The Trouble With Personality Tests

Chally Group WORLDWIDE

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Personality tests are a popular component of many organizations' hiring processes. As these tests contend to measure traits and characteristics that remain stable over time, it is intuitive to believe information regarding candidates' individual differences in these areas would be helpful when making selection decisions. Yet evidence supporting the usefulness of personality tests in the hiring process has been called into serious question. This is due to repeated findings that correlations between measures of personality and measures of job performance are not strongly related. After nearly two decades of enthusiastic support for the use of personality assessments, there has been a call for talent management professionals to reevaluate the merits of these tests.

In a recent article presented by Human Resource Executive Online, entitled *Assessing Personality,* Peter Capelli (2007)[1] briefly reviews the history of using personality tests for hiring and promotion decisions. He remarks that the current popularity of this method is reminiscent of its use as a "best practice" in the 1950s, which he notes is curious given the fact that "by the early-1960s, the consensus among researchers was that personality was not a useful criterion for assessing individuals." During the decades that ensued (1960s – 1980s) "personality-based assessments ... largely disappeared from the lists of 'best practices' in human resources," however, a resurgence of interest in, and use of, personality testing emerged in the 1990s. Yet the central issue that led to the disfavor of personality tests 40 years ago (i.e., the lack of predictive validity or extent to which the assessment relates to or predicts job performance) still remains an unresolved issue.

A panel of prominent personnel psychologists (Morgeson et al., 2007), all former editors of top-tiered journals, recently collaborated on an article discussing the utility of personality tests in personnel selection. The one clear theme that emerged from their work was that the validities of personality measures are so low that using them for selecting employees should be questioned. Although research studies have demonstrated statistically significant relations between some personality factors and certain areas of job performance, the practical significance, or overall usefulness, of these relations remain as weak as those reported 40 years ago. This finding led one author to question, "why are we now suddenly looking at personality as a valid predictor of job performance when the validities still haven't changed and are still close to zero?"[2]

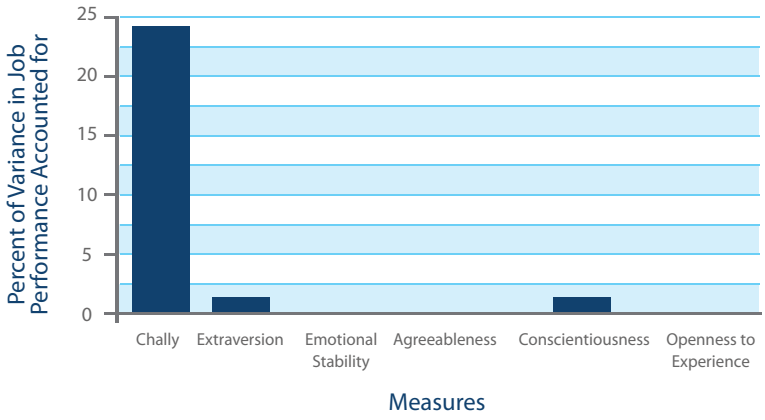
While evidence suggesting that personality tests are not robust predictors of job success has been available for some time (particularly if one considers the glut of research surrounding the issue in the 1960s), the comments made by the panel of experts' article drew a storm of criticism from other researchers in the field.[3,4] In a recently published follow-up to the rebuttal articles, the panel underlines that its "fundamental purpose in writing these articles is to provide a sobering reminder about the low validities and other problems in using self-report personality tests for personnel selection."[5]

Poor Predictors of Job Performance

It is noted that blind enthusiasm for the use of personality testing has stemmed from researchers and practitioners alike, ignoring the basic data demonstrating that personality assessments are poor predictors of job performance. This evidence might be overlooked because of the potential for lowered adverse impact and increased criterion variance explained by the use of personality tests. However, the authors state that increases in the criterion variance explained has not been realized. In light of these problems, it is noted that Robert Guion's comments from over 40 years ago still hold true today: "In view of the problems… one must question the wisdom of using personality as instruments of decision in employment procedures." [6]

Unfortunately, as Capelli asserts, "the least valid of the personality measures are the ones most employers are likely to use: published tests that individual candidates complete themselves." The most popular personality tests being used for hiring purposes utilize broad-based approaches, such as the Big Five Personality traits and Emotional Intelligence, but these have had limited success. For example, meta-analytic research has found that these tools account for less than 6% of variance in sales effectiveness.[7] One of the reasons for this outcome could be that most personality tests are very broad in scope, whereas the areas of job performance are fairly narrow and specific. Researchers have posited that the specificity of a predictor (e.g., an assessment measure) should match the specificity of a construct, or the area of job performance the predictor is designed to predict.[8] It stands to reason that a test designed to predict specific and precise work behaviors and outcomes would predict those specific work behaviors and outcomes better than a test designed to reveal a general and broad sense of an individual's personality.

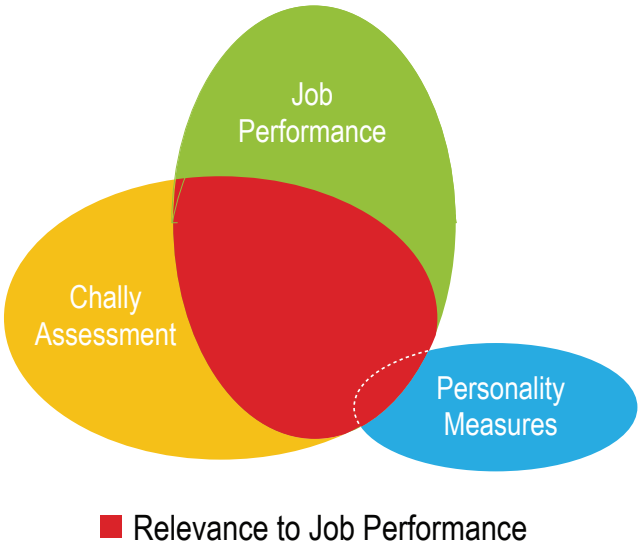
Chally Predicts Job Performance Well Beyond Personality Measures



Chally Group Worldwide concurs with the central tenet of the works described above; however, some context is necessary to avoid the blanket conclusion that any assessment that measures individual differences is bad. Most criticisms apply directly to the broad-based personality tests people in the employment assessment field call "off-the-shelf" measures. These assessments were designed to be general, apply to a wide range of situations (most were not specifically created for workplace application), and are not amenable to customization. Such measures employ a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which (similar to clothing) does not provide a very good fit in most cases. The Chally Assessment, custom designed to measure areas of job performance, does not fall into this category.

Chally's assessment measures narrow, job-related constructs rather than broad, personality constructs. As opposed to developing a measure descriptive of personal characteristics, Chally's goal was to develop a measure that best predicted job performance in specific areas. While researchers and practitioners later became interested in the relations among general measures of personality and job performance, Chally's focus from the company's founding was to predict success on the job. Over the years (beginning with a grant from the U.S. Justice Department) Chally has created more than 150 different work-related competencies that are measured through the Chally Assessment. Chally has long championed research designed to measure the competencies, behaviors, traits, and temperaments that predict specific job behaviors. The criterion-related validation approach, which is the statistical demonstration of the relationship between scores on an assessment and the job performance of sample workers, continues to be at the core of Chally's selection method.

Interestingly, when Morgeson et al., and their critics discussed ways to improve selection methods, they all agreed that one way to increase validity is to develop tests that keep in mind the outcome, criteria, and/or on-the-job behavior the end-user wishes to predict. The shared opinion is that keeping these factors in mind will likely lead to increases in validity and improve one's ability to defend the use of the test if challenged. This has been a central tenet at Chally since its inception.



The PREDICTIVE Power of Chally's Selection SYSTEM

The Chally Assessment was designed by taking an actuarial approach (or criterion-related approach) to predict job success, whereas the aim of most published personality measures is to perfectly represent a theory of personality. Researchers agree, regardless of whether they propose using "compound" or "narrow" scales, companies need to measure more than personality traits if they are concerned with predicting job performance. Chally focuses on the competencies, behaviors, and temperaments that predict actual job behavior. As a result, the Chally Assessment consistently has greater predictive power than existing "off-the-shelf" published personality measures.

Members of Chally's Center for Scientific Innovation (C^2SI) have published research in several leading academic journals and regularly apply their findings in the company's practice. C^2SI's research supports the conclusion that off-the-shelf approaches have limited success predicting actual job performance because off-the-shelf measures do not consider the possibility that jobs with surface similarities may require different competencies for success. For example, different sales roles require different skills and motivations for success.[9] Although extraverts (outgoing people that like to be the center of attention) tend to make better retail salespeople, they actually perform worse in business-to-business sales.[10] Business-to-business salespeople focus on listening to the potential customer rather than dominating the conversation.

Chally's utilization of criterion-related validation studies has led to reductions in turnover of up to 30% and increases in individual productivity of up to 35% in numerous organizations across most industries. Chally has developed a unique assessment based on literally hundreds of actuarial studies (i.e., the rigorous statistical methods used to assess risk in insurance and finance industries). Chally's research, and the research of others, consistently demonstrated that personality tests are not robust predictors of job success. Now, top researchers in the field are proclaiming this same conclusion.

How to Recognize a Personality Test

It is not always readily apparent that an assessment is a personality test designed to *describe* an individual rather than a work-related measure designed to *predict* on-the-job behaviors, outcomes, or criteria important to performance. There are three questions that should help one determine the type of assessment being presented.

1. Was the measure designed to describe a theory or model (usually of personality) or predict future behavior?
2. Was the measure designed for academic or business application?
3. What evidence exists to show how the measure can impact business results?

Most personality tests were designed to describe a theory/model, are academic in nature, and are not likely to impact business results. It is sometimes difficult to avoid personality tests as many have become better known by their acronym. These include the:

16pf (16 Personality Factor; IPAT)

6 FPQ (6 Factor Personality Questionnaire; Sigma Assessment Systems)

CPI (California Personality Inventory; Westburn Publishers)

CPQ (Craft Personality Questionnaire; CraftSystems/Previsor)

DPS (Dynamic Personality Shift; Kenexa)

HWPI (Harcourt Workplace Personality Inventory; Harcourt)

HPI (Hogan Personality Inventory Hogan Assessment Systems)

IPIP (International Personality Item Pool; Oregon Research Institute)

JPRF (Jackson Personality Research Form; Sigma Assessment Systems)

MPQ (Manchester Personality Questionnaire; Hogrefe Ltd.)

MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory; Pearson Assessments)

NEO-PI-R (NEO Personality Inventory – Revised; Psychological Assessment Resources)

OPI (Occupational Personality Inventory; Kenexa)

OPQ (Occupational Personality Questionnaire; SHL)

PIP (Personality Interview Profiler; PIP)

RPQ (Rapid Personality Questionnaire; Kenexa)

WPI Select (Work Personality Index Select; Psychometrics Publishing)

Even more difficult to avoid are those assessments that do not include "personality" in their name, yet are clearly revealed to be personality tests in their accompanying literature and/or documentation. The following tests would fall into this second category:

Caliper Profile[11]

CDR Character Assessment[12]

Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression[13]

Devine Inventory/Select Best[13]

DiSC[14]

Employee Screening Questionnaire[14]

Gordon Personal Profile Inventory[13]

MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)[15]

Personal Style Inventory (PSI, two different tests with same name from different publishers)[16, 17]

Profiles International Tests (ProfileXT™, ProfileXTSales™, Profiles Performance Indicator™, Profiles Sales Indicator™, Customer Service Profile™, ProfileEasy™)[18]

Profilers Premium Placements Inc.,

Job-fit Assessments (The Achiever The Sales Achiever The Guardian, The Performer, The Scoreboard)[19]

Perhaps the most generally effective way to identify a personality test is to review the output of the measure. If the assessment produces a description of personality traits, then it can reasonably be considered a personality test. Some common personality traits assessed are:

Ego, Ego Strength, Ego Resilience, Empathy, Empathetic Outlook

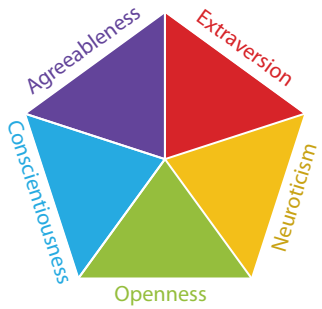
Big Five personality traits:

- Neuroticism
- Extraversion
- Openness to Experience
- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness

(e.g., DiSC = Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness)

Many assessments disguise the Big Five personality traits by using variations in the trait names such as Emotional Stability, Emotional Control, Sociability, Introversion, Openness, Intellectance, Cautiousness, Dependability, or Responsibility. A reader familiar with a feedback report for the Caliper Profile, the Hogan, or the PreVisor Assessment likely recognized some of these name variations. Likewise, these name variations are common to many assessments that claim to measure predictors of job performance but are actually measuring personality traits.

Keep in mind the Chally Assessment was specifically designed to predict success in a business environment and that plenty of case studies and testimonials are available to demonstrate how this approach has lead to great success for our clients.



Beyond Personality

Personality tests are commonly used for hiring in organizations. Personality tests attempt to measure a broad range of basic traits, such as the Big Five[1] Personality traits or Emotional Intelligence. Although these may provide useful information on how to describe a person, research has repeatedly shown that they do little to predict how well a person will perform in a given job.

Academic researchers are re-emphasizing what Chally Group Worldwide reported over 30 years ago – personality tests are simply too broad to predict on-the-job performance. Chally, on behalf of the US Justice Department, found it necessary to research solutions well beyond the accuracy of this type of assessment - to identify and measure very precise, job-specific competencies, behaviors, and skills that have been scientifically shown to predict on-the-job success. Chally's methodologies account for performance improvements of up to 35%, turnover reductions of 30% as well as provide the very general traits, and temperaments reported by personality-based instruments.

Unfortunately, much of the "research" reported in marketing materials, and even many published articles, could be explained by the powerful research phenomenon know as the "placebo" effect. This effect is the automatic improvement that occurs when any new effort is committed to, and focused on. Thus, medical research today must report the difference between the real drug and a "placebo" which can have no real effect in itself but will show apparent results often as much as 60% as strong as the real medicine. Unfortunately the placebo effect doesn't last much longer than the research effort to report it. This is why Chally does not rely on one or even a few validity studies to identify effective predictors. Chally has completed literally hundreds of studies, on samples as large as several thousand individuals, usually with objective and quantitative measures of actual job results. This has led Chally to develop databases of several hundred thousand salespeople, evaluations of over 7,000 sales forces, and detailed interviews with quantitative ratings of over 80,000 customers. Chally remains committed to:

"Solid Science...Better Results"

This white paper describes the many weaknesses of personality tests and their inability to predict job performance. Finally, it describes why behaviorally-based measures, like the Chally Assessment, should always be the preferred choice for assessments in hiring.

Chally is a talent management, sales improvement , and leadership development corporation providing personnel assessment and research services in 40 countries for over 35 years. Chally is recognized as an international technology leader in scientific assessment and prediction for selection, job alignment and leadership development, and for management assessment.

[1] See the article at http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/story.jsp?storyId=39419841
[2] Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy, & Schmitt, 2007a, p. 694.
[3] Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007.
[4] Tett, & Christiansen, 2007.
[5] Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy, & Schmitt, 2007b, p. 1046.
[6] Guion, 1965 p. 379, as cited in Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy, & Schmitt, 2007b, p. 1045.
[7] Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Vinchur et al., 1998.
[8] Petty & Krosnick, 1995.
[9] Miller (under review); Miller & Culbertson (under review); Miller, Tristan, & Leasher (2005).
[10] Dean, S. L., & Miller, C. E. (2009). Extraversion, customer ratings, and sales performance: A multilevel analysis. Poster presented at the 24th annual meeting of the Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA.
[11] http://www.caliperonline.com/index-organizational.shtml
[12] http://www.cdrassessmentgroup.com/Assessments/CharacterAssessment.asp
[13] http://www.panpowered.com/tests_assess_type_display.asp?type_id=7&type_name=Personality and Personal Skills Assessment
[14] http://www.discprofile.com/
[15] http://www.knowyourtype.com/
[16] http://www.hrdq.com/products/psi.htm
[17] http://www.bradworthley.com/store/pdf/RATechnicalPaper.pdf
[18] http://www.profilesinternational.com/SOL_Personality_Tests.aspx
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