

ANNOTATIONS

METHODS IN PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT¹

THE studies reported here are directed to the problem of maximizing predictions to criterion behavior from psychological test data. If this were the sum and substance of the volume then it would be of little interest to those who are unconcerned with the specific criterion investigated of school achievement. The authors' purpose, and it is this that raises the book above standard fare in educational psychology and invites the attention of the general reader, is to present an abstract statement of an ideal assessment procedure and of related but less-than-ideal variants and to illustrate each of the methodologies with prediction studies in which they have been incorporated.

The unique feature of the proposed ideal approach to assessment is the emphasis on the explicit and detailed analysis of the specific criterion in each situation. This serves to determine the selection and development of instruments for the assessment program. In other words, major emphasis is placed on a solution to what is usually referred to as the criterion problem. If it seems strange to mark as an advance the fact that much care is given to discovering exactly what it is to which the assessment team is expected to make predictions, it may help to note that the two major assessment programs which antedated the present effort, the research of the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) during World War II and of the Veterans Administration in the years following the war, both foundered on exactly this problem of not being able to define and properly measure their respective criteria. Further, many of the conventional studies of school achievement and of job success are guilty, as alleged by the authors, of accepting an ab-

¹ Stern, George G.; Stein, Morris I.; and Bloom, Benjamin S.: *METHODS IN PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT*. Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1956, 271 pp. \$6.00.

stract and somewhat unreal statement of the criterion rather than an operational standard of performance.

In their particular definition of the criterion situation special stress is placed on the social and interpersonal nature of the process of evaluation. That is, they assume that in all but the most trivial situations the criterion consists essentially of an evaluative standard imposed by one set of persons on the behavior of another set of persons. The implication of this orientation is to direct attention away from job-specific aptitudes to the study of the "whole man"—to the assessment of personality.

The ideal assessment procedure is termed *Analytic*. It includes an intensive analysis of the forces which are likely to affect performance in the situation and of the standards of evaluation actually in operation among the "evaluators." This leads to a description of "good" and "poor" performers as social roles. The next step is to translate these role descriptions into the terms of a personality model, that is, personality types are derived which are presumed on theoretical grounds to represent the hypothetically good and poor performers in the situation. (The authors use a framework of needs for describing personality which covers the broad areas of interpersonal relations, of reactions to inner impulses, and of styles of approach to external goals and stresses. The approach, however, is not dependent on any particular theory of personality.) A large amount of information is now gathered through clinical instruments such as projective tests, interviews, autobiographical essays, and so forth. The personalities of the subjects are compared with the model of the good performer, and predictions are then made on the basis of the "closeness of fit." These predictions represent the consensus of the various members of the assessment team worked out through collective discussion rather than predictions from an automatic statistical weighting of various scores.

It is clear that the *Analytic* approach is time consuming, expensive, and particularly appropriate only where small numbers of subjects are involved. The other assessment methodologies that are presented diverge from this ideal in the interest of practicality. Some compromise is made at one or another point in the sequence described above. Essentially, all of the

compromises are aimed at reducing the amount of time that must be spent in the clinical evaluation of each case by developing paper and pencil tests that may be scored mechanically and that will permit the relation of scores to criterion performance to be evaluated by statistical rather than clinical procedures.

Both the *Empirical* and *Configurational* approaches differ from the *Analytic* in that they substitute for the intensive analysis of the situation a definition of criterion groups of good and poor performers. Tests are administered to these groups and on the basis of the differentiating scores an empirical model of the personality of the effective performer is constructed. The tests are refined, new tests are added, and the study is replicated on a new group to see if the instruments will adequately distinguish effective from ineffective performers. The *Configurational* differs from the other approach only in recognizing the possibility of multiple personality types as meeting criteria of effectiveness. Transposed factor analysis and discriminant function analysis are suggested as possibly more appropriate techniques for problems of analysis in this approach than standard multiple regression procedures. These two approaches do not differ from conventional procedures except in the emphasis on personality and on the operational description of the criterion. The last approach is termed *Synthetic* and seems simply to be a cruder version of the *Analytic*. Rather than deriving a hypothetical model from the analysis of functional roles of effective performers, this approach takes a model from personality theory that is assumed to affect performance, develops personality paper and pencil tests based on it, and then attempts the prediction.

It is beyond the scope of this review to report the substantive details of the various studies that are used to illustrate the different approaches to assessment. It may serve to note that the major criterion is school achievement broadly conceived and that the subjects in the various studies were graduate students in theology, teacher-training, and physics, and college freshmen. In the course of the work a number of new paper and pencil tests were developed which appear to be quite promising. The results of the different studies are uniformly encour-

aging. For example, except for the transposition of one pair of cases they are able to match perfectly the rank ordering by the faculty of an entire class of ten teacher-trainees and using a paper and pencil test developed on previous classes they are able to predict the performance of college freshmen on comprehensive examinations at the end of the school year with a correlation of .63 (the correlation of this examination with the standard ACE scholastic aptitude test for the original sample was .17).

On the whole, this is a good and provocative book. None of the specific studies is beyond criticism from the point of view of design and analysis but since their purpose is illustrative this may be left as a minor fault. The major limitation lies in the inadequate conception of the situational "press." Lip-service is given to the notion that the evaluation process is a social system but no systematic account is provided analogous to the framework of variables for describing personality. The comparison of one situation with another and the consequent cumulation of knowledge about, for example, invariant aspects of the evaluation situation becomes virtually impossible without a more generalized and detailed statement of this side of the equation.

Finally, there is a more general social limitation which follows from the full and explicit acceptance of the criterion in each situation as an unchangeable "given." This book may open a "new chapter" in the history of assessment as is claimed by Professor Henry A. Murray in his Foreword. It is to be hoped that we may look forward to the first chapter of a new history when assessors come to take as their criterion each individual's "best" performance and turn from the assessment of men for situations to the assessment of situations for men.

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THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW¹

DURING the last ten years the techniques and procedures in interviewing have developed tremendously. Much basic

¹ Merton, Robert K.; Fiske, Marjorie; and Kendall, Patricia L.: *THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW*. Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1956, 186 pages, \$3.00.