

# THE NEW WORKER

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### **Measuring Temperament in Vocational Evaluation**

What is temperament and what impact does an individual's temperament have on his or her career development and occupational compatibility? Career theorists and vocational rehabilitation professionals understand that temperament, or personality type, exerts a motivating and directing influence that fundamentally shapes one's vocational development, occupational choices, and work productivity. However, vocational rehabilitation personnel, including those charged with doing forensic assessments, often neglect to measure work temperament or personality but still include that sometimes-critical factor in their projections or opinions of the examinee's disability, employability, and earning power.

In this commentary, I will outline a definition of temperament and speak to the importance of measuring and describing work personality in vocational assessment. I will make specific recommendations regarding the inclusion of personality data in forensic assessments often requested in workers' compensation, personal injury, and marital law litigation cases.

Vocational rehabilitation personnel employed in personal injury legal matters as vocational experts are tasked with the responsibility of discerning with "a reasonable degree of professional certainty" what work a person is qualified to do following the onset of injury, illness, or impairment. In workers' compensation litigation, vocational experts may be asked to describe why particular jobs might be available to an individual. In marital law, vocational experts are employed to assess an individual's capacities to work and earn money.

First, a point of clarification may be in order. Medical experts evaluate impairment. Vocational professionals assess occupational disability, residual employability, and earning power, often in the context of an individual's occupationally-significant health history. There is a notable difference between impairment and disability. Vocational rehabilitation personnel are trained to evaluate occupational disability. Physicians are not trained to assess vocational disability or employability.

With these distinctions in mind, I would like the reader to understand that an individual's employability is a function of numerous factors, including his or her age, education, work experience,

acquired skills, practiced avocations, measured abilities, expressed interests, and demonstrated – better still – *measured* work personality/temperament. In my experience, many vocational experts unfortunately fail to fully assess an individual’s employability and occupational fit by not utilizing psychometric tools, including objective measures of personality and temperament. Yet, we know that personality, or work temperament, is a critical factor with which an individual succeeds or fails to find and execute work-related tasks that are satisfactory to the individual and executed to the satisfaction of whom he or she works.

The late Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. John Lewis Holland (1919-2008), created a seminal career theory that spoke of “vocational choice” based on the idea that one’s occupational preferences were a “veiled expression of underlying character.” In an associated vocational development model, Dr. Holland originally labeled six personality types as motoric, intellectual, aesthetic, supportive, persuasive, and conforming, and later changed them to **Realistic** (Doers), **Investigative** (Thinkers), **Artistic** (Creators), **Social** (Helpers), **Enterprising** (Persuaders), and **Conventional** (Organizers). Dr. Holland believed the choice of a vocation is an expression of personality. His resultant **RIASEC** model of vocational match is often considered in measures of interest or career themes, but Dr. Holland was first and foremost a career theorist who researched vocational personalities and created occupational development tools to reflect a person’s vocational preferences based on personality characteristics.

In the creation of the 16 Personality Factor (16PF) Questionnaire, Raymond B. Cattell, Ph.D., analyzed data through a statistical method of “factor analysis” to summarize human personality traits into 16 continuums. The data he analyzed came from questionnaires and tests he developed, as well as other sources such as student report cards and employee evaluations. Dr. Cattell’s daughter, Heather E. P. Cattell, and others further refined the 16PF to make it highly predictive of occupational compatibility.

The California Psychological Inventory (CPI) was created much like the well-known Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2). However, unlike the MMPI-2, the CPI was created to assess not psychopathology, but “folk concepts” of normal personalities that are often employed in school and work settings. The CPI is a useful tool in predicting long- and short-term work behaviors and ultimately vocational matches.

In an article titled “Personality Measurement and Employment Decisions,” which appeared in the May 1996 edition of the *American Psychologist*, Robert Hogan, Joyce Hogan, and Brent W. Roberts stated, “In our view, what people do – their behavior – is a function of the kind of people they are – their personalities.” More than 20 years ago, these psychologists, finalized their article with, “...we want to suggest in the strongest possible terms that the use of well-constructed measures of normal personality in preemployment screening will be a force for equal employment opportunity, social justice, and increased productivity.”

It has been both my experience and disappointment over the past 40 years of helping people make life-changing decisions, including those with their career paths, that objective personality tools are infrequently utilized in assessment. Unfortunately, this is much to the detriment of the person being evaluated or to the chagrin of stakeholders, including employers, who have a right to know the person’s occupational potentials.

Personality measurement in vocational evaluation may be defined as the use of standardized psychometrics to reveal the emotional state and character traits of individual’s in order to better judge

their work behaviors, rather than relying on the examinee's self-report and/or anecdotal disclosures, which by nature may include bias and misinformation. Personality testing can be either subjective or objective.

Subjective testing allows the person being evaluated to project his or her feelings, perceptions, and prejudices into test responses. Objective personality testing measures an individual's characteristics with mechanisms that eliminate or isolate the test-taker's personal bias or efforts to control the outcomes of tests. As a result, objective personality testing is deemed more valid and reliable. It is less vulnerable to subject manipulation and can be more useful in counseling and decision-making.

Since standardized testing in vocational-disability assessment is equivalent to the reliability of medical diagnostic testing (i.e., performing x-rays or CT scans), simply taking a history and performing subjective testing are hardly considered sufficient given all the tools available to offer an accurate vocational diagnosis and prognosis for appropriate employment. Personality testing can and should be part of a more complete psychometric battery, and there are many objective personality tests that describe normal personality and occupational compatibility.

Many currently available measures reflect the so-called "Big Five" personality constructs, namely, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism, the latter of which refers to Emotional Stability. The "Big Five" is thought to be one of the most frequently validated models of personality assessment. There are numerous personality measures that capture data reflecting the "Big Five." The Myers-Briggs, CPI, NEO-PI-R, and 16PF are only a sample of personality tests that provide useful information regarding an individual's occupational compatibility and anticipated work behaviors.

Recently, I had the opportunity to study, review, and comment on the Work Personality Survey (WPS) for the *Mental Measurement Yearbook* published by the BUROS Center for Testing. I recommend the BUROS library of standardized tests as a resource for anyone interested in utilizing objective personality testing in career counseling, occupational evaluation, preemployment screening, and forensic/vocational disability assessment. The WPS reflects the continuing development of psychometrics that yield ecologically valid data regarding what one can expect from an individual as he or she interacts with and contributes to the world of work.

Many personality measures can be computer scored, and interpretation is made easier through the test publisher's computer-generated reports. An examiner's competencies in administration, scoring, and interpretation of objective personality testing can only enhance the assessment process that too often relies solely on a history alone. Thorough assessment increases the appreciation of an individual's "real world" potentials.

Think of it in this way – if you had what you suspected was a broken ankle, would you not want the examining physician to order an x-ray of your ankle to better visualize the ankle structure? Likewise, if you requested a vocational evaluation or a career assessment, would you not want the evaluator to perform standardized testing, including a measurement of personality, to match work potential and compatibility?

## **A Definition of Ecological Validity**

Upon completion of any research endeavor or study – including, perhaps, the administration of standardized tests during vocational evaluation – it is imperative to determine a study’s validity in order to gauge its success and effectiveness. One approach that researchers take in measuring validity is to consider ecological validity, which specifically represents how much a study’s results can be seen as applicable to or representative of the natural world.

In Ecological Validity of Neuropsychological Testing, Robert J. Sbordone, Ph.D., defines ecological validity as “the functional and predictive relationship between the patient’s performance on a set of neuropsychological tests and the patient’s behavior in a variety of real-world settings (e.g., at home, work, school, community).” Standardized testing can have more or less ecological validity. A study may produce “high” or “low” ecological validity, depending on how closely that study mirrors a participant’s real-life encounters with the natural world.

Ecological validity is an important factor when considering the results of any study conducted for research purposes. To learn more about ecological validity, visit the following links:

[http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781848721166/chapter7/Key-issues\\_Ecological-Validity.pdf](http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781848721166/chapter7/Key-issues_Ecological-Validity.pdf)

<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-glossary-of-human-computer-interaction/ecological-validity>

## **Put Your Strengths in Action**

One of the focuses of positive psychology is the study of positive individual traits, rather than abnormalities or weaknesses. In *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (2004), Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman describe and classify positive traits in people. They outlined 24 character strengths (e.g., Bravery, Curiosity, Honesty, Love of Learning, and Humor) that are the fundamental elements that encompass goodness in human beings regardless of culture or belief.

Recent research has found that using character strengths at work can help improve job satisfaction, productivity, and the ability to better cope with work stress. The Values in Action (VIA) Survey is a personality test that measures an individual’s character strengths. To learn more about the different character strengths and/or to take the VIA Survey to find out about your own strengths, visit: <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu>.

## **Fit Your Employment to Your Personality**

There tends to be a lot of talk about how companies can select potential employees based on their personality traits, but one should not ignore that it is just as important for a potential employee to choose a company or even a career based on what traits would best suit his or her personality.

Obviously, one of the most important steps in attaining job satisfaction is finding a career that you not only enjoy but are well suited to perform. For people who are uncertain what types of careers would be best suited to their personalities or abilities, standardized testing, which includes interest inventories, would be beneficial. This is especially helpful to young adults entering the workforce for the first time or to people who are looking to change careers to increase their job satisfaction. Informal versions of these tests can be found online. In addition, firms, such as CEC Associates, Inc., can be hired to perform an in-depth analysis.

Another important aspect of job satisfaction is finding a company or organization that best fits your personality and work habits. The first step to finding clues about a potential new employer is to do research. Check out their website and learn not only what they do, but what their professional goals are for their organization. Some companies are involved in charity work and/or making their workplace enjoyable for their employees – and likely talk about it on their website, blog, or social media sites.

The second step is to gather information during the interview process. Joe Konop, a contributing author on Forbes.com, makes a very important statement: “You are there to *ask* questions, too.” He states one of the three top things to do during a job interview is to find out if the employer is the right fit for you. He suggests asking questions such as: what skills and experiences make an ideal candidate for the position; what has the interviewer enjoyed most about working for the company; and what are the people like with which you will potentially be working. For more on what to discuss during the interview process, check out Mr. Konop’s [article](#).

In an ideal world, the best workplace scenario is one in which the employer *and* the employee are both reaching satisfaction. For this to be achieved, clearly both parties need to do their research.

## Earth Day 2017

At the end of April, the [Earth Day Network](#) (EDN) launched its three-year campaign promoting environmental and climate literacy on Earth Day. The goals of this movement include educating citizens about environmental issues, as well as promoting civic engagement and public outreach endeavors to help individuals spread environmental literacy to their local communities and beyond.

The EDN has toolkits available on their website to help community leaders hold their own teach-in events, so that anyone who is interested can become a part of their campaign. The EDN hopes to reach 5 billion acts of environmental service and plant 7.8 billion trees by Earth Day’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020.