Of Quintax® Types and Traits

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Introduction

Quintax was launched in 1998 as an assessment tool spanning the dichotomy between ‘trait and type’ approaches to personality assessment (Robertson & Wilkie, 1998). The name ‘Quintax’ was created from combining two abbreviations: ‘Quin’ to represent the ‘Big 5’ trait dimensions which the questionnaire was intended to tap, and ‘tax’ to illustrate that the questionnaire also gave rise to a taxonomy or classification system for summarising responses.

We aim to:

- document and consider the original rationale for Quintax as both a trait and type measure;
- identify some of our objections to the traditional Jungian approach to typing;
- conclude with some of the lessons we have learned from using Quintax.

Rationale and Context

In authoring Quintax we were trying to achieve a number of goals:

1. To develop a tool capable of measuring the key dimensions of personality in a work related context.

With the increasing influence and the increasing amount of supporting evidence for the ‘Big 5’ model (see Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997) we decided to focus our attention on the operation of the five factors in typical work settings. This was partly to reduce the intrusiveness of the questionnaire by focussing on work, and also to help simplify it for the respondent by clarifying the context in which questions are meant to be interpreted. We also considered that for credible use in a range of work settings (including selection) a social desirability scale was needed.

2. To build a concept of typing into the trait model to enable more holistic descriptions of the person.

Having used other type measures, we recognised their value in relation to feedback, particularly in development situations. With a relatively small number of dimensions it becomes feasible to give holistic interpretive support for each combination of factor poles. In our experience holistic and non-judgmental feedback that can identify the advantages and disadvantages of particular styles at work provides a powerful framework for discussion.

3. To create a classification or typing system that is easy to use and understand.

In Quintax our approach has been to create a classification system based upon combining scale poles using a normative breakpoint on each scale from our composite general population norm. This generates a total of 32 types that allow summary descriptions of the behaviours that typify each combination of poles on the questionnaire.

One advantage in this approach is that it has enabled us to avoid some of the pitfalls we have experienced in using Jungian type measures. For example:

- Despite a degree of convergence found between the Jungian preferences and 4 members of the Big 5, (McCrae & Costa, 1989), there are aspects of Jung’s theory that cannot easily be justified, either theoretically or empirically.
- In our view Jungian type theory fails to deal satisfactorily with emotionality and its impact upon other aspects of personality and behaviour in the workplace.

1 Quintax is a registered trademark of Stuart Robertson & Associates.
Objections to Traditional Type Concepts

There are many different variants of the type concept. These include:

- “the various attempts to operationalise Jungian Type theory (Jung, 1921/1971) – for example in the development of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® or MBTI (Myers & McCaulley, 1985)
- Eysenck’s (1985) three-dimensional model of personality
- Krug’s (1981) taxonomy of 16PF profile patterns
- Gordon’s (1976, 1984) configural models for the Surveys of Personal & Interpersonal Values.”

Among these, there are big differences in the way the type concept is used. In some cases authors argue for a jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive set of psychological categories (Jungian), while in other cases they refer to global traits that can be unpacked into facets, and subsequently into individual behaviours (Eysenckian).

Jung (1921/1971, para 939) for example commented that:

“One cannot be introverted or extraverted without being so in every respect. For example, to be “introverted” means that everything in the psyche happens as it must happen according to the law of the introvert’s nature. ...”

Where typological models have taken a traditional line and made strong claims about the separation between or categorical nature of types they have been subject to considerable criticism (e.g. see Barbuto, 1997). At least three lines of evidence have been considered in this debate:

- Evidence of Bimodality. Attributes such as introversion and extraversion may be plausibly treated as mutually exclusive types if the distribution of scores from a measure of these attributes is bimodal. Despite the use of sophisticated IRT statistical approaches, little or no evidence has been found that the score distributions underlying the type dimensions are anything other than approximately normal in form (e.g. Hicks, 1984; Harvey & Murry, 1994; Bess & Harvey, 2001).

- Discontinuity in an external criterion. Even if (e.g.) introversion-extraversion exists on a continuous scale it may be plausibly treated as typological if some external criterion (e.g. ratings of gregariousness) show a discontinuity around the break point for the type classification. Little evidence has been adduced that such discontinuities can be shown to exist (e.g. Stricker & Ross, 1964; Hicks, 1984).

- Separate measurement of scale poles. If the poles of the Jungian preferences were measured with separate sets of items (e.g. one set to measure Sensing, and one to measure Intuitive) then cases where individuals rated themselves high in both areas would provide evidence against the mutual exclusivity of the type categories. Sufficient cases of this have been identified to question the true bipolarity of MBTI types (e.g. Loomis & Singer, 1980; Cowan, 1989; Girelli & Stake, 1993).

From a practical point of view the danger of asserting mutual exclusivity of the types is twofold. It can lead to the problem of labelling individuals in ways that they may consider repugnant or in ways that they may then determine to use as a model for future behaviour, with the attendant dangers of inflexibility in reaction. Secondly, it leaves those people who fall in the middle of the normal distribution curve on the measurement scale with a query over their true temperament and status. These are by no means the only difficulties of Jungian theory.

As an alternative we felt that a model based on the Big 5 with a normative split into ‘types’ was the simplest and best approach that modern science could offer as a basis for our measurement and classification strategy.

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*Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press Inc.*
Conclusions: Some of the practical and other lessons learned since 1998

Since launching Quintax we have learnt a good deal about the measure and its applications. For example:

- Type feedback based on straightforward classification around norm group means has proven to be widely accepted by respondents, a sound basis for workshop activities and resilient across various European cultures.
- Type tables demonstrating the proportions of members of a team or an organisation exhibiting different types are a powerful way to gain additional insights into the importance of personality in team and organisational culture.
- Further empirical evidence in relation to both construct and criterion related validity has confirmed our initial confidence about the breadth of applications to which Quintax can be put. The process of independent BPS review has helped us to focus our minds on areas of development for the instrument.
- The gains in assessment time afforded by a short form questionnaire have been highly valued by our clients. In addition we have found that completing Quintax on-line can reduce completion time by around 20 to 25% and sometimes more.
- Users have commented on the value of emotionality as a dimension, e.g. in understanding respondents' reactions under stress at work, or in supporting a person's response to outplacement and subsequent career search (e.g. Lees, 2004).
- Respondents react well to work related feedback from a measure based on continua rather than on supposed underlying categories. Being in the middle ground on a scale can indicate flexibility in behaviour with respect to the factor concerned rather than a lack of clarity about one’s ‘true type’.
- We have found that use of a short form questionnaire (Quintax has 72 items) creates different challenges and opportunities for the user compared with a longer profile measure. Because of the smaller number of scales, more time is available for focussed discussion in feedback. Equally, because of the breadth of the dimensions, more unobtrusive and non-reactive questioning is possible to explore facets of behaviour that fall within each scale.
- One of the most difficult skills we have found for the new user is report writing. The provision of carefully constructed type descriptions at least enables a ‘starter for 10’ for consistent interpretation of scales and their interactions.

With these and other lessons behind us, we are hopeful that the next 10 years of Quintax development and application will prove as interesting and fruitful as the last!

REFERENCES


