



“Worker Types:” A New Approach to Human Capital Management

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Abstract. – New research by 20|20 Skills™ assessment reveals that employees in the service-hospitality industry fall into eight “worker type” classifications. This article reviews these new classifications and discusses how you can increase the success of your recruitment, training and succession planning initiatives by thinking both of *people* and *job positions* in terms of these performance labels.

True advances in employee assessment are rare, as most instruments on the market are based on statistics and scoring schemes outdated since 1960¹. Consequently, hiring and training professionals receive minimal value from the feedback provided by most tools. With this in mind, it is noteworthy that 20|20 Skills™ (www.2020skills.com) recently pioneered an innovative approach in employee assessment. This approach categorizes test takers (employees and applicants) based on a “modern test theory” model of workplace attitudes and behaviors in the service industry. These predictions are called *performance labels*.

Performance labels differ substantially from the traditional *content labels* used in many popular but outdated instruments, such as –

- The acronyms used in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, e.g., “INTJ” to refer to a specific combination of extraversion / introversion, sensing / intuition, thinking / feeling and judging / perceiving.
- The high- or low- scores across the four dimensions on DISC-based instruments (DISC: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Compliance).
- The feedback provided by the “adjective checklist” approach used in the Predictive Index (PI) and PAPI.

The usefulness of instruments like the above is severely limited, as they provide feedback based on how a test taker perceives him or herself. In other words, these instruments describe individuals only in a *self-referential* way, i.e., against themselves. Because self-referential measures give superficial feedback limited to what the individual wants that measure to say, many test takers mistakenly believe that they are extremely specific and accurate. However, these types of assessments have largely been abandoned by professionals in the tests and measurements field, who are acutely aware of the legal liabilities in the reliability and validity of the corresponding feedback.

Normative instruments, by comparison, are *inter-individual*. This means they describe test takers against a reference group. But “norms” per se are not enough to ensure reliability and validity of an assessment’s findings; instruments must also have a statistical scoring scheme based in modern testing theory, notably Item Response Theory











or Rasch scaling¹. These are the same gold standard statistics used in such well-known assessments like the GRE, MCAT and LSAT. This approach generates proper normative instruments that take into account response biases related to age, gender, cultural background and employment level of the test taker². In other words, it uses unbiased and rigorous metrics to evaluate job applicants and benchmark employees. Besides greater technical precision and the protection of meeting legal requirements, modern testing theory allows an assessment to yield richer information about test takers. This information transcends mere content labels to identify important patterns in a test taker's attitudes and behaviors of which the test taker may even be unaware.

Consequently, Human Resources professionals in the service-hospitality industry now have the capability of reaching a deeper level of analysis in employees and applicants. For example, state-of-the-art technologies can produce feedback reports that include specific and defensible Action Plans – a series of customized questions and issues – based on the candidate's distinctive response patterns on the assessment – which professionals can use to guide structured behavioral interviews and proper reference checking. For existing employees, these questions and issues can be used to help identify performance or professional development goals².

The proprietary research that underlies the 20|20 Skills™ assessment also yielded new information for revolutionizing Human Resources in the service industry: **eight different categories of employees based on evidence-based performance issues rather than how test takers perceive themselves.**

Understanding the Eight “Worker Type” Classifications

The 20|20 Skills™ assessment measures ten core competencies predictive of job performance in the service-hospitality industry. The table below shows how each of these ten competencies contributes to one of three industrial-organizational constructs – Task Orientation, Social Maintenance and Cognitive Ability:

	20 20 Skills™ Core Competencies
<p>Task Orientation</p> <p><i>“capacity for personally accomplishing concrete goals”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Self-Efficacy  Loyalty to Company  Ethical Awareness  Service Orientation
<p>Social Maintenance</p> <p><i>“capacity for getting along with others”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Team-Building/ Group Process  Sense of Humor  Leadership  Sensitivity to Diversity
<p>Cognitive Ability</p> <p><i>“capacity for right and left brain thinking”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Personal & Applied Problem Solving  Creativity

Note that these competencies are not personality traits per se, which traditionally tend to be the focus of HR screening instruments. Personality traits arguably are *indirect* predictors of job performance, and they perhaps are best at gauging in which topics or tasks a given employee is interested. On the other hand, the best predictors of actual job performance are a person’s *Attitude* and *Skill Set*. These factors are *directly* tied to success in the service industry environment.

Thus, when categorizing individuals’ overall scores on Task Orientation, Social Maintenance or Cognitive Ability, you can classify those as relatively “High” who score equivalent to the educational grades of “As” and “Bs” and classify those as relatively “Low” who score at the average level or below. There are three broad constructs, so this yields eight possible combinations of “Low” or “High.” These eight different

combinations really describe a different type of employee – hence eight profiles or “Worker Types.”

The Table below summarizes the scoring combinations that define each worker type, as well as the corresponding attitudes and behaviors predicted by our mathematical modeling.

	Pattern		Worker Type	Corresponding Attitudes and Behaviors
Task Orientation	Social Maintenance	Cognitive Ability		
Low	Low	Low	“Novice”	This individual is a prime candidate for ongoing coaching and training.
Low	Low	High	“Thinker”	This individual is most suited for an autonomous position and duties focusing on analysis, planning, organizing and developing strategy.
Low	High	Low	“Facilitator”	This person is well suited to facilitating interpersonal interactions and fostering collaborative relationships with peers and supervisors.
Low	High	High	“Visionary”	This individual is well suited for a leadership position overseeing analysis, planning, organizing and developing and communicating innovations and strategies.
High	Low	Low	“Soldier”	This individual focuses on high efficiency and productivity in accomplishing concrete goals.
High	Low	High	“Researcher”	Individuals like this are excellent at thinking about problems, issues and challenges and developing and implementing plans to address those challenges.
High	High	Low	“Motivator”	Individuals like this focus on high efficiency and productivity in accomplishing concrete goals and inspiring and supporting others to follow suit.
High	High	High	“Peak Performer”	Individuals like this focus on teamwork, inspiring others when needed, and are strong on accomplishing tasks associated with analysis, planning, organizing, and developing innovations and strategies.

Using “Worker Types” in Practice

Thinking in terms of “Worker Types” can streamline the way professionals address (i) conceptualization and preparation of job descriptions, (ii) candidate screening and selection, (iii) employee training and professional development, (iv) conflict resolution and (v) succession planning. Going well beyond simplistic “personality” testing, “Worker Types” quickly and reliably describe an individual’s *Attitude* and *Skill Set* – the core predictors of job performance and compatibility with a company’s culture.

But it is up to hiring and training professionals and managers to determine which “Worker Types” are needed in certain positions, that classic concept of putting the right people in the right seats of an organization. “Worker Type” labels can help guide or determine initially which candidates to interview, or the profiles can help professionals prepare for interviewing a short list of candidates that have been already selected. Screening and selecting candidates based on “Worker Type” profiles can be done empirically by benchmarking successful versus mediocre employees in the same position (*quantitative approach*), or by having the hiring professional or supervisor of the job position compare the competencies documented in a job description against the competencies on the assessment (*qualitative approach*). And too, the eight “Worker Types” show different degrees of compatibility between each other. As a result, professionals can also use these labels to help know better which people will form the most cohesive teams or in what way teams are not working together optimally.

“Worker Types” are a new tool that you will actually use, because they are evidence-based descriptions of workplace behavior based on modern test theory models of classic principles in industrial-organizational psychology. Professionals need not be experienced psychologists or Human Resource professionals to learn and utilize these profiles. They are intuitive concepts that speak directly to an organization’s bottom line. Forward-thinking companies know their employees better than the competition and they use best practice principles and strategic assessment programs to help avoid bad hires and to develop their existing talent. Experts agree that talent is the foundation for business success – and “Worker Types” can help build your business on talent in a way that was never before possible.

About the Author

James Houran holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and is President of 20 | 20 Skills™ assessment. He is an 18-year veteran in research and assessment on peak performance and experiences, with a special focus on online testing. His award-winning work has been profiled by a myriad of media outlets and programs including the Discovery Channel, A&E, ABC News, BBC, CNN, NBC's *Today Show*, *Wilson Quarterly*, *USA Today*, *New Scientist*, *Psychology Today*, Forbes.com and *Rolling Stone*.

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