

Right Person - Right Job

A person seven feet tall walks through an airport crowd...

People immediately think, "He must be a basketball player. I wonder what team he plays for."

Those people may not even play basketball. Most are certainly not basketball coaches, yet their observation is reasonable and clearly logical to most of the crowd. Even without specialized knowledge of the game of basketball, the connection between height and the performance elements of the sport are obvious. Being tall is a marvelous advantage in basketball. Being short is an extreme disadvantage. It takes extraordinary talent and exceptionally hard work for a short person to succeed at the game. Even then, their accomplishments are marked more for the novelty of their size rather than in comparison to the accomplishments of taller players. Their careers also tend to be brief, because of the strain and punishment they receive from their bigger competitors.

Similar and equally defining connections exist for almost every job. Successful performance in management, sales, manufacturing, administration, finance, and customer service depends upon certain key traits and abilities that are as unchanging as height. From plumbing to banking; from truck driving to health care; from engineering to child care; and from teaching to mechanics, it is the core strengths and abilities of the individual and their match to the capabilities of each job that determine how effectively they can perform that job.

Anyone can do anything, but the cost in energy and stress depends upon how well a person's strengths match those needed for the job. In his book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001), Marcus Buckingham reported on the conclusions derived from the extensive research conducted over the years by The Gallup Organization to correlate job performance with "unique talents and strengths". Here the reference is to personality traits. Gallup reached two clear conclusions:

1. Each person's strengths are unique and enduring.
2. The greatest potential for growth is found in the areas of greatest strength.

Gallup's findings echoed many previous, but less popularized, confirmations of the direct link between personality traits and job performance. In 1991, Dr. Robert Hogan concluded his review of individual differences and personality stating, "Meta-analysis of 25 years suggests that personality inventories can make valid contributions to personnel selection and assessment."

In a more academic approach, Professor Adrian Furnham, in his book *Personality at Work* (1991), cites a number of significant advantages attendant to the use of assessments in selection processes.

- Tests provide objective and quantified information, which means that individuals can be more easily compared on the same criteria. In interviews, different questions are often asked of different candidates, or candidates' answers to the same questions are often so varied as to defy easy comparison.
- Tests give explicit and specific results on abilities rather than vague, ambiguous, coded platitudes that are so often found in references. A percentage on a normative test makes for much clearer thinking about personal characteristics than terms like satisfactory or high-flyer.
- Assessments are comprehensive in that they cover all of the basic dimension of personality and ability, and therefore give a complete picture of individual functioning.
- Personality and cognitive assessments are fair because they eliminate favoritism or discrimination.

- Personality tests increase the behavioral language of those that use them. They gain effective concepts of human behavior which are effective in discussing employee interactions in the workplace.

Perhaps the strongest summary of Professor Furnham's finding is found in the Forward of his book: "Despite overall similarities, all human beings are unique; they differ in intelligence, personality and special abilities...They also differ, as a consequence, in their ability to do satisfactory work in any of the many jobs, professions and callings. Some are good at the job; some are not; taking quite simple occupations, it is usually found that the good do twice as much work as the bad. As the work becomes more complex and demanding, the ratio becomes even greater."

My own experience offered real life confirmations of this. For four years, I was the principal channel for hundreds of consultants, delivering thousands of assessment-based projects. Each of these projects examined the correlation of cognitive abilities and personality traits with job performance. Myriads of jobs were involved, across hundreds of industries throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and even reaching as far as China. In virtually every single case, there was a clear connection between the job performers' traits and abilities and their ability to perform the job. The impact of this connection on traditional concepts of hiring, training and management were discussed in my book, *Right Person - Right Job, Guess or Know* (1996). "If Job Fit (personality traits and cognitive abilities necessary for the job) is unsatisfactory, it is almost impossible to increase performance with training or coaching."

This connection has been acknowledged for many years, but the challenge has been the usability of sound assessment instruments and the accessibility of the resulting information. The paradox was this: simple and easy to use instruments, such as DISC or Myers-Briggs, were enjoyable and interesting exercises, but offered little in the way of practical, decision-level information. There were excellent instruments available, but they were complex and difficult to use without expert guidance. The information produced was sound, but again, extensive training or professional help was needed to implement the program. These complications, plus the cost of better assessments, precluded any widespread use.

Still, the truth was out there, as we know from the X-Files. Jim Collins could not have been more direct in his book, *Good to Great* (2001). He states, "Get the right people on the bus. Get the wrong people off the bus. Get the right people into the right seats on the bus...People are not your most important asset; the right people are."

BestWork DATA is not a pioneer in the concept of matching the strengths and abilities of individuals with the strengths and abilities needed for success in a particular job. BestWork follows a long path of extensive research and stands on a foundation of an even greater record of practical application over the last twenty years. Where BestWork DATA is a thought leader is in making the power of assessment information available to anyone. Whether that person is a human resources professional, a business owner, a production line supervisor, a recruiter, a college student, or a job seeker, BestWork believes that opportunities for better decisions are yours when presented properly.

Chuck Russell
Chairman and CEO, BestWork DATA

References

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