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Incorporating Personality Traits in  
Hiring: A Case Study of Central Texas  
Cities

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**Incorporating Personality Traits in Hiring:  
A Case Study of Central Texas Cities**

**by**


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## **Abstract**

The first purpose of this paper is to describe the personality traits of an ideal employee. The literature indicates there are five identifiable personality traits that should be assessed during the hiring process. The traits are conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience. Second, this research describes the extent to which cities in central Texas use hiring processes that take into account an employee's personality traits. Data from a questionnaire sent to human resources directors in central Texas cities are used. The directors were asked about using personality assessments during the hiring process. The data reveal that a majority of cities do not administer personality tests during the hiring process. The research presented in this paper is helpful for human resource directors because it reviews the literature that explains why incorporating personality assessments in the hiring process helps put the right person in the right position.

### **About the Author**

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### Scenario: Considering Personality in an Interview

At a recent graduation ceremony, Joe and Jenny, two graduates, sat side by side. Having only met a few times, they did not realize how alike they were at that present moment. Both graduates had interviewed for jobs and accepted positions in different central Texas cities. Jenny interviewed for a management position, as did Joe.

The city Joe interviewed with uses traditional interviewing techniques. He had a panel interview, and was asked basic questions. Jenny, on the other hand, participated in an all-day assessment. The first part of the day was spent in preparation for an exercise where she prioritized issues typical of those she would find in her in-basket on the job. The second task was writing a press release about a city emergency. The third task was to prepare a PowerPoint presentation Jenny would show the city council. Her afternoon was spent going over what she prepared in the morning and then finally answering basic interview questions. Each task she performed measured a specific aspect of her personality. The comprehensive tests showed Jenny the type of job she was interviewing for, and also helped the assessors see how Jenny would fit into their organization.

A year after being hired, Jenny excels in her job. She gets along with her coworkers and is a perfect fit for the organization. Her behavior has been consistent with that predicted by the assessment exercise. Jenny is a dedicated employee who likes her job and plans to stay for many years.

A year after being hired, Joe is back in the job market. The position he had accepted was not what he expected. The job did not fit with his personality; it required many hours behind a desk, as opposed to working with constituents face to face. Joe felt he was a poor fit for the organization, and started looking for other positions in central Texas.

One day, Jenny ran into Joe. They reminisced about their graduation day and talked about the jobs they had been so anxious to start. Jenny's story was very different from Joe's. After describing the pre-employment assessment she talked about her work environment. Everything was different, and Joe was puzzled by this. What did Jenny do that was so different? What did Jenny's employer do to ensure she was the ideal candidate for their position? After speaking for an hour, Joe came up with a few thoughts. It seemed Jenny's employer had considered her personality! Joe remembered the process he went through, and realized it had been less comprehensive than Jenny's and resulted in a poor match between job duties, the organization, and his personality.

In doing some research, Joe learned about the five-factor model for assessing personality. The five factors are conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience. The tests Jenny had performed in her pre-employment assessment had examined each factor and rated different personality traits. By assessing the different traits, a well-balanced candidate – Jenny – had been identified for that position.

A few weeks later, Joe ran into Jenny again. A position had opened up with Jenny's employer, and Joe had interviewed. An assessment was performed, and Joe's personality was taken into account during the process. He left for the day feeling

confident about the position he applied for, and also confident that his prospective employer had taken notice of his personality. Later in the week he was offered job. As soon as he started, Joe knew that he fit in well with his department. Soon he began to excel in his new position.

Several years later Joe and Jenny are still working for the same employer. Both have moved up in the organization and have successful careers. Both attribute their success to a hiring process that took their individual personalities into account.

### **Research Purpose**

The first purpose of this paper is to describe the personality traits of an ideal employee. The literature indicates there are five identifiable personality traits that should be assessed in hiring: conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience. Second, this paper describes the extent to which cities in central Texas use hiring processes that take into account an employee's personality traits.

### **Chapter Overviews**

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that identifies the personality traits possessed by an ideal employee. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to determine if central Texas cities are taking the personality of a prospective employee into account during hiring. The fourth chapter presents the findings from the research. The final chapter summarizes the findings and draws conclusions about the role of pre-employment personality assessments in central Texas cities' hiring practices.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Chapter Purpose<sup>1</sup>**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the traits of an ideal employee. Certain traits predict the extent to which an employee contributes to the work organization. Hiring assessment centers are often used by municipal governments to evaluate applicants for job vacancies. Assessment centers measure the psychological traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience.

### **The Use of Assessment Centers as a Hiring Tool**

Assessment centers have become a popular tool to evaluate applicants for job vacancies. An assessment center is a hiring process, not a physical place, and is defined as “a comprehensive, standardized procedure in which multiple assessment techniques such as situational exercises and job simulations (i.e. business games, discussion groups, reports, and presentations) are used to evaluate individuals” (Liner 1991, 11).

Pre-employment testing by an assessment center can require a full day of activities and interviews. As part of the process, applicants meet with the assessors and explain the handling of the tasks they worked on earlier in the day. The applicant who scores the highest throughout the center exercises is most likely the individual who can best do the job at hand (Roth, Bobko, and McFarland 2005, 1009). Further, “because

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<sup>1</sup> For additional Texas State Applied Research Projects dealing with human resource administration issues, see Martinez (2006); Whitmore (2000); Gonzales (2005); Francois (2004); Anderson (2003); Worley (2003); West (2002); Garcia (2001); Garza (2001); Piat (1998); Byram (1997); Phillips (1996); Liner (1991).

assessment centers are generally designed to elicit behaviors that resemble those actually found on the job, results are widely accepted by candidates and courts alike” (Haaland and Christiansen 2002, 137).

The processes used by all assessment centers have a similar structure. The format is designed to evaluate behaviors by assessing job-related tasks and simulated work situations (Lance et al. 2000, 324). According to Bowler and Woehr (2006, 1114), assessment centers “evaluate job-related skill dimensions through the use of multiple situational exercises.” An applicant’s skills are outlined in their application. An assessment center then addresses personality and on the job skills. The tests during the assessment center will verify what the applicant summarized in their application.

### **Construct Validity in Creating Assessment Centers**

There are many models of assessment centers. Centers that focus on job tasks while ignoring the personality of the applicant suffer from problems of construct invalidity. In other words, the exercises do not fully measure the dimensions that lead to a successful hire for a particular job (Kolk, Born, and van der Flier 2002, 326).

To ensure that dimensions are accurately constructed, measurement of personality needs to be included. Research performed by Haaland and Christiansen shows assessment center ratings are related to a candidate’s personality. It would be expected there is a “better convergence across exercises that allow observation of behavior related to the same trait” (Haaland and Christiansen 2002, 139). Lievens, de Fruyt, and Van Dam (2001, 633) concluded that using personality as a descriptor helps in the prediction of final employment recommendations. In addition, personality testing

is useful as an addition to the assessment center and an assessment center is a great way to test for personality (Goffin et al. 1996, 756). The research demonstrated a connection between personality and assessment center criteria, and the importance of taking into account applicant personality in the assessment process.

### **Five-Factor Model for Personality Measurement**

Assessment center personality rating criteria generally rely on the five-factor model originally described by Tupes and Christal<sup>2</sup>. The five-factor model is intended to provide a systematic framework for personality measures in broad terms. The model enhances the “ability to compare and contrast different constructs and promises to bring clarity and order to an enterprise that was once described as a disconcerting sprawl” (McAdams 1992, 332). The model identifies the five basic dimensions that help define underlying individual differences in personality (McAdams 1992).

As stated previously, a candidate’s personality should play a major role in the hiring process. A system that evaluates personality traits is more likely to find the appropriate person for the vacant position. Tett, Jackson and Rothstein (1991, 703) found that personality plays an important role in the explanation and prediction of behavior. The five most important dimensions of personality should to be incorporated into the job selection processes. These dimensions are conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience (Mount, Barrick, and

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<sup>2</sup> The five-factor representation was originally described by Tupes and Christal (1961), on the basis of reanalysis of various data sets using bipolar variables constructed by Cattell (1951) and Goldberg (1992). Cattell was the first to develop a method for improving the factor analytic pursuit of basic personality traits by commencing with a complete field of personality traits, called the trait sphere (Cattell 1951). Tupes and Christal put the types of personality traits into five categories, thus defining the five factors.

Stewart 1998, 146). Each of these dimensions represents a facet of an individual's personality.

Integrating personality traits into an assessment center should ensure the evaluation of all dimensions necessary to hire the appropriate person for the open position. If the assessment center evaluators follow certain principles, the exercise should be an effective tool for selecting the best candidate. By identifying standard principles to test for personality, the continuity of the exercises helps develop a model which will have a residual effect for all the candidates who participate in the process (Cosner and Baumgart 2002, 5).

### **Integration of the Five-Factor Model into Assessment Centers**

When evaluating applicants using an assessment center, it is important to incorporate the five factors of personality into the job assessment process<sup>3</sup>. Mount and Barrick (1998, 849) assert that people have long-term, dispositional traits that shape their behavior in work settings. The five-factor model helps to focus these personality traits into five specific categories. The five categories illustrate that personality “consists of five relatively independent dimensions which provide a meaningful taxonomy for studying individual differences” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 5). The five factors are the basis for the categorization of traits<sup>4</sup>. The strength of the five-factor model is that it provides a “meaningful framework for formulating and testing hypotheses relating individual differences in personality to a wide range of criteria in

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<sup>3</sup> This research does not identify the best instruments to test for personality traits.

<sup>4</sup> Study performed by Costa and McCrae 1988, 258.

personnel psychology, especially in the subfields of personnel selection, performance appraisal, and training and development” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 23).

In order to incorporate personality testing into assessment centers, Haaland and Christiansen (2002, 142-143) suggest “evaluating exercises because they provide an opportunity to observe differences in trait-relevant behavior for each trait that is used.” To do this, assessors need knowledge of the exercises and the different personality traits that can be evaluated during the exercises. Assessors can then judge the “extent that such behavior is likely to be observed and whether differences on those behaviors are likely to emerge” (Haaland and Christiansen 2002, 142-143). Second, it is expected there is a “greater convergence among ratings from exercises on assessment center dimensions that are conceptually relevant to a given personality trait” (Haaland and Christiansen 2002, 142-143).

The five-factor model can be used as a tool for assessors to better understand the answers applicants give, as well as to ensure a complete assessment process. Haaland and Christiansen (2002, 155) suggest personality constructs can be associated with patterns of behaviors across different situations. In an assessment center, “these behaviors serve as the basis for dimension ratings derived from observing performance across a variety of exercises.”

The five-factor model can help evaluators to more effectively structure assessment center exercises. Two exercises can be very similar, but emphasize different aspects of the job function or skills and thus result in different conclusions. One exercise may test skills and another may test knowledge (McFarland et al. 2005, 959). As Tett et al. (1991, 708) found, it is difficult to determine the extent to which certain

personality dimension are relevant to work performance without using conceptual analyses or personality-oriented job analysis. Conceptual tests such as the five-factor model make job exercises more consistent. Working with the five-factor model increases the stability of personnel selection. Bobko, Roth, and Potosky (1999) also note that “the resurgence of interest in personality testing has also promulgated several meta-analyses which demonstrate stable levels of prediction for several Big Five [five-factor model] indices (particularly conscientiousness) across a wide variety of domains” (562).

Use of the five-factors over the past decade “has served as a unifying theoretical framework to substantially advance our understanding of personality-based predictors” (Lievens et al. 2003, 479). Research suggests that personality can affect the outcome of a job interview in two ways. Personality can be observed during the interview and prior to the interview. In addition, an individual’s personality plays a significant role in workplace behaviors (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 120-134).

When a hiring process results in limited exposure to the applicant, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness are difficult to observe (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 121). These traits are unlikely to be displayed in a non-assessment center interview. Unless the interviewer knows how to ask probing questions into these personality types, “it is difficult to imagine how information relevant to a person’s openness to experience would surface during a typical job interview” (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 121). This is why assessment centers are so important. The assessment center gets to the point of probing for personality traits.

Recognizing and aligning traits into the five factors enables evaluators to see structures in individual differences (Paunonen and Jackson 2000, 821). When evaluators understand these differences and associate the differences to the five-factors, this helps relate the factors to various personality traits. Personality differences measured by the five-factor model affect success during the job-seeking process by affecting behavior during an interview (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 124). Behaviors are then measured by the assessor, individual differences are identified, and the candidate's behavior can be aligned with the open position.

### **Breakdown of the Five Factors**

Mount et al. (1991, 146) define each of the factors and listed certain qualities associated with the factor:

- Conscientiousness (responsible, careful, persevering, orderly, hardworking, planful);
- Emotional Stability (secure, stable, relaxed, self-sufficient, not anxious, tolerant of stress); and
- Agreeableness (good-natured, flexible, cooperative, caring, trusting, tolerant);
- Extraversion (talkative, assertive, adventurous, energetic);
- Openness to Experience (intellectual, curious, imaginative, cultured, broad-minded). (Mount et al. 1991, 146)

Assessment center exercises that accurately measure these traits in job applicants should yield a more complete evaluation.

Each of these factors represents one-fifth of the five-factor model. By including all aspects in an assessment center, the assessors can get a more complete understanding of an applicant's personality. If performed correctly, an assessment center reveals the

best person for the job. Personality testing is necessary in order get the best fit for the organization.

### **The Five Factor Model**

The first purpose of this paper is to describe the personality traits of an ideal employee. The literature indicates there are five identifiable personality traits that should be assessed: conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience. Second, this research describes the extent to which cities in central Texas use hiring processes that take into account an employee's personality traits.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research is descriptive categories. Description is often chosen as a research purpose when basic information is found missing from the literature (Shields and Tajalli 2005, 26). The initial categories established may ultimately provide an incomplete framework, but descriptive categories can be modified and the elements re-classified to better meet the descriptive purpose (Shields 1998, 218). Categories are used as the framework to describe the traits of an ideal employee.

### **Conscientiousness**

The first personality attribute of an ideal employee is conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is defined through traits such as careful, thorough, responsible, organized, and planful (Barrick and Mount 1991, 4). A **careful** employee is one who

uses discretion in their work. This helps minimize careless errors in the workplace. Conscientious employees also make specific **plans** to carry out their work on a daily basis. Their work should be done in a **thorough** manner so as to cover all aspects of a project<sup>5</sup>.

Those individuals who exhibit conscientiousness tend to be dependable and have significant achievements (Bobko et al. 1999, 574). A **dependable** employee is punctual and completes assignments on time. Individuals who are “dependable, persistent, goal directed and organized tend to be higher performers on virtually any job” (Mount and Barrick 1998, 851). The dependable person is disciplined. Such a person prefers order before acting in any situation (Hough 1992, 144). Conscientious employees are also **organized** in their tasks, and **responsible** in getting a job done. When looking for employment, highly conscientious people find out as much information as possible about the job-seeking process, potential employers, and how to interview (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 123). The person who is conscientious “is well organized, **planful**, prefers order, thinks before acting, and holds him- or herself accountable” (Hough et al. 1990, 585).

Conscientiousness is known to “measure personal characteristics that are important for accomplishing work tasks in all jobs” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 6). Conscientiousness should be included in comprehensive job performance models because the trait includes different aspects of personality connected with work behavior (Salgado 1998, 284). Conscientiousness is the most important predictor of hireability

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<sup>5</sup> Traits outlined in articles by Barrick and Mount 1991; Caldwell and Burger 1998; Lievens et al. 2001; Mount et al 1998; and Mount and Barrick 1998.

and, conversely, also a predictor of potential counter productivity (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 120).

### **Emotional Stability**

Employers look for positive psychological traits among employees. Likewise, they are interested in avoiding problematic personality traits. Emotional stability (the second factor) captures the negative aspects of personality that employers seek to avoid. Common traits associated with impaired emotional stability are “being anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, emotional, worried, and insecure” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 4). If an employee possesses extreme **anxiousness**, **depression** or **anger**, he or she will most likely be a poor fit in the organization. Organizations do not want to hire an employee who is going to create more work in the department. These qualities are “difficult to determine... because, except in extreme cases, most applicants probably work hard to avoid coming across as anxious, hostile, or despondent during a job interview” (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 121).

Other facets of emotional stability to address in an assessment center are how the employee reacts to **embarrassing** situations, if they are **overly emotional**, or possess many **insecurities**<sup>6</sup>. An interview can elicit many of these feelings. Observing how the prospective employee reacts should reveal how they will act if hired. A “well adjusted person is generally calm, displays an even mood, and is not overly distraught

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<sup>6</sup> Traits outlined in articles by Barrick and Mount, 1991; Caldwell and Burger, 1998; Lievens et al, 2001; Mount et al, 1998; and Mount and Barrick, 1998.

by stressful situations. He or she thinks clearly and maintains composure and rationality in situations of actual or perceived stress” (Hough et al. 1990, 585).

Tests for emotional stability measure “characteristics that may hinder successful job performance” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 5-6). Emotionally stable people generally work well in teams. Those individuals who score high during an assessment as being emotionally stable are likely to be more relaxed and tolerant of stress. This also means those individuals are reliable and easily create trusting relationships with coworkers (Mount et al. 1998, 151).

### **Agreeableness**

The third factor, agreeableness, mainly assesses how well employees work and get along with each other. Qualities associated with agreeableness include “being courteous, flexible, trusting, good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, soft hearted and tolerant” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 4). Ratings in this dimension should also be indicative of an individual's suitability for a management position, because “interpersonal dispositions are likely to be important determinants of success in management occupations” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 6 - 7).

Agreeableness is consistently related to an employee's ability to work cooperatively with others in a team (Mount et al. 1998, 151). If an employee is **flexible**, he or she will be easy to work with. A **courteous** employee tends to listen to others and consider the ideas of coworkers. A **good-natured** employee works well in groups. Likewise, someone who is **trustworthy** works well with others and is approachable. To be agreeable means to be **cooperative** and work with all people. **Tolerance** is

another factor to assess in determining if a person can work well under different conditions. **Forgiveness** is essential because it helps employees work together when they may not agree on certain job situations<sup>7</sup>.

The agreeable “and likeable person is pleasant, tolerant, tactful, helpful, not defensive, and is generally easy to get along with. His or her participation in a group adds cohesiveness rather than friction” (Hough et al. 1990, 585). If an employee is agreeable, the employee works well with others in the office, making it a very important factor. It is also one of the “most important attributes related to rating of potential counter productivity” (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 120). In other words, a potential employee who scores poorly on agreeableness may disrupt work-related teams, causing divisiveness and problems that supervisors want to avoid.

### **Extraversion**

Extraversion is the fourth factor, and is related to the way people interact with others. Behaviors associated with extraversion are “being social, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 3). A strong degree of extraversion is indicative of suitability for a management position (Barrick and Mount 1991, 6). Like agreeableness, extraversion is predictive because “interpersonal dispositions are likely to be important determinants of success in [management] occupations” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 7). In a job that requires public contact, it is important to be **social or gregarious**. Being **assertive** is also an essential element in dealing with the public<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Traits outlined in articles by Barrick and Mount 1991; Caldwell and Burger 1998; Lievens et al. 2001; Mount et al. 1998; and Mount and Barrick 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Traits outlined in articles by Barrick and Mount 1991; Caldwell and Burger 1998; Lievens et al. 2001; Mount et al. 1998; and Mount and Barrick 1998.

Highly extraverted people “are likely to **talk** more, be more expressive, and generally provide more information about themselves through verbal and nonverbal sources than highly introverted people” (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 121).

Extraversion is the easiest of the five major dimensions to assess during a job interview. This is because the “extent to which an individual is extraverted is strongly predictive of the kinds of behavior that are being displayed during the typical job interview. A job interview is above all else a social interaction” (Caldwell and Burger 1998, 121). Possessing extraversion attributes, such as being active, sociable, and open to new experiences, may lead individuals to be more involved in training and therefore learn more (Mount and Barrick 1998, 851).

Evidence of extraversion is suggestive that the applicant is a “go-getter” and not just someone who waits until they are given something to do. An employee who is an extravert is more likely to be self sufficient in a job, and will not need to be micromanaged. Extraverts are generally **active** in their jobs, looking for things to keep them busy rather than waiting to be told to do something. Extraverted people are more likely to think for themselves and make good decisions.

### **Openness to Experience**

The fifth factor, openness to experience, is useful in identifying who is ready for training, or will be easy to train in specific job functions. The qualities most often associated with this trait are “being imaginative, cultured, curious, original, broad-minded, intelligent, and artistically sensitive” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 5). A person’s

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degree of openness to experience predicts his or her training proficiency. “Openness to experience assesses an individual’s readiness to participate in learning experiences” (Barrick and Mount 1991, 6-7). Individuals who are **imaginative**, **broad minded**, and **artistically sensitive** are usually willing to learn new things and adapt to new ways of doing things. Their **curiosity** helps them discover new ways to do things that can help the department run more efficiently<sup>9</sup>.

Measures of openness to experience may “identify which individuals are ‘training ready’, those who are most willing to engage in learning experiences, and consequently, may be useful in identifying those who are most likely to benefit from training programs (Barrick and Mount 1991, 20). Openness to experience is also associated with **intelligence** and a willingness to learn skills that benefit the organization. A **cultured** person demonstrates an interest in art, music, and literature. These interests are suggestive of a larger openness to new experience. Openness to experience “is a valid predictor of training proficiency across occupations. Being active, sociable, and open to new experiences may lead individuals to be more involved in training and, consequently, learn more” (Mount and Barrick 1998, 851).

Openness to experience is “consistently related, albeit moderately, to performance in both team and non-team settings” (Mount et al.1998, 158). This trait is important because assessors are able to determine if an individual is willing to learn and adapt.

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<sup>9</sup> Traits outlined in articles by Barrick and Mount 1991; Caldwell and Burger 1998; Lievens et al. 2001; Mount et al. 1998; and Mount and Barrick 1998.

### **Ranking of Characteristics**

When the traits are ranked in order of importance, conscientiousness tops the scale and is strongly related to the employee's ability to work with others and perform in teams (Mount et al. 1991, 150-151). Emotional stability ranks second to conscientiousness as one of the most important traits, and should also be "included in a comprehensive job performance model because it covers different aspects of personality connected with work behavior" (Salgado 1998, 284). Agreeableness comes after emotional stability, but is ranked evenly with extraversion and openness to experience (Mount et al.1998, 150). In the rank of most important factors, extraversion comes after emotional stability, but ranks in kind with agreeableness and openness to experience (Mount et al.1998, 150).

Since extraversion is a predictor of managerial performance, interaction with others is an elemental part of the job. Extraversion "is the most important characteristic for the job representing the enterprising type but was of almost no influence in judgments about the social type job" (Dunn et al. 1995, 506).

### **Characteristics Fit into Job**

The relative importance of each personality trait or factor depends on the nature of the job. Depending on the job for which a candidate is being assessed, certain personality traits are more desirable than others. For an accounting position, it may not matter whether the applicant is extraverted. Assessment center processes should consider the value of certain personality traits in a specific position. It is important to

keep the nature of the job opening in mind when establishing exercises for an assessment center.

The literature consistently indicates that conscientiousness, along with emotional stability, are predictors of success for **all types of jobs**<sup>10</sup>. The manager's job involves significant interaction with others; extraversion leads to effective performance in managerial jobs, whereas this trait and its associated behaviors are less important in **skilled, semi-skilled, and professional** jobs (Barrick and Mount 1991, 19).

Extraversion is also an important trait for people in **sales** (Dunn et al 1995, 504).

An assessment that captures the openness to experience that should identify which individuals are '**training ready**' – those who are most willing to engage in learning experiences and consequently most likely to benefit from training programs (Barrick and Mount 1991, 19). Artistic and investigative jobs are best performed by those who demonstrate openness to experience (Dunn et al. 1995, 505).

The jobs within an organization should be filled by people with a variety of personality types. An organization's hiring processes should strive to match job responsibilities with personality traits. For example, if hiring for a managerial position, make sure the person is conscientious and extraverted.

### **Summary of Conceptual Framework**

**Table 2.1** summarizes the five-factor model that is used as the conceptual framework for this research. The qualities with each trait formed the basis of the

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<sup>10</sup> See studies done by Salgado 1998, 284; Barrick and Mount 1991; Lievens et al. 2001.

questionnaire that was used to evaluate how well the assessment center processes used by central Texas cities take into account the personality traits of future employees. The literature review presented in this chapter specifically addresses the traits of each factor.

As stated above, the purpose of this research is to describe the characteristics of an ideal employee. Five factors/traits are measured to determine how a person will fit into an organization. The conceptual framework outlines these traits and identifies jobs that are matched to the different traits.

**Table 2.1 Descriptive categories for an ideal employee**

Descriptive Category	Sources
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependable</li> <li>• Responsible</li> <li>• Organized</li> <li>• Careful</li> <li>• Thorough</li> <li>• Planful</li> </ul>	Barrick and Mount 1991 Bobko, Roth, and Potosky 1999 Caldwell and Burger 1998 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001 Hough et al. 1990 Hough 1992 Mount, Barrick, and Stewart 1998 Mount and Barrick 1998 Salgado 1998
<b>Emotional Stability</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiousness</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Embarrassment</li> <li>• Insecurities</li> <li>• Worries</li> </ul>	Barrick and Mount 1991 Caldwell and Burger 1998 Hough et al. 1990 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001 Mount, Barrick, and Stewart 1998 Salgado 1998
<b>Agreeableness</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courteous</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Good-Natured</li> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Forgiving</li> <li>• Soft Hearted</li> <li>• Tolerant</li> </ul>	Barrick and Mount 1991 Caldwell and Burger 1998 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001 Mount, Barrick, and Stewart 1998 Mount and Barrick 1998
<b>Extraversion</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Gregarious</li> <li>• Assertive</li> <li>• Talkative</li> <li>• Active</li> </ul>	Barrick and Mount 1991 Caldwell and Burger 1998 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001 Mount, Barrick, and Stewart 1998 Mount and Barrick 1998
<b>Openness to Experience</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imaginative</li> <li>• Cultured</li> <li>• Curious</li> <li>• Original</li> <li>• Broad-minded</li> <li>• Intelligent</li> <li>• Artistically Sensitive</li> </ul>	Barrick and Mount 1991 Caldwell and Burger 1998 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001 Mount, Barrick, and Stewart 1998 Mount and Barrick 1998

<b>Characteristics fit with job</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management</li> <li>• Skilled/ Semi-Skilled</li> <li>• Professional</li> <li>• Sales</li> </ul>	Salgado 1998 Barrick and Mount 1991 Dunn et al. 1995 Guion and Gottier 1965 Lievens, De Fruyt, and Van Dam 2001

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined the literature that discusses the five traits of an ideal employee. In the next chapter, the five factors are operationalized through a questionnaire.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **Chapter Purpose**

This chapter describes the research methodology, survey instrument, unit of analysis, and population studied. It also describes how the categories of the conceptual framework were operationalized through the survey questions sent to human resources directors in central Texas cities.

### **Survey Research**

This study used survey research directed at human resource directors in central Texas cities in order to assess whether personality is taken into account during hiring. The survey incorporated each particular personality trait identified in the literature and summarized in the conceptual framework. For example, responses to the survey question, “My Department’s test for future employee’s dependability is” reveals if an aspect of conscientiousness is addressed.

### **Survey as a Template**

The survey questions were designed to find out whether local governments in central Texas consider personality traits when they hire managers. The survey results should reveal which personality traits could be better captured if existing methods were changed. This establishes a template for human resources directors to use to ensure they are incorporating personality into their hiring processes.

## **Research Technique**

The study used survey research as the assessment technique. A questionnaire was used, which is an “instrument specifically designed to elicit information that will be useful for analysis” (Babbie 2004, 244). Because a 100% return rate is not practical, response bias becomes a concern. A low response rate is a danger sign because those who do not respond are likely to differ from the ones that do participate in the survey (Babbie 2004, 261).

To control for the weakness inherent in survey research, several methods were used. First, to ensure high participation, a reminder was sent to those who did not return the surveys by the initial completion date (Babbie 2001, 225). Second, a pretest of the survey instrument was done to address biased or incomplete question statements. The individuals who tested the questionnaire were the assistant city manager of community services and the human resources director for the city of San Marcos. Finally, selection of central Texas human resources directors as survey recipients minimized recall error because the recipients serve as the expert in hiring for each city.

Although it is preferable to have multiple sources of data to corroborate findings (Yin 1994, 92), time and financial limitations did not permit a more in-depth study. The operationalization between the survey items and each component is shown in **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1 Operationalization of the conceptual framework

<b>Descriptive Categories</b>	<b>Questionnaire Item</b>
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	
Dependability	My Departments test for future employee's dependability is
Responsibility	My Departments test for future employee's responsibility is
Organization	My Departments test for future employee's organizational skills is
Careful	My Departments test for future employee's careful nature is
Thorough	My Departments test for future employee's thoroughness is
Planful	My Departments test for future employee's planfulness is
<b>Emotional Stability</b>	
Anxiousness	My Departments test for future employee's anxiousness is
Depression	My Departments test for future employee's depression is
Anger	My Departments test for future employee's anger is
Embarrassment	My Departments test for future employee's embarrassment is
Emotions	My Departments test for future employee's emotions is
Insecurities	My Departments test for future employee's insecurities is
<b>Agreeableness</b>	
Courteous	My Departments test for future employee's courteousness is
Flexible	My Departments test for future employee's flexibility is
Trusting	My Departments test for future employee's trustworthiness is
Good-Natured	My Departments test for future employee's nature is
Cooperative	My Departments test for future employee's cooperation skills is
Forgiving	My Departments test for future employee's forgiveness is
Tolerant	My Departments test for future employee's tolerance is
<b>Extraversion</b>	
Social	My Departments test for future employee's social skills is
Gregarious	My Departments test for future employee's gregariousness is

Assertive	My Departments test for future employee's assertiveness is
Talkative	My Departments test for future employee's talkative nature is
Active	My Departments test for future employee's activity is
<b>Openness to Experience</b>	
Imaginative	My Departments test for future employee's imagination is
Cultured	My Departments test for future employee's culture is
Curious	My Departments test for future employee's curiousness is
Original	My Departments test for future employee's originality is
Intelligent	My Departments test for future employee's intelligence is
Artistically Sensitive	My Departments test for future employee's artistic nature is

Note: Scale used for responding to questions was: strong, adequate, poor, or not evaluated.

Each survey question had four responses. **Appendix A** shows a copy of the survey instrument. The questionnaire was distributed by regular postal mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed. A reminder postcard was sent out during the second week after the survey was distributed, asking for the return of surveys that had not been collected.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The study's unit of analysis was human resources directors in the central Texas area. The directors of the departments were surveyed because they have the most technical and institutional knowledge of the hiring process.

## **Population**

Human resources directors in forty-two central Texas cities were surveyed, from Waco to San Antonio. The list of the human resources directors contacted was compiled using information obtained from the Texas Municipal League and the Capital Area Council of Governments. The information from these two entities is most complete and accurate, and contains information from all the cities in the central Texas area. Cities with relatively large municipal governments were chosen since these cities were more likely to use personality assessments in the hiring process.

Surveying the entire sampling frame is preferable to selecting a sample, because that method is more likely provide an accurate representation of the study population (Babbie 2001, 178). The population in this study was a manageable size.

## **Human Subjects Protections**

The proposed research was reviewed by the Texas State Institutional Review Board. The research was found exempt (see **appendix C**).

## **Statistics**

Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the survey data. The mode and frequency of responses for each survey question were calculated to describe the tendency of each response. Means are not collected for this type of survey because the data are ordinal. The statistics collected reveal whether a particular personality trait is taken into account during the interview stage. A higher mode of “strong” would indicate that the most frequent response was “strong”. Replies to an item such as “My

Department's test for future employee's dependability is" show that many of the cities have considered an aspect of conscientiousness in evaluating their employees. A low mode of "poor" would possibly indicate the trait of conscientiousness is inadequately addressed and therefore needs to be incorporated into the hiring process. If several characteristics associated with a trait are accounted for, this should indicate that the trait is tested in the hiring process. The data collected show whether cities within the central Texas area are hiring the best individuals for their open positions.

The next chapter reports the survey results and examines how central Texas human resources directors consider an applicant's personality the hiring process.

## Chapter 4 Results

### Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the results of the survey instrument. These results are the basis for determining whether personality is used when hiring. Simple descriptive statistics are used in presenting the data.

### Description of Returned Surveys

Forty-two cities were selected as part of the research survey. Of the forty-two human resources directors contacted, twenty-four returned the surveys. Therefore, there was a 57.1% response rate. Two questions were asked at the top of the questionnaire: “My city uses Assessment Centers to fill certain job vacancies,” and “My city uses other hiring tools that address the following characteristics.” If “yes” was the answer to either question, the respondents were asked to complete the rest of the survey. Five surveys were returned incomplete, and were not included as part of these results.

The main goal of this survey was to ascertain whether personality is taken into account when hiring. **Table 4.1** indicates the number of cities that use personality in the hiring process. The data shows that 68.4% of responding cities do not use personality in their hiring processes. The research presented contains the results of six cities that indicated the use of personality when hiring employees.

**Table 4.1 Count of surveys received**

	<b>Yes, use personality in hiring</b>	<b>No, do not use personality in hiring</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Cities	6	13	19

**Conscientiousness**

Of the six cities that consider personality in hiring, most (at least four of six) considered conscientiousness in the process. This shows that of the cities testing personality, conscientiousness is usually a tested trait. **Table 4.2** summarizes the responses dealing with conscientiousness.

Two associated factors, organizational skills and thoroughness, were most likely to be measured (six of six cities). The mode of the answers for testing characteristics associated with conscientiousness was adequate, indicating that conscientiousness is a factor tested for in hiring employees.

**Table 4.2 Conscientiousness response summary**

Sub-Categories	Questionnaire Item	Number of Cities Responding Strong or Adequate	Mode
Dependability	My department's test for future employee's dependability is	4	Adequate
Responsibility	My department's test for future employee's dependability is	4	Adequate
Organizational Skills	My department's test for future employee's organizational skills is	6	Strong, Adequate
Careful nature	My department's test for future employee's Careful Nature is	5	Adequate
Thoroughness	My department's test for future employee's thoroughness is	6	Adequate
Planning Ability	My department's test for future employee's planning ability is	4	Adequate
<i>N</i> =6			

Note: Twenty four questionnaires were returned. Sixty-eight percent (13) indicated they did not take personality traits into account in hiring decisions.

### **Emotional Stability**

Most characteristics associated with emotional stability were not evaluated. The cities evaluated did not consider emotional stability when hiring employees. However, one characteristic associated with emotional stability—planning ability—was evaluated by four of six respondents.

The findings indicate that emotional stability per se is not evaluated in prospective employees. The mode for the characteristics associated with emotional stability is not evaluated. Only one trait yielded a majority response other than “no evaluation done”. **Table 4.3** shows the responses associated with emotional stability.

**Table 4.3 Emotional stability response summary**

Sub-Categories	Questionnaire Item	Number of Cities Responding Strong or Adequate	Mode
Anxiousness	My department's test for future employee's anxiousness is	2	Not Evaluated
Depression	My department's test for future employee's depression is	3	Not Evaluated
Anger	My department's test for future employee's anger is	2	Not Evaluated
Embarrassment	My department's test for future employee's embarrassment is	2	Not Evaluated
Emotions	My department's test for future employee's emotions is	3	Not Evaluated
Insecurities	My department's test for future employee's insecurities is	4	Strong, Adequate, Not Evaluated
N=6			

Note: Twenty four questionnaires were returned. Sixty-eight percent (13) indicated they did not take personality traits into account in hiring decisions.

### **Agreeableness**

All characteristics under agreeableness were evaluated except one. A majority of the cities (at least four of six) evaluated the remainder of the characteristics. The cities that responded reported that they do test for an employee's agreeableness. The mode for agreeableness was adequate. **Table 4.4** shows the number of responses for each category and the mode of responses.

**Table 4.4 Agreeableness response summary**

Sub-Categories	Questionnaire Item	Number of Cities Responding Strong or Adequate	Mode
Courteousness	My department's test for future employee's courteousness is	5	Adequate
Flexibility	My department's test for future employee's flexibility is	6	Adequate
Trustworthiness	My department's test for future employee's trustworthiness is	4	Strong, Adequate
Nature	My department's test for future employee's nature is	3	Adequate
Cooperation Skills	My department's test for future employee's cooperation skills is	6	Strong, Adequate
Tolerance	My department's test for future employee's tolerance is	4	Adequate
N=6			

Note: Twenty four questionnaires were returned. Sixty-eight percent (13) indicated they did not take personality traits into account in hiring decisions.

### **Extraversion**

Extraversion is tested in potential employees, but not often. Social skills, assertiveness, talkative nature, and activeness were evaluated by four of six cities. Only one attribute, gregariousness, was not tested by a majority of cities. **Table 4.5** illustrates the responses from this category.

Extraversion is evaluated in the hiring process, but is not strongly used. The mode of the responses for extraversion was adequate, showing extraversion is tested.

**Table 4.5 Extraversion response summary**

<b>Sub-Categories</b>	<b>Questionnaire Item</b>	<b>Number of Cities Responding Strong or Adequate</b>	<b>Mode</b>
Social Skills	My department's test for future employee's social skills is	4	Adequate
Gregariousness	My department's test for future employee's gregariousness is	3	Not Evaluated
Assertiveness	My department's test for future employee's assertiveness is	4	Strong, Adequate, Not Evaluated
Talkative nature	My department's test for future employee's talkative nature is	4	Adequate
Activeness	My department's test for future employee's activeness is	4	Adequate
N=6			

Note: Twenty four questionnaires were returned. Sixty-eight percent (13) indicated they did not take personality traits into account in hiring decisions.

### **Openness to Experience**

Openness to experience is not tested regularly. Three of the associated characteristics—imagination, originality, and intelligence—were tested most by four of six cities. The other three characteristics were tested by two of the six cities. **Table 4.6** shows the responses in this category.

As a whole, this trait is not evaluated. Half the responses were adequate and the other half were not evaluated.

**Table 4.6 Openness to Experience response summary**

<b>Sub-Categories</b>	<b>Questionnaire Item</b>	<b>Number of Cities Responding Strong or Adequate</b>	<b>Mode</b>
Imagination	My department's test for future employee's imagination is	4	Adequate
Culture	My department's test for future employee's culture is	2	Not Evaluated
Curiousness	My department's test for future employee's curiousness is	2	Not Evaluated
Originality	My department's test for future employee's originality is	4	Adequate
Intelligence	My department's test for future employee's intelligence is	4	Adequate
Artistic Nature	My department's test for future employee's artistic nature is	2	Not Evaluated
<i>N=6</i>			

Note: Twenty four questionnaires were returned. Sixty-eight percent (13) indicated they did not take personality traits into account in hiring decisions.

These results provide findings relevant to the research purpose. The next chapter discusses conclusions and recommendations related to these findings.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions**

### **Chapter Purpose**

This chapter discusses the research findings of and addresses which of the five factors are considered most often in the hiring process. Finally, this chapter addresses recommendations for incorporating the five-factor model in hiring processes.

### **Summary of Findings**

The intent of this research was to assess if the five-factor model is incorporated into hiring potential employees. The results indicate a majority of cities that responded (68.4%) do not test personality traits in the hiring process. Of the cities that responded “yes” to assessing personality, only the characteristics associated with conscientiousness were completely evaluated. Emotional stability is not evaluated, and only one of the associated characteristics—insecurities—was tested by four of six cities. Half of the characteristics associated with openness to experience are assessed, while half are not. Agreeableness and extraversion characteristics are assessed a majority of the time.

Research indicates that central Texas cities are not assessing personality in their hiring processes. The sample from central Texas is indicative of the rest of the state. One intent of this research was to convey that personality is important in hiring. People who are hired with personality assessments are likely to be the most appropriate person for the open position and a better fit for the organization. While most cities do not use

personality assessment, by accounting for traits, a better fit with their employees would result. The five-factor model encompasses many traits. Addressing these traits helps the both employer and the prospective employee. While the results of this study show cities are not using personality assessments, incorporating several traits into pre-employment procedures may result in cities taking the first step toward such testing.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Research performed for this project found Central Texas cities are not testing for personality traits in prospective employees. By not including the five-factor model in pre-employment testing, it can be suggested that cities are not hiring the best persons for their open positions. With personality traits not being considered, additional studies can be done on employment retention of individuals hired using personality testing versus those not tested.

This study's scope did not include research to identify the best instruments for testing personality. Additional studies outlining the best interviewing techniques to incorporate personality assessment into job interviews could result in development of an ideal model for interviewing. This approach can incorporate tests used by municipalities that currently use personality assessment in hiring employees.

Replication of this study can be easily done with a larger sample. Using additional cities or branching out nationally would result in higher return rates and additional data to use.

## **In Closing**

People hired using personality testing have a greater chance of being in a position that fits them. As in the scenario at the beginning of this paper, Jenny and Joe had very different hiring experiences. Jenny was hired using personality tests in an assessment center; Joe was not. When Joe was given the opportunity to interview and his personality was taken into consideration, he found a job that was a perfect fit for him.

Using personality assessment to fill job vacancies can only help employers. Using such a tool enables employers to have a better idea of who they are hiring. Such testing shows that the job pool includes talented, qualified individuals. The research reported in this paper shows personality testing plays an important role and can be a powerful tool in getting the best people hired by our local municipal governments.

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## **Appendix A Survey**

Human resources directors were asked a series of questions in a paper survey. This appendix presents the survey. (**Appendix B** contains the actual responses of the survey.) The letter written to accompany the survey is included, as well as the text of the reminder postcard.

## Survey Letter

October 3, 2007

Dear Human Resources Director:

My name is Rebecca Britain, and I am a Public Administration Graduate Student at Texas State University. I am working on my Applied Research Project (ARP), which is the final paper needed for graduation. I need your expertise with statistical data regarding hiring employees using an assessment center.

The research I am working on is designed to show it is necessary to evaluate personality traits in order to hire the appropriate person for a vacant position. The following questionnaire includes several personality traits which fit into these five main categories: conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience.

By filling out the questionnaire and returning it to me in the self addressed, stamped envelope, you will be helping me accomplish my Masters of Public Administration. Please assist me by returning this survey to my by October 17<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for your input.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Britain  
Administrative Assistant  
City of San Marcos

## **Survey Reminder Postcard**

Dear Human Resources Director-

My name is Rebecca Britain. I am a Graduate Student at Texas State University. I recently sent you a letter dated October 3, 2007 requesting your help with my Applied Research Project. By filling out the survey enclosed with the letter, you will be assisting me with my research. I included a self addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience. Please help me by returning the survey as quickly as possible. I am on the downward hill for this project and your input is needed and greatly appreciated. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy day to read this, and return my survey.

Thank you,

Rebecca Britain



	Strong	Adequate	Poor	Not Evaluated
My department's test for future employee's trustworthiness is				
My department's test for future employee's nature is				
My department's test for future employee's cooperation skills is				
My department's test for future employee's tolerance is				
<b>Extraversion</b>				
My department's test for future employee's social skills is				
My department's test for future employee's gregariousness is				
My department's test for future employee's assertiveness is				
My department's test for future employee's talkative nature is				
My department's test for future employee's activeness is				
<b>Openness to Experience</b>				
My department's test for future employee's imagination is				
My department's test for future employee's culture is				
My department's test for future employee's curiousness is				
My department's test for future employee's originality is				
My department's test for future employee's intelligence is				
My department's test for future employee's artistic nature is				

When performing a job interview, how do you take into account personality when setting up test scenarios?

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**Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important research!**

To receive a summary of the findings, please send an email to [britain\\_rebecca@ci.san-marcos.tx.us](mailto:britain_rebecca@ci.san-marcos.tx.us).  
Individual survey returns and jurisdiction names will not be included in the summary.

## **Appendix B Survey Results**

The actual results of the survey are on the following pages. A free response asking for name of the city has been omitted from these results. The number of each response is indicated in the cells for each category. The free response question about setting up testing scenarios is included.



	Strong	Adequate	Poor	Not Evaluated	n
My department's test for future employee's emotions is	2	1	0	3	6
My department's test for future employee's insecurities is	2	2	0	2	6
<b>Agreeableness</b>					
My department's test for future employee's courteousness is	1	4	0	1	6
My department's test for future employee's flexibility is	2	4	0	0	6
My department's test for future employee's trustworthiness is	2	2	1	1	6
My department's test for future employee's nature is	1	3	1	1	6
My department's test for future employee's cooperation skills is	3	3	0	0	6
My department's test for future employee's tolerance is	1	3	1	1	6
<b>Extraversion</b>					
My department's test for future employee's social skills is	1	3	0	2	6
My department's test for future employee's gregariousness is	0	3	0	3	6
My department's test for future employee's assertiveness is	2	2	0	2	6
My department's test for future employee's talkative nature is	1	3	0	2	6
My department's test for future employee's activeness is	1	3	0	2	6
<b>Openness to Experience</b>					
My department's test for future employee's imagination is	0	4	0	2	6
My department's test for future employee's culture is	0	2	1	3	6
My department's test for future employee's curiousness is	0	2	0	4	6
My department's test for future employee's originality is	1	3	0	2	6
My department's test for future employee's intelligence is	1	3	1	1	6
My department's test for future employee's artistic nature is	0	2	1	3	6

When performing a job interview, how do you take into account personality when setting up test scenarios?

Pose questions regarding work related scenarios to test response.
Do not take personality into account.
1) The public safety positions are civil service- only test cases can be used. For entry level officers a psychiatrist makes the assessment of the individuals ability to perform the work, use various tests and an interview. Of the characteristics that you list, emotional stability would be the only one assessed. 2) Face to face interviews allow managers to assess individuals personality; personality tests cannot be used in hiring decisions.
In an assessment center process you can test for various personality traits by using exercises such as role playing to test for customer service skills. You can use a leaderless group exercise to test for cooperation social skills, assertiveness, etc. In an assessment center you can tailor your exercises to test for the needed personality characteristics for a specific job.
When employed by the City you have to deal with the public on a daily basis. People with all different personalities.
Test scenarios are not utilized. Most all of the above items can be evaluated through interpersonal skill expressions, the interview, and through evaluation of handwritten applications.
Typically interviews are done in panel format (3 or more interviewers). Each person is responsible for identifying their perception of person. 2 <sup>nd</sup> comparison is made as to how the person would “fit” within the workgroup. Interview questions include situational responses and questions about past experience in dealing with other coworkers and different types of problems.
We only use assessment tests for Police/Fire. For general government employees we ask open ended behavioral interview questions.

## Appendix C IRB Exemption

### Exemption Request

Based on the information in the exemption request you sent September 7, your project has been found exempt.

Your project is exempt from full or expedited review by the Texas State Institutional Review Board.

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**Becky Northcut, CIP**

**Compliance Specialist**

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