



Conscious behavioural skills – the history and the challenges

... Building great organisations in a sea of change

Contents

Page 1	History and background - from the 'plans approach', through 'qualities', action centred leadership, motor skills and managing skills, psychometrics, emotional intelligence and competency frameworks to 'the fringe'
Page 4	The nature of the problem – definitions and commentary on skills and knowledge, conscious behavioural skills, managing change and the situational interview
Page 7	The R & D programme and the introduction of technology
Page 9	The Magus Assessor and Profiler model – the rationale

History and Background

Selection interviewing is one of those much-researched subjects, on which the researchers are all agreed - but apparently not too many people are listening to them. The general agreement is that, as a device for predicting performance, the standard selection interview has a just about perfect record - of failure. Yet, in spite of the evidence that continues to pile up, both in the research and through live experiences of practising managers, it remains the most popular method of selecting staff, from entry level through middle managers to top brass.

This paradox would require explanation if, in fact, there was no effective alternative to the standard selection interview. In those circumstances, there might be a lot of frustrated managers out there, waiting with baited breath for a new technique to emerge, while still struggling with the vagaries of Lady Luck and old methods. The reality is that there are other, more effective methods. Unfortunately, too many people stay wedded to the comfortable routine of reviewing CVs - and asking the standard questions that are so well rehearsed that all too many candidates have their answers lined up just waiting for the opportunity to offer them.

The purpose of these notes is to review the reasons why standard selection processes do not work; provide a short history of various attempts to develop alternative methodologies; identify why they all fail; and then identify the one

exception to the rule. After reviewing why that one exception does, in fact, work, the paper will then illustrate why the one 'success method' has so few adherents. Finally, it will show how new technologies are making it easier, and more cost effective, to apply rigorous assessment methods, and introduce more objectivity into selection decisions.

On the way, it will be shown that the three underlying challenges, that have to be dealt with in making selection decisions, have not changed. What has changed is that until the appearance of a then new way of thinking about success in management, there was no workable solution to the challenges: after that, a possible solution appeared, but few were ready to take it up.

Implicitly, the paradox noted above will be explained in passing, although the reader will necessarily have to interpret the information provided to explain individual cases.

A Short History Lesson

In the beginning, there was family ... In the days before the industrial revolution, most businesses were family owned. Decisions about management and management succession were more about the number of sons in the family and who would take over and when, and if, Dad could be persuaded to let go of the reins.

As the productive capacity of factories outpaced the productive capacity of families, and as the number of employees in firms started to increase came the need for recruiting outsiders, when managers were needed to direct and control the work of the workers – or so the myth went at the time. Family connections were still strong as were the relationships between the owning, or directing, family and others from similar social circles.

When finally the demand for new managers outstripped this supply as well, the selection interview finally arrived, to hold sway until the present day. As the realisation dawned that businesses were really rather dependent on the contributions made by new managers, the development of various methods to improve the quality of selection decisions started up in earnest. The field is too large for a fully detailed review of what developed, but perhaps a few headlines will suffice.

The 'Plans' approach

There was, for example, the 5-point plan, which subsequently became the 7-point plan. The idea was to use the structures – with dimensions such as knowledge, experience, attitudes, aptitudes, physique, circumstances and intelligence – to bring some discipline to what otherwise was often no more than a 'bit of a chat' about the candidates totally subjective self-description. It may be the advent of the 5- and 7-point plans that led directly or indirectly to the development of aptitude and intelligence testing – both certainly appeared at about the same time. Whatever the exact causal relationship, assuming that there was one, the inventories of the day were a response to undoubtedly real difficulties with the selection interview.

How was the interviewer to know what the real experience of the candidate was? How to assess aptitudes? How to assess intelligence? Knowledge was easier to test – by examination if necessary. Circumstances easier still – if it was possible to separate the reality from 'what the interviewer wanted to hear'. (Leading questions are not uniquely restricted to courts of law!)

Now, if all these characteristics of the candidate were difficult to assess, similar problems applied to the ability to define what was needed in the job. This was especially true, because it was difficult, if not impossible, to define in an objective way the causal relationships between the characteristics of 'managers as people' and the results they were achieving. Having got over the wishful thinking of the time, it is now generally recognised that there are no known causal relationships between, on the one hand, personality, and on the other hand, performance

in the job. Much the same is true for intelligence, circumstances and aptitudes. Experience has its values, but can be as big a hindrance as benefit, especially as the pace of change in management heated up.

As realisation dawned that there were even difficulties over the very meanings of the words themselves, the various 'plans' and the inventories that went with them, disappeared into the trashcan of history.

The Qualities Approach to Leadership

As a slight, but only slight, diversion, it was during much the same period that the qualities approach to management, (or more strictly leadership), appeared. This came out of the armed forces in the run up to the Second World War, when some bright spark observed that there was possibly going to be an increased demand for officers. The idea that evolved was simple: "Find people with the right qualities – that 'good stuff' that we all recognise when we see it – pop them through officer training school, and, hey presto, we will have all the jolly fine officers we need".

A typical list of needed qualities included the following: judgement, initiative, integrity, foresight, energy, drive, decisiveness, dependability, emotional stability, fairness, ambition, dedication, objectivity and co-operation. Try reaching agreement on what these words actually mean, in a group of, say, 10 managers, and the problems start to emerge immediately.

Needless to say it was a total failure, partly because of the impossibility of defining what those 'right qualities' actually were and partly, again, because of the impossibility of knowing who has them and who has not. Add to this the problem of the total subjectivity of the whole process, and failure was assured from the start. Which leads to another paradox: in spite of all the evidence that the qualities approach to management is unworkable, how is it that so many managers out there are still trying to make it work today?

The theme that is consistent is that there are difficulties with definition of what is needed, and with deciding whether it is present or not. In one sense, at least, that was about to change – for the better.

ACL (Action Centred Leadership)

It was after WW2 that sense started to appear, with the introduction of a very simple, but very powerful concept. This was action centred leadership. Observation of effective managers

and leaders at work – is there a real difference between the two? – demonstrated that there were shared patterns in how successful people behaved that were not true of the less-than-successful variety. This led to the focus on a very short word indeed – what is it that successful managers DO?

If it is possible to define the behaviours that produce success, then it is possible to train people to become skilled at behaving in that way, and presumably greater success will follow. The way was, therefore, open to a new and potentially successful way of selecting managers than all the plans, qualities and other characteristics of the person had offered up to then – the concept of behavioural skills. But a new problem struck home.

Motor skills and managing skills

This related to the key difference between motor skills and managing skills. The problem related both to definition and assessment. To illustrate: a common motor skill is needed to ride a bicycle, to get from A to B, without falling off. (For the purposes of these notes, the ‘managing skill’ of being able to ride safely, from A to B, over busy public roads, largely populated by demonic drivers late for work, is ignored).

It is easy to define what success looks like; it is easy to define a learning experience, with feedback loops, possibly from the contact between knees and elbows and the road surface; it is easy to assess when a trainee has achieved a defined level of success. By definition, it is also easy to design an assessment process for a ‘candidate cyclist for our firm’ if we ever need such.

Now ask the same questions in relation to a managing skill and the difficulties become evident. Suddenly there are interactions between the manager and other people; there are issues of unpredictability about the future; there are uncertainties and ambiguities in the information available for processing. To cap it all, some of the information processing goes on inside the head of the manager / candidate and, as such, is totally invisible to the observer.

The problems of (objective) definition and assessment are formidable. As if these are not enough, a new and very serious difficulty emerges. If behavioural skills are the basis of success in management; and even if it is possible to define them in an objective way; and even if it is possible to define valid opportunities for candidates to demonstrate that they have the requisite skills; then who is the person qualified to observe the behaviour patterns of the candidate and decide that the required skills are

present in the candidate? Fantasies about employing Superwoman or Superman remain just that – fantasies.

To bring this brief history up to date, we need to include five more recent developments, mostly serious if flawed, and some frankly whacky! First the serious versions.

Psychometrics

In the last 30 years we have seen the development of scores of personality profiling inventories as a major industry – the world of psychometrics. These have evolved alongside a battery of critical reasoning – numerical and verbal – inventories, and a variety of other, knowledge based assessments. There are undoubtedly good products, as equally there are some dodgy ones. There is undoubtedly interesting and valuable information that is generated by the better products, but there are three fundamental barriers that have become clear, that would have to be resolved before personality profiles could be used as the basis for making selection decisions.

The first, to repeat, is that there is no known relationship between personality and performance. It is certainly true that the reputable practitioners make no such claims. Second, is that peoples’ personality profiles, as assessed, are not a fixed quantity. Especially in those parts of the profiles that deal with feelings and emotions or relationship with people, mobility is more common than immobility, perhaps for reasons that are simple to understand. Third, there are now any number of web sites offering advice on how to ‘create the profile of your choice’, for all the popular inventories.

So, interesting and valuable as personality profiles may be, a basis for making selection decisions they are not. At best, they can provide useful additional information about fit between person and organisation – just as long as it is the ‘real Mrs Jones’ we are seeing in the profile.

Emotional Intelligence

A rather different, and relatively recent innovation concerns the profiling of peoples’ emotional intelligence. It is too early to reach a positive conclusion, but a quick skirmish around the web sites of the practitioners suggests a new occurrence of some very old problems. First, is a little matter of definition. There appear to be as many meanings attached to the term ‘emotional intelligence’ as there are firms offering to measure it for you. Second, the ‘measurement’ methods vary widely – and produce different results for the same people.

Finally, there is, as yet, little evidence of any known causal relationship between emotional intelligence and actual performance in the job, whatever emotional intelligence may turn out to be.

Competency Frameworks – and Attitudes

Staying within the realms of that which is serious, there is the fairly recent advent of competency frameworks. All the usual problems rear their ugly heads, plus a few new ones.

Some extraordinarily valuable work has been done in recent years on the subject of **organisational** competencies. Unfortunately, the word has been applied to individuals in ways that make more money for the vendors than sense to the people attempting to use some of the new models being offered.

There appear to be as many attempted definitions of what 'competency' means, as applied to individuals, as there are people trying to define them. When used as an indicator of the **level** available in a particular skill, there is little difficulty - person A is highly competent at selling or person B negotiates competently. When used as a noun, however, problems strike.

Competency framework manuals tend to occupy many centimeters of shelf space, and some manuals appear to leave the shelves only rarely. It may be that the zillions of words used for the descriptors are simply too voluminous for busy line managers to cope with, especially with all the demands for 'evidence' of the existence of a competency. Moreover, subjectivity in descriptions appears often to be a way of life for the writers of the manuals.

Another highly dubious feature of the frameworks is the assumption, often built in to their design, that increasing levels of seniority require increasing levels of competency, across the board. A touch of 'real-world' thinking and observation demonstrate the fallacious nature of the assumption. There are plenty of examples of employees in lower level jobs needing higher order competency, in specific 'competencies' – whatever 'competencies' turn out to be.

What is a competency? What does a competency contain that is additional to and different from three old fashioned words - skills, knowledge and attitudes? If there is no satisfactory answer to this question, it is suggested that the whole subject be dropped, and that attention be given, instead, to concepts that work and demonstrably so.

Moreover, any methodology that is to be useful to practising line managers has to be subject to measurement and be able to predict performance. Part of a 1965 research project,

referred to below, demonstrated that attitudes cannot be measured, and, even if they could, would produce no demonstrable basis for predicting performance.

As a final thought, the attitudes of people at work are partly a vector of their own human characteristics and partly a consequence of the organisational environment in which they think and act. The latter includes the managing style and behaviours of their colleagues, and that opens up an interesting can of worms.

The Fringe

And finally to the 'lunatic fringe' of selection methods. First up are the hand writing experts. What the supposed causal relationship between handwriting and success in management is remains an unknown, especially in this age of technology, with unskilled fingers fumbling over hot keyboards. What is important is that we now hear that, in the same way that ambitious young managers can find their way past personality profiling assessments, they can also pass handwriting tests.

As a last resort, the same young managers may be faced with body language translator examinations. This is based on a technology, (called MAPS - Motivation in Action Profiles), developed by a choreographer and movement theorist born in Bratislava in 1879. Yes, really!

All of which leads us to the need do a quick summary of the nature of the real issues with making selection decisions, and then a declaration of our position in all of this.

The nature of the problem

There is only one predictor of success in management, and that is the ability to deploy the behavioural skills necessary for the specific job. The reason is that the only thing that drives performance is behaviour. Everything else is a driver of behaviour. Anyone wishing to take the indirect route, should try psychometrics, emotional intelligence, qualities – or even handwriting or MAPS! If the wish is to improve performance, then **conscious behavioural skills** (CBS) are the only way to go.

That is as true now as it has been true 'ever since'. As it is true in every other 'profession' other than 'management', where common sense appears to prevail. Would we employ someone to deliver pizzas who can't ride a bike? Silly to think otherwise! Would we employ an aeroplane pilot who can't fly one of the wretched things? Even more silly – and dangerous to boot! Would the police or army employ someone as a marksman who has never hit the bulls eye and

can't prove that they can still do it – time after time after time?

And in all those and any number of other cases, would we take the word of the candidate that they have, they can and, of course, they will? Just as daft. We would offer them all the opportunity to DEMONSTRATE that they have the skill needed for the job. So how is it that when it comes to managers we will do just about anything and everything except the obvious? The answer comes down to three simple observations – in fact, the three challenges:

- It is difficult to specify managing skills in a valid, objective way, matched to the highly variable needs of different jobs, in different organisations, at different times.
- It is difficult to construct valid opportunities for candidates to demonstrate managing skills.
- It is difficult to conduct valid assessments, as assessors must themselves have all the skills that are being sought.

There is one possible escape route that we should touch on here, before moving on. That is the assessment centre model. This certainly has the possibility of providing a solution to the need to enable candidates to demonstrate managing skill, but as ever there are snags. The first is the cost of conducting them. They are labour intensive, high on resource consumption – and costly for candidates as well.

Next is the fact that, like so many forms of inventory, the results can be 'adjusted' to suit the model that it is believed is being sought. And then there are all those senior managers who see themselves as above the level where any form of assessment centre would be appropriate. And that still leaves the three challenges noted above. Maybe that is why, some public sector employers apart, who don't have cost and performance considerations to worry about, the assessment centre approach for managers has also faded into history.

So that is the nature of the problem – now to solutions. They all revolve around the concept of the situational interview, which is explained in more detail below. Suffice it to say that the situational interview, probing as it does behavioural skill, is the only interviewing technique that is a good predictor of performance in the job – but it has always been a difficult technique to apply, and has its own limitations.

First a few (loose) definitions.

Definitions and Commentary

Skills and knowledge

The important issue here is that understanding the difference between skills and knowledge enables key differences about acquisition, development and assessment to be identified, and that, in turn, will enable good practice to be applied.

- Knowledge is about the ability to retain information, insights and ideas, and access them when needed.
- Skill is about the ability to do something, to achieve a predetermined set of objectives. All skills are behavioural. (Ethical standards are assumed to be included as a default).
- Knowledge is acquired through listening, observing or reading.
- Skill is acquired through practice and feedback.
- Teaching (education) is about the transfer of information, insights and ideas that enables knowledge to be acquired.
- Training is about the development of skills.
- Behavioural skills can be measured (assessed). If what is alleged to be a skill can not be observed and counted, it is certainly not a behavioural skill, whatever else it may be.

One view of skill is that it is the practical application of knowledge. In other words, knowledge becomes useful when and only when it enables useful behaviour to occur. This is suggested in the following table of levels of learning:

- Recognition - can the learner separate the concept from others?
- Recall - can the learner label the concept's components?
- Description - can the learner explain the concept's components?
- Application - can the learner explain how to use the concept?
- Demonstration - can the learner use the concept?

It is only when the learner achieves the demonstration level that it can be said that skill has been developed. Up to that point, all the other levels involve some form of verbalising of the understanding that has been acquired; only at the demonstration level can the learner do it, whatever the 'it' may be.

To illustrate the inconsistencies that have grown up about these two, simple concepts, consider the case of computer based training (CBT). In fact, with one exception only, all CBT is actually computer based education (CBE), not training at all. The exception is that of computer skills, where CBT will enable the learner to arrive at the demonstration level.

In the case, for example, of negotiating skills, whatever the alleged CBT package may inculcate in terms of knowledge, understanding or insights, valuable as they may be, this will say little about what happens when the trainee comes face to face with a real, flesh and blood, human being who is engaging in a real negotiation. This condition will include not only the negotiating construct, which may have been explored thoroughly through the CBE process, but also many other dimensions, including:

- The body language of both negotiators
- Emotional pressures on both, including time
- Business pressures on both, including time
- The analytical and interpersonal skills of both

The only way the learner will arrive at the demonstration level will be through getting face to face with another negotiator, and then through an iterative process of practice and feedback. (Needless to say, even when an apparent high level of skills has been acquired in the learning environment, because of the additional dimensions that exist in the real negotiation, the skill development process needs to be continued beyond the learning environment into the work environment. This raises the issue of the role of the supervisor in following up on and consolidating newly acquired skills, but that is another subject altogether).

None of this is to undervalue knowledge. On the contrary, it is inevitable that a high level of skill cannot be developed without the requisite knowledge being available - skill is the practical application of knowledge. It is equally true, however, that knowledge without skill has little, if any, practical value.

The fact is that the two - knowledge and skill - are two sides of a coin. Like currency that is defaced, either side is valueless without the other. In fact, the latter is impossible without the former. The key is to recognise this simple fact and to ensure that all personal development programmes, be they in the classroom or in the workplace, target the development of skill, and that they also recognise that this in turn will mean that requisite knowledge will need to be provided.

Knowledge is an enabler of skills - similarly, attitudes are drivers of behaviour. In both cases, it is more useful and safer for managers wishing to make decisions about other managers, their roles and development, to focus on behaviours and ignore the enablers and drivers. Sticking to behaviours means we are in the arena of observation, measurement and counting. This highly instrumental approach may be accused of being over simplistic, and it may be. It does, however, have the admirable characteristics of being workable and successful.

Conscious Behavioural Skills

The only real issue here involves that word 'conscious'. The implication is that, in any given circumstance, there are several options about which way to behave. The highly skilled manager will make a conscious choice about the behaviour to be deployed, depending on the exact nature of the circumstance and the objectives to be achieved. Following on the relationship between knowledge and skill noted above, the choice will often involve knowledge of research about what works and what does not work, given the circumstance and objectives.

Managing change

There are several ways of considering the job of managing. One is that a key part of defining the role is in the balance between maintenance and development activities. Briefly:

Maintenance activities are:

- Repeated, cyclical
- Go on day by day, week by week, month by month
- Are never finished
- Are important for maintaining standards of performance in the business

Development activities are:

- Once-off tasks or projects
- Occupy a finite space in time
- When finished, are over and done with
- Are important to develop and improve standards of performance in the business

Reflection suggests that any management team that devotes 100% of its energies and time to maintenance, to the exclusion of development, will witness the onset of stasis in their business, rapidly followed by decline and extinction.

There are many influences on managers that all

tend to drive them in the direction of maintenance, not least of which is that all development activities involve the introduction of a change, represent a leap into the unknown and are hence much more risky than sticking to maintenance. Maintenance activities generally involve doing things that have been done many times before, and where the results are much more predictable. (Information systems that focus on short-term, cyclical, often monthly performance figures help to exacerbate the problem).

In spite of the difficulties, and especially in a fast changing world, there is no sensible business future that does not require a degree of development activity. (Maintenance activities are still essential, but the issue is one of balance). This is an argument that, unless any individual manager wishes to lapse into a maintenance only mode, which is tantamount to administrating the business and nothing more, then managing in real terms equates to managing change - the two terms are largely synonymous.

Given this observation, it will come as no surprise that a 1990 research programme on change discovered no special set of skills required for managing change - the skill set involved was that of good management, without the qualification.

The research did, however, uncover one interesting insight into the nature of change processes. It was based on the fact that very few people resist change, in itself. In general, the reasons for resistance to change can be found in the systems established and operated by the organisation. These are the technical, political and cultural systems, all of which contain powerful symbolic messages about what is and what is not acceptable behaviour in the business. This, combined with the other observation that people resist change that they do not understand, which they find threatening and over which they have no influence, leads to a key conclusion.

It is that change is better enabled than managed, if by manage we mean the old command and control style of getting things done. In this sense, the change management (or management) skills that are needed today are less about top down directing and managing change - they are more about creating a climate in which emergent change can happen, in conditions of bounded freedom and through self organising groups.

The situational interview

This is based on providing a number of

descriptions of commonly experienced management situations, often problems, and asking the candidate manager how they should be handled. (This is something of an oversimplification, but it will do for the purposes of this paper). It should be noted that, at best, this technique is a negative evaluation. The 'levels of learning model' noted above gives the clue.

Recognition, recall, description and application all operate at the level of knowledge. No question and answer tactic can get to the demonstration level. But consider this. If the articulated answers to the situational questions indicate no appropriate knowledge of how to tackle the problem situation, then it is unlikely in the extreme that the candidate has a high level of skill.

If, however, the offered answers are 'perfect', it can be concluded that the candidate potentially does have the requisite skills. If the answers are 'good' but less than 'perfect', then it can be concluded that the candidate potentially has the requisite skills at least to some degree.

In this way, potentially good candidates are screened in and doubtful candidates are positively excluded. The final short list of potentially good candidates can then be subject to (real) positive assessment. This is the final stage and requires candidates to demonstrate that they do, in fact, have the required skills.

It may be noted that applying this process vastly reduces the resource consumption and costs involved in the assessment stage, while increasing the probability of success. It may also be noted that it is now possible to conduct the situational screening 'interview' using web based (negative) assessment techniques, reducing resource consumption and costs even further.

In passing, it may be worth noting that there is a thing now called the case study interview. It is even referred to as the 'dreaded case study' interview. Two comments are apposite here. The first is that there are already books available on how to handle the case study interview, so as a predictor of performance it is likely to go the way of many other 'new ideas'. There is also advice available on the case studies that are in common use. Will the real candidate stand up and be counted? The second is that the case study interview is a pale imitation of the situational interview. There are two key differences:

In the first case, all good situational interviews are employer-organisation, job and time specific, and hence custom built. So no advice is possible on the 'case studies' in common use. In the

second, situational interviews are testing for the presence of specific behavioral skills, as required for the particular job – not generic nonsense such as ‘the ability to think on the feet’. Assuming that there is such a generic skill at all, it may say something about the ability to handle a case study interview – it will have little value in a real management job, and may even be downright dangerous.

The R & D Programme

In 1965, the author was employed by Xerox, as a young and rather inexperienced manager. The company was in the middle of its explosive growth state, and this made both recruiting and management development critical activities.

A project was established between the company, the National Institute of Industrial Psychology and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, with the author being a member of the research team. The aim was to research the selection methods available at that time to identify those that would produce the best results. The first outcome was that all of the then available methods did not work. This included the standard selection interview and a variety of aptitude, intelligence and other tests, including several critical reasoning inventories.

The second outcome was the development of a new interviewing method, which the team called the situational interview. This was demonstrated to be able to predict performance, in job specific applications, to an acceptable degree. It is slightly ironic that this same technique was announced to an unsuspecting business world, as a new selection technique, in the late 1990s! Not by us, we hasten to add!

The significance of this project, in the context of this paper, is that it was the first serious event in a lifetime involvement with selection processes, and led directly to the development, application and testing, over a near 40 year period, of a model of conscious behavioural skills for managers.

The situational interview technique was developed in Xerox throughout the 1960s, and applied by the author in three other companies, with continuing success, through the 1970s and 1980s. This included training other people to apply the method, and the development of an enhanced mechanism for modelling the managing skills that people would need. This became known as AIMS – Assessment of Individual Managing Skills.

In parallel with these developments, the author became involved with a training movement known as Criterion Referenced Instruction (CRI).

The key differentiator of CRI was its emphasis on making behaviour measurable, and defining objectively the behavioural skills need for proficiency in a specific job activity. The skill development cycle was then based on a practice and feedback loop that was applied through as many iterations as were required until trainees met predetermined (measurable) behaviour patterns.

The idea of making behavioural skill measurable was then applied to profiling the managing skills needed for success in specific management jobs, on both sides of the equation – the job demand and the skill set available.

In the 1980s, the situational interviewing method was applied, for the first time, in a recruitment consultancy, majoring on senior management appointments. To improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the process, the AIMS model was extended and became a three dimensional model. The top three layers were in fact applications of the foundation skills contained in the base layer. The use of the ‘application layers’ made the whole process of defining situational interviews much faster and better targeted.

Part of the driver of the extension was the decision to offer an absolute guarantee. This meant that, in the case of any appointment made through the recruiting firm, if the newly appointed manager did not deliver an agreed level of performance by the end of the first year, the appointment fee would be refunded in full. No client ever asked for their money back, over a period of nearly seven years and more than 100 appointments completed.

The guarantee at the time was unique and it may be that still, to this day, it has not been repeated.

In effect, all of the three challenges had been dealt with, albeit with a few downsides still on the table. The three dimensional CBS model was all that was needed to define valid targets. The situational interviewing technique provided a very adequate technique for measuring their presence – or absence – subject only to the negative evaluation caveat. As the situational interviews was conducted by the author, or members of a team trained by the author, who was also the designer of the system, so in theory at least, the requisite skills were in place.

The snag was the whole process was still heavy on resource consumption, and relied heavily on up-front research to enable valid job demand CBS profiles to be built, that reflected the real needs of the job, as distinct from more ideal-world thinking.

The introduction of Technology

Recent developments have introduced a software-based version of the model – the Magus Assessor and Magus Profiler products. These encapsulate the current version of the conscious behavioural skills model, which is updated every two years. Magus Assessor uses web based assessment packages to build skills profiles, as well as team roles and managing style profiles of candidates. Magus Profiler uses Assessor profiles to match candidates against job specific target profiles, and find candidates with the closest matches. There are Assessor packages for senior managers, middle managers, junior managers (supervisors) and graduates, where appropriate providing scenarios covering both operationally and administration oriented jobs.

The logic for this is simple. It is based in the philosophy of 'develop in slow time – use in fast time'. Whatever difficulties may be involved in designing and conducting situational interviews, exactly the same apply to designing web-based assessments, but there is a key difference.

The construction of the questionnaire can be done over time, with many iterations through the model, with much fine tuning of topics and words. The building of the inference engine, (an extended form of expert system), with its many thousands of formulae, that links candidates' responses to the output dimensions can also be built slowly, taking time out to reference the applicable research on successful behaviours on the way. The testing of the model can also be done slowly, through many more iterations, with 'tuning code' in the inference engine being used to make final adjustments to the model.

Finally, two separate 'spooft controls' are built into the model to detect candidates that are likely to have profiles of doubtful value. These controls test for two different types of signal, at the same time. The first is where a candidate may be trying 'present a picture' – trying to work out what the expected answers might be, rather than following a direction dictated by reasoning and knowledge. The second is where more than one person is involved in answering the questions.

When the assessment packages are loaded to the web and candidates provide their responses, the profiles are built in 'fast time' – seconds for downloading and even less in the calculation.

The assessment packages are built around the situational interview model. Powerful as this is, the assessments remain a negative evaluation, as described above. They are, however, very rigorous. They are designed to locate potentially

high performing managers – measured against the needs of the specific job. They perform a 'screening out' and 'screening in' function. Expensive and time consuming final interviewing and assessment methods are only applied to candidates where it is already known that they have the potential to deliver excellent results in the job.

The Magus Assessor and Profiler model – the rationale

"People are a company's most important asset." On closer examination, there are two problems with this often quoted statement. The first is that it is not even true. People, their knowledge and skills, are a company's **only** asset. (Consider the source of all those other assets that appear in the financial accounts of the business - did they not accrue through the activities of people?)

The second is that so many organisations appear not to have noticed, if by that we mean that they take management action to ensure that people are recruited and developed so that there is a close match between the demands of the jobs for skills, and the skills of the people in them. In fact, many organisations do not seem to have noticed just how big the selection decision actually is. Consider:

Recruit a middle manager on a salary of £40,000 p.a. Employment costs of 25%, and annual inflation of 5%, expenses of £10,000 p.a., together with similar costs for support staff of £19,000, offices of £2,250 and on costs of £4,500 gives us a total of just under £3M over a twenty year period - and that's without promotion!

Which, of course, means that it is OK to make selection decisions based on hunch, a quick chat, a couple of gin and tonics at the club and no preparation whatsoever. Or does it? And if £3M is not enough to prompt a little rigour in the recruiting process, consider the contingent cost of getting it wrong - it might just be the company that is being bet! **Magus Assessor and Magus Profiler** are the culmination of years of development in live applications - all designed to minimise that risk and maximise the pay off to business results.

Footnote: The sharp-eyed reader may well have noted that there is one outstanding issue from the pre-technology days. This is the up-front research needed to define valid job demand skills profiles. In fact, technology provides the solution there as well, and there are three separate products, all using inference engine methodology, that provide extremely rapid, 'real world' profiles of how the organisation actually operates. In their various ways, these use the

data generated through the 1990 research programme on change, and how organisation soft systems enable or disable the capacity of the organisation to handle change processes.

The products are the Change Program itself, Indexer and Scanner.