



THE THEORY BEHIND MEASURING PERSONALITY

What exactly is the theory behind measuring personality? Robert and Joyce Hogan have spent over 40 years promoting socioanalytic theory as a scientific basis for measuring personality and understanding workplace behavior. Socioanalytic theory suggests that job performance is directly related to social motives and social competency. In *Work Motivation: History, Theory, Research, and Practice*, Gary Latham provides a clear and efficient description of socioanalytic theory:

[Robert and Joyce Hogan's] taxonomy [of needs] is the basis for socioanalytic theory. This theory (Hogan, 2007; Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003) states that people have innate biological needs for (1) acceptance and approval; (2) status, power, and control of resources; and (3) predictability and order. These needs translate into behaviors for getting along with others, getting ahead in terms of status, and making sense of the world. Hogan (2004) argued that the agenda for personality theory is to explain individual differences among people in their ability to get along and get ahead; the agenda for personality assessment, he argued, is to predict individual differences in people's potential for doing so.

Socioanalytic theory states that personality should be defined from the perspectives of both the person and the observer. Personality from the person's view is his/her identity. It is defined in terms of the strategies one uses to satisfy the needs for acceptance and status. Personality from an observer's point of view is a person's reputation. It is defined in terms of trait evaluations. Hence, reputation reflects the observer's view of the characteristic ways the person behaves. Reputation describes a person's behavior; identity explains it (Hogan & Holland, 2003).

Socioanalytic theory...states that the two needs, to get along and to get ahead, are intertwined with basic personality traits. The need to get along underlies and is expressed through three traits: emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The need to get ahead underlies and is expressed in terms of two traits, extroversion and openness to experience. The theory also states that these two needs have a distal influence on job performance. They require proximal qualities to transform and direct them into actions, specifically social skills. Social skills moderate the relationship between these two needs and job performance evaluations. This is because social skills enable employees to transform intentions both to get along and to get ahead in ways that are perceived and evaluated by others positively.

Blickle and his colleagues, in a series of studies conducted with employees in Germany, found support for this theory. Specifically, they showed that agreeableness x social skill interaction predicted job performance ratings from supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Blickle et al., 2008). A second study revealed a significant extroversion x social competency



interaction in the prediction of sales performance (Blickle, Wendel, & Ferris, 2010). A third study (Blickle et al., 2011) replicated these findings. For employees high on political skill, higher levels of getting along predicted higher levels of job performance ratings. For those low on political skill, higher levels of getting along predicted lower levels of job performance ratings. Similarly, for employees high on political skill, higher levels of getting ahead predicted higher levels of job performance ratings. For those low on political skill, higher levels of getting ahead predicted lower levels of job performance ratings.

Locke (1991) has argued that needs operate cyclically; they are never satisfied permanently. They exist whether or not an employee is aware of them. A given need can instigate many different behaviors, and a given behavior can be the result of more than one need. Needs give rise to values and goals.

For more information on socioanalytic theory, read Joyce Hogan and Brent Holland's white paper *Using Theory to Evaluate Personality and Job Performance Relations: A Socioanalytic Perspective*.

Latham, Gary P. "Chapter 6: Needs: The Starting Point of Motivation." *Work Motivation: History, Theory, Research, and Practice*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012. 137-38. Print.