

Misconceptions of Normative and Ipsative Tests

Broadly speaking, there are two types of personality tests: ipsative and normative. Ipsative tests measure a job applicant's characteristics through a forced choice questionnaire that requires the applicant to choose between or rank various characteristics. Normative tests allow job applicants to rate themselves related to various characteristics and then compare these ratings against the self-ratings of other applicants. The advantage of Ipsative tests is that they are far more effective at overcoming what is called social desirability or faking. That is, job applicants want to be seen in a positive light by the employer and thus they will tend to rate themselves higher than they would otherwise. Normative tests make the assumption that applicants will have a fairly equal amount of faking which is not the case. However, normative tests have the advantage of being able to compare applicants against each other.

What is the solution? Overcome either-or thinking! To achieve the best of both worlds, the test should be both ipsative and normative.

Harrison Assessments is both ipsative and normative. The questionnaire is ipsative in that 8 items are ranked against each other in a group and there are 16 groups. This greatly helps to avoid faking especially since it is supported by a highly sophisticated technological lie detector which determines the exact consistency of their answers via a quarter million calculations. However, Harrison Assessments also includes an overall score related to a specific set of job criteria and these overall scores used to compare applicants. Therefore, it is both ipsative and normative.

How the scores are determined is of vital importance. The scoring is specific for each job and is based on previous performance research that analyzes the difference between high performers and low performers for similar jobs. This data is then used to calculate the overall score related to the job.

All tests, whether they are normative or ipsative have limited value unless the test clearly identifies which characteristics are related to job success and the relative importance of each factor **as related to the specific job**. Otherwise, the user is forced to guess at how to interpret the results which greatly diminishes the value of the test. Most tests simply show the results for every factor that is measured. By showing all the factors, the test is implying that they are all related to job success which fundamentally misguides the interpretation of the results. This is especially a problem since more than half of characteristics measured don't relate to job success at all for a specific job and the ones that do related to job success have very different importance levels.

Normative tests compound this problem by displaying norms related to all factors causing the user to interpret the results in relationship to the norms. The user views all the norms but has no idea that more than half of that information is completely irrelevant to what they are trying to determine. Nor does the user have any effective means to determine which of those factors are related to job success or how important the related factors are in relationship to each other.

Harrison Assessments overcomes this problem through performance research and flexible assessment criteria. Each assessment is analyzed in relationship to a specific set of job criteria and more than half of the measured traits are completely ignored in that analysis. The related traits are built into a mathematical formula that give greater weighting to the more important factors related to the specific job success. This formula creates an overall score which is then used to compare the applicants to each other. Therefore, HA achieves the advantages of both ipsative and normative testing while at the same time focusing on only job related issues. This is a far superior approach resulting in much greater accuracy and usability.