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## PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING IN PROFESSIONAL SELECTION: APPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, psychological testing has become increasingly prevalent in the professional selection process within organizational contexts. Psychological testing offers valuable insights into candidates' psychological traits and abilities related to the specific requirements of the workplace. This paper provides an overview of the use of psychological testing in the selection process, covering the types of tests most commonly used, the importance of the validity and reliability of psychological instruments, the ethical considerations, positive practices and recommendations for further use. The emphasis is on the selection of appropriate measuring instruments and the proper application of psychological tests based on the organizational needs, in order to provide more information about the potential work performance of the candidates and their compatibility with the job requirements. Although the use of psychological testing in the selection process can be particularly useful, it is recommended to be used in combination with multiple assessment methods in order to optimize its impact on hiring decisions.*

**Keywords:** *professional selection, psychological tests, testing, recruitment, human resources*

### INTRODUCTION

Human resources are considered the most important asset of any organization, and hiring the right candidates for the job is one of the key aspects of the recruitment process. For those reasons, the professional selection of candidates is a challenging task for professionals working in the field of human resource management. They aim to recruit and select potential candidates who will meet the organization's needs in order to fulfil its strategic goals. Basically, recruitment refers to the activities carried out to attract qualified people,

according to the human resource plan, while personnel selection consists of the procedure of selecting those who are most suitable to fill a position (Dolan & Raich, 2010; Polanco, 2013). Therefore, professional selection is an extremely responsible activity because it involves making decisions that can have a significant impact on the organization and its employees.<sup>1</sup>

Professional selection is the process of carefully screening potential job candidates in

<sup>1</sup> Escobedo Portillo, A. & Mancera-Valencia, F. (2021). The Processes of Recruitment and Selection of Personnel: Between Objectivity and Subjectivity. *International Journal of Social Sciences Perspectives*. 9. 1. 10.33094/7.2017.2021.91.1.8.

order to select the most suitable individuals to meet the needs of the position. Selection can be defined as the procedure of choosing one candidate of the group of registered candidates who is most suitable for a certain position and organization.<sup>2</sup> According to Dale Yoder, "Selection is the process in which candidates for employment are divided into two classes - those who are to be offered employment and those who are not".<sup>3</sup> Employee selection is the process of collecting and evaluating applicant information with the goal of identifying the best person for a position. During the selection, the applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as attitudes and other relevant factors are carefully analyzed.<sup>4</sup> The objective of the selection process is to match the applicant's ability, knowledge, skills and experience with job requirements in a fair and legal manner.<sup>5</sup> The goal is to predict whether a given person will be able to cope with situations of specific tasks and requirements at the workplace. Through the professional selection, the degree of compatibility between the job candidate and the professional and personal criteria for the performance of the specific work activity is perceived. Every candidate can be a potential employee, but it becomes real when the professional selection procedure is successfully completed for him. (Mancheva, 2020)

The success of the organization depends on effective recruitment and selection system. The scope of professional selection of candidates is very wide, and each company has its own model of recruitment and selection according to their policies and procedures. The right professional selection is crucial to the success of the organization because it can lead to increased productivity, collaboration, better

team dynamics, greater employee engagement and overall better performance and development. On the other hand, making the wrong selection can result in wasted resources, reduced satisfaction, affect the company's reputation and cause potential legal problems. (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010; Escobedo Portillo & Mancera-Valencia, 2021).

To avoid any negative outcome and ensure relevant employment, it is common for companies to base their recruitment on job competencies, basing selection procedures on interviews, application of psychological tests, review of resumes and checking of references, among others, all based on the previous analysis of the job position. (Lopez, 2010) It is essential that organizations invest in effective selection processes to ensure that they hire employees who are aligned with the company's goals and needs.

## 1. THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

To ensure an effective, correct and aligned process with the organization's goals, it is necessary to take into account various factors that are relevant to the organization and the workplace. In the twentieth century selection was primarily aimed at matching people to specific jobs. However, in the 21st century more and more importance is given to flexibility and following the changes that occur in the wider occupational context. (Davidson et al., 2020) It has now become necessary to look beyond job-specific skills when assessing people and look at the potential range of personality matches. (Chai, 2022) Such matches include organizational culture, personality characteristics and movement in and out of the institution, interaction with a wider range of potential collaborators.<sup>6</sup>

The existing literature in the field suggests that the professional selection process should be aimed at providing relevant information to

<sup>2</sup> Gusdorf, M. (2008). Recruitment and selection: Hiring the right person, Society for Human Resource

<sup>3</sup> Selection: Meaning and Procedure by Anurodh Godha. Retrieved March 12, 2024 from <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/mgmtmp01/chapter/selection-meaning-and-procedure-2/>

<sup>4</sup> Fried, J. B., Johnson, J. (2002). Human resources in healthcare: managing for success. AUPHA Press, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Karim, Md & Bhuiyan, Arafat & Kumer, Sujit & Nath, Deb & Bin Latif, Wasib. (2021). Conceptual Framework of Recruitment and Selection Process. Journal of Business and Social Sciences Research. 11. 18-25. 10.18533/ijbsr.v11i02.1415.

<sup>6</sup> Ogunsola, O. K., Arikewuyo, K. A., Oluwarotimi, O., & Akintokunbo, V. E. O. (2023). Employee Selection Process: An Approach for Effective Organizational Performance. International Journal of Social Science and Human Research, Vol. 06 (10), 6132-6140

the candidate through a number of successive steps or stages. Kis (2022) suggests that the selection process consists of the following steps:

- 1) Initial Screening
- 2) Completion of the Application Form
- 3) Employment Tests
- 4) Job Interview
- 5) Conditional Job Offer
- 6) Background Investigation
- 7) Medical Examination
- 8) Permanent Job Offer

MacKenzie & Pantelakis (2023) distinguish the following stages in the process of professional selection:

- [1] Application
- [2] Resume screening
- [3] Screening call
- [4] Assessment test
- [5] In-person interviewing
- [6] Background checks
- [7] Reference checks
- [8] Decision and job offer

Analyzing the models for professional selection, Mancheva (2020) points out that the dynamics of the work positions require the search for potential in the candidates that will enable them to accept and adapt to the changes in the labour activity. According to her, in the methodology of the American organizational structure for professional selection, job candidates go through four stages: testing, preliminary interview, interview with a supervisor or manager and a job offer. The review shows that in the selection process the psychodiagnos- tics assessment is applied immediately after the analysis of their documents, while in the European area the interviewing of the candidates precedes the diagnostic process.

The selection process needs to be organized in a way that will allow candidates to accurately demonstrate or provide information on compliance with the criteria for selecting the position. As all positions differ in purpose, knowledge, skills and abilities required, so may the

selection techniques used to assess suitability to match the requirements. However, the professional literature in the field and practice in personnel selection shows that useful to include several methods and techniques for selection, such as tests, techniques and scales for assessing personality and specific abilities. In this way, the data obtained by methods with naturalistic character (interview, observation, communication) are supplemented with psychological instruments and a more comprehensive evaluation of the candidates is enabled, providing unique insights into their characteristics, skills, abilities and qualities related to the professional role they are expected to perform.

## 2. THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

A psychological test is a systematic procedure of “collecting” a sample of behaviour relevant to the cognitive, affective or interpersonal functioning of the person being examined and their scoring and interpretation according to established norms. (Belevska, 2018; Miller & Lovler, 2018; Anastasi, 1998) Testing involves the application of standardized psychological instruments, and increases the reliability of information obtained by other methods and means, usually of a naturalistic character. Four basic principles are important to psychological testing (Hogan, 2007):

- 1) People differ in important traits;
- 2) Traits can be quantified;
- 3) Traits are relatively stable;
- 4) Trait measures are related to existing behaviour.

These principles are also particularly significant in testing for professional purposes, as they form the basis for understanding and assessing individuals in the selection process. The use of psychological tests is a practice used by many organizations to assess various aspects of individuals’ functioning that are relevant to their performance in the positions they are applying for. Psychological tests play a crucial role in enhancing the accuracy of

candidate selection in recruitment processes. (Chipana-Castillo, Miranda-Roca & Wagner, 2021; Sherin & Ghazal, 2022) They can provide valuable insights into the suitability of candidates for a particular role by assessing their personality characteristics, abilities, attitudes, potential, and help organizations make more informed hiring decisions. (Meyer, 2023; Mancheva, 2020; Gusdorf, 2008) However, in order to obtain relevant information, psychologists need to make an adequate choice of measuring instruments with which to make an assessment, with particular attention to what they specifically want to assess, how reliable that method is, for what age it is intended and whether it is sensitive to cultural, educational, gender or age differences. When using psychological tests, it is necessary to consistently follow the professional recommendations for their use in selective purposes that are regarding their reliability, validity, normative samples, critical scales, and feedback given to candidates and potential employers. (Carles, 2009) Miller and Lovler (2018) state that psychological testing is an important component of the overall assessment of an individual for various purposes, but it is not the sole component of assessment. Yet, psychological testing has several advantages over other selective procedures:

- Psychological tests are easy to administer;
- Unlike other selective means, they are less influenced by the personal qualifications of the one who gives them;
- They are objective;
- The bias in the assessment of the test is lower in contrast to other selective means;
- The tests provide a quantitative description of an individual's characteristics. Quantification is very important for distinguishing between candidates in professional selection.

Depending on the specificity of the job and the requirements of the company, different types of psychological measuring instruments are used in the professional selection process, belonging to one of the following broad categories

of tests: (Taylor et al., 2002; Salgado & De Fruyt, 2005; Carless, 2007; Belevska, 2018)

- Ability tests, and
- Personality tests.

Ability tests are standardized methods of evaluating an individual's performance in various situations or work activities. Since the development of ability tests until today, they represent one of the most reliable means of occupational selection and are used to assess various types of abilities, including cognitive abilities, psychomotor abilities, some specific job-related abilities, and the achievements of candidates. (Riggio, 2003; Carles, 2009; Sehrawat & Sehrawat, 2007) According to Schmidt & Hunter (1998) the main reason to incorporate ability testing into the selection processes is that they are the strongest predictors of real-world job performance known. The type of abilities that are assessed during the professional selection process depend on the nature of the tasks of interest. For the most part, according to the needs of the organizations, tests that measure individual's cognitive abilities as verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, numerical reasoning, working memory, problem-solving, analytical and critical thinking, spatial reasoning, psychomotor abilities and additional specific abilities are used. (Robertson & Smith, 2001; Sehrawat & Sehrawat, 2007) According to Petrovska-Beshka, Kenig and Blazevska-Stoilkovska (2018), in the period from the 50s of the last century until today, tests of cognitive abilities have been constructed that are used as selective techniques, starting with those for measuring general intellectual ability, and ending with those which assess specific cognitive abilities, such as: sensory, psychomotor, mechanical, etc. They state that tests of general intellectual ability, as opposed to tests that measure specific abilities, have been criticized for being less effective predictors of job performance, but many authors point out that they remain valid and reliable means of professional selection. (Riggio, 2003; Robertson & Smith, 2001; Schmidt, 2002)

Personality tests are based on either trait or type approach of personality theory. In general, personality refers to the enduring characteristics and behaviour that comprise a person's unique adjustment to life, including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns.<sup>7</sup> Personality tests measure the typical behaviour of the individual in a certain situation or context, and the dispositions of the individual in a given situation to behave or react in a certain way. (Petrovska-Beshka & Kenig, 2013) It has long been recognized that personality is of great importance in people's success in work, no less than in the approach they take to other aspects of their life. Personality tests are used in the organizations to determine whether the candidates will fit the organizational needs and culture, and also to identify the ones that have a correlation to the performance at the workplace. Personality measurement is very clearly

a part of the whole field of testing, but the way in which personality measures are labelled and described varies. (Edenbrough, 2005) Depending on the structure of the test, one or more dimensions of a person and their relationship are measured, in order to detect personal advantages and disadvantages of the candidates in relation to the specific requirements of the workplace, as well as the potential for their professional growth and development. Table 1 provides a list of the most commonly used personality tests in professional selection, with a description of the characteristics obtained by the assessment.

Psychological testing is considered an integral part of the best practices for professional candidate selection. Carless (2009) points out that in recent years the use of psychological tests in the selection process is increasing for the following reasons:

- [1] Availability of psychological tests;
- [2] Awareness of testing as a positive selection practice is growing;

<sup>7</sup> American Psychological Association. (N. D.). Personality. Retrieved 04.03.2024

**Table 1. List of personality tests used in professional selection**

Personality Test	Description	Key Features
NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R)	Measures five broad personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism	Provides a systematic assessment of emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles. This detailed personality description can be a valuable resource for a variety of professionals.
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	Assesses personality preferences based on four dichotomies (Introversion vs. Extroversion, Sensing vs. Intuition, Thinking vs. Feeling, Judging vs. Perceiving)	Provides insights into communication style, information processing decision-making, work preferences.
16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF)	Includes 16 primary trait scales: warmth, reasoning, emotional stability, dominance, liveliness, rule conscious, social boldness, sensitivity, vigilance, abstractness, privateness, apprehension, open to change, self-reliance, perfection, and tension	Provides predictive insights for behaviour in work-related settings, including leadership potential, teamwork skills, problem-solving abilities, communication style.
DISC Assessment	Evaluates personality traits based on four dimensions: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness.	Provides valuable perspectives on person's interaction style, control over situations, ability to work in consistent manner, approach to tasks.
SHL Occupational Personality Questionnaire	Key measurement areas include relationship with people, thinking style and feelings and emotions.	Provides insights into an individual's work-related behaviours, interactions and collaboration with others, approaches to intellectual tasks, emotions management, adaptability, work ethics.

- [3] There is evidence of validity and reliability of the tests;
- [4] The professionalism of human resources management and their involvement in decision-making in the organization has increased.

According to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology many organizations in the United States use psychological assessment as supplemental information for making hiring, promotion, and development decisions. Statistics show that:<sup>8</sup>

- 29% of employers use one or more forms of psychological measurement or assessment;
- 20% of employers use cognitive ability tests;
- 14% of employers use some form of managerial assessments;
- 13% of employers use personality tests;
- 8% of employers use interest inventories.

Many studies support the use of psychological instruments for professional selection, highlighting the benefits of psychological examination of candidates. Psychological testing is used in the selection of professionals in various positions such as health professionals (Powis, 2009), police officers (Cochrane, Tett & Vandecreek, 2003; Lough, & Von Treuer, 2013; Detrick & Chibnall, 2013), bank service representatives (Baron, Hellya & Hellya, 2020), management positions (Kumar, 2014; Wasylshyn, 2010; Taylor, Mills & O'Driscoll, 1993).

The ultimate goal of psychological testing is to provide accurate and meaningful information about the traits, characteristics, abilities and behavior of individuals involved in the selection process, and this is possible with professional and responsible use of measuring instruments and compliance with the principles of psychological testing.

### 3. CONSIDERATIONS IN USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS FOR PROFESSIONAL SELECTION

Regardless of the type of psychological testing in the organizational context, it is necessary to assure that the tests are given according to the recommendations, and that the results are communicated in a way that is understandable for all professionals involved in the selection process. It is important to note that the psychological tests may only be given, analyzed and interpreted by licensed psychologists, in a way that is determined according to the specifics of the tests and the guidelines for their administration.

In practice, among professionals who are not psychologists, there is often a discussion whether abilities, characteristics and behaviour are measurable at all. Although there are different views and opinions regarding this issue, it is more than certain that they can be measured with appropriate psychological tests and provide an answer to the specific needs of the selection process. Psychological measuring instruments used in the process of professional selection need to be standardized, thus ensuring objectivity and certainty that the evaluation of each respondent depends only on the expression of his characteristic or ability, and not on the testing procedure. (Dinić, 2019) In addition, to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the test results, the validity and reliability of the psychological tests are taken into account. Reliability is a characteristic that a test should possess in order to be usable, the scores obtained during repeated application of the test to the same subjects will be the same or similar and will not include error due to the measurement process itself, while the validity of the test is the extent to which the test measures what it claims to measure (Dinić, 2019; Urbina, 2004). Understanding the complex nature of the psychological testing in professional selection is of crucial importance for optimizing the recruitment process and mitigating any potential flaws. Likewise, the selection of tests that are appropriate for the specific job role and organization may respond to

<sup>8</sup> Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (N. D.). How Many U.S. Companies Use Employment Tests? Retrieved February 24, 2024 from <https://www.siop.org/Business-Resources/Employment-Testing/Test-Use>

the need to address the specific abilities, skills, and personality characteristics necessary to fit the specific job position.

Apart from the psychometric characteristics of the tests, it is important to consider the ethical standards for application of the psychological tests, as well as the regulations for their application. (Petrovska-Beshka, Kenig and Blazevska-Stoilkovska, 2018) Important decisions for people are made based on the tests, and therefore their professional and ethical application is of particular importance. A basic rule regarding the use of tests is that psychological testing may only be performed by a person who possesses appropriate professional qualifications. (Petrovska-Beshka & Kenig, 2013) Thus, in the process of professional selection, candidates are protected from irregularities in the selection, administration and interpretation of test results. If there are any limitations regarding the application of the test and its interpretation, they must be explicitly stated and explained.

Psychologists who are involved in the candidate selection process need to ensure a high quality of services, which includes impartiality in the procedure, confidentiality and integrity. Respecting the privacy of candidates is of undoubted importance. Recruitment of candidates for employment often involves sharing a lot of data before the selection process begins, and psychological testing sometimes includes personal information that is not directly related to the job, but is important for assessing certain aspects of the respondent's functioning. (Sehrawat & Sehrawat, 2017; Wang, Sun, Drake & Hall, 2015; Stone-Romero, Stone & Hyatt, 2003) For those reasons, in the selection process, it is necessary to inform the candidates about the objectives of the testing and the way in which receive the data, as well as the confidentiality of the shared data, i.e. who will have insight into the results obtained. Bearing in mind that this is sensitive information about the candidates, including their personality characteristics, abilities and functioning, the obligation of privacy and confidentiality

applies to all professionals involved in the selection process.

It is important to mention that candidates can influence the results of some psychological tests. It may happen that the candidate consciously distorts the data and manifests a tendency to present himself in a socially desirable light, to lack motivation for engaging in answering the tests, or that his answers are under influence of inappropriate conditions and distractors during the testing. (Dinić, 2019; Belevska, 2018; Paulhus, 2002) In order to prevent negative impact of testing in the selection process, it is important to provide clear instructions for answering the tests and to encourage candidates to give accurate responses. Many psychological tests also contain validity scales, so they can detect socially desirable behaviour and thus provide reliable results. It is also important that the testing takes place in pleasant conditions to minimize distractions and ensure that candidates can focus on testing without external influences.

Although psychological testing has numerous advantages and provides significant insight into the personal characteristics, abilities and behaviour of the candidate, conclusions regarding professional selection should always be based on assessment with multiple methods, including resume screening, interviews, background and reference checks. Overall, using several approaches for professional selection improves the fairness, accuracy, and efficacy of the hiring process, resulting in better recruiting decisions and stronger organizational outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The process of professionally selecting candidates is one of the most crucial activities undertaken by organizations. Its primary objective is to hire individuals who will deliver optimal performance in the workplace and contribute effectively to achieving the organization's goals. Various methods are used for the purposes of professional selection, among which is psychological testing as a significant resource for the selection of candidates

for employment in various job positions. Psychological tests provide significant information about the abilities, skills, personality characteristics of the individuals involved in the selection process, which cannot be obtained by other methods or from different sources. (Carless, 2009; Chipana-Castillo, Miranda-Roca & Wagner, 2021; Sherin & Ghazal, 2022)

When using psychological tests in the selection process, the choice of instruments to be used is particularly important, in order to obtain valid and reliable information about candidates according to organizational needs. In practice, ability tests and personality tests are predominantly used, which include the assessment of various aspects of the functioning of individuals, as well as their qualities and potentials related to the occupational role that is expected of them. From psychological testing, significant information can be obtained that is relevant for predicting their adjustment in the organizational context and potential success in the given role, as well as improving the

process of professional selection by providing comprehensive reliable and valid data for candidates. Psychological testing can be a powerful tool for making effective hiring decisions, and when used in occupational selection it is recommended to:

- Use standardized measuring instruments, with proven validity and reliability;
- The tests must be used by qualified professionals, in a manner determined according to the specifics of the tests and the directions for their administration;
- Respect the ethical standards for the use of psychological tests;
- Respect the privacy of the candidates and the confidentiality of the received data;
- The testing should be conducted in adequate conditions to avoid potential inconsistencies when answering the tests by the candidates;
- Psychological testing should be used in combination with other professional selection methods to ensure fairness, accuracy, and efficacy of the hiring process.

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## PSIHOLOŠKO TESTIRANJE U PROFESIONALNOJ SELEKCIJI: PRIMENE I RAZMATRANJA

**Rezime:** Poslednjih godina psihološko testiranje se sve više koristi u procesu stručne selekcije kandidata u organizacionom kontekstu. Psihološko testiranje nudi dragocene uvide u psihološke osobine i sposobnosti kandidata u vezi sa specifičnim zahtevima radnog mesta. Ovaj rad daje pregled upotrebe psihološkog testiranja u procesu selekcije, pokrivajući tipove testova koji se najčešće koriste, važnost validnosti i pouzdanosti psiholoških instrumenata, etička razmatranja, pozitivne prakse i preporuke za dalju upotrebu. Akcenat je na odabiru odgovarajućih mernih instrumenata i pravilnoj primeni psiholoških testova na osnovu organizacionih potreba, kako bi se pružilo više informacija o potencijalnom radnom učinku kandidata i njihovoj kompatibilnosti sa zahtevima posla. Iako upotreba psihološkog testiranja u procesu selekcije može biti posebno korisna, preporučuje se da se koristi u kombinaciji sa više metoda procene kako bi se optimizovao njen uticaj na odluke o zapošljavanju.

**Ključne reči:** profesionalna selekcija, psihološki testovi, testiranje, regrutacija, ljudski resursi