

Variability in the Workforce

Kim's response to an online discussion of "The Best & the Rest: Revisiting the Norm of Normality of Individual Performance" Ernest O'Boyle Jr., Herman Aguinis, Publisher: Personnel Psychology, 2012, 65, 79-119.

This is interesting and valuable research that adds to our understanding of performance variation, but it's not presenting anything really new or revolutionary. A perfect bell-shaped distribution is rare in nature – most are skewed somewhat and may even have a bi- or multi-modal distribution. That said, all distributions are normally distributed when the population is randomly sampled and the samples are plotted. Think about what the O'Boyle and Aguinis research really tells us:

- There is a lot of variation in performance and contribution of the workforce (perhaps more than most people acknowledge)
- The top performers contribute far, far more than "average" performers
- Because of the ultra-high contribution of top performers, the majority (more than half!) of performers are "below average" when compared against the mean

This research supports rather than refutes the great amount of variance in the workforce.

Unfortunately, many people will misinterpret the research and use it as an excuse to fail to differentiate talent. Properly understood, it provides further support of the value of differentiation. By the way, I believe that Josh's statement, "*I personally believe that everyone can be a "hyper-performer" when the conditions are right,*" is a bit of naïve wishful thinking and plays into the hands of those who struggle with the concept of a meritocracy that rigorously differentiates by performance and potential.