



Rivers of Ice
Hogan Personality Case Study
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The Challenges

To provide psychological/coaching support to Tarka L'Herpinier and Katie-Jane Cooper in the lead up to and during the Rivers of Ice expedition (www.rivers-of-ice.com). This was to be the first attempt at an unsupported crossing of the Southern Patagonian Ice Cap. Tarka has a lifetime of expedition experience, whilst Katie only the last four years (since meeting Tarka). For many different reasons and on many different levels this was to be the most extreme and challenging expedition for both of them.

They first contacted me less than a month before departing. My challenge was that I had less than a month before they left for South America and that in addition to the usual interpersonal challenges a team might benefit from learning to manage in extreme environments Tarka and Katie had the added challenge of being a couple, which was likely to have both upsides and down sides. And whilst on the expedition support was restricted to 5-10 mins by satellite phone (often with poor connection).

The Objective

In the lead up to and during the expedition to help Katie and Tarka develop their self and each-other awareness and work with them on tools and techniques to maximise strengths and minimise the potentially dysfunctional aspects of their personalities.

Tool selection

Tarka and Katie were very aware that the Rivers of Ice Expedition was both physically and mentally very high risk. So to maximise chance of success we decided a good strategy would be to assess both the 'bright' and 'dark' side of their personality styles so they have a really good awareness of their own and each other's preferred style of operating i.e. their strengths and potential expedition derailers. And with this information give them the tools and techniques to best manage themselves and each other in an extremely challenging environment. The aim being for each to make the most of their strengths and to reduce the impact of their dysfunctional behaviours.

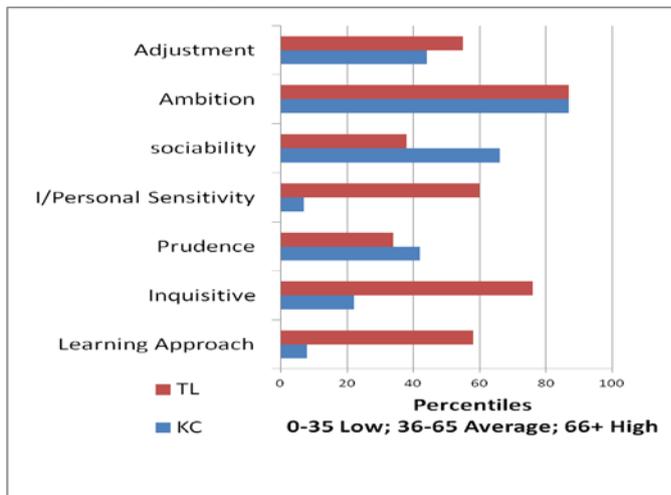
To achieve this we used the Hogan personality questionnaires, because Hogan offer both the 'bright' and 'dark' side and they have been designed to be used in conjunction with each other.

1. The Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) is designed to assess the 'bright' side that is aspects of their personality that promote success. This assessment can reveal areas of strengths and also some interpersonal tendencies that might cause problems.

- The Hogan Development Survey (HDS) identifies the 'darker' side of our personality, revealing what we see when people are stressed. These 'darker' sides of our personality can affect an individual's leadership style and behaviour. Under normal circumstances these characteristics can be strengths. However, when stressed, tired, hungry or otherwise distracted these risk factors may become dysfunctional, impeding effectiveness and eroding the quality of relationships.

Tarka and Katie's profiles - what we identified before the expedition

HPI ('bright side')



Tarka

Strengths: ambitious, well informed, confident, creative, leader

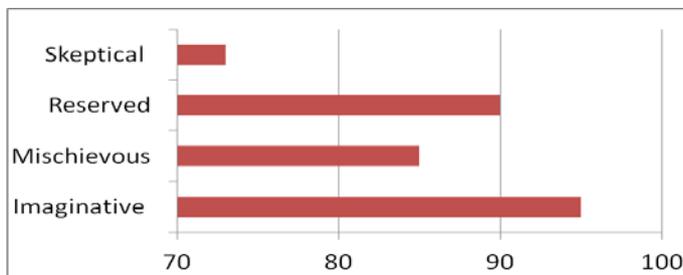
Challenges: ruthless, dominant, competitive, dislikes routine and detail

Katie

Strengths: ambitious, confident, gregarious, practical, leader

Challenges: 'it's all about me', worries what others think, as and when needs

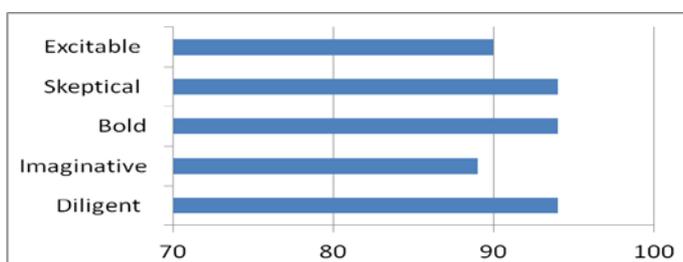
HDS ('dark side') – showing medium (>70th percentile) to high risk (>90th percentile)



Tarka

Good day: unorthodox, self-sufficient, risk-taker, analytical

Bad day: own ideas best, dismissive, failure to listen, manipulative, impatient



Katie

Good day: confident, analytical, conscientious, enthusiastic, open-minded

Bad day: overestimates ability, argumentative, critical, moody, impulsive

Tarka

Tarka's 'bright side' profile revealed he thrives in high risk situations is highly ambitious, confident and comfortable in a leadership role. However he may sometimes come across as ruthless, dominant and competitive. He enjoys the bigger picture aspects of the expedition and may struggle to pay attention to the detailed, more routine tasks that may be key to their survival (though this is strength of Katie's). In a crisis Tarka is likely to remain reasonably calm and make a realistic assessment of the situation before deciding what to do.

On the 'dark' side Tarka's strengths are that he enjoys being somewhat unorthodox in his approach (as evidenced by his strategy for this expedition) and is very self-sufficient. He has a high need for excitement and adventure coupled with ability to realistically assess the situation and focus on what needs to be achieved. However in high risk and high stress situations or when tired and hungry Tarka may not listen to Katie, may be dismissive of her ideas and may struggle to persuade Katie why his solutions/ideas are the best.

Psychologically his biggest challenges will be to keep his patience, keep talking and involve Katie in the decision making.

Tarka - What came out during the expedition?

Tarka's experiences during the expedition brought to life some of the identified personality characteristics:

Imaginative - This is strongly evidenced by his strategy for this expedition which was taking a different approach in that they would be the first to attempt the expedition completely self-sufficient – carrying with them all their food (no food caches en route) and only using human power (no kites to help). Whilst they didn't complete the crossing Tarka was planning another attempt in 2010 with the 3 Fs strategy (Fitter, Fatter, Faster) – again this demonstrates Tarka's innovative approach.

Being self-sufficient Tarka doesn't place great importance on other's opinions and whilst he worked hard to listen to and take on board Katie's ideas and opinions, he was not concerned by some criticisms posted on the message board of their website.

Ambitious – this was a very ambitious expedition, and whilst Tarka reported the likelihood of a less than 40% success rate, he still had the confidence in his strategy and leadership to attempt the challenge. Following a fall into a crevasse and being tent bound for several days at a critical point with food supplies running short, Tarka maintained his positive attitude.

Dominant and competitive – dealing with the worse than expected weather – Tarka reported trying to deal with the extremely bad weather through reasoning and being better than it (competitive), but that there are times when he just screamed at it (dominant)! However screaming at the weather conditions was an effective emotional coping strategy to work off his frustration!

Keeping his patience - we identified that one of his biggest challenges would be to keep his patience and this was the case! In the extreme conditions they faced, Tarka reported not always controlling his temper as well as he might have done and that as he was responsible for navigation the weather had a big impact on his levels of frustration. And whilst he only once lost his temper directly with Katie, he typically vented his frustration on the elements (rather than Katie) *'I got angry and had to let the frustration out'* and *'I lost patience and had tantrums with equipment'* though this served to

release his pent up frustration. Katie reported *'Tarka is losing his temper left, right and centre because you know the weather could be the end or making of the trip and you have the pressure of everybody watching wanting us to succeed or whatever. You know it's kinda getting to him.'*

Remain calm and make realistic assessments – throughout the expedition there were many occasions when Tarka demonstrated his ability to remain calm and rational and make well thought through decisions in extremely challenging conditions. Examples include, when Katie collapsed into unconsciousness and when their tent was destroyed in a storm and they had to go into survival mode and decide on an exit strategy. Tarka remained cool, calm and collected *'we are stuck between a little rock and a small hard place'*. He logically and systematically gathered and assessed all information available to develop different exit strategies, then weighed up the pros and cons of each before deciding which one might be best. The fact that they successfully exited the ice cap, only needing to be picked up from the mouth of the glacier they had descended (the most technically difficult thing they had ever done!), demonstrated they kept their heads and maintained effective decision making skills in extremely challenging conditions

Tarka's comment on Hogan

'I think it worked brilliantly'. Tarka is so impressed that he wants all team members on all his future expeditions to be both bright and dark side personality profiled.

Katie

Katie's 'bright' side revealed she is also highly competitive and comfortable in a leadership role. However on this expedition Katie was happy for Tarka to be leader as he has a wealth of experience behind him. Whilst Katie is gregarious and enjoys being the centre of attention, she has a highly task focused approach which may lead her to be intolerant and critical if things don't go her way. She may also be overly concerned about others opinions. Katie prefers learning on an 'as and when' needs basis, however when it comes to a crisis situation she'll need to ensure that she knows what to do in advance. Katie should be good at the more detailed tasks (great given Tarka doesn't enjoy them!), so is likely to have more of a lead role in managing the routine daily tasks (e.g. packing). Like Tarka she is able to remain reasonably calm under pressure.

On Katie's 'dark' side she is very enthusiastic and confident in her ability and is likely to read situations well and be creative in coming up with solutions to problem situations. However in high risk, high stress situations or when tired and hungry Katie might be overly confident in her ability and ideas, find it difficult to own up to her mistakes and questioning of Tarka's decisions. If things don't go well Katie may lose interest and become frustrated and difficult to please. However, should these situations occur her saving grace is likely to be her drive to succeed coupled with her organised and conscientious approach to this challenging expedition.

Psychologically Katie's biggest challenges will be to ensure that her high levels of confidence coupled with relative inexperience don't blind her to the potentially life threatening situations they are likely to experience. And, knowing when to keep quiet and give Tarka his own space, given that Katie enjoys talking and being the centre of attention.

Katie - what came out during the expedition?

Katie's experiences during the expedition brought to life some of the identified personality characteristics:

Sociability – due to prolonged periods spent making progress in strong winds and almost zero visibility Katie found the social isolation mentally tough, though as the expedition progressed she used various tools and techniques more effectively. Once on the plateau (week 2) she reported *'it's physically OK but mentally horrible – too cold, damp, windy, can't talk and all you can see are tips of skis – all day long.'* Whilst she is only a few feet from Tarka, the inability to talk in the howling gale meant she found herself lost in her own thoughts and without support and encouragement found it very hard to distract her mind from how *'miserable'* it is, Katie said *'it's s**t, if only we had visibility and could talk it would be so much better'*. As the expedition progressed she learned to distract herself and occupy her mind *'I eventually got used to being in my own mind and did things like planning every detail of the wedding and singing songs'*. At other times she reported that *'conditions required total concentration and then there was no down time and time went very quickly'*.

Managing Tarka's personality more effectively – e.g. learning to put her ideas diplomatically to Tarka reducing the likelihood of conflict and him dismissing her ideas and increasing the likelihood of him taking her ideas on board, as when in a blizzard, suspecting they were wandering off their bearing she'd say *'have you seen a crevasse? as I've noticed you turned slightly right'*.

Overly confident and enthusiastic: she reported that conditions were worse than expected, with the cold being one of her biggest challenges *'when I'm walking is the only time I'm slightly warm'*. Katie kept her confident self in check by constantly reminding herself and others that she was *'learning'* and *'relatively inexperienced'*.

Lose interest when things don't go well: At one point I received a call from a tearful Katie, the going was really tough and she reported questioning *'why am I doing this? What is the point?' 'if it wasn't for Tarka I'd quit'*. Focussing on her strengths such as ambition, drive to succeed and need to do a good job, seven minutes later a very different Katie ended the call saying *'just talking I feel so much better.....I won't quit. I have to keep trying to refocus and think 'come on, I came here to do this job, let's do it.'*

Worrying about what others think – after being tent bound for several days *'it was looking like we weren't going to make it and I got really upset about failing and what people would think.'* This is consistent with Katie's expressive and passionate personality style and her need for recognition from others. On the upside this gives her great enthusiasm and energy and on the downside she can become very upset and frustrated when things don't go her way or she has concerns about what people will think about her. Katie has been trying to rationalise with herself about being the first woman and the first British team to attempt the crossing, this is little consolation as she was still feeling they failed as their goal had been to complete the crossing. This is consistent with her need to achieve.

Katie's comments on Hogan

'I truly believe the bits we did together made a difference.....the work we did together certainly helped me' was how Katie reflected back to me on the work we did together. She reported that on the expedition *'I became a different person'*, which was helped by her working hard on the techniques introduced to her. Katie's summed up her experiences with *'I was absolutely thrilled with how I coped and I didn't feel like a hindrance to Tarka.'*

The outcome

Tarka and Katie travelled across the ice cap for 30 days making good progress towards their goal, in challenging conditions yet still within their physical capabilities, they are the fastest to the Fella Recchart Cerro Mayo section (75% of the distance) where their tent was destroyed and they made the decision that descending the Spegazzini Glacier was their best exit strategy.

Overall Katie and Tarka rose to and overcame the physical, technical and psychological challenges that were presented to them. Their personality profiles suggested that they were both able to remain calm and rational in high pressure situations and these personality characteristics served them well. They also had strategies to ensure they made the best of each other's strengths and learnt how to manage their own and each other's strengths and darker sides.

And from my point of view – 'I'm absolutely thrilled my involvement worked so well and that we'll be working together on future expeditions. HPI and HDS were really valuable tools in allowing us to ensure they successfully managed the psychological challenges as well as the physical ones'.

The 2010 attempt was put on hold due to other commitments however they have just announced a three person 2012 attempt using the 3 Fs strategy of Fitter, Fatter, Faster.