

The Athena Quotient®–AQ: A Unique Approach to Workforce Excellence

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SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT WORD

For a moment, I am going to refer to the Athena Quotient Assessment Instrument (AQ^{ai}) as the Athena Tool. I am using these descriptions to move the discussion of the Athena Quotient Assessment Instrument away from the commonly used terms *test*, *inventory*, and *profile*. These three common terms improperly place the Athena Instrument/Tool into a mass of assessment instruments that have been created and used across the last century to gain insight into individuals and workplace groups. These assessment instruments have been used extensively to diagnose and predict workplace realities, from the functional obstacles being faced by a work unit, to who might be the best candidate for some specialized job. To group the Athena Instrument/Tool with this greater mass of assessment instruments totally misrepresents the uniqueness of the approach and the processes used.

There is no other assessment tool even remotely similar to the Athena Quotient. It does not attempt to measure rational intelligence; an IQ Test. Its premise is that rational intelligence alone is not a good measure for workforce excellence. It is possible, even likely, to find *book smart* people who do not have *common sense*. The Athena Instrument/Tool is much more about assessing common sense and wisdom.

The Athena Instrument/Tool is also not an emotional balance profile that seeks out emotional dysfunctions. While there are a few AQ indicators that have matched the Athena Quotient with distinctly psychological tests such as the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), psychological dysfunction assessment is not its purpose.

In addition and perhaps most significantly—the Athena Instrument/Tool is not a personality profile. Most profiling instruments in existence today fall into this category, and—according to the Center for Creative Leadership and its excellent research—have only marginal positive impact as a tool for workforce enhancement. The problem with such assessment instruments is that individuals may have personality tendencies or character traits that are accurately noticed by the tests, but that are easily overcome in order for individuals to do their jobs. Consequently, personality profiles are misleading and often even unfair to persons taking such tests.

The Athena Instrument/Tool looks at a person's value system, the *lens*, or perspective that has evolved in a person over the entire course of their life. This *lens* or value system will greatly impact every decision, interaction, or task that a person pursues.

There is a value structure of work that reveals elements common to all work. These structural elements of work are (1) competent skill sets (2) competent processes (3) good information and (4) good judgment. Every task, no matter how mundane, involves skill set competence and good judgment. The more complex the task, the more pronounced the need for excellent skill sets and judgment. Most organizations have created means to assess skill set competence. The Athena Instrument/Tool is unique in that it allows for the assessment of the all-important, all-critical dimension of judgment. An IQ test, emotional balance profile, or personality inventory cannot do this.

The Athena Instrument/Tool is not really a *test*, an *inventory*, or even a *profile*. Each of these words is problematic in its own way. *Test* conveys the idea of right and wrong answers, the ability to pass or fail. The Athena Instrument/Tool is not about right or wrong answers, passing or failing. It examines individual uniqueness, judgment, not how someone matches with a preordained personality. It is more about achieving *fit* in a workplace rather than passing or failing, although it is very effective when used as a hiring tool.

The word *inventory* seems to fit better with the number of widgets in a warehouse than it does with the important factors of human life that guide and direct the accomplishment of work. If a person said that the Athena Instrument/Tool was an *inventory* of various judgment capacities, there would be at least an approximation of what the tool is designed to convey. Otherwise, *inventory* lacks a bit for clarity.

The word *profile* has come to hold a number of negative connotations in the past few years; a reality not predicted when the Athena Quotient was created in the 1960s. *Profiles* are done by the FBI to find criminals and terrorists. *Profiling* has also taken on negative racial and gender connotations. The fact that the Athena Instrument/Tool has passed every variety of validation study and has been proven to create absolutely no adverse impact on any protected group, still does not keep it from occasional skepticism based on the word *profile*. I am sure, for copyright and trademark purposes that the name as it presently stands will prevail, and that will be fine. So, the potentially misleading conversation over the word *profile* will likely continue on occasion.

I would rather use the words *task* or *project*. A person working with the Instrument/Tool is actually being asked to complete a *task* or a *project*. The *task/project* is the rank-order prioritizing of two sets of eighteen items. As the person completes this *task/project*, some of the unique judgment capacities of that person are revealed. How a person goes about working with the *task/project* will give an indication of how that person will go about other tasks and projects in their life and the resolution of issues. This kind of information is indispensable and not achieved by any other assessment instruments. Who would not want to

know about judgment capacities? Who would not want to have some sort of baseline that could lead to the enhancement and improvement of judgment capacities that relate to both work and self-issues?

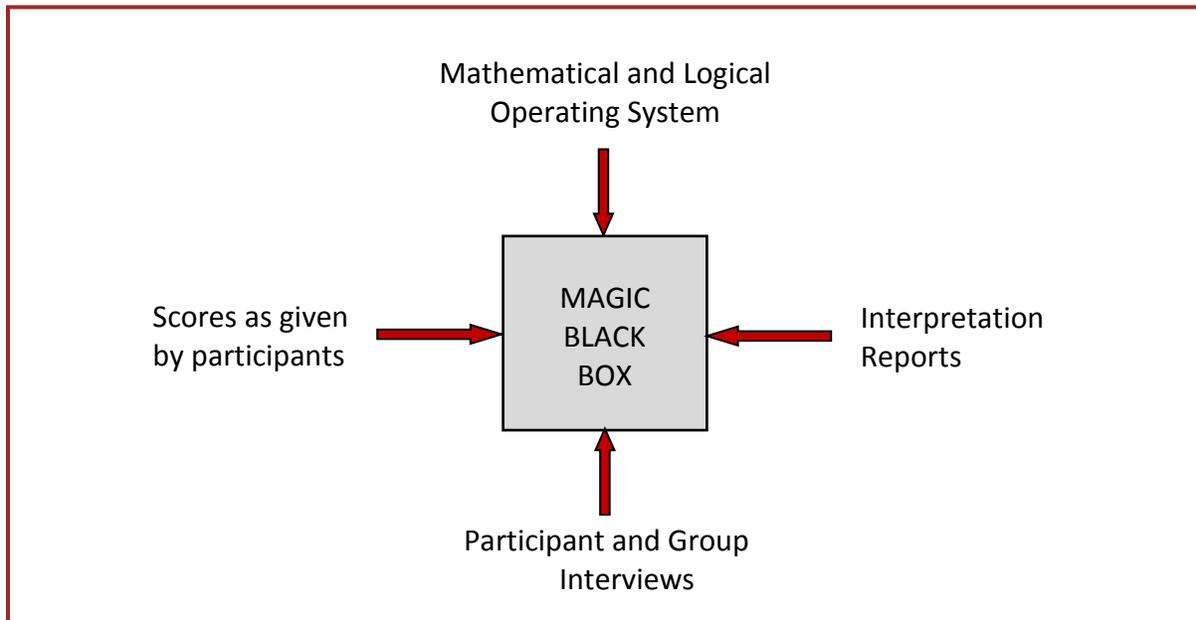
WHAT'S IN THE BLACK BOX

When individuals and groups have the chance to go through an interpretation session on their AQ scores, they are routinely amazed. Not only do they immediately see the relevance of the emphasis on judgment—as opposed to other assessment instrument results, but they are often in awe of how much the Instrument/Tool has *pegged* them. Continually people say, “That’s me! I can’t believe that the order of those words and phrases can reveal so much accurate information.” Then, the inevitable question rises as to how the Instrument/Tool actually *works*. How does the order of phrases assigned by the participant translate into the meanings conveyed in the interpretation reports? This is a fair question that deserves some explanation, although the best explanation is not likely to remove the surprise at the deep detail provided in the interpretation reports. There are three elements of input that drive the output of the interpretation reports:

1. The order of ranking by the participants.
2. The mathematical formulas that function as the operating system of the Instrument/Tool. This operating system is highly sophisticated in terms of scientific mathematics and rational logic, and gives a basic text from which interpretation reports can be derived.
3. The results of thousands and thousands of individual interviews by Dr. Robert Hartman, the creator, and those who have pursued his work after him that attempt to match numbers and their general meanings (the text noted above) with real-life situations and real-life people.

I am mesmerized by the complexity of the math and logic that stands behind the Instrument/Tool. Its sophistication gives the material great credibility for me. However, I have become convinced by more than three decades of work with AQ results that the real accuracy and credibility of interpretation reports rise from the diligent and tenacious work of gaining information from real people and real groups. I *trust*—in my own work—(the numbers and their meanings) because I have personally sat with thousands of people and hundreds of groups, and I have seen firsthand affirmation and confirmation of certain number patterns with certain behaviors, attitudes, and ranges of performance. We also have statistical validation based on best/worst norms throughout many organizations. This validation process continues with each new client.

The following graphic may help convey the point being made in this part of the discussion:



MORE THAN A HIRING TOOL

The Athena Quotient can be used to vastly improve the hiring processes. The cost of *bad hires* is often astronomical. Lowering attrition and turnover rates can save organizations large sums of money. Anything that can have an immediate impact on an organization's bottom line will be of high interest in the business world.

However, the Athena Instrument/Tool is about a lot more than simply lowering turnover rates. Consider the concept of *fit*, finding the best person for a unique task, finding a person who will fit with others in a work unit, and finding a person who will fit the mission, vision, and values of an organization. Fit will help an organization. Fit is also a credible and fair way of dealing with candidates. Who would want to leave an existing job, possibly uproot a family if there was not as much certainty as possible about fit? In this regard, we agree with the formidable idea of Jim Collins (*Good to Great*) that the most compelling question facing modern industry is, "Who's on the bus?" Get the right person, the person who fits on the bus, and almost every other issue will be handled with greater effectiveness.

In addition, this assessment tool serves *many* other applications in the modern workplace. It helps with selection and promotion. It supports and guides management development and succession plans. It helps build stronger teams. It enhances individual development and builds stronger people and subsequently builds a stronger workplace. Using the Athena Instrument/Tool is more about *culture transformation* than it is simply about hiring.

THE HIGHEST WORD OF PRAISE

In 2004, I had the opportunity to show the Athena Instrument to a Senior Vice-President in a major BlueCross BlueShield organization. This man, both to me and to his colleagues, is looked upon as a near genius. His insights are remarkable, and he has a way of assessing information and synthesizing corporate agendas that is amazing in its acute sensitivity. When this man speaks, people listen.

He had told me that he was not a particular fan of assessment instruments. Most of what he had seen was pretty shallow. I told him how much, across my life, I had held the same sentiment. Perhaps because of some degree of respect he held for me, he agreed to be profiled and sit for an interpretation.

It was another magical moment. He was intrigued and almost mystified by how much the results *pegged* him. He immediately saw all of the potential contained in the processes surrounding the Instrument/Tool. He was alive with new possibilities for applications that I had never conceived.

As our interview ended—well beyond the hour that had been assigned—he made a comment that I will never forget. He said with deep conviction: “You do not have a mere assessment instrument here. You have a *next-generation* human resources tool that is without peer.”

There is no substitute for good judgment, and the Athena Quotient can measure it. Measurement constitutes an assessment of how things are right now, but even more, measurement can be a powerful catalyst for growth, development, and improvement.