

***The science behind the
Thomas Personality
assessment***

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What is the Personality assessment?

The Thomas Personality assessment, which is powered by the High Potential Trait Indicator (the HPTI), is a self-report questionnaire, designed for the assessment of personality in the working context. The HPTI was developed by Ian MacRae and Adrian Furnham in 2006 and is based on the Big 5 personality theory. In the HPTI, six personality traits are measured – Conscientiousness, Adjustment, Curiosity, Risk Approach, Ambiguity Acceptance and Competitiveness.

Assessment takers are presented with 78 unique items each relating to one of the six traits, which must be rated on their level of agreement on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 'disagree completely' to 7 'agree completely'). Tests are administered online, either on computers, tablets, or mobile phones and it is available in multiple languages.

The HPTI offers a unique and nuanced opportunity to predict both performance and potential at work. Measuring personality traits as stable characteristics distinguishes what cannot be taught or changed (personality) from that which can be taught such as knowledge and experience.

What theory is the Personality assessment based on?

Based on the Big 5 theory, the HPTI was developed by Ian MacRae and Adrian Furnham in 2006. This assessment measures workplace success, providing valuable insight into both strengths and potential derailers using six personality traits: Conscientiousness, Adjustment, Curiosity, Risk Approach, Ambiguity Acceptance and Competitiveness.

Conscientiousness is the capacity for self-motivation, organisation, and planning. Those with high conscientiousness appear dependable and diligent. Those with lower conscientiousness tend to be more spontaneous, laid-back and may need to be motivated by others.

Adjustment measures the emotional resilience to stressors, difficulties, and challenges. Those with high adjustment are calm under pressure and appear unflappable. Those with lower adjustment feel stress more keenly and tend to show it.

Curiosity indicates the openness to new ideas, techniques, and ways of doing things. Those with high openness like novelty, learning and variety. Those with lower openness prefer tried and tested methods and consistency.

Risk Approach reveals the capacity to make reasoned decisions in the face of adversity. Those with high-risk approach confront difficult situations and have difficult conversations in a reasoned and rational way, those with lower risk approach make more instinctive decisions.

Ambiguity Acceptance shows the receptiveness to complexity, inconsistency, and incongruences. Those with high ambiguity acceptance thrive with uncertainty and complexity. Those with lower ambiguity acceptance like clear-cut answers and simple solutions.

Competitiveness measures the desire for professional success, recognition, and achievement. Those with high competitiveness enjoy positions of power, influence, and recognition. Those with lower competitiveness prefer cooperation, collaboration and may dislike the spotlight.

How is the Big 5 Theory predictive of work success/ outcomes?

Criterion-related validity definition

Criterion-related validity is concerned with the relationship between the measure and an outcome (or criterion) variable, it evaluates if a test predicts an intended outcome.

Criterion Validity:

Personality and work success

To test the ability of the HPTI to predict subjective success in the workplace, a peer reviewed article was published by MacRae and Furnham in 2020. Subjective success is self-reported success in relation to general success, promotion speed, education success, high marks and work success. The participants were recruited from three separate samples from individuals who had engaged in research between 2014 and 2018. The sample consisted of 779 individuals from the working population in 25 countries.

All HPTI factors significantly correlated with subjective success at work, while Conscientiousness ($r=.49$) had the greatest correlation with subjective success at work followed by risk approach ($r=.34$) and adjustment ($r=.30$). HPTI traits were then entered into a regression equation to predict subjective success at work. Conscientiousness ($t=9.00$) was the strongest predictor of success and Adjustment ($t=4.73$) and Competitiveness ($t=4.33$) were also significant predictors of success. The HPTI traits explained 30% of the variance in subjective success ($R^2 = 0.30$).

Personality and work success

In June 2022 a study was conducted with 226 individuals to understand how the HPTI could predict a variety of success metrics in the general working population. The study consisted of questions targeting general success, promotion speed, education success, high marks and work success, alongside items from the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). The IWPQ measures three areas of self-report performance: task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviours.

All HPTI traits showed correlations with measures of success and the strength of correlations varied depending on the trait and type of success.

Table 61: Correlations between the HPTI and self-report success metrics

	Conscientiousness	Adjustment	Curiosity	Risk Approach	Ambiguity Acceptance	Competitiveness
General Success	0.37***	0.35***	0.08	0.34***	0.17**	0.20**
Promotion Speed	-0.23***	-0.25***	-0.01	-0.15*	-0.28***	-0.17*
Education Success	0.16*	0.13	0.05	0.08	-0.02	0.13*
High Marks	0.17*	-0.05	0.10	0.00	0.01	0.06
Work Success	0.49***	0.34***	0.15*	0.39***	0.22***	0.31***
Task Performance	0.40***	0.41***	0.09	0.32***	0.06	0.13*
Contextual Performance	0.55***	0.40***	0.32***	0.56***	0.31***	0.18**
Counterproductive Work Behaviours	-0.35***	-0.67***	-0.15*	-0.34***	-0.26***	-0.01

Conscientiousness, Risk Approach and Adjustment had the greatest correlations with success at work.

References

MacRae, I., & Furnham, A. (2020). A Psychometric Analysis of the High Potential Trait Inventory (HPTI). *Psychology, 11(08)*, 1125. 10.4236/psych.2020.118074

MacRae, I., & Furnham, A. (2014). *High potential: How to spot, manage and develop talented people at work*. Bloomsbury Publishing.