

Personality vs. Job Performance

By Bill Schult, President Believe & Succeed Inc.

Since becoming certified in identifying, understanding and appreciating behaviour in the mid 70's it has become agonisingly apparent to me that attempting to hire a job candidate on behaviour alone is courting disaster.

A person's behavioural type or personality style, by itself, is not a valid indicator of his/her potential for success in a specific job. There are many tools in use that predict behaviour in a general or overall sense, but they do not predict job performance or are they job related. In order for an assessment to predict the potential for job success they must be validated against job performance.

So does this mean, you can't use personality assessments to predict the potential for job success? Not at all! But, you will need to use personality assessments that were designed for the selection process. The assessment must be job related and validated against a given job and the performance required to be successful in that job.

This will almost always eliminate the use of Ipsative assessments for selection purposes. This type of assessment uses the Most – Least word descriptor approach to identify a person's personal preferences. It can provide insight into the person him/herself, but not validated information to be used to make a selection decision. This type of assessment does not provide the necessary or right type of information to do a true validation study.

Good assessments consist of measuring the factors that contribute to job success. These factors are obtained by psychologists conducting well-constructed job studies to determine the personality traits that actually contribute to job success. They gather data of on the job performance for top and bottom performing job incumbents, along with collecting performance ratings of supervisors and managers.

Why collect data for a validation study on top and bottom performers? Good question! A well-validated assessment should have the ability to predict potential success, as well as the potential for job failure.

This is why a "one test fits all" mentality comes into question. Different jobs have different success patterns. One test cannot come close to measuring the varied and numerous traits and abilities necessary to perform a given job successfully.

Don't be fooled or talked into "benchmarking" your top performers. They are good compared to what? What if your top producers looked exactly like your bottom producers? Was the benchmark valid, did it predict success? Maybe and maybe not! Benchmarking only your top performers is a formula for EEOC disaster.

How do I have a validation study conducted for a job in my organisation?

First, you can use assessments that have already been validated for jobs that are similar to jobs in your organisation. This allows you to begin using validated assessments without having to make a large investment of money.

Second, you contract with a reputable psychological firm to conduct your in house validation studies. You will need between 100 to 200 people in your validation study. Less than 100 and the data statistically becomes less reliable.

I often hear the question, “Are assessments legal?” The short answer is, yes! When you compare your present process of mostly subjective interview techniques and the lack of a structured interview process to avoid what is called a “soft interview.” This is where candidates for the same job are asked different questions by the interviewers. Interview questions that are not criterion and face validated. And hiring to jobs that do not have defined job requirements.

Compare those legal issues to an assessment where the job has been well researched and defined. Assessments where validation studies conducted by licensed psychologists have identified the personality traits that actually contribute to success in the job. Assessments that have been constructed to identify those personality traits contributing to job success and predict the candidate’s probability of success on the job.

I point out to my prospects and clients that a well constructed and validated assessment is the most objective part of an organisation’s selection process. A good assessment never has a “bad day,” it never looks to see if a candidate’s shoes are shined, it never is impressed by a candidate’s “pat” answer, it never gives the candidate the answer before it asks the question, and it never produces a result based on the subjective gathering of information.

A well-constructed and validated assessment asks the same questions of each candidate, in the same order. It never has a “bad day,” it is never impressed by a “pat” answer or gives the answer to the candidate before it asks the question. When it is time for the assessment to deliver its report on the candidate, it is based on validated information that has been designed for just one purpose, to predict a candidate’s potential for success in a given job.

Assessments can pay for themselves by reducing the turnover in an organisation, while helping to place more top performers on the job.