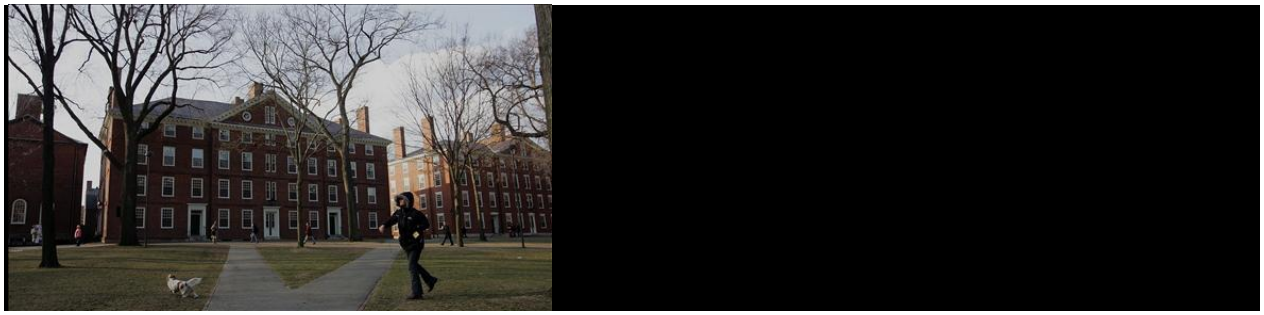
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
WSJ.com

May 1, 2013, 7:39 p.m. ET

B-Schools Know How You Think, but How Do You Feel?

By MELISSA KORN

Forget what you know. Business schools increasingly want to know what you feel.



Business schools are trying to get a sense of the human being behind the application process by adding personality tests and scored, standardized in-person interviews to the traditional application process. Melissa Korn explains.

Schools are trying to choose from a crowded pool of well-qualified applicants and get a sense of the human being behind the application by adding personality tests and scored, standardized in-person interviews to the traditional battery of essays, transcripts and recommendations. Now, prospective M.B.A. students need to shine by showing emotional traits like empathy, motivation, resilience and dozens of others.

Mikey Burton

Business schools increasingly want to know what you feel.

Measuring EQ—or emotional intelligence quotient—is the latest attempt by business schools to identify future stars. Since students typically start their job hunts almost as soon as they arrive on campus, the schools have little time to fix any faults.

"Companies select for top talent with assessments like this," says Andrew Sama, senior associate director of M.B.A. admissions at University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business. "If we are selecting for future business leaders, why shouldn't we be [using] similar tools?"

Since the fall of 2010, Mendoza applicants have been required to complete a 206-item online questionnaire called the Personal Characteristics Inventory. It screens them for traits the school has found in its most successful students and graduates, such as teamwork and leadership abilities.

More

- **What's It Like to Interview at Amazon**

It is difficult to determine the "right" answers. For example, one item asks, "What are your sources for new ideas?" The multiple-choice answers include "reading," "my own thoughts," "subject-matter experts," "family and friends" and "people I work with." Star students tend to provide the same responses, Mendoza says.

Paul Toboni, a first-year M.B.A. student at the school, says he "couldn't beat around the bush or give an artificial response" in the online test, unlike with interview talking points.

Still, the 23-year-old Mr. Toboni says he was pleased the school was evaluating his personality and not just the length of his résumé, since he was "shallow" on work experience.

Based on the assessment, Mendoza labels students "recommended" or "not recommended," though the school may ultimately admit a number of students in the latter category and may reject others in the former.

Measuring emotional intelligence is a complex endeavor. Here are sample questions created by Talent Plus, and used in admissions at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

What are your sources for new ideas?

- a. Reading
- b. My own thoughts
- c. Media
- d. Subject-matter experts
- e. Family and friends
- f. People I work with

What excites you about a "to-do" list?

- a. Keeps me focused
- b. Marking off my "to-do" list
- c. Shows management of my work
- d. Lets me observe my time needs

Mendoza plans to track this spring's graduates closely, as they are the first class admitted with the explicit consideration of EQ. The school says early indications show that those who scored well on the assessment are highly engaged in classroom and club activities.

Yale School of Management, meanwhile, plans to try out the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test on volunteers from its current batch of applicants in coming weeks. Results of the online self-assessment won't affect admission decisions, says Bruce DelMonico, assistant dean and director of M.B.A. admissions, because the school is just gathering data on what traits predict success.

The 141-item test, co-created by Yale University Provost Peter Salovey, measures how well applicants might manage or understand their own emotions with questions about everyday scenarios. A candidate might be asked, for example, to predict how someone will react in a certain situation, or to identify someone's emotions based on a picture.

"Talent assessment is a difficult science," says Mr. DelMonico, though he says it is getting easier to quantify, or at least figure out, what needs to be assessed.

Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business updated its recommendation form this year, fine-tuning questions to better assess EQ. The school says it asks people who recommend a student to score the applicant on ability to cope with pressure, intellectual curiosity and other traits.

Admissions Director Dawna Clarke says she is still on the hunt for a test that accurately and consistently measures EQ.

EQ assessments aren't altogether new. The MIT Sloan School of Management introduced its "competency model" in 2000, creating a four-zone grid that measures demonstrated success, such as test scores and standout work experience, and personal attributes, such as relationship-building skills and sensitivity to others.

The school doesn't administer a test like Mendoza does, but rather conducts behavioral interviews that require applicants to offer examples of times they demonstrated various elements of EQ. "You're assessing wired behavior," says Rod Garcia, senior admissions director at Sloan.

While a low EQ won't outright ruin someone who otherwise dazzles on paper, Mr. Garcia says, a high EQ —in certain cases, at least—can offset mediocre performance elsewhere. Sloan is "somewhat flexible" on GMAT scores and academic achievements, Mr. Garcia says.

Admissions consulting firm Veritas Prep added a Myers-Briggs personality assessment to its application-prep and GMAT study packages this spring, after noticing that business schools were paying more attention to personality and emotional maturity.

More than 200 clients took the Myers-Briggs test in just the first few weeks the firm offered it, says Scott Shrum, director of M.B.A. admissions research at Veritas. They can get a report highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in working styles and interpersonal relationships, with nuggets such as "[You] prefer to focus on the task, rather than on the people involved."

That insight helps students determine which traits to play up or minimize in their applications, or even what kind of school might be a good fit, says Mr. Shrum.

Business schools aren't the only educational institutions weighing emotional intelligence in their decisions.

University of Notre Dame's own undergraduate admissions office is taking a cue from Mendoza as it seeks a new way to identify standout students. Stellar test scores and grades don't differentiate many applicants anymore, laments Donald Bishop, associate vice president for undergraduate enrollment. He says this year the school could have filled its 2,000-student freshman class three times over with applicants who scored in the top 1% nationally on standardized tests or high school transcripts.

Mr. Bishop's team is in the research phase now, collecting data on current and former stars, and expects to roll out a tool within two to three years.

Meanwhile, University of Ottawa professors recently studied medical school applicants' EQ factors such as altruism and resilience, then tracked admitted students' use of mental-health services and other clues they might be headed toward early burnout.

Dr. Derek Puddester, a psychiatry professor at Ottawa involved in the research, says that while hard work and self-sacrifice are often valued in doctors, such traits need to be balanced by an ability to cope with stress.

Some experts say screening for emotional intelligence in admissions isn't very smart. It is good that business schools are thinking about EQ measures, says Daniel Goleman, a leading psychologist in the field of emotional-intelligence. "But they're paying attention to it in the wrong way if they're selecting for it."

EQ can be learned throughout life, he says, so "It should be the task of the business school itself to help people develop strength in emotional intelligence."

Write to Melissa Korn at melissa.korn@wsj.com

A version of this article appeared May 2, 2013, on page B1 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Business Schools Know How You Think, but How Do You Feel?.