

Inspiring People Development

# HR

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# Thinking beyond a one size fits all approach



**Andrew O'Connell** is managing director of Omni HR Solutions based in Edinburgh. Here, Andrew discusses the value

of measuring a much wider range of job suitably traits in order to boost talent selection and management

**HR** managers are no strangers to using psychometric testing in order to select the best person for the job. But with 50 years under their belts, are conventional techniques, such as Myers Briggs, too old hat? Do they now suit the vast complexity of modern job roles and the diverse range of candidates who want to work in them?

Opinion is polarised. After all, people's personalities are far too broad and complex to suit a 'one size fits' all approach.

As such, it is vital that HR and recruiters adopt the best screening techniques to separate the wheat from the chaff. The Financial Times reported in a recent article on psychometric testing that 'existing tools were unsuitable for recruitment and that new thinking was required.'

Existing psychometric personality instruments typically measure a limited number of behavioural traits. Due to the lack of a discrete number of traits, and because some use 'norms' of behaviour, they only determine a 'type' of individual for a certain 'type' of job.

Some tests now measure a greater number of traits, but these are often used as part of an assessment programme, costing up to £1,000 per head and taking days to complete.

Harrison Assessments (HA), developed in Perth, Australia and delivered across Scotland by Omni HR Solutions, was initially introduced into Asia through the mid to late '90s. HA was developed to measure the maximum number of behavioural traits required in most job roles. From aspects such as job suitability, there are over 200 traits defined and measured in total.

Unlike Myers Briggs that focuses on personality types, HA examines a multitude of aspects such as what people enjoy doing, their personal behaviours, tasks, interests and motivation.

A major element underpinning HA is Enjoyment Theory. It includes a questionnaire designed to elicit from respondents a ranking of behaviours and tasks they enjoy performing and those they don't.

The system is all about helping candidates fulfil careers that they enjoy doing and minimising their chances

of working in occupations they dislike. HA measures behavioural traits in a unipolar fashion. For example key traits, Diplomacy and Frankness are measured as extremes of one rating scale.

The relative difference, but not independent values are how traditional psychometrics work - HA measures them independently. HA assesses these as complementary traits or paradox pairs. Someone who scores very high on both diplomatic and frankness would be a far better communicator than someone who scores very low on both.

Omni HR Solutions has already seen success using the programme in Scotland, alongside global organisations, including AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals, BMW, Coca-Cola, Coopers & Lybrand and IBM.

The HA system brought benefits to BP, which jointly ran a scheme to provide long term unemployed teenagers with jobs as forecourt attendants. Only one in five trainees were employed after three months following a period of customer service training where they were paid three months' salary.

With training approaching £10,000 per head, the future of the entire program was at risk. The problem was that far too many candidates were placed on the program who were unsuitable for customer service roles. Harrison Assessments ran a profiling system which measured a large number of behavioural tendencies, interests and preferences.

HA examined 130 behavioural traits from a number of previously successful and unsuccessful forecourt attendants. The results did indeed show that there were a number of characteristics that indicate if a person will be a success in the forecourt environment.

And the results? Some 95% of the applicants predicted to succeed completed the course successfully. By the end of three months, the number of previously long term unemployed teenagers still in the job increased from 19% to 83%. The cost savings for training by selecting suitable staff was over £500,000 across the five courses.

In Scotland, the HA system, delivered through Omni HR Solutions, was successfully rolled out with the FRAE Fife Social Inclusion Partnership. Omni set up pre interview meetings with 11 staff team using psychometric profile techniques by remote access. It then received and analysed data from the staff team and produced detailed psychometric profiles. Meetings were undertaken with each staff member to discuss their individual profiles, strengths and weaknesses and potential paths for career/personal development. This resulted, in better performance and productivity, higher contentment and lower employee turnover.