

In this procedure, the usefulness of the test questions rests on the fact that they do, in fact, differentiate between groups who are presumed to have different degrees of the trait in question. The finding that such questions do distinguish between groups does not tell whether they do, in fact, reveal the basic personality trait under study.

All methods now available for evaluating personal characteristics suffer from inadequate information about the specific requirements of jobs, and inadequate measurement tools. There are, however, two major differences between the observational methods and the paper and pencil personality inventories.

(1) Generally, the observation methods can be designed to get at the kinds of behavior which the job is believed to demand, rather than to yield conclusions about poorly defined broad traits;

(2) The observation methods generally do not require or lend themselves to numerical scores to which trait names are easily attached. In contrast, the inventories do yield scores reported in trait terms, for example, sociability, submissiveness, hypochondriasis, et cetera.

Such scores are difficult to interpret even by properly trained professional persons. When recorded in personnel records, they become readily accessible to many persons who will read into the scores much that is not there, and may use them, unwittingly or otherwise, to justify personnel decisions.

B. Problems in using personality tests

There are a number of serious problems in the use of such paper and pencil personality tests in the Federal merit system:

(1) If the questions in such a test are to be useful, they must be based on knowledge by the employer as to the specific kinds of behavior, interests, and other personal characteristics that are required in the position to be filled.

Furthermore, the test questions must necessarily reflect the standards and values of management and the kind of behavior it expects of its employees in the work situation. For the most part, such information has not been developed in the kind of detail and specific language in which job requirements, such as aptitudes and skills, can be expressed.

For any organization to develop such information would require a continuing long-range research effort. In the absence of such an effort, it is unwarranted to assume that the answers by applicants to questions on such published tests are, in fact, related to the requirements of the job.

(2) The available personality inventories have been developed for clinical and counseling situations in which the cooperation of the applicant and a high degree of honesty can be assumed. The use and interpretation of such tests is a professional responsibility. The trained clinician can evaluate the test scores and the responses to individual test questions as a proper part of his total study of the person, of his culture, and of the circumstances surrounding the use of the tests.

However, when nonprofessionally trained persons simply administer these tests, compute overall scores, and then use the scores to label the applicant on such general traits as sociability, creativeness, and so on, the safeguards and professional standards of the clinical situation are violated. In employment use, particularly, the test becomes