

## The right test for the right hire

*But HR must understand the job before choosing an assessment*

BY SHAWN BAKKER

There are few things in HR that have such a level of apprehension, myth and misunderstanding as behavioural assessments. Yet when used correctly these tools can help organizations hire more effective employees, reduce turnover and save time and money.

HR professionals already use a wide variety of assessment tools. Interviews, application reviews and reference checks are forms of assessments used to judge how well a candidate fits with the job. Behavioural assessments are an extension of these other processes.

Behavioural assessments are standardized, structured tools that predict how an individual will carry himself at work. They provide information about how someone will communicate with others, solve problems, set goals, deal with stress, manage change and learn. They can predict how someone will lead others and how effective he will be at sales.

Behavioural assessments can measure many different characteristics and skills in a short period of time. Though most of these assessment tools can be completed in 30

minutes, they can provide much more information than could be gained in a longer interview.

Behavioural assessments also allow HR to quickly ascertain how well an individual fits the job requirements. With standardized scoring HR can quickly compare how well a person's characteristics line up with the needs of the job. They are reliable and consistent, eliminating the subjective bias that creeps into even the best developed interviews. As a result, all candidates are compared objectively and fairly.

There are three steps to using behavioural assessments:

- analyze the job and get a clear picture of what it requires;
- identify the skills and characteristics a person needs to do the job; and
- select assessment tools that measure those skills and characteristics

A Canadian lumber producer used these steps to improve its selection of sawmill operators. The job analysis revealed the most important skills an employee needed were to closely follow work procedures and be able to work closely with others in a stressful environment.

With this "shopping list," the company was able to

search for behavioural assessments that would best measure these characteristics. Having identified an assessment instrument, the company was able to decrease its time to hire, improve job performance through reduced accidents and reduce turnover by placing people in jobs that fit with their skills and personal style.

### What are you hiring for?

Understanding the job is absolutely critical when selecting a behavioural assessment. HR or the hiring manager needs to identify the key tasks and activities an employee needs to complete in order to be successful. This information helps HR choose the best behavioural assessment.

An accounting firm recently discovered how important this step is. The firm was considering using behavioural assessments to hire auditors. An examination of the firm's current practice revealed candidates who were friendly and pleasant passed the interview stage with greater frequency than those who were less outgoing.

However, when current auditors' job performance was linked to their personality assessment results, the firm discovered outgoing au-

ditors were among the poor performers. In essence, the firm's interview process was selecting people who were less effective at the job.

What went wrong? Recruiters didn't take into account that auditors spend more time working with data than with people.

So while behavioural assessments could help the firm select better auditors, they could only do so when the firm knew what a good auditor was like and therefore knew what to look for.

### Questions to ask when assessing a job

When assessing the job, HR needs to ask the following questions:

- What tasks are involved?
- What does the job holder do for most of the day?
- What things must be done effectively if a person is going to be good at the job?

*Shawn Bakker is a psychologist with Psychometrics Canada, an Edmonton-based organization involved in the application of psychology in work, careers and education. He can be reached at [sbakker@psychometrics.com](mailto:sbakker@psychometrics.com) or (780) 469-2268. For more information, visit [www.psychometrics.com](http://www.psychometrics.com).*