

PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENT

The whole process of recruiting new staff is remarkably hazardous. Make a good appointment, and you may have someone who will be five times as efficient as your least effective employee. Make the wrong appointment, and you may have recruited the employee from hell! Such mistakes can be extremely costly, especially for small businesses where they will have a disproportionate influence.

There are only two obvious sources of information available about a potential employee. Firstly the documentation – application forms, CVs, references, work history – and secondly, direct observation – typically interviews, but also assessment centres where candidates simulate some aspects of the job they are applying for. You will know only too well that *neither* of these sources of information are 100% reliable. CVs and application forms and references are, at best, part of the truth. To make things worse, we are notoriously bad at summing other people up. Pick up any newspaper and you will find stories about how one person's judgement of another let them – or the public – down.

There is a third source of information, and given the uncertainties about staff selection, it is not surprising that it has become pretty standard practice. When you apply for a job in any major company or government department these days, you should expect to be asked to take some tests. Psychometric tests provide information about a candidate's abilities and aptitudes and about their temperament. The benefit of recruiting people with the right abilities will be obvious. The importance of temperament may need some explanation.

There will be jobs which you, or anybody else, will never do well because their temperament or personality would get in the way. Shy people can't sell, highly imaginative people cannot do repetitive or detailed tasks, irritable people don't make effective customer service reps, energetic or ambitious people can't do jobs where there are no prospects of promotion, people who are talkative and sociable can't work in isolation, and so on. By the time you are adult, these characteristics are very difficult to change. The best appointments are those where the employee's temperament actually facilitates job performance, rather than interfering with it - situations where the lucky employee remarks "I love my job so much, I can't believe I get paid for doing this". This is the outcome we are looking for with psychometric testing.

Psychometric testing has more than 100 years of history behind it. Governments have lead the field in using these techniques – particularly at war time when thousands of recruits have to be allocated to jobs and where lives may depend on efficiency. Test publishing for businesses emerged in the 1920s. The technology has improved dramatically over time and the internet has boosted these activities dramatically as broadband connections reach into most businesses and many homes.

Like other selection methods, psychometric testing is less than perfectly reliable, but in this territory you need all the help you can get! Tests cannot make selection decisions for you, but adding this approach to whatever selection procedures you use now can only add to the confidence of your appointments. The latest online sites are very accessible and user friendly. Try, for example, www.profilematchassessments.com where you can pick the competencies that you want to assess and set up some assessments for your next staff appointment. Alternatively, to complete a questionnaire yourself and receive a report that is all about YOU, go to the home page of that website and click on the 'Sold Out' link, then enter the Access Code 'soldout' to access the questionnaire.

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