

KORN FERRY ASSESSTM – LEADERSHIP SOLUTION: A MODERN APPROACH TO EMPLOYEE ASSESSMENT

Thought Leadership



Korn Ferry Institute (KFI) built Korn Ferry Assess™ - Leadership solution (KFLS) to combine the strengths of traditional self-report personality assessments with more modern content, measurement techniques, and administrative methods (Lewis et al., 2021). In this paper, we outline advantages it has over traditional assessments, including reduced susceptibility to fake responses and increases in both descriptive and predictive utility. Results from companies using KFLS for employee selection and development help demonstrate its utility and highlight these advantages.

Personality + competencies

Although instruments examining personality traits, drivers, or competencies all have value for predicting job performance, KFLS combines all three to:

1. Reduce “faking good” and the ability for respondents to engage in impression management.
2. Maximize the prediction of overall job performance and its critical components for different roles.
3. Provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse individual characteristics that drive performance in various jobs.

Reduced faking

Traditional personality assessments often ask individuals to rate how well statements describe them using Likert-type scales with endpoints such as “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” However, concerns arise that this approach makes it easy for applicants to inflate their scores. Although there continues to be debate about the causes and impact of faking (Tett & Simonet, 2021), one thing that remains certain is that on average, *job applicants* tend to score higher on most personality scales than *job incumbents* (Robie et al., 2001). Furthermore, such differences are often larger on scales that are more predictive of performance (Huber et al., 2021).

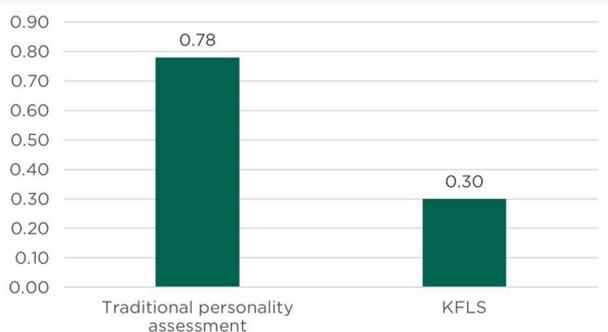
Early efforts to reduce faking relied on “ipsative” scoring approaches that forced respondents to choose between equally desirable descriptors representing different personality scales. Although such approaches nearly eliminate faking,

they don't allow for comparisons across people because higher scores on one scale (e.g., conscientiousness) necessarily result in lower scores on other scales (e.g., extroversion). To overcome this limitation, researchers have more recently developed a variety of forced-choice response and data modeling combinations that both reduce faking and produce normative scores that can be compared across individuals (Mead, 2004).

KFLS uses a forced-choice response approach, based on advances in item response theory, that reduces faking and enhances reliability and comparisons across people (see the KFLS Manual for a description (Lewis et al., 2021). Recent meta-analyses not only provide evidence for the effectiveness of this type of approach for reducing faking but also show it can produce results that tend to be more predictive than traditional personality assessments (Salgado et al., 2015). Data from companies using KFLS bear this out. Studies of faking on trait-like Likert item assessments, for example, often posit and confirm that job applicants expend more effort in impression management and faking than do job incumbents. Typical findings are that “fakers” and/or job applicants score between .60 and 1.0 standard deviations (SDs) above those who are not faking and/or those who are job incumbents. One relatively recent study on four separate large samples found the average difference between applicants and incumbents to be approximately .78 SD units, for example (Jeong et al., 2017). Our own recent study of KFLS traits module (N=760 incumbents, N=1,178 applicants) found the same difference to be approximately 2.6x lower, at .30 SD units, supporting that the methods used indeed improve resistance to faking.

Figure 1

Typical score differences between applicants and incumbents across types of personality assessments



Work-related motives and drivers are often examined in relation to fit with specific organizations, cultures, or teams, and researchers have long recognized the predictive validity of traditional personality assessments across a range of jobs and organizations (Hough et al., 2008; Ones et al., 2007; Tett et al., 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, leveraging the value of self-efficacy for competencies as a predictive and descriptive measure is less common and appears to represent a missed opportunity in many cases. Self-efficacy for competencies provides a direct description of an individual's state of mind concerning their capacity to execute certain behaviors and/or to attain certain outcomes related to specific skills or behaviors. It is correlated with past performance in any given domain, and it has a considerable impact on choices, motivations, outcome expectations, persistence, and methods by which individuals solve problems and set/pursue desired goals. While inclusion of self-report of competencies is not uncommon in multi-rater 360 tools, these typically are composed of one to three Likert-type items per domain, and they are rarely leveraged for central person descriptions and prediction of outcomes. KFLS includes these as a central component and measures them with far more items per domain using a forced-choice response format that produces normative scores.

Data from organizations using KFLS to assess candidates and incumbents show the value of this approach. We find that measures of competency self-efficacy are clearly associated with detailed, quantitatively measured job natures, management level, work engagement, organizational commitment, and more (Lewis et al., 2021). Although specific performance predictors may vary based on job and organizational characteristics, results from a single study of a few companies and over 700 current and future leaders highlight the predictive value and the insight provided by assessing multiple content areas, including self-efficacy for competencies. Table 1 below displays some of the most predictive KFLS personality traits and competency scales for three management levels found in this same study. While we emphasize that these data were from a single study with a few companies, findings shown in Table 1 nonetheless begin to demonstrate that inclusion of self-efficacy measurement provides utility not otherwise covered by traits and drivers alone.

Table 1

Top correlates with performance among KFLS measures from a single study

Senior Executives	Mid-level Managers	High-potential Individual Contributors
Global Perspective (Comp)	Builds Effective Teams (Com)	Action Oriented (Comp)
Curiosity (Trait)	Confidence (Trait)	Courage (Comp)
Cultivates Innovation (Comp)	Composure (Trait)	Confidence (Trait)
Tolerance for Ambiguity (Trait)	Influence (Trait)	Assertiveness (Trait)
Drives Results (Comp)	Develops Talent (Comp)	Optimizes Work Performance (Comp)
Strategic Mindset (Comp)	Drives Engagement (Comp)	Credibility (Trait)

Note: Comp = Competency; Trait = Personality trait; N = 100 for senior executives, 553 for mid-level managers, and 93 for high potential individual contributors; all KFLS scales reported in the table have significant correlations ($p < .05$) with overall job performance ratings representing factor scores obtained from multiple raters including managers, peers, and direct reports.

Success Profiles, predictive validity, incremental validity

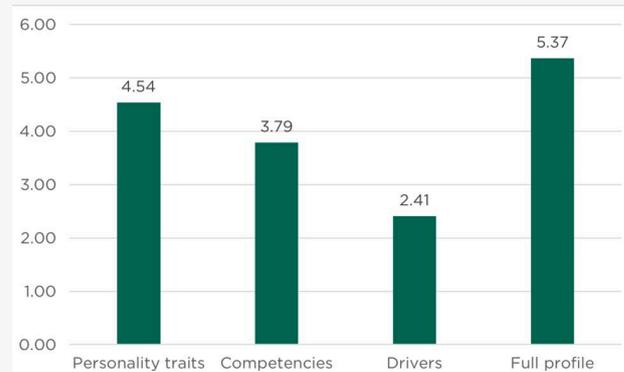
Perhaps the most useful aspect of KFLS is the ability to compare an individual's scores to multiple Success Profiles. Success Profiles are empirically developed based on tens or hundreds of thousands of data points. They represent the typical psychological profile (as measured by KFLS) associated with maximum work engagement in any job of interest from among more than 10,000 available jobs. Analyses of Success Profiles also demonstrate the incremental predictive utility of including traits, drivers, and also self-efficacy for competencies together. Success Profiles not only highlight important individual characteristics for jobs, but also critical score ranges.

Success Profiles help inform hiring and other HR activities for a diverse range of jobs and/or job families. Industry guidelines and best practices (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1978; American Educational

Research Association et al., 2014; Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology, 2018) require evidence of an assessment's predictive validity for each job or job family when using results to inform hiring decisions. Data from nearly 750+ real-world KFLS applications show that overall "fit" to Success Profiles across a wide range of diverse jobs and functional areas predicts performance at or above industry standards. The same study (see Figure 2) also underscores the incremental utility of including self-efficacy for competencies along with the more traditional trait and driver measures.

Figure 2

Odds ratios for being a high performer when fit to profile is high vs. low



In this study, individuals who were a high fit to the traits-only Success Profile associated with their management level were more than four times as likely (4.54) to be high performers. Notable results were also seen for the drivers-only Success Profile (2.37). The odds ratio for the competencies-only Success Profile was a bit higher at approximately 3.79x, while the 5.37x increase seen for simultaneous use of each available KFLS component underscores the incremental utility of using each module, including the self-efficacy for the competencies module. These results were based on participant score distances from their own management-level-based Success Profile. But we emphasize also that organizations can compare an individual's KFLS pattern to multiple Success Profiles to not only determine their likely success in different positions but also their critical developmental needs in different roles.

Summary

KFI designed KFLS to combine the best aspects of traditional self-report personality tests with modern measurement theory and techniques to create an assessment with three distinct advantages. Not only is KFLS one of the only assessments available today that can tout these advantages, it also has a proven track record in hundreds of organizations for assessing applicants and employees. To summarize, the advantages include:

1. Enhanced predictive value and insight due to the inclusion of multiple content areas.
2. Less susceptibility to faking without sacrificing predictive validity.
3. Additional confidence in predicting performance and identifying developmental needs across diverse job roles.

Authors

James Lewis

Senior Director, Senior Scientist
Korn Ferry Institute

Mary Starke

Senior Client Partner
Korn Ferry

Jeff Foster

Korn Ferry Associate

Sarah Hezlett

Vice President, Assessment Science
Korn Ferry Institute

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