Using Persona Personality Reports to Help Recruitment in the Security Industry

FM Contract Watch

i-COMMENT360
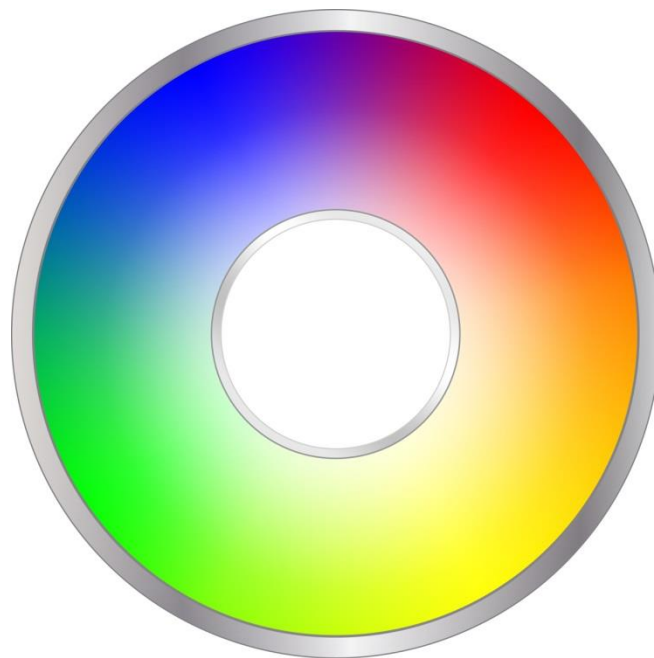
Background to Personality Reports in Recruitment

Personality reports have been used widely in recruitment for many years. The first psychometric questionnaires were given to WW1 soldiers to help identify officers from the vast numbers of new recruits. Myer-Briggs assessment was conceived as a tool to help women in the 1950's back into employment and help identify the right professions. Many variations of the DISC system (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Contentiousness) have been developed for use in sorting applicants into the most suitable careers.

FM Contract Watch and i-comment360 have combined their expertise in profiling and security to research the security industry and help companies with their selection process.

The Persona questionnaire measures aspects of personality and is widely used as an aid for recruitment and as a development tool in team building and management training situations. It is based on Jungian psychology, but personality is much more than just Jungian preferences; education, experience, training, up-bringing and life all add to our innate characteristics. We can adapt ourselves to many different roles and play different parts, not just when actors are paid for a role, but in everyday life.

Persona uses colours to describe behaviour. There is no doubt that consideration of colour energy can help individuals find a career that suits their personality and help employers find candidates whose personality is suited to that career. Having said that, the careers we choose are not totally defined by our personality.

This booklet aims to:
- Highlight the benefits of the Persona profile in recruitment,
- Applying this to the selection of Security personnel,
- Show some of the research specifically for the security industry, and
- Point out some of the pitfalls of using profiles.

The Colours

The Persona report uses four Jungian factors to describe personality, combines them and uses colour to represent each combination.
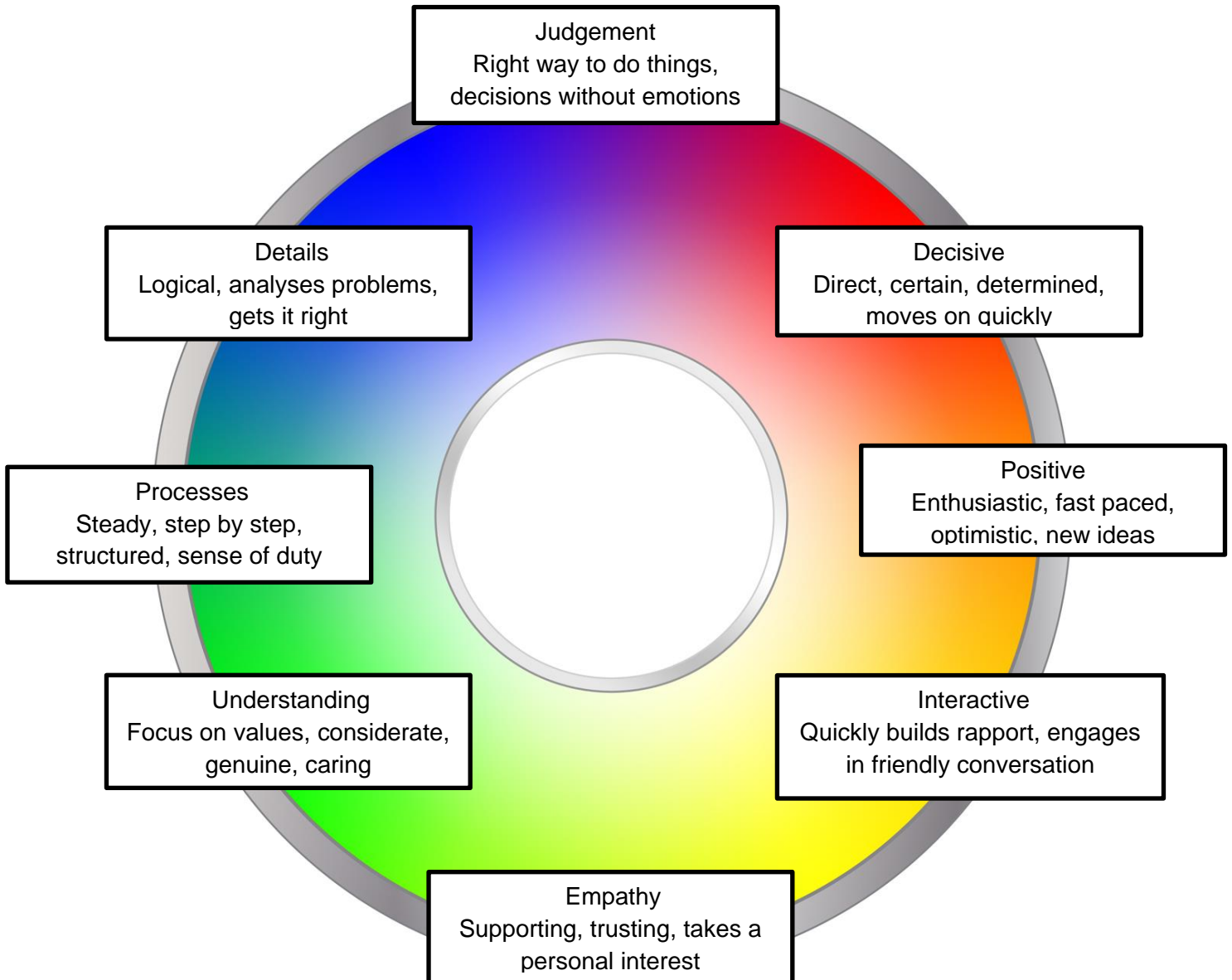
- **Red** represents Extraverted Thinking; bold, determined, direct and confident.
- **Yellow** represents Extraverted Feeling; optimistic, generous, free-spirited and trusting.
- **Green** represents Introverted Feeling; caring, considerate, supportive and loyal.
- **Blue** represents Introverted Thinking; logical, analytical, structured and disciplined.

There are no good or bad personalities and people will have elements of all four colours within their individual personality.

Using personality assessments in recruitment

Define a role

At the start of the recruitment process, the people that understand the role best should define the profile of the "ideal" person to do the job. Use the information about the strengths and weaknesses of each of the colours to help shape the profile; think around the wheel in general terms about the person you need for the position.

Judgement
Right way to do things,
decisions without emotions

Decisive
Direct, certain, determined,
moves on quickly

Details
Logical, analyses problems,
gets it right

Positive
Enthusiastic, fast paced,
optimistic, new ideas

Processes
Steady, step by step,
structured, sense of duty

Interactive
Quickly builds rapport, engages
in friendly conversation

Understanding
Focus on values, considerate,
genuine, caring

Empathy
Supporting, trusting, takes a
personal interest

We are not saying that Judgement is only in the Red/Blue area. If the role involves unemotional judgements on a regular basis, Red/Blue energy may feel more comfortable. In the same way Red/Blue preference individuals can show empathy, understanding and caring support but if the role involves this behaviour on a regular basis Green/Yellow preference individuals may feel more comfortable.

Think of your own list of behaviours ideal for the role. Write a list of 20 or 30 words or phrases that should describe the ideal candidate and mark each point Red, Yellow, Green or Blue. If the behaviour is between two colours give half a point for each. This should give you an idea of the "ideal" personality mix for the role.

Connect with applicants

In recruiting you have a short time to understand the applicant and try to glean information about how they will perform over the next few years in the job role. The Persona report will help.

Show the applicant their report and ask them to edit the Overview and / or the Strengths so that it is exactly like them. Usually the applicant is impressed with the depth of understanding of his/her personality shown in the report; even if the report is not a good match for their style, the edited version should give you much useful information to help with the interview process.

Once you understand their personality, you can make a faster connection to help you get the most out of the interview time. You can make them feel more comfortable so they give you more open answers.

Fit with a team

If you know the personalities in the existing team, you can select applicants that will fit more easily, complement existing behavioural skill or fill in gaps in the team.

Develop Stretching questions

People often develop skills that fit with their personality. Yellows will often find it easier to engage others in conversation; Greens will find it easier to empathise with another's problems on a personal level. If you have a limited time for questions and would like to understand your applicant's ability to stretch themselves, ask questions focused on the Development Points in their report.

Do they understand their own personality strengths and weaknesses? Ask the Blue's about their ability to persuade others around to their point of view; ask the Red about bringing a team together to form a consensus; ask a Yellow about attending to the details and processes and the Green about quick decision making when faced with unpopular choices. These things may not come naturally to them but that does not mean that they are not able to do them.

Your questions will be relevant to the job role but addressed to understand the applicants ability to stretch.

Measure success

If you have a large team involved in the same role, analyse the team around the Persona Wheel. Look for what gives you success. If Greens are consistently more successful than Reds in a particular role, you may only want to hire Reds if they appear to be outstanding candidates.

The section below looks at typical profiles from a sample of people from the security industry. These may fit your ideal profile, or you may be looking for something a little different in the role you are recruiting for.

Understand your own prejudice

Have you ever listened to opposing football managers commenting on that tackle in the penalty area? "It was an obvious penalty, the ref must be blind!" "He got the ball, no way was that ever a foul". Even if they watch the reply three times they stick to their original views. Our prejudices or our allegiances make a difference whether it is regional accents or the same university, and these can be hard to overcome as they are often done subconsciously.

Understand yourself before you look across the table and question your applicant. Press people with the same preferences a little harder and give those with the opposite colour energy a little extra consideration.

It is not what you've got…….

It is how you use it that counts. Think about Susan Boyle standing on the stage of the "Britain's Got Talent". Think of the look on the judge's faces. What did they expect? Would it have been possible to dismiss a star for one moment of prejudice because a star singer does not look like that?

Alongside Pele in the all-conquering Brazil football team was a winger called Garrincha. A childhood illness left him with a bent spine and one leg two inches (5 cm) shorter than the other. Not perhaps the first pick for the school football team, let alone the world champions.

With colour energy, it is not about what you've got. It is only about how you use it so it is important to bear this in mind when using Persona in a recruitment situation.

You may feel that a commercial pilot's role is to follow procedures and work with the flight manual. Do they have to be Blue? The passion some people show for flying overrides this basic attribute for the role. They exhibit Blue energy because it helps them achieve their goals of flying.
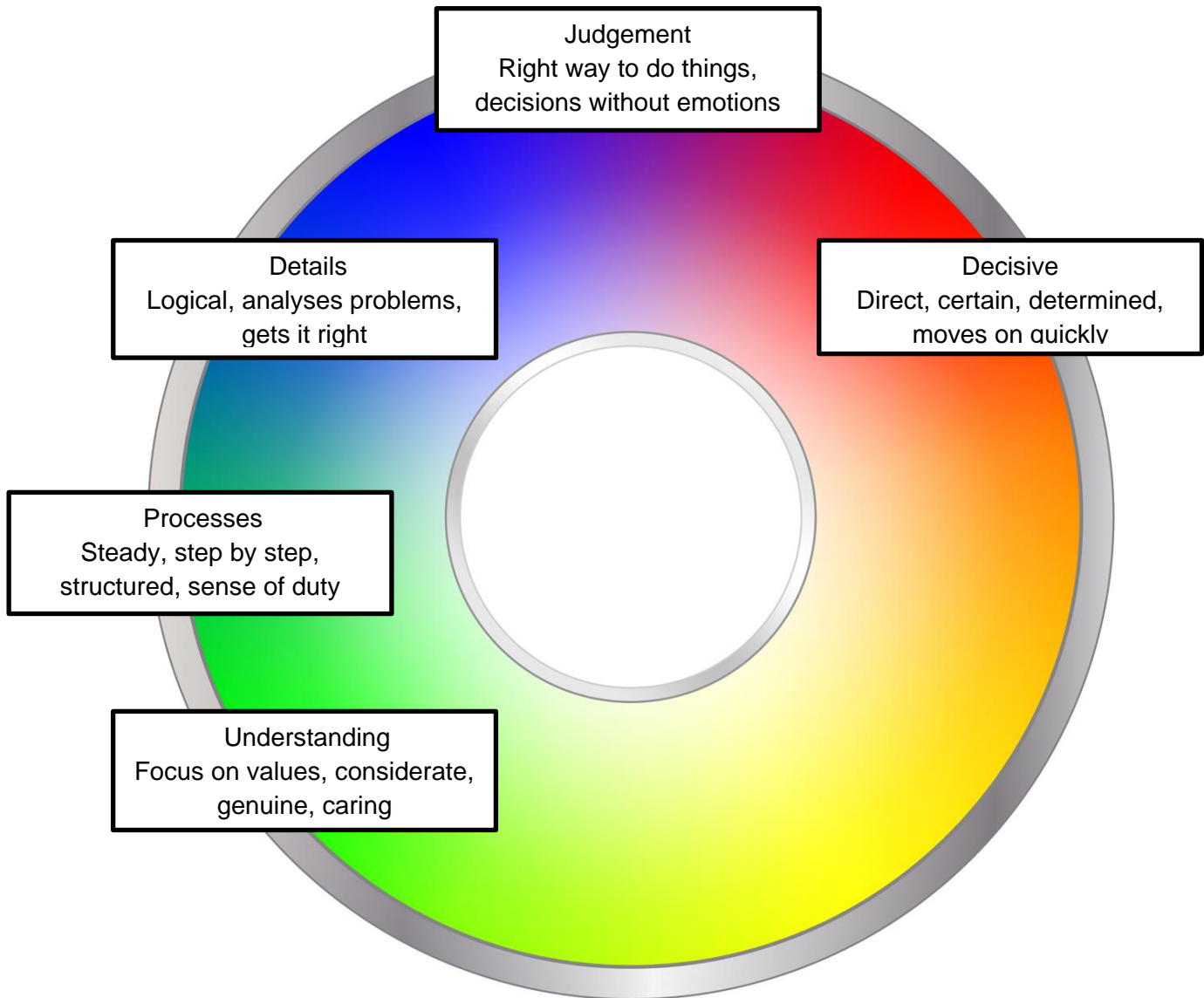
Was the fantastic interaction of Morecambe and Wise two Yellows having fun or carefully rehearsed spontaneity?

Personality is a useful tool in recruitment but the rich tapestry of individual behaviour makes it a tool for understanding, not just simple selection.
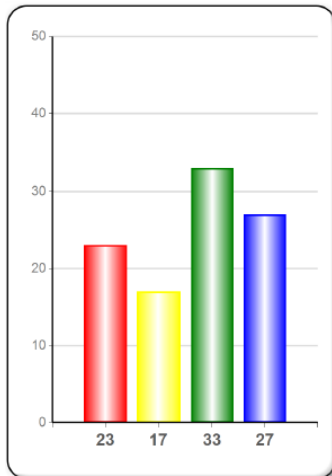
Applying this to Security selection

Defining the role

When we look at the attributes of a "typical" new recruit in the security industry, the words chosen to describe the role are more in the Green, Blue and Red areas and less in the Yellow. Roles do vary; most companies we asked mentioned the process, structure and sense of duty. Some roles though not all, add judgement and decision making.

Judgement
Right way to do things,
decisions without emotions

Details
Logical, analyses problems,
gets it right

Decisive
Direct, certain, determined,
moves on quickly

Processes
Steady, step by step,
structured, sense of duty

Understanding
Focus on values, considerate,
genuine, caring

The Persona graph for this applicant may look something like this:

Key Strengths: Practical and reliable, takes a balanced view, careful, cautious, sincere, thorough and systematic, finishes what they start, finds the safe sensible way.

Possible Weaknesses: May not see the big picture, blinkered by process, their introversion may be seen as reticence and their caution seen as indecision, avoids emotional situations.

Notes: Balances Thinking and Feeling, the most introverted, likely to have a strong Sensing preference.
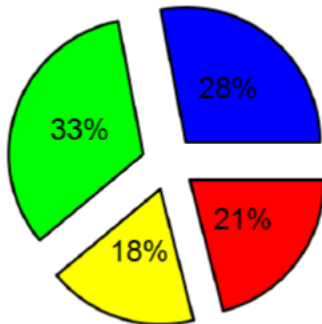
When we meet a candidate with high Blue and high Green on their Persona graph, we are meeting a more introverted character. It will take a little more effort on your part to make them feel relaxed at the interview and they will be a little slower to open up and answer your questions.

If the applicant's role is to deal regularly with the public and it is important that they are engaging, we would want to ask questions about their Yellow score; how comfortable they are with constant interactions with the public.

If their graph had Blue higher than Green we would describe the applicant as:
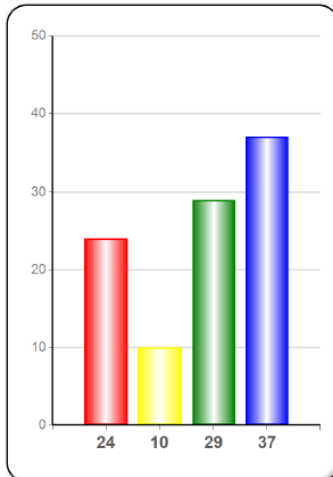
Key Strengths: Thinks carefully through the issues and keeps focus until the task is complete, considers all the facts, logical and analytical, leaves no stone unturned.

Possible Weaknesses: Obsessive about the details, asks too many questions, appears wary of change, hides behind the rules, may be guilty of paralysis by analysis.

Notes: More detailed focus than above, more task focus and less people focus.
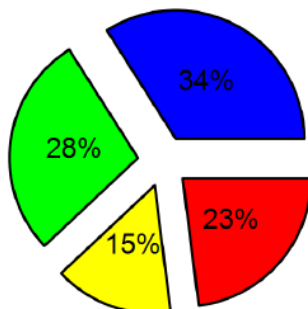
Is one better than the other? We are measuring personality preferences rather than skills. To see if they are right for the role, we must ask questions to see how well they use their natural attributes and how skilful they are at using attributes that may not be their natural style.

Give the applicant a copy of their report and ask them if it describes them. It will help you get to know them and understand their personality. If they disagree with parts of the report, they can change words, delete sentences or rewrite parts. The amended wording will help you get a good picture of the candidate.

Develop Stretching questions

Using your definition of the role, your picture of the ideal candidate, develop a list of questions to probe the attributes you feel the candidate lacks.

If the role calls for it, ask candidates with high Red score on their graph about their ability to deal empathetically with people.

Ask the Yellows about their ability to focus for longer periods on one task.

Ask the Greens about their decision making skills.

Ask the Blues about their people skills.

How an applicant's personality strengths will help them in the role may be clear, however you need to know that their weaknesses will not make them a bad choice for the role, or cause problems in the future.

Understand your own prejudice

Before we seek to understand others or their personality, we should understand ourselves. Our own personality brings with it the prejudice that our way is the right way to tackle life's challenges. The psychology tells us that you are more likely to see the positives in someone like yourself.

When you meet someone of a very different Persona graph shape to your own, you will need to work harder to see their positive attributes and also to accept their short comings. Preparing questions for an applicant who is a very different personality to you may take more thought.

Research for the security industry

Overall

In November and December 2014 we invited 50 companies to use the profiles on existing personnel to help understand the personalities of security officers. From the response we found:

- Green (38%) was the highest colour overall followed by Blue (25%); Red (23%) the third and Yellow (14%) fourth.

- Overall 38% of respondents had Green as their highest energy. This rose to 54% if we take those with two or more years' service and 73% if we take those with 5 years' service.

- Amongst supervisor and management Green was still clearly the top colour but now followed by Red as the second most popular highest colour energy.

The result matched our expected job profiles for the security officers though we anticipated Green and Blue to be closer. An attribute of Green is the desire and ability to stick with something once started so the increasing percentage of Green with length of service is understandable.

The predominance of Green amongst the management and supervisor grades is interesting as the job role profile may call for different skills but this may be caused by selection being from the longer serving officers.

Blue is the most popular second colour energy, showing that the personality traits of the Blue (attention to detail, ability to follow procedures etc.) are also valuable in the industry roles.

Red energy has been shown to be higher than average in supervisory and management roles. This is to be expected as those with high Red energy often push themselves forward and are driven and ambitious so will strive to climb up the career ladder.

Yellow energy seems to be much less common amongst our sample of security industry personnel than in the population in general. Those with high Yellow energy in our sample, tended to have been in the industry for less time, and did not tend to be in supervisory or management positions. There are always exceptions to this, and it does not mean that a person with high Yellow energy would not make a good security officer or supervisor; they may just have a different approach.

Variations by Company

From the companies where over 10 employees filled in the questionnaire, it is possible to see that each individual company values different personality traits. In one company there was a fairly even spread of personalities between those with high Red, Yellow, Green and Blue energy, however in another company the energy was almost entirely Green.

This is where assessing fit with the team and the organisation is important. Understanding the spread of personalities in the existing team will be valuable in finding someone who can fit with those personalities and work well in that team for years to come.

Conclusion

Personality profiling is a useful tool, especially in an industry like security where staff turnover has historically been high and applicants may see it as a short term career move.

Our research has shown that the sense of duty and ability to understand others that are common in people with high Green energy, are useful traits in the security industry. These traits also seem to be common among the people who spend longer in the industry and consider it to be a long term career.

At higher levels within these organisations, however, Red energy is also clear. This is the opposite, in personality terms from Green and shows that a variety of personality types is usually required to make a successful organisation.

Yellow is the only area where the security industry shows a lower than average incidence, although this is not unexpected given the nature of the industry and the nature of the Yellow personality.

As we have said, any personality may make a good security officer, however it is understanding how they would deal with situations that are not playing to their strengths that is the key.

To start using Persona in your organisation, please contact:

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