

The Big Five factors are *extraversion* (tendency to be sociable, assertive, active, upbeat, and talkative), *agreeableness* (tendency to be altruistic, trusting, sympathetic, and cooperative), *conscientiousness* (tendency to be purposeful, determined, dependable, and attentive to detail), *emotional stability* (tendency to be calm, optimistic, and well adjusted), and *openness to experience* (tendency to be imaginative, attentive to inner feelings, intellectually curious, and independent). The Big Five are very stable over time, and evidence suggests that roughly 50% of the variance in the Big Five traits appears to be inherited.³

Measures of Personality

Although personality can be measured in many ways, for personnel selection, the most common measures are self-report surveys. Several survey measures of the Big Five traits are used in selection. The *International Personality Item Pool* (IPIP), which can be found online and used freely, contains several Big Five measures. Exhibit 9.1 provides sample items from the IPIP. The *Personal Characteristics Inventory* (PCI) is a self-report measure of the Big Five that asks applicants to report their agreement or disagreement (using a “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” scale) with 150 sentences.⁴ The measure takes about 30 minutes to complete and has a fifth- to sixth-grade reading level. Another commonly used measure of the Big Five is the *NEO Personality Inventory* (NEO), of which there are several versions that have been translated into numerous languages.⁵ A third alternative is the *Hogan Personality Inventory* (HPI), which is also based on the Big Five typology. Responses to the HPI can be scored to yield measures of employee reliability and service orientation.⁶ All of these measures have shown validity in predicting job performance in various occupations.

Traditionally, personality tests were administered to applicants on-site, with a paper-and-pencil survey. Nowadays, many surveys are administered online, which is cheaper for the organization and more convenient for the applicant. However, because most online testing is unmonitored, there are three potential problems: (1) test security might be compromised (e.g., test items posted on a blog), (2) applicants may find it easier to cheat or be more motivated to cheat online, and (3) applicants may not tolerate long online personality tests. There are no silver bullet remedies to these problems. Because each of these problems is less of an issue with paper-and-pencil tests, organizations may be well advised to use that format where feasible. That being said, even when these problems are avoided with a paper-and-pencil test, online reporting of items can still be an issue. For example, the Internet is rife with posts and blogs about Wal-Mart's preemployment test, which includes personality questions. Some posts include the items themselves, whereas others provide tips on how to “game” the test. Thus, even when companies attempt to keep their personality inventories as private as possible, word often leaks out.⁷

Where traditional paper-and-pencil personality testing is infeasible, several steps can be taken to ameliorate the problems with online testing. First, experts