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Personality Characteristics of Counselors Rated as Effective or Ineffective

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A study of 320 counselors in four states revealed substantial and significant correlations between tested personality characteristics and rated job performances. The Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) was used to discriminate counselors rated as highly effective, as average in effectiveness, or as ineffective on a 28-point Satisfaction with Performance Blank (SWPB). Effectiveness ratings were completed for each counselor by three supervisors. Rated counselor effectiveness was positively correlated with the Social and Artistic codes of the VPI and negatively correlated with Realistic and Conventional scores. A regression formula with a cross-validation procedure was used to explain the variance of the supervisory ratings. Employment level—elementary, middle, or high school—was not related to other factors studied. Sex, age, certification, and degree status were of no significance in predicting rated effectiveness. Highly rated counselors had a group Holland code of Social–Artistic–Investigative (SAI) whereas counselors rated as ineffective had a Realistic–Coventional–Enterprising (RCE) group code. Individual variations were uncommon.

Our common sense tells us that some counselors are better than others in helping clients. We see evidence of this almost daily. Persons who receive assistance from Counselor "A" learn to make decisions about selves that seem logical, they become more independent, and concerns about family, friends, career choices, and future schooling seem to be resolved through counseling.

On the other hand, persons who see Counselor "B" return time after time for help with the same concerns, they seem to become more dependent on others to make decisions for them and, even after many discussions, problems of rejection, choosing careers, or pathways to future schooling seem to remain unresolved.

A generalized characterization of Counselor "A" is that "here is a good counselor." Counselor "B" is regarded as ineffective or actually harmful to others.

What are the personality and/or environmental characteristics that lead others to conclude that one counselor is effective, one is ineffective, and

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another is somewhere in between? Are there generalizations we can make about the relationship between effectiveness and age, sex, years of experience, degree held, certification status, measured job satisfaction, and/or job environment? These were the questions asked in this study. The answers obtained were tentative and heuristic.

STUDY PROCEDURES

First, a listing of school counselors in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania was obtained from the state educational agencies. Counselors selected to be contacted were chosen by area—specific counties or cities. An attempt was made to include a percentage corresponding to the total number employed in a geographic region although, in some areas, a disproportionate number of one sex was employed. Employment levels were used to further delimit the groups. Within the limitations of sex, area, and employment level, 800 counselors' names were randomly selected. Letters and copies of three instruments were sent to 400 men and 400 women asking them to participate in the study. Of the 800 counselors contacted, 310 were employed on the senior high level, 310 in the middle/junior high schools, and 180 on the elementary level. The instruments used were the Vocational Preference Inventory (Holland, 1965), the Hoppock Job Satisfaction Blank that has been used and researched for almost 40 years (Hoppock, 1935), and a Counselor Questionnaire (Wiggins, 1975) designed to obtain information on a number of personal and professional characteristics of the study participants.

Due to limitations of time, staff, and money, a number of desirable steps were not completed. No follow-up was completed and no attempt, after the initial one, made to ensure that all geographic areas were proportionately represented. Responses from approximately 420 of the 800 counselors contacted were received; about 390 of them had completed all three instruments and had signed a Participant's Agreement form. A near-equal number were completed be each sex and by a proportionate number of counselors at the various employment levels; this was expected due to the numbers originally contacted.

Using the original listings, supervisors/administrators from the various districts where the counselors were employed were contacted by letter. Those persons immediately superior in rank to each counselor were asked to complete a Satisfaction With Performance Blank (SWPB), *for all counselors* employed in their districts with whom they were familiar. Names of counselors were supplied from the listings previously made available from the various states. Although information was desired on only the subjects chosen for the study; the procedure described was followed in order to (1) eliminate the singling out of individuals, and (2) help administrators think in comparative terms by rating all counselors in their districts. A large

number of returns came back within a week or so; several follow-ups were made by telephone.

The SWPB ratings were completed independently, usually by a principal, a supervisor, and a director. In some districts an assistant principal was one of the raters; in smaller districts, a superintendent was often included. Local districts made their own decisions as to whom the raters should be. Ratings were obtained for 367 counselors who had completed the SWPB, the VPI, and the questionaire. More than 2000 other ratings were received for counselors who had not completed those three instruments; all of these were destroyed as their data could not be correlated with other instruments used in the study. Forty-seven responses were randomly eliminated for subjects who had completed the three instruments in order to balance sex, employment, and rated effectiveness levels, leaving 320 counselors in the study, 160 men and 160 women.

In all, 16 variables were examined: age; total years as a counselor; total years of educational experience; years employed in present position; counseling level (elementary, middle, or high school); certification status; assessed satisfaction with performance (SWPB); reported job satisfaction (HJSB); the first six scales of the VPI (Realistic, Investigative, Social, Conventional, Enterprising, and Artistic); highest degree held; and sex.

Counseling level, degree held, certification status, and sex were expressed in terms of noncontinuous categories in a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) paradigm. Along with the remaining 12 variables, they were also treated as continuous data for some factor analyses as in Table 2. HJSB and SWPB scores, in addition to serving as dependent variables in some analyses, were cast as independent variables in separate analyses and used to discriminate the remaining independent variables.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY GROUP

As noted, 320 persons (160 males and 160 females) comprised the final study group. Delaware was somewhat over-represented proportionate to the total number of counselors employed in the four states. The rural areas of each state were probably over-represented. No more than one counselor from any one school or two counselors from any district were included in the study. Also, the geographic distribution within all states showed a wide dispersion throughout their boundaries. Therefore, it would seem that the study group participants were fairly representative of all counselors; however, no substantive proof of this assertion can be offered.

Effectiveness Ratings

As noted previously, three raters within an individual counselor's district completed the Satisfaction with Performance Blank. These were

scored on a scale of 4 to 28, with 28 the highest possible score. Of the 320 subjects on which total information was available, within the parameters noted, 100 counselors were found to be "Highly Effective," 140 were in the "Average" category, and 80 were rated "Ineffective."

To be rated as highly effective, all three raters must have given a counselor a numerical rating of *21 or more* on the Satisfaction with Performance Blank, with the average of the three ratings being *23 or higher*. Ineffective counselors must have been separately rated *13 or lower* by all raters, with the average of the ratings being *11 or below*. Ratings between *14* and *21* (inclusive) were considered as "average" or "indeterminate" in nature.

A counselor labeled as "highly effective" was rated as performing tasks in a "superior" or "in the very best" manner, supervisors were satisfied with his/her performance "all" or "most" of the time, and the raters "could not think of another person who would do a better job." Finally, they felt that the counselor was "much better than the average" counselor or that "no one was better in his/her field."

The counselor categorized as "low" in effectiveness was rated as performing his/her job "terribly" or "poorly," the raters were "seldom" or "never" satisfied with job performance, and raters stated they would prefer to either "fire the counselor immediately" or "release him/her at the end of his/her current contract." They ended by rating the counselor as one of the "worst workers" in counseling or as one who "lacks the ability to improve."

An "Average" counselor was considered to be performing in an "average" manner, raters were satisfied with this person's work from "about half" to a "good deal" of the time, and this counselor was neither better nor worse than a mythical average counselor in this field.

RESULTS

Intercorrelations for the 14 major variables are reported in Table 1. A pattern of relationships emerged from the intercorrelation matrix; 34 of the correlations were significant at the .05 level. Variables 3, 4, and 5, all time-related variables, were highly intercorrelated as might be expected. However, age, sex, years as a counselor, years in education, years in education, years in present job, and employment level did not significantly correlate with rated effectiveness. Job satisfaction and the six VPI scales, on the other hand, all correlated significantly with rated effectiveness. Interest scale scores and job satisfaction were more related to job performance than were age and experience. The SWPB was positively correlated with job satisfaction (HJSB), the Social (S) scale of the VPI, and the Artistic (A) scale of the VPI. To extend the simple correlational analysis, counselors who were rated as effective scored high on the S and A

TABLE 1
Intercorrelations for Variables Included in the Study

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	1.000													
2. Sex	.102	1.000												
3. Years as counselor	.777**	.170**	1.000											
4. Total years in education	.901**	.168**	.841**	1.000										
5. Years in present job	.755**	.118*	.886**	775**	1.000									
6. Assignment level	−.081	.059	−.027	−.045	−.018	1.000								
7. SWPB	.008	−.036	.072	.005	.079	−.057	1.000							
8. HJSB	−.051	−.163**	−.012	−.021	.037	.064	.389**	1.000						
9. R[a]	.074	−.022	.022	.080	−.002	−.121*	−.598**	−.318**	1.000					
10. I	−.042	.086	.018	−.088	.004	.039	.118*	−.041	−.114*	1.000				
11. S	−.249**	.011	−.167**	−.263**	−.135*	.116*	.564**	.433**	−.583**	.210**	1.000			
12. C	.128*	−.021	.108	.130*	.070	−.018	−.420**	−.318**	.439**	−.150**	−.552**	1.000		
13. E	−.022	.095	.060	−.032	−.063	.021	−.160**	−.138*	.023	.193**	−.020	.114*	1.000	
14. A	−.195**	.021	−.127*	−.203	−.112	.082	.484**	.281**	−.451**	.333**	.661**	−.498**	.054	1.000

[a] Variables 9–14 are VPI codes.
* Significant at the .05 level (df = 318).
** Significant at the .01 level.

scales of the VPI while those who were rated low tended to score high on the Realistic (R) and Conventional (C) scales.

In order to explain the SWPB scores in terms of the other variables, a factor analysis of the data with varimax rotation was conducted. Four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 appeared. Table 2 lists the loadings of variables on each factor. The factor analysis procedure helped to clarify the data. First, it uncovered the independent dimensions within the intercorrelation matrix. Factor 1 was comprised of time-related measurements (age, years on the job, and so on). Factor 2 included rated effectiveness and R, S, and the A scales of the VPI. Rated performance was relatively independent of age and experience. This supported earlier findings. Factor 3 was comprised of the I and E scales of the VPI. Factor 4 was not included in further analyses as it had a low eigenvalue and was not clearly defined. Second, the varimax rotation gave a hint as to which independent variables could be used in a stepwise multiple regression analysis to minimize overlap.

Before the regression analysis was conducted, the sample was randomly split into two groups of 160. One set served as a holdout sample for cross-validation of regression findings. Because of the tenuous nature of regression weights, this cross-validation procedure was designed to verify the research findings.

TABLE 2
Factor Loadings, Varimax Rotation

Variable	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
1. Age	.89*	−.12	−.04	−.11
2. Sex	.24	−.04	.33	.59
3. Years as counselor	.93*	−.04	−.02	−.02
4. Years in education	.92*	−.13	−.08	−.03
5. Years in position	.87*	.00	−.07	−.08
6. Level	−.07	.07	−.16	.78*
7. Degree status	.77*	.06	.11	.35
8. Certification	.77*	.03	.10	.20
9. SWPB	.13	.79*	−.07	−.11
10. HJSB	.01	.59	−.37	−.06
11. R[a]	−.02	−.76*	.01	−.13
12. I	.01	.25	.72*	−.05
13. S	−.17	.85*	.07	.09
14. C	.08	−.71	−.02	.01
15. E	−.05	−.13	.67*	.04
16. A	−.12	.75*	.30	.03
Eigenvalues	4.58	3.38	1.48	1.05

[a] Variables 11–16 are VPI codes.
* Variables weigh significantly.

With the SWPB scores as the dependent variable, a four-step regression analysis was completed to obtain the multiple correlation between such scores and the four predictor variables. After examination of the factor analysis results, four independent variables were selected as predictors of the SWPB scores in the regression analysis. Table 3 shows the intercorrelations of the predictor variables and SWPB results. Predictor variables were selected which represented the factors and correspondingly had relatively low intercorrelations.

Years as a counselor was entered first to account for the effect of time-related variables (Factor 1). It accounted for only a small amount of the variance of the SWPB scores. The S, R, and the E scales of the VPI were entered in order. Each variable added significantly to the increment of the multiple correlation.

The multiple correlation between the SWPB scores and the four predictors was .695. Together the predictors explained 48% of the variance of SWPB. The F test of the multiple correlation was significant beyond the .001 level [$R = .695$, (4, 155) $F = 36.25$]. This is in marked contrast to the findings of Loesch, Crane, and Rucker (1978) who found nonsignificant relationships between tested personality characteristics and rated effectiveness of counselor trainees. They did not use employed counselors as subjects or the VPI as an instrument in their study. Also, the findings of this research directly contradict their recommendation that less attention be paid to personality characteristics and more to skill training in counselor education programs. It would appear that the issue is still unresolved.

Table 4b depicts the regression equation that was computed for predicting the SWPB scores. The S and R scales received the largest weights in the prediction equation (Table 4a). In the cross-validation procedure, the β weights were applied to the raw scores of the 160 subjects in the holdout sample in an attempt to predict their SWPB scores. The correlation between the derived scores and their actual scores was .65596. The shrinkage of squared multiple correlation from the first regression analysis to the cross-validation was .053, a modest amount.

The regression equation and β weights both seemed to be predicting at

TABLE 3
Intercorrelations of Predictor Variables ($N = 160$)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. SWPB	1.000				
2. Years as counselor	.092	1.000			
3. R	−.567	.043	1.000		
4. S	.622	−.107	−.620	1.000	
5. E	−.082	−.034	−.023	.650	1.000

TABLE 4a
Multiple Regression Analysis for Prediction of SWP (N = 160)

Variable	Standardized β weights	Raw β weights	Correlation with SWP
Years as Counselor	.15100	.15636	.09235
S	.48382	.71439	.62158
R	−.27689	−.48890	−.56718
E	−.14292	−.46750	−.08157
Constant 15.66967			
$R = .69525$, $R^2 = .48338$, $F\ (4,155) = 36.26$, $p < .001$			

TABLE 4b
Cross Validation Regression Equation for Prediction of SWP (N = 160)

SWP = Years as Counselor × .15636
+ Social Scale of VPI × .71439
− Realistic Scale of VPI × .4889
− Enterprising Scale of VPI × .4675
+ Constant 15.66967
Cross validation $R = .65596$, shrinkage of $R = .03929$, shrinkage of $R^2 = .053089$.

significant levels. Results of the stepwise regression analysis were supported by cross-validation results. This was in part due to the fairly large sample size and the conservative predictor variable to subject ratio (4/160).

The Social scale, in a positive manner, and the Realistic scale, in a negative way, contributed most to explaining the variance of the SWPB scores in the study. Longitudinal or time-measured variables, even when considered first, were less important than personality components, as measured by the VPI, in explaining rated counselor effectiveness.

The Artistic scale did not appear in the regression equation; however, the Social and Artistic scales were highly correlated ($r = .66$). Therefore, the Social scale explained much of the SWPB variance which might have been accounted for by the Artistic scale. They measured somewhat the same dimension of rated counselor effectiveness. An interpretation of the negative influence of the Enterprising scale is problematic. The total group mean VPI code for this sample of counselors was SAE, consistent with the code Holland (1977) listed for counselor. However, an overemphasis on Enterprising type behavior resulted in a counselor being rated as ineffective in this study. A high score on the Realistic and Conventional scales hurt even more. Low-rated counselors had an average VPI code of RCE. It would seem that workers who are rated as doing very well in a job might well have codes that differ from "average" codes that are found for

specific jobs in *The Occupations Finder* (Holland, 1977) which are often used for counseling and research purposes. Highly effective persons in any occupation might differ from average and ineffective workers in personality typology; this would seem to be a logical conclusion but should be tested further. We could eventually develop an "Occupations Finder" with different codes for various levels of effectiveness.

Although the average code for this sample of counselors was SAE, which matched the descriptive code found in *the Occupations Finder,* counselors in the highly rated groups had an average code of SAI when the codes were broken down by level of rated effectiveness. Therefore, fitting in or resembling coworkers did not necessarily mean that a counselor would be rated as highly effective. It was the "something different" which seemed to translate into some counselors being viewed as superior. In this study, the tertiary Investigative scale appeared as the "something different." The data in this report show that those persons who were rated "high" or "low" or "average" in effectiveness differed in their descriptive codes, a commonsense finding.

There may be a particular combination of personality factors which contribute to excelling in a job. The worker who fits in with co-workers may be in a congruent environment, but may also be an "average" worker. Within each occupation there may be a demand for a special combination of traits, interests, and abilities which, when present, would help explain why some workers are better at their jobs than are others. Further research using different occupational groups would be needed to extend, confirm, negate, or modify this finding.

Other Factors

For all practical purposes, assignment level of counselors had little relationship with SWPB or HJSB scores—or any other pertinent factors in the study. There were no significant correlations between certification and/or degree status and other important variables. Age was related only to other time factors.

Sex differences did not appear as related to the VPI scales. Only the differences on the E and I scales approached significance. In spite of the fact that six independent comparisons were made, and the probability of finding at least one significant difference was increased, none was discovered. The apparent lack of sex differences on the VPI scales had even more credence due to the large sample sizes involved in the statistical analysis. Given that the VPI is a personality scale, the personalities of male and female counselors in the study were quite similar. Indeed, it appeared to be more important to be a member of the counseling profession than to be male or female when making comparisons. Table 5 displays the mean VPI scores for males and females.

The key findings of this research report were related to the VPI.

TABLE 5
Univariable Analysis of Variance for Male and Female Counselors, VPI Scales

	Female, $N = 160$	Male, $N = 160$	F ratio*
Realistic	5.063	5.219	.7087
Investigative	3.569	4.075	2.2097
Social	6.863	6.938	.7392
Conventional	3.125	3.013	.9782
Enterprising	3.819	4.163	2.5214
Artistic	5.094	5.219	.6877

* No F ratios are significant at the .05 level.

Although findings generally paralleled commonsense and theoretical expectations, they did so to a higher degree than might be expected. Social and Artistic codes were most predictive of "high"-rated effectiveness, Realistic and Conventional codes most predictive of "low" ratings of effectiveness. This was generally true of counselors at all assignment levels regardless of sex, age, or other factors.

People with a Social orientation, as denoted by a high S code, may have been able to present themselves better to their superiors than their Realistic counterparts who, according to Holland's theoretical findings, are not adept at interpersonal skills. Counselors (and others) are treated as they are perceived, and they are often perceived in light of one's stereotypical expectations as to how a counselor "should" behave. They are hired, fired, promoted, and rated according to many inferential means. The present study discovered that SA counselors were consistently *rated* higher than counselors with differing codes. Arguments that counseling cannot be measured are moot; people act according to their perceptions.

The overall RCE code of the "low" effectiveness group denotes incongruency between personality and environment which would seem difficult to reconcile, according to Holland's hexagonal scheme and explanation (Holland, 1973). This incongruence of personality and environment would explain the lower satisfaction self-ratings as well as lower performance ratings; we do well the work that meets our personal needs. Clearly, work of an SA nature does not meet the characteristic needs associated with an RC personality. Therefore, based on the theory, the most satisfied group of counselors would be those with SAI codes; this was true for both males and females in our study. The most dissatisfied group of counselors were those males with a RCE code and females with a CSR code. Again, there were individual variations, but not as many as one might expect.

The significance of these findings take on even more meaning when we note that *one in four counselors were rated as ineffective.* This ranking went beyond any decision by the authors to split the group into arbitrary divisions for statistical purposes. These persons were each rated by three

different supervisors as only "occasionally" performing their jobs as expected, as needing to "improve . . . in a number of areas," and supervisors would "transfer subject(s) to another type of position." These ratings were made independently, were consistent at different levels, and were independent of sex, age, degree, and experience.

In conclusion, we can say that the VPI was generally predictive of rated effectivness of either a high or low nature. Personality characteristics, as reflected in VPI codes, were more important than other factors in denoting "high" levels of rated effectiveness or levels of job satisfaction.

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