

Graphoanalysis: The What, Why, Who, How and Where is it Going, in Terms of Its Use in Business Decisions

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ABSTRACT

The use of graphology, or handwriting analysis, is not a new phenomenon even though its usage has been escalating recently. This paper discusses the definitions and history of graphology, why an organization might choose to use it in making Human Resources and business decisions, as well as how an organization should implement the use of graphoanalysis. Finally, a brief discussion is included concerning the future directions of graphology in light of the changing of handwriting curriculum in the United States education system.

INTRODUCTION

Can one's leadership style be predicted by how one writes his/her name? Can the success/failure of negotiations be predicted by studying the handwriting of the participants? Ruth Brayer of Graphological Services International indicates that the answer to both of the above questions is "yes." Her consulting firm has been able to boast of clients with the reputation of Citibank and Bristol Myers (Watch Out, John Hancock, 1988).

What assessment method of potential success on the job is legal; predictive; nondiscriminatory of gender, race, or religion; fast; and comparatively reliable? If the reader answered "handwriting analysis," he/she could be correct!

What method of analysis is used extensively by European and an increasing number of United States organizations in personnel selection and management decisions? Again, if the reader answered "handwriting analysis," he/she is correct (Levy, 1979; desGarenes, 2001; theguardian.com, 2009; Ploog, 2014)

In today's world where much moral and legal controversy surrounds the use of polygraph tests, urine analysis, and many paper-and-pen tests, what does the Human Resources Department or the line manager have from a job applicant that is easily obtained, does not require expensive equipment, and can be valid and reliable? Applicants generally complete application blanks, sign application letters, or present other written data during the application process anyhow, so no extra steps are incurred in obtaining samples of writing to be analyzed. Therefore graphology provides an interesting option for information to be used in decision making.

Richard Klimoski, a professor of industrial psychology at Ohio state University and a prolific scholarly researcher and author once identified handwriting analysis as a solution for employment problems that was too good to be true. Robert Krueger, a Los Angeles management consultant described people's reaction to graphology as one of skepticism, and likened it to fortunetelling. But Krueger also acknowledged the growing acceptance and utilization of handwriting analysis (McCarthy, 1988).

WHAT IS GRAPHOLOGY?

History of Graphology

The use of graphology is not a new phenomenon even though its usage has been escalating recently. Before the Renaissance, little consideration was given to handwriting as the masses of people could not write. In 1609, Francois Demelle, a Frenchman, expressed his belief that handwriting revealed a person's character. Several studies on handwriting analysis were completed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The best known was perhaps that of Lavater who was encouraged by Goethe to pursue this study. Goethe was an ardent devotee of handwriting analysis and has been quoted as saying in 1828, "In every man's writings, the character of the writer must lie recorded." The Roman historian Suetonius considered the handwriting of his subjects when he compiled their biographies. Nero is quoted as having said "His writing shows him to be treacherous." Aristotle expressed the idea that "Handwriting is a symbol of speech and speech a symbol of mental experience" (Lynch, 1985, p. 15).

The first known text on graphology Treatise on a Method to Recognize the Nature and Quality of a Writer from His Letters, was written by an Italian physician and professor at Bologna University, Camillo Baldi, in 1622. The word graphology was introduced by Jean Hippolyte Michon, a French priest, in 1868. He also developed a methodical system of interpreting slants and strokes of letters in terms of human characteristics which were included in the book, The Practical System of Graphology, which he published in 1875 (McCarthy, 1988).

In 1895, Dr. Wilhelm Preyer, a German professor, wrote The Psychology of Writing, which stated that handwriting emanated from the brain and so established the link between psychology and graphology. Dr. Georg Meyer, another German doctor and psychiatrist, was analyzing his patients' handwriting before treating them; and based on these experiences, he published The Scientific Basis for Graphology, in 1895 as well (Lynch, 1985; Ploog, 2014).

In the late 1920s, Robert Saudek was noted for his research of the anti-social tendencies which could be detected in handwriting. Alfred Mendel related the principles of graphology to psychological objectives in his book, Personality in Handwriting that was published in 1947 (Lynch, 1985).

Also in the twentieth century, German philosopher Ludwig Klages, who has perhaps made the greatest impact on the scientific fraternity, published The Handwriting. This writing influenced Dr. Max Pulver, a Swiss graphologist, who was an associate of Dr. Carl Jung and Dr. Hermann Rorschach (noted for the ink blot test), Pulver, connected with the Institute of Applied Psychology and the University of Zurich, established ground rules in his work, Symbolism of the Handwriting, that are still used today (Lynch, 1985; Ploog, 2014).

The era of Nazism forced many graphological researchers to leave Europe and most ended up in the United States or Palestine. Such individuals included Rudolph S. Hearn, Hans Jacoby, Alfred Kanfer, Felix Klein, Alfred Mendel, Richard Pokorny, Klara G. Roman, Ulrich Sonnemann, Thea Stein Lewinson, Herry O. Teltcher, Frank Victor, and Werner Wolff. Only Thea Stein Lewinson went on to add significantly to the field. She was instrumental in setting up the American Society of Professional Graphologists (www.aspghandwriting.org) which still exists today (Ploog, 2014).

Definitions of Graphology and Related Terminology

The term "graphology" is more than 130 years old (Klimoski & Rafaeli, 1983). Graphoanalysis, or handwriting analysis, is a subset of graphology. And while graphologists are not certified, graphoanalysts are (des Garness, 2001). About 56,000 graphoanalysts have passed the 18-month certification program

since the beginning of the graphoanalysis society in 1926. Most of the society's 10,000 members work with businesses according to Kathleen Kusta, a former president of the International Graphoanalysis Society, which is headquartered in Chicago, Illinois (des Garness, 2001).

Handwriting analysis, when performed by a well-trained graphoanalyst, can allow one to draw conclusions about another human being's general personality, intelligence, strength of will, social skills, and reliability. It does not allow another individual to knowledge about a person's physical features (body strength, hair color, illnesses, weight.), facts (race, gender, age, past experiences, financial status or destiny), or intellectual particulars (profession; special skills and knowledge, or whether one is a genius) (Ploog, 2014). The basic mind set of a person can be clearly displayed and identified in his/her handwriting. Graphology looks at a person's personality as a functional unit—or dysfunction unit in the presence of personality disorders (Ploog, 2014).

WHY SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS USE GRAPHOLOGY?

Graphology, or handwriting analysis, can be used for HR decisions at every level of hiring from hourly laborers to top executives, from skilled workers to non-skilled (Self, 2012). A recent study showed that 4 out of 5 workers are in the wrong job, and thus not happy and probably not producing at their abilities peak (Ross, 2001). This leads to the discussion of why graphology is important in business settings—getting the right worker in the right position cuts down on low job satisfaction, lowers absenteeism and turnover, and increases job performance—all of which are cost savings or improvements for businesses. In 2012 the cost for a hiring error which results in employee turnover can range from \$2,000 to replace a clerical employee to \$75,000 for a typical manager (Self, 2012). More importantly, graphology can be used as an initial method to identify candidates with personality traits of dishonesty, fraud, stealing, etc., who would obviously not be the employee wanted by organizations. Handwriting analysis is comparable to a seismograph, which picks up movement in the earth's plates and records this movement. Graphology detects and records personality traits through the movement of the writer's writing instrument. And, no two handwritings are the same, since no two personalities are the same, and therefore, handwriting analysis can be used to identify individuals. However, it must be noted that an individual's handwriting can change over time or during times of great stress or illness according to the individual's current state of being or outlook on life (Self, 2012).

Other support for using graphology in business and life decision making situations is that it just makes sense to people—it is appealing and logical, and people just feel it should work. In addition a clearly positive aspect of handwriting analysis is that is hard to fake, and unlike other devices handwriting samples can be gathered unbeknownst to the prospective employee or teammate or juror (Thomas & Vaught, 2001). Particularly when the person does not realize his or her writing is to be analyzed, the conscious or unconscious effort to influence the outcome of the analysis is eliminated—they don't know they are being evaluated, so they can't and won't try to manipulate the results or cheat (Ross, 2001).

A list of possible uses for organizations to consider using graphology include: hiring decisions, firing or elimination decisions, promotions decision, relocations evaluations, transfer selections, and team or committee membership compatibility decisions. Outplacement is a newer use of graphology. Some companies are using graphoanalysts to aid the outplaced or eliminated employees to adjust to the unemployed situation and to help them, using personality trait analysis through handwriting analysis, to identify businesses and/or industries that would fit the employee and his/her skill set to be a better employee who is more satisfied in the long run (Self, 2012).

WHO IS ALREADY USING GRAPHOLOGY?

Graphology has had consistently wide use in Europe (established to be used by 85 percent of all companies) (Lynch, 1985; McCarthy, 1988; Thomas & Vaught, 2001). Multiple sources indicate that more than 90 percent of French recruiters and executives utilize handwriting analysis in decision making (ehandwritinganalysis.com, 2001; theguardian.com, 2009;) According to an article written in 1979, International Graphoanalysis Society has indicated that around 2,000 American firms retained outside graphoanalysts as personnel consultants; this number had doubled since the late 1960s (McCarthy, 1988). And continuing the increasing trend, a 2001 article (des Garness) quotes Handwriting Research Corp., a Phoenix-based company, as estimating about 10,000 American corporations use handwriting analysis in HR procedures and/or programs.

Iris Holmes, owner of HuVista Inc., a Louisville Graphoanalysis firm, indicates that handwriting analysis is no more mysterious than evaluating an individual on the basis of his/her handshake, carriage, and/or speech (Jacobs, 1982). Bob Lewis, president, and major franchise holder of 135 H & R Block offices in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Nevada, was so highly skeptical of graphoanalysis in the early 1970s that he used it, assessment testing, and a battery of psychological surveys to identify employees with managerial potential. Criteria for comparison were developed. After graphoanalysis had had equal results with the other more expensive, time-consuming methods for several times, Mr. Lewis dropped the other tests and began relying on graphology exclusively. He reported that turnover has slowed and he was definitely please with the success his company realized because of using graphology. He indicated that managers had left for reasons such as to start their own businesses, but no turnover had occurred because of bad selection (Nelson-Horchler, 1984).

Some business executives—for example, Roy Cowles, vice president of Emhart Corp., Farmington, Connecticut-- do not use graphology in hiring U.S. executives, but do not use it extensively in hiring and promoting people in the company's European operations. The reasoning given was that graphology is an accepted practice in Europe (Nelson-Horchler, 1984).

Judy Piani, whose firm is J. Piani and Associates, Wilmington, Massachusetts, indicated that graphoanalysis is particularly effective in the areas of team building, management training, conflict resolution, motivation, and hiring. Piani claims an 85 percent accuracy rate in predicting success (Handwriting Analysis Plausible Means..., 1987).

In a 1983 article (McLaughlin & Sarkisian, 1983), when the use of graphology law enforcement was relatively new, Mr. McLaughlin has been in the security and law enforcement fields for over twenty years, indicated that graphoanalysis is a method which can be used to access dispositional positions as well as situational dishonesty in suspects. Ms. Sarkisian is a psychologist, and both are certified graphoanalysts. Indication is given that applications of graphoanalysis are becoming more prevalent, even to include the screening of jurors in some areas. Prospective jurors usually provide some type of documents which include the handwriting, which can be used as a sample for analysis. And court decisions have supported the legality of using handwriting samples for analysis for juror choices and as admissible evidence in a trial. Therefore, lawyers do not consider the use of handwriting analysis as an invasion of privacy even when prospective jurors are unaware that their handwriting is being analyzed to uncover personality traits and tendencies (Silas, 1983).

Trenton H. Shelton, general agent for Northwestern Mutual Life in Jackson, Mississippi, indicated that he used the services of a graphoanalyst for both predicting the success potential employees as well as predicting training needs. He indicated positive results from both (Shelton, 1978).

“The following was taken from the March 1980 Bulletin to Management: ‘Graphoanalysis is being used by a growing number of U.S. employers to pick the right worker for the right job. Many organizations ranging from banks to manufacturers, have found handwriting analyses save time and money in the hiring process.’” (Lynch, 1985, p. 14). Brian Lynch, formerly personnel director of LRC International, was exceedingly skeptical of graphoanalysis; however, he has become an advocate of it because of the successes he has seen (Lynch, 1985).

Curtis Casewit, who has taught graphology at Colorado University for 10 years quotes Dr. A. Roback of Harvard University as saying, “Thurs far I have not encountered a single individual who, after considerable application of graphology, has rejected it as unscientific” (Lynch, 1985, p. 14). David Ogilvy, mentor of the world’s fourth largest advertising agency, is quoted as saying, “Dare I confess that I have come to believe in graphology as an instrument for assessing character...” (Lynch, 1985, p. 15).

HOW IS GRAPHOANALYSIS PERFORMED AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNED?

Evidence is given of organizations who use graphoanalysis in screening applicants to interview for positions and in selection of employees from these applicants. The determination of group members to work together on projects may also be aided by analysis of handwriting to determine traits that will/will not be compatible.

The specific techniques used to compile a graphoanalysis report vary with each individual company. However, some 300 basic characteristics are considered in making an analysis. They include the spacing of letters, words, and lines; the layout of the text; the size and proportion of the characters; the slant of letters and lines; the formation of capital and small letters; and the regularity, rhythm, speed and pressure of the writing (Lynch, 1985).

Traits which can be identified include: motivation, determination, persistence, problem-solving ability, organization ability, communication skills, and magement or sales potential. “Obstacles” detectable include: stubbornness, pessimism, indecisiveness, and also being argumentative (Nelson-Horchler, 1984). The identification of characteristics is made by a means not unlike that of an interview in which repeating behavior patterns are being sought. During an interview this is done by discussing the various background areas of the candidate. Consistent achievement in all areas can be determined to exist or not exist. In a graphoanalysis all the indicators are evaluated separately and then compared collectively. In this analysis, several characteristics will group together and reinforce each other with a pattern emerging.

Even though graphology has the reputation of being unstructured, it requires painstaking analysis. Snap decisions made using only select characteristics are dangerous. The typical analysis of a half-page of writing takes approximately three hours (n.a. Handwriting Analysis Plausible, 1987). Much of what an analyst can see is not of any importance to a potential employer, or is it really any of his/her business, so only job-related characteristics are reported to the company, according to Iris Holmes, president of HuVista (Nelson-Horchler, 1984).

To perform a graphoanalysis, the graphoanalyst must have a sample of the individual’s writing which can be anything from a piece of written text to merely a signature. Then the above-mentioned areas are analyzed. The final product returned to the company is a clear, concise report on the findings of the graphoanalysis. The report merely reveals what to expect if the person is hired; it does not make any positive or negative recommendation.

The average cost for a graphoanalysis report will run a company from \$25 for a screening report to \$125 for a more detailed analysis. The sample to be analyzed can be attained simply by having the candidate complete an application in writing—not printing—and therefore no extra time element is involved. The major graphoanalysis companies in this country will guarantee at least an 85 percent accuracy rate. Compare this to the time and money involved in the more traditional psychological testing methods which can require up to 1.5 days and cost upward from \$300-\$600 per person. This cost factor alone makes graphoanalysis attractive to today's profit-oriented companies (Nelson-Horchler, 1984).

The formation of the letter "t" and its crossbar are two of the most important strokes to be analyzed. Just from these two factors, forty-one characteristics can be identified. The fact that the stems are separated is indicative to several characteristics. However, the placement, shape and stroke weight of the cross bar is extremely telling. For example, if the crossbar has a basin-like shape or is similar to a bowl shape, it indicates the candidate is "irresponsible and cannot be relied on in any situation." On the other hand, if the crossbar has an upslant, the candidate is "sure of his/her ambitions and certain that goals will turn out as planned." If simplicity is the rule—no upstrokes or flourishes—the candidate is likely to get to the point quickly and does not waste time beating around the bush. These are just three examples of a very long list (Martin, 1969).

The United States has six major graphoanalysis firms. They include HuVista, a Louisville personnel-consulting firm with more than 240 business clients (founded by Iris Holmes, a well-known analyst and speaker/writer); Barbara Harding Associates, Concord, Massachusetts, which has more than 100 business clients (Nelson-Horchler, 1984). Handwriting Resource Corp., a Phoenix, Arizona, concern nearly six years old which added more than 100 corporations to its roster of 363 clients this year, including three Fortune 500 companies; A New Slant, an 11-year-old handwriting firm in New York whose clients also include several Fortune 500 companies (McCarthy, 1988); J. Piani and Associates, Wilmington, Massachusetts, founded by Judy Piani who is also a well-known analyst and speaker (n.a. Handwriting Analysts Plausible, 1987); and International Graphoanalysis Society, a Chicago-based group (McLaughlin & Sarkisian, 1983). In addition to these companies, several schools are offering courses in graphology. They include: University of Miami, The New School of Social Research in Manhattan, and the University of Colorado.

After a company has made the decision to use graphoanalysis, the next step is finding the graphoanalyst who is best suited for the organization. Two ways to secure the names of the practicing graphoanalysts in a given area are available. First the Directory of Handwriting Analysts is in public libraries; and if this fails the local telephone directory is a good alternative.

The next step is to verify and test the qualifications of the analyst selected. Begin with education and training information. The graphoanalyst who has been training beyond the trait stroke method has more ability to formulate an analysis which is more detailed and accurate. The analyst's having a strong background in psychology is an asset.

Once the employer is satisfied with the graphoanalyst's credentials, the second step is often to have an analysis performed on his/her own handwriting sample. If the resulting report is believable and felt to be accurate, the credibility of the analysis is created dramatically and will usually lead to the hiring of the consultant.

In addition to background information and a preliminary analysis as the basis of selecting a graphologist, one should secure information about whether or not the analyst belongs to one of the professional graphoanalyst organizations as this will enhance his/her reputation. Each professional organization has its own set of criteria a graphoanalyst must meet before the organization will adhere its

stamp of approval. These three steps used together and honestly are a reliable method for choosing a graphoanalyst (Farmer, 1980).

WHERE DOES HANDWRITING ANALYSIS GO FROM HERE?

The United States education system is continuing the debate concerning the merits of including cursive writing in elementary curriculums. More and more is being demanded of elementary teachers and classroom time in order to meet and/or exceed state standards exams. Cursive writing, which is not included in such exams, is an easy elimination choice. However, this could be problematic, at least on a first glance level (Nix, 2008; Supon, 2009). As of May 2016, only fifteen states require the teaching of cursive writing in their Core Curriculum Standards, with the remaining 35 states allowing individual school districts to make the curriculum decision (American Handwriting Analysis Foundation, 2016).

A second reason why cursive writing is becoming an endangered species is the rise of and dependency upon the computer (Carpenter, 2008). Students who have been playing computer games and texting on phones for considerable time prior even to kindergarten are not as receptive to handwriting, especially cursive. And more and more of the younger teachers do not know or use cursive themselves—this makes cursive writing instruction all the more difficult (Supon, 2009). Print script has been taught in the United States schools since the 1970s (Ploog, 2014). Patricia Siegel, a graphologist, analyzed 175 samples of handwriting submitted by United States applicants for a job opening and found that 26 percent of the women and 40 percent of the men had submitted their materials using print script. This reinforces the widespread increasing use of print script (Siegel, 1997; Ploog, 2014).

Handwriting analysis has traditionally, and most easily, been performed using cursive, or joined-up, writing samples. And while analyzing print script is initially considered more difficult, it is not impossible (Ploog, 2014). Graphoanalysts are capable of analyzing writing samples in other languages, even including Chinese and other more character-type and less joined-up writing styles. Therefore, while cursive writing is easier to analyze, the training of graphoanalysts may need to be “tweaked,” but print script can also be analyzed.

CONCLUSION

In summary, advantages and disadvantages of graphoanalysis can be cited if one accepts the credibility of graphoanalysis. Objectivity can be cited as perhaps the biggest advantage. One does not encounter interviewing errors such as the halo error, horn error, contrast error, primacy and/or recency error or others. Forgery is impossible because writing evolves from brain wave patterns which are not subject to whims of change. Time and cost factors would certainly be balanced favorably toward graphoanalysis as travel expenses, interviewing expenses, etc., could be eliminated.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage is the unwillingness of people to consider graphoanalysis as a valid predictor. Perhaps no one test should be used exclusively. Graphoanalysis might be dangerous if not incorporated into an evaluation package. However, when one reads statistics related to the success of the interview technique, one doubts the validity of it also!

From the position of a professor—when new textbooks are discussing graphoanalysis, the Wall Street Journal and other professional journals are including articles related to it, 85 percent of the European organizations incorporate it into their testing programs, attention should be given to becoming more knowledgeable regarding graphoanalysis. One does not wish to label graphoanalysis as wisdom or

witchcraft without adequate study. And finally, since the HR or executive decisionmaker very likely already has a handwriting sample from the applicant or employee, and since having it analyzed and using handwriting analysis information for decisionmaking purposes is legal...if you have it, use it!

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