International OB
Does Personality Testing Work Outside the United States?

Given that early research linking the Big Five personality traits to job performance was conducted in the United States (see Chapter 5), you might wonder whether the traits found useful for selecting employees there— especially conscientiousness—also work in other countries.

Average levels of personality traits do vary across nations: people in East Asian cultures are more introverted and neurotic, individuals in African nations more agreeable, and people in South American countries more open. However, evidence suggests that within each nation, employees who score highest on the traits—especially conscientiousness— also are more effective at work. Conscientiousness predicts job performance of European workers nearly exactly as well as it does that of U.S. workers. Less research exists on how conscientiousness and the other Big Five traits predict job performance elsewhere— particularly Asia—but it does suggest conscientiousness is important to work effectiveness in Asia, too.

Evidence also indicates that core self-evaluations, reflecting the degree to which individuals have a positive view of themselves, also lead to worker effectiveness inside and outside the United States. Studies of core self evaluations in France, Japan, China, Greece, Britain, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands all show that employees with a positive self-concept appear happier and more effective at work. These studies strongly suggest that while values do vary across cultures, organizations can profitably select employees based on personality tests regardless of culture.

Sources: Based on D. P. Schmitt, J. Allik, R. R. McCrae, et al., "The Geographic Distribution of Big Five Personality Traits: Patterns and Profiles of Human Self- Description Across 56 Nations," Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 38, no. 2 (2007), pp. 173–212; T. A. Judge, "Core Self- Evaluations and Work Success," Current Directions in Psychological Science 18, no. 1 (2009), pp. 58–62; and B. S. Connelly and D. S. Ones, "The Personality of Corruption: A National-Level Analysis," Cross-Cultural Research 42, no. 4 (2008), pp. 353–385.

Class Exercise

1. Ask all students to complete the Big 5 Questionnaire at http://similarminds.com/big5.html
2. Each student should record his or her results.
3. Divide the results into students from similar countries of origin such as Asian, Hispanic, Black, European, or U.S. (Ask students who are native to the U.S. if they have close ties to a country of origin and would choose to identify more closely with a country of origin rather than a generic U.S. category.)
4. Ask students to review the results. (An Excel spreadsheet or statistics package such as SAS or SPSS will allow categorizing and summing responses).
5. Are there any differences in responses among the national categorizations? Are there any surprises?

Myth or Science?
It's First Impressions That Count

This statement is true. When we meet someone for the first time, we notice a number of things including physical characteristics, clothing, firmness of handshake, gestures, and tone of voice. We use our observations to fit the person into ready-made categories, and these first impressions tend to hold greater weight than information we receive later.

The best evidence that first impressions count comes from research on employment interviews. Interviewers often know whether they will hire someone soon after the opening handshake and small talk. It appears a firm handshake really does affect interviewer judgments.

Research on applicant appearance confirms the power of first impressions. Attractive applicants fare better in interviews, and overweight applicants are penalized. People show especially strong preference for attractive opposite-sex applicants, and there was some evidence that female interviewers actually prefer unattractive female applicants over attractive female applicants.

Another study revealed just how superficial interviewer judgments often are. Researchers responded to employment ads in Chicago and Boston with fake résumés of high and low quality and used names that were traditionally African American (Kenya and Hakim) and Caucasian (Allison and Brad). Résumés with Caucasian names received 50 percent more callbacks than those with African American names. While 27 percent of the high-quality résumés with Caucasian names received callbacks, only 8 percent of the high-quality résumés with African American names did.

A final body of confirming research finds interviewers' post-interview evaluations of applicants substantially conform to their pre-interview impressions. That is, first impressions carry considerable weight in shaping final evaluations, assuming the interview elicits no highly negative information.

Class Exercise

1.   Direct students to http://www.collegegrad.com/.
2.   Have students research job interviewing, interview attire, and negotiating.
3.   Ask students to describe what they discovered about these elements.
4.   What role do they think first impressions play in the interviewing process?

An Ethical Choice
Is Honesty the Best Policy in Getting a Job?

Yes and no. Are you surprised?

On one hand, despite what organizations may tell you, there are right and wrong answers for nearly every question you are asked in tests or interviews. This suggests you should provide the "socially desirable" answer: to put it more coarsely, "fake good" when you can.

Of course, there are ethical concerns here. There are also practical considerations. The right answer is not always clear. So in faking good you might, ironically, be providing the wrong answers. What to do? Here is our best advice:

1. Put your best foot forward, within reason. If a test or interviewer question asks about your behavior or attitudes, answer for your best realistic self. This is not a time to be hard on yourself.
2. Avoid answers you couldn't defend. Just because you're putting your "best realistic" foot forward doesn't mean you should lose touch with reality. If an interviewer asks you about your biggest weakness, you probably shouldn't answer, "I just work too hard."
3. Know yourself. If you are a person who is tough on yourself or modest, then make a special effort to put your best foot forward and describe yourself positively. If you're someone who is bold and confident (think Donald Trump), then you probably shouldn't make such an effort, as you run the risk of coming off as arrogant or brash.
4. Watch your résumé. Résumés are a special case—see our discussion in the Ethical Dilemma at the end of this chapter.
5. Match yourself to the organization. When Rob Sparno found himself unemployed, for each job he sought he spent a great deal of time asking himself "What do they want? What keeps them up at night?" He then thought through how his skills, abilities, and experiences would address those questions. The beauty of this approach is that it is effective, and it doesn't require compromising your values.

Sources: Based on J. L. Yang, "How to Get a Job," Fortune (April 13, 2009), pp. 49–56; A. Byrne, "True or False, Both Right," The Australian (July 19, 2008), www.theaustralian. news.com.au; and S. Smith, "Jobseekers Put on False Face at Interview," The Scotsman (January 14, 2008), news.scotsman.com/uk.

Class Exercise

1. Ask students to read the article at http://www.bookrags.com/articles/47.html.
2. Divide students into groups of three to five each.
3. Ask students to discuss job interviews they have participated in.
4. Can they identify any of the common mistakes they may have intentionally or unintentionally committed in the interview? What would they do differently?

Point/CounterPoint
Telecommuting Makes Good Business Sense

Point

In a sense, telecommuting and flexible schedules are old news. Many companies have allowed and encouraged employees to work flexible schedules for years. However, in another sense, the logic and impetus for flexible schedules is stronger than ever.

The first and most obvious reason is changes in how and where work is done. Confining the "workplace" to some arbitrarily chosen office makes less and less sense for more and more organizations. The global consulting firm Accenture is so unwilling to maintain the hoary old "office bunker" mentality that it actually asks its 178,000 worldwide employees to make reservations for office space when they need it. Accenture finds its non-office culture fits the distributed, global nature of its business and better connects employees to clients.

Second, organizations are realizing that offering telecommuting and other flexible schedules allows them to attract and retain the best talent. New entrants into the workforce value autonomy, creativity, and virtual access over routines, structures, and dress codes.

Third, while managers are a main source of opposition to telework, once exposed to it they become much more positive. As a Wall Street Journal article noted in describing flexible workers, "Allowed to find their own equilibrium between work and private lives, they tend to put work first." Managers see this through experience. A review of 46 studies on telecommuting revealed positive effects on employee productivity and morale.

There are too many arguments in favor of telecommuting and flexible schedules for organizations to ignore. A recent survey of employers indicated 63 percent.

CounterPoint

Telecommuting and other flexible schedules are among those management fads the business press loves to shower with praise. Like most other fads, however, they don't stand up to close scrutiny and logical analysis.

Managers don't view telecommuters very positively. And if you respond honestly and objectively, you would have a hard time advising employees to indulge in flexible work schedules when doing so hurts their career. A recent study gives some interesting support.

More than two-thirds of employees surveyed (68 percent) thought working at home made them more productive. However, when managers were surveyed, more than one-third (37 percent) thought that if allowed to work at home, staff would use their so-called working hours for personal activities.

Sure, employees want flexible schedules and rationalize their preferences by arguing that it helps them get more done. But a lot of managers know better—while some of "working at home" does include work, another part is spent doing nonwork-related activities such as chores, personal or family activities, and so on. That's exactly why employees want it so much.

If you asked employees "Would you like to get paid the same for working half as many hours?" most employees would probably say "Sure!" But that doesn't mean management should give employees something for nothing. Effective HRM sometimes means not giving employees what they want.

Sources: Based on J. Marquez, "Connecting a Virtual Workforce," Workforce Management (September 22, 2008), pp 1–25; D. Pauleen and B. Harmer, "Away from the Desk . . . Always," Wall Street Journal (December 15, 2008), p. B8; R. Zeidner, "Telecommuting: The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown," HR Magazine (May 2008), p. 10; D. Fost, "They're Working on Their Own, Just Side by Side," New York Times (February 20, 2008), p. 5; and R. Scally, "'Working From Home Today'—That's Not What Your Boss Thinks," Workforce Week, May 6, 2007, p. 1.

Class Exercise

1. Divide students into groups of three to five each.
2. Assign half of the groups the Point position and half the CounterPoint position.
3. Ask the students to develop arguments for each position (this means a little research and fact finding must be done beyond what appears in the Point/CounterPoint reading).
4. Select two of the groups to present their positions.
5. Take a poll of the class on which team presented the stronger, more convincing argument.