



Personality, **the Powerful Predictor**



Authors



This whitepaper has been created from the contributions of multiple psychologists and experts in applied psychometrics at Thomas International.

- > Arianna McMechan, Assistant Research Psychologist
- > Caitlin Meyer, Content Psychologist
- > Jayson Darby, Head of Science
- > Luke Treglown, Principal Data Psychologist
- > Mollie Tatlow, Assistant Research Psychologist
- > Stephen Cuppello, Principal Research Psychologist

Contents

04	> An introduction to personality	> How we measure personality	06
10	> Making the best possible hiring decisions	> What does our research say?	13
15	> Summary and conclusions	> References	16

1. An **Introduction** to personality

What is personality, really? You may have heard about personality types and possibly completed the odd personality quiz online, but these are only scratching the surface of one of the most powerful predictors of future success, human personality.

A person's personality influences their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours

Personality traits are very stable across someone's lifetime (*Furnham, 2002*) and have been shown to predict things as critical as health (*Strickhauser & Krizan, 2017*), political views (*Vecchione, Schoen, Gonzalez-Castro, Cieciuch, Pavlopoulos & Caprara, 2011*) and success at work (*Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 2003; Furnham & Fudge, 2008*).

If you're reading this, you're probably interested in learning more about human personality and how you can harness its predictive power. Let's start with the building blocks of personality: personality traits.

Personality traits

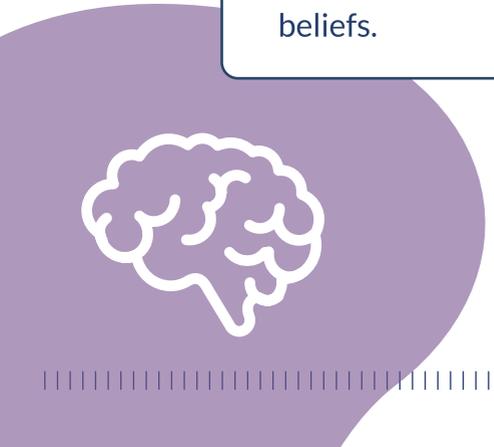
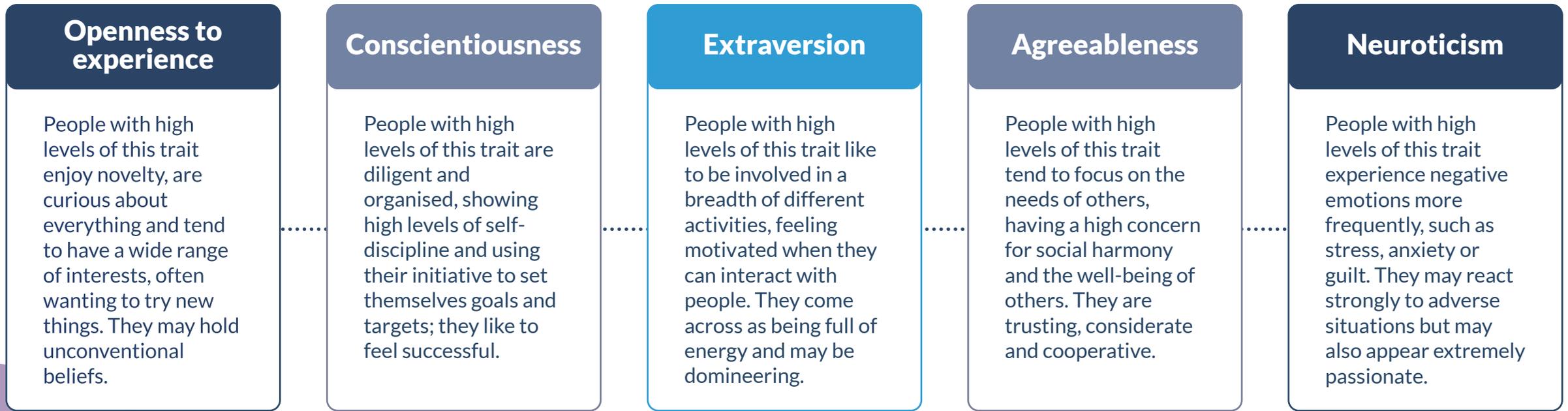
Your personality is a constellation of many different traits, all at different levels and interacting together to make you, you! A personality trait is an enduring characteristic of a person, like their approach to taking risks, how outgoing they are or how well they handle stress. When you describe someone's personality, what words do you use? The first psychologists to categorise human personality started here, looking at the words we use to describe people to see if they could be grouped together into what we would recognise as personality traits.

Gordon Allport (1927) went through every word in the English dictionary of the time and identified 4,500 words that could be thought of as 'traits', words that could be used to describe a person. This contribution to trait theory would be built on in the following decades until researchers started converging around the same model.





Today, the most widely researched and accepted model of human personality is the Five Factor Model (FFM) or the 'Big 5'. This model was evolved from the work of many researchers such as **Fiske (1949)**, **Norman (1967)**, with **McCrae & Costa (1987)** popularising the model in the format we see today. The Big 5 model has been extensively validated as the most accurate categorisation of human personality traits to date.



2. How we measure **personality**

At Thomas International, our Personality assessment is powered by the High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI), which measures six personality traits that are proven to predict success at work. Those traits are:

Conscientiousness

People with high levels of Conscientiousness tend to be focused on goals and how to reach them. They will usually be self-motivated. Those with lower levels of this trait tend to be relaxed and easy-going, taking things as they come.

Adjustment

People with high levels of Adjustment are calm under pressure and rarely experience stress or negative emotions. Those with lower levels of this trait can have more intense emotional reactions to stress and pressure.

Curiosity

People with high levels of Curiosity often like novelty, learning and variety in the world around them. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer conventional approaches and trusted methods.

Risk Approach

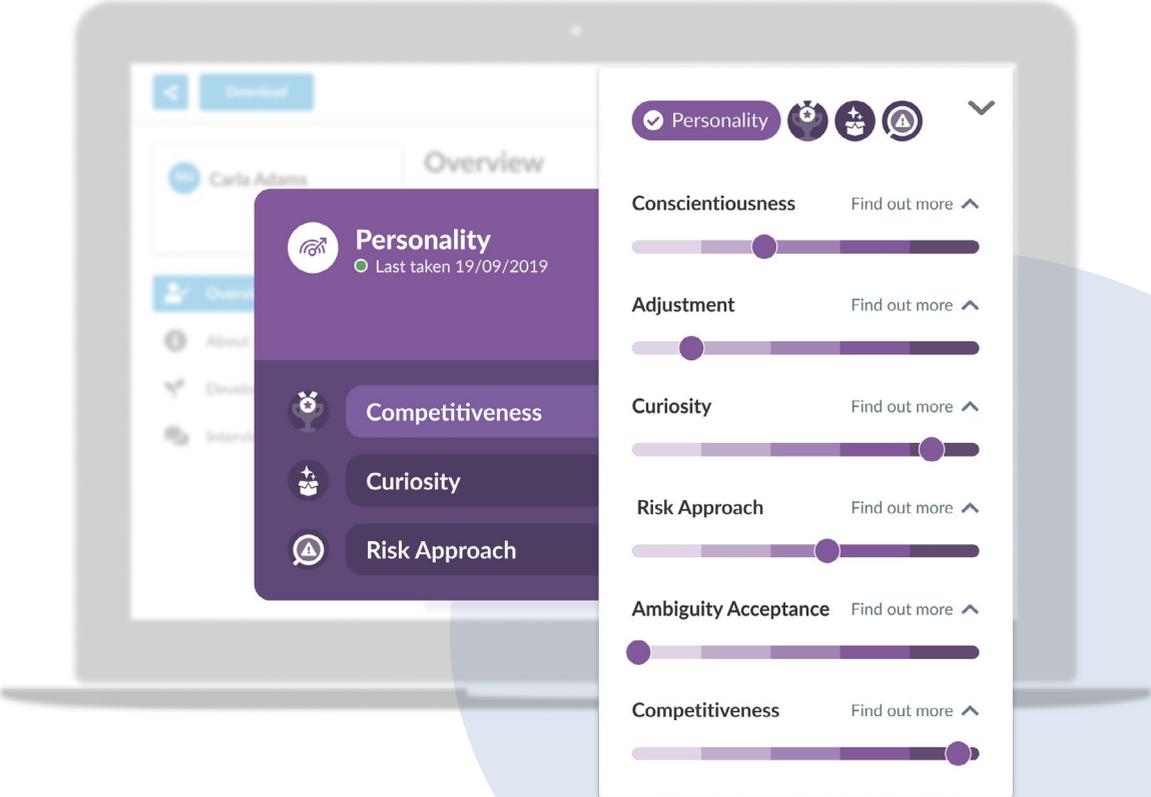
People with high levels of Risk Approach are keen to solve interpersonal issues proactively, not being afraid of confrontation. Those with lower levels of this trait tend to be more agreeable and avoid conflict with others.

Ambiguity Acceptance

People with high levels of Ambiguity Acceptance thrive in uncertain situations and enjoy complexity. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer high levels of clarity and simple solutions to problems.

Competitiveness

People with high levels of Competitiveness are motivated by power and influence, always wanting to win. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer non-competitive environments that focus on group cooperation.





Sound familiar? That's because the HPTI is based on the Big 5 model. If the Big 5 is so well researched, why is the HPTI different? The key factor is optimisation for predicting success specifically in a workplace environment.

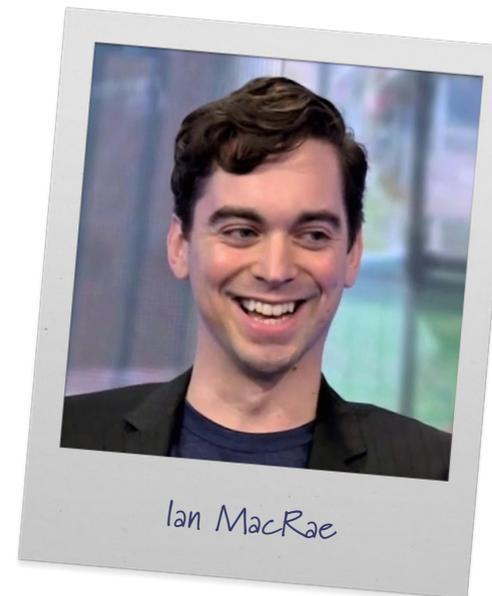
The Big 5 is a brilliant framework for measuring human personality in general. The HPTI is a brilliant framework for measuring the traits that matter the most for predicting job success.

Personality guru, Prof. Adrian Furnham, and renowned work psychologist, Ian MacRae, developed the HPTI over several years, wanting to identify which specific traits had the strongest relationship with success at work (*MacRae & Furnham, 2014*).



Professor
Adrian Furnham

Professor Adrian Furnham is a British organisational and applied psychologist, and Adjunct Professor of Psychology at the Norwegian Business Institute. He was Professor of Psychology at University College London for over 30 years and has held professorships in several institutions and lectured across the world. He has written over 1200 scientific papers, 90 books, has been cited over 128,000 times and is on the editorial board of a number of international journals.



Ian MacRae

Ian MacRae has been an organisational psychology consultant for over a decade and is the director and co-founder of High Potential Psychology Ltd. He is the co-author of "High Potential: How to Spot, Manage and Develop Talented People at Work." He also works with and writes about a wide range of topics relating to psychology in the workplace.

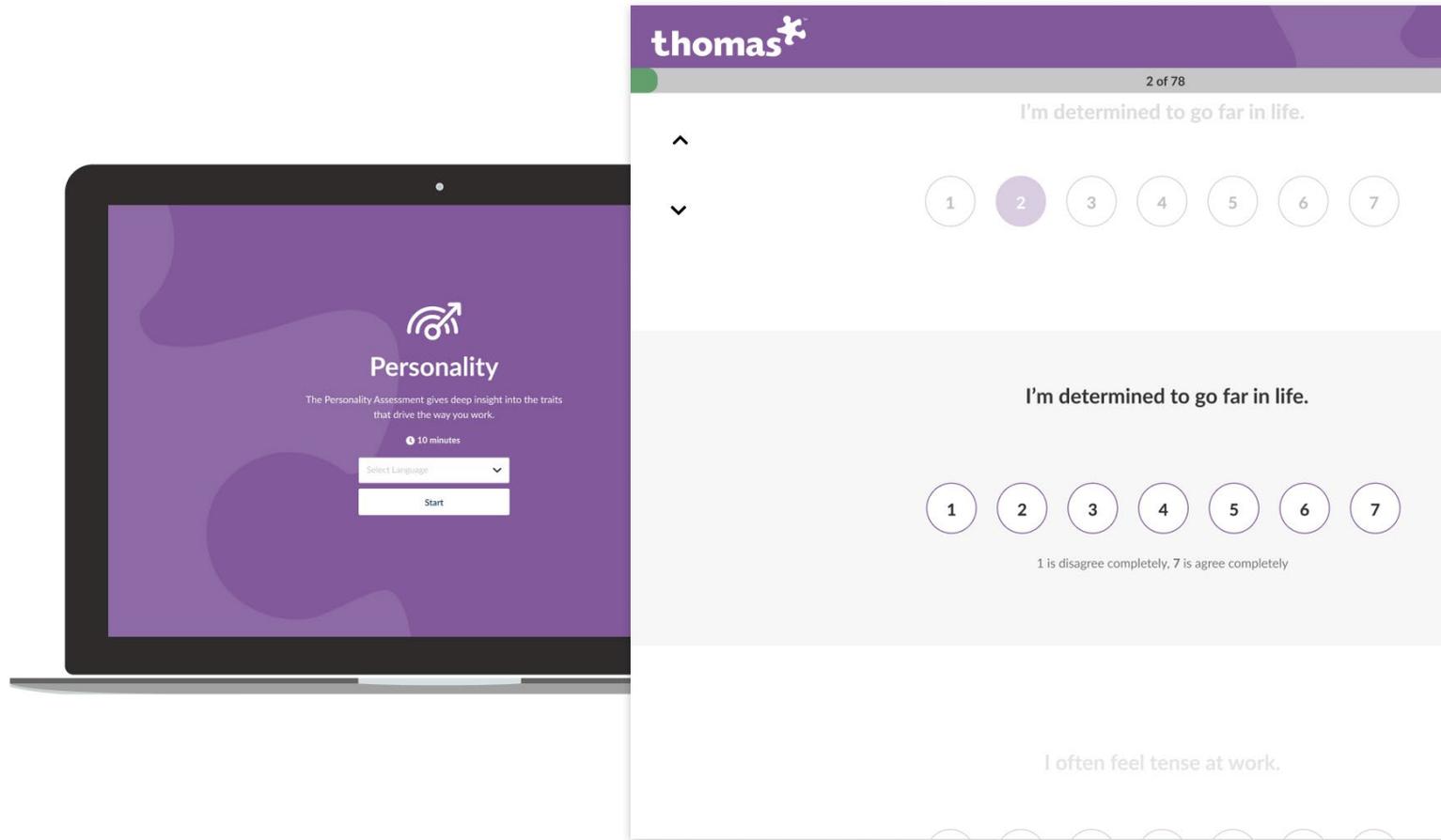




The HPTI itself is formed of 78 questions, taking 10 minutes to complete on average - a short amount of time to unlock deep insight! Upon completion, the assessment taker will receive a rich summary of their personality.

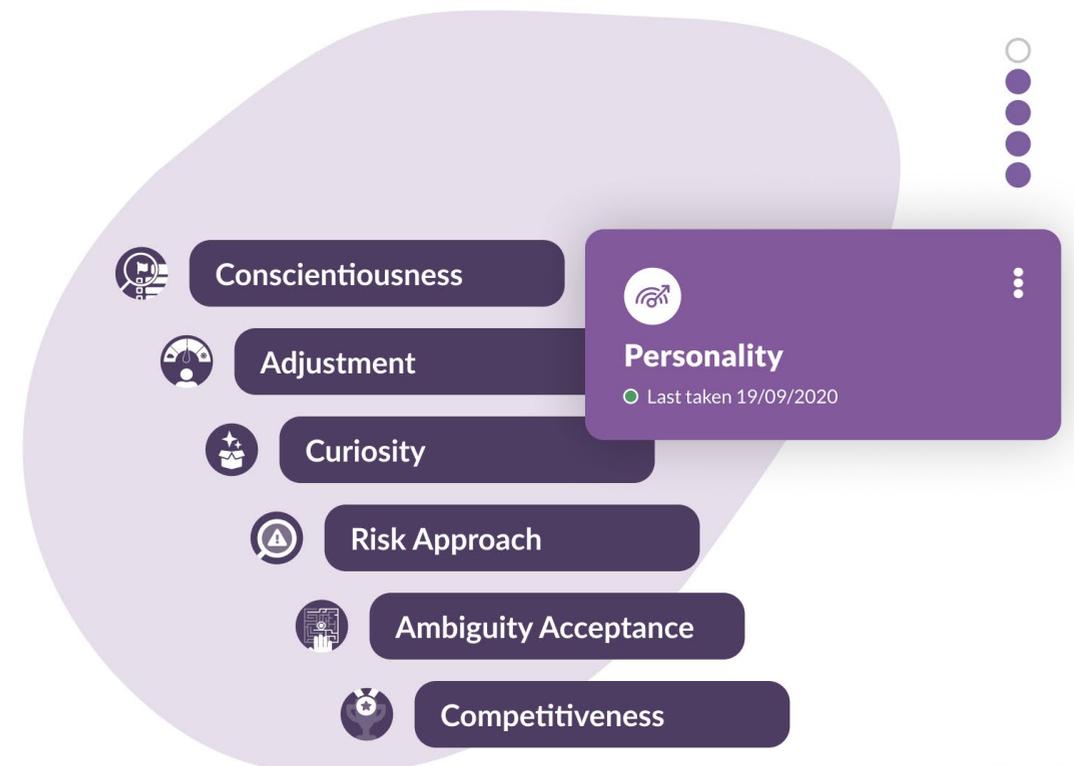
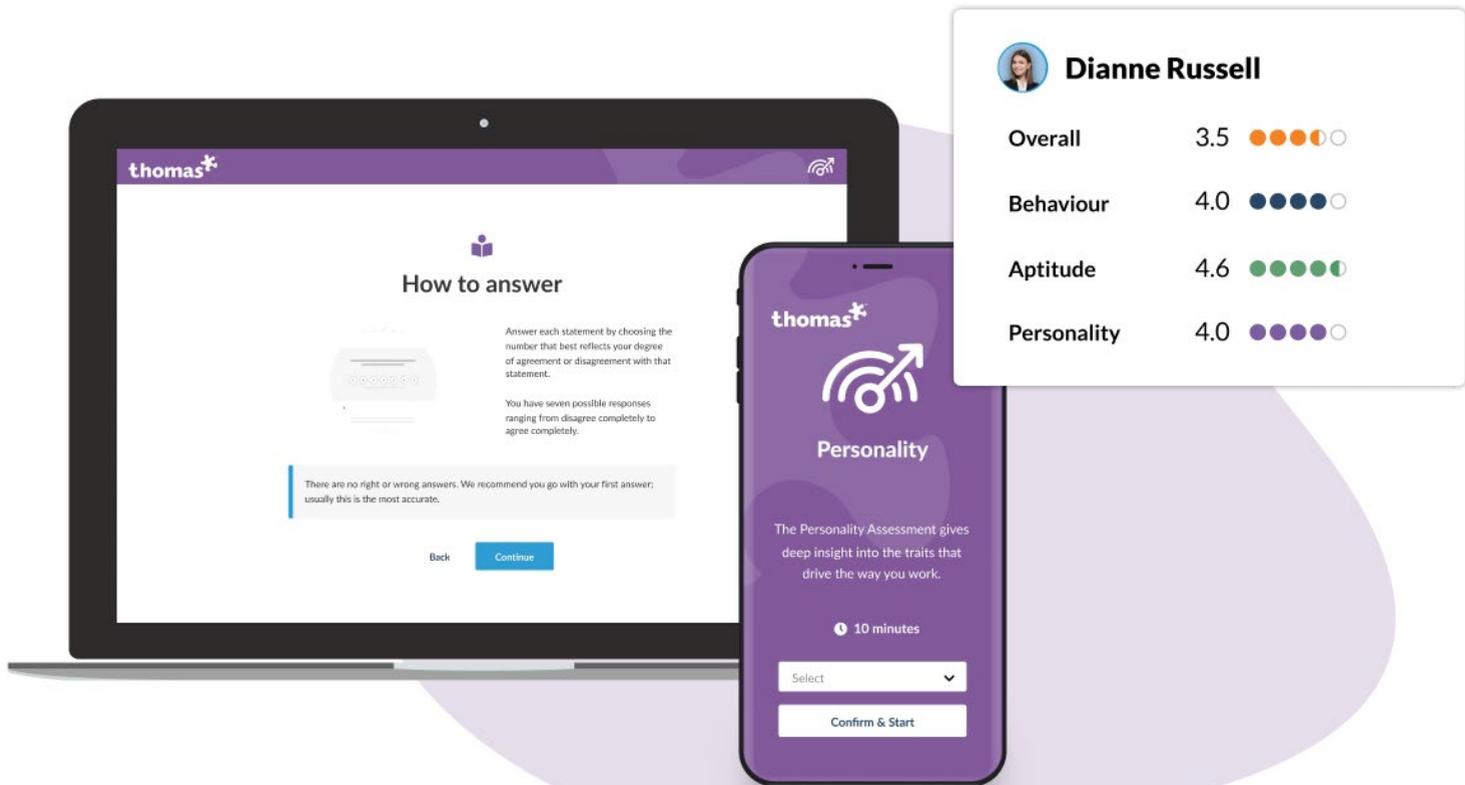
The person issuing the assessment will receive a comprehensive look into the respondent's personality profile, describing that person's **desire for success**, their **reaction to stress**, their **preference for novelty**, their **approach to risk**, their **tolerance of uncertainty** and their **desire for power** and influence.

Additionally, candidates have access to a profile summary based on the assessments that they have completed. This gives them **valuable self-awareness**, helping them to understand not just why they might behave and work in certain ways, but also how others might view them. This all leads to a better candidate experience, and even unsuccessful applicants will leave the recruitment process with the benefit of added insight.





In our new talent assessment platform, **Thomas Perform**, you can also explore how someone's personality influences their **suitability for certain roles** and delve deeper into their areas of limitation with our dynamic interview guide.

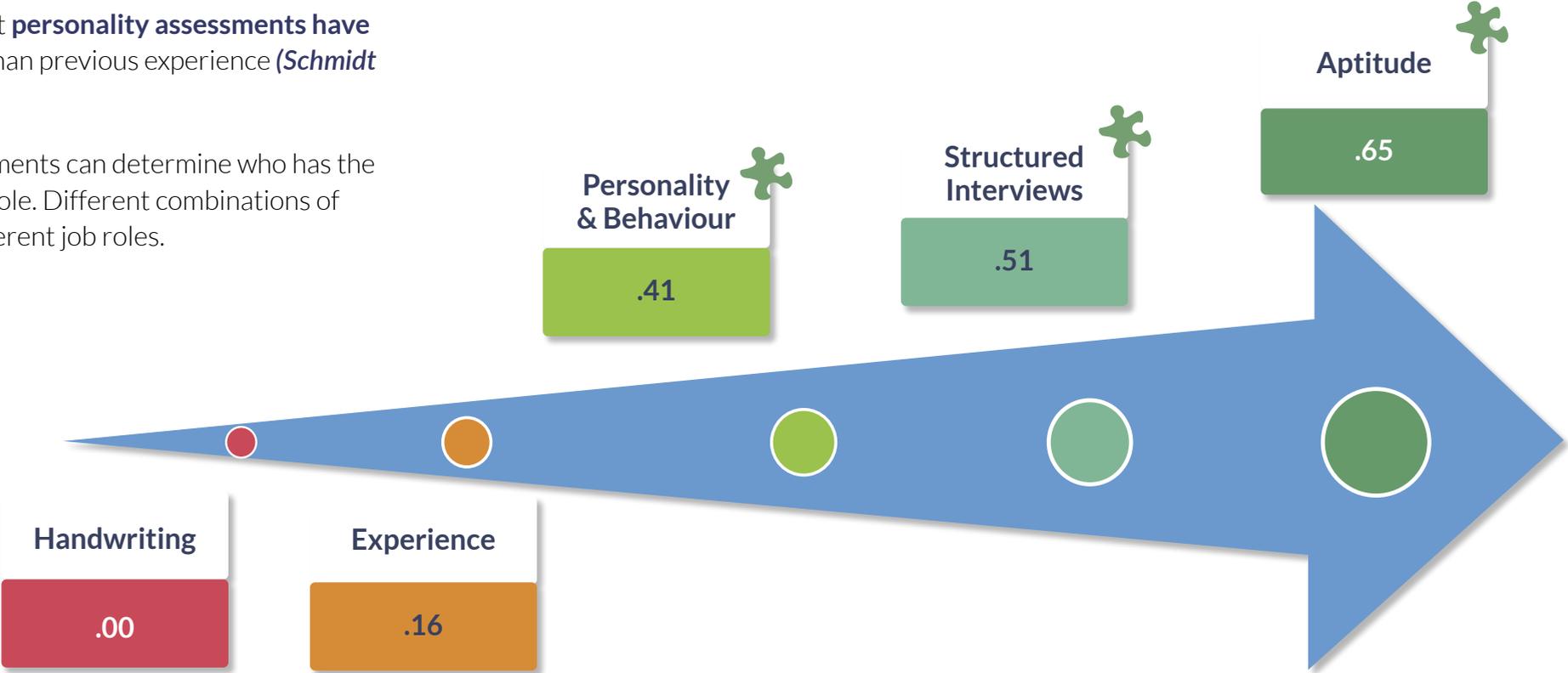


3. Making the best possible hiring decisions

It may sound surprising, but your **previous work experience is a poor predictor of future job success**. In fact, findings from a meta-analysis study by *Van Iddekinge, Arnold, Frieder and Roth (2018)* on the validity of prior work experience suggested that the types of pre-hire experience measures which organisations currently use to screen candidates are poor predictors of future performance and turnover.

In an extensive review of literature, it was shown that **personality assessments have significantly stronger relationships with success** than previous experience (*Schmidt et al. 2016*).

In recruitment, the application of personality assessments can determine who has the most advantageous traits to succeed in a particular role. Different combinations of traits can help people succeed in a wide range of different job roles.



Let's look at which traits may be advantageous for some example job roles:



1. Sales Leader

> *Higher Competitiveness & Conscientiousness*

Thriving in changing and ambiguous environments is essential in the current landscape of sales. By looking for individuals who are motivated by power and influence, you will recruit a manager that will want to win and drive your sales strategy. Equally important for a successful Sales Leader is being self-motivated, focused on goals as well as how to reach them.



• **General Manager**

> *Higher Adjustment & Ambiguity Acceptance*

Insight into someone's leadership style can assist you in recruiting the right person for your next leadership role. Knowing that they can drive innovation in their team and make them feel comfortable through ambiguous and stressful situations is crucial with employees' mental health causing increased levels of concern for organisations today.



• **Financial Services Specialist**

> *Higher Conscientiousness & lower Ambiguity Acceptance*

Your next Financial Specialist role requires an individual that develops and maintains a standardised, predictable way of working while taking a detail-oriented approach to ensure that their work is of a high quality. Equally important is a strong preference for stability and structure in the world around them where they will know exactly how to do something, rather than having to deal with ambiguity and constant change.



• **Healthcare Worker**

> *Higher Adjustment & Conscientiousness*

Healthcare Workers face extremely stressful situations daily, so ensuring that you recruit someone that will have an even temper and stay composed in most circumstances will help you to retain your professionals in these roles. A higher level of Conscientiousness should mean you'll have a dedicated and self-motivated team member.

Including personality assessments in your recruitment programmes can help you decide who has the most advantageous profile of traits for roles in your organisation. **Personality insight can help you decide who to bring to interview, what to ask them and give you a deeper understanding of what they need to thrive at work.**



3.2 D&I considerations

|||||

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace have become one of the top priorities for organisations today. The objective information provided by **psychological assessments can reduce the influence of biases** in critical decision-making processes, like recruitment.

In practice, creating well-defined job roles in advance of a recruitment programme is a good first step in reducing unconscious bias. **Research** has shown that companies with a more diverse employee base are more likely to financially outperform industry averages because a diverse workplace often means more knowledge and experience in different business areas and environments.

Personality assessments can level the playing field if everyone is just as likely to have certain traits or not. For example, if certain traits predict leadership success, and those traits are just as frequent in men and women, why do we see so few women in senior leadership roles? It isn't due to Personality differences – read our research on **Women in Business** to find out more.



3.3 Stacking the odds **in your favour**



The advantages of psychological assessment can be multiplied by measuring different characteristics, rather than just one. Research (Furnham & Treglown, 2018) has shown that a combination of personality and aptitude assessments can add unique value, for example.

You can stack the odds in your favour by combining multiple psychological measures with structured interviews, helping remove the guesswork and reduce the influence of unconscious biases while you're at it!

What does our research say?

At Thomas International, we frequently conduct our own research to show how powerful a predictor of success our Personality assessment can be. Here are two examples from 2018 and 2020:

1. High potential personality and intelligence (Furnham & Treglown, 2018)

When predicting performance – whether in education or at work – personality and aptitude are consistently, positively shown to be powerful predictors. Despite this, research has also found that specific aspects of our personality and aptitude are often shown to negatively relate. Furnham & Treglown (2018) explored this further with Thomas' assessments to investigate whether this was really the case and what the impacts are for finding the best fit candidates for your role. Their results showed three main things:

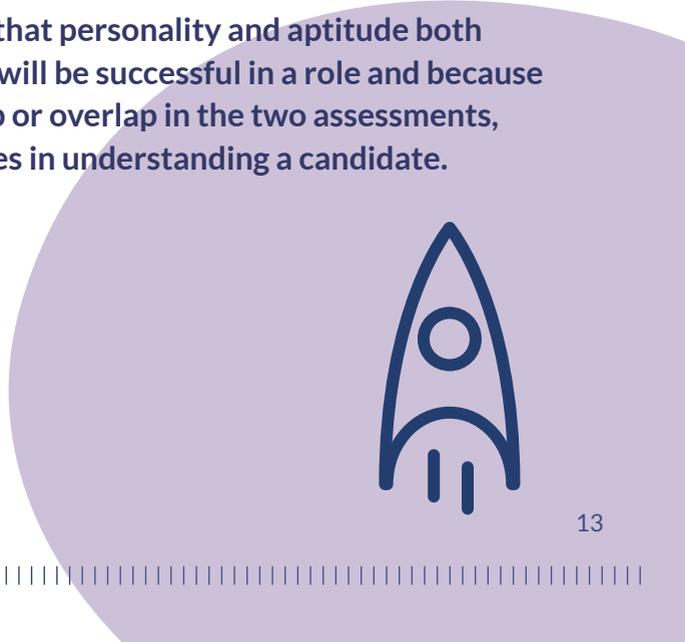
Firstly, **some aspects of personality do negatively relate to aptitude.** For instance, higher Conscientiousness (our internal motivation and achievement-striving) was related to lower levels of Reasoning (our ability to process new information quickly and accurately). Psychologists refer to this as the 'Intelligence Compensation Hypothesis' – some individuals who are naturally able to process and apply new information quickly do not develop self-discipline or achievement-striving traits because they do not need them to be successful. Additionally, those who are naturally driven and

achievement-striving sometimes develop these aspects to their personality in order to succeed when they don't naturally learn new information at a fast pace.

Secondly, **some aspects of personality are positively related to aptitude.** People with a greater comfort for uncertainty and complexity, i.e., higher Ambiguity Acceptance, are better at learning, applying and breaking down numerical and verbal problems. Similarly, people with a higher tolerance for stress at work, i.e., Adjustment, can conceptually visualise and manipulate complex ideas and shapes in their mind.

Finally, and most importantly, **the relationship between personality and aptitude was small.** These results have significant and important insights for our understand of how personality and aptitude relate to each other. But in terms of practicality, their relationship to each other has little to no observable impact on hiring the best candidate.

What does this mean? It means that personality and aptitude both offer predictive insights to who will be successful in a role and because there is a very small relationship or overlap in the two assessments, they provide two powerful angles in understanding a candidate.





2. What makes a leader? An investigation into the relationship between leader emergence and effectiveness (Treglown, Cuppello, Darby, Bendriem, Mackintosh, Ballaigues, MacRae and Furnham, 2020)

Who has the potential for leadership? Can we truly predict who will thrive in the highest echelons of an organisation? Which leaders may bring the risk of derailment, both to their own careers and the organisations they lead?

These questions have become an enduring theme of research as we try to identify who will truly thrive in leadership roles. Researchers such as *Silzer & Church (2009)* have developed models of leadership potential that psychological factors, like personality traits, can be mapped onto and used to explain differences between groups.

The HPTI, which powers the Thomas Personality assessment has been extensively researched to identify which trait levels are optimal for success in senior leadership (HPTI technical manual © 2017, MacRae & Furnham, 2014). After developing the core of the HPTI, MacRae and Furnham invested great efforts to validate its ability to predict leadership outcomes.

In partnership with MacRae and Furnham, Thomas International conducted further validation of the HPTI as a personality assessment that can predict leadership potential – you can read more in our whitepaper, *Reaching New Heights*. A sample of 936 general population and 198 executive* leaders completed the HPTI, with the leadership group taking additional measures of leadership emergence (how quickly they achieved their senior roles) and effectiveness (metrics concerning the performance of the business/business unit they were accountable for).

*C-level, Managing Director or Country Manager

All six HPTI traits (Conscientiousness, Adjustment, Curiosity, Risk Approach, Ambiguity Acceptance and Competitiveness) were associated with leadership emergence. Successful senior leaders have significantly different personality profiles compared to the general population.

In addition, four traits (Adjustment, Curiosity, Risk Approach and Ambiguity Acceptance) acted as significant predictors of organisational effectiveness in the leader sample.

For example:

- > Adjustment was positively predictive of **higher rates of talent retention** within the business
- > Curiosity was predictive of **higher sales revenue growth**
- > Risk Approach was positively predictive of **achieving a greater proportion of performance targets**
- > Ambiguity Acceptance was positively predictive of **higher annual organisational revenue**

This research demonstrated that people with high (but not excessively high!) scores were more likely to achieve leadership positions than the general population, and that certain personality traits can differentiate between effective and ineffective leaders. Remember, getting into a senior leadership role is only the first step. Being effective at that level is a much more complex challenge.



4. Summary and **conclusions**

Personality traits are building blocks of who we are, and they are fascinating predictors of a vast range of positive outcomes.

In the realm of talent management, personality traits predict success at work. If you want to make the best possible people decisions, you need to measure what really matters. CVs and previous experience are nice to know, but **psychological characteristics like personality are a must if you truly want to predict job performance.**

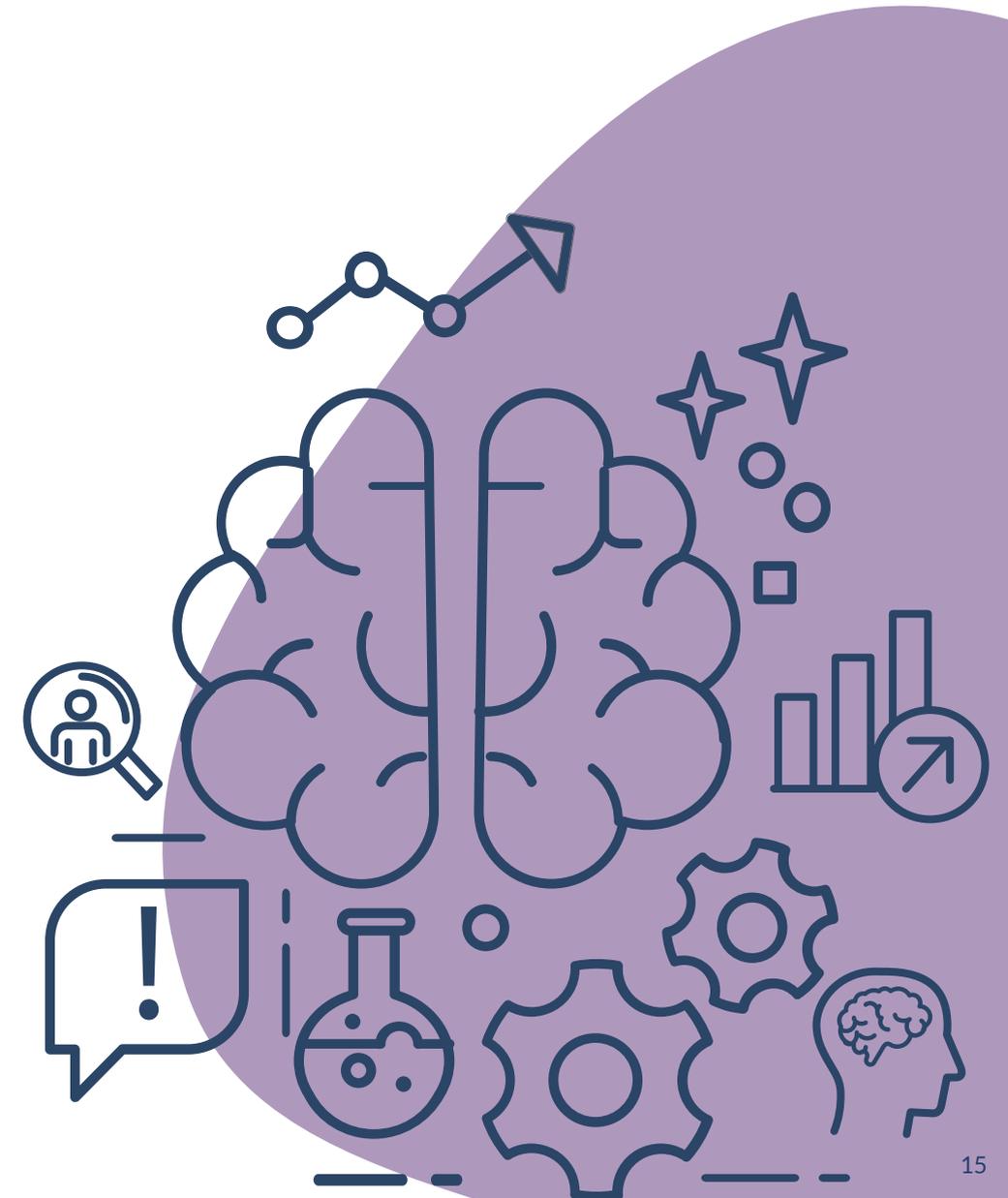
The added advantage of psychological assessments is that they introduce objective information into what can be subjective people processes. **This can reduce the influence of unconscious biases** in decision-making, on top of the valuable insight they already provide.

If you want to make the best possible decisions, remember that personality is a powerful predictor of future job performance.

With Thomas' talent assessment platform, you can **easily build job profiles** by telling us what really matters for each of your roles. Your choices will allow us to instantaneously define a success profile built from personality, aptitude, and behavioural characteristics as well as **comparing candidates to this profile to determine goodness-of-fit** based on the requirements of the role.

This insight can inform who you choose to bring forward to interview, with our **interview guides recommending the most important questions to ask.** We prioritise questions in areas where each candidate has a low fit with the success profile you defined.

If you choose our new talent assessment platform, you can make the best possible recruitment decisions without days of training and with no consultancy required to get you set up. On top of it all, we offer a great candidate experience at the centre of the process by **providing candidates with instant access to their own psychological profiles.**



References:



Allport, G. W. (1927). Concepts of trait and personality. *Psychological Bulletin*, 24(5), 284–293

Barrick, Murray R. and Mount, Michael K. (1991). The Big Five Personality Dimensions and Job Performance: A Meta-Analysis. *Personnel Psychology*; Spring 1991; 44

Fiske, D. W. (1949). Consistency of the factorial structures of personality ratings from different sources. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 4, 329-34

Furnham, A. (2002). *Personality at Work: The role of individual differences in the workplace*. Routledge, ISBN 0415106486, 9780415106481

Furnham, A. and Fudge, C. (2008). The Five Factor Model of Personality and Sales Performance. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 29, pp. 11-16 <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001.29.1.11>

McCrae, R.R., and Costa, P.T (1987). Validation of the Five-Factor Model of Personality Across Instruments and Observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1987, Vol. 52, No. 1,81-90

MacRae, I. and Furnham, A. (2014). *High Potential: How to Spot, Manage and Develop Talented People at Work*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing

Norman, W. T. (1967). 2800 personality trait descriptors: Normative operating characteristics for a university population. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Department of Psychology

Salgado, J. F. (2003). Predicting job performance using FFM and non-FFM personality measures. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 76, 323-346

Schmidt, F. (2016). *The Validity and Utility of Selection Methods in Personnel Psychology: Practical and Theoretical Implications of 100 Years of Research Findings*

Silzer, R. and Church, A. H. (2009b). The Potential for Potential. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2, 446-452. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2009.01172.x>

Strickhouser, J. E., Zell, E. and Krizan, Z. (2017). Does personality predict health and well-being? A metasynthesis. *Health Psychology*, 36(8), 797–810 <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000475>

Van Iddekinge, Chad, Arnold, John, Frieder, Rachel and Roth, Philip. (2018). It is Required, but is it Job-Related? A Meta-Analysis of the Validity of Prior Work Experience. *Academy of Management Proceedings*. 2018. 10426. 10.5465/AMBPP.2018.278

Vecchione, M., Schoen, H., Gonzalez Castro, J. L., Ciecuch, J., Pavlopoulos, V. and Caprara, G. V. (2011). Personality correlates of party preference: The Big Five in five big European countries. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 51: 737-742



Contact us



We hope you enjoyed exploring our insights as much as we did putting them together.

You can learn more about our **psychometric assessments** [here →](#)

You can also explore the new-and-improved **Thomas Perform** [here →](#)

With Thomas Perform, you can distil complex data into simple insights – and make smarter choices for your people and business.



© Thomas International Ltd 2021. Founded in 1981, Thomas International transforms the performance of organisations around the world through smarter people decisions, looking beyond just skills and experience to identify the true potential and capability of people. Its talent assessment platform combines technology, psychology and data to make the complex nature of human behaviour, aptitude and personality easier for everyone to understand. Today, Thomas helps over 11,000 companies across 140 countries unleash the power of their people.

