

Career Assessment Tool for Companies and Students



Frida Polli - CEO

About pymetrics

How awesome is it when Netflix recommends you a TV series that then becomes your new favorite? Or Amazon suggests a book that you can't put down? Or OkCupid recommends the person who becomes your life partner? Wouldn't be it great if the same could happen for your career?

That's what we're trying to achieve with pymetrics. Co-founded by postdocs from MIT, pymetrics is driven by the idea of using neuroscience to reinvent career search and hiring.

Over the last two decades, neuroscience has revolutionized our understanding of the brain and given us novel ways to assess cognitive and personality traits. We apply this to helping people find their optimal career path, and help companies find ideal candidates.

Want to join us in making this happen?

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. Polli, what is the concept at pymetrics?

Ms. Polli: The concept of pymetrics is that we are trying to be a tool that students and companies can use in addition to the current resume process to figure out whether they are a match for each other. The idea is that the initial decision point that is used for any kind of corporate recruiting on one hand is the resume and that might not be enough information. There are additional pieces of information that can be used to decide whether someone would be a good fit for a company that may not leap off a resume. That is sort of the proposition from the company side. From the student side, it is really a career assessment tool that looks at their cognitive and emotional strengths and helps them figure out from that perspective what types of careers and companies they might be best suited for. It is a matching tool.

CEOCFO: What is the problem with the current methods?

Ms. Polli: The current methods do the best job that they can, with students on one hand and companies on the other hand. It is that the resume is a bit of a blunt tool for really understanding whether someone is going to be suited for whatever career we are talking about. Because of the volume of applicants, it is the first decision tool that is used and those companies' and students are looking for additional input at that very early stage, prior to having met with anyone as to what direction they should go in. It is an additional information point, sort of describing attributes about someone that are not easily taken from a resume. Either reading a resume or submitting one and wondering how will anyone really know who they are based off this paper. It is a pain that everyone has felt either as an applicant or reading a resume and usually you can only get a good sense of someone once you meet them in person. You cannot meet every single person that drops off resumes, so pymetrics is just an additional data point to help you know something about a person and to help students understand if their profile's strengths and weaknesses really match with the profile of someone who is in that role. It is a matching tool that helps both parties understand whether they are a good fit for each other.

CEOCFO: What types of questions are there? How do you do it and make the connection?

Ms. Polli: There are no questions. Our offering uses what we call games but they are neuroscience exercises that have been developed over the last twenty years by neurosciences across the globe that are routinely used in research and in a healthcare context to understand cognitive and emotional traits in people. The games are actually kind of fun and are all pretty short. There are twelve of them and they cover a wide variety of things like your cognitive flexibility, how well you remember things to how well you read emotion to how risk taking you are. That just helps you understand yourself. It will help you get a sense of where you are in comparison to other people and it also helps you understand your strengths and if those strengths would make you better suited for this type of career and less suited for that type of career. If the student wants to, they can enter themselves into this job matching process whereby companies are looking if an individual has

shown a particular fit for that company and if the student ops in, they can be matched. It is a little bit like a dating site where students can be matched with companies their profile is well suited for. The profiles on the company's side are made in exactly the same way. We have employees at the company who play the games and then we build like a group profile that the student profiles are compared to.

CEOCFO: *When a student is looking for a self assessment to see what might be right and if you are looking for a certain type of position, how do you get around the likelihood that someone is going to play in a certain way thinking it will get them the job?*

Ms. Polli: That is actually the beauty of these games; you cannot actually do exactly what you described. You cannot play them in the way that you would like to. You would have to go try them but they are almost impossible to game. You do not know what the correct answer is, so you are just left to play them how you play them. For example, you are presented with a bunch of red and green circles and you are basically told to please hit the space bar when you see the red circle, and do nothing when you see the green circle. It is hard to know exactly how to play that game to get job A, B or C. That is kind of the whole point, that it is very hard to over think these games. Again, it is completely optional; it is not like if you do not play these games and some company is going to turn you down. It is only if you are a good match that we every send your information to a company, and if you are not a good match and you think you want to go into marketing. However, we do not tell you that you are a good match and it does not impair you from doing that through the current channels in any way. It is really another tool that you could use to figure what you want to do in life and potentially showcase yourself to different companies. One other thing I would say is that students actually like that part of the assessment because it does not ever hurt your chances; it only helps them. They go into this approach of that this is going to help them understand. Many students do not know what they want, especially undergraduate students. They really want to know what they should be doing. We find real interest in self-understanding.

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- Frida Polli

CEOCFO: *Your site points to student led teams at schools at well-known universities. What is the relationship?*

Ms. Polli: We have a variety of channels where we get out the word about what we are doing. pymetrics is completely free to anyone who wants to use it anywhere across the globe. It is on the internet and it is free so anyone can use it. We just use different ways of getting the word out that the site exists and that it can be helpful to students and that it gives an opportunity to find great companies to be matched with. The student teams are just students who we have reached out to because we think they might be interested in our assessment and then they have gone on to tell other students at their schools about pymetrics. The term for this kind of program is called an ambassador program and it is a pretty tried and true way of getting the word out about certain opportunities to college students. That is really what that it is all about. Then we have official partnerships with schools, institutions and companies and that is a different channel for getting the word out. Two of our official partners in the states would be Dartmouth University, an official partner where the actual Career Development Center is telling students about the site, and then Forte Foundation is another official partner where they distribute our materials and information about pymetrics to all of their 50,000 members.

CEOCFO: *What is the business model?*

Ms. Polli: The business model is very similar to LinkedIn. LinkedIn is mostly free for users and yet you can upgrade your account and get a premium package, but for most users, it is free and then they monetize companies and it would be the same here. If companies find candidates that they otherwise would not have found or it makes this process in some way better for them, they would just pay a subscription fee for access to students that we would be sending them.

CEOCFO: *What have you learned since the games have been in use? What has changed from the original concept?*

Ms. Polli: The main thing that has changed is that we are now a marketplace and we used to be a recruiting tool. When we first started out, we thought maybe the best way to use this tool was to have company X use it to help them in their recruiting process and have it be sort of one directional where the company is assessing people and making decisions based on it. What we realized is that is fine, however, the best way to provide this tool to the world in general is as a marketplace where we can have students coming on or users coming on one side, companies coming on the other, and trying to match-make rather than just be a tool for individual companies to help them select the right people. The reason that the marketplace is so much more appealing is that it provides more opportunity to both sides. It provides more opportunity to students if they can go on and play twenty minutes worth of games and have access to many companies as

opposed to just doing one company and then another company. For companies as well, they have a large base of applicants, some of whom they would have never considered or found on their own, it is also a value to them. The biggest learning was that the marketplace idea was preferred to a recruiter tool model.

CEOCFO: *Are you finding word of mouth in the student population or is that not a factor yet?*

Ms. Polli: That is really what those student ambassador campaigns are all about. Last year we able through our student ambassador campaigns to get 17% of MIT students to sign up, 10% of Harvard and so on. It was really just students letting other students know about the site and what you could get from it.

CEOCFO: *Rather high percentages!*

Ms. Polli: I honestly think that students are really open to technology and how it can help them. If I went back to when I was twenty and in college, I had no idea what I wanted to do and I would have been very open to any tool that would have provided me with any kind of insight. It does not mean that I would have lived and breathed by what that tool said but I think I would have been interested. Even if they do not want to be matched with companies, it is still a career assessment tool for them that can still provide them information about what they might be best suited for and I think that is high value to students anywhere at any school. Students might use it for different reasons, even self-exploration. People love to learn about themselves.

CEOCFO: *Do you see an international component at some point and would it be the same tests?*

Ms. Polli: Definitely, because the tools for these games are mostly non-verbal. Obviously if you had a large presence in a country where the main language was not English, we would have to change the language of the instructions but the games themselves do not change and that is actually the nice part about the games. They have been used over the last ten or twenty years in research context and healthcare context across the globe. We already know that they have been in use in those settings and they are accepted as being valid in those settings. We are currently reaching out to students at some schools, not in the US, primarily business schools. We are starting out with business schools just because it is a little bit easier and there is a large English speaking component in those student bodies. However, there is nothing to prevent having us be a global tool and some of the partner companies we have worked with have used it globally in terms of getting employees to build the profile, they have not limited their employee space to just people in the US.

CEOCFO: *What are the next steps?*

Ms. Polli: The main thing we need to do between now and March is build up both sides of the marketplace. We have to continue to attract users to the site and continue to show companies that are using the site that there are users and that they are users that they would be interested in meeting. Companies today really value diversity whether it is gender, ethnic, regional, socio-economic, whatever it is, diversity is a very interesting concept for many companies and this platform can really be a tool for diversity. All of the career recommendation engines we build, we test them all for bias, we make sure that they are not biased for a certain gender or ethnicity. Both sides of the platform can be sure that if a candidate is being recommended, it is not because they are of a certain demographic or anything like that. That is very appealing for companies. For example, technology firms that might be looking for more women, this is actually a nice way for them to potentially find woman candidates that otherwise might be overlooked and that is one of the reasons that Forte Foundation is interested in what we are doing. It opens additional avenues for people that right now either may be self-selecting out of those industries or for other reasons are not choosing those industries.

CEOCFO: *Will you be seeking partnerships or funding?*

Ms. Polli: We raised venture money in September of 2013 and we are good with funding for now.

CEOCFO: *Put it together for our readers. Why pay attention to pymetrics today?*

Ms. Polli: Right now if you want to figure out your career fit, you do not play a bunch of a games, so from that perspective, it is very different from anything else that is out there right now for student users. Furthermore, very few people find the career search process enjoyable. Most find it overwhelming, with too many options and too much information, and little understanding of what is best for them. It's like the movie rental or dating industries were like decades ago. pymetrics is making the recruiting industry relevant to today, by using similar tactics to Netflix and OkCupid. Using recommendation engines based on profiles to make matches. For companies, it is a really different approach and while it is not meant to replace the current system, it certainly adds to it. It is novel, exciting and fun. And if you simply want to learn something about yourself, it can be a fun exercise in self-discovery.

BIO: Frida Polli is pymetrics' CEO and chief visionary. Frida has spoken at MIT and Harvard, appeared on CNN, and contributes on career and entrepreneurship to Forbes. She was named a Robert Kaplan Life Science Fellow by Harvard Business School. Before founding pymetrics, Frida was an award-winning neuroscientist at Harvard and MIT. Frida has too many degrees: an MBA from Harvard, a PhD from Suffolk, and a BA from Dartmouth. Frida balances entrepreneurship with being a mom to an amazing 8 year old. Say hi on Twitter @fridapolli



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