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The Effectiveness of Personality Tests in Predicting an Individual's Job Performance

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This study is designed for the purpose of determining whether personality tests are effective in predicting an individual's job performance. I chose to research this topic because of my interest in industrial psychology. In addition, there are a number of businesses that require potential employers to complete a personality test.

Bates (2002), addresses the fact that personality assessments can be extremely useful in hiring the right person for a particular job. Employment tests seem to be on the rise and roughly 40 percent of employers use them. In addition, human resource professionals should expect to pay a significant amount of money for quality assessments, but in the long run it can cost less than hiring the wrong person. Bent (1996), emphasizes that personality tests should only be used as a supplement to other sources of information. No test is perfect and a person should be evaluated on additional criteria. Flynn (2002), informs employers that tests that are improperly handled can leave companies vulnerable to lawsuits. First, the employers must make sure that the test has gone through a validation procedure. Secondly, the language used in the test must not be biased (assuming everyone has the same education, culture, etc.). Additionally, there have been cases in which individuals have felt the test invaded their privacy.

Extensive research has shown that personality tests can be extremely useful if they are properly handled, but should be used only as a supplement to other sources of information. Based on such research, I believe that if a group of applicants is given a personality test, it will be effective in predicting their job performance as an employee.

Method

Participants

The study will involve males and females that are applying for various positions at a Target store in O'Fallon, Missouri. Target was chosen because it has a variety of employment opportunities available. Individuals applying for cashier, stock, and pricing positions will be participating. There will be a total of 90 participants being studied. 30 participants will be hired for each position, in which 15 will be hired with an interview and personality test and 15 hired solely on the basis of an interview. A female researcher will conduct experimental sessions.

Materials

Participants will be given Paul Costa's and Robert McRae's NEO-PI-R (Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness-Personality Inventory Revised). It is a self-report inventory that assesses the Big Five Traits of neuroticism, extraversion-introversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. It consists of 240 items and for each item the participant will indicate the extent to which he or she disagrees on a five-point scale. In addition, each of the Big Five traits is divided into six facets. As a result, there is an individual profile of 30 scores. Some sample questions include: I have an eye for detail; I do things my own way; I do not have a good imagination; I do just enough work to get by.

The study will be conducted at Target in a small office setting, where a table, chair, and pen will be provided for the participants.

Procedure

The study will be following the employment process of a Target store in O'Fallon, Missouri. There will be two hiring procedures. For one group of people, a personality test will be given along with an interview. For the other group, only an interview will be required.

Both groups will be given the same interview questions by the same female interviewer, but the NEO-PI-R will be administered to one group by the interviewer. All 240 test items will be identical for each candidate. They will have approximately one hour to finish the test. When finished, they will hand it in to the interviewer so that the researcher can calculate their scores.

Implications

If my hypothesis were supported, the group that was given the NEO-PI-R will have more efficient employees. If my hypothesis were not supported, the group that was not administered the NEO-PI-R will have more efficient employees, or there will be no difference in the two groups.

Efficiency will be measured on the following criteria: number of complaints received, number of days the person called in sick, maintains an appropriate appearance, shows up for work on time, and takes breaks according to how long they are expected to. Specifically, the cashier can be evaluated on how many times their drawer has been even and how long of lines they have. The stock associate can be evaluated on the number of items they check in per day and if they are being placed in the appropriate areas. The pricing associate can be evaluated as to the number of times merchandise is signed incorrectly and how long it takes for them to price merchandise.

Using the NEO-PI-R, specific points are represented for the individual's answer to a question. The results can be graphed and it is detectable if they scored low or high in the Big Five Traits. For example, if a person were applying at Target for a job in which they would ring customers' merchandise, you would expect that they would score high on the trait of extroversion and agreeableness. Their scores could reflect their potential in a particular position. In addition, a t-test would be used to analyze the data statistically because I am comparing between two groups; one hired solely on the basis of an interview and another hired as a result of their scores on the NEO-PI-R, along with the interview.

Personality tests can provide extra information about ability, skill, and overall functioning in a place of work. In interviews, people can present themselves differently from how they truly behave at work. People tend to portray themselves in the best possible light and hiding any weaknesses. In addition, personality tests can save a company time and money. Hiring someone who presented well at an interview only to find problems with their work performance can be expensive and frustrating. Selecting the right people for a role ensures the investment of time and money is put into the right people. On the other hand, personality tests should only be one form of the employment process. They can help in the selection of applicants, but it is not the primary basis for selecting an applicant.

References

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