



Mind how you move your arms—your career prospects, or even your relationship, may rest on a new way of reading your personality

body talk

BY ALIX KIRSTA

In the boardroom of one of Europe's leading advertising agencies, two senior managers are discussing a pending reshuffle of the managerial team. A few feet away, another man with a camera records the conversation, focusing on the movements of the younger employee, a recent recruit. As the man relaxes and explains what qualities he can offer, his movements become more spontaneous and expressive.

The video operator makes diagrams and calculations, noting how the younger manager leans backwards and forwards or rises from his chair, the extent to which he either contracts or expands his abdomen, how frequently

he shifts his position and how vigorously he illustrates his comments with arm and upper-body movements. After two hours the session ends.

Several days later the video and written notes of the young manager's movements have been decoded and the findings delivered to the agency's head. That week, he's promoted to the position of senior manager.

What the report revealed is that the new recruit is a man of high ambition, motivated to dig out as much new information as possible about a project, and willing to share his findings with colleagues before decisively implementing a plan of action. Crucially, these qualities of dynamism are exactly

what's needed to balance and strengthen the senior management team.

HOW DID THEY REACH THAT DECISION?

The profile of the new manager is based on one of the most comprehensive personality assessment systems of recent years. The principles of movement pattern analysis (MPA) were developed in Britain in the 1940s by the Hungarian movement analyst and dance notator Rudolf Laban, then expanded in the 1950s by Laban's former student Warren Lamb as a management consultancy tool in the corporate world.

Many behaviour analysts estimate that up to 80 per cent of human communication is non-verbal. But, according to Lamb, the shifting, overlapping and melding processes of movement should not be confused with more popular forms of "body language" said to reveal the deeper meaning behind our static postures and gestures.

"MPA is about a person's integrated movement, which uses the body as a

whole, especially the pelvis and trunk," says Lamb. "Trying to gauge someone's behaviour from crossed arms or a tapping foot is futile because these are isolated gestures that indicate absence of movement. Noting that someone's keeping their legs crossed isn't an observation of movement but of stillness. What counts is how the person arrived at this position."

Lamb and his colleagues believe that our constantly changing "posture/gesture mergers"—the processes linking one body movement to the next—convey a unique "body signature". Profiling is a way of joining up the invisible dots linking every posture and gesture to another. The resulting patterns are as fundamental to our identity as our fingerprints or DNA, says Lamb. He suggests visualising our joints and limbs emitting a vapour trail, like a high-flying aircraft against a blue sky: "The vapour trails illustrate a person's intrinsic patterns of movement."

The unique aspect of MPA is its capacity to indicate how a person acts

and interacts with other people at all points of decision-making, at work or home. We all recognise such obvious traits in others as dynamism, impulsiveness and snap decision-making—the classic "human dynamo"; or fastidiousness, deliberation and hesitation—the typical "dependable plodder". But the discovery that these traits can be identified from how we move is relatively recent.

HOW IS MOVEMENT ASSESSED?

According to MPA, all decision-making—whether you're choosing what to cook for supper or when to launch a new product—consists of three distinct phases identified by Rudolf Laban and Warren Lamb.

The first "attention" phase involves ferreting out information, investigating the facts and doing all the homework necessary to assess a situation.

The second "intention" phase consists of weighing up the pros and cons of different possible courses of action,

determining which route to take, then deciding how to act.

Once a person has made that decision, whether to book a holiday, hire or fire an employee, or launch a new business, he or she enters the final "commitment" stage. It is time to act, and the way in which they carry out their decision—perhaps single-mindedly, with little thought for what might go wrong, or slowly and hesitantly, seeking feedback from others—determines the outcome of the process.

MPA reveals that each of us has a "preferred" phase, to which we devote most of our energy and time and which determines the style in which we act and take decisions.

Apart from identifying that a person has, say, a "high commitment" profile, with a tendency to act first and rationalise later, or a "high investigating" profile, with little energy going into the final action, MPA also reveals our adaptability to changing circumstances and whether we share our decision-making with others or prefer to act alone—>

analysing world leaders

Recently, Warren Lamb has acted as

a consultant to the Ministry of Defence and the US Defense Department. His analyses of world leaders—including Kim Jong-il, Muammar al-Gaddafi,

Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev and Hugo Chávez—based largely on videotape, were commissioned by the US Naval War College.

Lamb's findings, which are top secret,

so impressed the UK and US defence authorities that MPA is now the subject of ongoing research as a means of understanding the behaviour of the world's most powerful individuals.

Using movement pattern analysis to judge our leaders could revolutionise the world of politics.

(From left) Kim Jong-il, Muammar al-Gaddafi, Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev and Hugo Chávez



your own signature

The complex and hidden code of movement pattern analysis

makes it relatively hard to recognise our own movement “signature” or even that of those close to us. However, Warren Lamb advises that just by becoming more aware of how we move, we can improve the quality of communication. “Once you become sensitive to your own integrated movement, you become aware of the other person’s. That



leads to improvement in all relationships.”

The main qualities that determine our profile are the amount of effort, speed, direction, control or relaxation that go into our movements. Some people only use a limited range of movement; others display a broad spectrum, sometimes even displaying different overlapping movement “styles” in short

➤ useful insight for finding the right person for the job.

ISN'T THIS JUST ANOTHER MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY GIMMICK?

No. MPA is based on rigorous research dating back to early time-and-motion studies on the shopfloor of British factories, including those of Dunlop and Mars during the 1940s and 1950s. By studying how workers moved on the assembly line and how this influenced their productivity and physical state, Laban found that giving workers “corrective” movement classes to relieve them of physical pressures improved productivity. Women workers who were trained during the Second World War to adopt different movement rhythms could comfortably take on

heavier jobs previously carried out by men.

Lamb transferred his focus to upper and middle management, where he discovered that, in the course of an interview, each person displayed a repeated and characteristic way of moving. To his surprise, this matched a manager’s own explanation of his or her preferred style of working, carrying out tasks and achieving their goals.

HOW EARLY ARE BODY MOVEMENT PATTERNS FORMED?

Integrated movement develops throughout childhood, only becoming fully formed by the late teens. These movement patterns can’t be altered or imitated: in studies where people adopted uncharacteristic behaviour to convey a false impression, their movements

periods—indicating dynamism and assertiveness, an instinct to keep many challenges and tasks on the go at once.

As a rule, the more varied the speed of our actions, the more likely we are to act promptly, methodically and competitively. Switching frequently from sharp, direct movements to more meandering, circuitous ones indicates an analytical and probing approach to decision-making. Variations in the degree of pressure, delicacy, control and relaxation in movements reveal determination, purposefulness



and a need to be at the hub of activity at work.

A less obvious but key feature of MPA is how we shift position in the kinesphere: the 3D space “bubble” surrounding the body. This spatial shape is defined by opening the chest and arms as in greeting, or closing them as in an embrace; rising and falling, contracting or stretching; and moving backwards and forwards. Some of us may create fewer or very limited shapes. In contrast, a full range of shapes corresponds to the desire to explore alternatives, bring fresh perspectives and anticipate the outcome of one’s actions.

soon became stilted and clumsy. (When Warren Lamb profiled Sir Lawrence Olivier in three different plays, Lamb found that although the actor’s postures and gestures altered to suit the roles, his integrated movements remained consistent throughout.)

Not surprisingly, we express more integrated movement patterns when discussing topics that interest us. In a typical two-hour MPA interview, most people display about 200–250 sequences of similar or identical posture/gesture clusters. Throughout an average day, we will express our body signature in some way, even while asleep. Activities carried out daily—teeth-brushing, shaving, applying make-up—illustrate how such movements become a ritual. Integrated movements don’t change as we age and may only be altered by severe illness, injury or mental

illness. (Recent studies in Germany suggest that women suffering severe depression, or the inability to express or describe emotion, display almost no movement patterns.)

WHO’S USING MPA?

By providing an accurate profile of the strengths and weaknesses of each person’s decision-making style, MPA is proving useful not only for job recruitment, team restructuring and careers advice, but also for personal development and relationship counselling.

So far, MPA profiles have been created of more than 30,000 men and women in over 30 countries, and have been used by many major companies in Britain and the US to help strengthen teamwork. Perhaps it’s an approach our new coalition government might think about taking on board? ■

IMAGE SOURCE