

Chapter 70

The Role of Computerized Personality Assessments in Students with Disabilities' School-to-Work Transition

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ABSTRACT

The use of personality measures for pre-employment selection continues to be decidedly strong. Nationwide retailers have opted to administer these assessments increasingly via computer for prospective employees ranging from entry-level worker to upper-level manager positions. School-to-Work transition students with mental and physical disabilities are among the individuals completing these assessments. Nonetheless, the validity evidence supporting their use with this population remains unclear. Because school-to-work transition programs are designed to enhance students' work competence and ultimately employability, schools need to not only develop students' technical knowledge, but also prepare students to handle taking the personality assessments. This is explored in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

I am 17 years old and have been trying for a few weeks to get a job. I have my first interview tomorrow (thankfully), but in case that doesn't work, I need a back up plan. I've applied to almost ten stores, and the only store to actually give me an interview was Target, where I filled out the application in the store. I was told that I failed the assessment tests at both Sears and Best Buy, and there's a good chance I failed at all of the stores that I couldn't get in touch with too. I am a straight A student in Honors and College-Level courses, and I really don't see why I can't get a job! Sadly, there is no place to put my

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GPA on applications. What can I do to pass these tests? They are the personality tests that you take while filling out the application” (blackroseishot, 2007, para 1).

In this Web blog, the adolescent is voicing concerns about passing a pre-employment personality assessment to secure an interview. The use of personality tests, either face-to-face or online, is a major issue because they are used extensively in organizations for applicant screening purposes (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006; Stark, Chernyshenko, Chan, Lee, & Dragow, 2001). As evidence of their wide-spread use, roughly five million U. S. applicants complete personality assessments annually for positions ranging from entry-level works to upper-level managers (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). The assessments are utilized because they can predict applicants’ overall job fit, job performance, trainability, leadership aptitude, and propensity to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, to name a few (Stabile, 2002; Van Iddeking, Raymar, & Roth, 2005). Being able to reliably predict good employee and job fit can reduce the likelihood of poor performance that unnecessarily costs organizations.

“Chain stores” in the food preparation industry, such as Burger King, Boston Market, and Red Lobster, and retail industry “Big-Box” stores like Target, Sears and Best Buy have an array of entry-level position openings each year. Such positions attract applicants from across the adult lifespan, including retirees, but proportionally more from the young (Van Iddeking et al., 2005). High school students transitioning to work, among them those with mental and physical disabilities, apply for such openings as well. Indeed, food preparation, service, and sales-related occupations are quite common among young adults with disabilities, as approximately a third of job-seeking young adults with disabilities become employed in food preparation-, service-, or sales-related occupations within eight years of high school graduation (Newman et al., 2011).

Even for entry-level openings in the food preparation and retail industries (e.g., cashier, stock clerk, and dishwasher), however, human resource (HR) professionals rely heavily upon pre-employment personality measures for employment screening (Stabile, 2002). Of major concern, however, is the validity of their use for predicting students with disabilities’ workplace behavior and performance because the measures often have not been validated for use with this population or even for online application (Rothstein & Goffman, 2006). Thus, HR professionals may be using selection-related measurement tools inappropriately for these individuals. To deal more effectively with this organizational reality, schools and school-to-work transition programs in particular now more than ever need to implement procedures to better prepare students to handle pre-employment testing procedures because they are a condition of employment.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of pre-employment assessment in school-to-work transition among young adults with disabilities. Our interest is anchored in the proliferation of pre-employment assessments in general and its under-examined impact on youths with disabilities’ prospective employment. This issue is especially important in that so many of the entry-level jobs available for young adults with disabilities require assessments, despite uncertainty about the validity of their use with this population. The chapter proceeds through three parts. The first section examines school-to-work transition in relation to direct employment. The second section reviews computerized pre-employment personality assessment including an overview of personality theories, Five Factor Model of personality, test validity, and current trends in pre-employment assessments. The third section critiques the role of pre-employment personality assessments on students with disabilities’ transition to employment. Last, implications and considerations for professionals, practitioners and parents involved in students’ school-to-work transition are discussed.

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