

The Development of Behavioral Performance Level Descriptors

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As part of ACT's Holistic Framework,¹ ACT researchers developed a Behavioral Skills Framework that can be used to assess behavior in education and work settings. By utilizing specific statements of effective behaviors, known as performance level descriptors (PLDs), the Behavioral Skills Framework is designed to predict successful outcomes, identify potential risks, and propose actionable resolutions by assessing non-cognitive factors (i.e., factors not related to one's intellectual capacity).

Development

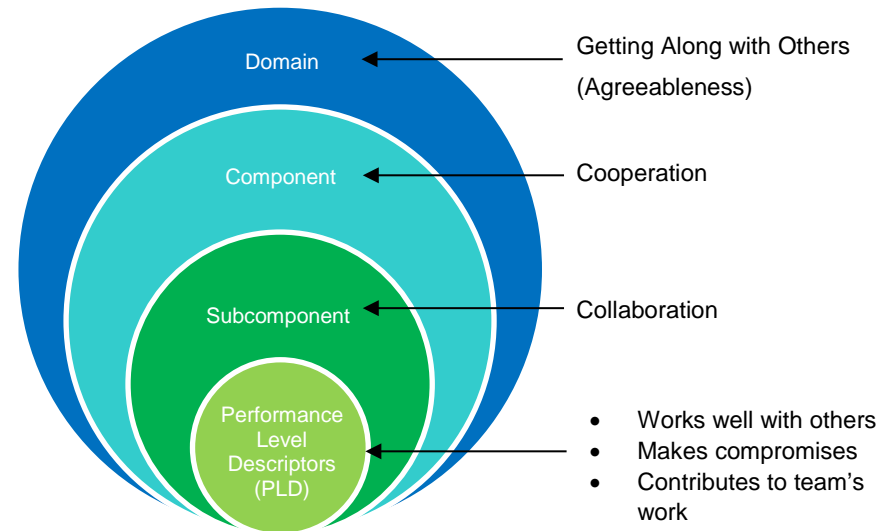
In this project, the HEXACO model of personality² was used as a foundation for the framework because it builds on the traditionally-used Five Factor Model (FFM).³ It provides specific components (or facets) of behavior beyond broad domains.⁴ This last element is particularly important because research has demonstrated that specific components of behavior have incremental predictive validity over broad domains of behavior alone.⁵

Structure

ACT's Behavioral Skills Framework consists of hierarchical levels of behavior that range from the more general domain level to the more specific PLD (Performance Level Descriptor) level.

More specifically, PLDs are a series of statements regarding the effectiveness of specific behavioral skills in specific settings. In the study, they were categorized by level of effectiveness (i.e., Highly Effective, Effective, Somewhat Effective, and Not Effective) and therefore contain multiple statements capturing different degrees of effective behavior. Findings from these analyses have established PLDs for elementary school, middle school, high school, postsecondary, and workforce settings.

Nested Structure of Performance Level Descriptors



Note: The Behavioral Skills Framework contains six domains, 23 components, 50 subcomponents, and PLDs for each of the 50 subcomponents.

Levels of Behavior, from Broad to Specific (see figure):

- Domains
- Components
- Subcomponents
- PLDs

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Purpose

PLDs can inform the development of future academic and workplace behavioral assessments by:

- Serving as the foundation for assessments that will identify areas of strength and opportunities for development at the individual level
- Aiding individuals in better understanding what they must specifically change about their actions in order to achieve the desired outcome for success
- Informing the development of training and intervention curriculum to assist students and workers to leverage their strengths and develop areas of need
- Being used by curriculum experts to develop more specific and aligned instruction to support the development of more effective behaviors across education and workplace contexts

Through exposure to more specifically-tailored curriculum, students and workers will be more likely to develop the skills they need to achieve academic or workplace success. ■

¹ More information about ACT's Holistic Framework can be found in Latino, C.A, Way, J., Colbow, A., Bouwers, S., Casillas, A., & McKinniss, T. (2017). *The development of Behavioral Performance Level Descriptors*. Iowa City, IA: ACT; and Mattern, K., Burrus, J., Camara, W., O'Connor, R., Hansen, M.A., Gambrell, J... Bobek, B. (2014). *Broadening the definition of college and career readiness: A holistic approach*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

² Ashton, M. C., & Lee, K. (2007). Empirical, theoretical, and practical advantages of the HEXACO model of personality structure. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 11(2), 150–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868306294907>

³ In the Behavioral Skills Framework, the names of the six HEXACO domains were modified for ease of understanding as follows (with the HEXACO name first): Honesty-Humility = Acting Honestly, Emotionality = Maintaining Composure, Extraversion = Socializing with Others, Agreeableness = Getting Along with Others, Conscientiousness = Sustaining Effort, and Openness to Experience = Keeping an Open Mind.

⁴ Lee, K., & Ashton, M. C. (2004). Psychometric properties of the HEXACO personality inventory. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 39(2), 329–358. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327906mbr3902_8

⁵ Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. (2003). Personality traits and academic examination performance. *European Journal of Personality*, 17, 237–250. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.473>