

Identifying High-Performing Probation and Parole Officers with the Critical Hire-Personality Assessment

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Abstract: The Personality-Job Fit Theory suggests that the better an employee's personality fits with an organization's culture and demands of the job the more likely that employee will be successful at the job. Researchers have repeatedly shown how various personality traits correlate with and predict job performance ratings for police and correctional officers. Similar research, however, is sparse for probation and parole officers (PPO), despite PPOs being identified in many states as peace officers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the degree to which personality traits, as measured by the Critical Hire-Personality Assessment (CH-PA), a pre-employment integrity, honesty and personality assessment, correlated with and predicted supervisor ratings of PPO job performance. The methods used to study this relationship consisted of supervisors within three community-based corrections agencies rating the job performance of 53 PPOs for purposes of this study. Job performance ratings were then analyzed against the PPO's scale and subscale scores on the CH-PA the PPO took as part of their application and hiring process. Results revealed that multiple CH-PA personality scales and subscales significantly correlated with top performer ratings. Calibration, discrimination, and accuracy metrics also revealed that, when using a cut score of one standard deviation from the mean, multiple CH-PA scales adequately predicted PPO job performance ratings. Results from this study can provide PPO hiring agencies with information on what personality traits are empirically associated with top performer ratings and provide practical utility for agencies using the CH-PA.

Keywords: Pre-Employment Testing, Probation Officer, Parole Officer, Personality, Personality Testing, Selection, High Performer

1. Introduction

The practice of evaluating non-pathological, or normal [1], personality traits during the pre-employment hiring process has become widely used across a variety of work settings [2]. Reliable and valid personality assessments can help identify the degree to which an applicant's personality will likely fit with the requirements of the job and interpersonal dynamics at the job. The Personality-Job Fit Theory [3] suggests that the better an employee's personality fits with an organization's culture and demands of the job the more likely that employee will be successful at the job. Conducting pre-employment personality testing helps identify those applicants with personality traits commensurate with the job requirements early in the hiring process. Pre-employment personality tests are also being increasingly used by hiring agencies to help reduce costs. Hiring poor performers can have a financial

impact that can be devastating to an organization. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that replacing an employee costs an additional 30% of that employee's potential first-year earnings [4] causing significant financial loss, particularly for smaller agencies with relatively small budgets. This financial cost is greatly increased when including losses in productivity by a poor performer and legal and/or settlement costs. Identifying employees with personality traits associated with successful performance helps increase the odds of hiring employees with a strong personality-job fit, potentially reducing rates of turnover, termination, and overall costs.

One field where pre-employment personality testing has become prominent is law enforcement. The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training has provided guidelines for evaluators conducting evaluations of peace officers, which state in part that evaluators should include an assessment of "normal" personality, or non-pathological behavior, along

with assessments of pathology or abnormal behavior [1]. Measures of abnormal behavior would include tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 [5] or the Personality Assessment Inventory [6]. Tests of pathology have been determined by the Courts to be medical examinations [7, 8] and therefore must be administered after a conditional offer of employment is given. Measures of personality or normal behavior, on the other hand, are not medical examinations and can be administered pre-conditional offer. Measures of normal personality include tests such as the NEO Personality Inventory-3 [9] or Critical Hire-Personality Assessment [10], both of which follow the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM) [11]. The FFM, also known as the Big 5, measures traits such as extraversion, openness to new experiences, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Existing research exploring the relationship between police officer personality traits and job performance, academy performance, absenteeism, stress response reactions while on the job, and disciplinary problems has been well documented [12-21]. Research exploring the relationship between correctional officer personality traits and job performance has also been well documented [22-24]. Similar research on the relationship between probation and parole officers' (PPOs) personality traits and job performance, on the other hand, has been sparse despite PPOs being identified as peace officers in many states [25].

There are noteworthy differences between police officers and PPOs that warrant a unique analysis of PPOs. Most prominent are the differences between their philosophical orientation, certification requirements, and essential job functions [26]. Although police officers can take on multiple roles within the community, their primary role is often to enforce laws and protect their community's citizens. PPOs, on the other hand, serve to enforce supervision conditions imposed by the Courts or Boards of Parole, while simultaneously working to coach and rehabilitate individuals under their supervision [27]. These differences between police and PPOs' job duties and responsibilities warrant a unique study of the personality traits of PPOs and how they impact work performance.

Only one study has been identified that has explored PPO personality traits in relation to job performance. Tatman [10] used the Critical Hire-Personality Assessment (CH-PA) to evaluate the degree to which the personality traits of 94 community-based PPOs, residential officers, administrators, clerical staff, and treatment staff were associated with supervisor ratings of job performance. Tatman revealed that the Stress Response, Extraversion, and Consciousness scales of the CH-PA, and their various subscales, significantly correlated with, and adequately predicted, supervisor ratings of job performance. Although these findings are promising and provide an initial foundation for future empirical study, they are results from only one study. Additional study of the CH-PA, and its ability to correlate with and predict future PPO job performance, is needed to support future generalizations and the practical utility of the CH-PA in the PPO hiring

process.

In addition to the limited amount of research on PPO personality traits in relation to job performance, there is also a limited amount of practical information hiring agencies can use from the existing literature. For example, although there is value in knowing that Conscientiousness and Stress Response scores are significantly associated with supervisor ratings of job performance [10], hiring agencies are left to wonder at what level or scale score these relationships significantly predict job performance ratings. In other words, when does a score become important? Having this added level of analysis identifying possible decision points or cut scores could provide practical utility for users of the CH-PA early in the hiring process.

When hiring agencies interview applicants for a job they use a variety of procedures (e.g., interviews, background checks, and assessments) to either screen out (i.e., procedures that exclude or disqualify candidates who do not meet a minimum standard or exhibit psychological traits that make them unfit for a career in law enforcement) or screen-in applicants (i.e., procedures that "identify the best candidate from among those who are minimally qualified") [1] (pg. 2). Given that normal personality assessments can be administered before making a conditional offer they are aptly positioned to help hiring agencies screen in top performers. Therefore, having information about what personality traits are predictive of PPO job performance, and at what level the scores become predictable, could provide hiring agencies with valuable information for identifying potential top performers early in the hiring process.

Two research questions were asked to guide this study: 1) Do normal personality traits significantly correlate with PPO top performance ratings, and 2) Can personality test cut scores be identified that significantly differentiate between top performers and average or poor performers?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants consisted of 53 PPOs employed at three Midwestern community-based corrections agencies. Demographics for this sample consisted of 30 female and 23 male officers. Racial/ethnic status for the sample consisted of 39 Caucasian, 8 African American, and 6 Hispanic participants. The average age for this sample was 34.5 (SD = 9.48) and ranged from 21 to 55 years of age.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. The Critical Hire-Personality Assessment

The Critical Hire-Personality Assessment (CH-PA) [10] was chosen as the measure of normal personality in this study due to it being developed on, and validated with, new and incumbent PPOs, making it a logical fit with the target population and purpose of this study. The CH-PA is a 72-item assessment containing five distinct, and FFM consistent, personality scales and 17 subscales. The five CH-PA scales

are Stress Response, which is made up of three subscales (Impulsivity, Irritability, and Social Discomfort); Extraversion, which is made up of four subscales (Warmth, Assertiveness, Gregariousness, and Activity Level); Flexibility, which is made up of two subscales (Intellectual Curiosity and Openness to Change); Agreeableness, which is made up of four subscales (Empathy, Trust, Modesty, and Cooperation); and Conscientiousness, which is made up of 4 subscales (Drive & Self-Discipline, Dependability & Reliability, Organization, and Deliberation). CH-PA scores are reported as T scores ($M = 50$, $SD = 10$), and questions are anchored with a five-point, Likert scale (e.g., Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Research on the CH-PA has shown it to have adequate reliability, validity, and accuracy in predicting PPO job performance [10]. Each participant took the CH-PA as a natural part of their respective agency's hiring process, providing naturally occurring, archival data for this study.

2.2.2. Supervisor Ratings

For purposes of this study, each officer's direct supervisor was asked whether or not they would rate their respective officer(s) as a "top performer", "average performer" or as a "poor or below-average performer". Top performers were defined as the officer falling in the "top 10% of employees", while poor performers were defined as the officer falling in the "bottom 10% of employees". Officers were rated by their respective supervisors and after the officer worked with their agency for at least one year to allow adequate exposure to the PPOs work product and performance. Supervisors rated each of their officers without immediate knowledge of, or direct access to, their officer's CH-PA scores. Sixteen officers were rated as being "top performers", 29 were rated as "average", and eight were rated as "poor or below average".

2.2.3. Procedures

To answer the first research question "*Do normal personality traits significantly correlate with PPO top performance ratings?*" supervisor ratings were collapsed into two groups: 1) Officers rated as top performers and 2) officers rated as average and below-average performers. Collapsing the original three performance groups into two groups was done to isolate top performers from the average and below-average performers. Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to measure the relationship between supervisor ratings and CH-PA scales and subscale scores.

To answer the research question "*Can personality test cut scores be identified that significantly differentiate between top performers and average or poor performers?*" CH-PA scales and subscales that generated significant correlations were then further analyzed for their degree of calibration, discrimination, and accuracy [28]. Cut scores of one standard deviation from the mean were chosen for this study to be consistent with how high and low scores are defined by the NEO-Personality Inventory 3 (NEO-PI 3) [9]. The NEO-PI 3 is a FFM-based assessment of normal adult personality conceptually and statistically similar to the CH-PA [10]. Therefore, T scores at or below 40 for the Stress Response scale and subscales, and T

scores at or above 60 for Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness scales and subscales were used as cut scores for the subsequent calibration, discrimination, and accuracy analyses. Calibration is the degree to which an assessment's prediction of an outcome agrees with known outcomes and is defined in this study as top performance ratings. Discrimination refers to the degree to which an assessment can differentiate between two outcomes and is defined in this study as top performers versus average or poor performers. Positive predictive values (PPV) and negative predictive values (NPV) were calculated to measure calibration. PPV provides true positive rates, while NPV provides true negative rates. PPV, for this study, is the probability that an individual with a given CH-PA scale or subscale at or exceeding 1 standard deviation above or below the mean is classified as a top performer by their supervisor. NPV for this study is the probability that an individual with a given CH-PA scale or subscale score that is not at or exceeding 1 standard deviation above or below the mean is not classified as a top performer. Sensitivity and specificity metrics were calculated to measure discrimination. A measure's sensitivity is the degree to which the assessment can correctly identify the intended trait or outcome. In this study, sensitivity measures the degree to which the CH-PA can correctly identify top performers from the sample population. Specificity is the degree to which an assessment can correctly identify the absence of the identified trait or outcome. In this study, specificity measures the degree to which the CH-PA can correctly identify average or poor performers out of the sample population. Global accuracy was also calculated to identify the degree to which the CH-PA can correctly identify the combination of people correctly identified as top performers from those not identified as top performers. Relative risk ratios were also calculated to measure the degree to which PPOs with elevated personality scales or subscales (i.e., one standard deviation above or below the mean) are top performers compared to PPOs without elevated scales or subscales.

3. Results

3.1. CH-PA and Performance Rating Correlations

CH-PA scale and subscale means and standard deviations are provided in Table 1. Correlations between supervisor ratings (top performer vs average or poor performer) and CH-PA scales and subscales scores are also provided in Table 1. Correlation results show that multiple CH-PA scales and subscales significantly correlated with top job performance ratings. The Stress Response scale ($r = -.48$, $p = .000$), along with its three subscales: Irritability ($r = -.40$, $p = .003$), Impulsivity ($r = -.42$, $p = .002$), and Social Discomfort ($r = -.34$, $p = .012$), showed significant, negative relationships with supervisor ratings of top performers. This suggests that PPOs presenting with a low propensity for expressing anger or irritability, exhibiting impulsivity, and experiencing uneasiness in social situations, respectively, were more likely

to be seen by their supervisors as top performers, compared to officers with higher scores in these areas.

Table 1. Critical Hire-Personality Assessment Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations with Supervisor Ratings.

CH-PA Scale	Subscales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Response		51.91	12.37	-.48	.000
	Irritability	49.11	9.37	-.40	.003
	Impulsivity	52.13	10.10	-.42	.002
	Social Discomfort	51.66	8.58	-.34	.012
Extraversion		45.51	8.92	.23	.104
	Warmth	48.60	10.34	.30	.032
	Assertiveness	50.49	8.90	.21	.132
	Gregariousness	49.09	8.49	.07	.622
	Activity Level	49.13	10.62	.10	.481
Flexibility		49.53	9.98	.09	.541
	Intellectual Curiosity	49.28	10.48	.06	.674
	Openness to Change	49.94	9.45	.10	.499
Agreeableness		55.45	10.64	.35	.009
	Empathy	61.66	12.11	.31	.024
	Trust	51.21	9.00	.18	.188
	Modesty	49.08	9.42	.09	.543
	Cooperation	52.09	9.84	.30	.031
Conscientiousness		50.19	9.96	.45	.001
	Drive & Self-Discipline	50.74	9.28	.45	.001
	Dependability & Reliability	50.23	9.21	.48	.000
	Organization	49.91	10.38	.34	.014
	Deliberation	49.32	9.36	.32	.021

Warmth ($r = .30, p = .032$) was the only Extraversion subscale found to be associated with supervisor ratings. This correlation would suggest that traits such as kindness or friendliness are significantly associated with top supervisor ratings. The Extraversion subscales Assertiveness ($r = .21, p = .132$), Gregariousness ($r = .07, p = .622$), and Activity Level ($r = .10, p = .481$) were not significantly correlated with top supervisor ratings. This might suggest that a PPOs level of assertiveness, the degree to which they are outgoing or sociable, and energy level, respectively, are not significantly associated with performance ratings.

The Flexibility scale ($r = .09, p = .541$), nor its subscales Intellectual Curiosity ($r = .06, p = .674$) or Openness to Change ($r = .10, p = .499$), were significantly correlated with job performance ratings. This finding would suggest that traits such as being open to new theories and philosophies, approaching tasks with a sense of curiosity, having an open mind to novel things, and having the flexibility to change were not associated with supervisor ratings of job performance.

The Agreeableness scale ($r = .35, p = .009$), along with its Empathy ($r = .31, p = .024$) and Cooperation ($r = .30, p = .031$) subscales, showed significant, positive relationships with supervisor ratings. This would suggest that officers who showed a greater propensity toward, or interest in, cooperating with others and having a high level of empathy towards others were associated with top performance ratings. Trust ($r = .18, p = .188$) and Modesty ($r = .09, p = .543$), however, were not significantly correlated with job performance ratings. These findings suggest that the degree to which a PPO trusts others, or how humble they may be, respectively, is not significantly associated with job performance ratings.

The Conscientiousness scale ($r = .45, p = .001$), and its four subscales, were all found to have positive relationships with supervisor ratings of job performance. This finding would suggest that PPOs who present with high scores on Drive and Self-Discipline ($r = .45, p = .001$), Dependability ($r = .48, p = .000$), Organization ($r = .34, p = .014$), and Deliberation ($r = .32, p = .021$) were also more likely to be seen by their supervisors as top performers, compared to officers with lower Conscientiousness scale and subscale scores.

3.2. Calibration, Discrimination, and Accuracy

Results from the calibration, discrimination, and accuracy analyses are presented in Table 2. Global accuracy results revealed that the CH-PA scales and subscales were between 54.72% and 79.25% accurate in discriminating between top performers and average or below-average performers when using the cut score of one standard deviation from the mean. The Stress Response scale showed the greatest global accuracy (79.25%) and generated a Relative Risk Ratio of 8.47. This indicates that PPOs with Stress Response scores falling at or below a T score of 40 were over 8 times more likely to be seen as top performers compared to PPOs with Stress Response scale T scores over 40. It is noteworthy to report that the Stress Response scale showed an 80% PPV, but only a 47.06% sensitivity rate. These findings suggest that when using the decision point of $T < 40$ the Stress Response scale correctly identifies top performers 47.06% of the time (i.e., sensitivity). However, when a PPO is identified as being a top performer their Stress Response scores fall at or below $T < 40$ 80% of the time (i.e., PPV). This relatively low sensitivity rate versus PPV suggests that there are factors

beyond those measured by the Stress Response scale that are impacting top performance ratings (i.e., sensitivity). However,

if they have been selected as top performers, the PPO is highly likely to have low Stress Response scores (i.e., PPV).

Table 2. CH-PA Calibration, Discrimination, Global Accuracy, and Risk Ratios.

CH-PA Scale	Subscales	Sensitivity	Specificity	PPV	NPV	Global Accuracy	Risk Ratio	95% CI	p
Stress Response		47.06%	94.44%	80.00%	79.07%	79.25%	8.47	2.01-35.69	.004
	Irritability	52.94%	88.89%	69.23%	80.00%	77.36%	4.76	1.71-13.31	.003
	Impulsivity	23.53%	94.44%	66.67%	72.34%	71.71%	4.24	.86-20.90	.076
	Social Discomfort	29.41%	100%	100%	75.00%	77.36%	22.61	1.32-386.93	.031
Extraversion									
Agreeableness	Warmth	47.06%	88.89%	66.67%	78.05%	75.47%	4.24	1.48-12.13	.007
		58.82%	80.56%	58.82%	80.56%	73.58%	3.03	1.39-6.57	.005
	Empathy	44.44%	76.47%	39.39%	80.00%	54.72%	1.38	.93-2.04	.112
Conscientiousness	Cooperation	35.29%	91.67%	66.67%	75.00%	73.58%	4.24	1.20-14.93	.025
		47.06%	86.11%	61.54%	77.50%	73.58%	3.39	1.30-8.82	.012
	Drive & Self-Discipline	47.06%	86.11%	61.54%	77.50%	73.58%	3.39	1.30-8.82	.012
	Dependability & Reliability	41.18%	94.44%	77.78%	77.27%	77.36%	7.41	1.72-31.97	.007
	Organization	35.29%	86.11%	54.55%	73.81%	69.81%	2.54	.90-7.17	.078
	Deliberation	35.29%	94.44%	75.00%	75.56%	75.47%	6.35	1.43-28.27	.015

4. Conclusion

4.1. Discussion

Data obtained in this study revealed significant correlations between PPO personality traits and job performance ratings, which is consistent with similar research on police officers [13-21]. Results from the present study also identified that Stress Response and Conscientiousness scales and subscales had significant correlations with top-performing PPOs while only select Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness scales and subscales were associated with top performance ratings. This finding is also in line with existing literature. Researchers have shown that Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (which is statistically similar to the CH-PA Stress Response scale) [10] are associated with supervisor ratings of job performance across occupational settings, while Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness are more job-specific in terms of their predictive ability [29-30]. This would suggest that, like other professions, top-performing PPOs appear to exhibit personality structures high in Conscientiousness and low in Neuroticism.

The relationships identified within the Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness scales are noteworthy and valuable to correctional agencies hiring PPOs. In terms of Extraversion, results from the present study would suggest that highly rated PPOs tend to exhibit more warmth or friendliness than PPOs who are rated by their supervisors as average or poor performers. Assertiveness, Gregariousness, and Activity Level, on the other hand, were not significantly correlated with performance ratings. This may suggest that, although a level of assertiveness is required to be an effective PPO, a level of moderation in assertiveness may be more appropriate and associated with top performance ratings, as opposed to high or low levels of assertiveness. Similarly, although a level of sociability and energy is required to be an effective PPO, top-performing PPOs may not exhibit either high or low levels of gregariousness or extraversion and

energy. Rather, top-performing PPOs may present with moderate levels of sociability and energy levels. When looking at the Agreeableness scale, PPOs who were highly rated tend to exhibit high levels of Empathy and Cooperation compared to PPOs who were rated as average or poor performers. However, the degree to which the PPO trusts others (i.e., Trust subscale) or their level of humility (i.e., Modesty subscale) were not significantly correlated with performance ratings. In terms of Trust, this finding may mean that there is a level of trust that is appropriate and that top-performing PPOs do not exhibit either high or low levels of trust in others. This interpretation makes intuitive sense in that PPOs can neither be paranoid nor gullible, but rather appropriately vigilant with a tendency to “trust but verify”. In terms of Modesty, the present study’s finding may suggest that, again, there may be an average level of humility, self-confidence, or self-assuredness that is associated with top performance ratings, as opposed to a PPO being either head-strong and cocky or self-conscious and unsure of themselves. When looking at findings across scales, the combination of subscale results appears to be consistent with the growing trend in corrections for PPOs to function more as a “Coach” versus a “Referee” [27]. Lovins et al. have promoted a shift in corrections away from the PPO being an authoritative “referee” or mere enforcer of the rules and supervision conditions to being a “coach”, mentor, or guide in their client’s rehabilitation. Results from the present study identified that highly rated PPOs tend to exhibit high levels of Warmth, Empathy, and Cooperation, for example. Appropriately coaching a person on probation or parole toward positive life changes requires a degree of warmth, empathy, and cooperation from the officer, while being a referee or mere enforcer of the rules does not. Top PPOs appear to have these “soft skills” required to build the rapport, relationship, and trust with their clients that research has found significantly enhances positive change [31]. These results help provide correctional agencies with information about which personality traits tend to be associated with top-performing

PPOs.

These results are also consistent with the limited amount of research investigating the relationship between job performance ratings and PPO personality traits. Tatman [10] investigated the accuracy of the CH-PA in predicting PPO job performance ratings by using Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curves. The present study contributes to this existing literature by identifying CH-PA scale and subscale cut scores that hiring agencies can use to help guide hiring decisions. For example, PPOs with low or very low scores (i.e., scores of $T < 40$) on the Stress Response's Social Discomfort subscale were 22.61 times more likely to be identified by their supervisor as being a top performer, compared to PPOs with higher scores on Social Discomfort (Table 2). Also, PPOs with low or very low scores on the Stress Response's Irritability subscale were 4.76 times more likely to be identified by their supervisor as being a top performer, compared to officers with higher scores on Irritability. PPOs high or very high (i.e., at or above a T score of 60) on the Conscientiousness's Drive & Self-Discipline, Dependability & Reliability, and Deliberation subscales were 3.39, 7.41, and 6.35 times, respectively, more likely to be identified as a top performer, compared to officers with lower scores in these areas. Similarly, PPOs scoring high or very high on the Warmth and Cooperation subscales were both 4.24 times more likely to be identified as top performers, compared to officers with lower scores on these subscales. These cut scores, combined with information about the degree of predictive accuracy of each CH-PA scale and subscale, can help provide practical information to aid hiring decisions.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research

There are a couple of noteworthy limitations that should be reported. First, the sample size used in this study was relatively small. However, based on a post hoc power calculation conducted with ClinCalc.com a sample of 53 is adequate. Parameters used in this power analysis consisted of estimating the population incident rate of top performers as being 10% of the workforce, which is consistent with published statistics [32]. The present study had a top-performer incidence rate of 32%. With alpha at .05 and power set at 80%, a sample of 53 participants was adequate to detect the effect intended.

Although correlational data obtained in this study is consistent with existing literature, the specificity of identifying cut points for predicting top-performing PPOs is novel to the field of pre-employment evaluations for PPOs. Therefore, additional research is recommended to bolster generalizations made from these findings. Additional research is also recommended regarding the relationship between PPO personality traits and specific outcome and criterion variables such as employee turnover, rates of offender recidivism, a PPOs propensity for taking responsibility for their mistakes, responsiveness to feedback from others, and working alliance ratings by clients.

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