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## **APPLICATION OF BUSINESS-ORIENTED ASSESSMENTS TO IMPROVE COACH AND PLAYER INTERACTIONS: A CASE STUDY**

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## **Introduction**

At the beginning of the Fall 2011 club season, the first author, as the coach of a U-17 girls premier-level soccer team, received a very distressing phone call from a parent of one of his players. This parent indicated that the ongoing actions of several of her daughter's teammates had created an environment on the team that was not the positive-type environment that the coach envisioned for his teams. Over the next couple of days he reflected on this call and observations that he had been making about teammate interactions. He also consulted with his assistant coaches as well as some of the other players on the team. As a result of these observations and information, it became clear that there was not only a challenge that the team needed to face, but a real opportunity to improve team collaboration, communication and cohesion. More importantly, this situation also provided an opportunity for individual players to examine their strengths and weaknesses related to the mental and emotional aspects of their development that Beswick (2001) emphasized as critical, but often ignored, in the development of athletes in their quest to achieve peak performance.

Based on collaborative partnership that has been in place since the late 1990's, the three authors decided to apply an assessment instrument, Trimetrix DNA™, available through Talent Training International (TTI), Ltd. to improve understanding of the behaviors, attitudes, values, and soft-skill-based tendencies of the players on this U-17 girls team. Although this assessment instrument is predominantly used in the business world, Bill and Ron have worked to solve performance issues for numerous sports, including work with amateur and professional athletes. TTI's validated assessments to help Anthony Robles (while he was interning at TTI) recognize and understand his own strengths and weaknesses in regard to behavioral traits and motivators.

This information helped Anthony become the 2011 national wrestling champion at 125-pound. The TTI authors have also assisted high school soccer teams, including the State Champion of Georgia, numerous college basketball teams, including the University of North Carolina and the NBA Phoenix Suns. Their most recent work with PGA and LPGA members has combined the use of TTI assessments and their patent pending application of Validating Ipsative Decision-making using Electroencephalography (VIDE) process to uncover the beliefs behind our actions (Bonnstetter and others 2012). The purpose of this paper is to provide examples from the application of TTI's instrument to improve a coach's understanding of the players on the team and player understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

## **Methods**

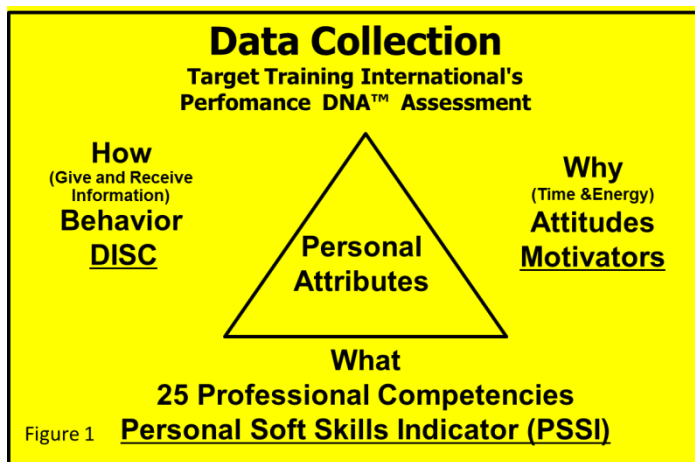
*Participants:* The participants in this study were 20 players and two coaches from a U-17 Premier Level Club team, the "Fire". Players were sophomores and juniors from four high schools. . Participation was voluntary and parental permission was obtained for each player. References to individual players are made with numbers.

*Instrument:* At the most basic level, the TriMetrix DNA™ instrument simply helps give voice to those things that we all know, but are challenged to find words to express about ourselves. There is nothing in the tools that can be classified as good or bad. The tools help articulate how

each person is unique and helps identify different strengths and weaknesses, which can be worked on and altered.

TriMetrix DNA™ is an on-line instrument that takes approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Players accessed the online survey on their own time. Staying mentally on task was crucial and it was important to complete the entire survey without interruption. It was emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers and to not over think their replies. When taking the survey, there are references made to “your job.” In the context of this survey, the players were told their job was being a soccer player and a teammate.

The three-part tool (Figure 1) assesses the behaviors that people bring to a position, in this case being a player, the values that motivate them to do a job, and the extent to which people have obtained personal competencies also referred to as soft skills. These assessments helped us understand what made each of our players function. The first assessment (DISC) measures normal behavior or “How” a person carries out decisions and “How” they want to receive communications that influence them. The second assessment looks at their motivators or the “Why” behind their actions. The third assessment, is the Personal Soft Skills Indicator (PSSI) which measures 25 “soft skills” or more appropriately, professional competencies. Information regarding validity and reliability of the instruments can be obtained from the authors upon request. In this paper, we will only focus on behavioral (DISC) and motivational aspects of the instrument.



## Results

**Assessment I.** The behavioral component of TTI’s assessment describes a person’s behavior in the context of four basic styles, represented by the letters DISC (Bonnstetter and Suiter, 2011). A person’s behavior is the sum of the intensity of all four factors: D – Dominance, how you approach and respond to problems; I – Influence, how you interact and attempt to influence others to your point of view; S – Steadiness, how you respond to change, variation and pace of your environment; and C – Compliance, how you respond to rules and procedures set by authorities. Data for the 20 players are provided on Figure 2. The wheel demonstrates the similarities and differences in behavior amongst team members and uses eight specific

identifiers: conductor; persuader; promoter; relater; supporter; coordinator; analyzer; and implementor. The two coaches for the team are represented by triangles.

The head coach is represented by two triangles, 7 and 8, because he took the assessment twice on different days to give a sense of the reproducibility of the results. Triangle 2 is the assistant coach. Both coaches are coordinators whose strengths tend towards being self-disciplined; setting high standards of conduct and work; being alert to problems, rules, errors and procedures; having the ability to make tough decisions without letting emotions interfere; and emphasizing the need for quality. Fifteen percent of the players have similar characteristics. Thirty-five percent of the players are supporters and relaters who are very supportive of team activities. Relaters tend to: create an environment where people feel significant and support others in achieving goals; offer understanding and friendship; and show team loyalty. Supporters tend to: be understanding and good listeners; be patient and comforting; like to be in a team environment; prefer an environment where long service is deemed important. Interestingly the three goal keepers (10, 12, 15), and a fourth (17) often willing to play keeper, when necessary, are relaters.

Two players are considered to be promoters who tend to: utilize social and verbal skills within the team; be good at persuading people; and calm conflict situations within the team. It should be noted that the closer that a person plots to the center of the wheel, the less clear the predominance of a given behavioral style. Another 25 percent of the players are persuaders. They tend to get results through team members; promote and accept change, and can be decisive and aggressive when presented with challenges. The two conductors (10%) on the team like challenging assignments. They have a strong drive for results and like to be in position of power and authority. They appreciate direct answers and like confrontation. Last, but certainly not least, the one implementor will make tough decisions using insight and facts. She appreciated a structured approach to the use of her time. In addition, she challenged the team to develop high performance standards.

**Assessment II.** The second assessment provides background on a person's motivators or fundamental reasons for our behavior. The six motivators that explain the "whys" behind a person's actions are: theoretical, utilitarian, aesthetic, social, individualistic, and traditional (Spangler 1928). It is important to recognize that these motivators are not always readily observed and are often hidden. Figure 3 highlights the primary and secondary motivators for the players and coaches. This graph illustrates that 80% of the players are driven by social factors. They thrive on: eliminating conflict and pain within the team; assisting with the needs and struggles of team members; and taking a personal interest in team members. Forty percent of the players are driven by theoretical factors through which these players thrive on: solving team problems; Identifying and systematizing team activities, pursuing knowledge and truth. Thirty percent of the players have individualistic factors that serve as secondary motivators. These factors include that they want to take a tactical approach to life and develop team relationships that advance their position within the team whereby they can attain and use power. They want to lead the team while planning and carrying out a winning strategy.

The head coach's two primary motivators are theoretical and individualistic factors. The assistant coach has aesthetics and theoretical as the primary and secondary motivators. Only one player has aesthetics as the primary motivator. People who are influenced strongly by this thrive on:

creative expression within the team; want to understand the feelings of team members; and thrive on the uniqueness of experiences missed by other team members.

Figure 2

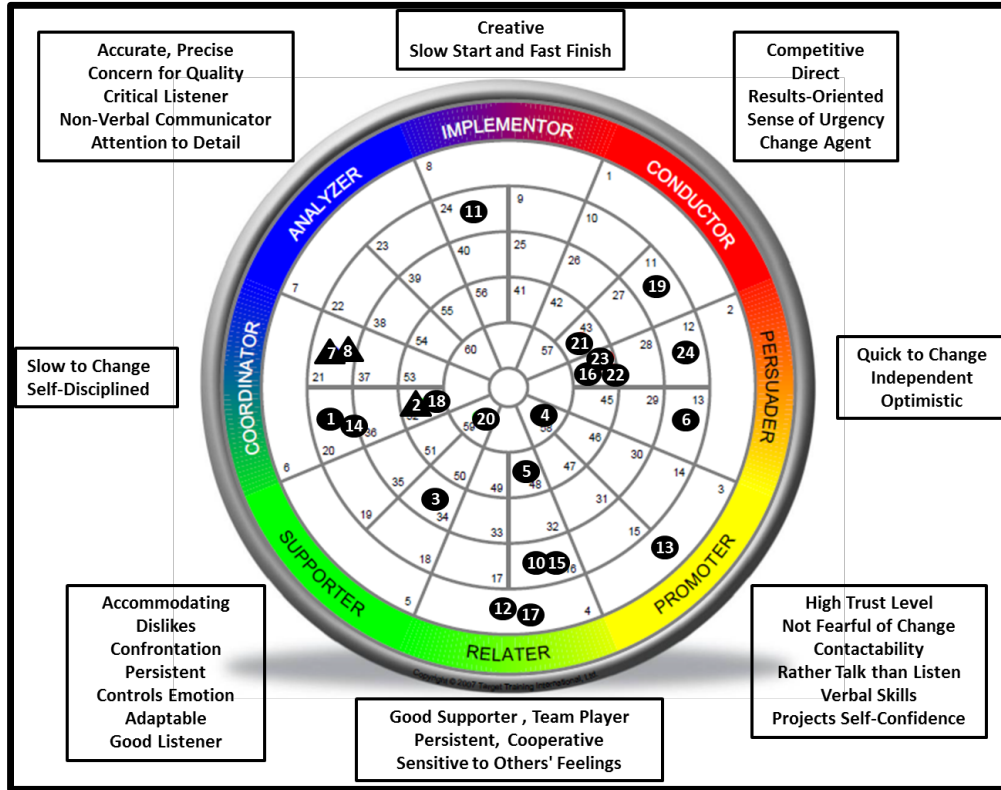
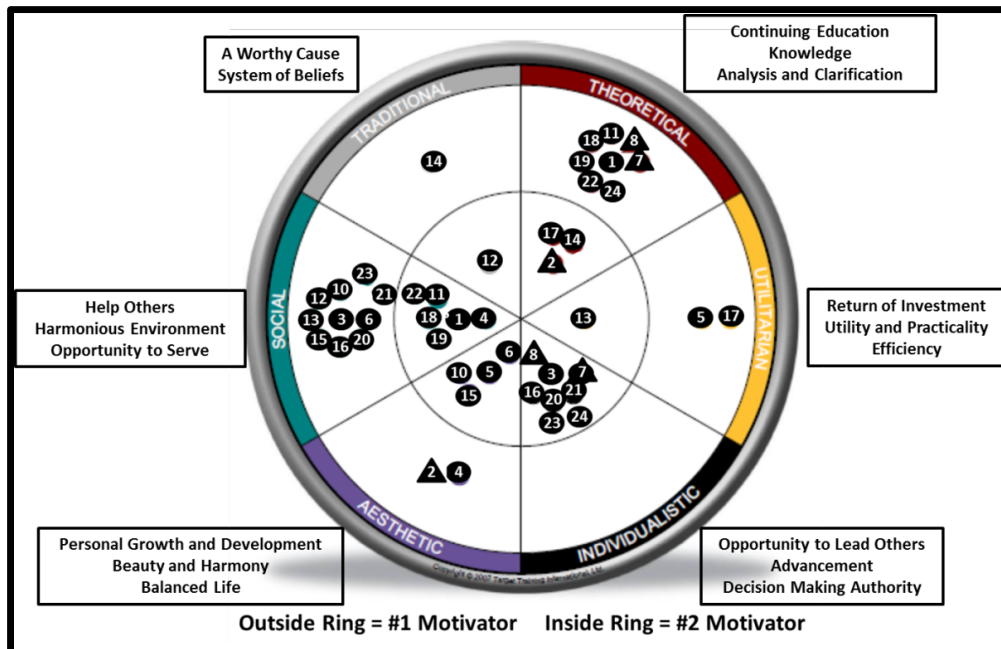


Figure 3



## Applications

One of the primary purposes of giving the players the assessment was to help each player gain a better understanding of self and to show them how they are similar and different from one another. By increasing their understanding of self and their teammates, the goal was to help them to develop strategies to meet the demands of the environment, that is, being a member of the team. Each player was sent a report about their behavioral and motivational characteristics.

The following is an example of how one player gained a better understanding of self and made the entire exercise worthwhile regardless of the extent to which the rest of the team benefitted. It clearly had a positive impact on her.

*“So, before the season even started, I could've told you that I always followed rules. In my eyes, as the Trimetrix report said, I see rules as being there to follow. However, I saw this as more of a "party-pooper/too uptight" thing. And I didn't really see that it was okay. I thought it was more of a negative quality, when really it could've been a strength. I also learned that I can be stubborn at times. When I first saw that on the Trimetrix report, I immediately regarded it as totally wrong, but when I thought about it, it can be very true. I'm not necessarily someone that will totally regard the opinions of others as wrong, but I can still be stubborn. The report also said that I was pessimistic which really didn't float my boat at the time, so I worked hard to fix that in case it was a problem. And, according to my teammates, my hard work is paying off. Also, I learned and am still learning, even outside of soccer, that I'm motivated by my values. If you had asked me that before the report, I probably would've told you that my motivation was along the lines of "I'll do this because I don't want to get in trouble".”*

Prior to two practices, the team spent approximately 30 minutes in small groups of 3 to 4 using a TTI customized team report that included amongst other things, team wheels for behaviors and motivators (Fig. 2 and 3). The small groups were created by the coach. Several groups purposefully were created to include the players who were having the apparent problems with each other. In the small groups, each player presented their behavioral characteristics. They discussed how these characteristics may influence how they interact with each other and how their behavioral tendencies may create roadblocks to effective communication both on and off the field.

In the context of our original story, the challenges that were noted during the call to the coach were likely the result of differences in both behavioral tendencies (conductor/persuader relative to relater/supporters) and motivational factors (theoretical versus aesthetic). Table 1 illustrates some of the behavioral roadblocks that were likely contributing to the relationship challenges.

Table 1. Potential factors that may create conflicts between conductors and relater/supporter/coordinators

<b>Conductor</b>	<b>Relater/Supporter/Coordinator</b>
Quick Pace	Slow Pace
Extroverted	Introverted
Impatient	Patient

Enjoys Conflict	Avoids Conflict
Quick to Anger	Slow to Anger
High Risk	Low Risk
<b>Tendencies</b>	
Conductors tend to overpower. They must hard to build up a trusting relationship before Relaters/Supporters/Coordinators feel comfortable verbalizing their concerns. Conductors need to be mindful of their listening skills as well as their diplomacy.	

Potential conflicts can also occur because of the influence of different motivators. The contrasts between the primary motivators of theoretical versus aesthetic also contributed to the relationship problems. To the aesthetic- dominated player, the theoretically motivated player would appear to be a close-minded, know-it-all. In addition, the secondary-motivator for the aesthetic-dominated player was social that will lead to them having issues with those motivated by individualistic tendencies, which was the second motivator for the theoretical-dominated player. At its most basic lever, the socials will be have issues with the individualistic tendencies to place themselves above others. Interestingly after the small group discussions, the coaches noticed a notable improvement in the relationship between these two players to the point where they were choosing to warm up with one another, which had not happened prior to the discussion of the assessment results.

Another example as to how understanding behavioral tendencies may help you as a coach in addressing issues between players on the field. Here is a message that coach Gosselin sent to one of his players after a conversation after a practice (names have been changed):

*“I sensed from our conversation last night that you may be challenged playing with Jules in the back. I would like you to look at the attached team report that we discussed together early in the season. It may help to explain some of the struggles that may be occurring. Specifically look at where you and Jules plot on the Team Wheel ... The characteristics that you and Jules have are similar to Ron (Bonnstetter) and I. Ron is the person that has provided us with the Performance DNA instrument and he is a conductor. Many people struggle dealing with Ron because he is direct, will take aggressive action, and will seem to become angry quickly. He thrives on change. This is Jules. In contrast, I like to do things systematically, diplomatically, and do not like things to change too quickly. I have learned to adapt to his style and we have become very good friends. I am sure he has adapted to my style as well... As I indicated last night, we need to focus on what we can control, that is in this case, how we go about adapting to others. It is not easy, but in the big picture it is a valuable skill that requires practice. I do not have any expectations that you will become BFFs (Best Friends Forever) with Jules, but it is important that you recognize your differences with Jules as you interact on the field. She may come across as angry and impatient especially if she is under stress. One of the reasons I have Jules in the middle back is to take advantage of her conductor style.*

From a coaching perspective, attempting to change your defensive system of play to meet the needs of a given game situation, may meet resistance if your backs have characteristics of coordinators. Furthermore, if you have expectations that your backs are going to need to be loud communicators then a coordinator may be very much challenged by this. It is not that they cannot be loud, it is just that it is going to take a very concerted effort on their part to be able to overcome their more natural tendencies. Persuaders are typically more animated and come

across as being extroverted in contrast to the coordinators who will be introverted and be very reserved during their interactions with each other. The coordinators will keep their emotions to themselves. From a coaching perspective, coordinators need to be given an environment where they will have the opportunity to directly and openly express their feelings and concerns. When facing challenges such as being down at half time 1 to nil, the persuaders will be saying "We can do it" whereas the coordinators will be asking "How do we do it?" In the context of receiving instruction, coordinators need specific instruction, follow up and follow through.

If a coach can connect with the top two motivators for an individual player, this will increase the likelihood of getting the player more engaged and moving into action. The opposite is also true. For example, over 71% of the Fire players have social as their primary or secondary motivator. This is not unusual for women soccer players to want a very social environment. They want a team environment that has minimal conflict and is in harmony. As a coach whose top two motivators are fundamentally different, it is extremely important that I be open to dealing with subjectivity and feelings and the extent to which I assert my decision making authority. If the culture of the team is not meeting the motivational needs of the player, this will increase the likelihood of a player leaving and looking else where for a team that meets their needs.

### **Closing Thoughts**

As a coach, we are ultimately educators and it is important that we get our players to reflect on their individual strengths and weaknesses. When creating a team, as we know from many examples, the most successful ones are not always the ones with the greatest athletes or the most skilled players. Commonly, the most successful teams are the ones that come together and take advantage of their strengths and manage their weaknesses. The Trimetrix HD provides a tool that can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of individuals as well as teams. In many cases, getting a team that consists of group of players who have the behavioral and motivational characteristics distributed around the wheel (Fig. 2 and 3) may increase your chances of team success.

However, when it comes down to it, helping a player understand themselves and their teammates as outlined in the following note conveyed to Coach Gosselin late in the season has rewards in and of itself that go well beyond the soccer pitch.

*“being honest, at the beginning of the season, I really wasn't looking forward to this whole bonding, getting-to-know-each-other stuff. I thought that we were better off spending our time working on soccer and not learning about each other.... However, looking back, you can see that I was obviously soooooo wrong. And I guess that going through that really helped me respect you more as a coach (not that I didn't respect you already, or anything). Also, when all of us were just out there in the open, it helped us bond so much more and I am so much closer to this team than I thought was possible at the beginning of the season. And bonding, obviously led to better and more positive interaction..... Like I said earlier, if you had asked me at the beginning of the season, I would've told you that this would've been a waste of time. However, it has helped tremendously. As players, and as friends, we understand and respect each other better. And the feeling goes out from everybody for everybody. No teammate is excluded from this.”*



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