

Tests and Assessments: The Key to Hiring Right



Q How can tests improve our hiring process?

A Tests offer numerous advantages over other alternative and perhaps more common selection tools including interviews and resume reviews. Tests are efficient, gathering a great deal of information about an applicant with only a minimal investment of time – you need only access and review the test results, a review that typically takes only a matter of minutes.

Perhaps more importantly, tests allow you to gather the same information about each job applicant, providing a common metric to compare one applicant to another. No need to worry about how to equate a bachelor's degree with several years of experience. The process is both standardized and consistent, which in turn makes it auditable and explicit. You know how applicants are being evaluated and compared, and you know that each applicant is given the same opportunity to demonstrate his/her qualifications for the job - a unique advantage in the event of a legal challenge.

Q Do all tests offer the same advantages?

A No, they do not. To result in good hires, the information that supports decision-making must not only be consistent, but job-related as well. That is, the test must measure competencies and characteristics

that are important for performance and prerequisite for success. If the test is not related to your job requirements and success factors, your hiring decisions may be consistent but they will not necessarily be good.

Q How do I go about selecting a test for use?

A First, review the job or jobs to identify success factors. Identify what makes one person a top quality performer while another struggles. What competencies and characteristics are associated with success in this job, at your company, or in this context? Finally, look for or develop a measure that taps those competencies and characteristics – effectively and consistently.

Q Should I develop a test or buy one? Which is the better alternative?

A It is a matter of quality, not source. What is important is that the test is job-related and well-developed, not whether it is customized or purchased off-the-shelf. That is, what is most important is that the test is valid – that it has a demonstrated relationship to job success.

The advantages of off-the-shelf tests include cost effectiveness, ease of use (i.e., a turn-key solution), proven track record of success, and benchmarking or normative data. Test norms are important in that they serve as a guide in how to interpret the test scores – how good or how bad is a particular score? Having a relevant norm group available provides the context for interpretation.

There are, however, a variety of reasons that test development may be the more attractive alternative. In today's work environment, employers depend upon their employees to differentiate them from the competition. It is reasonable to assume that developing a test tailored to your unique success factors will fine-tune the selection process. Research bears this out as well. Customized tests generally offer even higher validity coefficients and do an even better job of identifying top quality employees.

Other advantages include being able to communicate your brand and your standards to job applicants before hire – supporting the self selection process and giving those who will not fit the information they need to make that decision before joining the organization. Finally, with a customized test, you can include only those factors useful for and relevant to success in your organization – no potential misuse or misunderstanding of scores that bear no relevance and no need for applicants to answer questions that will never be considered.

Q How can an experienced applicant or a high-level executive take an entry-level test and not pass?

A Tests are not infallible nor are they perfect. Yet, the fact that an experienced applicant or tenured executive fails the test is not evidence that the test is ineffective.

To be effective, a test must be used as intended. An entry-level test, for example, is measuring competencies and interests appropriate for that level – competencies and interests that are not relevant to or predictive of performance as an executive. Second, test scores are impacted by factors other than ability. The fact that an experienced applicant failed a test may indicate a lack of effort or attention. It may also indicate, however, that the applicant, despite his/her experience, lacks the prerequisite skills and abilities to perform the job. After all, time and tenure do not necessarily equate to ability.

To ensure top quality hiring decisions, use tests only as intended. And, recognize that tests are a tool – a tool that has proven to be the single best predictor of performance available and far more accurate than any other measure!

Q So, if the test indicates an applicant is qualified; I should hire him or her?

A The best hiring decisions are based on a variety of job-related information, not a single score or even a single measure. Consider the test score, but also consider for example the interview, work history, reference checks, and background information. The more information you have, the more informed your decision will be.