

Graphology – the ‘write’ path to recruitment success

South African companies are fast realising the benefits of using graphology as a recruitment tool although it is still viewed with a degree of scepticism.

Mention graphology (the study of personality through handwriting) as a recruitment tool and the predictable response is one of scepticism; a view that the use of graphology is akin to tarot card reading – occultish, unscientific and frankly a load of hogwash.

It is this disparaging perception that often leads users of graphology to reluctantly admit any association with the tool, Nigel Bradley writes in the *Journal of the British Academy of Graphology*.

The truth is that graphology is an emerging science, now taught in major universities in Italy, Spain, Brazil and in Germany as a part of courses in the faculty of psychology.

Almost 80% of large French and Swiss companies and several large corporations in America, for example, Boeing, Deloitte & Touche, Kodak and Peugeot, hire prospective employees with the assistance of appropriately trained and experienced handwriting specialists. And in Israel graphology has become the most used personality test.

South African companies are fast realising the benefits of using graphology as a recruitment tool, says Ladrach Couzens, Managing Director of Couzens Personnel, who uses graphological assessments to recruit her own staff as well as for selective clients. “When I first heard about it I was very sceptical. Now I know I could have saved a lot of money if I had simply listened to the outcome of graphological assessments.”

Couzens says clients react “very positively” to the assessments because they give a “... different angle. Other personality tests give you an overview, but I find many of them to be quite superficial in relation to the graphological assessments.”

According to Sonja Broschk, who completed a Masters dissertation on the correlation between graphology and personality, when compared with the results of the Personality Profile Analysis (PPA) which is used widely in personnel recruitment, the results of graphological



Natalia Thomson is Managing Editor and Divisional Head of NowMedia, a business to business publishing house.

assessments are very similar. “The graphological assessment does, however, offer slightly more in-depth insight into the personality traits which could have a negative impact on this person’s work situation.”

Broschk says in her study the graphological assessment tool proved to be “more efficient and effective in determining the character of the individual” specifically within a position.

Talisman Plant Hire Personnel Manager, Rein Botha, says the company has used graphology for recruitment purposes over the past six years, particularly to fill senior positions. “Using graphology in recruitment has been relatively successful for us and I believe, when used in conjunction with psychometric tests, it can be even more effective.”

Hiring the wrong person can be very expensive and disruptive to any business. It takes more than matching the applicant with the right academic skills and training to the requirements of a job. Other aspects such as intelligence, being able to show initiative, honesty, drive and motivation and other character traits dictate the success of an appointment.

The use of graphology, says Grafex owner, Silvana Grandin, is very valuable in assisting HR to recruit the right staff

as it is based on the uniqueness of the writer.

Graphology is not limited to certain areas of personality. It looks at all personality traits. “It is not a standardised test. Rather it focuses on the individuality of the candidate and his or her specific capabilities in the particular position he or she is supposed to occupy.”

British Academy of Graphology Vice Principal, Savina Lykiardopulo, adds: “Graphology can provide an employer with an independent professional opinion as to the suitability of a candidate for a particular position.” An assessment, she says, would provide practitioners with a profile covering aptitude, compatibility and general personality traits.

Grandin cites other successful applications for graphology including team building, especially when companies merge, leadership, potential for promotion and pre-training assessments. Other applications cited include assessing aptitudes, coaching and career management.

Asked whether the use of graphology in recruitment is ethical – in several countries it is seen as “too intrusive,” Grandin says, adding there is a wrong perception that graphology is a breach of privacy.

“Firstly, we need the consent of the candidate in writing. Secondly, we do not need any information. And this is to show how unbiased graphology assessments are. We do not have any contact with the person and know nothing about him or her, except for having a written specimen and signature in our possession, so nobody could argue that it is unethical.”

Grandin says she’s seen growth in the use of graphology in personnel selection over the years. “I believe that South Africa is now ready to consider it as a valuable tool.”

To learn more about graphology in South Africa, visit www.graphanex.co.za.

What graphology can identify ...

Among the many characteristics identified through handwriting analysis are:

- attention to detail,
- ability to work with others,
- clarity of thinking and of judgment,
- deductive thinking,
- leadership ability,
- versatility of ideas,
- mental agility and a critical mind,
- creativity,
- dishonesty and hypocrisy,
- organisation,
- reliability,
- stubbornness and tenacity.