ABSTRACT

Organisations in their collective sense are composed of individual human beings. These individuals act out their working lives within the framework of an organizational structure and in the context of particular organisational culture. Kreitner (1995) states that researchers and practising managers have focused much effort on studying people in small groups and as individuals. In so doing they have discovered that differences between individuals, are as important as their common features. An individual at work is perceived by others in three principal ways:

- As a physical person having gender, age, race, size and characteristics,
- As a person with a range of abilities (i.e. intellectual, physical and social);
- As a personality (i.e. some one having a particular kind of temperament).

Accepting that each person, ultimately, is a unique blend of all three dimensions, it is nevertheless important, from an organizational behaviour perspective, to ask whether it is possible to categorise individuals in some way. Much of the work on measurement of human performance is devoted to developing standards of comparison between individuals. This enables us to describe individuals in terms of broad types, such as similar ability groups and personality types.

Key words: perception, personality, aptitude, abilities, psychometric tests.
INTRODUCTION

Cole (1998) says that an individual sex seems to make very little difference to job performance, except perhaps where brute strength is involved. Studies have shown that there are few differences between men and women in such key areas as problem solving ability, analytical skills, learning ability and motivation. Whilst men may be less differential towards authority than women, have higher expectations of success and may be more aggressive in their behaviour at work. There is likely to be very little practical difference in their behaviour. The one feature of working life where differences are likely, is in respect of absenteeism, where women consistently have higher rates than men due mainly to their primary role in caring for children of the family. Most of the differences in the way women are perceived at work, are due to:

- Stereotyping (i.e. assuming that particular sets of characteristics which are unchangeable;
- Past precedents in work types patterns.

WOMEN’S STEREOTYPING

The stereotyping of women as being only suited to certain, specific types of work and roles has been on the fore-front of working life in Britain for a hundred years or more ever since women and children were finally banned from working in near slave labour conditions in the mines and cotton mills of Northern England. However, such harsh conditions were overly protective and only in the last decades or so has the underlying paternalism of this situation, been addressed (at least in the Western world).

The resultant stereotyping of women’s role has been softened considerably by employing the legal system to counter unfair discrimination against a person on the grounds of gender. In association with legal changes, have come changing attitudes both on the part of men and of women themselves. Thus, today women are increasingly able to apply themselves to almost any role they are qualified to perform.

AGE AS DISTINGUISHING FACTOR

Age is a factor which distinguishes people. As the population of Western nations, in particular, manifest an ever-increasing proportion of older citizens, it is likely that work groups will increasingly be composed of older rather than younger employees. This has considerable implications for career development, promotion, labour turnover, absenteeism and motivation. It is likely that career development and promotion for younger employees will slow as higher proportions of older employees remain in the workforce. Turnover is likely to decrease as older employees become settled in their jobs and locality. Absenteeism is usually lower among longer-serving employees. Older professional employees seem to be generally motivated in their work right up to the time of retirement (Cole, 1998).

On productivity, it might be thought that older employees would be less productive than their younger counterparts due to slower reaction time, loss of stamina and lower motivation. In the study carried out by McEvoy and Cascise (1989) it was
found from an analysis of several studies that there were no correlation between age and productivity. On the contrary, older employees were just as productive as younger ones. Despite the work worthiness of older employees, there still is a strong tendency for organizations to seek young persons when recruiting personnel. However, organizations with strong equal opportunities policies have issued guidelines to recruiters warning them of unfair discrimination against potential applicants on grounds of age.

Questions of sheer physical size do not enter into most selection processes. Only in certain occupations, such as the police and military, is height taken into account. Some occupations also ban the wearing of spectacles usually on grounds of safety or credibility. Nevertheless, like most other human features, size etc, can be the subject of stereotyping and unfair discrimination. What should account for most in the work place is the ability to do the job to a satisfactory level. All the official guidelines on unfair discrimination emphasise the essential justice of appointing or promoting employees on the basis of their ability to do the job.

ABILITIES, APTITUDES, SKILLS AND TALENTS

Kreitner (1995) defines ability as a stable characteristic responsible for a person’s maximum physical or mental performance. Skill on the other hand, is the specific capacity to physically manipulate objects. Abilities and skills are getting a good deal of attention in management circles these days. Charles Spearman (1989) says that they are various types of abilities, one being general mental ability needed for all cognitive tasks.

Mental Abilities Underlying Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal comprehension:</td>
<td>Ability to understand what words mean and to readily comprehend what is read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word fluency:</td>
<td>Ability to produce isolated words that fulfil specific symbolic requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numerical:</td>
<td>Ability to make quick and accurate computations such as adding and subtracting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial:</td>
<td>Being able to perceive spatial patterns and to visualize how geometric shapes would look is transformed in shape or position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory:</td>
<td>Having good rote memory for paired words symbols, list of numbers etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual Speed:</td>
<td>Ability to perceive figures, identify similarities and differences and carry out tasks involving visual perception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inductive Reasoning:</td>
<td>Ability to reason from specifics to general conclusions.</td>
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APPTITUDES AND TALENTS

These are used to describe an individual’s potential towards certain levels of behaviour. Aptitudes and talents tend to be measured in specific types of behaviour e.g. an aptitude for numbers. Aptitudes and talents are often described as gifts. Important ‘aspects of attitudes and talents are:

- Learning capacity;
- Individual motivation.

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

It measures human performance and is devoted to developing standards of comparison between individuals. Anastasi (1988) describes psychometric test as an objective and standardized measure of a sample of behaviour. To reasonable extent of a person’s current performance and aptitude levels, many organizations apply aptitudes of individuals. Also, its value, for work organisation, is principally as an aid to employee selection and development by improving the chances of allocating people work and roles for which they are best suited.

Thus, potential managers in an information technology environment may be tested for their numerical and perceptual abilities and their ability to reason logically. The tests are standardized and objective in that:

- They are administered and scored in consistent and uniform ways;
- The scoring is done according to explicit rules and not on the basis of the examiner’s subjective opinion.

Key feature of all psychometric tests is that they have to fulfil two principal criteria in use and these are:

- Reliability (i.e. tests must provide consistent results when measuring the same characteristics or factors on two or more occasions).
- Validity (i.e. they must be able to measure what they claim to measure).

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS FALL INTO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

- Intelligence tests e.g. especially of logical reasoning. Such tests are designed to produce a single score (an Intelligent Quotient or IQ).
- Attainment tests (tests of previous learning in numbers, spelling, keyboard skills e.t.c.).
- Aptitude tests e.g. facility with numbers, spatial reasoning. These tests also produce a range of scores.
- Occupational preference tests which bring out a person’s preferences for occupational choice.
- Personality tests which are designed to provide a profile of an individual’s temperament.
For personality files, most tests in a work situation are used to provide a quick and standardized method of obtaining information about a particular aspect of an individual’s abilities in order to recruit a person in a suitable job. The tests are used in conjunction with other information about candidates (e.g. from application forms, references, academic certificates e.t.c).

PERSONALITY

Kreitner (1995) defines personality as the combination of stable physical and mental characteristics that give the individual his/her identity. These characteristics or traits (including how one looks, thinks, acts and feels) are the product of interacting genetic and environmental influences. Kreitner (1995) introduces five personality dimensions which issue some cautions about workplace personality testing and examine an important personality factor. Internal locus of control means attributing outcomes to one’s own actions while external locus control means attributing outcomes to circumstances beyond one’s control. Below are the five personality dimensions:
PERSONALITY DIMENSION | CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON SCORING POSITIVE ON THE DIMENSION

1. Extraversion: Outgoing, talkative, assertive, etc.
3. Conscientiousness: Dependable, persistent, responsible.
5. Openness to experience: Intellectual, curious, broadminded, imaginative.

Standardised personality tests determine how positively or negatively a person scores on each of the five. For example, someone scoring negatively on extraversion would be of an introverted behaviour. Someone scoring negatively on emotional stability would be nervous, tense, angry and worried. A person’s scores on the five dimensions reveal a personality profile as unique as his fingerprints.

CONCLUSION

Like many areas in psychology, the concepts of personality and intelligence have some things in common and some that deal with human cognitive processes and they both acknowledge that people are unique. They are also abstract concepts involving mental activity which cannot be observed directly, and so personality and intelligence can only be inferred from invisible behaviour. Finally, personality and intelligence both deal with aspects of behaviour that reflect a person’s reactions or responses to the world. However, alongside these similarities, there is an important difference between the two concepts. Personality is a more global concept than intelligence. Although it embraces some facets of intellectual activity, it essentially expresses a person’s reactions and responses to the social world, whereas intelligence is more often used to describe responses to the world of objects and things of abstract thoughts. Although this difference exists, there is still a degree of overlap between the two concepts.
REFERENCES


Individual at work: Physical Characteristics, skills and Personality