Individual Assessment[1][2]

Industrial-Organizational Psychology ("I-O Psychology") is a field of study and practice that focuses on the application of psychological principles to the workplace (Landy & Conte, 2010). Past research in this field has demonstrated that individual characteristics such as personality traits, knowledge, skills, and abilities are some of the largest contributors to occupational performance (Lubinski, 2000; Wright, Kacmar, McMahan, & Deeleeuw, 1995). As a result, individual assessment— measuring and quantifying the *amount* of a characteristic that an individual possesses— is critical for understanding and predicting work-related behaviors.

In the workplace, I-O Psychologists employ individual assessments across all stages of employment. Assessments are used most frequently in the areas of selection or development of job candidates or incumbents, and can provide much value to organizations (Jeanneret & Silzer, 1998). For example, they can be used to eliminate applicants who do not have the skills necessary for a job or to identify incumbents who are well-suited to moving in to leadership roles. Assessments can also be used to measure employee attitudes that predict who will leave an organization (Wright & Bonett, 2007), to understand what makes an organization's culture unique from others (Hofstede, et al, 1990), and for a wide variety of other purposes. Ultimately, assessment allows I-O Psychologists to collect rich, detailed data about individuals within an organization that can be used to produce real-world benefits.

Modern assessments can be used to measure many different characteristics, including cognitive ability, physical ability, personality, integrity, and attitudes and interests (Guion, 1998; Murphy, 1996). Assessments are often combined, which allows I-O Psychologists to evaluate more than one of these content areas and form a more complete picture of an individual. These modern assessments can also take different forms (Scott & Reynolds, 2010). Written or electronic assessments require individuals to read and respond to a set of pre-written questions. The format of the questions can vary, asking respondents to evaluate their own levels of characteristics or to indicate what they would do in hypothetical situations, among other options (Scott & Reynolds, 2010). The interview, in which one or more individuals verbally prompt an interviewee with questions, is one of the most commonly used and researched methods (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Camsion, 2002; Salgado, Viswesvaran, & Ones, 2001). Interviews can evaluate several categories of applicant characteristics and qualifications (Landy & Conte, 2010), though research has shown that the effectiveness of this method is dependent on the traits it is seeking to assess and the format of the interview (Huffcut, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001). Simulations and work sample tests can be used to assess a person's ability to handle actual job-related tasks in realistic settings (Scott & Reynolds, 2010).

Not all assessments are created equal, though, and I-O Psychologists are keenly aware of this. It is important that assessments are both valid and reliable. Reliable assessments offer consistency in results. If a person completes an assessment twice, we would expect that their scores would be similar both times. If not, the test is unreliable and I-O Psychologists will be unable to trust the results. When an assessment is valid, it is measuring what it intends to measure: the information is accurate. If a person completes an assessment designed to measure a certain characteristic, I-O Psychologists want to be certain that the assessment is not actually measuring something different. In addition to these, assessments should also be used in accordance with legal, professional, and ethical guidelines (Ployhart, Schneider, & Schmitt, 2006).

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Individual assessment is an area of critical importance to I-O Psychologists. Assessments allow both researchers and practitioners in this field to understand, measure, and predict the vast array of human personality traits, knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and other characteristics. It is an area of study and application that is developing rapidly, with I-O Psychologists making contributions and enhancements based on research, analysis of data, and the results of business application. Cross-disciplinary research and application will continue to enhance the practice of individual assessment, ensuring continuous adaptation to the constant evolution of organizations and employee best practices.

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