge. For some Extraversion features; for others, Judging, and so on.

Emotional intelligence is important to most tactics, but specific facets of EQ are more or less relevant to different tactics.

However, at the risk of gross simplification, there are two overarching tactical themes:

Defensive tactics. These include Gravitating Towards Success, Focus on Priorities, Controlled Delegation, Mastering the Art of Timing, Playing to Strengths and Managing Ego Emotions.

Defensive tactics minimise the risks and hazards of personal shortcomings. Limitations in intellectual power or emotional intelligence can either be exposed with knock on implications for current effectiveness of future progression, or tactics can be deployed to compensate.

Proactive tactics. These include: Projecting Confidence, Balancing Stakeholder Groups, Building Broad Based Commitment, Managing Corporate Politics, Flexible Curiosity and Using New Challenges to Speed Development.

Proactive tactics optimise personal assets. The “cream does not always rise to the top” and “results do not speak for themselves”. Career Tactics ensure that personal qualities are utilised to make maximum impact, within current roles as well as for longer-term progression.

Implications

Knowing how Career Tactics operate provides a better understanding of individuals and how they can maximise current effectiveness and plan for their future progression:

Career workshops and development centres

Which tactical assets and liabilities are highlighted?
How does this stack up against other assessment data and with individual aspirations? Which tactics can be deployed now? Which could be developed relatively easily in future? And which tactics may be more difficult to draw on?

Talent programmes and high potential programmes

Which individuals have lots of “career runway”, the personal resources - cognitive, motivational and emotional - that provide the full repertoire of Career Tactics? Which individuals might be tactically exposed in different and more demanding roles?

Executive coaching

From the profile of Career Tactics, why has an individual’s career stalled? Which tactics are being over used and are becoming counter-productive? Which tactics need to be deployed to a greater extent in future?

“What got you here won’t get you there.”

Marshall Goldsmith

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; performance management; and talent and succession management.

If you are interested in our assessment and development tools and talent management processes, call us on:

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admin@amazureconsulting.com

- **we're professionals but we're not pompous.** We are at the edge of the latest research and thinking in the field of people management, but we're not precious about the "one thing". We have some good ideas to help your organisation perform even better, but we know that you may have some better ones, but want support in making them work. We don't impose the "solution".
- **we design but we also implement.** Our content, design and technology can build cost effective solutions quickly. Over-engineered consultancy solutions don't interest us, and they are bad for organisations. Our consultancy experience of "real world" implementation will move things forward from initial concept to results rapidly.
- **we start things to build momentum but we also follow through.** Results come from the discipline of "making it stick", of evaluation, learning and continual improvement. And we maintain ongoing relationships with our clients to keep achieving positive outcomes.