

The Value of Assessing a Candidate's Interests in Personnel Selection

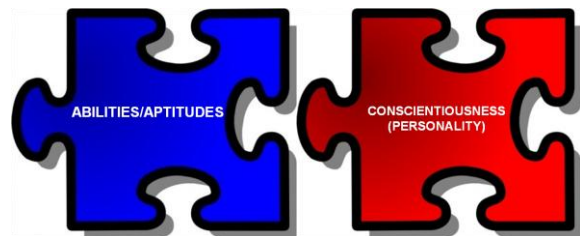
An Overlooked Predictor of Job Success

May G. Doyle, M.A.
Applied Assessments, Inc.

In his book The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness, Stephen Covey states,

"If you hire people whose passion intersects with the job, they won't require supervision at all. They will manage themselves better than anyone could ever manage them. Their fire comes from within, not from without. Their motivation is internal, not external." P. 76

So the question to ask is: How do you find individuals 'whose passion intersects with the job'? Over 85 years of selection research has demonstrated that the best predictor of job success is delivered by combining assessments of general cognitive ability and personal conscientiousness. General cognitive ability has been shown time and again to be the most valid predictor of future performance and learning, especially when hiring employees without previous experience in the job. Candidates with high general cognitive ability demonstrate rapid job-related learning and ability to acquire and apply knowledge gained from experience on the job. Similarly, the personality factor of conscientiousness, which measures an individual's dependability, thoroughness and responsibility, has been positively correlated with job performance across all occupational groups. While evidence demonstrates the predictive validity of cognitive ability and conscientiousness to job success (Barrick & Mount, 1991, Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), these factors represent two pieces of the whole puzzle for determining a candidate's potential fit for a job.

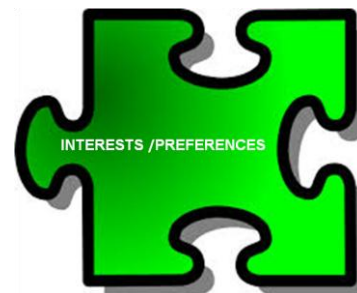


Assessing a person's cognitive ability and conscientiousness alone cannot predict a candidate's passion to perform a particular job. Consequently, an additional, often overlooked factor that offers valuable insight into an individual's passion for a job is his/her interests and preferences. In fact, a recent article by Rounds & Su (2014) provides evidence that interests are no less important than other predictors of success including cognitive ability and personality traits.

Measuring Interests: Not Just for Making Vocational Choices

Research on interests which spans back to the beginning of the 20th century have shown that interests:

- Are stable over time
- Focus on types of activities people prefer and the work environments in which to perform these activities
- Influence the way people behave by increasing motivation



These features support the notion that interests are an important piece of matching individuals with jobs. Initially developed to help young people make educational and occupational choices, interest questionnaires received minimal attention for use in personnel selection. Even today, interest questionnaires are most often associated with high school and college students who

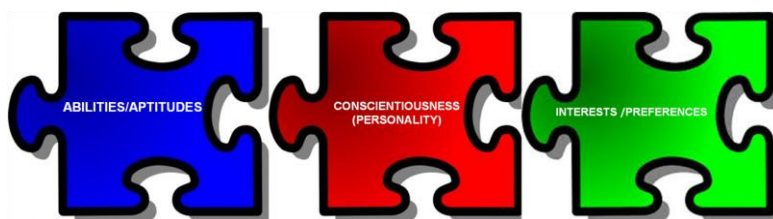
are exploring potential career paths. However, assessing an individual's interests in order to predict job performance and success merits greater attention, as reported in recent studies.

Using data from 74 studies Van Iddekinge et. al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between interests and employee performance, training performance and turnover. The estimated mean validities for studies that used multiple interest scales were .14 for job performance, .26 for training performance, -.15 for turnover. Moreover, they found that as the job relevance of a particular interest construct increased, its correlation with job performance became more positive. In addition, the use of multiple interest scales as opposed to any single interest scale yielded higher levels of validity for criteria that reflect employee performance. Overall, these results support the value of assessing a candidate's interests in predicting job performance.

Another more recent met-analysis study by Rounds & Su (2014) examined the correlation between interests and performance over the past 70 years. They included studies that measured interests using either (1) interest-scale scores that assessed the strength of interests; and (2) interest-congruence indices that showed the fit between the individual and his/her environment . Results of the meta-analysis found moderate correlation between interest-scale score and job performance ($r=.20$). The correlation was even higher when interest-congruence was used ($r=.36$). These findings support that employees who are interested in their occupation perform better, contribute more to the organizations and coworkers, and persist longer in their jobs.

Along with evidence from research studies, the importance of individual interests is also recognized on the O*NET. A primary source of occupational information sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Employment & Training Administration, the O*NET is a database that is comprised of hundreds of occupational definitions, job requirements and work attributes. Not only does the O*Net provide the work activities, knowledge, skills and education that are necessary for a particular occupation, but it also includes the interests of a typical worker. For example, the O*Net indicates that a chemist usually prefers to address practical hands-on problems, follow set procedures and routines and work with data and details. The interests category of the O*Net connects workers' personal interests to indicate which occupations would be most fulfilling.

Conclusion



Knowing an individual's interests and preferences BEFORE a candidate is hired can save a company valuable time and money in hiring an individual who may possess the knowledge and abilities to perform the job, but lacks the interest that contribute to the

motivational potential of the job. Too often, the focus in personnel selection seems to be "Is the applicant smart enough to successfully perform the job? Consequently, employers examine whether there is a match between the ability demands of a job and the cognitive ability of a candidate. Similarly, personality features, particularly with regards to conscientiousness is also a prominent construct assessed in the selection process. While research supports the use of cognitive ability and personality assessments to predict job performance, recent evidence provides support for also assessing interests and preferences in order to predict success. A candidate who possesses the capabilities to perform the job AND also shows high interest in job-related tasks is likely to be motivated to succeed. In other words, the individual

possesses the passion to perform the job duties and therefore, exert maximum effort to ensure goals are accomplished.

References

Barrick, M.R. & Mount, M.K. (1991). The Big Five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, *44*, 1-26.

Covey, S. R. (2004) The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness. New York, NY: Free Press.

Rounds, J. and Su, R. (2014). The nature and power of interests. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. *23* (2), 98-103.

Schmidt, Frank L. & Hunter, John E. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods in Personnel Psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. *124*, No. 2, 262-274.

Van Iddekinge, C.H., Roth, P.L., Putka, D.J. & Lanivich, S.E. (2011). Are you interested? A meta-analysis of relations between vocational interests and employee performance and turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *96*, 1167-1194.

www.onetonline.org