

# PERSONALITY TESTS: PROS, CONS, AND HOW TO CHOOSE



We all approach work and life with a mix of strengths and weaknesses. This can come in the form of aptitude and abilities, such as the ability to understand complex financial issues or the ability to persuade. Organizations need people of varied talents and abilities, and not everyone can do everything well. Great sales people often make lousy accountants, and vice versa.

Personality is part of this. We all have personalities that are unique to who we are, with strengths and weaknesses in regard to our work life. In fact, a personality strength often has a very direct corresponding weakness. For instance, a manager who is highly detailed and diligent may struggle with micromanagement. Inversely, a manager who is a great delegator may struggle to stay up to date on the progress of their subordinates' work. The key to success is not in trying to be someone we are not, but in awareness of our strengths and weaknesses and the ability to leverage our strengths and appropriately compensate for our weaknesses.

Personality testing has long been used in the business world to help gain personal insight. That insight, when accurate, can be a key in leveraging strengths and mitigating weaknesses. Also known as psychometrics, personality testing first gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, primarily with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This kind of test has gained and lost favor in the business community over time as questions arose regarding their overall validity. These questions continue today, as demonstrated by a September 2019 New York Times article entitled "Personality Tests are the Astrology of the Office". Not exactly a ringing endorsement.

These tests can be interesting to take and can feel very insightful,

but do they actually measure how we fit in the greater interpersonal world? Do they offer adequate feedback that help a person improve in their interactions? Do they measure a person's reputation, or just their perception of themselves?

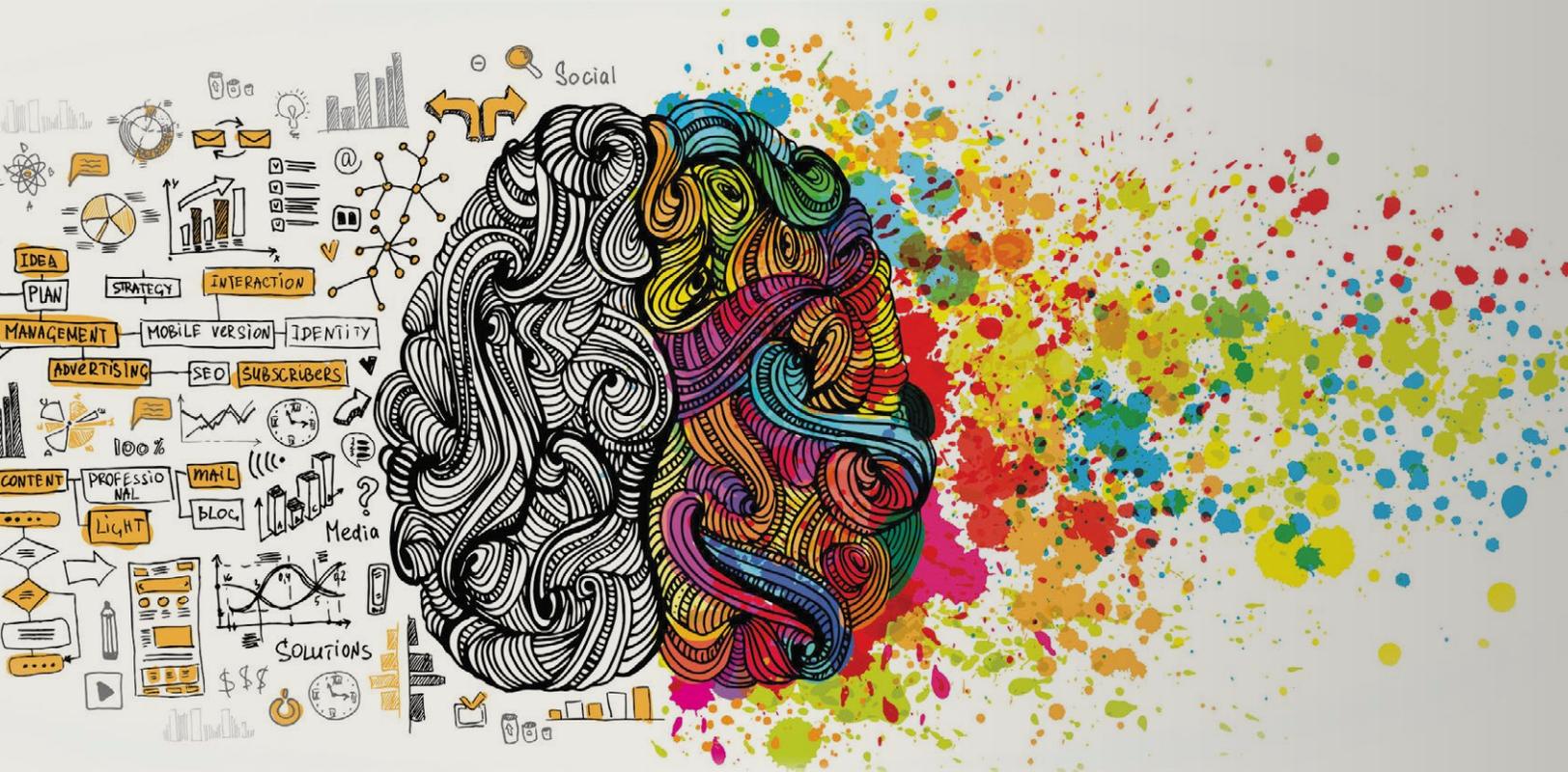
Many of the tests available today actually measure what is referred to as a person's identity, or our perception of ourselves. For those of us who have taken these tests, this is somewhat obvious, because the tests ask us questions about us. In reality, how we think of ourselves is often very different than the way others perceive us.

Sigmund Freud once wrote "the you that you know is hardly worth knowing". This is because what we think or know about ourselves is often a very poor indicator of who we really are. It is a good indicator of our likes, dislikes, and tendencies, but it is influenced by the story that we tell ourselves. Tests that measure our own perceptions offer a poor reflection of how we are seen by others.

Personality testing in the workplace has been somewhat controversial for that reason. For every person who sees it as a valuable tool, there is another who views it as hokey or even detrimental. Much of the concern is valid.

Many of the tests summarize the immensely complex world of personality into categories, colors, acronyms, etc., which invariably fall short of genuine insight into how a person actually interacts in the world and the reputation they have created by their behaviors, attitudes, and emotions.

The psychological community has recognized the shortcomings of many methods and some tests have addressed them. There have been



significant advances related to correlating an individual's response to particular questions and their actual reputation in the workforce. With the more advanced methods, an individual may answer a question regarding how they perceive themselves, but the results of the test actually measure how they are perceived by others. This has been accomplished through the correlation of hundreds of thousands of data points over many years.

There has also been progress toward representing the complexity of personality through descriptive ranges rather than a set number of types. For instance, representing someone as an introvert or an extrovert ignores much of what makes us who we are. In reality, introversion and extroversion can only be measured through a scale that measures the various aspects of introversion and extroversion in a number of contexts. Pigeon holing someone into two, four, or six categories of introversion and extroversion falls short of an accurate description.

The best testing methodology goes beyond the compilation of data into a report. The best approach utilizes a trained interpreter to work with the subject being tested, going over the data, and co-creating the actual results as they talk through the data and what the subject learns through it. Relating the information from the test to an individual's past experiences is a profound method of self-discovery. The information from the test can be further recalled and related to future experiences as well, causing the learning and benefit of the test to continue, perhaps for a lifetime.

Psychometric testing has many applications in the business world. Personal and leadership development is one the most common, as is succession planning. When evaluating people for future roles and

developing them to fit those roles, a deep understanding of one's personality and how they are perceived by others is imperative. Psychometrics can help in understanding team dynamics and how to better function in a team environment. They can also be used to determine the collective culture of a team or an organization, which can be invaluable in the recruiting process. Understanding the individual culture of a candidate compared to the culture of the organization can avoid the inevitable turnover that occurs when an individual's values, preferences, and tendencies do not match that of the organization.

Psychometric tests are valuable, but they are not all created equal. When choosing a test, make sure it has been highly scrutinized and has very high validity through research by the organization that created the test and third party evaluations. If they cannot demonstrate the evaluation of hundreds of thousands of data points over several decades, the test may not have a high degree of accuracy. It's also good to make sure that a test has stood up well in the court system, especially regarding selection and succession planning. Last but not least, avoid tests that simply churn out a report and place people into a set number of categories. Our personalities are far too complex for a simple explanation.

Morrison has adopted and is certified to provide the Hogan Assessment. The Hogan Assessment has been scrutinized and verified by many third party studies over the last 30 years and has stood up well in the court system. We believe it is one of a small number of truly valid tests available, and in our opinion, is the best option for use in the business community. Please contact us for more information, and how the Hogan Assessment might work for you.