



Using Behavioral Tests for Selection, Identification of Top Talent and Leadership Development: TAIS INVENTORY Advantage

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This paper is being written for individuals who are already using *The Attentional and Interpersonal Style* (TAIS) inventory, as well as for those who are in the process of considering its use. The article has two purposes:

- To provide a summary of recent opinions and issues relating to the use of personality inventories like TAIS inventory for selection, talent management and leadership assessment and development.
- To explore how TAIS inventory can be differentiated from other personality inventories.

Over the past 70 years, the use of psychological tests for selection, screening, development and succession planning has waxed and waned in direct relationship to the pressure being placed on the corporation to find qualified people to fill critical assignments (Banks, 1995). From our perspective, the demand for behavioral testing is growing and will continue to increase much more dramatically in the next few years because of the need not only to assess the “fit” of a particular candidate for a position but also the need to develop and train that same individual once s/he has been hired or promoted. Identifying those who are high potential for increased responsibility in the organization is becoming an important, board level initiative globally.

As technological and business complexity rises, we are seeing a rapid disintegration and redistribution of traditional management models (Lawton, 2007) in favor of the “matrix” or multipoint roles and responsibilities. In today's business climate, individuals must learn to perform under pressure in largely unstructured environments. Companies must respond more quickly and often have to make critical decisions before all of the information is available. Organizations need to put the right people in the right positions, and those people have to be able to communicate effectively and collaborate with each other while functioning as a team. Recent research is providing compelling evidence that behavioral tests can add value.

Research Findings Relating to Management Success

DeVries (1992) reported the failure rate for senior executives in corporate America is higher than 50%. Given the harm a single individual can cause in today's market place, that failure rate can no longer be tolerated. The reasons for failure are most often associated with decision-making issues and/or interpersonal conflicts resulting from arrogance, untrustworthiness, insensitivity, inability to confront issues, and an inability to delegate (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). One of the biggest predictors of success as a manager, and when absent, one of the best indicators of problems, is the ability to self-monitor, to have an accurate perception of one's own strengths and weaknesses (Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991; Ellis, 1988). In short, a highly developed self awareness.

Hogan, Hogan, and Roberts (1996) in an article in the *American Psychologist* have made a strong argument for the use of psychological tests in selection, screening, and training. A quick summary of their main points includes the following:

- “The data are reasonably clear that well constructed personality measures are valid predictors of job performance, and they can enhance fairness in the employment process (p. 469).”
- There is no evidence whatsoever that well-constructed personality inventories systematically discriminate against any ethnic or national group, age or gender. (p. 473).

- The base rate of deliberate faking in applicant populations is low (p. 475).
- Specific behavior is not more important than personality. “Any single behavior is a high fidelity, narrow bandwidth expression of a personality disposition. For example, we rarely want to predict how late an employee will be next Tuesday; rather, we are interested in a person's punctuality. To predict punctuality—a broad bandwidth behavioral characteristic—we need constructs of the same bandwidth (i.e., personality dispositions or conscientiousness).”
- Many personality researchers now agree that the existing personality inventories all measure essentially the same five broad dimensions of behavior, with varying degrees of efficiency (p. 470).

The “Big Five” Personality Variables

Factor-analytic studies of a wide range of multi-scale personality inventories like the 16PF, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, the California Psychological Inventory, TAIS inventory, NEO Personality Inventory, MMPI, and the Hogan Personality Inventory have identified five general factors that are common to all of them. It is these five factors that have been found to be predictive of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 2001).

On the surface, the discovery that all well constructed multi-scale personality inventories were measuring the same five fairly broad behavioral dimensions seems a little like “good news-bad news.” The good news is that there is some consensual validation for more global behavioral dispositions and that these have some predictive validity across gender, race, age and culture. The bad news is that people may have a tendency to over generalize and fail to differentiate between the different measures of personality. To understand this issue, and to see how TAIS inventory can be differentiated from its competition, let’s take a closer look at the “Big Five.”

- **“Surgency”**—this dimension reflects sociable, gregarious, assertive, leadership type behaviors. Some examples of scales measuring “surgency” include, dominance, capacity for status, social presence, need for power, assertiveness, and sociability. On TAIS inventory, surgency is most directly related to the leadership factor that consists of Control, Self-Esteem, Decision Making Style, Physical Orientation and/or Expression of Ideas.
- **Agreeableness**—this dimension separates individuals who are cooperative, sympathetic, warm, and good natured, from those who are aloof, cold and distant. Personality scales measuring agreeableness include likeability, friendly compliance, need for affiliation, relatedness and love. On TAIS inventory, agreeableness is most directly reflected in the extroversion factor that includes extroversion, expression of support and affection, and a low score on introversion. In addition, expression of thoughts/ideas and criticism and anger fall into this area as counter indicators.
- **“Intellectance”**—this dimension is associated with being imaginative, broad minded, and curious as opposed to concrete, practical, and narrow minded. Personality traits associated with this include openness to new experiences and change readiness. When smoothed for IQ (a concept we feel is irrelevant in most modern corporations because all but a few employees have now completed post secondary education and, as a result, are above the average of 100 on the traditional IQ assessment (Anderson, 1993)) the focus is on how someone is smart, not how smart they are. On TAIS inventory, this factor is most directly tied to external awareness, analytical preference, information processing, and expression of ideas.
- **Conscientiousness**—this dimension separates individuals who are hard working, focused, and persevering from those who are impulsive, irresponsible and undependable. Personality scales measuring this dimension include discretion, ambition, will to achieve, need for achievement, and dependability. On TAIS inventory high conscientiousness is indicated by low external and internal distractibility scores along with a high score on action/focus. Low tallies on orientation towards rules and risk coupled with a low to moderate score on expression of criticism and anger also predict conscientiousness.

- **Emotional stability**—this dimension of personality reflects calm, cool, steady, and self-confident behavior. It is the opposite of anxious, worried, insecure, and erratic behavior. On TAIS inventory emotional stability is most directly reflected in the performance anxiety factor that consists of internal distractibility (i.e. tendency to worry), a decision making style that is slow and careful, and a tendency to fall apart under pressure—reduced flexibility and performance under pressure.

Narrowing the Bandwidth

Given the consistency with which the “Big Five” dimensions of personality appear in well constructed, multi-dimensional personality inventories, and given the correlations between those dimensions and performance, Hogan et. al., (1996) suggest choice of a test should begin with one that measures these dimensions. “It is like making sure that the car you want to buy has an engine, brakes, steering system, transmission, and headlights (p. 470).” Having selected an inventory which at a minimum measures the ‘Big Five’, it is then pointed out that prediction of performance within a particular arena can be improved by sharpening your metrics, i.e., “narrowing the bandwidth.” This is accomplished by looking at individual scales rather than more global factors as the following quote from Hogan et. al. (1994) illustrates:

“We recommend selecting personality predictors on the basis of job analysis results because measures chosen in this way have significantly higher correlations with performance (Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). Next, we recommend matching measures and criteria in terms of their specificity (Pulakos, Borman, & Hough, 1988). Although the big-five dimensions are useful for summarizing results, they are the wrong bandwidth for many prediction problems; narrower measures of personality often yield higher validity coefficients (Cronbach, 1984; Hough, 1999; Shannon & Weaver, 1949).”

Shared and Unique Variance of Personality Measures

Looking at the names of scales that make up the different big five dimensions of personality, it is easy to see that, at least in the minds of their developers, they measure different things. Will to achieve, discretion, dependability, ambition, the ability to narrow one's focus of attention, external and internal distractibility are presumably quite different, yet they obviously share something in common. It is this common or shared variance that causes the measures to correlate with each other into a factor called “Conscientiousness.” Looking across a wide range of studies, this factor has been shown to have some limited ability to predict performance in the general work place. As Hogan, et. al. (1994) suggest, the ability to predict performance can be dramatically improved by:

- Getting a behavioral definition of “conscientious” behavior in a given work environment. Is it being on time? Is it following through on job assignments? Is it the ability to avoid distractions? Is it avoiding risks? Is it doing what you say you are going to do?
- Looking at the individual scales that provide the best direct measure of the desired behaviors that are relevant within the job setting.

For example, in discussing this issue with a leader at financial institution, it becomes clear that “conscientious behavior” within his particular work environment means staying focused on the task at hand, and avoiding external distractions (e.g., loud and disruptive conversations on a trading floor). While it is true that any of the above measures of conscientious behavior will probably have some small but statistically significant (assuming sample size is large enough) correlation with job performance (between .20 and .30), those measures that have a direct relationship to the criterion behaviors (e.g., distractibility and focus), should correlate more strongly (e.g., between .30 and .60).

TAIS Inventory Advantage One: The Ability to Predict Success in Management and Leadership Roles

When the assessment situation calls for both generalizing and more situational predictability, TAIS inventory is the instrument of choice. There are two key questions that demonstrate this point:

- Can we behaviorally define the characteristics leading to success and/or failure in a given job?

- Can we compare brief descriptions of the different scales to see which best reflect the job-relevant behaviors?

The “big five” personality dimensions are measures of individual *interpersonal* behaviors. These behaviors provide information about a person's management style, how s/he will be perceived by others, or whether or not the person will be a leader or a follower. Although interpersonal behaviors are critical determinants of success and/or failure in teamwork and management, they don't provide information about a person's ability to learn, nor do they provide all of the information required to understand why an individual behaves in a certain way in specific situations.

A person's “hardwiring” is reflected in one's *intrapersonal* characteristics. They predict how one interacts with someone else. TAIS inventory is uniquely designed to assess intra and interpersonal traits. To identify top talent for management and leadership positions, an understanding of desired behaviors (often linking to organizational leadership competencies) along with the required intra- and interpersonal traits will enable a very high predictive element to any selection process.

TAIS Inventory Advantage Two: The Ability to Predict Performance Under Pressure

The increasing complexity of today's corporate environment (e.g. matrix reporting, economic pressures etc.) puts pressure on our leaders. The underlying theory behind a behavioral inventory is important in this regard.

Tests are developed and administered for different reasons. Sometimes they are used to provide insight into, and/or understanding of, a person's behavior. Sometimes they are used to provide information about the likelihood an individual will behave in a particular way in the future (e.g. predicting an individual's likely success in a senior role.). Sometimes, they are used to provide direction to the individual and/or to a trainer or counselor so that behavior can be changed and/or modified. The ability to use an instrument in these different ways is directly tied to the theoretical framework (assumptions) underlying its development.

How closely coupled are a test's constructs (scales) to a unified theory of human performance? Does the theory lead to a better understanding, prediction, and development of performance-relevant behaviors?

Using the MMPI as an example, there is no performance-relevant theory that underlies the inventory. The test is useful for predicting the diagnostic label that is likely to be assigned to an individual. Because the scales that make up the test are not connected to each other and/or to day-to-day performance in any logical way, however, the test has little relevance to predicting job performance, to identifying an individual's relative strengths and/or weaknesses within a job setting, and/or to designing performance-enhancement or training programs.

Every inventory reflects the view (constructs) of the individual(s) who developed it. That means you need to look at the theory to determine how well it reflects the environment you work in. Some personality theorists, for example, have particular biases when it comes to “how people should behave” and/or “what makes a good leader.” When this is the case the inventories developed tend to categorize behavior as good or bad. A theorist who believes that good managers should motivate and lead by being positive and supportive and feels that an authoritarian and/or confrontive management style is bad will design an inventory with that bias built in.

A good example, other than performance under pressure, of the kind of bias we are referring to can be seen in most measures of introversion. Early theorists tended to associate introversion with anti-social, “shy” and withdrawn behavior. Thus, their measures of introversion reflect those behaviors, and individuals tend to be classified as either extroverted (seen as a positive characteristic), or introverted (seen as a negative characteristic). In contrast to this view, the theory underlying TAIS inventory defines introversion as the enjoyment of personal space and privacy, the ability to work and function in isolation along with a tendency to self evaluate vs. evaluate one's work and behaviors through the eyes and reactions of others. On TAIS inventory, individuals can score high, medium, or low on both extroversion and introversion and this is seen to be neutral, not good or bad.

Because of the link between increasing emotional arousal (as a result of pressure) and the breakdown in the individuals' control over their more dominant characteristics, TAIS inventory profiles allow you to predict both the conditions most likely to lead to problems for a person, and to predict the specific behaviors that will interfere with performance. We know, for example, that an individual who scores high on the control and self esteem scales, who makes quick decisions, and tends to have a confrontive management style, will be stressed when he or she is feeling

a sense of urgency (e.g., aware of time pressure) and is not in the driver's seat. We can predict that under these conditions, this individual will lose his/her ability to delegate and become frustrated and impatient with anyone who doesn't move as quickly as s/he does. When the development of a subordinate is more important than the immediate outcome, this individual's leadership style is going to have a negative impact on their intended results unless s/he is trained to self manage these tendencies.

Therefore, how a potential leadership candidate is likely to handle the increased pressure and stress in a more senior role is highly relevant and is becoming a clear determinant to success and failure. TAIS inventory is the only inventory that can identify this important factor.

TAIS Inventory Advantage Three: The Ability to Improve Self Awareness

The theory that underlies TAIS inventory ties cognitive or intrapersonal characteristics to interpersonal behaviors in a very straightforward, rational way. The constructs underlying that theory have been supported by a great deal of research (Nideffer, 1989; Nideffer, 1993). Very few of us are highly skilled at understanding ourselves and seeing ourselves the way others do. (Luft and Ingham, 1955). Self awareness allows for "on the fly" adjustments given that "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." (Nin, 1969)

Both cognitive and interpersonal characteristics are seen as having state (situational or temporary) and trait (consistent, defining) components. Different individuals have different cognitive and interpersonal strengths or preferences. The greater the preference, the more trait-like that characteristic is for the individual. As pressure increases within a situation, individuals begin to lose control over their ability to alter their behavior to systematically fit the demands of their environment. Instead, they become dominated by their preferential styles. If they have strong control needs, for example, and they are under pressure, they will attempt to take control even if the situation is one where they should allow someone else to lead.

The theory does not view any particular behavior(s) as good or bad; instead, the appropriateness of a behavior is determined by the situational context and whether or not the behavior leads to the accomplishment of the desired objectives.

Introversion, for example, is not viewed as a negative interpersonal characteristic. If an individual's desire or need for personal space and privacy prevents him or her from reaching out to others when the job requires it, there is a problem. On the other hand, there will be situations where the individual's ability to work alone is to his or her and/or the organization or team's advantage.

The theory leads to the development of training programs that emphasize identifying and modifying those situational, intrapersonal, and interpersonal variables that are interfering with desired performance. It also allows us to assess and predict suitability for particular roles and responsibilities, particularly leadership.

TAIS inventory—better than any other inventory—allows you to:

- paint a complete picture of what is needed for success in almost any performance situation.
- identify those aspects of an individual's intra- and inter-personal behaviors that will interfere with his or her success.
- improve self awareness with a view to understanding how one's own style impacts other people

TAIS Inventory Advantage Four: The Ability to Build A Team and Staff Effectively

With increasing regularity, we are asked to intervene with leaders who have inherited a team or are experiencing difficulty with their current team. Leadership, in this context, has more to do with teaming rather than a manager's leadership competencies. We believe that leadership is a follower driven process and as a result modern leaders must be both self aware and empathetic to each of his/her direct reports.

The emerging field of neuroleadership offers a practical model for this team approach. Leaders can best lead their teams if they are aware and can manage *status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness* (SCARF) for individuals within their team. (Rock, 2008).

TAIS inventory is ideally suited to assist organizations:

- in identifying and assessing potential leadership traits that will enable a follower based approach through understanding SCARF
- in developing top talent behaviors once they have been identified and positively assessed.

Summary

Recent research has demonstrated that most well constructed multi-dimensional personality inventories measure the same five, relatively broad, personality dimensions. Where personality tests differ is in:

- The composition of the individual scales that correlate with the five different dimensions, and the ease with which those scales can be related directly to highly specific performance situations.
- The extent to which the tests measure other performance relevant behaviors (e.g., cognitive or intrapersonal characteristics) as well as the five interpersonal dimensions of behavior.
- The extent to which the tests are based on a theory relating directly to the prediction of performance and to the design of performance enhancing programs.

Factor-analytic studies of TAIS inventory result in the identification of scale clusters that mirror the big five dimensions of personality. TAIS inventory has several advantages over other personality inventories, however.

First, TAIS inventory measures performance-relevant cognitive or attentional characteristics as well as interpersonal behavior. Because attentional processes as well as interpersonal ones are critical to successful performance, TAIS inventory provides a more complete picture of the individual and of his/her likelihood of success.

Furthermore, because attentional processes are so directly related to performance in all settings, coaching for improved performance can be accomplished more effectively. Behavior change always centers on controlling one's ability to concentrate on the right thing at the right time. TAIS inventory alone gives information about individuals that pinpoint development needs.

Second, TAIS inventory scales were developed without bias relative to what would be seen as desirable or undesirable behavior. Instead, it was assumed that the situational context in which the individual must perform would determine the utility of a given behavior. There is a time and place for confrontation and a time and place for support. A time and place for leading, and a time and place for following. For this reason, and in contrast to many other personality inventories, TAIS inventory scales were not developed as polar opposites (e.g., forcing people to be either confrontive or supportive, extroverted or introverted).

Finally, TAIS inventory is based on a performance-relevant theory. A theory:

- specifically designed to predict an individual's ability to perform across a broad range of performance arenas.
- designed to identify the specific intra- and interpersonal processes contributing to success and/or failure in any given job.
- that enables the development of highly individualized, situation-specific coaching and/or training programs.
- that has been supported by a great deal of scientific research.

The modern corporation continues to change to reflect the external environment. The individuals best suited to lead this change need to be identified and developed earlier in their careers to afford them the time to succeed. TAIS inventory can play an important role in this process.

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