Tracing the Creation History of the Martin Achtnich Vocational Guidance Test

Maryna Illiusha

International Schicksalsanalyse Community Research Institute

@ Email: vildiviya@gmail.com

Abstract

The following paper reviews the history of the projective psychological methodology - the Test of Photos of Professions or BBT (abbr. from German Berufbildertest), providing diagnostics and identification of individual professional aptitudes and predispositions of an individual. In Switzerland, the psychologist and vocational counselor Martin Achtnich created this professional orientation test in the 20th century, and since then it has become widespread not only in Europe but also abroad.

Keywords
Achtnich test, fate analysis, Lipot Szondi, Martin Achtnich, occupational orientation, professional orientation test

Introduction

The efficacy of professional performance is intrinsically linked to job satisfaction and a vested interest in one's work, thus underscoring the prognostic significance of ascertaining predispositions. When an occupation chosen is incongruent with an individual's inherent aptitudes, it engenders what is termed as an "discordant occupational choice," thereby precipitating discontentment and consequent diminution in performance. In optimal circumstances, this disjunction may prompt a vocational transition, while in more adverse scenarios, it could potentially culminate in somatic ailments and distressing psychosocial responses (Achtnich, 1979).

Choosing a profession ranks high among life's pivotal choices. A profession not only occupies a substantial portion of our existence but also stands as a foundational pillar of human life affecting all areas (Dirlam & Zheng, 2017; Haar et al., 2014; Hoff et al., 2020; Karanikola et al., 2020; Tiefenbach & Kohlbacher, 2015). It is more than just a routine; it is a channel through which individuals tap into their potential, amass fresh skills, and carve out their

identities. Understanding one's inclination toward a specific profession significantly influences the trajectory of one's life. This article delves into the historical origins of the test of professional fate. The general discourse of current social-behavioral research focuses on obtaining reliable data through rigorous testing (Fakkel et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2014; Labuschagne et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2020; Thibaudeau et al., 2018). New tests and scales are constantly being developed, a trend that has become especially relevant with the growth of the Internet (Király et al., 2017; Siciliano et al., 2015; Turel & Serenko, 2020; Walsh et al., 2016).

Figure 1. *Martin Achtnich*

Back in 1971, Martin Achtnich, a proponent of fate analysis and holder of a Ph.D. specializing in clinical, medical, and pathopsychology, devised the projective test for professional orientation. Just before that, Dr. Lipot Szondi (1944), who later became Achtnich's mentor, had formulated a photo-based test (test with the use of photographs). This test found its place in Szondi's seminal work, "Schicksalsanalyse: Wahl in Liebe, Freundschaft, Beruf, Krankheit Und Tod" ("Fate Analysis: Choosing Love, Friendship, Profession, Illness, and Death") (Szondi, 1944). This test explores the interplay of diverse inherited factors and their sway over individual choices. The Lipot Szondi (1960) framework delineates the process of categorizing eight factors, shedding light on the psychological predisposition guiding significant life choices, including the path of one's career.

It is important to highlight that all eight predispositions are inherent in every individual, existing not in isolation but interconnected. However, certain inclinations may hold greater prominence while others exhibit lesser influence. The intricate interplay of these aspirations shapes a distinct personal predisposition, an intricate yet active pattern, fueled by energy that guides decision-making. This logical underpinning forms the basis of the principle that steers choices and the "struggle of drives." This hereditary framework is malleable through upbringing, environmental stimuli, sublimation, and the development of responses.

The earliest pioneers in Swiss career guidance believed that beyond aptitude, consideration should also be given to predisposition and a candidate's interest in a profession. The presence or absence of professional satisfaction significantly impacts a person's work engagement and productivity, reflecting their predisposition and the suitability of the chosen profession. A mismatch between occupation and predisposition is referred to as an "discordant occupational choice," resulting in dissatisfaction and potentially reduced productivity. In favorable scenarios, it might lead to job changes, while in less optimal situations, it could even result in illness, such as mental health issues.

The photo-based test is not merely a tool for career guidance among teenagers aged 14-17; it can also guide adults, pinpointing crucial milestones in their journey towards a fulfilling career. Moreover, this test serves as a scientific instrument to unveil psychological motivations and inclinations, highlight challenges in career selection, and offer an intricate professional prognosis that proves invaluable when transitioning between careers.

Methods

Lipot Szondi, a Hungarian psychoanalyst who devised the photographic test, known as Szondi test, formulated his theory and techniques on the premise that one's preferences and abilities could be unveiled by scrutinizing responses to images. The testing process is straightforward, requiring the test subject to repeatedly select the most and least pleasant portraits from the options provided. While the test was traditionally conducted manually in the last century, technological advancements have given rise to electronic versions. These modern iterations utilize a specialized program to process data and present test results through a visual representation on a screen. The crucial aspect that remains is interpretation, involving the deciphering of the test results.

Professionals well-versed in the Szondi test acknowledge that an authentic and reliable interpretation can only be provided by a specialist in person. Automated conclusions are deemed unreliable and may lack credibility. It is important to highlight that a test featuring modified stimulus material, such as redrawn and altered portraits, is widely considered invalid by many experts.

Szondi's projective personality test provides insights into the status of eight motivational factors influencing an individual. The inherent nature of the test, involving the intricate interplay among these factors and their connections to memory, consciousness, human automatic system, psychological reactions, pathologies, and even the formation of destiny, demands a specialist with a high level of training, knowledge, and practical experience for independent interpretation of the Szondi test.

In 2017, Academician Oleg Maltsev (2019) developed 17 interpretation methods for the Szondi test, applicable in psychological, therapeutic, business, managerial, and HR contexts. These methods enable the assessment of an individual's current state, identification of increasing tension or discharge, consideration of personality as a system, revelation of intentions, aspirations, values, external demonstrations, and behavioral patterns. They even provide insights into a person's ability to make independent decisions, confront group opinions, lead or follow, and respond to various systems, and other. The Szondi test's diagnostic accuracy has established it as a reliable tool in psychiatry, psychotherapy, vocational selection, HR management, and forensic applications. However, the complexity of the classical interpretation method has hindered its widespread adoption.

Martin Achtnich incorporated Szondi's ideas, utilizing the eight-factor classification, in creating his Test of Photos of Professions but the specifics of his test may differ. This test seems focused on identifying primary occupational interests based on reactions to images. Grounded in Szondi's concept, the Achthinch test uses images to assess reactions and evaluate preferences across various occupational fields. Comprehending individual preferences and motivations is instrumental in anticipating potential career advancement and development. These facets are interconnected, constituting an integrated approach to comprehending and nurturing individuals within the professional domain. Counseling derived from photo tests and analogous methods offers a tailored approach to career development and personal growth. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this methodology may elicit subjective reactions, and the interpretation of results relies on the professionalism and experience of the test administrator.

The psychological analysis of photo tests typically entails a methodical and organized review of participants' responses to the presented images. Several prevalent techniques used in scrutinizing the outcomes of photo tests include:
1. Content Analysis: A thorough examination of participants' responses, investigating the content of their answers or comments related to the images. This involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, or emotional responses.
2. Symbolic Analysis: The identification of symbols or metaphors within reactions to photographs, offering insights into concealed aspects of personality.

3. Statistical Analysis: Employing statistical techniques to analyze quantitative data, such as the frequency of specific responses or correlations between different variables.
4. Comparative Analysis: Examining the outcomes of distinct participant groups to pinpoint statistically significant differences.
5. Thematic Analysis: Identifying common themes or categories of responses and their connection to specific images.
6. Cluster Analysis: Grouping similar responses into clusters to unveil patterns or types of responses.
7. Contextual Analysis: Delving into the circumstances in which a test is conducted to comprehend how environmental factors may impact participants' responses.
8. Association Analysis: Scrutinizing connections between images and other variables (e.g., social status, education) to discern the influence of various factors on reactions.
9. Researcher Qualifications: Evaluating results through the lens of an expert in psychology or a relevant field, contributing depth and interpretation.

It is crucial to emphasize that photo-test analysis is dynamic and demands meticulous methodology, especially regarding procedural standardization and result interpretation. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods often yields a more comprehensive understanding of data derived from a photo-test.

Results

Test creation

Let us delve into the historical backdrop of the Achtnich's Assessment of Vocational Guidance, Berufsbilder-Test (BBT), inception. Martin Achtnich, deeply immersed in depth psychology and armed with practical insights and knowledge within the realm of career guidance, stumbled upon a pivotal resource in shaping his path. This resource was none other than the book "Fate Analysis: Choosing Love, Friendship, Profession, Illness, and Death" authored by L. Szondi (1944). Recognizing the imperative nature of connecting with the book's author, Achtnich felt compelled to initiate this crucial interaction. Subsequently, in 1951, he embarked on a journey to Zurich to meet Lipot Sondhi during a scientific conference, where Szondi was delivering lectures. This initial encounter not only shed light on the distinctions between fate-analysis and other strands of depth psychology but also introduced him to Szondi's projective test, a pivotal tool in this field.

During the same year, 1951, M. Achtnich encountered Dr. Schottkowski's doctoral dissertation titled "On Professional Aptitudes, Their Heredity and Depth Psychological Foundations, and Their Significance in Career Choice" (Newspaper of International Schicksalsanalyse Community Research Institute, 2018). Dr. Schottkowski, a professional consultant within the administrative sphere of the federal state of Tyrol, presented insights that not only prompted Martin Achtnich to delve into the intricate dynamics of heredity, its interplay with an individual's potential, career choices, and subsequent determination of their professional trajectory but also sparked contemplation about the test's structure. Dr. Schottkowski had crafted a prototype of the test in the form of a questionnaire. However, it became evident that a questionnaire, as a tool, falls short in facilitating qualitative engagement with the projective memory environment.

Achtnich's engagement with the BBT commenced during the summer of 1961. This endeavor was spurred in part by the concept put forth by Dr. Hans-Jörg Ringer, who envisioned crafting a test centered around professions' names and aligning it with the facets of fate psychology. Subsequently, as recounted by Achtnich (1979) in his work "Test of Photos of Professions," he and his colleague turned to Lipot Szondi for guidance and scholarly counsel.

This decision was prompted by Szondi's successful creation of a widely employed test across Europe. L. Szondi's initial counsel was to substitute the questionnaire (a form of verbal communication) with portraits due to their heightened capacity for stimulation.

The joint scientific exploration undertaken by Achtnich and Ringer spanned five years. Within this period, an archive containing 10,000 photographs was meticulously curated. This repository was housed in a dedicated documentation facility in Bern, along with the career guidance photo archive in Zurich. These captured images primarily conveyed diverse aspects, encompassing an individual's occupation, posture, and condition, which constituted pivotal variables for examination. Moreover, the photographs depicted the tools employed and their manner of use, the surrounding environment, and the scope within which the individual operated within their specific profession.

Subsequent to this phase, the selection process commenced to isolate a subset of photos from the initial 10,000, forming the core of the test. To achieve this, the researchers meticulously scrutinized and defined specific criteria that these chosen images had to fulfill. For instance, the photos were to remain free from distracting elements, such as inscriptions or extraneous minutiae (an instance could be a cigarette held by the specialist). Furthermore, the chosen images were required to steer clear of antiquated elements, ensuring the absence of outdated equipment or tools. It was also deemed essential that the focus not be on the specialists themselves but rather on their activities, thereby necessitating a portrayal of dynamic engagement rather than static poses. Authenticity and other specified criteria also guided the curation process of the chosen photographs.

Subsequently, the most challenging phase commenced, as the test's projective core had yet to be solidified. Multiple attempts were made to create the initial set of photos for the test, yielding unsatisfactory outcomes. This pattern repeated with subsequent attempts, leading to distortions in the data and inconclusive results. In 1966, Achtnich embarked on crafting
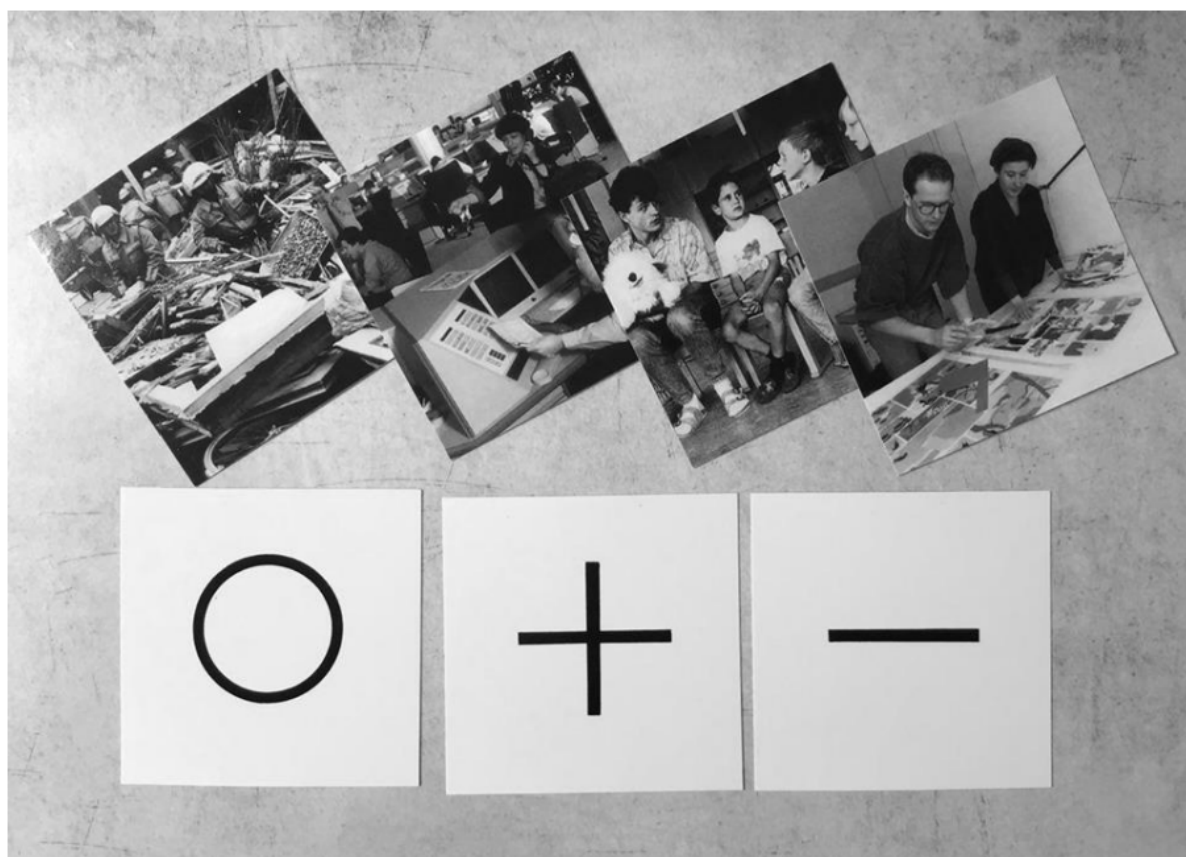

FIGURE 2. TEST OF PHOTOS OF PROFESSIONS OR BBT (ABBR. FROM GERMAN BERUFBILDERTEST)

the fifth iteration of the test. During this phase, the fate analysis approach and the Szondi test once again came to the rescue. Collaborating with Dr. Wolfgang Husmann, a lecturer at the Szondi Institute and an authority in fate-analysis, Achtnich refined the test materials by replacing unsuitable images. By 1968, the principal work was concluded, followed by minor refinements. Consequently, in 1971, the male version of the test was released, featuring 96 photographs, while the female version, encompassing 100 images, was published two years later in 1973 (Achtnich, 1971, 1973). The subsequent proliferation of the BBT was swift (Pasian et al., 2007).

Discussion

The foundation for constructing the Achtnich test is rooted in Lipot Szondi's conceptual framework and its alignment with the notion of vocational choice (Szondi, 1944). The photographs featured in the Achtnich's test encapsulate professions and their inherent activities. In the course of taking the test, participants are tasked with selecting an image that resonates or correlates with their self-identification or associations, particularly in relation to the profession depicted. This involves contemplating whether they see themselves as the portrayed specialist, if they aspire to undertake work congruent with the depicted activity, and if they desire to engage with the portrayed tools and materials. Subsequently, the specialist proceeds to decipher the test subject's predispositional makeup. During testing, it holds immense significance that the subject's choice is made instinctively. The visual photo-based test boasts an advantage by sidestepping conceptual abstraction, directly involving memory in the decision-making journey.

The visual methodology not only captures the conscious interests on the surface but also delves into the deeper, unconscious realms of the test-taker's personality. Beyond scrutinizing the test pictures from a vocational perspective, it becomes essential for the test-taker to express their viewpoint about the entire professional environment. Hence, the choices made within this test are not anchored in rational reasoning, but rather emanate from the essence that resonates with the individual's emotional disposition.

The Achtnich Test Comprises Eight Fundamental Predisposition Elements or Factors that Possess Varying Degrees of Intensity

W - gentleness, femininity, caring. K - strength, physical power, toughness, compulsion, aggression. S - social inclinations with dual tendencies: SH - readiness to assist, do good, offer aid, heal, care; SE - strength, bravery, dynamism, desire for activity, need for motion, urge to move. Z - expression of desires, aesthetics, display of aspirations. V - intellect, reason, logical thinking, desire for clear comprehension, rationalization. G - spirit, inspiration, creative imagination, imaginative capability, creativity, ideas, intuition. M - substance, core essence. O - communication with two tendencies: OR - speech, need for interaction, sociability; ON - attitude towards food, eating.

The interaction and intermingling of these factors yield a multitude of individual configurations (Szondi, 1969). Just as a chemical element loses its distinct nature upon combining with another element in chemistry, similarly, the pattern through which a predisposition factor manifests changes when intertwined with other tendencies.

In vocational counseling, photo tests represent a method for evaluating an individual's personality and interests through their responses to images. Typically, these tests present various pictures, scenarios, or situations, prompting the test taker to react. Subsequently, the results are scrutinized to ascertain occupational preferences, aptitudes, and personality traits.

The utilization of photo tests in vocational guidance can be grounded in diverse psychological testing theories and approaches. The administration of a photo test typically involves the following steps:

1. Presentation of Images: Participants are presented with photographs or images.
2. Subject's Response: The participant is required to make multiple choices from the presented images. Additionally, facial expressions during image viewing and other emotional responses, gestures, or reactions are potentially recorded.
3. Analysis of Results: The psychologist or career counselor evaluates the participant's choices based on specific criteria.

The incorporation of photo tests in career counseling aims to provide a deeper understanding of an individual's personality, interests, and motivations—crucial factors influencing their professional choices. These tests benefit both career counseling professionals and individuals, assisting in identifying occupations and roles where individuals are likely to thrive. However, it is essential to view tests as tools rather than exclusive assessments. Integrating photo tests with other approaches like interviews, questionnaires, and psychometric tests ensures a comprehensive understanding of personality and occupational interests. The effectiveness of photo tests relies on their quality, alignment with cultural contexts, and the expertise of those interpreting the results.

The outcomes of a photo vocational orientation test can vary, influenced by the specific methodology, objectives, and targeted questions. Several general types of conclusions that may be drawn from the test results include:

1. Occupational Preferences: Identifying the occupational domains that evoke the highest interest in the test taker and specific activities or areas that bring satisfaction and motivation.
2. Personality Traits and Qualities: Recognizing personality traits manifested in responses to photographs and their connection to vocational preferences.
3. Identification of Strengths: Identifying personality strengths that can be effectively leveraged in specific occupational domains.
4. Work Types and Environments: Recognizing favored work types (e.g., creative, analytical, communicative) and determining the preferred work environment, whether it be independent work, teamwork, office settings, or remote work.
5. Recommendations for Training: Recommending potential areas for further professional training or development aligned with interests and motivations.
6. Career Planning: Formulating specific steps and strategies to attain career goals in harmony with identified vocational preferences and personality traits.
7. Stress Management and Job Satisfaction: Offering guidance on stress management and enhancing job satisfaction by tailoring advice to personal preferences and the specific demands of the work environment.
8. Personal Development: Recognizing facets of personality that may benefit from additional focus and development for a successful career. Providing suggestions for self-improvement and reinforcement of personal qualities.

These comprehensive results can be presented either individually to the test participant or in collaboration with a professional counselor or psychologist, laying the foundation for subsequent actions in professional career development.

Practical Application

Viewed in terms of its practical significance, the test holds considerable potential due to its versatility. It serves as a versatile instrument applicable across multiple disciplines, offering solutions for professional challenges within HR management, business planning and business

engineering, forensics, advocacy, and other domains where an understanding of individual predispositions and motor inclinations is imperative. Moreover, the test is also adaptable for group investigations, such as those involving family members or specific occupational clusters. In such cases, the test can consolidate individual statistical findings into an overarching occupational profile. This profile vividly portrays the predisposition framework of specialists within distinct professional categories. To illustrate, a study of 10 dedicated machine fitters yielded results indicating that factor K (utilization of strength) emerged as their primary factor.

Engaging in a professional pursuit offers individuals the avenue to fulfill and express their inherent predispositions. A profession acts as a magnetic force, drawing individuals with congruent drives. By comprehending the array of predispositions requisite for a specific vocation, it becomes feasible to discern the needs that can be met through such an occupation. Concurrently, a profession's predisposition framework illuminates the motivations an aspiring job seeker should possess to experience contentment and fulfillment within that domain. Thus, the predisposition structure linked to a profession aids in delineating criteria for potential candidates as well.

Conclusions

This perspective broadens the conception of "professional requisites." It encompasses not only abilities, intellect, and talents, but also motivations aligned with the predisposition configuration of a particular field. It is only when an individual possesses both the necessary skills and predispositions that a steadfast commitment to the profession can be expected, fostering a robust, prosperous professional trajectory. The vocational photo-based test serves not solely to diagnose and affirm one's suitability for a given sphere of activity, but also empowers the individual to gain insights into their vocational aspirations. In retrospect, it took Martin Achtnich 16 years to craft the world's sole vocational orientation test. This time span was dedicated to meticulously validating the test for its reliability, validity, and practical utility. To this day, the Achtnich's test (BBT) remains unparalleled in its uniqueness, a dependable tool facilitating professional guidance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Author Biography

Maryna Illiusha is a head of the International Schicksalsanalyse Community Research Institute, adherent of the Venetian school. The main directions of the Institute's research are the applied aspects of fate analysis—depth psychology, mainly developed by Leopold Szondi, Swiss psychologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.