

Basic instincts

Bored with being dissected, evaluated, measured and categorised, business coach **WENDY BUCKINGHAM** put the latest personality assessment tool to the test, and was pleasantly surprised.

When I first heard about the Kolbe Index my response was pretty sceptical. "Oh no – not another assessment tool to measure my aptitude, dissect my personality, evaluate my position, comment on my emotions and tell me where to improve. Leave me alone, already! I just want to be me."

But curiosity got the better of me, especially when I read that using the Kolbe Index had been proved to create business teams with a significantly greater likelihood of achieving their goals. What's more I was told, I wouldn't need to change or improve – I could stay a perfect me!

get on with people who approach life in the same way as we do – and this can be a disaster in business.

For instance, if you have a company with too many "ideas people" who plunge ahead on projects with no attention to research, detail or back-up systems, the result will eventually be chaos. Conversely, if too many people in the organisation lean towards lots of research and systems and are naturally cautious and unwilling to take risks, the organisation may get stuck in the condition of inertia.

The other factor that can cause problems is having people who appear to balance each other in skills, but in fact are too different to work together without strain and tension. You

Balancing act

Kolbe's theory is that a balanced team is created from people who are encouraged to approach their jobs in a way that allows them to use their differing natural instinctive talents.

This enables team members to work in the way that is most energising and efficient. The result is the combined individual and team energy of true synergy.

Sounds simple enough, but choosing "who" to put "where" on that balanced team – even if it is only a single business partner – can be a challenge. We are usually attracted to and



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know the scenario. An executive gives non-specific instructions and wants his/her personal assistant to figure out the details and deadlines. The PA, although armed with all the necessary qualifications and skills, operates best with clear direction as to what is exactly required and when. Both may make the other wrong as they struggle to accommodate their natural differences.



The missing link

So how does the Kolbe Index address this challenge of creating synergy in the workplace in a different way?

Assessment tools have long been focused on measuring the cognitive (IQ) and the affective (personality) parts of the mind. While these tools are helpful in selecting, training and managing people, something has been missing.

In summary, IQ scores are influenced by opportunities to learn. However, the catch here is that being smart doesn't

necessarily predict success. Personality traits are situational and people who get along don't always do a job successfully or accomplish the team's goals.

What has been missing is the third part of the mind – the conative, or instinctive part.

Kathy Kolbe, daughter of E.F. Wonderlic who pioneered the field of personnel testing in the 1940s, developed a system for measuring the conative or striving instinct. She has written a best seller on the subject – *The Conative Connection*.



Table 1:
The four **Action Modes®** explained

Fact Finder	The way we gather information. Within this mode people range from generalist to specialist.
Follow Thru	The way we organise information. Within this mode people range from being adaptive to being structured/systematic.
Quick Start	The way we deal with time and uncertainty. People within this mode range from stabilisers to improvisers.
Implementor	The way we seek tangible, demonstrable solutions. People within this mode range from being abstract to concrete.

Kolbe believes human instinct is the power behind our actions – the source of our mental energy and motivation. Understanding how instincts combine with intelligence and personality will help you optimise your own efforts and those of your colleagues and staff, she says.

With the Kolbe Index, you identify the innate striving instincts you were born with, rather than behaviours and knowledge you have learned. These are what you will or won't do naturally, rather than what you can or can't do. It's not about personality, intelligence, skills or emotions – simply how you best get things done. The idea is that once you have this information – your natural mode of operation – you can go about getting results in your work and your life in a way that is the easiest and most natural and enjoyable for you.

You are also better able to understand and appreciate the contribution of others in your life and business and thus have the tools to build teams with the best chance of success.

There are four Action Modes® – Fact Finder, Follow Thru, Quick Start and Implementor – and your index results reflect how you initiate action, respond to opportunities and prevent problems.

These four Action Modes® are summarised in **table 1**.

When you complete a Kolbe Index test, the modes are scored from one to 10 and a set of four numbers emerges as being your MO (modus operandi). In each of the four modes you can either Prevent (1–3), Respond (4–6) or Initiate (7–10), creating 12 possibilities of approach in the overall result.

Approaching the problem

Kolbe suggests the way we approach problem solving is determined by our MOs. The degree of intensity with which we act in each Action Mode® combines to identify what is called our Natural Advantage™. Although we can all solve problems using any of the 12 methods, each of us has four – one in each Action Mode® – that allow us to do our best, most efficient, creative work.

One of the problems in business is that the people who initiate with Quick Start – the ideas “let's do it” people; the people who more often than not are the ones who bring business in the door – are usually the ones who get the

Who is **Kathy Kolbe?**



Former journalist **Kathy Kolbe** has spent more than 25 years researching and testing her theories on human behaviour.

Initially focused on critical and creative thinking skills, in the '70s she began to explore an under-researched part of the human mind – the conative – and developed the first instinct-based performance evaluation software.

In 1975 she founded the Kolbe Corp which has evolved into a leading provider of Internet-based assessment and performance improvement tools.

Her first professional focus was to pioneer efforts to teach creative problem solving to

greatest recognition and rewards. The “backroom boys” don’t often get promoted. As a result, everybody aspires to be like initiating Quick Starts, so they will be recognised and valued (and get that pay rise and promotion).

This means that a large percentage of people are struggling to be something they are not when they are fine just as they are.

Something else that often occurs is that as soon as someone excels at what they are naturally good at – say a brilliant salesperson keeps topping his/her targets – the reward is to be promoted into a management role that may require a different MO and Natural Advantage™.

Our consummate salesperson may be able to learn the new skills, and carry out the job adequately, but if he/she is not in the flow of how they naturally operate, the result is strain and discomfort that can even manifest in emotional problems and sickness.

The Kolbe system recognises all instincts and talents as being equal and contributing equally to the success of the business, so ideally in an organisation the Fact Finders, Follow Thrus and Implementors in various positions are equally valued and rewarded as being key parts of the team.

The Kolbe A™ Index measures your own MO and Natural Advantage™; the Kolbe B™ Index is for assessing what natural instincts you perceive are necessary for your job. The Kolbe C™ Index is for assessing what is required for the job by an employer or supervisor. If the A, B and C indexes differ to a

certain measurable degree, this indicates the source of what you may already be experiencing as strain and tension between people.

Once the various Kolbe Indexes have been completed, the synergy of the group can be measured which will show where imbalances that have the potential for problems are.

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But knowledge applied is power and, with appropriate coaching and change, choices can then be made to make career, business and personal life easier and more productive.

CASE STUDY Changing habits

Mary, an initiating Fact Finder with Researcher as her Natural Advantage™, was in charge of putting sales teams together and supervising their projects.

Mary needed to make sure her team had all the information. She would send them over lengthy reports that started with lots of facts and background and led up to the important conclusion and action steps. It was the same process she followed in her meetings.

The majority of people she was dealing with initiated from Quick Start and prevented in Fact Finder or Follow Thru. They were generally disinterested in all the frame-up details and wanted get to the bottom line – the actions needed.

Meetings were tense, with an anxious Mary trying to get what she needed to say across and a restless audience eager for her to get on with it.

When Mary understood the relevance of Kolbe Index results, she handled the problem by beginning her meetings and reports with a summary of the important points and actions needed. This got the attention and interest she required. Then she filled in the gaps by making available the details. She was still satisfying her natural instinct to thoroughly research and explain, yet allowing her sales teams to approach the project in a way that was natural for them. ○

WENDY BUCKINGHAM, A BUSINESS COACH, IS NOW A CERTIFIED KOLBE EXTERNAL SPECIALIST AND AUTHOR OF THE GOAL PLANNING HANDBOOK, *READY SET GOAL!* PUBLISHED BY PEARSON EDUCATION AUSTRALIA. SHE CAN BE CONTACTED ON (02) 9960 1413 OR VIA HER WEBSITE www.classonecoaching.com

children. This led to the development of her first award-winning business, Resources for the Gifted, a company which published and sold more than 140 titles to more than 30,000 schools in 15 countries, including 32 titles authored by Kolbe. Her research includes more than 450,000 case studies supporting her theories on conation or “how people take action”. Her work on dynamic educational models that nurture high-level thinking and creativity for children evolved into a worldwide standard for gifted education for pre-school through to college.

Kolbe is also recognised as one of the outstanding business leaders in the US. She was nominated by Time magazine as one of the seven Americans who possess the “spirit to inspire” and has been an Entrepreneurial Fellow at the University of Arizona since 1986. In Kolbe Index terms, she is a Quick Start/Follow Thru, which means her Natural Advantage™ predicts her role as a theorist.