

Radford University SHRM

# RU Newsletter

## Aamodt scheduled to speak at SIOP Symposium

### Special points of interest:

- Dr. Aamodt is scheduled to present at SIOP during the April 15-17 symposium.
- “You have to assume they will be positive. Applicants are not going to ask someone to recommend them unless it is going to be positive. It’s like Lake Wobegon, where Garrison Keillor says that all children are above average.”

Nearly 80 percent of employers use reference letters as part of their hiring decisions, according to a study by the Society for Human Research Management.

Yet, research conducted by Dr. Mike Aamodt suggests they don’t predict performance nor do they agree with one another. Of nearly 6,800 different reference ratings in his study, 96 percent rated the candidates above average. “Reference letters can provide valuable insight about a candidate if read correctly. The benefit is they reveal different perspectives about the person that can be quite helpful and aren’t seen on the application.”

Aamodt will be presenting his findings at a symposium dealing with various issues related to reference letters at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology April 15-17 in Los Angeles.

The key to deciphering what is being said about a candidate is to break down the content of the letter and study the words used to describe the person. If a person applying for an accounting position is called “accurate,” “detailed” and “careful,” then those are positive indications about the person’s suitability for certain jobs.

People reading reference letters should look for patterns in the descriptors. “Our research shows that two people writing letters for the same person are not going to use the same descriptors unless there is an obviously strong trait about the subject.”

“One letter,” notes Aamodt, “may say a person is conscientious and reliable, but no other letters mention those characteristics. Does that raise a red flag? It should.”

He cautions, though, about reading too much into letters of recommendation unless there is a consistency to them. “If, for example, a letter does not mention anything about the person’s personality or intelligence, traits that may be important to the job, don’t be too concerned. However, if none of the reference letters mention the subject’s personality or intelligence, then you should dig a bit deeper.

In his research, Aamodt used a “trait” method, which looks at basic personality or characteristic categories. By highlighting each trait mentioned in a reference letter and assigning it to a category, such as “conscientiousness,” “openness” and “vigor,” the person or persons reviewing the letter can begin to make some perceptions about the candi-



Dr. Mike Aamodt  
Personnel Selection Guru

date’s reliability and suitability for the position. For example, consistently used descriptors like “outgoing,” “talkative” and “friendly” indicate the applicant has the personality traits of an extrovert, which might be more suitable for some jobs but not for others. If, after carefully going through several of a candidate’s reference letters, a particular pattern emerges, then the reader can, with confidence, accurately describe the person, Aamodt maintains.

( The preceding text was obtained on SIOP.org, [www.siop.org/media/news/reference\\_letters0305.htm](http://www.siop.org/media/news/reference_letters0305.htm))

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## Seventh Circuit bars employer's pre-offer use of well-known psychological test

As reported by Maria Greco Danaher on the SHRM website, [the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals](#) has determined that the well-known MMPI psychological test used by employers for purposes of evaluating candidates for hiring and promotion is a medical examination that can screen out individuals with disabilities and its pre-offer use is, therefore, unlawful under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The question before the court was whether the psychological test used met the ADA definition of a medical examination, because the ADA prohibits the use of "medical examinations" that screen out, or tend to screen out, from employment people with disabilities. ADA's definition of disability includes both physical and psychological impairments that substantially limit a major life activity.

In conjunction with certain

other test results, RAC used the results of the MMPI to measure personality traits relevant to math and language skills and to determine interests and personality traits. The company based its promotion selection upon the results. An applicant therefore could be denied a chance for advancement simply because of an "unfavorable" score on the MMPI

The district court granted summary judgment in favor of RAC, saying that the use

of the MMPI as part of a test to determine personality traits did not violate the ADA because it was not a "medical examination." On appeal, that decision was reversed by the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

While RAC claimed to have used the test only to measure personality traits, the 7th Circuit found that the use of the MMPI test "likely had the effect of excluding employees with [psychological] disorders from promotions" because it is designed largely to diagnose mental illness.

## SHRM Minutes

### *Tour ideas discussed:*

- Chateau Morrisette - wine tour, 10/21: free admission
- Krispy Kreme
- Other tobacco and alcohol companies

### *Inter-chapter Relations Event*

- Bowling night, mixed teams from Roanoke and Tech
- Mark checking into a possible Saturday afternoon

### *Speakers:*

- Alumni from Roanoke - speak about the job hunt, internships, give advice
- other topics discussed were diversity and lay-offs (times being considered are 6:30pm on a Tuesday or Thursday)

### *New River Valley SHRM Holiday Party*

- 12/1 or 12/8 (Thursday)

### *Ropes Course*

- still being looked into

### *Rafting Trip*

- season ends 2nd week of Nov.
- maybe considering the spring instead

-Joanna will be checking into getting a SHRM e-mail address.

## Notices

Thank you to Greg for updating the RU I/O website!

Thanks Nora for arranging the Volvo trip!

If you don't paya yo dues, Nick will breaka yo face!

### New Officers Elected:

- Joanna: President
- Ashley: Vice President
- Beth: Secretary
- Nick: Treasurer
- Greg, Mark, & Jeff: Legal

George & J.J.: Newsletter Editors

Finally, please e-mail us your birthdays and suggestions so that we may include them in the newsletter.



George on left - Newsletter on right, sorry, we got tired.