Preparing for Personality Tests

Career Skills

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Preface

This eBook explains how and why organizations use personality tests as part of their recruitment process. It describes how personality tests work and what aspects of your personality organizations are interested in measuring.

You will learn:

- What the 'Big 5' aspects of personality are, and why they matter.
- How the most widely used tests attempt to measure your personality.
- How to define your 'work personality' and why you need to do this.
- Why you need to understand what the organization is looking for.
- How to avoid making 'mistakes' that can cost you the job.

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Introduction

Organizations invest millions of dollars in recruiting the 'best' employees they can find. This investment aims to ensure that they only employ those individuals who are going to fit in with the organization's culture and ethos.

They try to achieve this in several ways, including: specifying the personal qualities they are looking for in the job description; only offering interviews to people whose background and experience suggest that they have these qualities; and asking relevant questions in the interview itself.

However, some organizations go one step further and use commercially available tests that claim to measure various aspects of your personality in a quantitative way. The organization can then use this data in conjunction with the interview to make a (hopefully) better decision about your suitability for the job on offer.

These tests consist of answering a series of questions, and are usually referred to as 'personality questionnaires' rather than 'personality tests'—something that removes the implication that there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to answer the questions. Essentially, it is not about passing or failing this part of the recruitment process; it is about ensuring that candidates are selected on how well and how quickly they will fit into the organization.

Anyone seeking employment would be well advised to put considerable effort into their preparation for the recruitment process. Most advice concentrates on how to produce an excellent resume, practice aptitude tests, and maximize your performance in an interview. (These topics are dealt with separately in their own eBooks, available from the **Career Skills** area of our website.)

However, there is some debate as to whether or not it is possible to prepare yourself for these tests, and if there would be any benefit in doing so. This eBook aims to help you make an informed decision about this and to explain exactly what these tests are trying to measure and how they try to do so.

Before going into detail about how these tests work it is important to say something about the companies that provide these types of test. The personality questionnaire and testing industry is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and new companies appear every year. Some of these tests are seeking to classify your personality; others test for

certain traits (**honesty and integrity**) or your suitability for a specific role. This means that you will never be able to predict which of the 3,000 plus questionnaires you will be asked to take.

Whilst many companies offer a highly ethical and professional service, there are some who are reluctant to disclose the methodologies and level of accuracy used in their tests, claiming it is their 'Intellectual Property' and as such it is a matter of commercial confidentiality. If you want to understand this issue in greater depth, including why it has damaged the image of personality testing, see **Personality Tests—Understanding the Industry**.

**Personality
Questionnaire**

has increased
the use of

Need to deal
with potential
legal challenges
to recruiting

Online tests
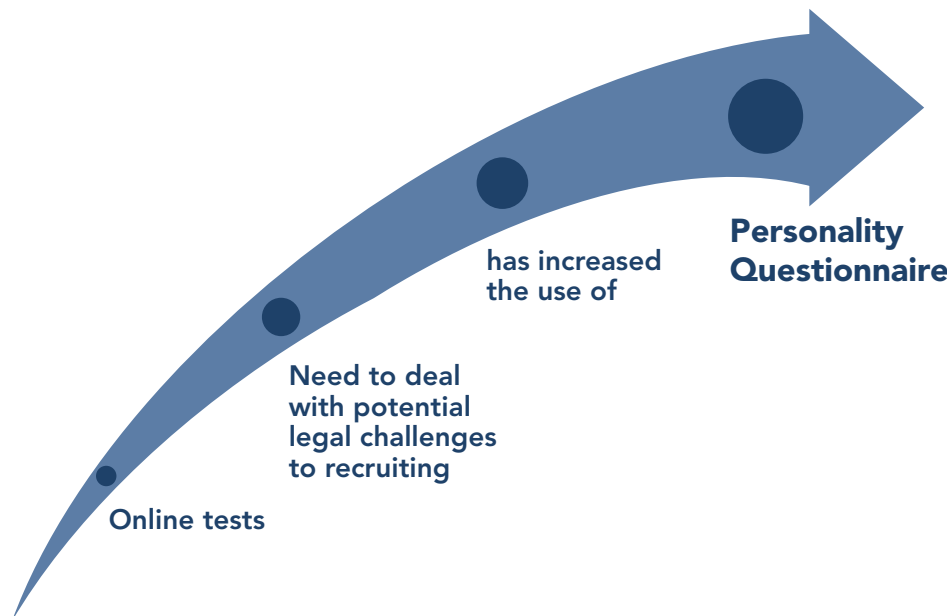
This secrecy has generated some controversy in the use of personality questionnaires, but has not stopped them rising in popularity. This can be attributed to:

- Availability of online rather than paper versions of the questionnaires and tests. This significantly reduces the administrative costs of such tests.
- The need for organizations to have impartial evidence to back up their recruitment decisions if they are challenged on grounds of equality and diversity.
- Increased acceptance by individuals of the need to complete personality questionnaires.
- Greater selection of tests for recruiting agencies and organizations to chose from.

As with many specialist fields, personality testing has developed its own terminology, and different companies sometimes use the terms in different ways. To avoid confusion this eBook uses those public domain definitions of psychologist Dr. John A. Johnson of Pennsylvania State University.

KEY POINTS

✔ Some organizations use personality tests as part of the job selection process.

✔ These tests attempt to measure various aspects of your personality in a quantitative way.

✔ There is some debate as to whether or not it is possible to prepare yourself for personality tests.

✔ Understanding how personality tests are supposed to work can help you to make your own decision about this.

Personality Theory

The desire to label an individual's personality is not new. The physician Galen in ancient Greece advocated that a person's susceptibility to disease was related to their personality, which was a reflection of one of the body's four fluids or 'humors', as shown in the diagram below.

Sanguine	Choleric	Melancholic	Phlegmatic
Pleasure-seeking & Sociable	Ambitious & Leader-like	Analytical & Quiet	Relaxed & Peaceful
Passionate	Quick to Anger	Pessimistic	Sluggish
Quick & Impulsive	Irritable	Slow to Anger, then explosive	Non-excitable
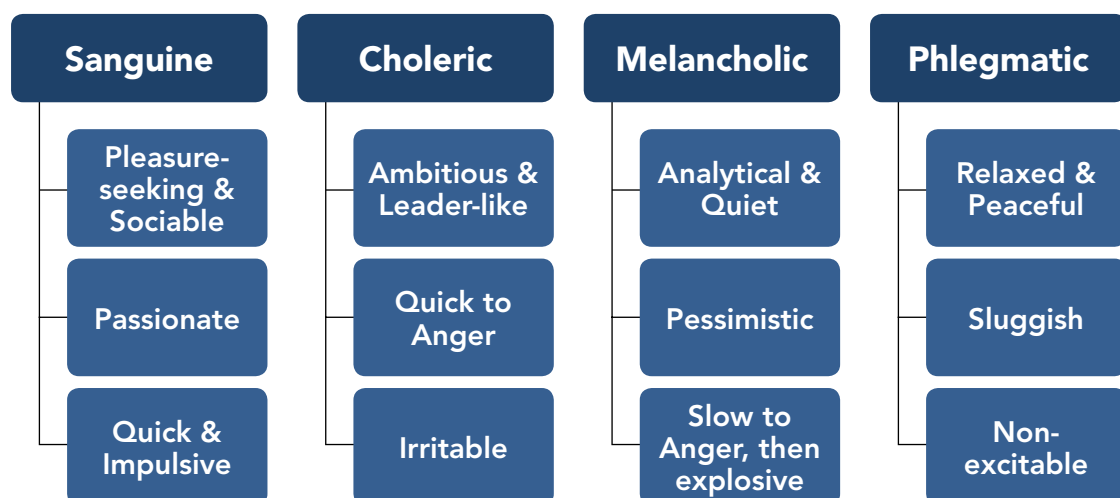
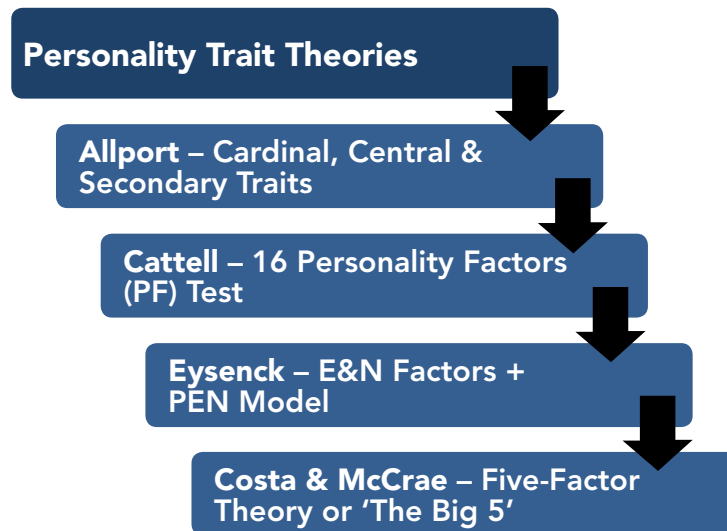The drive to understand what causes individuals to behave or respond to situations differently has been studied by psychologists for centuries. They have defined 'personality' as:

> *'The particular pattern of behavior and thinking that prevails across time and contexts, and differentiates one person from another.'*

Early studies sought to distinguish the characteristics (traits) that are persistent and define a person's personality. With this knowledge, studies then investigated what variables created and controlled these traits.

In order to understand personality traits and how they are measured it is worthwhile looking at the timeline of research and development in this field.

- Gordon Allport compiled a list of 4,500 words that describe a person. He grouped these into three levels of traits: (i) Cardinal traits are those that dominate and shape a person's behavior, for example passion for money or fame, self-sacrifice, etc.; (ii) Central traits form the basic building blocks of a person's personality, such as friendliness, honesty, or meanness; (iii) Secondary traits, whilst they are only seen sporadically, are required to complete an individual's personality. They explain why a person may behave 'out-of-character' in certain situations.

- Raymond Cattell condensed Allport's thousands of traits into 16 primary traits that he believed were the core source of the behaviors that made up a personality. He called this The 16 PF (Personality Factors) Test.

- Hans Eysenck created a two-factor model, Extraversion & Neuroticism (E&N model) that encompassed Cattell's 16 traits to describe the differences in people's behavior. He and his wife added psychoticism as a third dimension, creating the PEN personality model in the 1970s.

Personality Trait Theories

Allport – Cardinal, Central & Secondary Traits

Cattell – 16 Personality Factors (PF) Test

Eysenck – E&N Factors + PEN Model

Costa & McCrae – Five-Factor Theory or 'The Big 5'

- Two psychologists, Paul Costa and Robert McCrae, found the PEN model too simplistic and the 16 PF test too complex to use in the field and developed their own 'Five-Factor Theory' in 1990. It gained considerable support and has become widely accepted and used by psychologists worldwide.

It is important to understand the mechanics of 'The Big 5' as this will help you decide how to approach and prepare yourself for a personality questionnaire.

KEY POINTS

✔ Attempts to describe an individual's personality in scientific terms can be traced to antiquity.

✔ The most influential work was done in the second half of the twentieth century and resulted in models that are still in use today.

✔ The most widely used of these models was developed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae and is called the 'Five-Factor Theory.'

The 'Big 5' Aspects of Personality
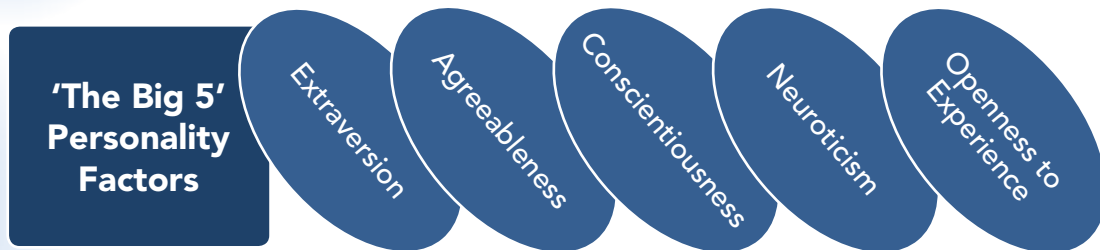
The five factors Costa and McCrae identified as making up an individual's personality are the traits extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. (The latter could not be assessed using the 16 PF test or PEN model.)
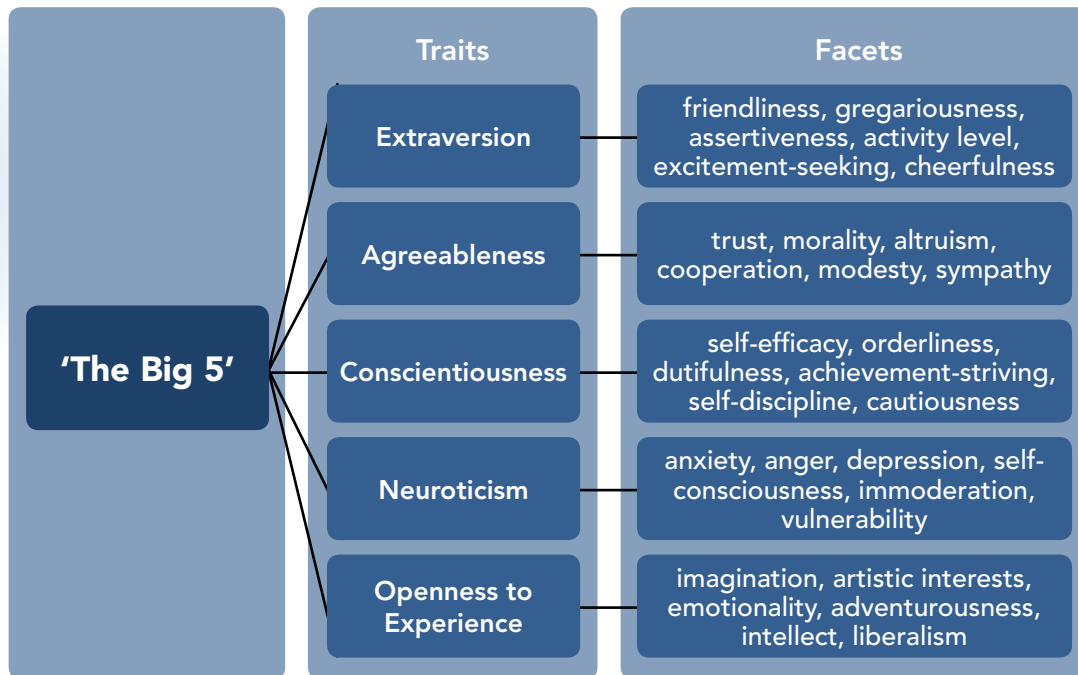
- **Extraversion**—is defined by a strong need to engage with the external world and other individuals.

- **Agreeableness**—is defined by an individual's desire to cooperate with others to ensure social harmony. (There are instances when the need to get along with people is detrimental to a positive outcome, such as soldiers in time of war, or scientists seeking a cure for cancer.)

- **Conscientiousness or Prudence**—is defined as the way in which we control, regulate, and direct our impulses. It is a person's ability to take into account the consequences of a deed before acting on the impulse to act.

- **Neuroticism**—is defined as the predisposition to experience one or more negative feelings such as depression or anger. The level of emotional reaction decreases a person's ability to make decisions, cope in stressful situations, and think clearly.

- **Openness to Experience or Culture**—is defined as an individual's ability to be imaginative and creative in how they act and think when in different situations. They are often described as nonconformists and have the ability to think in abstracts or symbols that do not directly relate to their own experience. (Some occupations, such as service occupations, sales, and police work are better performed by people whose thinking is more closed.)

An important aspect of 'The Big 5' is that each of the five traits is measured along a continuum showing the extent to which an individual displays it. Each trait is designed to measure the level of intensity and frequency with which an individual displays their

feelings, thoughts, and behaviors when interacting in different circumstances. It is also important to note that traits are neutral and carry no positive or negative associations.

|	Traits	Facets
'The Big 5'	**Extraversion**	friendliness, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity level, excitement-seeking, cheerfulness
	Agreeableness	trust, morality, altruism, cooperation, modesty, sympathy
	Conscientiousness	self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement-striving, self-discipline, cautiousness
	Neuroticism	anxiety, anger, depression, self-consciousness, immoderation, vulnerability
	Openness to Experience	imagination, artistic interests, emotionality, adventurousness, intellect, liberalism

Costa and McCrae then expanded each of the five traits into six sub-traits or facets. The significance of these facets is that they can be assessed independently of their trait and give a broader picture of the personality being studied. The facets relating to each of the Big 5 traits are shown in the diagram. People's scores for each facet of a personality trait tend to cluster in similar areas on the continuum, but this is not always the case. Further information is available on the Five-Factor Theory and personality traits and their sub-facets.

KEY POINTS

✔ The five factors that make up an individual's personality are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

✔ These traits exist on a continuum and everyone possesses all five to some degree.

✔ Each trait is made up of a number of facets.

Personality Questionnaires

Personality questionnaires are usually used in conjunction with aptitude tests, interviews, and exercises to assess your ability to perform the role you are applying for. The timeframe allocated to these questionnaires provides a natural limit to how many questions can be asked. This is especially true for online questionnaires.
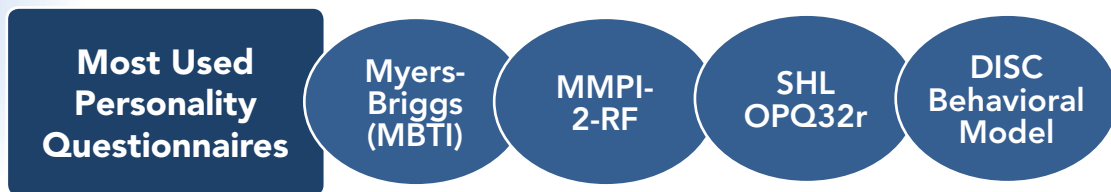
| Most Used Personality Questionnaires | Myers-Briggs (MBTI) | MMPI-2-RF | SHL OPQ32r | DISC Behavioral Model |

The most common forms of personality questionnaires used in recruitment are:

- MBTI indicator
- MMPI-2-RF
- SHL OPQ32r
- D.I.S.C. behavioral model.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

The MBTI started off as a questionnaire to help women entering the workforce during World War II to understand which occupations best suited their personality. By the 1960s this original test had been refined to create the MBTI. This measures they way individuals prefer to make decisions and how they view their environment. Its popularity comes from its ability to be used in a wide variety of situations and the ease with which its results can be interpreted.

The MBTI questionnaire asks a series of forced choice questions. This means that a person must choose one of the two proposed answers or skip to the next question. These answers are either short statements that reflect opposite preferences or views, or word pairs. It shows which characteristics, or behaviors, an individual prefers rather than how they will act in the workplace.

Whilst it is commonly used in recruitment its use is controversial. This is because it measures preferences not personality, making it a more appropriate tool for developing individuals. But it is useful when organizations want to develop future leaders or improve team performance.

Some of the issues you should be aware of when asked to complete a MBTI test are that it does not have a predictive validity, and is not able to distinguish between competencies and preferences. This knowledge will influence the way in which you prepare and the amount of time you devote to this activity.

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2-RF)

The MMPI was first published in the 1940s and is one of the most widely used and objective tests to assess the personality traits of adults and psychopathology. Despite it being heavily biased towards treatment of clinical patients it has been used in the form of MMPI-2-RF since 2008 to assess suitability for certain professions such as the police.

Whilst it has undergone several iterations since its inception, the nature and complexity of this personality test still mean that it is recommended to have a trained individual interpret the test results.

MMPI-2-RF uses more modern methods including validity scales to ensure its scores are theoretically grounded. The more focused design of the questions used in the MMPI-2-RF test make it suitable to take online.

The SHL OPQ32r

SHL is the market leader in providing organizations with a wide variety of science-based assessments that help select and develop individuals. Their proprietary personality questionnaire OPQ32r is a business-based occupational model of personality. SHL describes the questionnaire as:

> *'The Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ32r) provides an indication of an individual's perception of their preferred behavioral style at work and likely performance against important job competencies. It is designed specifically for use in a business environment and assesses 32 specific personality characteristics.'*
>
> *(Source: http://ceb.shl.com/uk/solutions/products/inc/detail.cfm?id=710)*

The questionnaire measures aspects of a person's behavior that are not easily recognized from resumes and in interviews. It is also quick and easy to use during the recruiting process as it only takes 25 minutes to complete online.

Organizations are keen to use an Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) because they are able to target the competencies a role requires for an individual to perform successfully in that role. It is widely used by both public and private organizations throughout the world to ensure they take on those individuals who provide the best match to the role's competencies.

The OPQ is designed to provide organizations with information about the aspects of an individual's behavioral style that will impact on their performance of competencies at work. The reports and graphs produced by the OPQ32r summarize an individual's performance against the competencies of the role. This is extremely useful in circumstances where large numbers of personnel need to be assessed following a merger or acquisition.

D.I.S.C. Behavioral Model

This model looks at the styles and preferences of a person's behavior to discern their personality. Its foundations lie in the study by William Marston of the effect a person's sense of will and power had on their behavior and personality. Marston researched how to accurately measure *'the energy of behavior and consciousness'* which resulted in the DISC acronym.
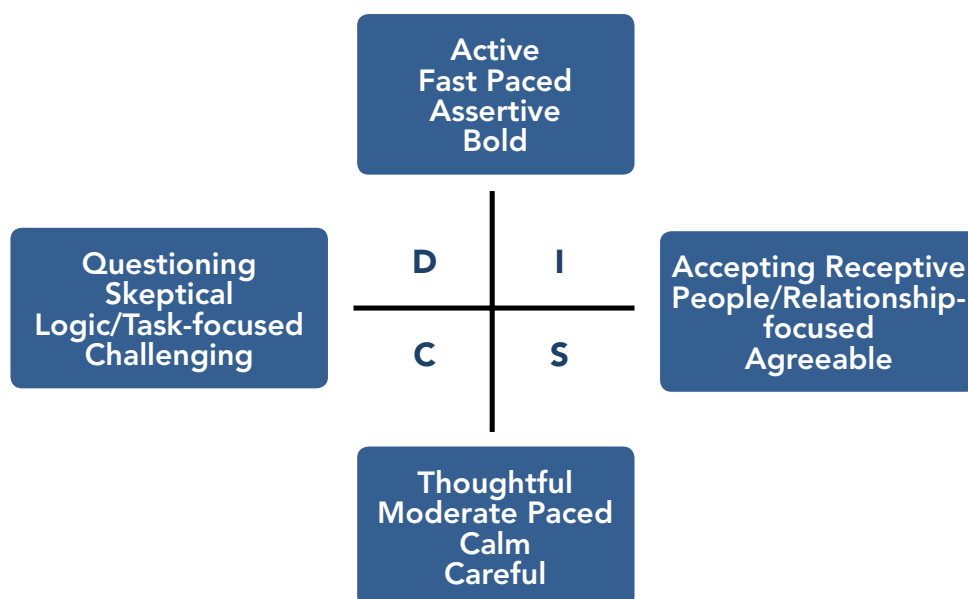
The four preferences that make up the acronym are Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness, and these are often said to resemble the four humors. The top row of the diagram represents the aspects of extroversion while the bottom row represents the introversion aspects of personality. An individual's personality is measured along the horizontal axis, which denotes guarded versus openness, while the vertical axis represents a person's behavior from passivity at the bottom to assertiveness at the top.

The model uses word associations to assess an individual's preferences.

- Dominance—relates to control, power, and assertiveness.
- Influence—relates to social situations and communication.
- Steadiness—relates to patience, persistence, and thoughtfulness.
- Conscientiousness—relates to structure and organization.

Any potential employer needs to assess the results from the DISC model in conjunction with the type of personality that best matches the job specifications and competencies. When using this and any of the other personality questionnaires to select candidates for a role results should be assessed by comparing them to the results of those successfully performing the role.

KEY POINTS

✔ Personality questionnaires are usually used in conjunction with aptitude tests, interviews, and exercises to assess your ability to perform the role.

✔ The most common forms of personality questionnaires used in recruitment are: MBTI indicator, MMPI-2-RF, SHL OPQ32r, and the D.I.S.C. behavioral model.

How They Work and Validity Scales

To appreciate how personality questionnaires work you need to consider how an organization will use the results and how they benefit the decision-making process. Organizations want to efficiently select the most able person to perform a role. They already know what is expected of the role; all they need to find out is which individual possesses the right level and number of the necessary competencies.

The diagram above shows you the three questions any recruitment process must satisfy in order to ensure productivity and harmony are maintained within the organization. It is essential the new individual's personality suits that of the team or group they are to manage or lead.

In response to the increased customer or team focus of roles in the modern workplace, organizations now place greater emphasis on a candidate's personality than they have done in the past. The various personality questionnaires that have already been discussed ask individuals how they feel, think, and behave in a variety of circumstances in order to gauge a person's intrinsic characteristics and personality.

The majority of personality questionnaires present you with between 50–200 questions that ask you to choose from two, five, or seven answers (referred to as point scales). An example of each point scale is shown below.

2-point scale

1. I enjoy public speaking?

A) True	B) False

5-point scale

2. I have clear personal goals?

A) strongly disagree	B) disagree	C) neutral	D) agree	E) strongly agree

7-point scale

3. I am good at dealing with difficult people?

A) very strongly disagree	B) strongly disagree	C) disagree	D) neutral	E) agree	F) strongly agree	G) very strongly agree

Some of these questions may appear too simplistic or imprecise to determine your personality. Others are open to interpretation that can vary depending on the circumstances, words, or phrases used and how you feel on that day. For example:

- Does the word 'good' in the third question above mean when compared to the public, to people you work with, or to some other group?
- What is meant by the phrase 'difficult people'? Does it mean abusive, withdrawn, or self-centered individuals?

It is only when you ask this question with a particular organization or culture in mind that you will find a workable definition in which to answer the question.

It is also important to understand that most personality questionnaires have validity questions built into them. These use a variety of validity scales to ensure as far as possible that people taking the test are being honest and open in their answers. Questionnaires such as the MMPI also judge how many questions you leave unanswered. If this is excessive (over 30) then your results will be seen as invalid.

Type	Description	Assesses
L Scale	Lie	If an individual is trying to present themselves in a more positive light.
CNS Scale	'Cannot Say'	Test is invalid if >=30 questions are left unanswered.
F Scale	Infrequency	Individual answers contradict themselves—'faking bad' (1st half of test).
Fb Scale	Back F	Consists of 40 items that <10% of the norm supports. Indicates poor attention or randomly selecting answers (2nd half of test).
K Scale	Defensiveness	Denial/Evasiveness. Trying to present oneself in best possible way.
F-K Scale	F minus K	Honesty of test responses/not faking good or bad
TRIN Scale	True Response Inconsistency	Individuals that respond inconsistently (23 paired questions that are the opposite of each other).
VRIN Scale	Variable Response Inconsistency	An alternative scale to detect inconsistent answers for similar/opposite question pairs.

The table above describes the main validity scales that you need to be aware of when answering a management personality questionnaire. These have been designed to detect anyone trying to 'fake' a personality questionnaire. These validity scales are far from infallible and with a little practice you can become familiar with the styles and formats of questions that are used.

Personality questionnaires designed for management seek to identify the 'best' individual—the one who has most if not all of the personality requirements described in the job specification. Employers will already have evidence of the qualities and competencies that individuals successfully performing the role have. This is what your questionnaire results will be correlated to.

These questionnaires are also designed to show that an individual is honest, has integrity, can control their emotions, and can cope in stressful situations. Stress is seen as one of the biggest threats to productivity because when people turn their anger or frustration in on themselves it results in poor health, antagonism, passive aggression, and in extreme cases violence. Such stresses in the workplace can result in people taking long periods off work, something that all organizations are keen to avoid. That is why organizations use personality questionnaires as one of the means to ensure they take on the 'right' people.

Another reason why some organizations use personality questionnaires is the desire for human resource professionals and recruitment agencies to appear scientific and objective in their work. This may sound rather cynical but in reality many HR and recruitment decisions are based on subjective data and anything that can offer apparent objectivity is often welcomed.

One final point that needs to be made regarding personality questionnaires is that there is a difference between how academic psychologists view them and the claims made for them by commercial test providers.

The following quotes are from David M. Boje, Ph.D., Professor of Management in the Management Department, CBAE at New Mexico State University (NMSU).

> *'... do not treat the archetype scores of Myers Briggs as anything more than Astrology.'*

> *'The test is not valid or legal to use for personnel assignments, hiring, or promotion. It does not have predictive validity for such uses. It is a useful guide, and no more. Problem is, people go to a workshop, get excited and treat M-B as a secret window into the mind of their co-workers.'*

Robert Spillane, Professor of Management at the Graduate School of Management at Macquarie University, argues that research shows that efforts to predict performance from personality and motivation tests have been consistently and spectacularly unsuccessful.

> *'[Tests] trivialize human behavior by assuming that (fake) attitudes predict performance. Not only is this incorrect but testers offer no explanations for behavior beyond the circular proposition that behavior is caused by traits which are inferred from behavior.'*

> *'The technical deficiencies of most personality tests have been known for many years. Yet they are conveniently ignored by those with vested interests in their continued use.'*

You can easily find hundreds of quotes like these, in which noted and published psychologists call into question the use of personality tests. However, the fact remains that they are used in job selection and if you find yourself facing one then it is a good idea to know how best to prepare yourself.

KEY POINTS

✔ Most personality questionnaires present you with between 50–200 questions and ask you to choose from two, five, or seven answers.

✔ The fact that many of the questions are open to wide interpretation is a fundamental problem with these tests.

✔ Test designers try to overcome this by asking the same thing in several different ways and then collating the answers, but there is very little evidence that this overcomes the problem.

✔ Validity questions are used to try to detect people 'faking' the test but these questions are fairly easy to spot.

✔ Academic psychologists tend to be skeptical of claims made by personality test providers regarding how useful these test actually are in predicting workplace performance.

Defining Your Work Personality

Very few people find their 'perfect' role. Most of us will have to modify our day-to-day behavior to suit the role or culture we are working in. For example, most of us find some aspects of our jobs require us to modify our preferred behavior. Perhaps you're more assertive at work than you really feel comfortable with, or maybe you're more 'inclusive.' The point is that we can and do deal with the demands of the workplace by adopting a 'work' personality. Most of us do it fairly effortlessly. We accept that the world of work is not about living within our 'comfort zone' all of the time and we all have the ability to step outside of our natural behavioral preferences in order to get something done.

The diagram above summarizes this: the behaviors that are appropriate for home are not necessarily appropriate for the workplace and vice versa. Obviously there is some overlap and some behaviors are right in both situations.

The work behaviors the role demands will be stated in the job description and specification. Your task is to create a list of the required behaviors from the competencies stated in these documents, prioritizing those most important for the role. (Our free **Management Competency Framework** template defines twelve competencies and their associated management behaviors.)

You can then check this list and its priorities against the Organizational Personality you have researched, adjusting and adding as necessary. Adding the behaviors of the organization's personality creates the diagram below.

Using the most simplistic interpretation of this diagram you can see that the shaded areas show:

- Work and organizational behaviors representing the key behaviors of the role.
- Home, work, and organizational behaviors representing the level of emotional intelligence required by the role with significant emphasis on relationship management.

To find out more information on how to develop your competencies as well as how to develop your emotional intelligence use these links.

With this in mind, there are two approaches you can take to answering personality questionnaires. You alone can judge which is the most suitable, and your decision is likely to be based on how well you judge your current behaviors match that of the role.
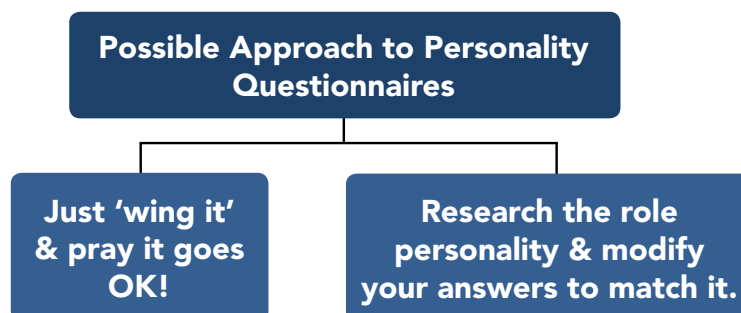
Approach 1—Just 'Wing It'

This may not be a wise choice, but in some instances it could work. You would have to be confident that your innate personality was a perfect match for the organization and role.
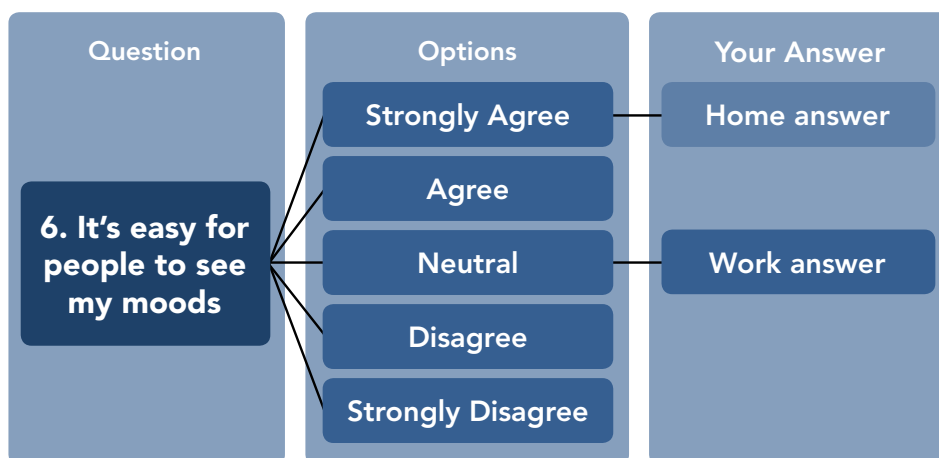
In today's competitive environment just 'winging' something as important as a career move is not a good idea. Many of these personality questionnaires are done online, before the interview stage, and you have no way of justifying your answer to a particular question. Remember, these tests are often used to 'screen out' candidates in order to reduce the numbers to manageable levels. The danger with using this approach is that you miss an essential aspect of the role personality that is essential to the organization. This oversight is likely to result in you being rejected without even getting an interview.

Approach 2—Research and Modify your Answers (a little)

With all the information available to you through the Internet there really is no excuse for not preparing. As a minimum this should involve looking at the personality traits likely to be required by the role and comparing them to your own.

Conducting thorough research into what exactly the organization expects from someone in the role will help you to prepare for all aspects of the selection process, not just the personality questionnaire.

This knowledge will enable you to influence the personality profile in a way that is consistent with the role you are seeking. This is not 'cheating' because personality questionnaires make no allowance for your ability to adapt your behavior to suit the environment. So in order to succeed you need to answer these questions from a work perspective. For example:

Question	Options	Your Answer
	Strongly Agree	**Home answer**
	Agree	
6. It's easy for people to see my moods	**Neutral**	**Work answer**
	Disagree	
	Strongly Disagree	

Depending on the role and organization the best work answer may be 'Disagree.' But this example gives a simplistic illustration of how to approach this question based on your 'work' personality rather than the more informal one you present to friends and family.

The extent to which you need to modify your answers depends on how dissimilar your work and home personalities need to be. In some jobs they may be quite close, but in many management jobs you will probably need to keep more emotional distance between yourself and others than you would outside of work. You may also need to display behaviors that are a bit tougher and less accommodating than those you would display with your friends and family.

Obviously, the organization/role must be a reasonable fit with your own personality otherwise you will find the work stressful and unpleasant. There would be no point in applying for a job that you were unsuited for; the important thing is that you are able to modify your answers to avoid raising 'red flags' that would result in you being rejected for roles that your track record and competencies show you are ideal for.

KEY POINTS

✔ Most people modify their day-to-day behavior to suit the role or culture they are working in.

✔ This involves stepping outside of their natural behavioral preferences in order to get the job done.

✔ Always answer personality questionnaires from the perspective of your own 'work personality.'

✔ The extent to which you need to modify your answers depends on how dissimilar your work and home personalities need to be.

✔ Don't lie, but avoid raising 'red flags' that would result in you being rejected for roles that your track record and competencies show you are ideal for.

'Make or Break' Questions

Many of the questions you will be asked are designed to show whether you are honest, have integrity, and possess leadership qualities. They also assess how well you control certain emotions and handle yourself in stressful situations.

Organizations are looking for like-minded individuals who will easily fit into their culture and work patterns. The qualities they are seeking to identify are both desirable and undesirable (as shown in the diagram) and they use personality questionnaires to assess such qualities.

The sample questions below have been split into seven keys areas that are part of most personality questionnaires. Each section explains how answers to these questions can be interpreted and guides you as to how best to answer them.

Honesty/Integrity

These questions require you to give clear answers, and strongly agreeing or disagreeing with the statement made in the question is the best course. The table gives examples of both types of questions.

Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Most individuals are honest by nature	
Very few individuals steal at work	People in their teens often go through a 'shoplifting' phase
Most people never shoplifted in their teens	It is human nature to steal from others
Most people can be trusted	The laws against shoplifting are too harsh
If someone is undercharged in a shop they will tell the cashier	Most individuals cannot be trusted
People who leave work early without permission are stealing from the organization	

It is vital that your answers show you are someone with a sound sense of right and wrong. Ensure that you maintain this level of morality throughout the recruiting process in how you answer **interview questions** and act in **interview exercises**.

Anger

Organizations see anger in the work place as destructive and undesirable. These questions give you no opportunity to give an explanation, so you need to ensure your answers show that you are able to control anger. The interpretation of 'anger' also incorporates acts of corporate vandalism or revenge, such as computer hacking, viruses, and leaking of information.

Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Those who know me would not describe me as having a temper	When driving I sometimes get angry with other drivers
I almost never become angry at work	Sometimes my colleagues annoy me
Individuals who get angry at work should receive counseling	Computer hackers and those who leak corporate data are treated too harshly when discovered
I cannot remember the last time I lost my temper at work	It's OK to lose your temper at work occasionally

Your answers must show that you find acts of revenge and displays of anger unacceptable in the workplace.

Stress

Managers need to portray themselves as an individual who can cope with sporadic increases in their workload and handle the unexpected in a structured and controlled manner. It is vital that your answers show how well you deal with these situations.

Strongly Agree or Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
I never get upset if my work is criticized by my manager	Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by all my work responsibilities
I have a positive relationship with my colleagues	Work is the most stressful thing in my life
I am confident in my ability to handle my work responsibilities	I have had counseling to help me cope with stress
I rarely worry about how well I'm doing at work	I sometimes worry about losing my job because of office politics
I have never suffered physical symptoms due to stress at work	I have been known to occasionally lose sleep from worrying about work

It is important that your answers reflect a personality that handles stressful situations easily, minimizing any impact on your work relationships.

Leadership

Leadership is an essential quality organizations require in their managers. Be aware of your **leadership style** and assess how well this matches that of the role and modify your answers to show your leadership qualities.

Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
I have a clear set of personal goals	
With the right motivation an individual will be more successful	I rarely have a firm set of personal goals
Everyone has the potential to be creative at work	Most people are already inspired to perform their best
Some managers spend too much time on the detail and not enough on the big picture	Nothing motivates individuals more than money or the threat of losing their job
The greatest historical figures always looked several years into the future	

Your research into the organization's personality will enable you to identify the favored leadership style. You then need to practice to ensure your answers reflect your own style as a close match.

Personal Motivation

This is an essential quality for any manager and your answers to the personality questions must reflect a high level of this quality. Organizations require that every employee gives 100% to performing their role and is totally committed to the organization.

Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
I admire those who work long hours	Work can be an addiction like gambling
People who know me say I work too hard	There are people I know who work too hard
Work is the most important thing in my life	I really look forward to my annual vacation
Working late or at weekends is something I happily do	I feel sorry for those who work very long hours
Individuals should expect to work extra hours to get the job done	Vacations are very important to me

The answers you give need to demonstrate you willingness to do whatever is needed to excel in the role. Qualities such as tenacity, determination, diligence, and fortitude need to come across in your answers. You will usually be asked to give examples of these qualities in your interview and to demonstrate them in any exercises you are given.

Extraversion

With the increase in service and customer-focused management roles the traits of extroverts such as friendliness, assertiveness, and cheerfulness need to be displayed appropriately.

Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Others would describe me as outgoing	I don't like talking to strangers or in new situations
I find it easy to keep a conversation going	I find I'm more productive when I work alone rather than in a group
I enjoy introducing myself to others in new settings	Others would probably say I was reserved
There are few of my friends I'd describe as quiet and reserved	I prefer it when the other person does most of the talking
I am happy to drive things forward, taking the lead if I need to	I take steps to avoid being the center of attention

As with leadership qualities, you will have to define your own brand of extroversion that you are comfortable with and confident to portray. This may require you to focus on developing the **social competencies** of your emotional intelligence.

Typical 'Checking' Questions

These are the questions questionnaire designers include to check if an individual is trying to influence or 'fake' their answers. You can spot them quite easily with practice because you are being asked to agree with an unconditional statement. They consistently use words such as:

- *'always'* or *'never,'* where you'd prefer to use *'occasionally,'* *'very occasionally,'* or *'usually'* as they are a more honest response.

- *'ever'* or *'whatever,'* when rephrasing the question and using words such as *'rarely'* would be more honest. For example, *'None of my close friends has ever upset me'* becomes *'My close friends rarely upset me.'*

The following table shows you some examples of typical checking or control questions.

Checking or Control Questions used in Personality Tests
I always keep others' secrets
I'm always full of energy
I always tell others exactly what I think
I can't remember ever being late for an appointment
I've never acted on impulse
I've never been bored
I have never missed a work task deadline
I have never met someone I didn't like
I've never been annoyed by a work colleague
I have planned ahead in everything I've done
I never regret my decisions once I've made them
I'm happy to do whatever I am asked
None of my work colleagues have ever upset me
I'll happily see people whatever the situation
My work has always been appreciated and valued by others

It is important to answer control questions such as 'I never tell white lies' honestly because it will not be detrimental to you. Where they relate to qualities such as dealing with stress, anger, or integrity, and use unconditional statements such as 'always' or 'never,' you will be expected to strongly agree or strongly disagree with them.

KEY POINTS

- ✔ There are certain personality traits that every employer sees as desirable. These include: honesty, integrity, self-motivation, and self-discipline.

- ✔ Extraversion is also seen as a desirable quality even if the role does not obviously demand it.

- ✔ There are certain personality traits that every employer sees as undesirable. These include: deceitfulness, inability to control anger, and inability to handle stress.

- ✔ Answering these questions 'wrongly' can result in you being rejected, because the questionnaires do not take account of mitigating circumstances.

- ✔ Impression control questions are designed to check for people 'faking' their answers. They use words such as 'always' or 'never,' where 'occasionally', 'very occasionally,' or 'usually' would be a more honest response.

Summary

The past 30 years have seen changes in the way that organizations operate. Specifically, there has been a move towards more knowledge-based and customer-focused jobs, and fewer levels of management mean that individuals have more autonomy than ever before.

In most working situations it's the compatibility of managers and team members that affect the day-to-day success of the organization; both of these groups need to buy in to the ethos and culture of the organization.

This combination of factors means that many employers now use personality tests or questionnaires as part of the job selection process. These tests attempt to measure various aspects of your personality in a quantitative way. There is some debate as to whether or not it is possible to prepare yourself for them, but understanding how they are supposed to work can help you to make your own decision about this.

Most personality questionnaires present you with between 50–200 questions and ask you to choose from two, five, or seven answers. The fact that many of the questions are open to wide interpretation is a fundamental problem with these tests. Although the test designers try to overcome this by asking the same thing in several different ways and then collating the answers, there is very little evidence that this overcomes the problem and academic psychologists tend to be skeptical of claims made by personality test providers regarding how useful these test actually are in predicting workplace performance.

Most people modify their day-to-day behavior to suit the role or culture they are working in. This involves stepping outside of their natural behavioral preferences in order to get the job done. Consequently, you should answer personality questionnaires from the perspective of your own 'work personality,' which may be rather different from the personality you present to your family and friends. The most important thing is not to lie, and to avoid raising 'red flags' that would result in you being rejected for roles that your track record and competencies show you are ideal for.

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