

“That’s not right!”

Objections to iWAM Test Results

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Executive Summary

On occasion, an individual will respond to the interpretation of their iWAM results with the statement: “That’s not right!”.

Over the years, we have studied why individuals might disagree with their results. This is a summary of a short article outlining the eight possibilities we identified with a note at the end about an additional observation.

Potential Sources or Causes of Disagreement

We have identified eight possible reasons that someone might object to the results of their iWAM survey. Here is a brief summary of each

1. The iWAM test did not provide an accurate measurement.

Sometimes the structure of a test can be the source of the issue. If it happens, we have found that only one or, in very rare cases, two iWAM scales are affected.

Why does this happen? In the iWAM, because of the way the five options are combined in a question, it is possible that an individual’s responses to a powerful pattern (ranks the item options high in the list of five), those rankings may inadvertently reduce the ranking of a companion pattern or other pattern that is in the list a couple of times. If that happens, the client’s objection may be related to the lower of the companion patterns under discussion. In this case, because of test construction, the client may be correct.

2. Client’s “Social Desirability” Level

Sometimes an iWAM result will be accurate but is not what the individual wants to hear or read. 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, but it’s a different kind of objection.

The difference in this case is that the test is probably accurate. We may be 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. An alternative explanation is that the individual is unaware of the pattern’s influence and since motivational and attitudinal patterns operate below consciousness, they are really unaware at the conscious level of how the pattern shows up in their behavior.

3. Context

In dealing with Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns (MAPs), understanding the context the respondent used is critical. If the context is not framed well or if the individual uses multiple contexts (e.g., different jobs they've held or work vs. home) while completing the iWAM, there is a possibility that the results will reflect more than one context.

4. Absolute versus Relative Scores

There are two kinds of scores for each iWAM scale. The first is the *absolute score*. The absolute score (X) indicates where the individual's score falls on the overall scale from low (=0) to high (=100).

The second score is the *relative percent score*. The relative percent score, calculated on the basis of where the individual's absolute score falls with respect to the standard group, gives an indication of how the people in the standard or reference group might view the individual's behavior based on the motivation and attitudinal patterns.

Most of the scales in the iWAM are interpreted on the basis of the relative percent scores. It is possible for someone to have a low relative percent (e.g. 20%) on Scale A and a high relative percent on Scale B (e.g., 80%). The interpretation will reflect those scores.

However, if we look at the absolute scores (X), they are almost equal. For this example, let's say that Scale A is 10% higher than Scale B.

Since the absolute score reflects the strength of the patterns internal to the individual, in this case they may say, "I want to do A as much as I want to do B". That statement would reflect their verbalization of the equality of absolute scores.

In this case, both the individual and the test are correct. The frame of reference (internal to the individual vs. comparison to the standard group) may trigger the disagreement.

5. Different Definitions

This is what we might call the "Webster Error." It is a frequent reason behind an objection. The nature of the objection is: *the client uses their own definition of the scale and that definition does not reflect what the scale actually measures*. For example, someone said, "the low score for Problem Solving can't be right—I solve problems all the time and am very good at it." This is likely a case of the individual treating the score as an ability or a behavior rather than as a motivation. It is often possible to do something frequently and to be good at something and score low on the iWAM scale.

A second possibility often occurs with a scale like "Assertiveness". Here, the individual may think the scale measures their "confident and forceful" behavior.

It does not.

This scale measures the extent to which you want to have others follow your rules; that is, the rules you have for yourself in this context.

6. Some Other MAPs or Something Other Than MAPs Did It!

Motivational and attitudinal patterns cannot explain everything.

Sometimes a score on a particular iWAM scale does not seem accurate based on the individual's behavior. If and when that happens, there are a couple of possibilities.

One is that other (a)nother motivational or attitudinal pattern(s) may be driving the behavior. Scanning for those possibilities might provide an insight.

In the Performance Model, motivation and attitude are not the only variables that impact performance. There are also "Criteria" (values, goals, etc.), "Knowledge & Competencies", and "Emotions". Any of these as well as a variety of external factors (Environment, Context, and Personal) could be a stronger force on behavior.

7. May not understand motivational and attitudinal patterns or how they work

One difficulty is a result of equating iWAM patterns to personality or other *traits*. Traits are often scaled on a continuum such that if you are "A", then you're not "B" or if you score in the middle, you're both or a combination of "A" and "B". The iWAM companion patterns operate differently. For example, it is possible to score low on all the patterns in a group which is not possible in most trait-based assessments. When that occurs, it means that you are not motivated by those dimensions. It is also possible for two or more patterns in a group to be equally strong (mid-range, high, or very high). When this happens, it tends to mean you are both motivated by the conditions measured by the scales and have some "motivational agility" to shift from one to the other or another when the situation calls for it.

A third possibility is that sometimes behavior is not motivated by a single pattern but rather is a result of a combination of patterns. For example, how might we explain a "control-freak" manager who is low in Power? The answer: we could look at a number of other patterns, some of which have to do with decision making (individual Motives/External Reference), some with rules (Assertiveness/Tolerance), some with agility (Procedures, Sameness, and Past), and some with how they process information to be convinced (Automatic/Consistency).

8. The I-don't want-to-be-here and/or this-process-sucks

Sometimes an individual ends up taking the iWAM as a component of a program such as executive coaching or as a requirement in an intervention such as a performance improvement program.

In a case like this, the individual may be looking for any reason the iWAM results aren't accurate. When the individual's perceptions or world view is not aligned with a situation, they may often in this order):

- a. Attack the data (iWAM results)
- b. Attack the vehicle that generates the data (iWAM survey)
- c. Attack the messenger who brought the data (person interpreting the results).

One More Thing: “Overthinking”

Occasionally we have a test taker indicate that the test “was hard to do” because the choices did not make sense. One example is an individual who said: “When I look at the list, I could rank the items a couple of ways—however I answered it would not be correct.”

Two factors may be operating here. First, if the individual does not want to make mistakes (e.g., could be high on Problem Solving—wants to avoid problems or things going wrong), it could lead to overthinking the list in order to avoid error. This might also be the case for someone who scores very low on the Achievement scale—a range we interpret as McClelland’s “Avoid” need. In this case, the motivation would be to achieve by avoiding failure. The second factor could be the multiple context variable discussed earlier. If, indeed, the individual’s patterns were somewhat different in different contexts, becoming aware of that when doing the test could create some conflict in providing answers. For example, the person would say, “Well, it’s A-B-C in work, but C-A-B at home.” He or she would be correct, of course.

In this case, “prevention is better than a cure.” That is, if you are clear about the notion of context and in your instructions to the test taker, you can decrease the probability that they will overthink the questions as they go through them. If I have an opportunity to talk with a test taker ahead of time, I tend to tell them: “Focus on your <whatever context you are using> and respond with the first thing that comes to mind. The iWAM measures patterns that best measured by what first comes to mind.”

Conclusion

There are several reasons why an individual might not agree with the results of the iWAM assessment. All are taken seriously. One role of professionals working with the iWAM is to sort the “wheat from the chaff” and help individuals, teams, and groups learn as much as possible about how motivation and attitude impact performance in their respective roles and contexts.

We hope this short article on the kinds of objections that can arise in the course of reviewing iWAM results helps both professionals using the iWAM and individuals who complete the assessment get more value from the experience.