



**Common Employee Selection Tools:
Trends and Recommendations**

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Overview

Employee selection is the starting point for effective Talent Management. A strong employer brand can be a true competitive differentiator for an organization. Building a strong brand starts with being concerned with the candidate experience during the selection process. The initial experience of the candidate during the selection process is likely to have a major impact on their view of the organization's culture, their perception of the value being placed on talent, and their perception of the sophistication of the organization's talent management processes.

Effective employee selection involves more than establishing a strong employer brand and attracting and hiring superior talent. The key to effective selection is the ability to match the right person for the right job at the right time. Retention rates, individual productivity, and business competitiveness all hinge on effectively matching individuals to jobs. This white paper provides an overview of common employee selection tools, identifies current trends that are impacting how employees are selected and matched to jobs, and provides recommendations for tool use.

Candidate Pre-Screening Tools

Candidate pre-screening refers to the initial evaluation of candidate qualifications at time of application. The purpose is to reduce a potentially large candidate pool to a more manageable number of candidates. While there is certainly a focus on efficiency in pre-screening candidates, there is also a concern about accuracy. You do not want to advance the wrong candidates or reject high quality candidates in the process.

Three of the more common approaches to candidate pre-screening include:

- **Resume Matching Technology** – There are a number of technologies that have been developed to search resume content for key constructs, phrases, or words that are relevant for a given position. They provide a tremendous efficiency advantage over manual resume reviews. Unfortunately, they are not necessarily accurate.

Part of the problem is in the resume itself. According to research conducted by The Society of Human Resource Managers, over 53% of individuals lie about their resume in some way. Forbes Magazine has a list of the top lies people put on their resumes. Some of the more common ones include:

1. Lying about your degree
2. Playing with dates
3. Exaggerating numbers
4. Increasing previous salary
5. Inflating titles

Another problem is candidates have learned to “seed” their resume with key words and phrases that are likely to result in a false match with a particular resume search.

Even when the resume is totally factual, it provides little information for truly differentiating individuals against the full range of job requirements for a position.

- **Profile Matching Technology** - The concept of matching people to opportunities based on profiles is very familiar to most people today with the proliferation of dating services that rely on this approach.

The approach is quite straightforward. The talent creates a profile of core attributes relevant for their consideration as a candidate (e.g., industry experience, management experience, salary preferences, etc.) and the profile is matched to the position requirements provided by an employer. While conceptually sound in theory, in practice there are problems. Most candidates are not willing to complete a lengthy profiling process as a pre-screen. Lengthy profiles would result in a high rate of abandonment. Therefore, the candidate match is only based on a relatively small number of job requirements and many unqualified candidates are incorrectly identified as a good fit.

In order to obtain a complete and useful requirement profile of a position for accurate matching, it is important to consider a number of characteristics. These characteristics could include:

- **Background requirements** – e.g., desired industry/functional experience, management experience, certifications, education
- **Contextual requirements** – e.g., compensation, travel, specific role challenges, and organizational culture demands
- **Personality requirements** – e.g., key characteristics and predispositions that would facilitate meeting the demands of the positions
- **Experience requirements** – e.g., critical experiences necessary to prepare an individual to be successful in the position
- **Competency requirements** – e.g., behavioral skills associated with successful performance in the position
- **Unique requirements** – any special or unique requirements associated with the position

It is for this reason job/talent matching is more appropriately applied later in the selection process, when the candidate is more motivated to provide a complete profile.

- **Scored Application Forms** - The application form is also a traditional source for evaluating candidate potential. There is typically a lot of overlap in information provided by a resume and information requested on an application form. The primary difference is the application form is a structured process that solicits the same information from all candidates. It overcomes the problem of difference in resume content and formats. It also allows the addition of specific questions regarding qualifications, preferences, and experiences that are important to the employer.

Application items can be assigned a particular weight and value for different responses.

Automated routines can be used to score application forms thereby eliminating the subjectivity of manual reviews and also addressing the criterion of efficiency. They need not be overly long and still provide relevant information concerning the full range of requirements. Scored application blanks have also been shown to be reasonably accurate (Reilly and Chao, 1982; and Schmitt, Noe, & Kirsch, 1984)

- **Custom Screening Questionnaires** – Custom screening questionnaires are similar to application forms but are designed specifically for a particular job. Structured questions that relate to the specific requirements of the job are created. These questionnaires are most commonly presented online and scored in real time. Differential weights are applied to candidate responses to create a weighted score. Knock out factors on mandatory requirements are included. Resume data are also captured and can be potentially scored.
- **Current Trends** – Technology providers are increasingly integrating screening questionnaires and resume review processes into selection workflow capabilities. The trend is to move beyond simple efficiencies in selection to being concerned with quality of hire.
- **Recommendations** – Custom screening questionnaires are recommended as the preferred method for candidate pre-screening. They are highly efficient, provide a structured approach for reviewing candidates, and are able to collect the job specific information necessary for making an accurate screening decision. One would review the resumes of screened-in candidates before making a progression decision.

Profile matching technology is recommended as an important component of the selection process which would be used later when candidates are willing to provide a complete talent profile.

Pre-Employment Tests

Pre-employment tests are quite prevalent today. According to a recent survey roughly 86% of companies are using some form of pre-employment testing. While there are a large number of different types of tests available, the two most common are:

- **Ability Tests** – The most common type of ability test is a measure of cognitive or mental ability. There is abundant evidence that this type of test is a strong predictor of overall performance across a wide range of jobs. In an often cited paper, Schmidt & Hunter (2004) provide evidence that general mental ability “predicts both occupational level attained and performance within one’s chosen occupation and does so better than any other ability, trait, or disposition and better than job experience” (p. 162). There are three common types of mental ability tests:
 - **Verbal Reasoning** – Verbal Reasoning is the ability to understand and reason using concepts framed in language. Critical thinking skills are commonly measured with these tests.

- **Numerical Reasoning** - Numerical reasoning is the ability to use numbers to develop, comprehend, and communicate ideas. Basic math skills are essential to having good numerical reasoning skills.
- **Abstract Reasoning** - Abstract Reasoning is the ability to recognize abstract patterns, associations, or relationships without using words or numbers. Different from both Verbal and Numerical Reasoning, Abstract Reasoning is right-brain dominated. It is a measure of an individual's ability to perceive and think clearly, make meaning out of confusion, and formulate new concepts when faced with novel information.

The main drawback to mental ability testing is evidence of adverse impact on minority populations. Diversity goals are negatively affected by this type of testing. Therefore, it is common practice to combine such tests with other tests or selection procedures to dilute their adverse impact.

- **Personality Tests** - Although personality tests measure a variety of specific constructs, these constructs typically collapse to five basic factors of personality. These factors, commonly called "the big five", include: (1) openness to experience, (2) extroversion, (3) agreeableness, (4) conscientiousness, and (5) emotional stability. There is growing evidence of the usefulness of these factors in predicting job performance (Barrick, M.R. & Mount, M.K., 1991).

When using personality tests, it is important to use those that were specifically developed for selection rather than for general research on individual differences. It is equally important to review the validity evidence for any selected instrument. Additionally, there are concerns that candidates may be successful in faking personality instruments. It is therefore important to select an instrument that contains a well-designed "faking" scale as a key construct.

The lack of adverse impact and the consistent evidence of validity have made personality testing a frequent component of selection procedures.

- **Current Trends** – There is increasing support for a different type of norm based test called an Experience Inventory. Everyone intuitively knows that experience matters when considering the qualifications of a candidate...but which experiences? Extensive research on the types of experiences that lead to leadership success has surfaced specific themes. Items have been created for these themes which has led to the construction of norm based experience inventories. These inventories are showing early promise as a new type of valid predictor.

There is also a trend toward non-proctored web-based testing to provide greater convenience for the test taker.

- **Recommendation** - A recommended approach is to combine personality testing, experience inventories, and mental ability testing to optimize the amount of predictive information that is gathered while minimizing the adverse impact of the mental ability test. It is also recommended to use numerical reasoning and abstract reasoning rather than verbal reasoning tests to further lessen adverse impact. Short forms of tests should be used when available to reduce the time required for test completion. Generally, testing should usually be positioned later in the selection process with candidates that have passed earlier hurdles and are motivated to complete the testing process. Test results should be used in matching talent profiles to job requirements.

Interviews

Interviews are the most ubiquitous selection tool in use today. They are also the selection method with the poorest execution. Many interviews are more of a “personal chemistry” check than a reliable and accurate evaluation of qualifications. Interview practices can be sorted into two basic categories:

- **Structured Behavioral Interviews** – There is a considerable body of research that supports the power of the interview when it is a structured process. When interviews are structured, they have considerable reliability and predictive value and are a powerful selection tool.

Structured interviews:

- Use competencies as the framework for structuring the interview. Competencies are based on a job analysis which is a systematic review of what it takes to be successful in a particular job.
- Use pre-planned interview questions that are linked to competency requirements. This ensures that the interview questions are job related. Pre-planned questions also ensure that the same questions are asked of each candidate to ensure consistency and “apple to apple” comparisons. Every candidate has the same opportunity to demonstrate they have the knowledge, skills, and background to perform the job.

- Use trained interviewers. Interviewers are trained in how to evaluate responses to prepared questions. Training helps take the bias and subjectivity out of the evaluation process and gives interviewers a common frame of reference for evaluating candidates.
- Ratings are integrated in a common way to arrive at an overall score as well as a profile of strengths and weaknesses.
- **Unstructured Interviews** - Research suggests that when interviews are unstructured, they are little better than flipping a coin. Unstructured interviews are characterized by:
 - Each interviewer decides where they would like to focus their information gathering.
 - Each interviewer comes up with their own questions
 - Each interviewer uses their own evaluation framework for evaluating responses
 - Each interviewer integrates the interviewee responses in their own way to reach conclusions
- **Current Trends** – Web-based interviewing solutions are now available in the market to help drive consistency, accuracy, and to reduce legal exposure. These interviewing platforms also make it easier to deploy and bring value to competency modeling efforts.
- **Recommendation** – Combine online interviewer training with an online interviewing management system to create structured interviews, manage the entire interview process, and equip interviewers with the tools and skills to conduct accurate interviews.

Behavioral Simulations

Simulations are designed to mirror important challenges within a particular job. When properly designed, they provide candidates with a realistic view of the skill requirements of the position and provide a forum for the candidate to demonstrate job relevant skills in a high fidelity representation of critical job demands.

- **Current Trends** – There are an increasing number of web-based simulations. Virtual reality technology is transforming the ability to simulate realistic work challenge and capture realistic candidate responses. However, it will still be some time before technology can replace trained assessors for providing insightful feedback and maximizing developmental impact.

- **Recommendations** - Use behavioral simulations at the executive level – The time and costs associated with simulations and trained assessors can be justified at the executive level. The impact of an executive’s performance on the organization argues strongly to take the time to thoroughly review candidate skills and qualifications.

Overall Implications for Talent Management Technology

Technology providers need to do more than making poor hiring practices more efficient. They need to provide embedded candidate evaluation tools as an integrated part of their external talent management processes. These tools would include:

- **Custom screening questionnaires**
- **Personality, experience, and mental ability tests**
- **Comprehensive job and talent profiling processes to match talent to job requirements**
- **Complete interviewing management capabilities**

By simply implementing some of these basic components, you can ensure that your organization is placing the right person, in the right position, at the right time ... every time.

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About OMNIview

OMNIview was created around the belief that talent selection and talent management is critical to the success of any organization. Founded by internationally recognized business leader and leadership talent management authority, Dr. Lowell Hellervik, **OMNIview** is supported by more than 90 years of academic experience by behavior science business experts. We know effective selection and talent management requires measurement and support that drives game-changing talent decisions for organizations.

OMNIview is all about making your life easier by giving you the data you need to make smart, effective decisions regarding talent at a fraction of the cost of other HR software companies.

Contact us at 877-426-6222 or visit us at www.theomniview.com.

