

5.16: Portfolios, Practice Projects, Etc.

Learning Objective

- Discuss the usefulness of creating additional assignments for potential candidates to complete.

Regardless of an interviewer's (or interview panel's) experience, judgement, or relevant expertise, an interview is largely a matter of faith. That is, the interviewers have to trust in the candidate's statements and resume. If position dynamics require a new employee to hit the ground running, it makes sense to assess a candidate's level of skill and knowledge relative to the stated job requirements.

What are the best way to assess a potential employee's skills? Read the following case study to consider the role of tests in the hiring process.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? USING CUTOFF SCORES TO DETERMINE JOB SELECTION

Many positions require applicants to take tests as part of the selection process. These can include IQ tests, job-specific skills tests, or personality tests. The organization may set cutoff scores (i.e., a score below which a candidate will not move forward) for each test to determine whether the applicant moves on to the next stage. For example, there was a case of Robert Jordan, a 49-year-old college graduate who applied for a position with the police force in New London, Connecticut. As part of the selection process, Jordan took the Wonderlic Personnel Test (WPT), a test designed to measure cognitive ability, or his ability to problem-solve.

Jordan did not make it to the interview stage because his WPT score of 33, equivalent to an IQ score of 125 (100 is the average IQ score), was too high.

The New London Police department policy is to not interview anyone who has a WPT score over 27 because they believe anyone who scores higher would be bored with police work. The average score for police officers nationwide is the equivalent of an IQ score of 104 (*Jordan v. New London*, 2000; ABC News, 2000).

Jordan sued the police department alleging that his rejection was discrimination and his civil rights were violated because he was denied equal protection under the law. The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court's decision that the city of New London did not discriminate against him because the same standards were applied to everyone who took the exam (*New York Times*, 1999).

What do you think? When might universal cutoff scores make sense in a hiring decision? When might they eliminate otherwise potentially strong employees?

There are three broad categories of job-specific testing that we'll discuss: work samples and simulations, cognitive ability tests, and personality tests.

Work Samples & Simulations

Work samples and simulation tests are used during the candidate evaluation process as a way for employers to evaluate job-specific skills and aptitude. A work sample consists of having a candidate perform a work-related task or subset of job tasks, generally in the actual workplace using the requisite equipment, processes and procedures. A work sample allows the employer to "preview" the candidate's performance and also gives the candidate a realistic job preview.

In a simulation, the candidate would engage in a highly structured role-play designed to represent broad aspects of a the job, for example, assessing an applicant's problem solving, communication, and interpersonal skills. OPM notes that performance should be evaluated "by trained assessors who observe the applicant's behavior and/or by measuring task outcomes (e.g., the degree of interpersonal skills demonstrated or the number of errors made in transcribing an internal memo^[1])." When administered and evaluated correctly, this assessment technique is one of the strongest predictors of job performance.

Cognitive Ability Tests

The McQuaig Institute describes a cognitive ability or mental agility test as "a tool to measure aspects of general intelligence, such as mental agility and speed of thought, analytical thinking, the ability to learn quickly, and verbal reasoning skills." Psychological research indicates that cognitive ability is one of the most accurate predictors of job performance and the tests are significantly more accurate predictors of job performance than interviews or experience. To be precise, the correlation between

cognitive ability and job success is 0.51 (1.0 would be a perfect or 100% predictor). This compares to a correlation of 0.36 for reference checks, 0.18 for years of experience and 0.18 for unstructured interviews^[2]. An example of a Cognitive ability test is a [general aptitude test \(GAT\)](#). A limitation of this approach, as with any test, practice and using test strategies can decrease the validity of the test. Also, researchers have noted the racial differences in test results, with validity (as a predictor of performance) lower for blacks and hispanics^[3]. To avoid the risk of discrimination, use this test in combination with other evaluation methods.

Personality Tests

Personality assessments such as the Big Five or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can provide insight into a candidate's personality and whether he or she would be successful in a particular role or prospective company culture. As described by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Federal Government's chief human resources agency, "Personality tests are designed to systematically elicit information about a person's motivations, preferences, interests, emotional make-up, and style of interacting with people and situations. This information is used to generate a profile used to predict job performance or satisfaction with certain aspects of the work." According to the OPM, "personality tests have been shown to be valid predictors of job performance in numerous settings and for a wide range of criterion types (e.g., overall performance, customer service, team work), but tend to be less valid than other types of predictors such as cognitive ability tests, assessment centers and work samples and simulations^[4]."

One caveat to keep in mind in the hiring process. As a self-reported test, the effectiveness of personality tests is dependent on a candidate's commitment to test accuracy. Some individuals people may attempt to "game" the test, providing what they think is the "right" answer rather than an accurate response. For best results, verify that a test is designed to identify misrepresentations.

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1. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/other-assessment-methods/work-samples-and-simulations/> ↵
 2. <http://blog.mcquaid.com/cognitive-ability-tests> ↵
 3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24188390> ↵
 4. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/other-assessment-methods/personality-tests/> ↵

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