



Are you Employable?

Interpersonal skill in the modern job market

College graduates face a harsh reality regarding their career prospects. According to the New York Times, recent graduates are entering the toughest job market in the last quarter of a century; only 56% are employed in jobs that require a college degree, 22% are working in jobs that do not require a college degree, and 22.4% aren't working at all.¹

These circumstances aren't limited to recent graduates. Underemployment among workers with a bachelor's or higher degree rose from 3.9% in December 2007 to 8.4% in March 2011, an increase larger than any other segment of the economy.²

The widespread and persistent nature of under- and unemployment in a group that is technically skilled and educated suggests that this demographic lacks the skill set necessary to obtain employment.

The Changing Workforce

What do employers actually want in their new hires? In the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Labor conducted a survey examining what companies want from their employees.³

"The report identified five critical workplace competencies: locating and allocating resources, acquiring and interpreting information, understanding complex systems, technological literacy, and interpersonal skills," said Dr. Robert Hogan, president of Hogan Assessments. "The inclusion of interpersonal skills as a critical competency was a historic departure from traditional thinking, which focused solely on cognitive ability."

So, if employers are no longer focused on cognitive ability, what makes an individual employable? Hogan proposes a three-part model.

"We believe the answer is (a) whether the person is rewarding to deal with, (b) whether the person can get stuff done, and (c) whether the person can fit with the organization," he said.

In other words, being rewarding to deal with depends on a person's positive personality characteristics (interpersonal skills); getting stuff done depends on competence and ambition; fitting in depends on a person's values or beliefs. Additional research indicates that, in this model, being rewarding to deal with is the most important indicator of employability.

The ability to do business depends on having a repertoire of social skills. If candidates have good attitudes, most companies can teach them what they need to know.

A study by Drs. Joyce Hogan and Kimberly Brinkmeyer showed this trend has solidified. Hogan and Brinkmeyer content analyzed employment ads in newspapers across the U.S. over the course of a year. Of the total positions advertised, 47% percent required strong interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills were deemed essential for 71% of the jobs involving client contact, 78% of the jobs requiring coworker interaction, 83% of the jobs involving subordinate interaction, and 84% of the jobs requiring management interaction.⁴

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Unskilled Labor

Despite the importance of interpersonal skills, however, studies indicate that college students are graduating without having developed them. A recent survey of top UK graduate recruiters revealed that there are not enough graduates with adequate interpersonal skills to fill the jobs available.⁵

“This explains why so many high-IQ people are unemployable,” Hogan said. “Some, despite their high IQs, don’t seem very smart based on the kinds of choices they make. Others are independent, non-conforming, and insubordinate. And still others are irritable, challenging, and disputatious – not rewarding to deal with.”

Training Employability

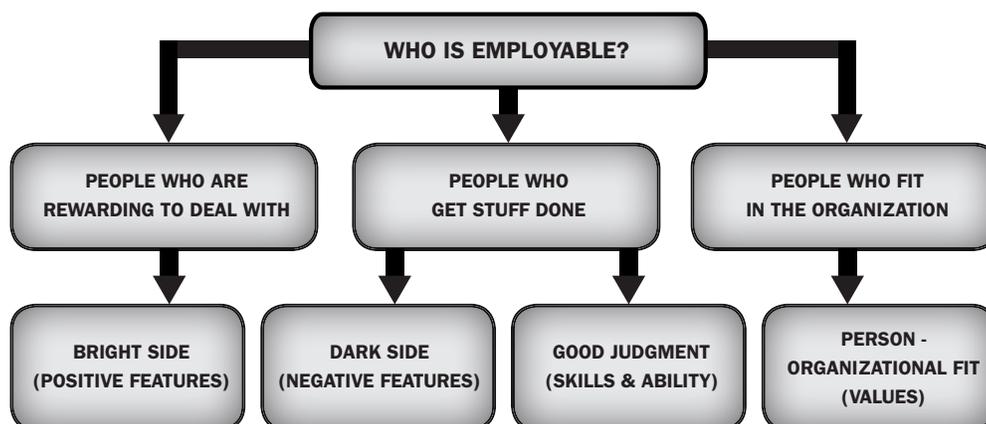
Although the lack of job candidates with good interpersonal skills presents employers with the possibility of a white-collar labor shortage, it also presents a tremendous opportunity. Good or bad interpersonal skill is a function of personality. Therefore, it can be measured using psychometric assessment and, like other counterproductive tendencies, mitigated through strategic self-awareness and coaching.

“The starting point in any coaching process is to narrow down the personality characteristics that are driving the problematic behaviors,” said Trish Kellett, Director of the Hogan Coaching Network.

Personality consists of two major components – identity and reputation. Identity is personality from the inside, how we view ourselves. Because identity is subjective, it is difficult to measure and not a useful predictor of future performance. Reputation (how we are viewed by others), however, is stable over time, and proven to be an excellent predictor of job performance.

Reputation has a bright side and a dark side. Bright side personality, assessed with the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI), is the characteristics that others see when we are at our best. Dark side personality, assessed by the Hogan Development Survey (HDS), is a set of strengths that, under stress or boredom, become obstacles to building and maintaining productive relationships.

DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYABILITY



Personality assessment and feedback are designed to align participants' identity and reputation to increase self-awareness.

Values, the component of personality measured by the Motive, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI), are the core drivers and interests that determine what we desire and strive to achieve. Values also determine what type of work we will find fulfilling, and into what kind of work environment we will fit, which makes values an important part of any discussion of employability.

“Poor interpersonal skill is usually driven by a lack of self-awareness about how certain personality characteristics show up in relations with others. These personality characteristics can be measure by certain HPI scales,” said Hogan Senior Consultant Dr. Susan Toback.

The HPI Adjustment scale, for instance, measures confidence, self-esteem, and composure under pressure. Interpersonal Sensitivity measures tact, perceptiveness, and the ability to maintain relationships.

“Low scores on either of those dimensions, or on any of the subscales that drive them, may work to exaggerate derailing tendencies,” Kellett said.

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“Self-awareness is the keystone of success in the workplace,” Toback said. “Everything we do at work and in life involves other people, so our ability to form relationships and influence others is absolutely critical.”

“Achieving a realistic view of your reputation, how others see you, and bringing that into line with your identity, how you see yourself, is 80% of the work,” Kellett said. “From there, you can begin to identify and institute behavioral changes.”

Changing Behavior

Fortunately, Hogan said, resources exist for job seekers who understand the importance of strong interpersonal skills for a successful career.

“There are myriad non-profit and for-profit organizations that help the unemployed find work,” Hogan said. “In one

job search club, members are told that they are their own worst enemies when it comes to finding new jobs. The task is to reconstruct and reinvent themselves, to learn to project a positive and optimistic attitude during the job search.”

Because personality is stable over time, Kellett said, without intervention, those who struggle with interpersonal skills will likely continue to do so. With adequate coaching, however, methods for mitigating off-putting behaviors can become second nature.

“At first, implementing behavioral changes is like putting a fresh coat of paint on an old house,” Toback said. “The changes might feel fresh, but at the same time can feel superficial or even unnatural. Eventually, though, the changes become ingrained behavioral tendencies and ways of looking at the world and other people. You learn to be better at reading people and managing your interactions.”

About Hogan

Hogan pioneered the use of personality assessment to help organizations make better decisions about people. Hogan Assessments has more than three decades of experience helping businesses hire the right people, develop key talent, and evaluate leadership potential, thereby dramatically reducing turnover and increasing productivity.

Based on more than a century of science and backed by the largest and most complete research archives in the industry, we assess normal personality, derailment characteristics, core values, and cognitive reasoning ability in order to predict job performance.

Hogan's portfolio of employee selection, development, and leadership tools allow companies to better manage their most valuable assets – their people.

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