

Chris Welford & Jackie Sykes

Staying



in Business

A practical guide to sanity, success and
satisfaction at work

sane.works

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Lastly we really want to acknowledge each other for practising what we preach by providing the mutual appreciation and support that enables us to stay sane in business.

About the authors



Chris Welford

People are a source of continual fascination to me – their motives, their drive, how they think and how they behave. This has been true for as long as I can remember! Whether we are alone, in a family or team, as a part of a large organisation or as citizens of a state, I wonder what makes us all tick; what lies beneath who we appear to be on the surface and what governs the way we act.

Over many years, working in HR, as a management consultant, a business psychologist, coach and registered psychotherapist, I have built up a picture of what seems to matter time and time again: what makes those who are exceptional truly different; how corporate culture excites and motivates us and how it sometimes turns us off and how extraordinary leaders do their jobs. Sometimes it feels to me like I am on a lifelong quest to understand the complexities of human nature. Maybe that in itself is a good thing?

My career has taken me all over the world and I have been lucky enough to have worked with hundreds of senior managers as an assessor, coach and team facilitator. I'm trusted by leading organisations to offer insight, advice and support and my clients tell me this is always delivered in a warm, inclusive and engaging way. You can read more of my thoughts in *Coaching at Work*, *HR Magazine*, *HR Review*, *Personnel Today*, *Management-Issues.com* and *Edge* magazine.



Jackie Sykes

When I was a toddler I started to ask the question 'Why?' and my curiosity has never subsided. As a teenager I made up my mind to be a psychologist and the enthusiasm I feel for my vocation is undiminished. From the beginning it was the world of organisations that caught my attention and in particular the way we behave in business. Over the last twenty years it has been a privilege to work with

so many interesting and varied companies across the UK and internationally and in such a diverse range of sectors and functions. No day is the same and every client I work with is a source of endless fascination to me.

I'm a pragmatist; a driven and positive person who turns ideas into action. I believe that business psychology, neurolinguistic programming and psychotherapy have so much to offer the world. Whether I'm carrying out an in-depth assessment, working one to one with someone on his or her personal development, facilitating a team build or running a workshop, I keep coming back to the idea of potential. It's my belief that we are all capable of so much more: individually and collectively. My goal is to help to enable my clients to be the best possible versions of themselves they can be. We all deserve sanity, success and satisfaction at work and sometimes we need a little support along the way so that we feel like an effective and efficient cog in the right wheel of life!

This has been an incredible journey for me, starting off in psychometric research and test publication, moving through HR consultancy and line management and now co-directing my own assessment, development, coaching and therapy business. I am looking forward to the next chapter as a new author and hope our observations add value to others in the business of work!

Foreword

This book has been written for anyone who faces the rough and tumble of work, with all the messy and complex web of relationships that this entails. Whether you are employed or have your own business, it is from your colleagues, clients, stakeholders and suppliers that you draw energy and inspiration, while, at other times, it can be those very same people who make you feel as though you are going insane!



Work can be an inspiration – or a weight on our shoulders. (Photo by CW)

Staying Sane?

It has been accepted for thousands of years that the key to wellbeing is *mens sana in corpore sano* – a healthy mind in a healthy body. This book addresses the first. Here we look at the mental processes that lead to happiness, resilience and productivity. We don't specifically address the physical side of the equation in detail – diet, exercise, sleep, relaxation and nutrition – but that's not to say we don't believe looking after your body is of any less importance.

You can look at sanity in lots of different ways. It may be that you think of it as an absence of mental illness, or possibly you are drawn to the slightly wider idea of sanity being freedom from dis-*ease*: freedom from the suffering, alienation and unhappiness that can be part of life.

Either way, we don't think the definition of sanity belongs solely to psychiatrists, psychotherapists or psychologists. For us, sanity is simply being happy, fulfilled and productive. These are states we can all aspire to. Unfortunately, the world of work has a nasty habit of bending us out of shape.

Definition of a Business

Our definition of a business is a broad one. It's an organisation or economic system in which goods and services are exchanged for one another or for money. We don't make any particular distinction between businesses that are privately owned, not-for-profit or state-owned. Large organisations tend to be more complex than small ones but exactly the same patterns of human behaviour play out wherever you are. So, whether you are working in a multi-national or a corner shop, we hope that you will find something between these covers that is useful, relevant and interesting to you.

The Reader

This book is written for people who:

- Usually find business books a bit boring and who have picked up this book in the hope that it won't be dense, dull or full of waffle!
- Are starved of time and have started more books than they have finished.
- Would like us to get to the point and not stray off it.
- Are only interested in psychology and psychotherapy to the extent that either is useful in everyday life.
- Want outcomes, not aspirations.

The Authors

This book is written by two individuals who:

- Wear more than one hat – be it consultant, psychologist or psychotherapist – so you should expect it to be a mixture of disciplines.
- Are knowledgeable about how people learn, perform and grow.
- Use that knowledge to help both individuals and groups to develop their personality, aspirations and achievements.
- Think in pragmatic, business terms.

We started this project many years ago when we discovered how much we liked working together and found that we could achieve more when we did. Jackie is a classically trained chartered psychologist and Chris is a blend of psychologist, management consultant and psychotherapist.

In writing this book we are trying to bring useful elements of psychology and psychotherapy to everyday organisational life. This is not an academic piece of work, nor is it a conventional management textbook. Over the years we have read a lot of material and tried out an equally large number of approaches. In this book, we are simply keen to share what we think works.

The Book

This book is divided into information and resources.

- We start off by looking at **personality**.
- The next chapter talks about what happens to personality under **pressure**.
- The third chapter is about **relationships**.
- We then talk about **mood**.
- The fifth chapter is a guide to getting **help** and **support**.

At the end of each chapter, we have included a résumé of top tips, each one supported by additional information in the second part of the book, which is a collection of practical **resources**.

You don't need to read the book in order if you don't want to; you can dip into any chapter as and when appropriate.

And it doesn't stop there. Our *Staying Sane in Business* ambition has been to create something that is informative, thought-provoking and practical, so there's lots more material on our website **www.sane.works** – from questionnaires and reading suggestions to web links and even details of the range of courses and seminars we offer. Just sign up for access to all these additional resources. You can also make your own contribution, as the sane.works project is designed to be a library of everyone's favourite material.

Introducing Martha

This isn't the sort of book that needs lots of case studies because we aren't making claims that need to be backed up with reams of data. What we are trying to do is apply the principles of psychology, therapy and counselling in a workplace context. In order to do this we have created a fictional character, Martha. We hope that she will help to illustrate some of the points we make and that you will enjoy following her story. Here is some background information on her for now.

Dr Martha Stewart is 38. She's a scientist and she works for a pharmaceuticals company in research and development, leading a team of professionals from all over the world whose job it is to guide a candidate drug through the early stages of development and on to clinical trials. It's demanding work by its very nature and made more complex by the fact that much of her team is virtual, spread over several countries and cultures, and it's a team that has a finite life. Once a drug has completed all stages of its development and is in production, the team is disbanded and a new one is formed to shepherd another promising compound from the laboratory to the prescribing physician.

Having risen through the ranks over the last ten years, Martha has entered a leadership development programme, which is aimed at growing board-level talent from within her organisation. Apart from the regular cycle of appraisals and the occasional survey exercise aimed at increasing employee engagement, Martha hasn't had much leadership feedback or development over the years. Her company has provided some excellent training but it's pretty much all been technical in nature.

She's open-minded and happy to join the programme, though a little wary of opening up to other people. Clearly focused on task and process, Martha isn't the sort of person who enjoys a vague brief and she wonders exactly what the programme might be all about. She hopes the investment will pay off and that her time will not be wasted.

Chapter 1: Self-Knowledge

*'Always be yourself,
express yourself,
have faith in yourself,
do not go out and look for
a successful personality
and duplicate it.'*

– Bruce Lee –



Just as you have a personality, you also have a shadow! (Photo by DF)

Who are you?

The foundation stone of staying sane, and therefore a useful place for us to start, is with some exploration of who you are and how you came to be like that.

It's a topic that has been the subject of fierce debate for as long as anyone can remember. There are those at one end of the spectrum who believe that we are pretty much wired up from birth (or even before that) and others who just as firmly hold onto the notion that we are completely a product of our environment. All sorts of things are thrown into the mix along the way: politics, philosophy, ethics – you name it.

As with so many things, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle: we are a complex and ever-changing blend of genetics and learning. Recent advances in neuroscience have shed a great deal of light on how malleable our brains actually are; experience literally re-wires us. However, it has also demonstrated that we are most sensitive to this re-wiring at the earliest stage of our lives.

Let's suppose, then, that a reasonable definition of who you are is the pattern of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that you usually show in particular circumstances and that have remained reasonably consistent over time. Two interesting questions flow from this:

- What are the patterns that *you* notice in *your* thoughts, feelings and behaviours?
- How helpful are they in dealing with the issues that you face at work?

Staying sane in business – and in life in general – is about either getting out of a stuck place or avoiding going there in the first place. Philippa Perry puts this neatly in her little book *How to Stay Sane* in the excellent School of Life series. Philippa argues that for all the complex systems of classifying human misery, the essential split is twofold. You can either lurch from one crisis to the next, living in chaos, or you can rigidly stick to ways of being that may have worked once but no longer serve you well.

Because you picked up this book and have read this far, we can safely assume that you are interested in your own development. If you want to develop, the more you know about yourself, the better you can be at identifying where you are starting from and the distance you may need to travel. It's our belief that pretty much everything starts with self-knowledge.

Let's not get too hung up about how the measurements are done at this stage but let's just accept that you need some information about your basic personal building blocks: how you tend to solve problems, what may happen to you under stress and pressure, the way in which you grew up and have adapted to the major events in your life, and what meaning you are currently making of your world.

We are putting biology to one side here. That's not to say that it's irrelevant because it's true that genes do play a part in who we are. But, despite the growing field of behavioural genetics, the exact role that heredity plays is not yet fully understood. Sure, there is some solid evidence for genetics making a significant contribution to our personal foundation – raw intelligence, introversion/extroversion and the degree to which we are predisposed to emotional stability, but, at the moment, that's about it.

Think of yourself in descriptive terms. This allows you both to get a fix on who you are and also provides the language for you to make reasonably reliable comparisons with other people, because who you are is relative to everyone else.

Personal Architecture

So, if you want to know more about yourself, where do you start? That's what this chapter is all about. Here are some building blocks:

- **Personal narrative** – Start off by thinking about your personal history, your hopes, dreams and aspirations. Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going? Looking back, what was growing up like? What was your experience of education? What major life events have shaped you? What achievements are you most proud of?

- **Consider what you attach meaning to** – What meaning do your current hopes and dreams provide for your life and what are the values that are important to you?
- **Think about your values** – What's really important to you? Hard work that is congruent with your values becomes your passion. Hard work that is at odds with your values is simply a source of stress.
- **Explore what motivates you** – What drives and energises you? How do you like to work and in what role and type of organisation? What excites you and what turns you off? You are a whole person, so what interests you outside of work is just as important.
- **Consider your personality** – Think about what happens to your style and approach under pressure.
- **What skills do you possess?** – Not just technical skills, which are often the subject of certification, but also your whole range of life skills.
- **Think about how you get on with other people** – Particularly in terms of your relationships at work. This might be how you prefer to be involved in things; the extent to which you like to be in control, how you feel about being told what to do and whether you prefer opening up to other people or staying quite private.
- **What about solving problems and learning?** – How do you go about either? Maybe you like to put your nose in a book or perhaps you like to learn by doing. Perhaps you are reflective or maybe you like to move on quickly to the next thing once you have accomplished a goal?
- **Lastly, consider your reputation** – If you weren't in the room, what would other people be saying about you?

Let's look at all of these points in more detail.

Personal Narrative

We all have a story about ourselves. Depending on who we are, we may or may not be so comfortable recounting it! You will come across

some people who want to tell you all about themselves – sometimes in a level of detail that you don't actually appreciate. There will be others who are a closed book: private people who change the subject quickly when the spotlight swings round onto them.

Nevertheless, we all have some sense of a personal narrative. One senior leader we worked with would start more or less every public speaking event with a description of the part of society that he came from. It was important to him to let his audience know what his father had once done for a living and that it wasn't a middle-class profession. Whilst it was a badge of honour to him that he had achieved his success in life without a particularly privileged start, in some ways his frequent references to his lowly beginnings also limited his impact. Another CEO once told us that, despite his great success in life, he still clung on to the belief that this was all the more remarkable for someone who came from his geographic part of the UK!

Some schools of psychology go so far as calling this story a life script. If this is true, your script becomes the lens through which you experience your life and the reason why the patterns of your life play out the way that they do. Some scripts are helpful but some are destructive. Scripts sit in the edge of your consciousness, just out of awareness, and like an image out of the corner of your eye, they seem to fade when you look at them directly.

The argument is that scripts were formed early on in your existence and they have a child-like or black-and-white quality about them in their purest form. The way that they play out in your adult self is complex but they do seem to influence the experiences that you seek in life. All scripts can be changed; all narratives can be re-written but first you need to discover what they are.

Here are just four examples of scripts that tend to appear in a workplace context and that could hold you back; of course, there are many more.

- **I always put other people first** – This script is a blocker to you looking after yourself. This could mean not fulfilling your emotional needs, your desire to be recognised, rewarded and promoted,

and it might mean not looking after your own health. This script is fuelled by a belief that says, 'Please others and you'll be okay'. This script is slightly more common in women than men, probably as result of upbringing. It's also common in middle managers with large teams of people reporting to them; jobs with a very high set of operational demands. If you have this script, it could be a barrier to coaching and personal development, both of which you might think of as being a bit self-indulgent!

- **I'm never good enough** – This one either exists in its pure form or comes in disguise. The disguised version is more like, 'I'm only as good as my last project or the most recent deal I have closed' or the rather self-limiting statement that 'People like me don't get...'. At its extreme, this makes you strive for more and more to try to counteract the empty feeling within. Sadly, organisations can fuel this belief in the performance management systems they set up. The reward for a stellar year of performance may be a bonus, a pay rise or a promotion but this will nearly always be coupled with even more stretching objectives for the following year. Kept in perspective, this can be no bad thing but if you allow the totality of your identity to be associated with accomplishment, you will never enjoy much mental peace. If you have this script you'll either under-achieve, as you give up before you have started, or you'll anxiously over-achieve and burn yourself out in the process. Either way, you will arrive in coaching or development sessions asking what the process can do to make you more effective and you might not be so keen on stopping and reflecting on the part that you need to play.
- **I always get left out** – An early script about abandonment, in business you could be the person on the edge of social groups, the one who is waiting to be invited rather than the one who does the inviting. If you are in sales, it could be this script that sits behind your fear of initiating new business contacts. This script can drive jealous and possessive behaviour and make you a difficult colleague to work with.

- **Bad things always happen to me** – This one is often about fear of making mistakes. It's sometimes associated with a belief that you must be perfect: a sense that you are only really acceptable if you do not make an error and that any mistake made could well have catastrophic consequences. If you have this script, it's hard for you to try out new things or to simply have a go.

As you can see, these scripts have a grandiose quality about them. Child-like beliefs usually do, and the emphasis here is on child-like not childish. It's easy to spot anything of this nature as the governing thought lacks balance and very often includes words like 'never' and 'always'.

Although we have listed your personal narrative as our first dimension of personal architecture, it's common that a deep understanding of this is arrived at over time. This is a frequent finding in therapy and sometimes in coaching. Clients talk of finding themselves or, even more tellingly, of meeting themselves. Nevertheless, starting the enquiry into who you are at this point makes a lot of sense.

Meaning

Having meaning in our lives is extremely important. In Nazi Germany in the 1940s, it was recognised that the way in which a person framed the experience of being in a concentration camp was a partial determinant of whether or not they survived.

Viktor Frankl's description of this in *Man's Search for Meaning* spawned a whole branch of therapy called Logotherapy, which holds that our primary motivation is to find a meaning in life. Whilst most of us will never have to face anything as harrowing as that which Frankl experienced, the sense we make of our life and what it means is critical to our mental wellbeing.

We need some way of defining ourselves and describing why we are here. We could turn to philosophy or religion, but what interests us is the contribution of psychology.

Most of you will no doubt be familiar with the now-famous Hierarchy of Needs from Abraham Maslow. We also find a similar-looking tool to be useful that comes from the world of neurolinguistic programming, or NLP. It's called Logical Levels and was created by a therapist called Robert Dilts. We use this a lot in coaching to help people who have become stuck with limiting beliefs.



Logical levels – after Robert Dilts

Let's say that you have had enough of your current job and you have a nagging desire to do something else. You decide to use the services of a career coach to explore different options but as you sit down to your very first session you realise with a heavy heart that you have a huge and crippling belief that you just can't change: you have trained too long to do what you are doing; your spouse is very attached to the security that your income brings; much of your identity is wrapped up in your career and the road to re-training looks long and arduous. Change just feels too difficult and you are frustrated and stuck.

Piece by piece, you work with your coach to examine your beliefs. She does this by putting six cards on the floor in front of you, labelled with the six logical levels in the diagram on the previous page. Let's have a go now. Imagine you are doing this exercise. You consider each level in turn. See what conclusions you draw. They can often be very illuminating.

- **Environment: where? when?** – You realise that your decision is partially influenced by timing. Whilst now might not be a perfect time, next year will not be so difficult. One of your children will have left education and your mortgage will be paid off. You have just looked at the layer called Environment in the Logical Levels model.
- **Behaviour: what?** – The job you are doing now isn't that different in some respects from what you want to do. At the level of Behaviour, you won't need to learn many new skills. Some re-training is necessary but you'll be able to take it in your stride.
- **Capabilities: how?** – You also reflect that the core Capabilities of the new role are things that have been mentioned countless times as things that you have the potential to do. It's just that your current job doesn't really call on them.
- **Beliefs and Values: why?** – Going deeper, you acknowledge that you have a strong desire to help people and that this is congruent with your Value that giving something back to society is a very good thing. You weigh this up against the loss of financial security and you realise the potential gain in job satisfaction is greater than the financial loss that you are going to incur. You have a clear rationale for what you are thinking about doing.
- **Identity: who?** – Arriving at the card labelled Identity, you hesitate. You have been working for your current organisation since graduating. It's what you tell people when they first meet you; they recognise your employer as a household name. In your heart though, your desire is to start your own business and for this business to have a pro-social theme to it. Your coach asks

you who else you know who has done this and if you identify with them. On reflection, you think of someone in your circle and you conclude that they aren't that different from you and that if they could make a go of it, so could you.

- **Mission: why?** – You'll notice that the levels often become harder to answer the nearer you go to the top. It can feel a bit existential when you start to ask who you are and unnervingly evangelical when you try to describe your life mission. Nevertheless, when we are coaching, we notice that the people who can put a clear label at the very top of their pyramid seem to be the most satisfied and productive individuals that we work with. This can't be an accident!

Later in this book, we talk about resilience and it also seems true to us that a clear mission and sense of purpose in life is one of the critical ingredients in being able to withstand both everyday setbacks and also the bigger disappointments and losses that can happen from time to time.

Values

Then, there's the whole area of values. These days, most organisations have clear sets of values and these are often given a high level of prominence in their promotional literature. Stating what an organisation stands for can be a helpful way of achieving brand differentiation. Knowing what you stand for and how well that matches the values of an organisation can help you decide to join it or stay in it – or not.



They do. Whether you are a business or an individual, values matter. (Photo by CW)

So what about your own values? We don't mean the various ways that authority figures, society, religion or politics tell you how you can live your life in a 'good' or 'bad' way. What 'values' refers to here are those things that you want your life to be about.

It can often be helpful to explore your values by asking yourself what *you* want your life to stand for. If your life could be about something,

what would that thing be? Or it could be more than one thing. An enquiry of this nature can be radical and challenging – in fact, it really should be.

Again, remember that you exist in context, in environments and cultures (both in work and, more generally, in society) that reward you for acting and thinking in certain ways. Over time, these patterns of thinking and behaving can become increasingly ingrained, but that doesn't mean that those ways of thinking and behaving reflect your values. In fact, you might feel unhappy, or uncomfortable in some way, in your day-to-day life, as though you aren't living in a way that is consistent with how you really see things and how you want to be.

A social psychologist called Leon Festinger called this 'cognitive dissonance' – the discomfort that arises from knowing that there is inconsistency between your thoughts and behaviour. He suggested that people feel an innate urge to correct such dissonance by altering or dropping one or both of the conflicting ways of thinking and/or behaving. In this way, you 'bend' the evidence to make yourself feel better.

Let's clarify this with a simple example. You buy a sports car that you have been wanting for years. After a few weeks of driving the car, you become aware that it has its good points and its drawbacks. The boot is small, the suspension is rock hard and you don't actually find the driving experience that comfortable. Since it cost you a fortune, you downplay the negative aspects of your chosen vehicle, as you tell your friends in the bar that you own an 'uncompromising marque' and that a few minor disadvantages are a small price to pay for 'engineering excellence'. Your friends stay quiet as they notice you are trying a bit too hard to justify your purchase!

Now try this with your career – an inherently more complex set of decisions and investments than a simple car purchase. You might be competitive, individualistic, freethinking and creative, compassionate, revolutionary or a host of other attributes. Just as it's important to know what you are, it's equally as important to work in an environment and culture in which these aspects of you are welcomed and where

you can be the best version of yourself without having to engage in endless compromise.

Once you are clear about your values, it will be easier to identify which patterns of thinking and behaviour are dissonant with them. From there, you can set goals to behave in ways that are consistent with your values.

Assuming there is a dissonance to begin with, this new behaviour is likely to lead to reduced discomfort and unhappiness on a day-to-day basis, and to greater contentment – something that is key to your physical and psychological health.

Motivation

This is a really interesting area as there are many more facets to it than you might at first think. Quite often in business we talk about people being motivated or not, as if it's a simple on/off switch. We seek out motivated people to work for us and we like the thought that other people will see us as switched on and energetic.

But what exactly are you motivated by? There's also the consideration of where and when and, probably, with whom?

Over the years, psychologists have built up a rich picture of human motivation. They like to talk of needs. Lots of needs have been identified but we notice some of them cropping up time and time again. Here are the definitions that we think are most useful:

Human Needs

Need	Characteristics
Achievement	This is all about setting stretching goals for yourself. Sometimes this comes out as competitiveness towards others and sometimes it's all about high personal standards. (Watch out for fear of failure here. We think that's something different.) A strong need for achievement is something we look for as business psychologists when we are assessing people for senior roles. Within reason, it's something that's desirable, if not essential, if you want to reach the top of your profession.
Affiliation	This is the need to belong to a group or something that is bigger than you. It could be a faith, a football team or a project team. Some people are natural 'joiners' whilst some don't feel that comfortable in groups. The need for affiliation is a tough one. In one sense it can make you 'one of the gang' but it's not so useful when you are promoted from within your peer group and you have to make decisions about the people who used to be your friends. All of a sudden, life can feel very lonely.
Power	This is where you experience satisfaction by seeing your environment move in the direction that you want it to. On the one hand this is good, as you will be the captain of your own destiny and the author of your own script. On the other hand, an excessive need for power can be very damaging and corrupting. We have all seen the consequences.
Recognition	We all need to be recognised to one extent or another. Therapists sometimes talk about 'strokes', which are just units of recognition. For some of us, a regular supply of strokes is very significant; for others, less so. If you want a lot of recognition, it's wise to ask yourself how you are getting your needs met. We don't always choose the ways that are best for us.

Need	Characteristics
Security	This is all about feeling safe. It's not necessarily connected with the desire for a quiet life but it is about the absence of threat.
Variety	The spice of life? If so, you have a need for novelty and stimulation. This is the territory of the low boredom threshold and there's some connection here with our propensity to take risks.
Freedom	Experiencing independence and spontaneity is what this one is all about. If you have this need it's likely that you will find rules and procedures to be something of an irritant and you won't always react positively to being told what to do.
Growth	Some of us are only really satisfied if we are learning. Such people love to master a new skill or get their head round a novel concept. There's a lot of evidence that taking the time to learn new things (and it probably doesn't matter what) is an essential component of emotional health, particularly as we age.
Purpose	A little bit like recognition, this one, in that we all need some meaning in our lives. Whilst most of us tire quickly of pointless tasks, for some people this need is much greater as they look for a personal mission and a calling. This is another need that seems to become more prominent as our lives move into middle age and beyond.

Remember, it's very easy for us either to behave as if we are motivated by something because we think that's the right thing to do, or to unwittingly import the motivations of others without realising it. We'd argue that sanity is about living our own dreams and recognising where these differ from the dreams of others.

Before we leave the area of motivation, we'd like to touch on something that therapists often call psychological hungers. The argument

goes that just as we get hungry for food and thirsty for water, we also experience the need for nourishment of other kinds. Deprived of these needs, we fail to thrive. So, in addition to the needs above, we also have the hunger for other elements.

- **Contact** – The physical connection you have with other people and the needs that you have to be physically touched have been shown in many experiments to be vitally important.
- **Sex** – It can have an impact on your mental and physical health when you fail to have your needs met in this area.
- **Structure** – This relates to the way in which you carve up your time. There's more about this in Chapter 3, where we look at relationships and how we form attachments to other people.

Personality

Having thought about all these elements, you could then turn your attention to personality.

Curiously, models of personality and their attendant questionnaires seem to attract their own band of loyal followers. In truth, as long as they have been put together with some care, they are all quite similar – it boils down to style as much as anything. Some questionnaires have been designed for the corporate market, some have a developmental twist, some have clinical roots and all of them say as much about their authors as they say about the people responding to them.

One useful way of thinking about personality is to consider the biggest building blocks or main areas to identify. This is where a model called the 'big five' comes in.

The Big Five Personality Model

Personality	Characteristics
Openness to experience	This element covers imagination, aesthetics, openness to feelings, engaging in new activities, exploring new ideas and entertaining the idea that there are lots of different ways to lead your life.
Conscientiousness	This is not just about being ordered, methodical and checking the details but also about self-belief, duty, striving for achievement, exercising self-discipline, and minimisation of risk.
Extraversion	This isn't just about being the life and soul of the party. It's fundamentally about where your level of mental arousal comes from. For extroverts, it's from outside stimulation. For introverts, it's from within and too much external stimulation can be overwhelming.
Agreeableness	Sometimes confused with extraversion, this is actually more about trust, altruism, promoting harmony, showing modesty and experiencing compassion.
Emotional stability	How we deal with the ups and downs of life is considered here, whether or not we experience worry and frustration, the extent to which we often feel down and despondent, how self-conscious we are and how much we can resist our impulses.

There used to be a nice little mnemonic for remembering this: OCEAN. That was when what is now more accurately called Emotional Stability was labelled as Neuroticism.

The advantage of this model is that it has been very well researched over the last thirty years and, as you've probably already worked out, there is a strong connection between personality and success in business. Broadly speaking, for leadership roles it's vital that you are conscientious – in the sense that you are driven to get things done

more than to work in a detailed way – and that you are emotionally stable.

It's a bit less important whether you are open to experience, although you'll probably be more amenable to being trained. It also doesn't really matter if you are extraverted or introverted unless your job requires a very large amount of social contact (see *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain). You don't even have to be a nice, warm guy or girl, though this can do no harm and would certainly make you more popular!

It's important to remember that personality is not a completely stable concept and it's not 100% predictable. It tends to develop over time, even if some of the components are more resistant to change than others, so the best way to think of it might be as a set of predispositions to behave in certain ways. Personalities bend under pressure and according to our moods, and different environments reward or punish different aspects of them.

Your Skills

At some point in your career, you will need to take stock of what you are really good at. It might be that as you read this book, you are planning a change of direction, or perhaps you are helping someone else make this sort of decision. Start by defining what it is that you are good at or could be good at with more practice. Sometimes, when we are helping clients describe their skills, we encounter some unhelpful modesty! When asked, they either look blank or give such generic answers that their true talents are masked by vanilla corporate language. If you don't know how to define your skills, here are a couple of techniques.

Using Sort Cards to Define Your Skills

One way of stepping back and looking at your skills is to use a set of sort cards. Each card contains a description of a discrete skill. There are plenty of sets on the market that are written in clear and accessible language. All you do is sort the cards into three piles which

represent things that you are really good at, things that you do about as well as most other people and things that just aren't you. This little exercise can be really helpful in getting you beyond the constraints of job titles. For example, being an accountant isn't all about numbers, it's as much about processes, logic and social skills. You'll find some recommendations for tools like the sort cards at www.sane.works

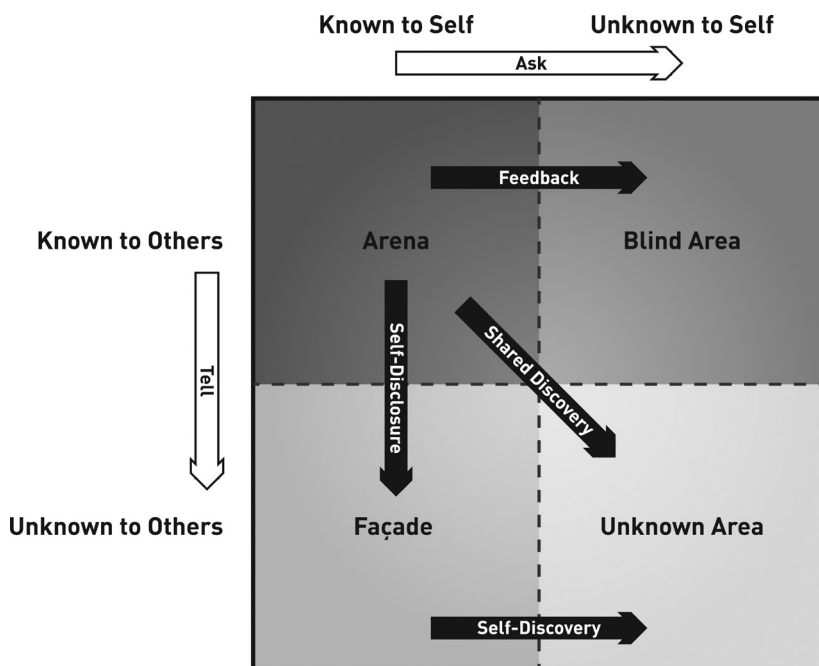
Using the Johari Window

Another way of understanding what your skills are is to ask other people. But remember, what you ask and how you hear what comes back depends on your frame of reference, how comfortable you are with asking and how much they want to disclose. It also depends on the insight of who is being asked!

There's a useful framework for getting feedback. It's called the Johari Window and it once featured in a complex statement made by then US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who said in 2002:

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.

Although Rumsfeld was talking about matters of state, the mental model he was using is just as applicable to personal discovery. And what he was describing is much better shown as a diagram:



The Johari Window

When we are looking to find out about ourselves, there's:

- Stuff that everyone knows and accepts. This is the open area or **Arena**.
- Things that we know about ourselves but other people don't. A good example is the seemingly cool and calm person who feels really nervous inside but doesn't show it. This is the hidden area or the **Façade**.
- Aspects of who we are that are more apparent to other people than they are to us. Indeed, we might be quite unaware of them. This is our **Blind Area**.
- Stuff that other people don't know about us and nor do we. This is clearly the **Unknown Area**.

To learn more about our skills or, in fact, to learn about pretty much any aspect of ourselves, we can use the Johari Window as follows:

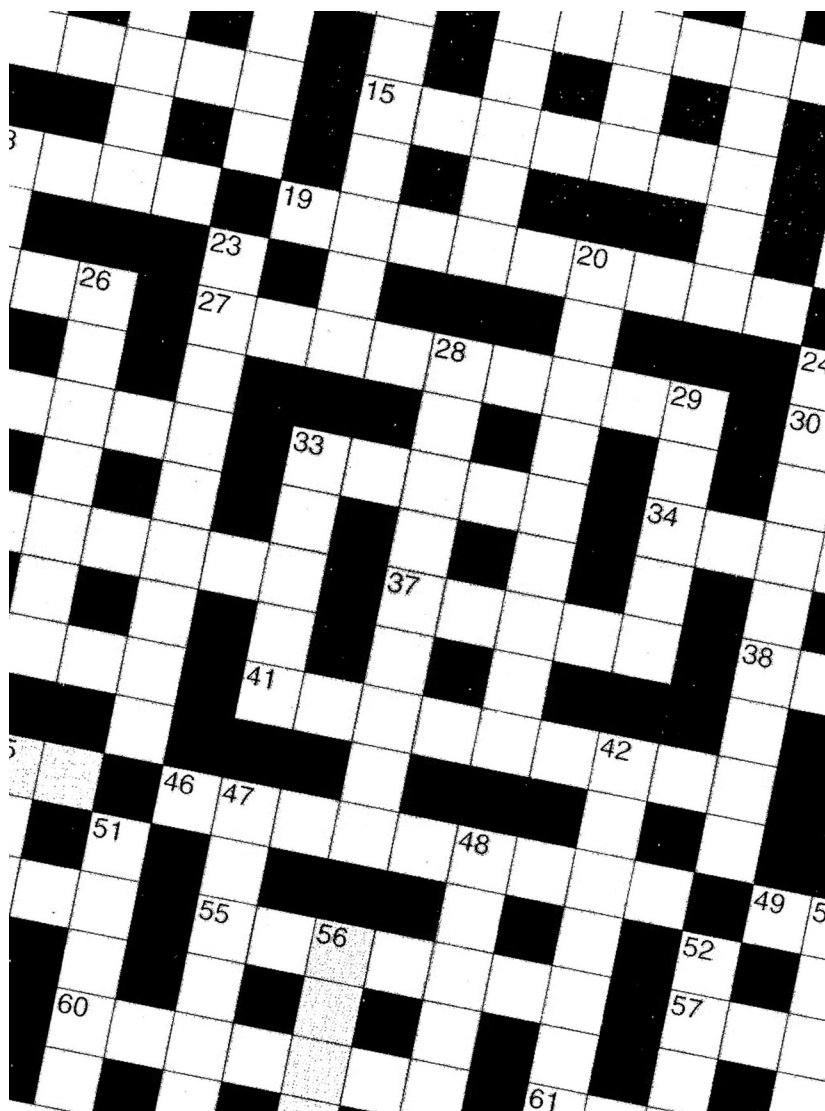
- We could make sure that as much of ourselves as is appropriate goes into the Arena.
- We could shrink or lower the Façade by self-disclosure and where we feel resistant to doing this, we could explore the reasons why.
- We could reduce the Blind Area by asking the right people the right questions and paying careful attention to what we hear. This is feedback.
- We could engage in activities that shed light on aspects of ourselves that other people don't know about and that we keep hidden from ourselves, i.e. the Unknown Area. You could argue that this is very much the territory of deep coaching and psychotherapy.

Relationships

The whole area of relationships gets more attention in Chapter 3. At this point, it might just be useful to think about what your basic attitude is to sharing aspects of yourself with others and how you react when they share aspects of themselves with you; how you seek to control people or experience being controlled by them; and the extent to which you like to be in groups and included or to be left to your own devices.

What's also important is how you form attachments and what being attached to other people feels like. The way in which you formed attachments early on in your childhood tends to repeat throughout your life, and many dysfunctional aspects of adult behaviour can be traced back to a failure to have had relational needs met before we could even speak. More about this later.

Problem Solving



Make the best use of your intellect. (Photo by DF)

Fundamentally, staying sane means making the best use of your intellect and not getting out of your depth. But it's not just about raw horsepower – and let's not get simplistic here either, as psychologists have argued for up to fourteen different types of intelligence, including emotional, creative, musical and intrapersonal (knowing yourself)!

We find the following broad categories helpful.

- **Complexity** – The first is all about you being able to deal with complexity. If you do not have enough raw processing power in this respect, you will either underestimate the size of a problem or you will freeze and fail to take action. It's no better with too much intellect, either. This is where the fine mind is set loose on a problem only to create a solution that is of such Byzantine complexity that it's unworkable.
- **Adaptability** – This is the second way of looking at problem solving and implies choice, your ability to see problems from different angles and the mental agility to do something differently according to the demands of the situation. What sits behind a lot of adaptability is self-confidence.
- **Self-awareness** – The third component of problem solving is all about being in touch at any given moment with what you are thinking, feeling and doing. Knowing what you are doing is fairly straightforward but really understanding what your pattern of beliefs is or being fully in tune with your feelings is less common. Hence, our ability every now and again to catch ourselves out and to say, 'Whatever came over me?'

It's also important to think about problem-solving styles. You might have a distinct preference for logic or intuition. It could be that you only really feel comfortable with the hard facts of what you can see, hear, feel or touch and you like to use a clear process or procedure when you are trying to work something out.

On the other hand, you might be more attracted to using gut instinct or intuition. If this is the case, you'll work better without procedures and processes and you might be particularly pleased about doing something new or untried.

Each approach comes with its strengths, and is more suitable for some tasks than others. It's not uncommon that you will be good at both and there's lots of evidence that they correlate. It's sometimes a matter of choice as much as anything. Chances are though that you will tend to default to one style over the other.

Ask yourself these questions.

- What kinds of problems do you think your dominant or default style would suit, or not suit?
- Think of a current problem at work, or a recent problem you've experienced. Did you neglect either logic or intuition?
- What would it have been like if you had deliberately chosen to adopt the other style to the one you used?
- How can you exercise mindful choice in the future?

Reputation

Organisational life is replete with feedback mechanisms and, with all the 'likes' on Facebook and other social media, you might argue so is your private time!

On the whole, though, anything that sheds some light on the way people see us is a good thing. Getting some reference points regarding how you come across is a great way of taking a reality check, but you do need to remember that the opinions of others are just opinions. How you are perceived tells you as much about the observer as it does about you!

To understand your reputation you could simply ask. You could also gain a structured understanding of how you measure up against criteria that are important in your organisation through 360° feedback.

There's even the idea that you could consider yourself as a brand. Have a think about your favourite brands – whether that's Aldi or Apple, B&Q or BMW, they all mean something to you. They have enduring and consistent characteristics and your connection with them is as much emotional as it is rational. A personal brand that works is a true

encapsulation of who you are – not a chimera or false and flimsy façade but something that makes you uniquely memorable for who you truly are. Later, we'll talk about how relationships rely to an extent on consistency and all that you are doing when you pay attention to your own brand is bringing the essence of you to the fore. There's lots of information about personal branding on the web and a good place to start is Jennifer Holloway's book *Personal Branding for Brits* (assuming you are a Brit, of course!).

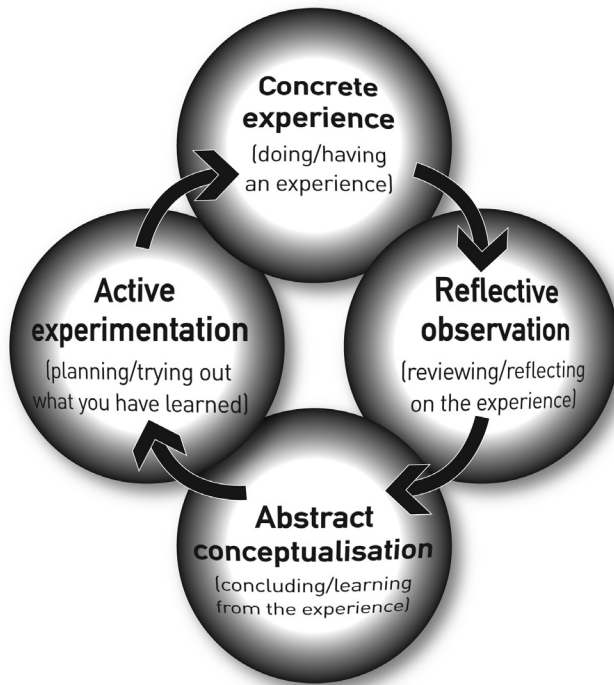
The Process of Self-Discovery

What we are arguing is that understanding yourself is the first step to ensuring that you stay sane. It's not about attaching a label round your neck – that can be very unhelpful and self-limiting. But a stable sense of who you are is vital for emotional wellbeing and, as we said, it can be the starting point for self-development.

Having talked about some of the dimensions that you could use to explore who you are, how should you actually go about it? One way is to have a developmental assessment session with a business psychologist – someone like one of the authors! There are lots of advantages to this but it's not the only way. Armed with the concepts we have examined in this chapter, you could also simply cultivate the habits of reflective learning and self-observation.

Reflective Learning

Educational theorist David Kolb believed that in order for us to learn information and skills at a deeper level – so that we can flexibly apply those skills to new, challenging situations – we have to engage in a cycle of reflection. This cycle focuses on reflection and learning as cognitive processes; in other words, it describes the things people must do mentally to be able to learn at a deeper level, and apply what they've learnt to new situations and problems. Here's Kolb's model:



Kolb's Cycle of Reflection.

In order to engage in this cycle, you must first have a 'concrete' or real-world experience, either by doing something, listening to someone teach, or by watching someone else do something.

You, the learner, must then reflect on this experience. Ask yourself the following questions next time you have an experience that involves a new skill or concept.

- What skills, behaviour and knowledge did the other person, teacher or I demonstrate? What exactly did they or I do and say? Get the specifics.
- What concepts, theories or practices were called upon? Do I feel I'm aware of those concepts, theories and practices?

- Do any of them not make sense to me? Do I feel that I have an incomplete understanding of what was underpinning what was said or done? Where can I find out more about these?

Following this part of the process, what you then need to do is engage in 'abstract conceptualisation'. This is where you apply those concepts, theories and practices in your mind to your own work. Perhaps picture in your mind's eye what it would look like to apply those to an area of your work by considering these questions in relation to that image.

- What specific concepts or principles that you've learned would you apply?
- What would that look like? What would you be doing? How would you do it?
- How would you know you'd done it right? What would the result be?
- How would you know if you could improve your skills or knowledge? What would indicate that?

The last part involves actually trying out these new concepts and practices in a real-world situation. This is active experimentation. A crucial part is considering the process and results of what you did.

- What did I do? What did I hope that would achieve?
- How did that work out? Did I get the result I had hoped for?
- If I did, was it because I applied the concepts or practices correctly, or for another serendipitous reason? If I did it correctly, how could I apply this effectively again?

You then repeat the cycle, carrying out the steps again to refine your knowledge and skills, using reflection, abstract conceptualisation and real-world experience to increase your performance.

You can enter this cycle at any point, but crucial to the learning process is that you undergo all stages of the cycle in order for deep, meaningful learning to have taken place.

Self-Observation

This is a bit like stepping back and looking at yourself from a distance. We talk about it later when we discuss the importance of recognising and working with mood. A lot of self-observation has its roots in therapy and its current expression in the idea of mindfulness, something we return to later in the book. There are a number of techniques that can help you step out of yourself and take an impartial view of what's happening.

To begin with, you can start building up your skills in self-observation by stopping whatever you are doing and asking yourself the following questions.

- **What specifically am I doing?** – The best way to do this is to describe what someone else would see if they were watching what you are doing.
- **What am I thinking at this point?** – What's my internal narrative saying?
- **What am I feeling?** – It has long been argued that the number of emotions that we can feel is finite. Let's say there are eight and they are: trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation and joy. Ask yourself, which one am I experiencing? Be true to yourself, some emotions will sit more comfortably with you than others. Since you can only feel through your body, a good tip here is to tune into bodily sensations.
- **How am I breathing?** – The pattern of our breath is a shortcut to our emotional state. (We deal with this in more depth in Chapter 4.)

Having arrived at something of a starting point, where do you go from there? If you can get a fix on the basic building blocks of who you are, you could go on to explore what happens to you under pressure. Your response to challenge can tell you a lot more about how you are constructed and how you got to be you.

Playing to Your Strengths

The idea that you can do anything is misplaced. There are some things that come easier than others and nobody can do everything equally as well.

And what's really helpful is to get a fix on the difference between what you *can do* and you are *cut out to do*.

Let's say you're thinking at this point about everything we have discussed so far and you conclude that you are really good at something. It might be that this is because you always found this skill easy or it might be that you've really had to work at it and that in the beginning you weren't that good. The same applies to something that you are currently finding really hard. Perhaps this isn't your thing or maybe you've had very little chance to practise?

The next section will talk about self-acceptance but overall we think that staying sane is often about knowing the difference between what you *can do* and what you are *cut out to do* and that involves important decisions. So in all the explanation of who you are we invite you to always:

- Identify, work with and play to your natural strengths.
- Explore and nurture your potential.
- Accept where you have developed coping strategies for things that you are weak at.
- Seriously consider getting other people to do the things that you are not good at and – no matter how hard you try – you don't seem to improve.

Of course, if you turn this on its head you end up with a situation that feels a lot less sane! Imagine not getting the opportunity to play to your strengths or develop your potential. Worse still, imagine putting all of your effort into trying to get better at something you can only just get by in or that you are simply not cut out to do. If one of the authors of this book had been judged by his abilities in football and woodwork

and if he had attached much importance to either, his experience of education would have been very different!

The Power of Self-Acceptance

Whatever you conclude as you think about who you are, be flexible in your response to it and bear in mind that all change involves effort and that circumstances dictate desired directions. Try and create a plan for your personal development that doesn't read like a charge sheet that contains everything you are poor at. Work with the resources and time that you have available, with the grain of your personality and abilities and consider where you will extract the maximum return on your investments.

Martha's Starting Point

Martha's leadership programme started with self-knowledge, and the first step was a full assessment with a business psychologist who was also to be her coach for the next six months.

Martha approached her assessment with some scepticism. She'd never filled in psychometric questionnaires before and she was curious what they would tell her that she didn't already know. She also wondered quite what she'd be talking about for three hours to a relative stranger! In the event, the questionnaires weren't difficult to complete but it was the assessment meeting that really surprised her – in a good way. Expecting to be required to 'jump through hoops', what Martha actually experienced was a warm, supportive and intriguing conversation and one that really made her stop and think.

A week after her meeting with the psychologist, Martha received her report and the recommendations for tailoring the leadership programme to her needs. What she discovered was that she was not only rather a driven person but also that under pressure she

had a tendency to become brittle and difficult to please and would often retreat into a private world in which she ruminated on her mistakes. Well respected as she was, she recalled feedback on more than one occasion from various well-meaning colleagues, who had said that she was a harsh self-critic and that this seemed to make her tense, demanding and a challenge to get on with.

Martha also recognised that she was often better at the start of a project than in the later stages and that she didn't deal with conflict very well. Given that she had no direct line control over the teams she led, influencing people indirectly always felt a struggle. Whilst she was warm and affable enough, she accepted that being a figurehead took its toll and made her relish time on her own, time that she seldom got.

Martha felt ambitious but it was clear that she also felt confused. Her job didn't require as much technical input as it once had and she was finding it hard to let go of that aspect. She couldn't quite decide whether she was a manager or a scientist, and with a wry smile she recalled the time when she used to question what the purpose of leadership was. Blushing slightly during the assessment session, she confessed to her coach that she had once said to a friend that management was nothing more than telling people what to do! Another slightly painful admission for Martha was that she has made a few political missteps over the past couple of years and that she had off-sided some important stakeholders.

It was also clear that Martha wasn't brilliant at slowing down and, if anything, expected everyone else to keep up with her frenetic pace. The feedback from other people, which formed part of the assessment, was quite telling. Martha's self-image was of being a clear, crisp and timely communicator. Her virtual team was

less convinced. Some of them were on her wavelength but others found her vague and confusing. Overall, she seemed better on transmit than receive, and it made her stop and think when she realised that several of the people she was regularly in contact with wanted her to pay more attention to what they were saying.

Martha was invited to sit with her report and the psychometrics for a week and then meet her coach for a second time to pull together a contract for her development. Martha's contract had three broad aims:

- To improve her communication skills.
- To help her deal more effectively with conflict.
- To enhance her political awareness and ability to influence people indirectly.

Together, Martha and her coach talked about what needed to be done and how they were going to make progress. The decision was made to meet at monthly intervals for two hours, off-site, and for email and phone contact in between.

Top Tips for Getting to Know Yourself Better

- Take some time to write down your personal narrative.
- Reflect on what you feel to be your purpose in life.
- Do a personal stock-take of all the skills and experience that you have.
- Reflect on your motivations.
- Learn more about your personality.
- Think about how you tend to relate to others and how you form relationships.
- Watch yourself solve a workplace problem and think about your preferred style.
- Get some feedback.
- Cultivate the skill of self-observation.
- Ask for development assessment if your organisation offers this.

Don't forget – there's more information for each tip online at www.sane.works

Just scratching the surface? Desperate to know more? Wondering what to do now?

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“I enjoyed reading this book and was impressed by the range and depth of ideas and resources that are gathered here. By using the focus on one person [albeit a fictional Martha] and realising what can be done by offering and accepting help it is a useful tool for people in business. Staying sane is a lifetime occupation and this book will aid anyone who reads it to take some steps along the way.”

Bishop Tim Thornton, Diocese of Truro