

# Study Protocol: Development and Validation of a Framework on the Personality Characteristics of High-Potential Employees (Hi-pots)

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Modern organizations recognize the importance of identifying, developing, and retaining high potential employees (hi-pots) who can contribute to effective functioning. They try different talent management strategies and frameworks to meet this purpose. Research shows that the involvement of a hi-pot in a team could increase the effectiveness, nearly 5-15%. The prevailing methodologies and models to identify hi-pots lack scientific evidence and are descriptive.

**Methods/Design:** The study will follow an exploratory sequential research design with four phases: 1) Meta-analysis review; a systematic review of the literature using category checklist 2) Qualitative; semi-structured interviews to explore the personality of hi-pots 3) Quantitative; exploring the framework on the characteristics of hi-pots 4) Tool development; developing a measure to identify hi-pots

**Discussion:** In this study protocol, we present the methodological approach to develop & validate a framework on the personality characteristics of hi-pots. The framework will help organizations to facilitate better talent management strategies.

**Keywords:** High-potential employees, hi-pots, personality characteristics, psychometric assessment

## 1. Background

The crucial objective of any organization today is to identify the potential employee who has the talent to make the entity unique from its competitors (Church & Waclawski, 2010; Silzer & Church, 2010). In line with Pareto's principle, 20% of employees who contribute to 80% of the organization's benefits are the high potential employees (hi-pots) (Berglas, 2006). Simply adding a high potential star performer in a team alone could increase the effectiveness, nearly 5-15% (Call, Nyberg, & Thatcher, 2015). Identifying those hi-pots has become a major focus of the corporates (Campbell & Smith, 2010).

### 1.1 Identification of hi-pots and their scope

Hi-pots tend to develop a high-performance culture at the workplace. They set the standards high for their co-workers and motivate them to model winning behaviours (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2017). Studies have shown the stronger financial performance of the

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organizations that have proportionally invested a larger amount in identifying and developing the hi-pots (Huselid, 1995). Existing literature indicated that hi-pots are consistently optimistic and holds high commitment (Gritzmacher, 1989 & Dries, 2007). Since hi-pots have the tendency to bring out the best in others (Dan, 2007), there is very little chance of them feeling anxious about someone else's rewarding experiences. Organizations identifying hi-pots from in-house talents will help in creating positive work culture, attracting the best talents, retaining more employees, increasing employee satisfaction and overall productivity (Kohll, 2018).

## **1.2 Consequences of not managing Hi-pots**

Hi-pots work for their fulfillment and are less concerned about their sense of belongingness to the organization (Rebeřák & Farkařová, 2014). Hi-pots when not recognized tend to look out for opportunities for a more rewarding experience. Failing to fulfill the needs of hi-pots may have adverse effects on the company's productivity and work atmosphere (Nyberg, 2010). Unable to retain a hi-pot would result in losing an experienced and competent employee. Replacing them with new employees will lead to high costs for recruitment, training, and development. An effective talent management strategy is to train and develop their hi-pots, recognizing and utilizing their competencies (Cairns, 2009).

## **1.3 Need for a framework to identify hi-pots**

During succession planning, the potential in-house workforce is identified and developed to take up leadership positions in organizations (Charan, Drotter & Noel, 2001). Unfortunately, the development initiatives such as 'HiPo' interventions (Chamorro-Premuzic & Bhaduri, 2017) tend to fail and do not see the return on investment for various reasons. The perception and the criteria to qualify employees as Hi-pots varies across people and organizations. The absence of a standardized definition gives managers and supervisors room for personal choices and beliefs during employee nominations to HiPo intervention programs.

To standardize the process of identifying hi-pots, it is necessary to develop a framework defining their personality characteristics. Empirical studies about hi-pots are very rare (Dries & Pepermans 2008; Groves 2007). The lack of relevant information on the personality characteristics of the hi-pots opens the scope of a study that follows exploratory sequential mixed design. An initial level meta-analysis review will give an overview of the identified personality characteristics of hi-pots. Following this, a qualitative exploration of the personality characteristics can be done through the managers in alignment with the current organizations' trends and requirements. The findings of the qualitative exploration will triangulate the output of the meta-analysis. The basic themes derived commonly in the meta-analysis and qualitative exploration will establish the socially constructed truth on the personality characteristics of the hi-pots. Individuals who have good experience in managerial positions can rate these newly derived personality characteristics as most to the least important in identifying hi-pots. An exploratory factor analysis of these quantitative ratings will reduce the personality characteristics into dimensions, based on which a framework can be designed. The framework will become the foundation to develop a measure on identifying the hi-pots. To ensure the validity, scores of the newly developed measure will be compared with that of grit, optimism, and fear of missing out (FOMO). Hi-pots are reported to be gritty (2021) and optimistic (Gritzmacher, 1989 & Dries, 2007). Their leadership style involves showing gratitude and recognition to co-workers. They always want to bring out the best in others (Reynolds, 2019). The chances of them feeling anxious about others' rewarding experiences might be less.

### **Objectives:**

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1. To identify the personality characteristics of hi-pots
2. To develop a framework to identify hi-pots
3. To operationally define the personality characteristics of hi-pots
4. To develop a measure to identify hi-pots based on their personality characteristics

## **2. Methods/Design**

### **2.1 Study design**

The study will follow an exploratory sequential mixed design in four phases.

#### **2.1.1 Phase 1: A meta-analysis review**

This phase is to systematically collect and review the available literature about the personality characteristics of hi-pots.

#### **Sample and procedure**

The sample for the meta-analysis review would be the secondary data available on internet sources. An extensive search of all possible manuscripts (Published & Non-Published), reviews, dissertations, blogs, newspaper articles that delivers information about the personality characteristics of hi-pots will be collected as samples. Relevant research articles would be scrutinized and shortlisted from the primary source, google scholar. Using a category checklist, the data collected will be systematically arranged into different groups.

#### **Analysis and expected results**

The list of Hi-pot personality characteristics curated in this phase will be subjected to thematic analysis where different themes will be drawn. The results will represent a thematic model of Hi-pot personality characteristics, a descriptive presentation of the qualitative data.

#### **2.1.2 Phase 2: Qualitative design**

This phase is to understand about the personality characteristics of hi-pots from the perspectives of organizational leaders.

#### **Sample and procedure**

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted and recorded. Informed consent will be collected from the participants before the interview. The participants of the study would be selected using the purposive sampling method. The initial sample size would be 10 and would vary in the process depending on the saturation of data. Any employee who is working/worked at a position of handling teams will be eligible to participate in the study, irrespective of their gender and the industry they work for.

#### **Measures**

To facilitate the semi-structured interviews, an interview schedule with a pre-defined set of questions will be developed by the researcher and will be validated by two industry experts.

#### **Analysis and expected results**

The recordings collected through the interviews will be transcribed to conduct thematic analysis. As the first step, the transcripts will be carefully read and the items of analytic interest will be coded with a label. The process will be repeated until all the key information required from the transcripts is extracted in terms of codes. Based on the codes identified, appropriate themes will be drawn. At the end of this phase, a thematic model representing the personality

characteristics of hi-pots will be developed. Integrating the basic themes from phase 1 and phase 2, a list of hi-pot personality characteristics will be developed.

### **2.1.3 Phase 3: Quantitative design**

Phase 3 is to develop a framework to identify hi-pots. Homogeneity of the personality characteristics across sectors will also be assessed in this phase.

#### **Sample and procedure**

The sample for phase 3 will be 300 employees who have experience in managing teams for a minimum of three years. Participants from Retail, Healthcare, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Information Technology, EdTech, Education, Manufacturing, and Consulting backgrounds will be included. The list of personality characteristics derived from phases 1 and 2 will be administered either directly or through an online survey. Consent of the participants will be taken before the administration.

#### **Measures**

The personality characteristics identified from phases 1 and 2 will be listed and devised for the participants to rate the importance of each personality characteristic on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 05-*Very important*; 04-*Important*; 03-*Neutral*; 02-*Slightly important*; 01-*Not at all important*. The respondents will be asked to rate the items keeping in mind the characteristics they look out for in a hi-pot.

#### **Analysis and expected results**

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) will be used to explore the framework on the personality characteristics based on the ratings of the participants. Cronbach alpha of the responses of the participants will be used to check the homogeneity of the characteristics across the sectors.

### **Phase 4: Tool development**

Phase 4 is to operationally define the hi-pots and develop and psychometrically validate a measure to identify hi-pots based on the framework of the personality characteristics, established in phase 3. The framework will become the foundation of the pool of items in the measure. Four experts, two from industry and two from academia, will check the items and make sure that the content of the items is adequate in measuring and identifying hi-pots. Concurrent, convergent, and discriminant validity will be established by comparing the scores of the new measure with that of the three-dimensional grit scale (Sreenath et al., 2020), life orientation test-revised (Schier, 1994), and fear of missing out on organizations scale (Vasundhara et al., 2020)

#### **Sample and procedure**

Sample for the present phase will be 1500 employees currently working in the sectors including Manufacturing, Retail, FMCG, Insurance, Healthcare, Information Technology, Education, EdTech, and Consulting. Part-time employees, freelancers, and self-employed professionals will be excluded from the study. Informed consent of the participants along with their demographic details will be taken before collecting data.

#### **Measures**

The three-Dimensional Grit Scale (3DGS), developed by Sreenath et al., (2021) will be used to measure grit. The scale assesses grit through three dimensions - perseverance and commitment, interest and passion, goal-directed resilience. The 5-point Likert scale consists of

17 items with responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale has met adequate reliability and validity.

The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994) will be used to measure dispositional optimism. The scales assess the present orientation of the participants through two dimensions – optimism and pessimism. The scale consists of 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale, responses ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4). High scores on the scale indicate higher optimism and lower scores indicate pessimism.

Fear of missing out at the workplace (FOMOW) scale (Vasundhara & Rajan, 2020) will be used to measure FOMO. The scale consists of 11 items on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (0). The scale has established Cronbach's alpha of 0.834 and has shown a moderate positive correlation with the Workplace stress scale (Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress, 2009) and Beck's anxiety inventory - BAI (Beck et al., 1988).

### **Analysis and expected results**

The discrimination index of the items will be established using the item-total correlation of the responses of the participants. The mean and standard deviation of the responses will be used to check item difficulty. Confirmatory factor analysis will be used to establish if the total of the responses of the participants designates the framework of the personality characteristics of the hi-pots. Internal consistency of the measure and the dimensions in the framework will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Temporal consistency will be assessed using split-half reliability analysis. Correlation analysis will be used to establish the concurrent, convergent, and discriminant validity of the new measure, comparing it with the criterion measures, 3DGS, LOT-R, and FOMO in organizations

### **3. Ethics**

Ethical guidelines will be strictly followed through all the phases of the study. Participation in any of the proposed phases is voluntary. Informed consent will be obtained from the participants. All the data collected will be kept confidential and safe in password-protected files. The anonymity of the participants/their organizations will be maintained. The research is approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) – Christ deemed to be University, Bangalore, India.

### **4. Discussion**

#### **4.1 Strengths**

The major strength of the study will be the framework describing the personality characteristics of hi-pots and the tool developed to identify hi-pots. The framework would allow researchers, psychologists, and organizations to understand the various dimensions contributing to the overall personality of hi-pots. All the stakeholders involved in the process of identifying and developing hi-pots can use the framework to design their hi-po interventions and training programs. Behavioural analysts and trainers can use it for training need analysis in the process of evaluating the behavioural components of their workforce. In addition, the inclusion of diverse sectors allows the findings of the study to benefit a larger audience.

The measure developed at the end of the study will allow organizations to identify their hi-pots objectively. Using a reliable and valid measure to identify hi-pots during succession planning will help in the correct selection of hi-pots. Developmental activity organized by the companies with an honest intent to appraise talents will lead to employee happiness. As office politics play a huge role in such initiative's employee satisfaction is often disturbed. Whereas,

the tool developed through the study will help in standardizing the process of hi-pot identification and will help remove bias and discrimination to a greater extent. Honest nominations for developmental initiatives within the organizations such as hi-po interventions, training, higher education, etc. will help in building employees' trust towards the organization.

The study provides huge scope for further research. Researchers can use the framework and the tool to validate different populations and cultures. Further research can be done to identify factors other than personality characteristics that contribute to the development of hi-pots.

## 4.2 Limitations

This study will not be without limitations. The participants will be chosen from India. The study will not tell whether the personality characteristics identified vary with external factors such as organization culture, career stages, developmental stages, functions, or roles. Future research can be done on each of the areas based on the findings of the study as the theoretical framework to further build upon.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the findings of the current study would allow organizations to constantly look out for behavioural parameters along with performance indicators to evaluate talents. Researchers and industrial psychologists can study the personality of hi-pots in detail using the framework and devise appropriate talent management strategies to acquire, develop and retain them.

## Declarations

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