

Edition 66  
Winter 2012

# Psyche

The newsletter of The Psychometrics Forum



Visit our website at [www.psychometricsforum.org](http://www.psychometricsforum.org)

You will find information about forthcoming events, speakers, the origins of the group and much more.

Want to add something to the website? Contact our Administrator – **Caro Leitzell**: [admin@leitzell.com](mailto:admin@leitzell.com)

Also keep up to date with developments by signing up to **The Psychometrics Forum Affiliates Group** on LinkedIn

# Employability, corporatization, global unemployment, and I/O psychologists:

what psychologists say employers need and what employers say they want in new hires

*Paul Barrett – MD Advanced Projects R&D Ltd  
Honorary Professor of Psychology, University of  
Auckland, NZ.*

*Associate Professor of Psychology, University of  
Canterbury, NZ*



Paul Barrett

A confluence of information comprising a couple of essays, a book review, and some unemployment statistics accompanied an “in press” target article in the SIOP journal (*Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*) by Bob Hogan, Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, and Robert B. Kaiser entitled “Employability and Career Success: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Reality”. The article is available for download; although at present, only for SIOP members.

The article abstract begins:

*“Employability is defined as the capacity to gain and retain formal employment, or find new employment if necessary. Reasons for unemployment are often attributed to economic factors, but psychological factors associated with employability also contribute to the problem. Consequently, Industrial-Organizational Psychologists should be uniquely suited to contribute to policy solutions for enhancing employability. This review begins by surveying the most common research approach to employability – the study of career success – which psychologists believe is determined by cognitive abilities, personality, and educational achievement. Next, we review the literature concerning what employers actually want ...”*

And the authors conclude ..

*“Historically, {psychologists} have told employers what they should look for in employees. The data suggest, however, that employers are no longer listening. Psychologists might consider expanding their research to include what it is that employers actually want in new hires.” p. 24.*

That alone is intriguing. But what attracted my serious interest was the last word in this statement:

*“In our view, both career success and employability depend on behaving in socially desirable ways, especially when interacting with recruiters, employers, and managers. The ability to do this depends on a surprisingly small set of competencies, namely seeming:*

- *interpersonally skilled;*
- *smart or able; and*
- *compliant” pp. 19–20.*

That word “compliant” triggered a sequence of propositions, deductions and questions in my mind. This was based upon the information in this target article, along with the global employment trend information being published by the UN International Labor

Organization, some facts from the US about how some liberal arts universities are changing their curricula, an analysis of the benefits psychopaths bring to the workplace (along with the problems), the largest global employers, and some observations on the nature and characteristics of corporate entities.

In a nutshell, I put together a line of speculative propositional reasoning:

**P1.** Modern corporations and their supervisors want employees who in addition to other attributes they possess, are compliant, obedient, and conforming (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010).

**P2.** Corporates are growing in size; globally, they are the largest employers of people:

- absorbing and rationalizing (e.g. *absorbing the IP/technology, making employees redundant*) many smaller organizations
- squeezing other smaller organizations and businesses out of the market altogether
- outsourcing employment to low-labour-cost economies wherever possible
- replacing high-cost labour with lower-cost automation wherever possible.

The result being fewer but higher paid and better rewarded jobs.

**P3.** To work in these corporates you need a higher-skill-level than previously required, and must possess those attributes of compliance, obedience, and conformity to the corporate ethic.

**P4.** The high rates of youth unemployment worldwide is not just the result of a worldwide recession, but precisely because young adults are not known for their compliance, obedience to authority, and conformity to convention. They are essentially being screened out (actively and passively) from many jobs because they do not fit the requirements for working in a 'corporate'. But many are also unemployable within such organizations as a result of their lower than required skill-level (because of the characteristics in P2).

Which brings me to my first question:

**Q1.** If psychometrics, interviews, and I/O team-building/coaching/development psychologists collectively serve to screen out/terminate non-compliant, disputatious, independent-minded, and

non-conforming individuals within corporations, then globally, how many people will, for all intents and purposes, be rendered unemployable in any corporate entity for their entire working life?

**P5.** What CEOs want from their leaders appears to be in direct contrast to what the evidence from corporate employee new-hire surveys seem to indicate. The press release from the recent 2012 CEO survey from IBM corporation stated (<http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/31670.wss>)

*“According to a major new IBM (NYSE: IBM) survey of more than 1,500 Chief Executive Officers from 60 countries and 33 industries worldwide, chief executives believe that – more than rigor, management discipline, integrity or even vision – successfully navigating an increasing complex world will require **creativity**.”*

In surveying more than 1,500 Chief Executive Officers from around the world, the IBM 2010 Global CEO Study found that chief executives believe successfully navigating an increasing complex world will require creativity.

And what defines creative people? From: Batey & Furnham (2006) summarizing the results from the famous study outlined earlier by McKinnon (1962):

*“The key findings from MacKinnon’s (1965) work were that the highly creative architects, in comparison with the noncreative architects, were **less deferent and team oriented; more aggressive, dominant, and autonomous; and less socialized** (responsible, self-controlled, tolerant, concerned with good impressions, and communal in attitude).” p. 383*

From the same article ...

*“Early research using the CPI and other measures indicated that **creative individuals** tend to prefer autonomy and independence; that they are often **less socialized** than less creative individuals, with **tendencies toward aggression or low agreeableness**; and that they appear **less concerned with convention or conscientiousness**.” p. 385*

**P6.** Why not accept that in the capitalist economies of the world, corporates actually need to employ those who display psychopathic traits, narcissists, and

machiavellian individuals, in order to be competitive? The recent review by Tim Adams in the Guardian newspaper on October 7th of the book by Oxford scholar Kevin Dutton entitled “The Wisdom of Psychopaths” provides an interesting insight ..

*“Along the way his analysis tends to reinforce the idea that the chemistry of megalomania which characterises the psychopathic criminal mind is a close cousin to the set of traits often best rewarded by capitalism. Dutton draws on a 2005 study that compared the profiles of business leaders with those of hospitalised criminals to reveal that a number of psychopathic attributes were arguably more common in the boardroom than the padded cell: notably superficial charm, egocentricity, independence and restricted focus. The key difference was that the MBAs and CEOs were encouraged to exhibit these qualities in social rather than antisocial contexts.”*

**Q2.** How many of these kinds of young graduate entrants to the workplace would ever pass the usual psychometric and even assessment centre screening of many graduate assessment procedures? How many “argumentative”, or “unusual” incumbents never gain promotion because their supervisors and perhaps psychologist-led assessors/coaches consider them “difficult to work with”, “not a team-player”, not an “academic or corporate citizen” etc. How will the corporations headed by the CEOs surveyed in 2010 ever encounter their next generation of new creative “alter the status quo” leaders?

I want to state clearly that this is not a ‘corporate-bashing’ or simple-minded quasi-political rant; the benefits of living in a ‘corporate’ world are all around us. I’m just looking at what Hogan et al have suggested in their in their article and extrapolated a line of

argument and propositions which represent one way of constructing a ‘big picture’ consequential analysis painted by integrating a variety of data sources alongside the author’s’ evidence-bases and statements.

I led a seminar-debate around this line of reasoning and evidence to students and alumni at Auckland University on the 11th October, 2012. The presentation and all the supporting information I used/referred to are available for download from my website (<http://www.pbarrett.net/presentations.html#employ>).

My gut feeling is that globally there is something happening that is not just the result of a sustained economic recession, but reflects a deeper, more fundamental shift in the very nature of what it might mean to ‘earn a living’ in the future. I think it will impact the very nature and basis of I/O psychology research, practice, and practitioners. How, is still a matter for debate.

## References

- Batey, M. & Furnham, A. (2006) Creativity, intelligence, and personality: a critical review of the scattered literature. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 132, 4, 355–429
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. (2010). *The psychology of personnel selection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacKinnon, D.W. (1962) The nature and nurture of creative talent. *American Psychologist*, 17, 484–495.

## Documentation available for download with the presentation

These are the files containing some of the information which I used to construct the line of argument.

Presentation #39: <http://www.pbarrett.net/presentations.html#employ>