

CAREER SEARCH AMERICA

CAREER TRANSITION TOOLBOX WHITEPAPER

CAREER ASSESSMENT:

AN OVERVIEW OF THE VARIOUS ASSESSMENT
TOOLS AND WHY THEY ARE USEFUL



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INTRODUCTION

CAREER ASSESSMENT IS SELF-DISCOVERY

If career assessment sounds a little too introspective and impractical, there's more to it than you might think; including a solid theoretical foundation, an established track record of effective use by fortune 500 companies from around the world, and, most important, tangible feedback that can dramatically accelerate your career search process.

Think of it as an immediately useful form self-discovery. And it's so important that we consider it one of the fundamental building blocks in the process of career transition.

The career assessment process can include elements as diverse as career aptitude tests, career interest surveys or personality assessments. For anyone unclear about their abilities or uncertain about their direction these tools can make all the difference.

There are a wide selection of instruments available. While it is certainly possible to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on career assessment, the good news is that there are plenty of inexpensive or even free resources available. These range from informal personality quizzes to extensive activities that pinpoint your preferences for how you see the world, how you make decisions, and what interests or activities really motivate you.

Properly conducted, career assessment builds a detailed picture of your skills, interests, personal values, and aptitudes that can have a profound impact on your career success and satisfaction. For example, if the test shows that you have a high tolerance for "creative chaos," then financial or logistics work won't be for you. You may instead be happier in a dynamic, "right-brain" environment such as graphic design or broadcast media.

Often the information revealed by these tests comes as no surprise, but occasionally there's an epiphany. We like to think that we know ourselves, but there are unconscious and subconscious drives that shape the way we act, react or decide. Even a single assessment combined with a little reflection on the results, can suggest new possibilities, even an entirely new direction to the course of our lives.

WHO USES CAREER ASSESSMENT?

Employers use such tools as career placement tests to assess where to slot new workers or new graduates fresh out of school, or to assess skill and training gaps. Federal employees have access to career tools to help them develop a personal development plan. Professionals who are seeking career counseling may be advised to undergo career assessment tests and universities offer free career aptitude tests to students about to graduate.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CAREER ASSESSMENTS

The best instruments are grounded in solid psychological theory. It's worth doing a little shopping to find those that seem best suited to your situation and personal style.

The widely-used Myers-Briggs Type indicator (MBTI), based on the work of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung, is used to distinguish personal preferences about

how we think, view and interact with the world, construct our values and make decisions. Because of its complexity and sophistication, MBTI is administered by trained professionals who normally charge for the assessment or include it as part of a coaching or counseling contract.

The Kiersey Temperament Sorter (KTS) is the shorter version of MBTI and displays results like the MBTI. At the very least, you get a better understanding of how you react to and deal with other people. There are, of course, many other career assessment instruments, in different formats and each with a slightly different focus.

The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (KTI), for example, is meant for those who will work on teams. It assesses an individual's ability to communicate clearly with colleagues, supervisors and senior management. As part of the test, participants receive a personalized report that explains the five different modes of conflict management, identifies their preferred conflict management style, and compares these results with others in similar managerial positions.

WHICH TOOL SHOULD YOU USE?

Well, it depends. If you are figuring out how to change careers and are uncertain what will work best for you, you may be interested in taking an inventory of your interests. If you are interested in enriching your present career by taking on additional responsibilities, the Strong Interest Inventory Career Enrichment Report may help you target new responsibilities and duties that will interest you.

If you are an introvert in a fast-pace, fast-talking work environment, getting a grip of your personality preferences through the MBTI may give the insight you need to better deal with people and make decisions, or, at least, help you understand why those around you are behaving as they do.

There is no single test that reveals everything. For this reason, career counselors prefer to integrate results from a battery of tests, but as a guideline, tests are divided into four different types:

Career personality tests look at personal traits, motivational drivers, attitudes. Examples include:

- Myers- Briggs Type Indicator
- Keirsey Temperament Sorter
- IMapMyLife.com

Interest inventory tests assess your likes and dislikes around activities such as sports, reading, golfing, programming, painting and so on. Examples include:

- Strong Campbell Interest and Skill Survey
- Career Key
- Career Planner
- Motivational Assessment of Personal Potential

Skill surveys point out what you enjoy doing and also gaps in your abilities that you may wish to address. Examples include:

- Skills Center
 - iSeek Skills Assessment
 - Career Assessment Exercises
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Values inventories measure how important different values such as prestige, job security, work-life balance are to you. Examples include:

- Competing Values Assessment
- Soul Survival, Career Values
- Value Questionnaire (University of Minnesota)

Many assessments are self-directed which means you get a free report that explain the results. Some indepth self-directed tests require a fee. With those tools requiring interpretative assessments, you need to pay someone trained to make sense of the data for you. For example, the fee for Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which averages around \$150, varies according to whether you take the test online or on paper and whether you require counseling from a practitioner.

SUMMARY

Remember an assessment test does not assure you of the perfect career. But the results will help you narrow possibilities, open new doors, and shed light on previously overlooked talents.

You shouldn't point to a test and say "it told me to do this." The key behind career assessment is to increase self-awareness so you can more consciously make choices that align with your values, make you happy and maximize your potential and job satisfaction.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Career assessment is a fundamental building block in your career search process
 - Career assessment instruments are based on solid theory and decades of experience
 - The best assessments are data-driven and generate useful, practical information
 - They are used by employers to help make hiring decisions and plan staff development
 - The process helps expand your self-understanding to include new interests and abilities
 - There are many different types of assessment instruments: from very simple to highly sophisticated
 - Many career assessment instruments are available online at low or no cost
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