

INNOVATION TO WATCH

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Karmagenes kit: a genetic test for 'personality'

Leslie Hook

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What can you learn from your DNA, and how much do you really want to know? Companies exist that are prepared to tell you about your potential medical conditions or your ancestry based on a cheek swab. Now Karmagenes, a start-up based in Geneva in Switzerland, proposes to go further and tell you about your personality.

Co-founder Kyriakos Kokkoris, who holds a PhD in microbiology, argues: “You can cheat a theoretical personality test by how you answer the questions, but you can’t cheat your DNA.”

It is an appealing proposition in an age where every other self-help book promises to tell you more about who you really are.

He and his co-founders developed an algorithm that matches specific genetic regions to personality traits, drawing on published research. Their test scores 14 characteristics they have defined such as spontaneity, risk-taking, confidence and self-awareness. The company slogan is

“meet yourself”. Mr Kokkoris and his wife have taken the test, and he even tested his son at three months old.

Karmagenes' success will hinge on consumers' acceptance of the idea that personality is determined by genetics, which is controversial.

Personalities are a mix of nurture and nature: but Mr Kokkoris says that by knowing their predisposition users of the Karmagenes kit can remedy “weaknesses” or focus on strengths.

“My DNA says I am ‘low social’, but after 11 years abroad, I can talk to anyone,” says Mr Kokkoris.

In the US, companies offering DNA tests to assess health risks have been censured by regulatory authorities. That has not stopped Karmagenes dreaming big: Mr Kokkoris talks about financial advice, professional guidance, even matchmaking, eventually being based on DNA data.

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