

# Using Personality Measures in Personnel Selection: Reasons for Optimism, Reasons for Concern

*Or*

Holding Two Pair, Fives Over Threes, in a High-Stakes Game

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# The Problem

- Personality *should* work, but in many cases it *doesn't* seem to work as a selection tool
- If we could do it right, personality would often be a very useful tool
- We rarely if ever do it right
- Personality measures are a very mixed bag - like holding two low pairs in a high-stakes poker game

# The Past

- “ it is difficult ... to advocate, with a clear conscience, the use of personality measures in most situations as a basis for making employment decisions about people” (Guion & Gottier, 1965, p. 160).

# The Present

- More optimism about the relevance of personality, based largely on a series of meta-analyses starting with Barrick & Mount (1991)
- Still some nagging worry about issues like faking

# The Present

- “From a practical standpoint, recent findings...suggest that the controversy over whether personality tests can be useful for prediction of employee performance is no longer pertinent” (Kanfer, Ackerman, Murtha, & Goff, 1995, p. 597).

# What Has Changed?

- In the 50's and 60's, validities seemed pretty low
- In the 90's validities were still pretty low, with mean observed validities in the low teens
- **Not much has changed, except for our standards**

# Reasons for Pessimism

- Weak theory
  - Functional relationships not articulated well
- Haphazard matching of constructs and jobs
- Poorly-specified constructs (e.g., integrity)
- Poor measures
- Guion & Gottier raised these concerns 40 years ago

# Reasons for Optimism

- Better taxonomies
- Good measures can be found - if people would only start caring about quality
- The theory that personality really has little to do with behavior in the workplace is almost certainly wrong

# What Does It Take to Do This Well?

- Strong theory linking situational constructs with personality constructs -
  - in what domains should particular constructs matter?
- Good understanding of functional forms
  - too much Agreeableness is not always a good thing
- Good measures
- Defensible decision rules
  - Should you use rank-order scoring, cutoffs, etc.?

# Why is This So Hard?

- In cognitive domain, more is better, tests are almost interchangeable, constructs are all inter-related
- In personality domain, none of the above hold
- We are victims of our own success in the domain of cognitive ability