

The key to successful recruitment

By Bill Schult
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Why the Selection Interview doesn't work

Having sat on both sides of the interview table during the past 30 years I feel I can speak to the issue with some clarity. If you think about it, most interviews can be categorised into several areas. The two that seem to be predominant are the let's "just visit" interview and the interview where the job candidate is told and sold.

Not much worthwhile is gleaned from the "just visit" interview. I have watched managers and interviewers conduct their interviews in a very loose and unstructured manner. Occasionally, the manager may ask a few general questions, but it is most times a free wheeling, tell me about yourself interview. This type of interview rarely provides any helpful information to make an informed hiring decision.

I've had the unfortunate opportunity to watch managers with whom I have worked go into what I call the "sell them into the business" interview. This is a sight to behold as a manager tells and sells the job candidate on every aspect of the job and company. Then the same manager says, "Now, I have some questions for you." Then you hear questions like, "How do you see yourself doing this job?" If the candidate is reasonably bright, he/she will parrot back to the manager what he/she has just heard about the job. This type of interview occurs more than any of us can imagine. The results are again less than helpful, because the candidate has been spoon-fed all the right answers.

Interviews by themselves have been and continue to be mostly ineffective in their ability to predict job success. Today we hear the "buzz" words "structured interviews." This process of interviewing has become quite popular in the past several years. But structured interviews by themselves are most times poor predictors of future performance. Even though the questions may be directly related to the job and performance on the job, most structured interviews are not reliable predictors of job success. In fact, research suggests that they predict success at a rate not much better than chance selection.

This becomes even more evident into today's work environment with so much information relating to the hiring process available to job candidates. Books are available by the hundreds, tapes too, that talk about how to interview, what to expect in an interview, including a structured interview. Consider a recent book, "The 100 Best Answers to the 100 Toughest Interview Questions." The question you have to ask yourself; is this the candidate's personal answers to the interview questions or are they someone's "book" answers. Does it make a difference where their answer comes from? Absolutely! What if it isn't their personal answer and you hire the person based on his/her "book" answers. The odds of the person not being able to perform the job adequately just increased dramatically.

Companies and organisations think the interview is the least expensive part of the selection process, when in reality they are often the most expensive. Interviews are expensive from a cost of time versus results and very expensive due to the risk of making a poor hire.

Today there are more predictive methods of making an informed hiring decision. They are called assessments. The best assessments are those that are validated against actual job performance and have the ability to predict the potential for job success.

Personality versus Job Performance

Since becoming certified in identifying, understanding and appreciating behaviour in the mid 70's it has become agonisingly apparent to me that attempting to hire a job candidate on behaviour alone is courting disaster.

A person's behavioural type or personality style, by itself, is not a valid indicator of his/her potential for success in a specific job. There are many tools in use that predict behaviour in a general or overall sense, but they do not predict job performance or are they job related. In order for an assessment to predict the potential for job success they must be validated against job performance.

So does this mean, you can't use personality assessments to predict the potential for job success? Not at all! But, you will need to use personality assessments that were designed for the selection process. The assessment must be job related and validated against a given job and the performance required to be successful in that job.

This will almost always eliminate the use of Ipsative assessments for selection purposes. This type of assessment uses the Most – Least word descriptor approach to identify a person's personal preferences. It can provide insight into the person him/herself, but not validated information to be used to make a selection decision. This type of assessment does not provide the necessary or right type of information to do a true validation study.

Good assessments consist of measuring the factors that contribute to job success. These factors are obtained by psychologists conducting well-constructed job studies to determine the personality traits that actually contribute to job success. They gather data of on the job performance for top and bottom performing job incumbents, along with collecting performance ratings of supervisors and managers.

Why collect data for a validation study on top and bottom performers? Good question! A well-validated assessment should have the ability to predict potential success, as well as the potential for job failure.

This is why a "one test fits all" mentality comes into question. Different jobs have different success patterns. One test cannot come close to measuring the varied and numerous traits and abilities necessary to perform a given job successfully.

Don't be fooled or talked into "benchmarking" your top performers. They are good compared to what? What if your top producers looked exactly like your bottom producers? Was the benchmark valid, did it predict success? Maybe and maybe not! Benchmarking only your top performers is a formula for EEOC disaster. How do I have a validation study conducted for a job in my organisation?

First, you can use assessments that have already been validated for jobs that are similar to jobs in your organisation. This allows you to begin using validated assessments without having to make a large investment of money.

Second, you contract with a reputable psychological firm to conduct your in house validation studies. You will need between 100 to 200 people in your validation study. Less than 100 and the data statistically becomes less reliable.

I often hear the question, "Are assessments legal?" The short answer is, yes! When you compare your present process of mostly subjective interview techniques and the lack of a structured interview process to avoid what is called a "soft interview." This is where candidates for the same job are asked different questions by the interviewers. Interview questions that are not criterion and face validated. And hiring to jobs that do not have defined job requirements.

Compare those legal issues to an assessment where the job has been well researched and defined. Assessments where validation studies conducted by licensed psychologists have identified the personality traits that actually contribute to success in the job. Assessments that have been constructed to identify those personality traits contributing to job success and predict the candidate's probability of success on the job.

I point out to my prospects and clients that a well constructed and validated assessment is the most objective part of an organisation's selection process. A good assessment never has a "bad day," it never looks to see if a candidate's shoes are shined, it never is impressed by a candidate's "pat" answer, it never gives the candidate the answer before it asks the question, and it never produces a result based on the subjective gathering of information.

A well-constructed and validated assessment asks the same questions of each candidate, in the same order. It never has a "bad day," it is never impressed by a "pat" answer or gives the answer to the candidate before it asks the question. When it is time for the assessment to deliver its report on the candidate, it is based on validated information that has been designed for just one purpose, to predict a candidate's potential for success in a given job. Assessments can pay for themselves by reducing the turnover in an organisation, while helping to place more top performers on the job.

How to predict success in a job

The answer is a job related and validated assessment. There are plenty of assessments that are validated for other purposes. Many of these can be categorised as Style or Type assessments. This group of assessments are most often used for team building, identifying a person's leadership style, behavioural style or type, communication style

and perhaps his/her sales style. It is important to understand that while these are very good things to measure, a person's style or type may not be a factor in determining job performance.

We have all witnessed the consultant who has attempted to convince his/her client that his/her assessment has credibility. They will say the assessment has been given to a similar group of workers, the scores have been calculated and a benchmark created. Be careful of this approach! That average or benchmark means nothing. It is the average of the best, the average and the below average. It does not mean it predicts job success.

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Yet, a client will say, "I want to test my top performers and create an average, so I can hire more people that look like the average of my top performers." That's not a good idea. Averages can mask the differences between co-workers. In a recent article averaging was described by saying, "If you averaged the gender of an equal number of men and women, you would have your basic hermaphrodite." The article continued by stating, "If you averaged the athletic ability of all the members of the top soccer team and compared that to the average of the bottom team in the league, you would see very few differences. Both numbers may be fun, intellectual exercises, but tell you nothing about test scores and performance." A good validity study will demonstrate that high scores match high performance and low scores match low performance. That's validity, developing averages is not validity.

So what counts in using personality assessments in the selection process? What contributes to success on the job must be identified, defined and measured. Once those steps have been completed, a competent assessment identified, a true study of at least the top and under performers in the job in question can begin. Assessment scores are collected, along with performance ratings for each group and the results are statistically analysed. For the assessment to predict success on the job, there must be a mean difference between the test scores and performance ratings. Without being able to correlate assessment scores with performance an assessment is not useful in the selection process. It is wise to use an assessment developed specifically for selection to use in your hiring process.

How do I have a validation study conducted for a job in my organisation?

First, you can use assessments that have already been validated for jobs that are similar to jobs in your organisation. This allows you to begin using validated assessments without having to make a large investment of money.

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