

# "The Art of Hiring Smart"

*Find the Best Person for the Job*

Arthur G. Schoeck, Competitive Edge!, December 1996/January 1997

Benchmarking is a process which establishes behavioural standards most appropriate for a given position - that is, what behaviours are most effective most of the time in this job. A well-defined Behavioural Job Description acts as a standard in evaluating existing employees as well as a guide in hiring new employees.

Today's benchmarking tools are powerful, but they can cause as much damage as good if they are carelessly applied. With the help of objective tools and targeted guidance, the process has productive results. No matter which quality tools are used in the benchmarking process, more and more companies, because they have experienced misguided application, are turning to professional help.

Traditionally, most benchmarking has involved profiling employees in a target position to determine which attributes are most common in your best performers. This imperfect method has several potential dangers.

First, it actually assumes you already have the best performers and that you can find none that can perform better. This assumption limits benchmark standards to your current employees only, and does not consider standards outside your current environment.

Another common mistake is that guidelines for selecting and ranking the top performers have not been well-defined. For example, sales statistics have been erroneously used to rank performance.

As an example, Joe has been selling for us forever. His figures make him look like a top performer, but Joe developed his client base back when all he had to do was take orders as people called in. He was the only salesperson in an easy market with little or no competition.

Today, however, is much different. Competition is fierce. If Joe had to start from scratch in today's market, how would he fare? How long would it take to build that client base now, if he could at all? If you based your sales position's benchmark on Joe because his statistics look good and hired people with this benchmark as your guide, you may have hired ineffective people with Joe's traits.

Still another common error is profiling only your top performers. Unless you profile your bottom performers as well, your information is invalid. If, for instance, your bottom performers scored the same as top performers in a certain category, that trait could be an insignificant concern in the hiring process. Yet, testing just the top performers would narrow your field and decrease your chances of successful job matching.

The benchmarking process is intended to improve productivity and performance but the opposite can occur if certain variables in the environment are not accounted for in the ranking process. It will not be an effective benchmark if your top ranking performers are in a "flush" market - that is, where almost anyone could do a good job.

Other environmental factors such as the consistency of systems and procedures across all employees considered in the benchmarking process may also have a powerful influence. If only half of your team is computerised, the behavioural job description may not be the same at all. Likewise, communication behaviours appropriate for supporting Sales & Marketing staff is probably quite different from doing that same support work for Auditing.

A better method is to have those who work, manage and know the position do an objective behavioural job analysis, starting 'from the beginning' - that is, don't look at current people, but evaluate the job itself. Some of the newer tools on the market make this exercise convenient (15 to 20 minutes), accurate and inexpensive. Once the ideal behaviours are prioritised, the job description becomes much easier to define and fulfil.

This refinement also accelerates the orientation process, greatly reducing that period of time it takes to "get the feel" of a new job. Turnover is reduced, performance is enhanced.