

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Are questionnaires useful training aids?

Questionnaires come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Choosing the right type and format of questionnaire largely depends on your purpose.

One of the many jokes about psychologists is that they simultaneously greet you with a handshake and a questionnaire to fill in. Well, you do not have to be a psychologist to become the butt of this joke; just a trainer who uses questionnaires as training aids.

Questionnaires come in a variety of shapes and sizes. At one end of the scale there are 'pop' questionnaires of the 'Are you a good lover?' variety and at the other respectable psychometric instruments administered by certified people under licence. They all have their place in the scheme of things.

The reason why there are so many different types of questionnaire is because they cover such a broad spectrum of human attributes. Here are six questionnaire types ranged from the most straightforward to the most complex.

1. Knowledge/attainment
2. Skill/aptitude
3. Behaviour styles/preferences
4. Attitudes/beliefs
5. Intelligence
6. Personality/temperament

Just to complicate matters within these different categories there are considerable variations in the house-style of questionnaires. Some use a checklist format, others offer paired statements, and still others offer a range of options and invite you to select one or to prioritise them.

Choosing an appropriate type and format of questionnaire largely depends on your purpose. Broadly there are just four purposes. You could use questionnaires to:

1. test whether people have attained a certain standard in knowledge and/or skills

2. establish people's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about something
3. help someone learn/develop and increase their self-awareness
4. predict people's suitability for a job/career and/or their potential.

Clearly these four categories may not be mutually exclusive. You could, for example, combine 1 and 4 by testing knowhow and use the results to select or reject candidates for a particular job. Or, you could conduct an attitude survey, 2 above, and feedback the findings to help people learn, 3 above.

Questionnaires to help learning and development differ significantly from psychometrics that are designed for assessment by third parties. Questionnaire for development purposes needs to be reliable (i.e. to tell the same story on different occasions) and valid (i.e. to measure accurately enough whatever it set out to).

However, even more important are norms that help learners compare themselves with other people. Norms usually put scores into bands, five bands is typical, so that people get a relative feel for whether their score is high, moderate or low. If you are going to make frequent use of a questionnaire, it is useful to develop your own local norms rather than relying on norms which have been calculated for other groups from different organizations and, sometimes, different cultures. You only need, say, fifty sets of scores to make this a worthwhile exercise.

Peter Honey; founder of Peter Honey Publications Ltd, gives his four pieces of advice for the trainer using questionnaires for development:

1. Whenever you plan to use a questionnaire on a training programme, always do it yourself first as preparation. The best way to understand a questionnaire is to complete it yourself and see what it tells you about you. When you have completed the questionnaire yourself, read all the supporting material so that you feel comfortable with what it's all about and the background.
2. If you are designing a training programme that includes a number of different topics, never schedule more than two questionnaires per day. Familiarity breeds contempt and if people are over exposed to questionnaires, they tend to lose their novelty value. Questionnaires, even when they employ a different format and/or probe different aspects, are too similar and need to be separated by other activities.
3. When people are sceptical about the value of questionnaires, don't be defensive or make exaggerated claims. Simply say that questionnaires are just devices for provoking initial thoughts about a topic. The results are purely for their own 'edification and delight' and not to be placed on files or used by third parties.
4. By all means invent your own questionnaires but always dry run them before going 'live' and do statistical checks to establish their reliability and validity. Detailed advice on the steps to go through is given in the final section of my manual on self-assessment questionnaires.



Enabling ^{even} better performance

Peter Honey Publications Ltd has a range of questionnaires for training, learning or self development. The questionnaires come in a variety of formats from printed booklets to online forms. For further information on Peter Honey Publications Learning Series, Behaviour series and Trainer Styles questionnaires, please visit www.peterhoney.com

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Company Profile:

Peter Honey Publications Ltd was founded by Dr Peter Honey – a leading guru on learning and behaviour and their impact peoples' performance in the work place. He is a prolific author, consultant and speaker.

The company publishes a range of resources to help individuals, teams and organisations make learning a priority. Products include online self-assessment questionnaires, booklets for learners and manuals for trainers. The best known product is the Honey and Mumford "Learning Styles Questionnaire" which was first published in 1982.

All the products are used globally with core markets in the UK, US, Australia and Europe. Customers include Blue Chip Companies, Local Councils, Universities, over 100 NHS Trusts and many training consultants and executive coaches as well as individual learners and students.

Our mission at Peter Honey Publications is to create success through learning. Learning, the most important of all human capabilities, will never become obsolete. Continuous learning is the key to sustained innovation and competitiveness.

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