What is difficult about Motivational Maps?

Every product, service and system has its difficulties, ranging from the sublime difficulty to the easy and the awkward. Awkward is the one we dislike the most; easy we can deal with, and sublime can throw us a challenge, so that when we prevail we feel good about ourselves. But awkward? Hmm, that's just damn irritating.

What about Motivational Maps – what is the most difficult 'thing' about them? We've been doing them now for some five years, and thousands have been done, so we should be getting a clear idea. And we are. Just recently, with the launch of Smart Development Solutions' Motivational Youth Map (http://www.smartdevelopmentsolutions.co.uk/), largely for students in schools, we have had a whole new audience – and they have identified exactly the same difficulty: loudly and clearly!

So what is it? It's the forced choice between the statements. Motivational Maps is a self perception inventory – like the Belbin Inventory. It works by getting you to allocate points between two statements according to how much you prefer them. However, the number of points is fixed, and furthermore, since there are an odd number (five in fact) and no half points are allowed, you are 'forced' to prefer one statement over another.

To give an example of how gut-wrenching this might be, and to take an example not on the Map, imagine you are a devoted animal lover with loads of pets. And you do a self perception inventory with the following two statements:

I like dogs
I like cats

You have to choose between these two statements by allocating the five points. If you give the dog the whole five points, you have to give the cat zero points; and vice versa. But you love your doggy – doggy deserves all five; yet, you have two cats too, you adore. So in a shabby compromise one has to be worth only three, but treachery of treacheries, the other then is devalued with two. Can you feel the pain of this?

The question I get, then, is: I don't want to do this, this is distorting what I really want, believe, feel. Why should I do it?

It is tough, but there is an answer, and here it is: the motivators of the Map are all in us. And like values they reside in a hierarchical structure whether we can discern it or not. The ultimate example of this in real life would be a life and death situation in which events conspired to make you choose between your two children, and you could only save one, and if you didn't save one, you'd lose both.

In that situation, as instant as it might be, you would make that choice: factors conscious and subconscious, including potentially abandoning the choice to some irrational or superstitious 'sign' would prevail - you make the choice and the preference and its underlying value structure becomes clear. So with the motivators - we will always, faced with two highly desirable choices, attempt to get both, but if we can't our motivation will lead us to choose one. The key issue is knowing what that one is for you; and not allowing a 'logical' over-ride or second guessing to occur.

Where we love both, then the scoring will be close to reflect that. So forced questions allow for this two-almost-equal by distributing the scores: here 3:2 or 2:3; but if you feel that strongly about one motivator, then you will certainly give it 5s when it is up against motivators you really feel little for. Or by analogy, perhaps when up against 'pets' you feel little for. Doggy 5, Snake 0!

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