

How Personality Influences Selection and Placement¹

A Brief Discussion Pointing to the Need for More Objective Methods of Personality Measurement and Better Methods of Personality Training

By HAROLD B. BERGEN

Manager of Personnel Department, Henry L. Doherty and Company, New York

Introduction

LET us first consider what constitutes selection and placement. Selection includes selection for initial placement, selection for training, selection for promotion, etc. Placement is closely tied in with selection, as the introduction of an individual to his work tends to overlap the process of selecting him. If selection and placement are to be effective, we must have at our disposal adequate techniques for the measurement of individual differences both in positions and in the men that are to fill them.

The techniques which have been developed for the purpose of measuring individual differences in positions include:

1. Organization analysis and synthesis, which results in an organization plan.
2. Job analysis and synthesis, which results in specifications for each class of position.
3. Class grading, which results in a grading plan of the various classes of positions.

The techniques which have been developed for the purpose of measuring individual differences in men include:

1. The interview
2. The psychological test
3. The rating scale
4. The medical examination.

The development and utilization of these techniques have indicated that personality plays an important role in the selection and placement of employees. The purpose of this lecture will be to discuss some of the aspects of the role that it plays.

¹From a lecture given at New York University, December 10, 1928, as part of a series on "Personality," under the auspices of the Association for Personality Training and New York University.

Definition

Before discussing the influence of personality in the selection and placement of employees, we should, perhaps, define the word "personality." Unfortunately, a generally accepted definition of this widely used trait term has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever been formulated. To some, it means the sum of all of the traits possessed by an individual; to others, it signifies only a certain personal magnetism or personal acceptability. It would indeed have been helpful if the individuals who planned these conferences had established a definition for us. For the purposes of this lecture, however, let us narrow our concept to include only the combination of temperamental qualities which causes an individual to be personally acceptable—socially or vocationally—to his friends, associates, superiors, subordinates, customers, prospects, etc. We would include such factors as personal cleanliness, dress, mannerisms, emotional stability, introversion and extroversion, "mixability," etc., and exclude such traits as intelligence, general capacity, special capacities, specific skills, ethical behavior, etc. Although a critical examination of this concept would detect many flaws, I hope you "will know what I mean" when I use the term.

Organization Analysis and Synthesis

In the development of the organization plan for any given institution, it will be found that the different types of relationships require different types of personality. On the basis of organization, business positions classify as follows:

1. Executive
 - a. Line
 - b. Functional
2. Staff
3. Rank and file

The line executive exercises direct control over the men who report to him. He is responsible for the execution of the work performed by them. He is the executive who handles dynamic operating problems. He must, therefore, possess the type of personality which will cause his subordinates to want to achieve the objectives of their jobs, of their department, and of the company. An example of this type of executive position is that of foreman of a processing department in a factory.

On the other hand, we have the functional executive who exercises functional control of the same particular factor necessary to operation. He represents the management in that he has the authority to approve (not disapprove) certain decisions of the line executives relative to such matters as methods, personnel adjustments, equipment, purchases, etc. He also renders specialized service to the line executives. He should, therefore, possess the type of personality which will enable him to co-operate with his associates and to win their confidence and respect. In other words, he must be able to "sell" his ideas to the line executives. An example of this type of executive position is that of comptroller.

It should be mentioned, however, that the line of demarcation between line and functional control is not always clear. The line executive often exercises some functional control and the functional executive usually has a working staff under his direct line control. There are, of course, various degrees of this overlapping. But we may say that, in general, executive positions tend to be either line or functional. The type of personality required in either case, therefore, should be given careful consideration in the selection and placement of executives.

Let us next consider the relationship of the staff man, who usually exercises neither line nor functional control but who may report to either a line or a functional executive. The staff man, as a general rule, is called on to make investigations, analyses, recommendations, and reports, but he does not have the authority of taking action on these matters. Examples of this type of position include research chemist, market analyst, auditor, industrial psychologist, etc. Even in this type of position personality plays a large part in selection and placement. With the exception of a few isolated positions, the researches of the staff man will bring

him into contact with other people, either within or outside of the organization. It is essential, therefore, that he possess a personality acceptable to the type of person with whom he will come in contact.

What has been said about the staff position applies also, to some extent, to the rank-and-file position. Practically all of the incumbents of such positions come in contact with other members of the institution or with the public. It should be obvious, therefore, that the personality of each rank-and-file worker must be given due weight in selection and placement if both personnel relations and public relations are to be developed to a high standard of effectiveness.

Job Analysis and Synthesis

Job analysis and the development of class specifications for the various classes of positions may be considered as a refinement of organization work. The specification which is established for any given class of positions should indicate the objectives of those positions and the qualifications required of the incumbents. Included in the statement of qualifications should be the type of personality required. If possible, these standards should be in terms of quantity as well as quality. For practical purposes, however, it will probably be many years before research workers in the social sciences produce such measures, although, at the present time, some attempts have been made to indicate personality requirements in qualitative terms. Attempts have been made also to measure personality requirements in terms of psychological tests, but, in practically all of these cases, the standards have been expressed in terms of the tests rather than in terms of the position itself.

Although at the present time he appreciates the inadequacy of the techniques for measuring the personality requirements of the various classes of positions, the practical personnel man gives careful consideration to the apparent requirements of each position which he is called upon to fill. For example, he must consider the human contacts involved. Are they with associates in the same department; with members of other departments; with the public? Also, are these contacts in person, by letter, or by telephone? What is the social status of the individuals with whom contacts are made? And so on. Even at the present time, personality