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## A Preliminary Study on Foreign Personnel Selection

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# A Preliminary Study on Foreign Personnel Selection

By HERBERT PAUL FROEHLICH<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The problem is not the usual one of trying to predict behavior relevant to an individual's daily activities, but that of predicting how an individual will behave in and adapt to an environment in which he has never found himself, or ever thought he would find himself. Involved in such prediction is the question of whether the individual will behave as predicted once he comes in contact with the new environment. This may be the situation facing a company wanting to locate abroad, hiring native employees together with some Americans. The expense of training, ill-will, loss of production, etc., created by placing Americans who can not adjust to a foreign culture are unnecessary losses that may be reduced through a better program of selection.

At the outset, it should be mentioned that this is not a validation study, but is an attempt to get leads for a real validation at some future time. It is presented as an idea which seems workable and challenging.

Several hypotheses concerning the nature of the employee who successfully adjusts to overseas life were put forth:

1. The person should be relatively *independent of the American culture*. Extreme reliance on the conveniences of the American life, dependencies on old friends, parents, etc., may lead to inefficiency or even turnover in overseas operations.
2. The person should have *knowledge of foreign cultures* (1). It was believed that knowledge of foreign customs, institutions, etc., would lead to or indicate interest in understanding of foreign peoples. It might also be that such knowledge would permit the employee to operate more efficiently in a foreign culture.
3. The person should be *intelligent*. It was felt that the intelligent person would be able to acquire more rapidly the things he has to know of foreign cultures and might also be more understanding of the differences between the American and foreign cultures.

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<sup>1</sup>The author wishes to acknowledge the guidance given by Dr. Howard Maher, and the work of Dr. Don C. Charles in the construction of the "Knowledge of Foreign Cultures Scale".

4. The person should be stable, i.e., *a well adjusted person*. An emotional stability test might eliminate the person who could not adjust to the frustrations of living in a foreign culture and the person who is currently so poorly adjusted that his desire to go abroad is motivated by escapism. We would also want to minimize "culture shock" (2) which is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols to which we have oriented ourselves. It has been suggested that such shock will eventually result in regression (2) in which the home environment assumes tremendous importance to an American, and everything American becomes glorified.
5. The person should be the kind who can get the job done, but *not at the expense of others* (1, 3). It is believed that the person who, on his present job, shows a good balance of getting things done as well as consideration for others, may be the best bet for foreign employment.

#### PROCEDURE

In order to test the above hypotheses, a number of tests were designed. Also a nationally published test was tried out.

These are:

1. *An Independence of American Culture Test*. This contains items designed to measure the extent to which the individual is closely "wedded" to the American scene—to what extent he depends upon sports, name brands, friends, supermarkets, etc. Sample items are:
  - a. People owe a lot to their parents.
  - b. Old friends make the best friends.
  - c. I prefer supermarkets to smaller grocery stores.

Subjects were asked to agree (A) or disagree (D) with each statement. Along similar lines, a *Food Preference Questionnaire* was constructed. This contains a number of foods mostly found in the foreign diet. The subject indicates whether he has ever eaten or would like to eat foods such as: goat cheese, eels, stuffed sheep stomach, avocado. The score is the sum of the foods checked.

2. A test of *Knowledge of Foreign Cultures* was established. This test contains items concerned with information about foreign foods, beverages, landmarks, music, painting, literature, and famous people. A total of 130 items cover the countries of Germany, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The subject marks on an IBM answer sheet the answer he believes to be correct. Two examples from a general section are:

- A. Bean sprouts are used mainly in the foods of:
  - a. Turkey
  - b. China
  - c. India
  - d. Japan
  - e. Russia
- B. Chutney is a:
  - a. meat dish
  - b. vegetable
  - c. pancake
  - d. condiment
  - e. soup
3. It was originally recommended that we use a complex, verbal intelligence test such as the Ohio State Psychological Examination. At Iowa State College, where the students were obtained for this study, scores were already available for the *American Council on Education Test* (A.C.E.). These scores were used. It provides separate estimates of language (L-score) and quantitative (Q-score) ability.

No tests that would measure hypotheses 4 and 5 were tried in the present study, but it is strongly recommended that they be included in any future study. The tests recommended are the Gordon Personal Profile (for the stability measure), especially the 'Emotional Stability' and 'Sociability' scales, and the Ohio State Leadership Rating Scale (for the "getting-work-out" consideration hypothesis).

#### CRITERIA AGAINST WHICH THE TESTS WERE CORRELATED

The ideal test prediction situation comes about through comparison of employee's test scores with some index of their over-all work efficiency. The present study is a 'best guess' validation because of the following:

1. There were few employees overseas who were available that could be used as subjects. Therefore students were used.
2. We had no records of actual overseas adjustment available.

It was believed that we could spot individuals having attitudes favorable to overseas adjustment. Two scales were used for this purpose.

One of the scales was especially designed for this study and attempts to detect *favorable attitudes toward foreign peoples*, herein after termed FATFP. Most items were drawn from specially taped interviews with students who had traveled abroad. They had been

asked to express their opinions about foreigners, foreign customs, and foreign living conditions. This method yielded 57 usable items, of which the following are examples:

- a. Foreigners talk too much.
- b. I wouldn't want my children to grow up in a foreign country.
- c. Foreigners play both ends toward the middle.

Each statement is answered by the subject according to the extent to which he agrees or disagrees: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, no opinion, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. A high score would indicate strong feelings against foreigners and their institutions.

The other criterion was obtained by taking the most reliable items from the *California Ethnocentrism Scale*, an extensively tested instrument. This scale essentially measures biases against minority groups in this country. The scoring on this scale was revised to give a freedom from ethnocentrism interpretations. Accordingly, this scale, with this interpretation, will henceforth be designated as FE. A few of the items are:

- a. Patriotism and loyalty are the first and most important requirements of a good citizen.
- b. There will always be war because, for one thing, there will always be races who ruthlessly try to grab more than their share.
- c. Most Negroes would become officious, overbearing, and disagreeable if not kept in their place.

The possible responses to the 20 item scale range from SA for strongly agree, through neutral, to SD for strongly disagree.

The subjects tested on both the test and the criterion scales were 86 students. These were mainly industrial administration students and were also, mainly, in their senior years. It would be desirable, of course, to administer the tests to employees of the sort to be considered for overseas placement to see if their scores approximate student scores.

## RESULTS

Following the administration of the tests and the criterion scales to the 86 persons, the test scores were correlated with the criterion scores. Table 1 shows the correlations between each of the tests and the criterion scores.

**Table 1**

Correlations of Each Test With Each of the Criterion Scales

Test	Criterion	
	FATFP	FE
A.C.E.-L Score	.32 <sup>a</sup>	.36 <sup>a</sup>
A.C.E.-Q Score	-.30 <sup>a</sup>	-.44 <sup>a</sup>
Independence of American Culture	.26 <sup>b</sup>	.41 <sup>b</sup>
Food Preference	.05 <sup>d</sup>	-.23 <sup>c</sup>
Knowledge of Foreign Cultures	.11 <sup>d</sup>	.17 <sup>d</sup>

a=significant at the .01 level.  
 b=significant at the .02 level.  
 c=significant at the .05 level.  
 d=not significant.

It seems as if the California Scale criterion is generally a more predictable one. Probably this is occasioned by the extensive use and revision of this scale in past studies as well as the careful selection of only the more reliable items for the present study. In view of this finding, the FATFP criterion was dropped from further consideration in this study, although it is felt that more subtle items and a careful selection of items would result in a more useful scale.

The Knowledge of Foreign Cultures test has no significant relationship with the criterion, which may be accounted for in part by the fact that the range of scores was somewhat restricted. Perhaps this test may be valuable in a situation where it is thought persons have a greater interest in foreign cultures, and because of their maturity have a greater amount of information. Two of the tests having a significant relationship with the FE criterion, the A.C.E.-L and the Independence of American Cultures test, were retained for additional statistical analysis.

The multiple correlation was computed using these two tests. This correlation was found to be .49. In order to give a better picture of the tests' value weighted test scores were plotted on one axis of a graph. The tests were weighted as follows:

$$\text{Total (combined) Score} = 1.5 \text{ (IAC score)} + .2 \text{ (A.C.E.-L score)} + 53.4. \text{ (The test scores entered are raw scores—not percentiles or any other derived score).}$$

On another axis were plotted the scores on the Freedom from Ethnocentrism criterion. On this axis were marked off the average Freedom from Ethnocentrism value, 75, and two points significantly above and below this point. The points were approximately equivalent to the standard deviation which was 8.73. Above 1 standard deviation signified "good," between  $\pm 1$  standard deviation corresponded to "average," and below  $-1$  standard deviation was considered "poor." These were the divisions on the criterion indicating "good," "average," and "poor" individuals that might be chosen for foreign employment. Finally, on the test axis, there was

found that test score that would give the maximum separation of these three groups. This maximum separation may be found from inspection of Table 2. The test score may be changed depending on the labor supply or the need. For instance, in this example the best cutting point is the one that allows us to select the most people from the total group, at the same time minimizing the poor and maximizing the good individuals. By cutting the score at 78, if we didn't need as many people, we would be eliminating all the poor persons. If no one is assigned to an overseas operation below a weighted test score of 75, then

1. 81% of the above average or good freedom from ethnocentrism applicants would be accepted.
2. 57% of the average applicants would be accepted.
3. Only 29% of the low freedom from ethnocentrism applicants would be accepted.
4. 57% of all applicants would be accepted.

Table 2

Percent Good, Average, and Poor Acceptable At Various Test Cutting Points weighted

test score	poor(N=14)	average(N=61)	good (N=61)	total(N=86)
90-92	0.00	1.63	0.00	1.20
87-89	0.00	1.63	0.00	1.20
84-86	0.00	1.63	9.09	2.30
81-83	0.00	8.19	27.27	9.30
78-80	0.00	32.78	54.54	30.23
75-77	28.57	57.37	81.81	55.81
72-74	64.28	88.52	100.00	86.04
69-71	100.00	96.72	100.00	97.67
66-68	100.00	98.36	100.00	98.83
63-65	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

DISCUSSION

The advantage of such an instrument as here illustrated to a concern with investments abroad is readily appreciated in light of the potential savings that may be realized. As a preliminary study this investigation has made no attempt at an ultimate discrimination of individuals. Yet the conclusions indicate that additional effort may produce a very practical selection battery. To this end we stress the use of an industrial concern with overseas employees and applicants for foreign service to (1) better render the conditions under which this battery would be used, and (2) to provide criterion groups. It is the aim of such a program to build a screening device making it possible to select new personnel resembling those present overseas employees found most successful, eliminating those candidates resembling unsuccessful overseas employees. Suggested cri-

teria (3) upon which to rate overseas personnel might include: (1) adjustment of employees to local conditions, (2) adjustment of family to local conditions, (3) ability of employee to relate to and work effectively with indigenous people, (4) ability of employee to work with American co-workers, (5) his technical competence, and (6) employee's overall job satisfactoriness.

Furthermore, additional statistical methods are needed to make the revised battery more discriminating. Outstanding are recommendations for an item analysis and a cross validation. Of necessity the items will have to be made more subtle. Tests allowing open-ended answers are possible, permitting the intensity and quality of feelings about foreign countries and foreign persons to be assessed. It is believed that a personality inventory should be included to weed out those individuals who are already unstable, or those who may not hold up long in a foreign environment. Perhaps, also, the Knowledge of Foreign Cultures test should be easier. This test may also be too heavily weighted with informational items which are not necessarily the best indices for "knowledge of a foreign culture." It might be that food habits, geographical information are less significant than some of the customs and mores of a wide variety of countries and cultures<sup>1</sup>.

The suggestion has been made<sup>1</sup> that a variety of personality types can make adjustments to overseas situations. An important variable that had been recognized at the outset is the situation in which these types are placed. Some countries impose greater hardships than others. A given person may get along well in Paris but experience great difficulties in Alaska. Furthermore, one job may in fact require much foreign contact and efficient communications with foreigners of all classes and background, while another job may require little foreign contact during the work activity. Different criteria for selection ought to be used. It may also be that individuals who know their jobs very well but know little about foreign culture are extremely efficient in carrying out their jobs and have a very favorable effect on the foreigners they meet.

Hypothesis 1— which states that "a person should be relatively independent of the American culture" in order to make a good adjustment overseas—presents a complicated problem<sup>1</sup>. An individual needs sufficient identification with his own culture and his past to have some measure of stability and personal adjustment; on the other hand, he has to be open to new and meaningful experiences. Undoubtedly, much remains to be done in trying to uncover the relevant variables and criteria for overseas adjustment and success.

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<sup>1</sup>Perlmutter, Howard V. Center For International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Personal communication.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid



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