

Are All Assessments Alike?

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Are all assessments alike? The short answer is a resounding NO. There are many kinds of assessment tools available for use. The right assessments can greatly increase the accuracy and efficiency of your hiring decisions but finding the right assessments can be a challenge of its own. This document will give you a brief description of the different kinds of assessment tools that are available to you and provide some tips on how to choose the one(s) that works best for you.

Assessment Types

Structured Interviews

You may not think of an interview as an assessment, but it is if you are asking specific competency-related questions and evaluating the responses with ratings. The most accurate and effective interviews are structured, meaning that the same questions are posed to all candidates, and focused on relevant competencies. The most effective types of interview questions are past behavior which ask candidates about specific examples of demonstrating a specific behavior. For example: Tell me about a time when you had to give constructive feedback to an employee.

Biographical Data

Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Gathering information and asking questions about past experiences can be done through the use of biographical data questions. These questions can be included in an application or an online assessment. For example: How many times have you been terminated from a previous employer in the last five years?

Personality Inventories

Underlying personality traits and characteristics have been shown to be predictive of job performance across jobs and industries. Typically personality is measured through a series of personal belief statements and candidates are asked to rate their agreement. These items measure one's feelings, interests and beliefs and use that information to draw conclusions about certain competencies. For example: I enjoy being the leader of a group.

Situational Judgment

In addition to knowing what candidates have done and how they think and feel, situational judgment items tell you what they would do in certain situations. These assessments present hypothetical scenarios to candidates and ask them to rate the effectiveness of different responses. For example: You are the leader of a group and one of your employees blatantly ignores a safety policy. How would you rate the effectiveness of the following response? A) Ask your employee to come to your office for a direction conversation about the violation.

Simulations

Many candidates have not held a job similar to the one for which they are applying. Simulations allow employers to see how they would perform in a similar environment to the one in which they would be working. Simulations can take many forms such as, role playing and in-basket exercises. Some manufacturing organizations may have actual production exercises that require a candidate to demonstrate similar physical work or complete computer simulations that mirror the process monitoring that would be done on the job.

Cognitive Ability

These assessment measure one's intelligence and ability to learn. How smart someone is has been shown to be highly related to job performance. However, given its relationship to adverse impact, it is important to build an assessment system that uses more than just cognitive ability.

Motivational Fit

Most assessments focus on candidates' ability to do the job. After finding out if candidates CAN do the job, it is important to look at if they WANT to do the job. Motivational fit questions look at the job characteristics as compared to the candidate's desired job. A mismatch can lead to turnover and absenteeism, which are very costly for organizations. For example: What was your favorite job and why?

Technical Knowledge

These assessments focus on the specific knowledge that candidates need to know to perform the job. For example, an electrician must have a certain level of electrical knowledge.

Tips

- **Use Multiple Assessments** – a strong hiring funnel will have multiple steps and will use well-developed assessment tools at each stage. For example, a standard hiring funnel for hiring a leader/manager might include a resume screen, structured phone interview, online assessment battery and a final structured interview. The table below shows how these four steps actually use eight different types of assessments. By doing so, you increase the accuracy, efficiency and utility of your assessment process.

	Resume Screen	Phone Interview	Online Battery	Structured Interview
Biographical Data	✓			
Motivational Fit	✓	✓		✓
Past Behavior Interview Questions		✓		✓
Personality			✓	
Situational Judgment			✓	
Cognitive Ability			✓	
Simulation: Role Play		✓		✓
Simulation: In-basket			✓	

- **Match the competency or skill to the assessment.** The most accurate and appropriate assessment depends on what you are trying to measure. Each assessment type has its own strengths and weaknesses. You wouldn't want to use a personality assessment to measure presentation skills. If that skill is important, a simulation would be more appropriate.
- **Be efficient.** Place assessments in your hiring funnel where they can add the most value. The most comprehensive assessments should be placed farther down the funnel where you have fewer candidates. However, if you have very high volume at the top of the funnel, find a shorter assessment that can help to screen out many of the less qualified candidates.
- **Use Pre-employment Assessments.** Make sure you use assessments that were developed for selection. Many assessments available were meant for another purpose – usually clinical or informational. You want to find an assessment that has clear information about validity and reliability. Be wary of assessments that are one size fits all or provide a category or 'label'. Those types of assessments were not developed for pre-employment testing.
- **Be Consistent & Relevant.** Whatever assessments you use, use them consistently. Establish standards and apply them to every candidate the same way. Make sure the assessments and their measurements are relevant to the target position. Just because an assessment contains a measurement does not mean that you have to use it in your decision making – do not use it if it is not important to success on the job.

In sum, no – not all assessments are alike. If you have difficulty sifting through all of your options, call in assessment experts who can show you the best solution for you and your target position.