

Q&A: Why Aptitude Testing Isn't More Popular



Q: Why is it that many people still don't know about aptitude testing?

A. A simple answer would be to point out that organizations that specialize in the field, such as Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation, Inc., or Career Vision.org are nonprofit entities and they don't advertise. Word of mouth is a primary method used to create public awareness and articles in the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Atlantic Monthly* or mention in a book help to educate the public.

But if you look at the history of aptitude testing, the answer is more complex.

In the 1920s, General Electric hired Johnson O'Connor, then a Harvard philosophy graduate with a background in mathematical research, as a factory worker because he wanted to learn engineering. He later headed their engineering department.

Discovering Aptitude Testing

O'Connor and a supervisor decided they could increase worker efficiency by assigning workers to the jobs that they seemed naturally compatible with and wanted to do. At the time, the primary method of personality evaluation was intelligence test scores, but after long study, it was decided that a new way to

evaluate people was needed because the current assessment tools were often open to faulty interpretation.

Since physics and chemistry had played an historic major role in influencing industrial progress, O'Connor believed that using research techniques from physics and chemistry to measure many people in various occupations would document the characteristics of the most successful people, writes Margaret Broadley in *Your Natural Gifts*.

Almost 3000 workers participated in the first work trials. Tests were known as work samples and didn't involve oral or written tests, but scored how a worker performed while actually performing specific tasks.

This method of testing was new and reversed traditional thinking: instead of putting the requirement of each job first, the individual and his or her natural ability to do a specific job was the primary consideration.

Popular with employees, who began asking that their children be tested, and other business firms and colleges asked for the tests. Accurate and nondiscriminatory, O'Conner's new approach had filled a need in the marketplace.

By World War II, mass-market methods of testing job applicants were developed and favored by the infrastructure. Cheap to administer, the standardized tests provided a quick way to categorize people on a mass level. That they're often not an efficient or reliable evaluation tool for everyone is beside the point. Today, the public often mistakes scientific aptitude tests with IQ and standardized testing.

Using two highly regarded search tools, I entered the word aptitude in the search box and got zero results. When I keyed in the word skill, I received a list of math and science notations. So it's no small wonder that many continue to remain in the dark on the topic.

References

Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation Inc.
www.jjocrf.org

Career Vision.org
<http://www.careervision.org/About/History.htm>

Your Natural Gifts
<http://tinyurl.com/lf8fno6>