

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENTS IN THE DISCOVERY OF TYPE

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Discovering your Enneagram Type

Working with the Enneagram for personal development represents a journey. This journey starts with a process of discovery that enables the individual to recognise and witness themselves. This recognition is organised around a central energy represented by the nine points of reference on the Enneagram (Bast & Thomson, 2005). This explains the pattern of motivation, personality and behaviour we recognise as each of the nine types. This article is written from the assumption that a person's type remains stable over time, although the integration within the type will change as an individual grows or regresses.

The journey towards discovering one's type is a deeply personal one. In this article we would like to explore the different strategies utilised to find one's Enneagram type, with a specific focus on advances in resource-based questionnaire strategies. Through an understanding of the role of technology in aiding questionnaire validity and reliability, new approaches to questionnaire design, dynamic reporting and the possibility of more sophisticated measures are emerging. These technological advances may herald the dawn of an era in which the role of questionnaires in the discovery journey will become more central, accepted and supported within the Enneagram community as a whole across all the traditions and schools of teaching.

Three Modes of Discovery

The discovery of one's point of resonance can be done in different ways but the options for doing so can be themed as involving three modes of discovery.

- *Self-guided discovery*: This involves reflective inquiry by an individual working by himself or herself. This is normally done in isolation and is mostly prompted by an understanding of the nine types that develops based on engagement with passive learning channels such as books, articles or videos.
- *Discovery with others*: This involves participation in collective inquiry in groups, coaching conversations, panel interviews, mirroring, feedback and other conversational modalities. Discovery during workshops normally draw heavily on interactions with other participants or the facilitator in panels and other narrative approaches to teaching. Sutton (2012) reports that in her research she used a criteria that operationalised "knowing your type" as requiring having completed a minimum of a week-long course in the Enneagram. This assumes that something happens in that interactive, social environment which carries additional weight in

relation to “knowing your type” through a more self-guided journey. This approach is central to the discovery process within the narrative tradition.

- *Resource-guided discovery*: This involves the use of an interactive resource such as typing cards and questionnaires. It is based on an active inquiry method that enables the individual to engage with the discovery through reflection that is mediated via the application of a resource. The use of typing cards or test are said to reveal the most likely options for a person to consider as a type of indicator. In a sense the resource is an indicator in the same way that feedback from others during collective inquiry can help to uncover type. Lapid-Bogda (2007) notes that these resources are helpful but that they cannot determine type. This positions resources as indicators or typing guides rather than providing definitive answers with regards to type.

The three modes of discovery discussed here are by no means mutually exclusive. Most people find their Enneagram point of resonance and deepen their discovery process through a multimodal approach. However, as Lapid-Bogda (2007, p.2) states, “Ultimately, you must rely on your own self-assessment to identify your Enneagram style”. This self-assessment allows the individual to take ownership of their patterns of thinking, feeling and action, which enables further development and integration work to take place. Unless a person drops into their type in a self-reflective and personal way, the work of the Enneagram cannot begin.

Self-Awareness as a Mediating Variable

Within this multimodal approach, the level of self-awareness of the individual is an important mediating variable that impacts on the outcome of this journey of discovery. Ebert (in Rohr & Ebert, 2001) notes that self-knowledge and inner work can be painful and demanding and is therefore often avoided by people. This implies that as a mediating variable, self-awareness cannot be assumed in an individual and that individuals who are low in self-awareness who try to find their Enneagram point of resonance may struggle to do so. At the same time all of the modes of discovery have their pitfalls, which may further impact on the ability of the individual to find their type.

For the purposes of this paper we define self-awareness as a person’s capacity to become the object of their own attention, a process which occurs when a person is able to focus on their internal milieu to become a reflective observer of the self that also processes self-information (Morin, 2006). The level to which self-awareness is focused on public or private self-information will vary (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975). It is however interesting to note that self-awareness research has been done with a variety of primates such as

chimpanzees (Gallup, 1982) and that self-awareness is not the exclusive domain of human beings. In primates, the process of self-awareness is often activated in experimental settings through the introduction of mirrors. In a similar fashion self-awareness in the private domain requires the ability to look into the internal mirror. Put in other words, this requires the individual to reflect on or witness internal and abstract motivation.

Working with the Enneagram requires self-awareness in the private domain that is generally more conceptual, abstract and complex as it focuses on an awareness of emotional, cognitive and motivational patterns. Self-awareness is made more complex as a result of the self-deceptive patterns or defence mechanisms that filter our ability to see our private selves clearly. The discovery journey of finding one's Enneagram type therefore requires individuals to recognise their patterns of self-deception on the map of the Enneagram despite these patterns of self-deception. The patterns themselves are abstract, conceptual and mostly in the private domain of self. Self-awareness entails the process of bringing the unconscious into awareness without the patterns being brought into awareness becoming distorted as a result of the nature of the patterns themselves.

The journey of self-awareness that enables one to recognise one's patterns through the framework of the Enneagram is rewarding in and of itself. However, if the Enneagram is to be, as Appel (2011) puts it both map and compass, discovery represents only the first step in the journey through which the Enneagram adds value to the individual. Once one starts using the Enneagram to do the work with self in relation to others and the world, the Enneagram becomes a compass or guiding framework for growth. This work enables one to transcend and integrate through one's type into higher levels of consciousness and effectiveness in the world. Although not the focus of this article, it is important to recognise that the journey of discovery represents but a step in the journey of development. Without this step, the individual is unable to use the map of the Enneagram effectively, yet without the developmental work being done the discovery process may be limited in its impact on the individual's consciousness and effectiveness.

Pitfalls of Self-Guided Discovery

In exploring the potential pitfalls of each of the modes of discovery, one finds that *self-guided discovery* may be misguided due to a lack of understanding of the Enneagram itself and the deeper motivational patterns and psychodynamic structures that each of the nine central energies represent. This happens quite easily when behaviours and traits are used as superficial indicators instead of exploring the deeper motivation of each type. The impact of the level of self-awareness of the individual is also greatest in this mode of discovery. The self-reflective process that enables a person to identify private patterns of self-deception and the courage to bring the unconscious into awareness can easily become hampered by these self-same patterns. Context and pressure from the

environment may also interfere with their ability to witness themselves as well as with their behaviours.

There are a variety of reasons why individuals are likely to mistype themselves or feel unsure about their type when they are exclusively engaged in passive and reflective learning by themselves. For this reason, many Enneagram authors, teachers and professionals make use of resource-based and social discovery methods to support and deepen self-discovery. Many Enneagram books include short questionnaires, checklists or references to typing cards or online tests (for examples see Bodnarczuk, 2009; Lapid-Bogda, 2004; Riso & Hudson, 1999; Tallon & Sikora, 2006).

Pitfalls of Interactive Discovery

The pitfalls of the *interactive discovery* process through workshops, coaching, interviews, panels and other social feedback mechanisms is spoken about more often than it is written about. At the most obvious level of critical inquiry, the mediating effect of self-awareness is once again at play. As Goldberg (1999) states, we interpret other people's behaviours through our own personal lenses and biases and tend to use our own stance as a baseline. Simply put, we are all subjective and self-referential. Enneagram teachers and coaches are by no means exempt, which is why the IEA ethical guidelines of doing the work with self and walking the talk of transformation are so important. Yet beyond the tenets of professional behaviour we are all still human, subjective and self-referential to some extent. Furthermore, in workshops not all interactions are between the teacher and the participant. Peer interactions may lead individuals astray. The moment someone else is trying to determine a person's type, the bias towards focusing on the external behaviours of what others say and do can lead to a confusion between behavioural traits and motivational patterns (Tallon & Sikora, 2006).

At a deeper level, we need to also be aware of the impact of power inherent in the student-teacher relationship in workshops. The teacher, even more so if positioned as the guru, is in a position of authority (perceived and/or real) and this holds the potential for the teacher to step into a parental role and interaction style from a transactional analysis perspective. This position of benevolent patriarchy is likely to make the student more open to suggestions and interpretations from the teacher. The line between the teacher's role in breaking through self-deception and imposing subjective interpretations and typing of others is a fine and taut one. Working with the Enneagram for self-development from an external locus of control, for example based on how others have typed me, plays out in the same way as assessment-based typing that is not internalised. Therefore, "Teacher X says I am a Six" becomes a similar positioning of self in relation to the Enneagram as "Test X says I am a Six". This leads to the de-authorisation of self-knowledge compared to the questions and feedback from the guru as authority.

The potential impact of the authoritative input becomes even more problematic in light of the lack of familiarity they may have with the student in question. If a teacher draws on superficial behaviours or trait-based evidence to indicate type such as body language, introversion/extraversion or centre expressions this is highly likely to lead a person astray which may lead to the expression of false-memories or inaccurate filtering of self-information, thereby interfering with self-awareness. Thrasher (1994) has suggested that significant others who know the Enneagram well may make better judges of type than experts who are not very familiar with the person in question.

The adoption of the archetypal expression of each of the types in panel discussions can in a similar way block the discovery journey. This typically happens when people participating in a panel adopt and express the patterns and language of an Enneagram type at the level of public self-awareness in an almost caricature-like way. People who know the Enneagram really well then use the Enneagram to filter more complex and private self-awareness to be closer to the Enneagram than their own thoughts, feelings and actions may truly be. This leads to a person presenting themselves as the type rather than who they really are, something we have come to refer to as a person “doing their type”.

Through this process it is as if “doing their type” leads to a person presenting a simplified version of self through the Enneagram. The answers start sounding like textbook examples of the type rather than the messier and often more paradoxical and complex expressions of self that indicate true self-reflection. In a way the Enneagram can then become a block to personal development and insight. The Enneagram becomes an easy and well-rehearsed explanation of personality rather than a tool for self-development and reflection.

Pitfalls of Resource-Guided Discovery

Resource-guided discovery that is based on assessment practices have been criticised for a variety of reasons. From the perspective of the narrative tradition assessments have the potential of detracting from true self-discovery. As a result of the myriad of Enneagram tests that are not particularly valid and reliable, assessment-based approaches have generally received a bad rap in the Enneagram community. This is somewhat contradictory as many of the Enneagram teachers have endeavoured to develop an assessment of some kind to support their work. However The Enneagram in Business Network (2011, p.2) benchmark report, goes so far as to state that “the most effective way to determine one’s type is guided self-discovery”, which seems to imply that resource-guided discovery is not seen as best practice.

Bland (2010) challenges Enneagram assessments by noting that the process of operationalising a framework with inherent heuristic value such as the Enneagram through linear tests, creates a static expression of an inherently dynamic framework. He refers to this as the process of “static typecasting” (Bland, 2010, p. 26). Questionnaires run the risk of not capturing the richer dimensionality and dynamics of the Enneagram while also losing sight of the

deeper purpose of the Enneagram as a symbol that enables individuals to work towards wholeness. Although many tests struggle with validity and reliability, there are tests that have been able to achieve fairly high levels of validity and reliability such as the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPPS).

Given the challenges of a lack of self-awareness and the complexities of trying to measure motivation through a questionnaire, some Enneagram professionals are highly critical and suspicious of assessments for understandable reasons. As Sutton (2012) suggests, questionnaires represent a first step in the discovery process. The application of questionnaires is also fraught with concerns of ownership of the patterns of the type as the results may not be internalised and owned by individuals, as per the example of “Test X says I am a Six”.

The validity and reliability, and by implication the accuracy and usefulness of Enneagram questionnaires are further influenced by a number of contextual factors and overlays. The Enneagram structure of the lines of integration and disintegration (to use the Riso/Hudson vernacular) represent the theory that people change in type-related ways under pressure (Sutton, 2012). Although the work of Thrasher (1994) and Twomey (1995) could not confirm the patterns of behaviour predicted by the Enneagram through their research, Thrasher (1994) indicated the need for more sophisticated measures of stress to explore the lines empirically.

The expression of culture also impacts on the way in which the different types present themselves (Appel, 2011) which further complicates the development of global measures. There are also numerous influences or overlays that impact on an individual’s behavioural expression of their type. These influences usually have multiple sources ranging from occupational and organisational influences to parental, gender-role, language and cultural influences. As psychometric tests that measure behaviour are generally easier to develop and validate than those that measure motivation or unconscious patterns, accurate measurement is often convoluted as a result of these influences.

Ironically, Bland (2010) notes that the bulk of empirical research into the Enneagram has been in the area of development and evaluation of questionnaires and scales to measure Enneagram type (e.g. Dameyer, 2001; Edwards, 1991; Gamard, 1987; Thrasher, 1994; Twomey, 1996; Wagner & Walker, 1983). Such research is required to academically legitimise the use of the Enneagram.

The use of typing cards is fairly common as a resource-guided discovery strategy. To date this approach has been under the spotlight much less than questionnaires have been. However, from personal experience it would seem that there is a strong tendency towards social desirability in the use of typing cards. This leads to the risk of people choosing the cards that resonate with their idealised self-image of idealised image of what others expect them to be rather than what is true. Even though some typing cards make use of language, images and metaphors in a powerful way, these representations are rarely able to communicate the deeper motivation and psychodynamic aspects of each type.

Given these pitfalls, the question arises whether there are ways of addressing, at least in part, some of these concerns with regards to resource-guided discovery.

Reconsidering the Role of Assessments

The general position on most Enneagram questionnaires to date has been that they offer a useful but limited starting point on the journey towards finding your point of resonance on the Enneagram. However, there are a number of developments in this field that warrant a re-examination of the value and contribution of questionnaires. Bartram and Hambleton (2006) devote an entire book to exploring how computer technology has impacted on psychometric assessment over the past three decades.

Assessments in an online world

Bartram and Hambleton (2006) note that computer technology has enabled assessments to evolve over time. This started with the application of computer-based scoring technologies to pencil-and-paper tests. Next followed software based and later online versions of pencil-and-paper tests. This is still by and large the most popular use of technology in the testing world. However, a number of innovative approaches have seen the light in recent years.

These innovative approaches include:

Computerised adaptive tests (CATs) in which the items in a test are continuously adapted to, for example, the ability level of the individual taking the test. An example of a CAT is the LPCAT, a system which measures learning potential by using a test-train-test paradigm (De Beer, 2000)

More complex algorithms and statistical scoring methods, based on, for example, Item Response Theory (IRT). As an example, it is possible to add a third item parameter, for multiple-choice items, referred to as a “pseudo-guessing” parameter that reflects the probability that an examinee with a very low trait level will correctly answer an item solely by guessing (Van der Linden & Hambleton, 1997)

Model and simulation based testing that is becoming more and more interactive and real-time as technology develops further. Kwiatkowski (2003) notes that advances in virtual reality simulators will enable people to directly engage with organisational environments and the people they are likely to work with.

Ipsative testing that enables forced-choice questions based on equally socially desirable items. Recent advances in measuring the Big Five factors of personality have been based on neutralising social desirability in this manner (Backstrom, Bjorklund & Larsson, 2009)

According to Olea, Abad & Barrada (2010) CATs have three advantages with respect to any other computerised test. Firstly it improves test security as the items presented from one test-taker to the next differs. Secondly it reduces application time as the items that are not relevant to the individual test-taker are

discarded. Thirdly, and in the context of the Enneagram most importantly, it provides more accurate assessments than conventional linear tests with the same number of items.

Integration of other theories into Enneagram thinking

Integrating other theories, frameworks and models from the fields of psychology and organisational behaviour is also becoming more popular. For an overview of the links between modern psychological thinking and theories and the Enneagram, Bland (2010) offers a comprehensive review. He concludes that the Enneagram “parallels several fundamental constructs from psychodynamic, depth, cognitive and biological psychology theories” (Bland, 2010, p. 23).

Some examples of Enneagram authors, teachers and practitioners integrating non-Enneagram theories with Enneagram-theories include the mainstream integration of Karen Horney’s work on social styles into the understanding of the Hornevia social styles (Riso & Hudson, 1999). McNab (2012) and Rhodes (2013) integrate Ken Wilber’s Integral Model with their application and understanding of the Enneagram. Morler (2008) integrates an emotional maturity model with the Enneagram. The Breckenridge Enneagram (Bodnarczuk, 2009) integrates Maslow’s work with the Enneagram. Others are starting to integrate the Enneagram with neuroscience, Spiral Dynamics, theories on levels of consciousness, and so the list continues to grow.

A new way of thinking about Enneagram testing

Applying the advances in assessment technology in an online world to Enneagram questionnaires holds great possibility. If technology could overcome the challenges around static typecasting and accuracy of results, this would necessitate the community of Enneagram practitioners to reconsider the relative value of resource-based discovery strategies.

The Enneagram is becoming more and more popular as a framework for organisational, team and leadership development in a business context (e.g. Appel, 2011; Bland, 2010; Thomson & Condon, 2001; Lapid-Bogda, 2004). These environments require scalability, empirically sound and time-efficient discovery strategies to enable effective application in a business environment where time is a scarce resource and operational pressures quickly encroach on participation and attendance in workshops. As an Organisational Development (OD) practitioner recently shared anecdotally after attending a weeklong intensive on the Enneagram in the narrative tradition: “This was a really deep experience for me. My personal insights happened on the last day and this was a real breakthrough but I cannot see any of my client organisations having the time and appetite that would enable them to commit to this way of working with the Enneagram.” (Kruger, 2013).

If one accepts that the variable levels of self-awareness required for self-guided discovery will impact on the effectiveness of the application of the Enneagram in a business environment, this leaves the practitioner in an

organisational setting with a strong reliance on interactive and resource-based discovery strategies. However, the time requirements of some aspects of narrative-based discovery in workshops may be problematic in application environments which require time-efficient and scalable discovery strategies. This leaves the practitioner with resource-based discovery strategies and within this category of approaches, questionnaires become more appealing.

Keeping in mind that no discovery strategy is complete without the individual's self-assessment or ownership of their point of Enneagram resonance, questionnaires are highly suited to discovery applications in a business environment. This statement is however conditional on the accuracy of the results of the questionnaire in question and its ability to provide contextually relevant information given the multitude of influences on measurement and type. It is also conditional on the extent to which the questionnaire is able to represent the dynamic and integrative qualities of the Enneagram rather than becoming a box-model, thereby not falling into the static typecasting trap. Furthermore, the organisational, team or leadership development process or journey should not be confused with the step in the journey that relates to discovering your Enneagram point of resonance.

This integration serves to embed the Enneagram in the landscape of theory and application with psychology and organisational behaviour whilst also providing interesting niche areas of practice for practitioners. From within the body of research on the Enneagram, it seems like an overlooked area of integration that relates to an aspect of the Enneagram framework, relates to the integration of stress measures with the theory of the lines of integration and disintegration. As suggested by Thrasher (1994) a more sophisticated measure of stress is required. This kind of measurement may also offer a bridge between the abstract and conceptual framework of the Enneagram and the current reality of the individual who is using the Enneagram for personal development. An assessment that integrates accurate measurement of Enneagram type that combines with a sophisticated measurement of stress or strain could anchor the Enneagram development journey in current challenges in a profound manner. The stress that is being experienced by an individual is also likely to impact on questionnaire responses, which has the potential of adding interpretive value for practitioners.

An Example of Innovative Enneagram Testing

In the Enneagram world, there are some emerging examples of the application of CAT, ipsative testing and innovative algorithms to improve the validity and reliability of questionnaires while retaining the dynamic qualities of the Enneagram framework. The Integrative Enneagram Questionnaire (IEQ) (Greeff & Cloete, 2011) will be explored as an example of a CAT that is available to practitioners.

The IEQ makes use of adaptive questionnaire technology in a way that enables a dynamic interaction between the test-taker and the questionnaire.

Test-takers are exposed to 154 items from a much larger item-bank. These items are customised and adapted based on the person's responses to an initial set of randomised questions. This kind of item selection and elimination process is fairly typical of CATs.

Through the application of CAT technology, the questionnaire is able to draw on ipsative testing methods and complex algorithms that support valid, reliable and dynamic results. For example, the test makes use of forced-choice questions that have been neutralised in terms of social desirability. The combination of modern assessment technologies enables the IEQ to:

- Test for mistyping based on specific reasons for confusion between specific types at the level of motivation
- Apply wing-, instinct- and level of development theories in a dynamic and type-specific manner which is reflected in the questionnaire design, algorithms for analysing responses and reporting
- Decrease testing time while increasing the depth of the assessment
- Reporting on multiple reliability scales and algorithms that indicate reliability for the Enneagram practitioner working with the results including honesty scales, paired item correlations, correlation between type and measures of Hornebian and Harmonic style expressions and differentiation in the profile between primary and secondary type scores.
- Integrate influences and stress from the current environment with Enneagram type measurement
- At a team level, apply fractal algorithms to integrate individual profiles into a team culture profile. This entails not looking at primary types or mean scores when integrating individual results into a team profile.

Rethinking the resource-based discovery strategies

These advances in assessment methodology aided by the application of technology, hold the potential to change the value and positioning of resource-guided discovery strategies, especially in the context of the application of the Enneagram in business. By offering results that are highly accurate as a result of the CAT and ipsative methods utilised, individuals who are on the journey towards developing themselves through the Enneagram are able to increase self-awareness through an objective measure. This discovery offers the potential for the kind of powerful and rapid "consciousness shock" that enables integration as Gurdjieff is reported to have advocated ([in Jaxon-Bear, 2012](#)).

However, the process of taking ownership and developing self-awareness through such a questionnaire is still best applied in a mediated environment through the professional assistance of an Enneagram practitioner such as a coach, facilitator or therapist. This enables a powerful combination of interactive and resource-guided discovery strategies to enable the individual to make a more accurate self-assessment than may have been possible otherwise. The facilitative

influence of a professional practitioner does not only aid the process of taking ownership of the patterns highlighted through the Enneagram. It also assists in bridging the Enneagram-based insights and the current, real life challenges individuals are facing to activate coping, development and integration. These challenges or stressors can have a significant impact on the wellbeing and resilience of an individual.

Conclusion

Working with the Enneagram for personal growth and integration is a lifelong journey that starts with meeting the Enneagram as a sense making framework and then finding and confronting one's point of resonance on the Enneagram. This discovery process marks the start of the journey and usually involves a combination of self-guided, interactive and resource-guided discovery strategies. Each of these strategies have their benefits and pitfalls and are only effective in so far as they allow the individual to draw and own conclusions regarding their own type. The higher the levels of self-awareness, the more accurate these conclusions are likely to be. Aiding self-awareness through resource-based discovery strategies hold the potential to support more accurate conclusions about one's type.

Recent advances in assessments as a result of computer and online technologies are starting to enable new and innovative approaches to Enneagram testing. These approaches, such as CATs, ipsative testing and advanced algorithms are enabling more accurate and dynamic testing. This is enabling resource-based discovery strategies based on questionnaires to add more value to the application of the Enneagram, especially in organisational settings where scale, accuracy and time-requirements influence the extent to which the Enneagram becomes a viable method for growth and development.

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