

## IN FOCUS: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

DO YOU USE YOUR LEFT OR  
RIGHT BRAIN?

You may be able to improve the way you think, to suit your finance role. Yes, really! Here consultant psychologist **Phil Jefferis** explains the Herrmann Brain Dominance Tool which looks at the different characteristics of 'left' and 'right' brain activity.

**F**OR THOSE OF you who have navigated the corporate world to senior management, you are likely to have, along the way, brushed up against, been subjected to or been gently press-ganged into psychometric testing. The ubiquitous nature of measurement tools for both core ability and personality preference to think and behave, to my mind, leads to problems for those on the receiving end of such analysis.

On many occasions in my work as a business psychologist, clients have often received an array of output reports, prior to anything we may work together on. These clients are often swamped with unfiltered information overload, which has not been effectively contextualised to their working environment.

But the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) is one tool that offers clarity and relevance to all business professions, accounting and finance being no exception. Its outputs can be clearly assimilated and acted upon in a developmental context. It has 'face validity' – in other words, what it seeks to measure is of immediate surface relevance. The test outputs are visually clear and engaging. Questionnaire-based, it is quick and easy to complete. Individuals are asked to report

themselves through questions on aspects of work and domestic life, which then makes up their profile.

**Left and right brained thinking**

The human brain is made up of two distinct hemispheres and research has shown a great deal of specific functioning can be attributed to the left and the right hemispheres. Broadly speaking, the left hemisphere deals predominantly with rational, logical and structured thinking and the right involved with creativity and regulating our emotions. The HBDI splits each hemisphere into two and seeks to measure behaviours relating to four 'thinking quadrants' (see the illustration opposite).

The two quadrants in the left hemisphere are:

- quadrant A – (blue, upper left) – this handles intellectual processing which is structured and systematic. This area deals with the evaluation of ideas, often through analysis of numbers. This is the mathematical and technical area of the brain, that works with rational, logical problem-solving; and
- quadrant B – (green, lower left) – this deals predominantly with practical and procedural thinking. This area deals with

organisation, reliability, efficiency order and discipline. In the business context, this quadrant relates to operational planning and the implementation and administration of schemes.

Then the right hemisphere is split into two quadrants:

- quadrant C – (red, lower right) – this area of the brain deals with a natural inclination towards 'feelings' and interpersonal sensitivity and empathy – the ability to relate to others with ease; and
- quadrant D – (yellow, upper right) – this deals predominantly with creative, intuitive and strategic thinking styles. High preference in this area would suggest an individual's ability to take a holistic, 'big picture' view of events and to work simultaneously on a range of tasks.

The output of the questionnaire offers the individual clear visual representation of the relative preferences for each of the four quadrants. Points within each quadrant are joined to form the individual's 'Hermann Square'.

It is not surprising that many professionals in the finance industry often have a strong preference for the A quadrant where numerical and mathematical reasoning resides (see Figure 1).

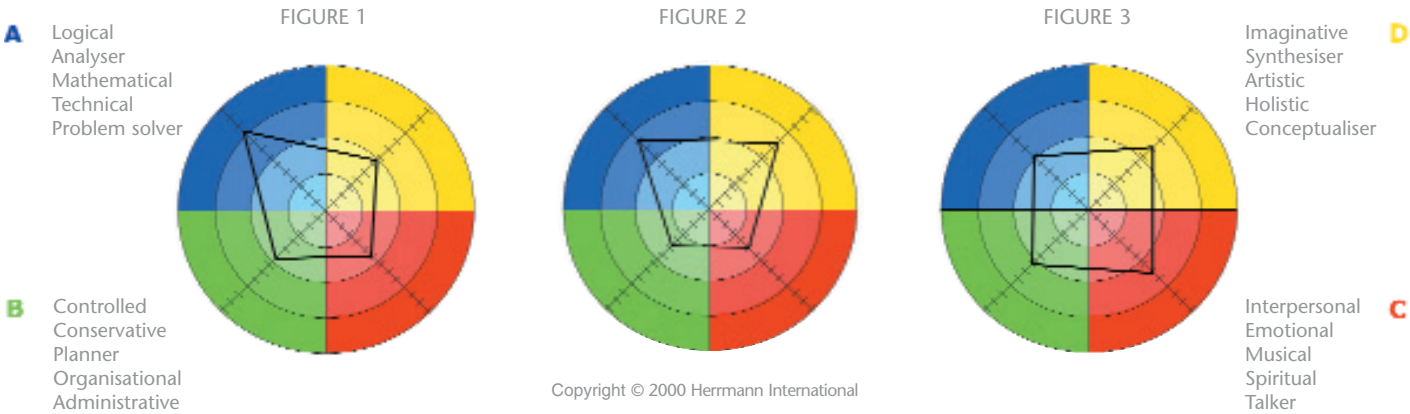
**Preference**

Often a strong preference for this 'left-brained' thinking style may dominate to the detriment of the other quadrants. It is common for

See  
[www.herrmann-uk.com](http://www.herrmann-uk.com) for more information

**Finance professionals seeking to develop management skills need to realise 'right brain' potential**

HBDI PROFILE – THE QUADRANT



finance professionals, particularly more junior executives, to have this strong preference. Senior finance managers and directors, from my experience, will need to have a shared strength in the D quadrant component (see Figure 2).

At this level, there is more often than not a need to be visionary in the application of technical financial knowledge to a broader commercial context. As such, the requirements for creative and strategic thinking are greater. Once individuals have a benchmark as to their thinking style preferences, they can choose to address greater emphasis on those areas. Such skills can be accessed through practical steps such as:

- prioritising thinking – not doing time during the working day;
- instigating a group brainstorming session, and;
- the use of metaphors in problem solving.

When using this tool in the assessment of general managers/managing directors and CEOs, or assessing the potential for someone to achieve at a cross functional discipline, the Herrmann can be extremely useful. In organisations where ultimate corporate leadership is routed through finance, important skill sets need to be learnt. In essence, such a role requires a balance between each of the quadrants to a greater extent (see Figure 3). Once again, the D quadrant is a requirement to envision future strategy and work predominantly from an overview

perspective. Increasingly, successful general managers rely heavily on effective facilitation skills and empowerment of others to perform optimally. The Herrmann C quadrant offers valuable information on emotional intuition that is the ‘raw material’ for success in this area.

**Imagination**  
Broadly speaking, where the technical components of financial practice reside in the ‘left brain’, people management and core components of leadership reside in the ‘right brain’. For financial professionals seeking to develop their management skills, it is often a case of realising their ‘right brain’ potential. The ‘right brain’ is not a controlled, analytical place. It is a place of imagination, fun, ‘play’, artistry, emotion and expression.

As Daniel Pink put it in his book *A Whole New Mind*, ‘We’ve progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now, we’re progressing once again – to a society of creators and empathisers, of pattern recognisers and meaning makers’. So although the ‘keys to the kingdom’ do not, in my opinion, reside wholly in ‘right-brained thinking’ a balanced set of thinking skills is extremely important, and for the technically trained professions, that invariably means a shift to the right.

The Herrmann is also useful for groups. The ‘Herrmann squares’ of several individuals can be superimposed and a group

aggregate calculated. Preferred thinking styles at the group level offers insight into corporate culture, and the general style of work in any given environment. This can work developmentally, and in a recruitment context, in terms of ‘person fit’ and also redressing the balance of a predominantly left or right brained organisation by avoiding the pitfalls of overly recruiting to type.

Finally, some words of warning: the outputs of the Herrmann should be treated as a ‘guide’ for development, rather than diagnostic ‘gospel’. As a self reported questionnaire the outputs are the individuals’ perceptions of themselves, and not a measure of actual ability. Nevertheless, with a thoughtful and honest approach, this test can be very useful. With a bit of luck it might just offer points for executive development that will be considered, reflected upon and actioned. ■



Phil Jefferis works as a consultant psychologist at Thompson Dunn Ltd.  
phil.jefferis@thompsondunn.com  
www.thompsondunn.com