Users of Graphology

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Introduction

For many years the possibility of using handwriting in management has been discussed. Münsterberg back in 1913 wrote:

> *" A correlation, for instance, which the commercial world often presupposes, may exist between individual traits and the hand-writing. Graphologists are convinced that a certain loop or flourish, or the steepness or the length of the letters, or the position of the i dot, is a definite indication that the writer possesses certain qualities of personality; and if just these qualities are essential requirements for the position, the impression of the handwriting in a letter may be taken as a sufficient basis for appointment. The scientist has reason to look upon this particular case of graphological correlation with distrust. Yet even he may acknowledge that certain correlations exist between the neatness, carefulness, uniformity, energy, and similar features of the letter, and the general carefulness, steadiness, neatness, and energy of the personality."*

How many companies use graphology?

This is a difficult question since the meaning of "use" can mean regularly, ever, sometimes, have used once etc. Taking this into account some indications are available. A 1991 study shows selection methods used in the UK. The data are from a survey of 173 organisations of different sizes in both public and private sectors. Graphology was used by one per cent of these employers (IRS 1991). A 1993 article shows selection methods in six countries. The percentages for graphology are France = 52, NL = 24, UK=3, Israel=2, Norway=2.   (Robertson and Makin 1993). A survey of 1419 undergraduates in the UK asked what was required in job searches. 18% underwent psycwwwtric/personality assessments, 11% attended an assessment centre, 4% provided handwriting for analysis.   This was a representative sample of final year students at 49 British Universities in July 1994. (The Guardian 1995: pg22). This suggests that over 3500 analyses are made a year on graduates in the UK.

A 1995 survey by the University of Berne (Personnel Studies Dept.) and the Swiss Personnel Management Society gave results from 843 Swiss company human resources managers (3000 members). 68% of these specialists in Switzerland claim to use graphology as a selection tool. (see Thom N & Zaugg R 1995). The European Union (1998) describes the use of graphology for recruitment in member countries.   France: used in up to 50% of companies and by 80% of consultants. Belgium: common in pre-selection or to back up impressions. Portugal: sometimes used. Italy: may be used. Denmark: rarely used.

The Employment Agency H W Group says that graphology is used by 6pc of large and medium-sized companies in the UK. (Daily Telegraph Appointments 29/4/99 Pg. A1). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development began an annual series of recruitment surveys in 1997. The sample is representative of establishments across the UK economy, but excludes any with below 50 employees. The telephone questionnaire is with the "most senior person responsible for recruitment in the organisation". Graphology use in 1999 was 1.1 per cent; in 2000 it was 1.9 per cent and in 2001 it was 1.9 per cent.

Denial of Use

Many large users of graphology have become reluctant to admit any association with graphology: the study of personality through handwriting.   I know the names of many multi-national corporations who have used graphology as a human resources tool; I know the graphologists who have served them.   I therefore know from both sides that work took place.

However, officially there seemed to be no evidence, graphologists would often not go 'on record' in order to respect their clients' wish for confidentiality. The client would deny any involvement for various reasons. The reasons are indeed varied, for some managers graphology is seen as a secret weapon, for others it may be seen as a potential area for union dispute, for others it may be considered as 'out-of-fashion' and therefore an embarrassment. Recent published papers help to understand this more. It has been reported that the use of graphology, by British employers, to recruit workers is a violation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. (The IRS Employment Review 2002). The article cites a book by Michael Evans – Employing People with Disabilities (2001) which states: *"employers that insist on handwritten job applications may put disabled jobseekers at an unfair disadvantage and could be in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act."*

In other cases users are aware that they are going against official positions of organisations like the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). The CIPD has stated its view on graphology for Personality Assessment as follows: *"graphology does not provide a sufficient basis on which to make important decisions about selection, developmental potential, redundancy or aptitude for training".* (CIPD 2001)

This reluctance to associate with graphology has probably led to a gradual erosion of graphology's image. The "Spiral of Silence" concept developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) is relevant here. Her main points are these:

1. Society threatens deviant individuals with isolation

2. Individuals experience fear of isolation continuously.

3. This fear means that individuals assess the climate of opinion continuously.

4. This assessment affects whether they express opinions openly or conceal them.

Let us apply this to graphology.   In order to avoid isolation on business policies (such as recruitment), Human Resources managers will look to their environment for clues about the dominant opinion, and which views are gaining strength or are in decline. As a manager, if you feel your personal views are amongst those in decline, you are less likely to express it openly.   As a result, the views perceived to be dominant seem to gain even more ground and other possibilities decline further.   These are Noelle-Newmann's words from 1974:

"The more individuals perceive these tendencies and adapt their views accordingly, the more one faction appears to dominate and others to be on the downgrade.   Thus the tendency of the one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiralling process which increasingly establishes one's opinion as the prevailing one".

The idea of the spiral of silence has been applied to other situations (such as interracial marriage and equal rights for homosexuals Willnat et al 2002) and would be interesting to test empirically with graphology. There has, in my experience, been an increase in the number of people who do not express an opinion on graphology.   Without interest being generated in the subject, it is possible that it will become a topic unknown to most decision-makers, and therefore one about which they are reluctant to comment, let alone to use.   It runs the risk of becoming a discipline which students are reluctant to choose, as they go for 'safer' subjects that are well known to prospective employers.   It runs the risk of becoming a knowledge which is 'lost', perhaps only evident as the written-word in books, it will therefore be 'lost from life, thereby 'lifeless'.

Country Differences

Some indications about differences between countries may be inferred from the number of graphologists in different countries. Table 1 below shows the "density" of graphologists in 16 countries.

Table 1.   'Density' of graphologists in 16 countries. Source: Bradley (2000)

Country	Estimated Number of Graphologists	Active Population (000)
1. Switzerland	500	3,860
2. France	5,000	25,871
3. Israel	200	2,100
4. Italy	2,000	22,680
5. Netherlands	500	7,358
6. Hungary	200	4,095
7. Spain	700	15,625
8 Belgium	180	4,237
9. Austria	60	3,881
10. Denmark	50	2,812
11. Germany	600	40,083
12. Norway	30	2,186
13. UK	200	28,271
14. Sweden	30	4,319
15. South Africa	60	11,624
16. Japan	20	66,660

Users Named

The identities of many users of graphology have been named in published sources. Searches have been made and a list made of them with the sources. The list is long so it is on another set of pages. Click here

This article was based on my lecture for the Module HRW201 Employability (2 Nov 2001) See powerpoint presentation here

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