

Stepping Stones



Sharing Experiences of The Highlands Company

NOVEMBER 2002, ISSUE 1

CSU Students Rate Highlands Battery #1

by Lazar Emanuel

As part of their training in a Counseling & Career Development course in Career & Employment Concepts, 21 graduate students attending Colorado State University were required to take the Highlands Battery, MBTI, the Strong Inventory, and True Colors. The course was conducted by CSU Professor Richard Feller. Following the completion of the Battery by all the students, Anne Angerman, a Highlands licensee with an office in Denver, led the students in a group feedback which I was able to attend.

After the students had completed all four assessments, Prof. Feller distributed a survey which was completed by each student. The survey asked the students to rank the four assessment tests in order of their effectiveness. The results of the survey will please and encourage all of us who have worked to enhance and encourage the use of the Battery.

The 21 students ranged in age from 22 to 48. The average age was 29. In addition to ranking the four assessment tools, the survey asked the students two basic questions about THAB:

Q: Do you agree with the generalist/specialist scale results?

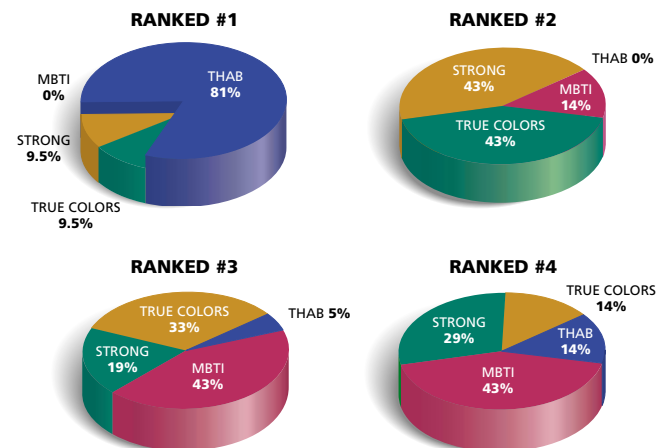
A: Yes, 17. No, 4.

Q: Do you agree with the extrovert/introvert scale result?

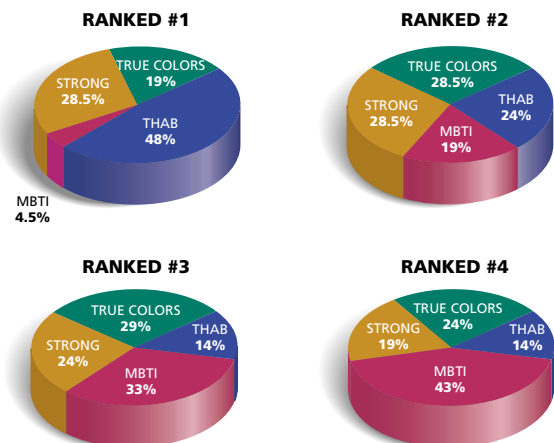
A: Yes, 21. No, 0.

The rankings given by the students are in the charts below.

Instruction: You have taken the Strong Interest and Skills Confidence Inventory, the MBTI, True Colors and the Highlands Battery. List these tests in the order of their effectiveness in measuring your abilities or talents.



Instruction: List the Strong Interest and Skills Confidence Inventory, the MBTI, True Colors and the Highlands Battery in the order of their effectiveness in guiding you in future career decisions.



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THAB Observations —Notes from Academia

— By Dr. Tom Tavantzis

I recently had the opportunity to conduct a small, informal survey of graduate students in my Psychological Assessments in Organizations class at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. The twelve students are enrolled in the Training & Development Master's program with a concentration in Organizational Psychology, which is the portion of the curriculum for which I have directorial responsibility. The average age for students in the class is 34 years and the group has an average of seven years of experience in a T&D or Human Resources role in the workplace.

Approximately half the students are currently in a management level position and three quarters are at least half way through the part-time, evening Master's program. All of these students were administered the THAB-CD and received group feedback. Upon completion of our feedback session, I asked each student to fill out an anonymous survey. While the survey was brief, it did provide some illuminating observations with respect to students' perceptions of THAB.

The survey asked a total of 11 questions geared toward gaining a better understanding of how the students experienced THAB. Two of these questions, along with the corresponding answers, were very interesting and provided some good validation. I was intrigued by responses to the first question – "How accurate a measure was the THAB of your abilities?" On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being high and 10 being low, what do you suppose was the average score registered by all students? An impressive 2.08!

The responses to a second question were equally fascinating. The question asked students to rank THAB in a comparison to three other instruments they had taken in the past. The comparison was intended to rank the instruments' effectiveness in measuring abilities and talents or guiding career direction. Students in this particular class had all taken the NEO-PI. All survey participants had previously taken the MBTI at work with most having taken DiSC. Others had taken the HBBDI, Birkmen and FIRO-B. (I had used the FIRO-B in a previous career development class.) Essentially, students could rank any test they had ever taken, but had to put them in order of their top four. The overall mean ranking for THAB was 1.08!

It is significant that this group of very experienced T&D and HR professionals from several large Fortune 500 and mid-sized companies agree on the perceived accuracy and significance of THAB for individuals.

In another educational activity relevant to our efforts, students from the same Assessments class were asked to choose two instruments that their companies relied on for development. The task required that students critically examine these tools from the perspective of reliability, validity, norms and various other psychometric dimensions. During their review of relevant literature, it was suggested that students utilize Buros'

Mental Measurement Yearbook as a reference. Buros quickly became the test review source of choice for the group. Of the many instruments used and reviewed during the semester, only the NEO-PI received top honors, with FIRO-B and MBTI getting adequate reviews. Not surprisingly, both the NEO-PI and FIRO-B are not being used in any of the corporate settings represented in this group! Much to the chagrin of the students, the tools that failed to measure up – HBBDI, DiSC, Birkmen – were the very ones being used frequently within their companies. One student was appalled that her company director was planning to roll out a major initiative for employee development using a tool for which she could find no supporting psychometric data! One thing became increasingly clear to these students. Organizations (and these are Fortune 500 companies and federal government agencies) make their buying decisions based on the marketing wizardry of the salesperson, rather than on sound scientific data. One student commented aloud that this is a situation of "hardheaded businesspeople being softheaded on numbers."

According to one student's review, THAB by comparison, was judged to be a strong instrument based on available reliability and validity data. (Students thought the availability of this data on THAB's Web site was helpful.) Similar data are available when looking at the Ball Aptitude and Johnson O'Connor instruments. However, a major weakness identified by students for THAB was the absence of a review by Buros. Again, it is significant to note that students came to rely on Buros as a definitive source for instrument review.

One final observation on the topic of group feedbacks: The Assessments class provided, in retrospect, a natural laboratory to study group feedbacks. 50% of the class had previously taken my summer course in career development, which is structured very much like THAB's Personal Strategic Planning Seminar. The other portion of the class took THAB during the current semester and received only one 3 hour group feedback. Essentially, we spent no time in the Assessments class discussing or using the abilities information beyond that initial group session. My observation was that there was far less satisfaction and many more quizzical looks and doubts associated with the group that did not benefit from several, in-depth classroom sessions to digest personal THAB results. After seeing that this was the case, I provided 30 minute blocks of time for students to review their results privately with me. With the exception of one student, all of the Assessment class students sought me out for further consultation. Reports of satisfaction, enthusiasm and understanding rose dramatically following these individual sessions and each student sent me an e-mail on the experience or mentioned it to me personally during subsequent class meetings. *

Tom Tavantzis became a Highlands Licensee in 1996. He is Director, Organizational Psychology and Leadership Program, Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA.