

• **Personality Testing Controversial, But Poised to Take Off**

- Advocates of personality testing say such assessments offer useful and legitimate insights into how well people might fit into an organization. Critics, though, question personality tests' effectiveness and suggest they can harm job candidates.

By Ed Frauenheim

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You don't act polite when you don't want to. You are more relaxed than strict about finishing things on time. You have a lot of confidence in your ability to succeed.

- These are among the statements job candidates are asked to respond to in a personality test created by software company Unicru, which recently was bought by HR technology firm Kronos.
- The test, which is part of a broader applicant assessment that considers data such as educational background, is meant to uncover work-related personality traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness.
- Advocates of personality testing say such assessments offer useful and legitimate insights into how well people might fit into an organization. Critics, though, question personality tests' effectiveness and suggest they can harm job candidates.
- One thing seems clear: Personality assessment is likely to become a more prominent tool for employers.
- "It will be used more and more, because new-hire turnover is very expensive," says workforce management consultant Joyce Gioia. "It just makes sense to hire right the first time."
- About 35 percent of U.S. organizations use personality tests as part of their hiring process, according to the Association of Test Publishers, a trade group for makers of tests including education and employment assessments.
- Companies paying for personality tests may be getting a raw deal, skeptics suggest. Scott Lilienfeld, associate professor of psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, says the testing industry has not been as open to public scrutiny as it should be, raising questions about the validity of personality assessments. "Most tests in the industry haven't been subjected to adequate peer review," he says. "That's troubling."
- Lilienfeld says tests that seek to gauge a person's integrity can wind up harming employers by screening out quality candidates who are willing to ask tough questions. "They tend to have a high false-positive rate," he says.
- Labor attorney Brad Seligman says false positives are a serious issue. "It can create an underclass of people who can't get employed," he says. "They just don't test well."
- Personality tests sometimes result in false positives, but so do other selection tools such as interviews, says David Arnold, general counsel for the Association of Test Publishers. Arnold doubts employers would use the tests if they were missing out on large numbers of quality candidates. He also says the validity of personality tests has been shown in numerous studies.
- Kronos said Unicru's selection methodology has been reviewed in a number of peer-

reviewed journals and at scientific meetings and research universities.

- Integrity tests differ from other psychological tests that ask invasive questions about sexuality or political views, Arnold says. And there are few legal worries regarding the tests, he says.
- Meanwhile, Arnold says, personality tests that focus on honesty and integrity can play a major role in deterring employee theft and fostering cultural fit among new hires ranging from entry-level workers to experienced executives.
- "Bottom line, these tests do a good job of identifying people who are conscientious and don't engage in counterproductive actions," he says.