

Assessing Personality as Part of Talent Management

Put simply, Talent is something that is above average although there are many definitions. At Arimo Consulting, we define talent as `Delivery of consistent, near perfect performance`. Global organisations such as GE, Shell, Vodafone, Walmark, British Airways etc endorse this definition yet often they ignore the effects of individual differences such as personality. Research at Arimo Consulting Ltd suggests that assessing personality may provide a greater proportion of the talent jigsaw puzzle than many senior HR professionals believe and this may surprise many of the talent experts.

TALENT = `Delivery of consistent, near perfect performance`

Fundamentally, performance in almost any role involves highly complex activities that tap into our skills of logic and emotions. Activities, which often change at short notice, more often require team working practices as oppose to individual performance. So, average performance requires a broad personality mix of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to experience. It is not surprising to learn that many talent management programmes use this during the assessment process. However, the extent to which a person may perform in the new role is often still a mystery to line management. So, we need to clarify what the benefits of personality assessment really are.

The Science of Personality

The 5 broad personality factors comes from over 20 years of research. In broad terms, C is a valid predictor across performance measures in all occupations studied. C and ES are positively correlated with job performance in virtually all jobs. C is somewhat more strongly related to overall job performance than is ES. Employees with high scores on C should also obtain higher performance at work. Specific dimensions of work such as team working require C and ES. Employees who approach training in a careful, thorough and persistent manner (High in C) are more likely to benefit from training. ES and C are positively related to teamwork performance and C will be positively related to performance training. E has been found to be related to job performance in occupations where interactions with others are a significant portion of the job. Higher scores with E are associated with greater training proficiency. One explanation for this finding is that highly extraverted trainees are more active during training and ask more questions. A appears to have high predicative validity in occupations that require considerable interpersonal interaction, particularly when interactions involve helping, cooperating and nurturing others. In fact in these settings, A may be the best predictor of job performance. It appears that employees who are intellectual, curious, and imaginative and have broad interests are more likely to benefit from training and therefore A is related to rating of teamwork, whereas O is related to training.

So, it appears that the research does support personality assessment within the work place because we can predict things such as attention to mundane tasks, motivation to learn, tolerance of others and team working. Research also suggests that where personality is combined with General Mental Ability (GMA), superior performance is identified. At Arimo Consulting we suggest that high levels of GMA, C and A predict higher overall performance. Collective interaction of individual GMA and personality within team settings has also appears to be a valid predictor of performance, specifically where teams are self-managed and fully autonomous. Therefore, personality testing can be seen as a useful selection tool where an individual is being considered for a specific team within which to work.

Some Criticisms

There are some criticisms of personality testing. Specifically, what is a candidate comparing him or her self against when responding to personality questions? Ipsative measures make comparisons against the person in isolation whereas normative questions force comparison against the whole population. Both approaches have merit but from a developmental perspective we argue that ipsative is the most effective whereas the normative approach a fairer technique for broad selection.

Culture and Personality

Personality has been shown to be highly relevant across different cultural situations and contexts. An alternative to the FFM is the Global Personality Inventory (GPI) proposed by Schmit et al, (2000). The instrument is significant because it has the potential to further our understanding of personality-performance linkages in different countries, an area of weakness with the FFM. Though personality may not be different across cultures, the expression of personality is highly likely to differ. Accordingly, the GPI has made progress from a multi-cultural perspective, which is important where interanational HR interventions are being developed. In overall terms, the GPI represents an important step forward in the measurement of FFM dimensions.

Conclusions

There are some clear benefits of using personality assessment as part of any talent management framework particularly because of changing work patterns. The key benefits are being able to measure suitability for 1) team which is best achieved with a high mix of C and A, 2) training potential which is closely linked to E and O and 3) mentoring or nurturing which requires strong E and A. The GPI is providing an important contribution to the questions of cultural variations with personality testing and assessment. Although current research supports personality stability across cultures, our experience at Arimo Consulting Ltd suggests that many of the current assessment tools do not provide sufficient reliability. But of far greater importance is overcoming candidates misconceptions of personality assessment particularly where they are seeking work in a global market.

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