

“That’s not right!”: Objections to iWAM Test Results

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One of the more anxiety-producing experiences for a coach or consultant using the iWAM is to have your client respond to an assessment report with the statement “That’s not right!” When we hear this phrase, all the bells, whistles, and other error alarms go off. Note that the alarms may be “louder” if you have high Problem-Solving and/or Affiliation scores on your iWAM.

Regardless of the nature of the objection, it is always helpful to begin with a question aimed at understanding the basis for the disagreement. The least helpful response would be to tell the client that he or she is probably wrong followed by trying to convince them of why they are wrong. This will virtually assure a poor outcome (especially if the person scores high on Individual Motives).

If you come at the issue from a respectful inquiry basis listening to the responses the client gives to your questions, you have a very high probability of both understanding the situation and helping the client work through it. We believe that over 99% of the objections will fall into one of the categories above.

It helps your inquiry to understand the nature of the objection. The rest of this article, based on doing hundreds of face-to-face iWAM feedback sessions, is designed to provide some perspective on the reasons for objections and some possible responses.

Possible Causes of Disagreement

There are a number of reasons that a client objects to the results of the iWAM. Here are the most frequent:

1. The test did not provide an accurate measurement.

This, in our experience, is the least frequent reason that the client objected to the iWAM score. There may, in the course of creating scores for 48 scales, be a scale that does not fit the individual’s conception, behavior, or experience. We always allow for that, but very rarely ultimately conclude that is the case.

2. Client’s “Social Desirability” Level

Sometimes a result will be accurate, but not what the client wants to hear or admit. Suppose a client scores very high on *Procedures* and low on *Alternatives*. The client responds to the interpretation by saying, “Well, I don’t see that . . . I’m willing to consider alternatives—this sounds like I’m not.” The client’s reaction and explanation may sound very similar to what you will hear in #1 above.

The difference is that in this case the test is probably accurate and we're getting a response that is related to the fact that either the individual somehow knows that effective leaders in his/her organization tend to score high on *Alternatives* and lower on *Procedures* and wants to be in that category. The alternative is unaware of the pattern's influence and /or since the pattern is below consciousness and they are really unaware at the conscious level of how the pattern shows up in their behavior. In any case, one can really only reach this conclusion if you have enough experience with and/or information about this individual to know how they tend to behave in this context.

In this case, you might inquire about how the individual's perception differs from their experience. When dealing with an outcome the client "does not want to hear," you may be faced with an insurmountable challenge. At the same time, a discussion about how certain aspects of work energize or sap energy can often open up windows of opportunity for the individual to understand how patterns impact motivation, behavior, and energy.

3. Context

In dealing with Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns (MAPs), getting the context right is critical. If it is not framed well or if the individual uses multiple contexts while completing the iWAM, there is a possibility that the results will reflect one context and the client will be thinking of another. We once had the experience of working with a client who, during his career, had worked with four major corporations. When he received his printed iWAM results, he felt as though the test was not very accurate. However, because we knew the client and had worked with him in three of the four corporations, we were able to ascertain through questions the fact that he had considered different jobs (contexts) in responding to different questions in the iWAM. Ultimately, when we began to sort the contexts he used, we were able to get agreement that, in fact, the test was very accurate. At one point, when talking about a result in which he was particularly unhappy, he said, "Yes, that's how I behaved in that situation, but I didn't like it."

4. Absolute versus Relative

There are two possible interpretations to an iWAM scale score. The first relates to its *relative percent score*. The relative percent score gives an indication of how the majority of the people in the standard or reference group would view the individual's motivation and attitudinal patterns. In the iWAM Management Report, the Standard Group is represented by the red bar on the scale.

So, if the relative percent score on a pattern is above 70%, the majority of the standard group is likely to see you as more of that pattern than they are. If relative percent score is below 30%, members of the standard group are likely to see you as less of whatever the pattern is than they are.

The absolute score is where the individual’s score falls on the scale from low to high. The absolute score is a mathematical product of how the individual ranked each item that is in the scale.¹ In the iWAM Management Report, the absolute score on a scale is represented by the green bar. The individual’s absolute scores provide an indication of how the patterns work for the individual. To get an indication of the impact of the patterns on the individual, look at the position of absolute scores with respect to each other.

Note that there are four sets of scales that are interpreted in the iWAM Management Report on the basis of the *absolute score* rather than the *relative score*.²

If you encounter a client who disagrees with a particular scale, look at the absolute and relative scores of the companion scale or scales. If you were looking at *Initiation*, for example, you would look at *Reflection & Patience*. If you were interested in the Time pattern *Present* you would look at *Past* and *Future*.

The first question regardless of the objection is: “How is the score different than you perceive yourself?” or “Can you help me understand what seems off to you?” If the individual responds: “Well I’m really high on that <pattern> and you said I’m low on both scales; but, that’s not true, I’m high on that.”

When you get that kind of response, look at the companion scales (see Figure 1). If *Initiation* and *Reflection and Patience* are both low (below 30% relative), but the relative score for the *Initiation* scale was 25% and the relative percent for *Reflection & Patience* was –15%, you have a low relative score for both patterns. The strict interpretation is “you are low in both patterns.”

When you then look at the absolute scores, however, you see that the *Initiation* pattern is 40 relative percentage points higher (-15 to +25) than the *Reflection & Patience* score.

Figure 1
Absolute vs. Relative Scores on an iWAM Scale

iWAM Scale	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	Relative Percent	
	Initiation									X											
Reflection & Patience								X													-15%

¹ For a slightly longer explanation of the difference between absolute and relative scores on the iWAM, see the *iWAM Resource Guide – User Edition*.

² See the chapter on iWAM interpretation in *Decoding Behavior* to see the specific patterns to which this interpretation applies.

In absolute terms, the iWAM *Initiation* pattern is higher than the *Reflection & Patience* score. What may be happening in a case like this is that the client is aware of how the patterns (in terms of absolute scores) impact him or her. That is, the relative score tells you how others will perceive you while the absolute scores give you an indication of how you will perceive the patterns. In most cases, the two interpretations will be the same for the individual. In some cases, however, in some cases regardless of the relative percent, one pattern may seem much stronger than the other.

5. Different Definitions

This is what we might call the “Webster Error.” It is a frequent reason behind an objection. The nature of the problem is fairly simple: *the client put his or her own definition on the scale and that definition does not equate to what the scale actually measures.* For example, we once had an executive who said “the low score for Problem Solving can’t be right—I solve problems all the time and am very good at it.” Another example involved a chief financial officer who scored low on the *Money* Interest Filter.

These are classic examples of both the client and the iWAM test being correct. We have no doubt that the first client does solve problems and that he or she is quite good at it. Also, we can understand why an effective CFO might not score high on *Money* just as we can understand why some very effective Human Resource Executives do not score high on the *People* interest filter. When the CFO says that he or she “works with money all the time,” they are talking about something different than the pattern measures. An HR executive who scores low on *People* may score higher on *Tools, Systems, and/or Information* as indicators of what they really want in their work.

The iWAM scales measure the extent to which you *want* to do something as part of your daily work, not whether you actually do it. So, someone who scores low on problem solving might have the ability to do good problem solving and might spend a portion of their time doing it, but if put in a role where solving problems was the main work day-after-day, this individual would likely become bored, frustrated, and/or burned out. The HR executive may want to create systems or strategies that impact people’s lives in a positive way, but may not *want* to deal face-to-face with people on a regular basis.

A second possibility in situations such as those described above is that the individual reframes their behavior to fit the stronger pattern. The problem solving behavior is really done in service of a strong *Goal Orientation* pattern. That is, they view (reframe) patterns as obstacles to goals and are motivated to solve them as a means of getting them out of the way. The CFO actually uses numbers related to money to be part of the larger corporate strategy team and activity rather than doing what the bookkeeper or accountant might do in actually working with figures. In fact, most strategic CFOs do not want to work with the actual numbers; they want to work with what the numbers tell them in

terms of the business. The HR executive “cares about people” and dedicates his or her life to doing things that make work life better for people, but this caring and work are driven by different patterns than if the person wanted to work directly with people.

6. **The I-don't want-to-be-here and this-process-sucks**

Sometimes an individual ends up taking the iWAM as part of a larger intervention such as being sent to you for coaching. In such a case, the individual may be looking for any reason the process won't work. Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance work comes to mind. When the reality doesn't match the individual's perceptions or world view, they will (often in this order):

- a. Attack the data
- b. Attack the vehicle that generates the data
- c. Attack the messenger who brought the vehicle and/or the data.

If you encounter such a situation, you are advised to stop the feedback, evaluate the situation, and see if there's another path to follow in the intervention. Trying to fight your way through this issue with the iWAM data is a no-win strategy.

That summarizes the primary reasons for objections to iWAM results.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why an individual would not agree with the results of the iWAM assessment. All are legitimate—whether we think so or not. Our role is to sort the wheat from the chaff and help the individual learn as much as possible about him- or herself and how motivation and attitude impact the particular aspect of work they are exploring.

Sometimes we have to understand the client better to understand the “reality” from which they speak. At other times, if we help the client understand a different reality—for example, when they have a different definition of a scale than what it actually measures—we can get a better outcome.

The keys are to: (a) understand all the possibilities; (b) have a plan to deal with objections; and (c) have the versatility to make the shift that makes the difference.

We hope this short article on the kinds of objections that arise in the course of giving feedback about an iWAM helps professionals be more effective in the process.³

³ For more information about the iWAM Certification program, see <http://www.iwaminstitute.com> and <http://www.iwamcertification.com>. The iWAM Certification Program helps professionals acquire a deeper understanding of the iWAM scales and how iWAM results translate into action and application related to work.