

Personality Tests

How Effective Are They When Making Selection Decisions?

It would be hard to argue against the fact that personality tests are often used in making hiring decisions. A quick search on the internet reveals the popularity of personality measures for personnel selection. An internet search titled "Personality Tests for Selection" yields 178,000 pages of results!! The number of pages is overwhelming.

Despite the popularity of personality inventories, the fact remains that the use of stand-alone personality measures runs counter to research evidence that shows marginal validity in predicting job performance. In a recent article featured in *Personnel Psychology* a panel of Industrial/Organizational Psychologists reviews the usefulness of personality tests within the context of selection decisions (Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy, Schmitt, 2007). In reviewing the validity research, they agree that personality tests as predictors of job performance are disappointing. Moreover, the potential for dishonest responding or faking as well as misinterpretation of the items can be problematic. Given these findings, should personality tests be given the boot?

On the contrary, personality tests can contribute important information about a candidate when incorporated with other measures of human performance. Indeed, this is the suggestion that the panel of psychologists offers that would allow personality measures to be used in a more effective way. In conjunction with other measures, personality assessments provide an objective view of a candidate's potential fit within the context of the job and the overall corporate culture. Applied Assessments has long acknowledged the importance of pairing personality measures with other assessments through the use of the Professional Assessment Series and Professional Pre-Employment Screen. These assessment batteries address two major components important to successful work performance and career satisfaction.

Before electing to incorporate any assessment tool as part of an overall selection process, it is essential to note the importance of knowing the job demands of the position as well as the context of the work environment. This involves the identification of the duties and working conditions associated with the position as well as the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the job. How can the factors important to job success be addressed without a complete understanding of the job?



Once the job demands are well understood, it is appropriate to investigate the match between those demands and an individual's talents. In other words, does the candidate possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the job effectively? The capability portion of the Professional Assessment Series and the Professional Pre-Employment Screen addresses an individual's problem solving skills and cognitive ability. These measures provide insight into what an applicant CAN do.

However, even when a candidate possesses the "horse power" to successfully perform the specified job duties, the question remains about the individual's willingness and motivation to perform the work at hand. Generic measures of motivation are of limited value here. On the other hand, if an individual's interests, preferences, and personality align with the required job duties, the likelihood that a person will be motivated to perform the work is dramatically improved. For example, a person may have the general reasoning and problem solving skills to effectively perform in a sales role. However, if his personality shows a dislike for socializing with peers, working in groups or selling to others, he is unlikely to be motivated in a sales role. Consequently, the suitability component of the Professional Assessment Series and the Pre-Employment Screen provides insight into what a candidate WANTS to do.

The combination of capability and suitability assessments provides insight into the motivating potential of a job for any given

candidate. Motivating potential is maximized when:

- The candidate has the capabilities to do the job. In other words, he/she possesses the gifts, talents and cognitive abilities to effectively perform the job.
- The applicant possesses the passion for the work. Passion to perform the job duties and work within a given job context is measured by examining the individual's personality, interests and preferences.

The combination of valid cognitive ability and personality assessments provides a means to identify the best person for the job and the organization. Although personality tests have

achieved significant popularity, it is important to remember that stand-alone personality measures have typically shown marginal validity in predicting job performance. Moreover, personality inventories alone provide only part of the total picture about an individual. Individuals who possess the capabilities and also evidence the personality and high interest in job-related tasks are likely to be motivated to perform the job. The Professional Assessment Series and the Pre-Employment Screen capture the alignment of job demands and work context with the capabilities (gifts, talents, horse power) and suitabilities (personality, interests, preferences) of job candidates. This approach maximizes predictions of motivated performance and ensures the accuracy of assessments in predicting job performance.

Reference: Morgeson, Frederick P., Campion, Michael A., Dipboye, Robert L., Hollenbeck, John R., Murphy, Kevin, Schmitt, Neal. (2007). Reconsidering the Use of Personality Tests in Personnel Selection Context. Personnel Psychology, Vol. 60, No. 3, 683 - 729.