

WHITE PAPER

THE VISUAL IMPLICIT PROFILER (VIP)®

An implicit approach to measure
personality traits with the aid of a
visual questionnaire

and

THE PSYFIERS® STRENGTH APPROACH

A resource-oriented approach
to promote personal development and team performance
entwickelt aus der Verbindung von based on practical
and scientific knowledge and experience

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1. INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE VIP

The Visual Implicit Profiler (VIP) is a questionnaire to determine personality traits. The test is virtually non-verbal, test takers interpret visual stimuli. The VIP is available online and takes about five minutes. It includes simple graphic symbols that can be perceived and interpreted in various ways. Based on the primary purpose of perception, which is to identify and classify objects and patterns, and to ascribe meaning and significance to them, interpretations of visual stimuli can provide information about stable personality traits.

This paper describes the scientific basis for and the method of the Visual Implicit Profiler (VIP).

2. THE STORY OF THE VIP

Would it not be immensely helpful if we could design corporate communications, products, advertising, maybe even job advertisements, seminars or other events in a way that they address defined target groups directly and specifically? We could reduce scattering loss in marketing and lay out many corporate communications processes more effectively.

This thought was the basic idea for the business concept of a start-up company and brought together the creators of the visual questionnaire outlined in this paper.

Dieter Loerwald, Bernhard Mikoleit, Dr. Alexander Ribowski, and Prof. Dr. David Scheffer (names in alphabetical order) combine scientific and practical expert knowledge in the areas of marketing, design, human resources, and psychology.

In order to create something like communications, products, advertising and so on, that would perfectly fit a person or group, two major marketing and communications issues had to be considered at the very beginning:

How does a target person or group perceive, and how do they make decisions based on what they perceive?

These questions were to be answered by means of an online questionnaire that could measure personality traits. The questionnaire was to be suitable for the mass and for people with various backgrounds; it would have to be quick and easy to complete, interesting, and entertaining. After four years of developing and testing, a psychometric tool, the Visual Questionnaire (ViQ), was completed in 2007.

In 2008, Armin Neische joined the team. He updated and adjusted the tool for online use over the course of several years, creating a high-performance system. On the basis of the ViQ, Neische developed a tool called PST at a later stage.

By the time the psychometric instrument was validated again in 2017 (Scheffer et al.), as many as 300 national and international projects with groups of at least 100 persons were analysed. At that time, the (corrected) database included approx. 520 000 tests. Projects were conducted in the areas of human resources (Kuhl, Scheffer, Mikoleit, Strehlau, 2010), marketing, and corporate communications.



Since 2018, PSYfiers AG has worked with the instrument, calling it Visual Implicit Profiler (VIP). In Switzerland alone, the VIP has been used approx. 150 000 times so far. The questionnaire is based on the PST developed by Armin Neische.

Today, the VIP is an integral component of the PSYfiers product range and is available in combination with PSYfiers applications only.

3. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

3.1 PERSONALITY AND PERSONALITY TRAITS DEFINITIONS

The attempt to define the notion of «personality» has occupied many psychologists, geneticists, and neurobiologists. The following definition has become prevalent:

Personality is the sum total of all defining characteristics of an individual.

Personality is considered to be constantly developing to a certain degree rather than a construct of perception and thought structures, skills or abilities. Personality is a dynamic classification system that enables an individual to adjust to changes and demands of his or her environment. Nevertheless, personality is considered a stable feature of an individual. It tends to change slowly, over the course of several years.

Personality traits are characteristics that allow scientifically sound descriptions of and predictions with regard to individual perception, processing of stimuli, and behaviour. Differential psychology, which studies a more precise definition of personality traits, sums them up as traits. The term differentiates stable characteristics from «states» that describe a momentary, often passing conditions. An example for a well-known, time-stable trait is «openness to new things». «Alertness», on the other hand, is an example for a passing state.

The VIP measures time-stable personality traits.

3.2 THEORIES OF PERSONALITY – DEFINITIONS

Personality theories try draw a connection between the various characteristics of an individual and use them to explain the individuality people.

There are various forms of personality theories. For the development of the VIP, personality theory as

- a trait theory,
- typology,
- and as a psychodynamic theory of personality played a role.

The *trait theory* in personality psychology does not study every single characteristic. It finds and describes basic characteristics that are considered important or defining. A very popular tool of this form is the five-factor model by Costa and McCrae, the NEO-Five-Factor-Inventory (NEO-FFI), also referred to as “the Big Five”. Factor analyses in the lead up to the development of the tool had shown that the assessment of individuals via questionnaires are based on five dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These five distinct factors were measured and gave the tool its name.

Typologies interpret combinations or patterns of personality as types. An accumulation of certain traits might constitute an authoritarian or obsessive type in the diagnostic area of psychotherapy, for instance. When applied in training and coaching, types such as “the entrepreneur” or “the moderator” might come up.

Psychodynamic personality theories consider and describe the role of mostly subconsciously working systems, forces, and processing methods that together form a personality with all its givens and possibilities for development. Carl Gustav Jung’s psychology is an example for psychodynamic theories of personality.

Procedures as described in typology are used to establish VIP reports. Functionalities as, to some extent, described in C.G. Jung’s dynamic personality theory are assumed.

3.3 THE PERSONALITY SYSTEM INTERACTIONS THEORY (PSI THEORY)

The theory of Personality System Interactions (PSI theory) by Julius Kuhl has a special status among theories of personality. It integrates and expands the various personality theories on the basis of research in the area of psychology and neurobiology, and can probably best be classified as a dynamic personality theory.

The PSI theory integrates motivational, volitional, cognitive, developmental, and personality psychology theories.

One of Kuhl’s objectives is to resolve a basic issue of established teachings of personality psychology—linear, monocausal thinking. Many earlier approaches tried to explain personality on the basis of a psychological system only, or to ascribe a phenomenon to a single cause.

In his theory, Kuhl draws on established knowledge of various schools of thought (e.g. Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Hans Jürgen Eysenck, Carl Rogers, Ivan Pavlov, and

Kurt Lewin) and on findings of modern neurosciences. And he offers his own system-theoretical personality and motivational theory.

He also sets himself apart from conventional typologies and factor-analytical concepts in methodical terms. In his PSI theory, the interaction between varying systems and system levels plays an important role.

There is comprehensive literature providing an in-depth description of the PSI theory, but Professor Kuhl offers a very helpful introduction on his own website (Eine neue Persönlichkeitstheorie – Einführung in die PSI-Theorie; free download in German).

The VIP was developed on the basis of the PSI theory. The theory explains the elementary systems of perception and processing of information, while the VIP measures levels of their activation. The fact that Professor Julius Kuhl interpreted C.G. Jung's personality theory from a modern perspective and integrated it into his own model was helpful for the tool. Proven elements of this area could be preserved and integrated into a scientifically valid, modern method.

3.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS WHEN MEASURING PERSONALITY TRAITS

When gathering personality traits, the choice of test method is of great importance.

There are implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) test procedures. Linguistically speaking, there is a small imprecision with this distinction: Even though it is the examined psychological process that is implicit or explicit rather than the method, the terms implicit and explicit method have become widely used.

Any personality traits that are being established can be more or less conclusive, depending on which method is used to identify them. Implicit procedures measure subconscious processes. Explicit methods, tests in which test takers have to answer questions about their personality and behaviours, capture the conscious self-image.

One of the most important discovery of modern brain research may be that implicit or subconscious traits, motives, and other processes determine the perception and decision-making of an individual to a much greater extent than had been assumed. Freud and his student C.G. Jung pointed to the importance of the subconscious for human behaviour early on. Findings of current neuroscientific research confirm an extremely high share of subconscious influencing variables. Harvard professor Gerald Zaltman (2003) estimated that up to 95% of decisions were taken subconsciously.

Psychologist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman (2011) refers to subconscious processes as «fast thinking» or «system 1». This system steers individuals, almost putting them on autopilot. This happens frequently and even when people think they are in control and using conscious, analytical thinking.

Conscious, analytical decision-making, called «system 2» or «slow thinking» by Kahneman, is often less influential than system 1.

System 1, subconscious traits, are thus considered more time-stable than those of system 2. They influence an individual's behaviour in open situations – whenever a person is either free in his or her decision-making or when a situation is complex to a degree where considering all factors is simply not possible. This is when heuristics come into play. According to the Wikipedia definition, heuristic methods «can be used to speed up the process of finding a satisfactory solution». Trusting other people is a good example for a «product» of heuristics.

The chance of making long-term predictions with regard to behaviour on the basis of implicit traits is considered much higher than with system 2 traits.

System 2, or conscious traits, are considered less stable, and they change relatively quickly in changing circumstance or living conditions. System 2 traits determine behaviour in strongly controlled situations, e.g. whenever strict self-control is required. Compared to the sum total of all brain activity, controlled and conscious processes seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

The influence of the two systems varies from person to person. Depending on an individual's personality, system 1 (subconscious) and system 2 (conscious) have more or less control.

This fact, or functionality, is described in Julius Kuhl's Personality System Interactions theory (see page 17) that served as a basis for the construction of the VIP.

In real life, a decision or behavioural trigger will always consist of both implicit and explicit elements that complement rather than exclude each other.

3.5 MEASURING PERSONALITY TRAITS WITH EXPLICIT QUESTIONNAIRES

People have difficulty in validly and reliably assessing their own interests, desires, talents, and possibilities. Their knowledge about their own personality is incomplete.

A popular 1977 piece by Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson summarised this fact in its title: *Telling more than we Can Know*. Individuals have only very limited insight into the objective depiction of their personality. They have no access to the subconscious.

Because automatic processes are not accessible for the conscious mind, people rarely have introspective insight that could reveal why automatic decisions or judgments are made.

This circumstance significantly impacts the forming of a self-concept, the way people view themselves. The only option we have to interpret our own self is to look at what our environment reflects back in the form of reactions to our behaviour. Getting a valid picture of ourselves on the basis of these “data”, is never easy and sometimes impossible. Filter bubbles and echo chambers have become relevant with social media, and they are great examples for how susceptible to manipulation self-perception and self-concepts are.

Daniel Kahneman (2012) adds to these points from the perspective of modern cognitive research: The memory of past behaviours can be strongly influenced by effects such as availability heuristics. Availability heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that lead to errors in judgement. In cognitive psychology, they are classified as so-called judgement heuristics and «are meant to serve as quick mental references for everyday experiences and decisions. In situations of uncertainty, where information is incomplete, heuristics allow for the less-is-more effect, in which less information leads to greater accuracy» (Wikipedia definition).

Walter Mischel (2015) found that self-reported traits often are very specific to a situation. An individual could have a very organised, clean, and neat desk at work and live in a cluttered, unorganised home at the same time, for instance. The phenomenon is called consistency paradox.

The five leading causes for distortions of results of an explicit measuring method include

- inaccurate self-concept,
- social desirability,
- availability heuristics,
- consistency paradox, and
- the possibility of an active falsification based on a predictable formulation of a question (this aspect will not be further discussed in this paper).

The measuring of personality traits with the VIP avoids scanning the conscious self-concept altogether.

3.6 MEASURING PERSONALITY TRAITS WITH IMPLICIT METHODS

Walter Mischel also suggested a solution for the problem of the consistency paradox, making his point in his famous Stanford marshmallow experiment. The test on self-restraint (first trials were made in the 1960s) proved a very good predictor for people's behaviour over the course of their life. His conclusion was confirmed in various long-term studies.

Primary school pupils were given the choice between a small, immediate reward (a marshmallow or other treat) and a somewhat larger reward (e.g. two marshmallows) if they stayed in a room with the marshmallow in front of them without eating it for 20 minutes. Some people are able to do without immediate rewards if there is a prospect for a larger reward after 20 minutes (deferred gratification). And even though this is an ability that can be trained to a certain degree, the behaviour of people in similar and many other situations is fairly stable throughout their lives.

The conclusion to be drawn from the studies on the marshmallow experiment is that an objective observation of behaviours in a standardised situation yield a higher prognostic value for the measuring of personality traits than mere self-reports.

The predictive efficiency of human behaviours in specific situations (first experiments had been conducted in the early 1960s) was addressed in connection with a personality and motivational theory linked to David McClelland (1985). He showed that picture story exercises, such as his Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), predict behaviour of individuals. In a TAT, test takers are asked to interpret pictures showing people interacting with others. The pictures are somewhat blurred, or they are just sketches that leave room to «see» individual emotions in them. Responses by test takers predict their potential future behaviour in situations as depicted in the pictures with a high probability – with respect to their entire lifespan.

Validation, proof that the instrument will measure exactly what it is supposed to measure, is an issue when developing implicit tests.

A method to validate classic, explicit test procedures includes examining the object of study of comparative studies by means of established and proven other explicit tests. For these correlation studies, tests are used that measure the same or similar constructs as in the procedure that is being validated.

But what if the result to be validated was measured by means of an implicit method?

An implicit method sets a test taker a task and measures the result of a coping process in a human brain by looking at the task was solved.

An explicit measuring method asks individuals how they think they will usually complete such a task.

This juxtaposition helps create a sense for the fact, that while the object of study may be the same – the question as to how a person will behave in a given situation – the result – has been established in very different manners.

When directly comparing results of explicit measuring and established validation processes, differing values are to be expected. After all, different things have been measured, and results can be compared to a certain degree only.

Collating results with other implicit methods is usually not possible because of the small number of procedures that have been developed so far. There are simply not enough such instruments.

Therefore, we still have to compare apples to oranges. Born out of necessity, this has been done for many years. There are empirical values from decades of research about the motive test, or TAT, that give an indication with regard to the results of comparing implicit with explicit values.

While values between $r = .60$ and $r = .80$ are expected when comparing explicit methods, values range from only $r = .10$ to $r = .40$ when comparing implicit and explicit measurings.

In correlation studies (see the meta-analysis by Spangler, 1992), the explicit achieving motive (measured with a self-disclosure questionnaire) and the implicit achieving motive (measured by a Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)) resulted in values between $r = .10$ and $r = .20$ (positively correlated).

And yet, there is a royal road to validate implicit procedures. How else could the consistency of such tests be proven? The ideal way lies in the comparison with behaviour observations. This could be done by means of 360 degree feedbacks that are incorporated in observations by peers, superiors, staff members, etc. Standardised observation procedures, e.g. in assessment centres that gather the

behaviour of people in standardised situations, are even better.

Initially, the VIP was being developed in cooperation with the University of the Federal Armed Forces Hamburg. Standardised behaviour observance was done with officers during military exercise. The authors of the test were able to examine, whether the test was going to measure what it was supposed to measure.

3.7 REACTIONS TO VISUAL STIMULI SHOWING THE WAY TO THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

Learning from the approaches of Mischel (marshmallow experiment) und McClelland (implicit test (TAT)), a new course was adopted for the VIP. The work of scientists, who addressed the connection between perception and traits that constitute personality, were crucial for the development of the test.

Hermann von Helmholtz (1925) and Solomon Asch (1946) noticed that visual perception is fully automatic and pre-rational early on. Their interpretation is largely unaffected by explicit intentions. Visual perception is influenced pre-attentively by the personality and motivation of the perceiver (Henderson & Hollingworth, 1999; Balcells & Dunning, 2006).

Several characterologists started to consider the examination of perception as the royal road towards understanding implicit personality systems (Henry Murray, 1938, 1943; McClelland, 1985).

Empirical research has revealed correlations between individual differences in visual perception and differing personality traits. Below are a number of examples with references to the dimensions to be measured with the VIP (see p. 18).

Iftah Yovel, William Revell, and Susan Mineka (2005), for instance, showed that obsessive-compulsive individuals had a pronounced perceptual focus on details. There are references to this result in the measuring of the activation of the object recognition system (sensing).

Jens Foerster and E. Tory Higgins (2005) found that dispositional sensitivity towards negative affects with local processing and dispositional sensitivity towards positive affects with global processing are associated. This finding is connected to the measuring of sensitivity for positive affect (extraversion) and of propensity to negative affect (judging).

Scott J. Dickman (1985) explained how differences in people's impulsiveness depend on the speed and accuracy of visual information processing. His paper provides information about the difference between intuitive behavioural control (intuition) and sensitive visual processing (object recognition system).

Irena Zuber and Bo Ekehammar (1988) researched the connection between selective attention, the complexity of stimuli, and prominent features of visual stimuli. Their work holds indications about the difference between visual processing of stimuli by the two antagonistic systems of the extended memory (feeling) and the object recognition system (sensing).

Daniel Ellis Berlyne (1966) found the potential of observing the reaction of individuals to discrepant, conflict-inducing, and complex visual stimuli for the assessment of their personality. This work provides information about the difference between visual processing of stimuli by the two decision-making systems experience memory (feeling) and memory for intentions (thinking).

As neurosciences have already established that responses to visual stimuli are processed in brain areas that are also responsible for non-cognitive decision making, responses to visual stimuli should provide answers as to how individuals process or carry out so-called collative variables, such as complexity, predictability, rationality, etc.

Automatic, implicit reactions to visual stimuli can be considered a reliable source for measuring personality traits. This conclusion led to the decision to measure personality traits implicitly, via the processing of visual stimuli.

4. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

4.1 GENERAL AND DIAGNOSTIC GOALS OF THE VIP

The creators of the VIP constructed the VIP on the basis of a number of requirements and criteria. The questionnaire was to be

- web-enabled,
- suitable for the masses (scaleable),
- suitable for test takers with all kinds of backgrounds,
- quick (it should take no longer than five minutes), as well as
- interesting and entertaining.

The VIP

- should apply quality criteria that are common in the test market.
- should be normed by means of population-representative random samples (no measuring of pathological profiles).

In addition,

- results should yield guidelines for a design that would be adequate for target persons and groups.
- an essential criterium was to draw on a popular theory on which plenty of accessible information was available in the international market. As mentioned in the introduction, the instrument had been developed (and used) as a market research tool for psychological target group analysis, in addition to its application in HR. Users included advertising and design agencies. This group of users was not expected to have knowledge with regard to any psychological typology and should therefore have access to easy-to-understand inputs.

4.2 CHOOSING AN IMPLICIT MEASURING METHOD

Based on previous experience with test-theoretical approaches and after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of explicit and implicit test methods (see p. 11), the decision to develop an implicit test method was taken.

The goal was to measure individual resources validly, without the interference of a blurred self-concept, availability heuristics, and social desirability. In addition, effects from the consistency paradox were to be excluded to the greatest possible extent.

4.3 TEST METHOD – OBSERVING BEHAVIOURS IN STANDARDISED SITUATIONS

Observing behaviours in a standardised situation seems to have a higher prognostic value when assessing personality traits than self-reports (see p. 12), hence the decision for this method.

Showing graphics on a screen to which test takers were to react within a certain time limit was determined as standardised situation. Possible answers were provided. The time factor is not considered in the measuring. It merely limits the time necessary for the processing and prevents conscious, cognitive functions from taking over from implicit processing.

The VIP was designed as an online questionnaire from the start. There is no paper and pencil version of the questionnaire.

4.4 CHOOSING THE PERSONALITY MODEL

Based on the conditions for the design of the VIP (see p. 16), two personality models – or two instruments – with scales or dimensions suitable for the development of a new tool, remained at the end of the selection process.

One was the NEO-FFI (Big Five) with its scientific background as a trait theory (see p. 8). The NEO-FFI describes five distinct personality traits to be interpreted separately.

The other was Julius Kuhl's PSI theory (Kuhl, 2001), which looks at C.G. Jung's types (1923/1971) with the eye of modern neuroscience. The PSI theory names implicit personality systems that interact and build various coalitions depending on the situation. Because of the similarity to C.G. Jung's theory, there are common features between the scales and dimensions of the PSI theory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) that refers to Jung as well.

The decision to use the PSI theory as scientific basis and the Jungian Type Scales as operationalised by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was explained as follows:

1. Unlike the trait theory, the PSI theory describes systems and their functions and processes. It was easier to develop an implicit method to measure such processes than one that would measure distinct characteristics.
2. Measuring processes instead of characteristics (see p. 12) promises a considerably higher predictability for future behaviour (long-term predictability).

3. The tremendously deep and broad foundation of the PSI theory greatly helped the scientific work on the test procedure.
4. The PSI theory allows interested individuals to understand their own test score fully, and to utilise it.
5. The fact that the VIP used the nomenclature of the MBTI in its original version (ViQ), enabled users to draw on the comprehensive literature on such instruments if they wanted to develop and explore their score further. This was particularly helpful for users who did not have any educational background in psychology.

It should be noted at this point, that the terms of the scales corresponded to the Jungian Type Scales. The methods with which the constructs were and are measured, however, could not be more different.

4.5 THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF THE VIP

Kuhl's PSI theory and its description of the interaction of mental systems served as a basis for developing the VIP.

Below are the descriptions of the personality systems the VIP assesses.

Table 1 shows a list of the mental systems that are assessed by means of the VIP and provides a comparison with the terminologies of C.G. Jung and J. Kuhl. The term «judging» is put in squared brackets in the table. This functionality was not part of Jung's descriptions. Judging is measured on a scale of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The construct was developed by the eponymous team of authors Myers and Briggs.

C. G. Jung	PSI Theory
Sensing (S)	Object recognition system (ORS)
Intuition (N)	Intuitive behaviour control (IBC)
Thinking (T)	Intention memory (IM)
Feeling (F)	Extension memory (EM)
Extraversion (E)	Positive affect (A+)
[Judging (J)]	Negative affect (A-)

Table 1: Terminologies of C.G. Jung and J. Kuhl (PSI theory)

OBJECT RECOGNITION SYSTEM (SENSING)

Activating the object recognition system (ORS) leads to an information-searching and detailed perception of individual objects.

Neuropsychologically speaking, a system that focuses on recognizing discrepancies and avoiding inaccuracies is active. In this system, perception takes place via the five senses. The higher the level of activation of the ORS, the stronger the interest in specific results. Information is then taken in sectionally, simplicity precedes novelty. The perception system searches for unambiguous information, for comprehensible and measurable input. The more complex a matter, the more detailed information will be requested. This is necessary in order to comprehend what that matter may be about or how it works.

Behaviour based on sensitive information intake is beneficial whenever meticulousness is necessary, when things have to be structured and inaccuracy must be avoided.

INTUITIVE BEHAVIOUR CONTROL (INTUITION)

Activating the intuitive behavioural system (IBC) leads to a perception of connections that provides a general view (intuition), and it activates subconscious, automatic, quick action programmes.

Neuropsychologically speaking, a system that focuses on quick insight is active. With the help of the IVS, perception takes place in the form of a subconscious evaluation of patterns. Attention is focused on ambiguous, collative, and complex stimuli. Small indications or a minimal amount of information are sufficient to identify complexes of meaning, gain insight into highly complex connections, or anticipate future developments. Quick perception can trigger quick (spontaneous) reaction or behaviour.

Behaviour based on the activation of the IBC is beneficial in highly complex and dynamic environments, in which the conscious weighing of cost and benefit is too time-consuming. This system's automatic programmes of action are helpful, whenever action without long (conscious) reflection in a dynamic context is called for, e.g. when reacting to non-verbal signals or moods of people is necessary.

INTENTION MEMORY (THINKING)

Activating the intention memory leads to foresightful planning and analytical decision making.

Neuropsychologically speaking, a system that focuses on conceptual thinking and decision is active. This system creates a reality that can be formally described. It works

out plans and objectives and prevents them from being implemented too quickly by questioning them. Intentions are maintained, even for long periods of time, and they are approved for implementation at an adequate moment. The intention memory draws on previously perceived information, and analyses and processes it. This takes place partly consciously, step by step, logically, and rationally. The intention memory looks for and establishes order in information. Even in highly abstract information, principles of order are being detected or created.

Thinking and behaviour based on the activation of the intention memory is beneficial whenever things should be clearly analysed and objectively comprehended, when clearly communicable rules have to be laid down and explicable decisions have to be made.

EXTENSION MEMORY (FEELING)

Activating the extension memory clears the way to the experience memory of a person – to people's emotions, personal values, and allows these aspects to be factored in when they form an opinion.

Neuropsychologically speaking, a system is active that is focused on getting a holistic view of what is perceived and on sustaining an individual's own needs and values. Preferably, all influencing variables are integrated in the process of forming an opinion. The extension memory is a holistic system that copes well with secondary and even inconsistent information. Coping processes are relational and episodic. Often, only emotions, attitudes, and results are capable of becoming conscious. As these processes are mostly subconscious, they are, in most cases, hard to describe or to justify formally. The road to taking decision of people with a high activation of the extension memory often cannot be explained in retrospect.

Thinking and behaviour based on the activation of these system is beneficial to grasp matters or situations in their multifacetedness and possibly their inconsistency. This leads to a holistic view of the world. Decisions can be made while fully considering all kinds of even elusive parameters, such as emotionality.

SENSITIVITY TO POSITIVE AFFECT (EXTRAVERSION)

The propensity to experience positive emotions does not refer to the degree of activation of a mental system, but to the extent to which an individual reacts to positive affect.

The PSI theory describes how the energy for being motivated and for action can be released by stimuli that are perceived as positive, by positive affect from the outside world, or by self-generated positive affect.

People high in extraversion have a strong propensity to positive triggers from the outside world. Such individuals display an outward attention for stimulating sensations. Things or events they experience as positive quickly trigger the mobilisation of energy for motivation and performance. This process causes a high level of energy and, on a behavioural level, agility. Sociableness, representing a dominating factor in some theories on extraversion, is only one aspect of extraversion. As subjects, people are among the strongest sources for stimulant and therefore a major influencing factor. The stimulus is not necessarily perceived as positive by all extraverts. To some people, monitoring a scientific experiment, admiring the beauty of nature, exploring an interesting computer programme, a mathematical formula, or a text provide a much more intense positive affect.

PROPENSITY TO NEGATIVE AFFECT (JUDGING)

The propensity to negative affect does not refer to the degree of activation of any mental system, but describes how sensitively individuals respond to events they consider inconsistent.

People with a strong propensity to negative affect, display a high general alertness to matters or events that could be rated menacing or perilous. They strongly focus on areas of perception and action in which they identify or suspect inconsistencies or discrepancies from applicable or prevailing rules. To restore safety, they address potential sources of danger and eliminate them if need be. Their attention is focused on the problem. Foresight and planning prevent unforeseeable matters or events. A high value in this dimension leads to determined behaviour and a pursuit of unambiguous and consistent decisions, as well as to norm-oriented approaches.

4.6 DEVELOPING ITEMS

Scientific experiments about designing items and measuring methods were conducted. The results revealed that visual stimuli would provide a simple but solid possibility to predict a degree of activation of implicit personality systems.

When developing the items, the authors of the test drew on the figure-ground perception theory of gestalt psychology. The human brain provides functions to filter and select information. It can filter out the information it deems most important at a given point in time of a remarkable influx of sensory impressions. These impressions – according to gestalt psychology – then come to the fore and become a “figure”. They are perceived consciously and in a nuanced manner. They are at the centre of attention. The remaining sensory impressions, the ones that have been considered less important, fade into the background and become the “ground”.

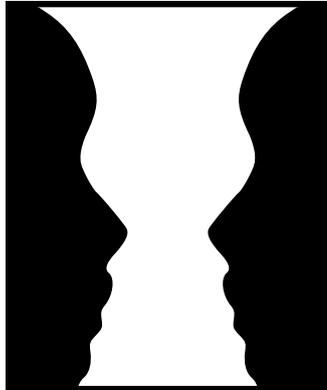


Illustration 1 shows a popular example for the figure-ground phenomenon. Viewers can see either a white vase or two black faces.

Illustration 1: Reversible figure – a vase or two faces?
(source: Wikipedia)

When developing the VIP, it was interesting to find out whether these choice heuristics would be influenced by the coalitions of personality systems that build the basis for certain personality traits.

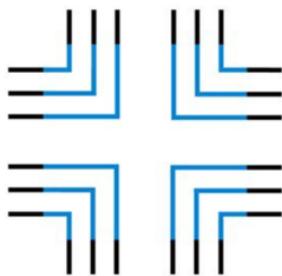


Illustration 2 represents an example for an item that was inspired by the theory of figure-ground perception. Initially considered promising, it was excluded during a later stage of development. The illustration serves as an example representing the approach for the item. The detailed active principles are a corporate secret.

Illustration 2: example for an item

The illustration can be viewed in two ways:

1. Detail-oriented and selective perception leads to a line pattern. At first glance, the person looking at the picture perceives black-and-blue angles.
2. Intuitive and integrating perception leads to a closed shape. At first glance, the person looking at the picture perceives a blue, partly transparent square covering the central area of the illustration.

The measuring method was organised as follows (procedures described below correspond with the principle of current VIP test):

- Test takers are asked to follow the instructions on the screen.
- The picture shown in illustration 2 appears on the screen for two to four seconds.
- The picture vanishes, and the following instruction appears:

Please click on what you saw first:

- black-and-blue lines
- a blue square

According to the theories that were used as a basis for the test, persons with a high activation of the object recognition system (OES) should see the lines before the square significantly more often. Their focus of attention differentiates details – the lines – in the picture.

Accordingly, persons with a high activation of intuitive behavioural control, should see the square before noticing the lines significantly more often. Their attention is focused on looking for patterns and finding coherences that cannot necessarily be connected directly to the information available, i.e. the square.

A large number of such icons and similar kinds of icons was developed and tested with various groups of persons. After four years of work, approx. 300 items that seemed to measure stable, individual differences in personality were available.

Table 2 shows the six dimensions of the VIP and a categorisation of observable effects of psychological systems.

C.G. Jung	PSI Theory	Theories on the functionality of mental systems and behaviours
Sensing (S)	Object recognition system (ORS)	Conscientiousness; determined and structure behaviour; sensitivity to discrepancies; detail orientation; realism; pragmatism
Intuition (N)	Intuitive behaviour control (IBC)	Automatic programmes of perception and action; quick inferences made from knowledge and reactions based on minimal information, even in highly complex and dynamic environments; intuitive learning
Thinking (T)	Intention memory (IM)	Quick identification of systematic and logic classifications; implementation of difficult intentions, rational thinking; rational control of action; planning
Feeling (F)	Extension memory (EM)	Access to self, empathy, social awareness; relational thinking; episodic memory; emotional and holistic way of experiencing things; integration of partly inconsistent aspects, e.g. in social environments with complex group dynamics
Extraversion (E)	Positive affect (A+)	Search for stimulation from the environment (sensation seeking); interest in feedback from people, matters and events in the environment
Judging (J)	Negative affect (A-)	Propensity to negative affect; search for and pursuit of unambiguous decisions, safety, structure, stability and predictability; norm orientation; consistent behaviour

Table 2: The six dimensions of the VIP and a classification of observable effects of mental systems

4.7 DEVELOPING THE VIP

The second step in the development process was the formal and comprehensive examination of the 300 items. All items had to show stable psychometric features. Eventually, the items used for the VIP were selected based on three criteria:

1. Stability
The items were examined with regard to their repetition validity in a random test of 60 participants over the course of three months. In order to be maintained, they had to show correlations above .50.
2. Homogeneity
In a series of explorative factor analyses, items were cross-culturally examined for consistency with the six dimensions. Items were kept if they showed an absolute value of their structural coefficient in a factor analysis for a given factor above $r = .50$, and for all other factors lower than $r = .30$.
3. Construct validity
The items had to exhibit significant correlations with the scales of a self-report questionnaire to measure the Jungian Type Index (MBTI).

Only 49 items met all three formal criteria. They were categorised in six types of design elements. Four questions or tasks are used:

- Which shape do you like best?
- What did you see first?
- How many colours were in the picture?
- Test takers are asked to manipulate an optical illusion to the point it disappears (to their eye).

5. QUALITY CRITERIA

Two aspects with regard to the scope of application of the VIP:

Colour blindness has no verifiable influence on the results of the VIP measuring.

Questions relating to multicoloured graphics can be answered on the basis varying individual colour perception or of various shades of grey, as if test takers were perceiving the colours actually used for the graphics.

The normalisation of the VIP refers to the population-representative random sample.

If individuals with autism spectrum disorder or Asperger's syndrome take the test, distortions of scores may occur.

5.1 DATA BASE AND NORMS

The instrument has been used since 2007 under the name VIQ. By February 2016, the overall data base consisted of $n = 517\,169$ data sets that had been gathered in 292 projects with more than 100 participants and in other programmes.

At the same time, Armin Neische's practically identical instrument was used under the name PST. 200 181 data sets were generated.

Since 2018, the instrument has also been used under the name VIP. By December 2020, approx. 150 000 VIP tests were conducted.

In 2018, a Swiss norm sample ($n = 4697$) was drawn. The adequate sample was drawn based on the adult population.

The norm sample was drawn with the help of LINK Marketing Services AG. LINK is the leading Swiss marketing and social research institute.

The norm sample was compared with a sample ($n = 54845$ cases, 2018) among children and young adults. Its structure proved almost identical to the one of the Swiss adult population.

5.2 OBJECTIVITY

Test takers access the VIP online. The test is compatible with all established internet browsers. Test takers read the instructions and follow the presentation of the items in a programmed routine. The test procedure and the evaluation process are not influenced by manual or human interaction. Both scoring and reporting are fully automated.

The VIP is highly objective with respect to the method of conducting the test, the evaluation algorithm, and the interpretation of scores.

5.3 INTERNAL VALIDITY

FACTORIAL VALIDITY

The goal of the VIP must be that each question can clearly be matched with a dimension and that there are no dependencies with regard to various dimensions. Factor analyses were conducted with three samples (N=1.508, N=1.985, N=2.873) that displayed a virtually identical factor structure. Only items are used with correlation to the factor above $r = .50$ and that correlate not higher than $r = .30$ with any other factor. This ensures statistical independence and high internal consistency with regard to the six measured dimensions.

INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

The internal consistency of each dimension of the VIP is between Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$ and Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$. This measure indicates the extent to which the items of a dimension are related to each other. Psychometric test instruments with a value of Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.65$ are recommended. The values of the VIP are thus to be considered very good.

TEST-RETEST RELIABILITY

The test-retest reliability ranges between $r = .70$ and $r = .91$ for a time period of six months. Repeatability is therefore to be considered very good.

Experiments have shown that the values of the VIP test-retest reliability can deteriorate if respondents obtain information on the test method or their score upon taking the test for the first time. This could lead to learning effects. Their completing the test for the second time will no longer happen in an unbiased manner, but will be influenced by conscious processes. We therefore recommend to wait for at least one year before conducting the test for a second time.

5.4 EXTERNAL VALIDITY

In order to establish whether the VIP measures validly as an implicit test, it was compared to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Correlations ranged between $r = .30$ and $r = .50$. When comparing these values to studies used to compare implicit with explicit tests (see p. 13), they are to be considered very good.

Further correlations studies were conducted with the California Personality Inventory (CPI) and the NEO-FFI (Big Five). In addition, results of the VIP were compared to assessment centre data.

6. SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND FOR TEST REPORTS

THE STRENGTH APPROACH

It may sound strange after all the efforts taken to ensure valid test results, but the test report is not aimed at providing test takers with a detailed analysis of their personality. That would be somewhat presumptuous, anyway.

At PSYfiers, we would like to tackle another, just as ambitious, challenge. And even though the metaphor may not be entirely new, it seems quite apt in our day and age: With our tools, we would like to take people on a journey.

What could such a journey look like?

In his famous book «To Have or to Be?», Erich Fromm (Fromm, 1976) juxtaposes being and having – two ways of existing.

While having leads to a form of logjam and to an exploitative society, people who focus on being actually live and evolve. The idea may be more relevant than ever.

Being is characterised by productive inner activity and by the use of individual gifts and talents. Fromm clearly distinguishes this form of being active from merely busying oneself with things, from activities that are carried out by people alienated from their work.

At PSYfiers, we would like to inspire people to activate their inner productivity and to use their talents and gifts. Therefore, we would like to introduce them to their own potential and help them become connected with their talents. This is where our strength approach (see p. 37) comes in. To users of our tools, the process will be a journey to their selves.

Anyone who has ever tried to find out what he or she is good at, what strengths he or she may have, will know that answering such questions is not easy at all. Even though finding one's strengths may feel simpler than answering the question «Who am I?», the two aim at similar sources. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott described these sources as the «true self» (Winnicott, 1974). The true self is coated by the so-called «false self» that has been built to protect the true – valuable but vulnerable – self and to adjust to the requirements of an environment. Winnicott's idea has become an established model of contemporary psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

With this model, Winnicott points to a very important notion of developmental psychology: All that constitutes an individual does not solely come from this individual. A person is what he or she is also through, with, or for others.

In their award-winning podcast about psychoanalysis, Cécile Loetz and Jakob Müller (2018) describe the true self as something that absolutely wants to be found, but that frequently eludes detection when actively searched for at the same time. The true self, as the two authors underline, cannot be forced. It chooses the moment of revealing itself. And because that is the case, colleagues, friends, and family can help with the process. They can try to pave the way and create an environment in which the true self, true strengths, feel safe enough to emerge. What a splendid task, what a great opportunity.

In this sense, every team, every community, every family has a co-responsibility for the development of each of their individual members.

For this reason, PSYfiers does not provide VIP scores as standalone solutions. Reports are part of programmes that always include at least two parties – the individual/the individual personality and a team, a social group, a family. Topics of the programmes vary. They can be about strengthening teams, or about how the social environment of young people can help them choose a career.

Even though there are several topics, the approach with regard to individuals and their environment and to strengths remain the same. In addition, they are always based on positive psychology according to Maslow and Seligman and a purely positive attitude towards people.

Thus, the journeys on which participants of PSYfiers programmes embark, are always expeditions in search of resources – both individual resources and those a group may combine. They are always about discovering, developing and using resources. The VIP report thus does not so much provide participants with ready-made answers than with an impetus. It is designed to invite people to start a conversation about their strengths, their interests, and opportunities, as well as to compare their self-concept to what others might see. The VIP report should get people to become curious about their own potential.

In psychology, resource orientation assumes that people already possess most resources they will need to complete their tasks and lead successful lives. The resource perspective has its roots in humanistic psychology and its firm belief in people's potential to change for the good.

The implicit method can offer surprising results, especially when it comes to hidden potentials, as it provides test takers with a glimpse behind their own curtain. The inspiration to think about topics of their life, to explore their own resources, to develop goals and activate a productive force becomes all the more sustainable if they get to work on known and unknown (subconscious) individual sources. An implicit test, such as the VIP, is well suited to reveal hidden resources.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE EVALUATION

PSYfiers also adopted a new course with the design of the report.

Our brain processes texts and images very differently. While texts tend to occupy the consciously working, rational part of our brain – Kahneman’s system 2 (see p. 10) –, images have a much stronger effect. They cause a deeper and broader activation of associative networks. They activate what Kahneman describes as the subconscious, holistic and quick system 1 (see p. 10). This system has a significantly higher share in an individual’s behavioural control than system 2.

Therefore, the VIP report combines text with illustrations.

As the VIP report is designed to provide an opportunity for reflection and an exchange of ideas with others, illustrations provide a much more inspiring source of information than texts. They promote thorough understanding and/or serve as projection surface.

In addition, illustrations can pave the way to accessing subconscious resources. The books and essays by Storch and Krause about the Zurich Resource Model (Storch und Krause, 2014) provide interesting literature on the subject.

7. BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE VIP REPORT

7.1 THE EVALUATING CLUSTERS – IN REMINISCENCE OF THE JUNGIAN TYPES

Once a test is completed, scores for the six dimensions of the VIP described above are available.

To analyse the test, clusters such as the ones for the Jungian types are established with the help of an algorithm. However, no type codes are provided. The missing scales for introversion (I) and Perceiving (P) are calculated from the dimensions E and J.

When integrating all measured dimensions and scales, 16 clusters, or 16 different types, can be established.

Based on the twofold interaction between a perception and a decision-controlling function (see p. 19), four basic types are established. They are named core personality types or core types.

- ORS-IM (ST)
- ORS-EM (SF)
- IBC-IM (NT)
- IBC-EM (NF)

In order to reduce complexity, the VIP report focuses on these four core personality types. The results of the VIP will classify test takers in one of these four clusters.

7.2 THE FOUR MAPS OF PERSONALITY

The most striking illustrations in the result report are the four maps. There are two types of maps, depending on the PSYfiers product. Figure 3 shows the four maps used for the VIP evaluation in Mission Career.

Depending on which core personality participants were identified with, one of four maps appears in the evaluation section “Your Personality Profile”. Two pages later, there are images of the other three maps, however in smaller format.

The maps and their various design elements symbolise the individual types. The maps stand for the group of specific strengths that characterise the respective personality type. These maps represent the environment in which a person will feel comfortable and be able to evolve. They give clues as to how to set personal goals as well as the ways of moving forward in life.

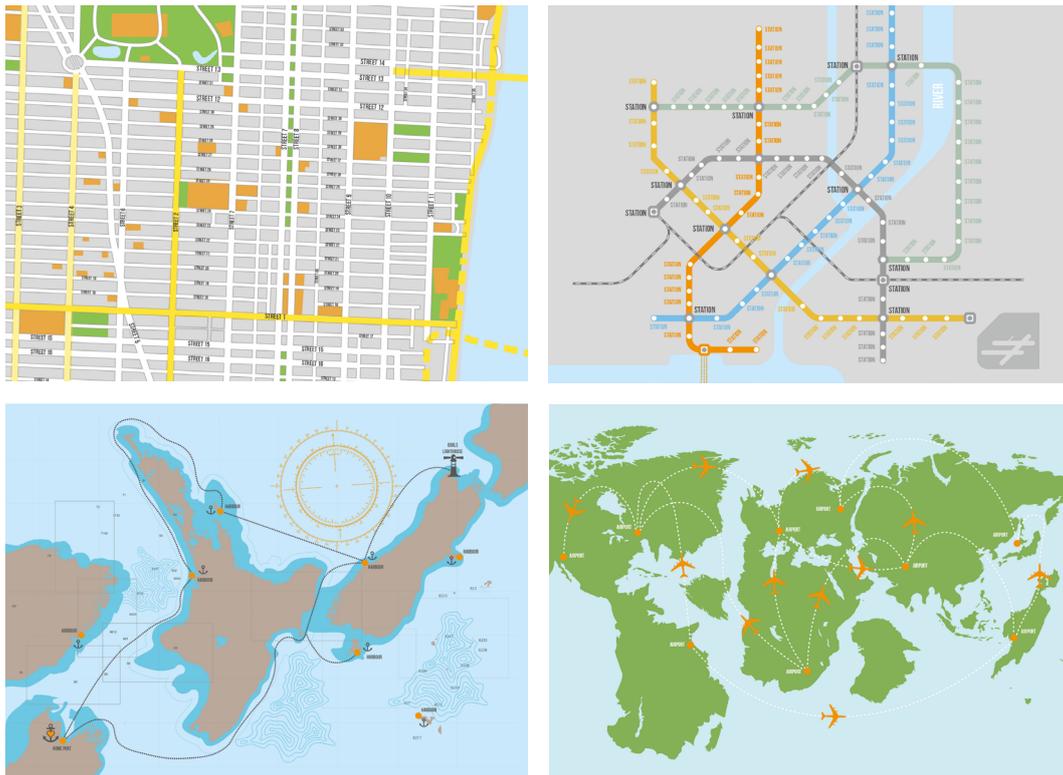


Figure 3: Example of the four-map representation in Mission Career evaluations

The map at the top left, the **city map**, symbolises clarity and structure. Everything can be grasped quickly and yet in detail. Straight lines and right angles enable easy calculations. They symbolise unambiguity, quick orientation and purposefulness. No winding path is obstructing the view.

Why we chose this map:

People with this map tend to form an overall, yet detailed perspective quickly. They prefer being led by clear structures, they convince others with their straightforwardness, and they enjoy an environment that is predictable in every sense. They unerringly determine their course on precisely defined paths.

The map at the top right, the **metro map**, is a symbol for planned processes, consistency and reliability. You are almost always riding the metro together with others. And the journey is like a commitment (I stay on until I reach the intermediate destination). At the end of a segment, a decision on whether to change trains in order to move on becomes necessary.

Why we chose this map:

People with this map like spending time and working with others. They like to plan and prepare for their tasks, stay on them and work precisely and persistently until everything is done. Then, they find their bearings, and often “change” to explore new things, to learn and to grow.

The map at the bottom left, the **nautical chart**, symbolises freedom and self-determination. The vast sea offers many opportunities to find one’s own way. Lighthouses on the horizon are often the only orientation. Shoals, currents and weather conditions demand technical knowledge and a good sense for the unpredictable forces at work.

Why we chose this map:

People with this map like to go by long-term goals, by an objective, without further conditions. They like to determine the route to get there themselves, exploit leeway, analyse the conditions and act strategically. They appreciate complex tasks and follow their intuition in inscrutable situations.

The map at the bottom right, the **aeronautical chart**, is a symbol for possibilities, spontaneity and mobility. The view from a great height allows them to see connections and developments. The map shows a world without borders. The lack of barriers in people’s minds can give space to new ideas and personal development.

Why we chose this map:

People with this map enjoy switching between topics, perspectives and activities spontaneously and quickly. They come up with unusual ideas, overcome boundaries and discover connections. They are fascinated by people and what they can do, and they want to evolve and keep getting better.

7.3 THE WORD CLOUD

Feedback provided in the form of a word cloud (see illustration 4) conveys the most detailed analysis of the VIP.



Illustration 4: Word cloud

An algorithm compiles an individual collection of adjectives from an overall list. Decisive for the selection are the values reported in the tests on the dimensions ORS (S), IBC (N), IM (T), and EM (F). In addition, the emphasis of such adjectives plays a role. Emphasis is given depending how representative an adjective is for the core personality type.

By considering all four cognitive functions, we ensured that a word cloud not only contains adjectives that can be ascribed to an individual core personality. Such an approach would not do justice to test respondents, as they all combine parts of all four basic types in their personality.

The adjectives in a word cloud are referred to as strengths. Each person possesses all strengths listed in their word cloud. In order to depict the influence of the various characteristics on the personality, the adjectives are printed in various sizes. The larger a word, the less energy a person has to invest to utilise the strength described in the adjective. If an adjective printed in small type has been already been established as an important strength, the particular strength has probably been practised by regularly using it.

7.4 ILLUSTRATED STRENGTHS

Eight adjectives listed in the word cloud are printed in particularly large type. These are the strengths that the report would like to highlight for the respondent. Reports come with a photograph in Polaroid format illustrating these particular adjectives. Illustration 5 shows some strength photographs.



Illustration 5: Photograph illustrating a strength (Mission Career)

As described in chapter six, the goal of these pictures is to facilitate an in-depth understanding of a given adjective. Ultimately, they are about checking whether the adjective represents an adequate indication to a known or hidden strength. Words and images are processed in different areas of the brain. Functioning together, they achieve the highest possible activation. If feelings, attitudes, or values are activated, the number of brain “institutions” that can check, whether a suggested strength triggers a positive resonance and should be noticed further increases.

7.5 RESULTS IN TEXT FORM

Text passages of the report are brief, carefully composed, and very concise. They are not designed to explain respondents what their personality is. Instead, they serve as source of inspiration, they provide ideas, and thus help test takers gain access to their strengths and traits.

Test takers receive a short text that refers to the individual type from the 16 types cluster. All other texts of the evaluation describe characteristics that can be deduced from their reported core personalities.

Following the principles of the strength approach, all texts are phrased in a positive way.

8. THE PSYFIERS STRENGTH APPROACH

8.1 DEFINITION OF STRENGTHS

Scientific surveys have not used the term very often so far. This may be partly because the topic of strengths and strength-based interventions represent a relatively new area in psychological research, and a common language is still being developed. If they are mentioned, strengths often come up in connection with strength of character. Strengths of character are a specific group of strengths that include honesty, bravery, kindness, fairness, or the willingness to forgive (Ruch & Proyer, 2017).

To be clear, strengths of character cannot generally be concluded from VIP scores, even though there are some overlaps – in the area of creativity or persistence, for instance.

And even though the terms cannot be used synonymously, the PSYfiers definition of strength aligns leans to the notion of resources, a term often used in science and in practical psychology.

According to Flückiger (2009), a resource can be any aspect of emotional occurrence and of the overall life situation of a person. This includes motivational dispositions, goals, dreams, interests, convictions, values, taste, attitudes, knowledge, education, abilities, habits, styles of interaction, force, and endurance. From a resource perspective, the sum total of these resources represents the so-called possibility space of people, in which they can act and use their positive potential for a successful life.

Strengths usually reveal themselves

1. by coming along with a good feeling (positive affect),
2. by proving helpful and beneficial (functionality), and they tend
3. to be temporary.

The aspect of being temporary originates in the fact that resources cannot be viewed as fixed entities. They can be found in a highly person- and situation-specific configuration, but yet are not necessarily lasting traits of a person.

As we establish the resources (strengths) we work with at PSYfiers from traits (determined by means of the VIP), we can define them more broadly, and consider them stable, in contrast to the third aspect of the definition.

In training and coaching, two additional conditions are often mentioned:

- a. Strengths should be easy to operationalise, and
- b. a strength may have to represent something, an individual is already good at.

About a)

As always in life, practise is necessary. We cannot be good at anything without it. Even the greatest talent needs training, and behaviour connected to it must be rehearsed. That is not always easy. “Just remember, when you go after your true identity, some part of you feels like you’re breaking the rules. It comes with the territory. It just means you’re human, and one day it will pass,” author Barbara Sher (1994) points out. Everyone who has gone through the process before, will look back on it with respect, and will definitely not claim that it had been easy.

In addition, as mentioned before, even recognising a strength may often prove difficult (see p. 29). Therefore, the condition that a strength should go along with positive affect seems much more relevant than the one about strengths making things easy.

About b)

A person may be particularly good at something because he or she has had to do it for a long time. Yet, this person would not necessarily count the skill among his or her strengths. And maybe, it even stands in the way of discovering the resources that would, if mobilised, lead to personal growth. This circumstance accounts for the claim that strengths are temporary. But again, the conditions «positive affect» and «functionality» are more apt determinants for personal strengths.

With the VIP report, PSYfiers also provides test takers with a word cloud. The word cloud contains adjectives that list the individual's strengths. The adjectives (strengths) are matched on the basis of the individual score of a person. And even if a test score defines a person's typology based on where most of his or her preferences cluster, every human being combines a multifaceted, individual mix of all possible personality traits. And it has to be pointed out again and again: People are capable of learning and developing. As stated earlier, PSYfiers would like to take their clients on a journey. For participants, it can be a journey to their selves, so that they can – as Nietzsche would say – become what they are.

To promote such a process with a score that tells respondents where they are without defining them, PSYfiers developed the strength cloud. This cloud points to aspects, individuals might not have been aware of before. Its purpose is to provoke thought and provide inspiration for new developments. Table 3 lists some strengths to give an

impression of their nature. As described above, they are not strengths of character, and the table does not show the entire pool of possible adjectives. Resources, or strengths, in this table are categorised according to the four main clusters (core personalities) of the VIP. A person’s word cloud could combine a collection of adjectives from all four clusters.

ORS-IM (ST)	ORS-EM (SF)	IBC-EM (NF)	IBC-IM (NT)
logical	understanding	creative	abstract
realistic	conscientious	empathetic	complex
precise	open-minded	versatile	methodical
objective	reliable	spontaneous	analytic
effective	persevering	flexible	instructive

Table 3: A selection of strengths mentioned in word clouds, listed according to the four VIP core personality types

8.2 STRENGTH-ORIENTED INTERVENTION – ACTIVATING RESOURCES

Focusing on strengths places abilities and motivational readiness of people at the centre of an intervention. Even early representatives of humanistic psychology, including Virginia Satir, Carl Roger, or Abraham Maslow, recognised the benefits of such an approach and professed their firm belief in people’s potential to change for the good. When the positive psychology school of thought emerged and creating wellbeing started to be looked at from a neuropsychological perspective, the topic became more and more relevant. Positive psychology determined that promoting positive features in a human being will have significant impact on self-growth and wellbeing, even if any ongoing problems are not explicitly addressed (Seligmann 2008). If people wish to do so, they can use the new possibilities they created by activating their resources to solve specific problems themselves.

Recognising and reinforcing already utilised or hidden strengths that are presented (in the form of the word cloud, for instance), is an essential requirement for resource-oriented interventions.

Using existing strengths, reactivating dormant ones, or expanding strengths can be considered crucial mechanisms for change.

As already mentioned, recognising a strength is not a trivial matter (see p. 29). It is the result of a more or less conscious process of coping with information. During this process, positive affect expands the attention and the cognitive search area is broadened.

Therefore, a wider range of problem-solving strategies can be tried out. Physical, intellectual, and social abilities and skills are practised that, later on, may serve as a stepping stone for acquiring further competencies (Flückiger, 2009). This can generate a reciprocal trigger and escalation process between positive effect and development of competency. Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (2001) provides a detailed description of these processes and relations. She describes how positive emotions can broaden people's minds and their range of behaviours.

Overarching goals of strength-oriented intervention includes increasing wellbeing, promoting personal growth, and boosting self-efficacy and autonomy.

8.3 EFFECT OF STRENGTH-ORIENTED INTERVENTIONS

The positive effects of strength-oriented intervention and the use of them in all kinds of contexts are well documented. Remarkably, evidence does not relate to psychotherapy settings only. They include broad applications, even though some, in contrast to psychotherapy, may not be aimed at some radical restructuring or may come in the form of small, simple exercises.

In their article „Strengths-based interventions in Positive Psychology“, Valentina Vylobvova, Sonja Heintz, and Fabian Gander (2019) compiled a collection of such evidence. In addition to promoting wellbeing and reducing symptoms of depression (z.B. Gander et al., 2013; Seligmann et al., 2005), interventions that are based on strengths have positive effects on hope and commitment (Lavy, 2019), as well as on people's self esteem (Proctor et al., 2011). Harzer and Ruch (2016) proved an increase in job satisfaction, while Dubreuil et al. (2016) found that they can improve performance and concentration at work.

Christoph Flückiger (2009) reports a strengthening of useful behaviours, including self-serving attributions (the way we explain the cause of certain circumstances of events), increased interest, creativity and willingness to cooperate.

8.4 PRACTICAL INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES

The practical basic framework for the PSYfiers strength approach was created through leading and observing performance-oriented individuals and teams. It is based on the insights and experiences of Patrick K. Magyar, one of the founding PSYfiers partners. His perceptions were validated and complemented with the help of the theoretical strength

approach (8.1 – 8.3 above) and additional experience, particularly of Bernhard Mikoleit and Maïke von Elverfeldt. The process allowed to identify the five success factors described below. They can be viewed as stages of an individual's or a team's journey to success.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Everything starts with the individual. Self-knowledge is about minimising the gap between the true and the false self (see p. 29). The VIP helps activate conscious and mostly subconscious resources. By measuring them implicitly, the tool also provides access to parts of a test respondent's personality that may have been hidden so far. The VIP's strength profile represents a set of suggestions that individuals can work with – by themselves at first and then together with another person. During this stage of the journey, individuals evaluate their own self with the help of the word cloud and illustrated strengths (see p. 34/35). They determine the strengths they would like to bring along for the further process themselves. In addition, they have the opportunity to adjust decisions they take to their own experience and level of knowledge.

The implicit learning goal during this stage: Only people who do not have to protect themselves with a strong false self can gain the freedom to be and test their true selves, to develop their own resources and to utilise them. Only then can they be on the road, equipped with the strengths that carry them, make them happy and help them be the best version of themselves.

RECOGNISING DIVERSITY AND OTHERNESS

Recognising the otherness in others is a journey of discovery in itself. The more mindfully we set off together, the more fascinating details will manifest themselves. An open-minded attitude, a calm demeanour, and a clear yet non-judgemental awareness of other members of a group or team are essential for the journey to become a success. The theory that serves as a basis for the VIP helps perceive, differentiate, and classify differences.

The implicit learning goal during this stage: Only people who do not have to guard and defend a false self, have the power to open up to the other or the unusual and to allow new insights and perceptions.

ACCEPTING DIVERSITY AND OTHERNESS

Diverse personalities with their various strengths do not simply have differing perspectives of a supposedly objective world. Their differing assumptions form the world they adopt. People develop their own paradigm – the way in which they see and understand the world. A consequential fact: A paradigm determines, which questions are deemed relevant, which arguments are considered valid, or what methods are used to solve a problem. The coexistence of multiple paradigms in people's social environments – in their family, their circle of friends, at school or in teams at work, in sports, in the cultural realm, in politics, etc. – is both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity.

The implicit learning goal during this stage: Only accepting the diversity and otherness of other peoples' strengths will preserve the treasure of diversity and its unique opportunity to act constructively and positively in a social group. Only a society of which all members can be sure that their strengths are accepted and that they can use them adequately can be tolerant.

TRUST

«Culture eats strategy for breakfast,» – a statement attributed to economist and business strategist Peter Drucker. Without a culture of trust, each strategy, each effort to improve any social collective will fail.

The implicit learning goal during this stage: People who accept and stand by their selves and their strengths, will become vulnerable. Always! Without confidence in the fact that this vulnerability will not be exploited, there can be no trust. All members of a social group are responsible to act in a way that helps build trust.

COMMITMENT – THE SUCCESS OF «WE» IS A DECISION

At the end of the journey, there is commitment – an individual decision that will help people enjoy their personal and/or the common success of “we”. This commitment is possible only with the knowledge of individual strengths, with their consideration, and when there is an opportunity to contribute them adequately to a social group.

The implicit learning objective during this stage:
To take a decision that people feel suits them, they have to know their strengths, and they have to consider them when deciding.

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