MCQUAIG PRESENTS

THE QUICK GUIDE
TO PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

These days, asking a job candidate to do some sort of pre-employment task, test, or presentation is becoming commonplace and there's a very good reason why. Interviews and resumes, the bedrock of hiring tactics, are becoming less able to accurately predict performance. In fact, research shows that hiring based on an unstructured interview alone only accounts for 14% of an employee's performance.[1] Aren't you interested in knowing what the other 86% is indicative of? Yet again and again hiring managers fall into the same familiar habits of "trusting their gut."

Pre-screening, structured interviews, and reference checking all help to increase the odds finding that great candidate, but most of our typical hiring tactics focus on past performance. Sure, your candidate might have excelled in their last job and wowed their references, but does that really tell you how effective they will be in their next role? There is a difference between what a candidate appears to do, what they can do, and what they will do in future. To give yourself the best shot at accurately predicting candidate success, you're going to have to go beyond traditional hiring tactics and consider bringing in some help in the form of a pre-hire assessment.

What do the numbers say?

Do assessments actually help you hire better? Well, the proof is in the results:

- Resumes are not always accurate with 85% of them containing false information to some degree[2]

- When it comes to wrong hires, 74% of employers admit they've picked the wrong person for a position[3]

- Talent Board's 2016 report shows that 82% of US companies use some form of pre-hire assessment testing[4]

- Companies who use pre-hire assessments report a decrease of 39% in turnover[5]

- Hiring managers report being 36% more satisfied with their final hiring decision when using assessments[6]

- Businesses using assessments are 24% more likely to see goal exceeding behaviour from their employees[7]

With stats like that, isn't it worth exploring what the power of assessments can do for your next hire?
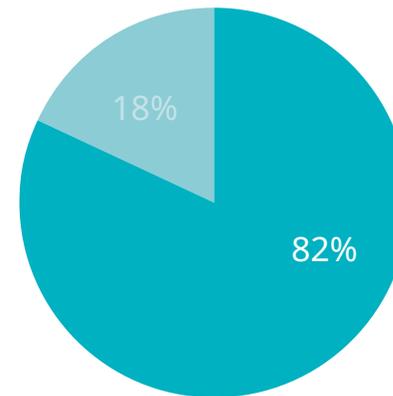
82% of US companies use pre-hire assessments

What is a personality assessment?

Personality assessments go far beyond surface level data to probe at the inner workings of a candidate's temperament and attitude. Unlike opinions or learned behaviours, personality is far more static and therefore far more useful to predict long term performance. Can a new worker learn a task they've never tried before? With coaching, yes. Can they become a different type of person if the role requires it? No, not easily. That disconnect between job and candidate fit can quickly become a source of stress and frustration which might even lead to early turnover. But when you use personality assessments, you can explore that fit among other benefits such as:

- **Fit**: Assessments help to better align positions with the people who have the skills or traits to excel in those roles

- **Honesty**: Tests are useful in getting beyond the positive projection most job seekers bring to an interview in order to more accurately predict job success within a specific position

- **Performance**: Taking a collection of traits into account, assessments can predict how a candidate will approach complex problems, critical thinking, and learning[8]

- **Personality or attitude**: How does your candidate look at the world? Tests highlight the natural behaviours and inclinations your candidate leans towards

- **Communication style**: Understanding how a candidate learns and communicates will help tailor the right kind of onboarding and management approach they'll require to succeed

- **Fairness**: Assessments allow every candidate to be compared along the same traits or to the same benchmark, evening the playing field while providing deeper insight into each candidate

The theory behind personality assessments

If you've ever walked through the psychology section of your local library, you'll know there are many theories when it comes to personality. Not all personality systems are created equal, however. While those online quizzes that predict your personality based on a few quick clicks are certainly fun, they're not going to get to the heart of what personality truly is or how it can be properly measured. When it comes to personality, the prevailing school of thought believes it is derived from five fundamental factors, often called the Big Five or OCEAN.[9] These traits consist of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Taken together, these factors cover all aspects of personality and can then be used to predict behaviour and beliefs. Let's explore what these traits mean and why they are so fundamental to personality assessment development.

The five traits include:

Openness: Are you inventive and curious or consistent and cautious? This trait explores the extent to which a person is open to new experiences and interests.

Conscientiousness: Are you efficient and organized or easy going and personable? This trait is closely tied to how reliable, organized, and thorough a person can be.

Extraversion: Are you outgoing and energetic or private and reserved? Extroverts draw energy from others while introverts draw it from within. This trait explores the balance between the two.

Agreeableness: Are you friendly and compassionate or analytical and focused? People who score high in this area are often cooperative and compassionate while lower scores are associated with being more distant.

Neuroticism: Are you sensitive and nervous or secure and confident? Think of this trait as emotional stability. Those with high scores may report feeling moody or tense. Lower scores are associated with more positive emotions and feelings.

One large caveat to note is that no specific trait score is better or worse than any other. The way a candidate responds across all traits and how those factors interact together is what paints the picture of who they really are. After all, there's is no one right personality. There are simply people who might do better in a role than others based on the requirements of that position.

The science behind personality assessments

Personality assessments are typically self-report styled tests designed to explore the introspective constructs that define personality and temperament. Given the variety of options available, it's important to know what to look for when selecting a strong tool. Avoid the flurry of free tests online and look for a psychometrically valid measures published by a trusted test developer who will put the assessment through rigorous testing to ensure the accuracy of the results.

A real personality assessment should include strong validity and reliability factors to support the integrity of the test.

Reliability

This test property refers to how consistently a test measures a trait or topic. If a person takes a test three times and gets different results, for example, then the test is not a reliable measure as you can't depend or trust the scores you receive. Strong reliability means the test will provide stable and consistent results even over time or across multiple test takers. There are multiple forms of reliability (such as test-retest reliability and inter-rater reliability) and a test's technical manual should be able to provide more information on what types of reliability were used to create the assessment.

Validity

This property refers to how well the test measures what it says it will measure. It is arguable the most important factor of a test because you want to be very sure the results you interpret are really related to the concept you were trying to quantify. Again, there are multiple forms of validity (such as criterion-

related validity and construct validity) that a technical manual should explore in more depth if you really want to dig into the stats of an assessment.

Also keep in mind, it's possible for an assessment to be reliable but not valid, but it's not possible to be valid and not reliable. The most commonly used example of this is a bathroom scale. Assuming your weight is stable, a scale should always tell you the same result no matter when you weigh yourself, which is reliability. However, if the scale is skewed 10 pounds heavier, your weight will consistently be reporting the same number, but it will not be your actual weight. That's validity. A strong test should be able to do both and if it can't, you should keep looking before bringing an assessment into your hiring process.

Extra features of excellent assessment tools

If all else is equal in terms of how the tests were developed, another factor to consider are the features of an assessment beyond their psychometric properties. Such as:

Reports

Once your candidate takes an assessment, how do you interpret the results? Will your test just spit out a bunch of numbers and percentiles or has a report been developed to help you understand the results and inform your next steps? Creating reports tied directly to a test's online scoring is not easy and not all publishers develop their report options to the same standards. When selecting your tool, make sure to ask to see a copy of the report results and look for features such as visually represented metrics, easy-to-read statistics, results driven predictions of performance, and recommendations for next steps, interview questions, or job/culture fit determinations.

Training

If you can use an assessment right out of the box with no training, you may be investing in too simple a tool. Hiring is a complex practice with many moving parts, and you want a measure that's robust enough to stand up to that level of uncertainty. Most in-depth assessments provide training or certification to ensure you are interpreting the results correctly and fairly. Training can range from in-person sessions, to online courses, to webinars, but regardless of which methods is offered, taking the time to learn the ins and outs of your chosen assessment can save time and frustration late on.

Customer Service

One factor to choosing a test that doesn't always come quickly to mind is the availability of support. Sometimes scores might be borderline or hard to interpret. Or maybe your login failed and you have a candidate five minutes away. When using assessments gets tricky, it's important to know there's someone who can help if you need them. Investigate the customer service offered between different publishers and consider that information when making your decision.

What are personality tests not recommended for?

Wouldn't it be nice if one test was the answer to all your hiring needs? Unfortunately, one test alone will never be able to definitively tell you who to hire. That's why it's best practice to combine multiple tactics. Hiring should never happen in a vacuum and even the best testing tool is only a single strategy in your hiring toolkit. The more tools you combine, the better picture of your candidate you'll develop. Assessments can uncover information in a way no other hiring method can, it's true, but it shouldn't be used as a definitive hiring decision. That being said, there are some who try to use personality tests as a magic wand despite the dangers that poses so let's cover a few things personality assessments should never be used for.
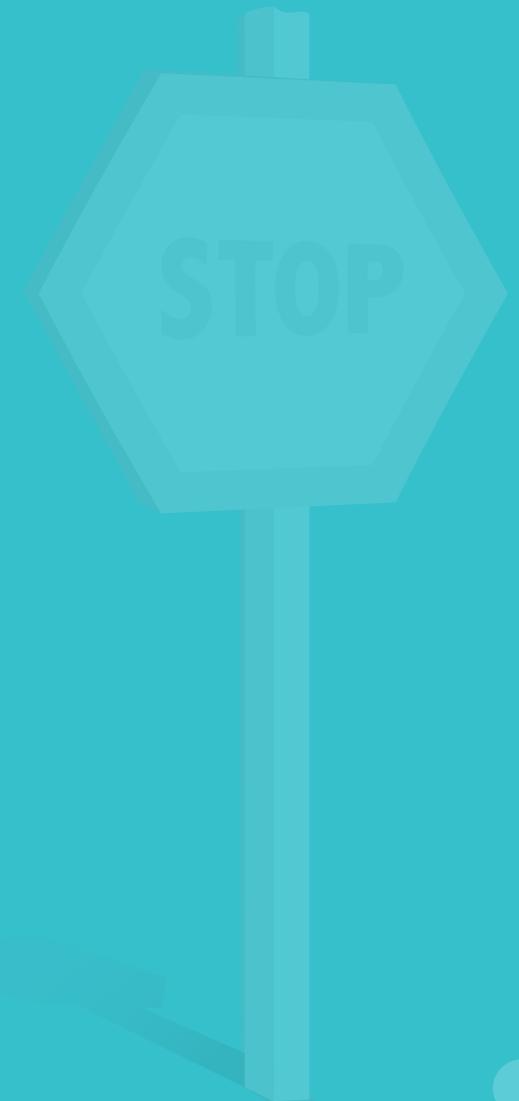
Tips to keep in mind

Avoid discrimination

When talking about personality traits it's easy to start thinking that some are better than others and then hiring for those factors specifically. The dangers of focusing on one personality type, however, can lead to the creation of myopic teams who all share the same viewpoint. It can stifle the creativity and innovation that should be flowing into the company with each new hire and can turn into active discrimination against certain people. A better approach would be to benchmark what collection of traits an individual role might require to succeed and then taking a holistic view of each candidate against that benchmark to better determine job and culture fit.

Be aware of situational factors

The results of a personality test should never be read in a vacuum but instead used to develop interview questions to probe areas of concern more thoroughly. It is important to note that while personality tests measure static concepts, there is a very human element to assessment that hiring managers should take into consideration. If a candidate gets in a fender bender on their way to take their test, their responses might be skewed to reflect the heightened stress and mental state they were in at the time. These tests are a snapshot in time and real life can sometimes get in the way so when in doubt, ask questions to see if any intervening factors are at play.

Assessments are not crystal balls

It's worth reiterating that using assessments is only one step in the hiring process. A person is more than a collection of results run through a computer system, no matter how sophisticated. Assessments can shed light on information that would be hard for a hiring manager to glean otherwise, but they should still be used in conjunction with resumes, screening methods, structured interviewing, reference checking, and other tactics that help to determine job potential.
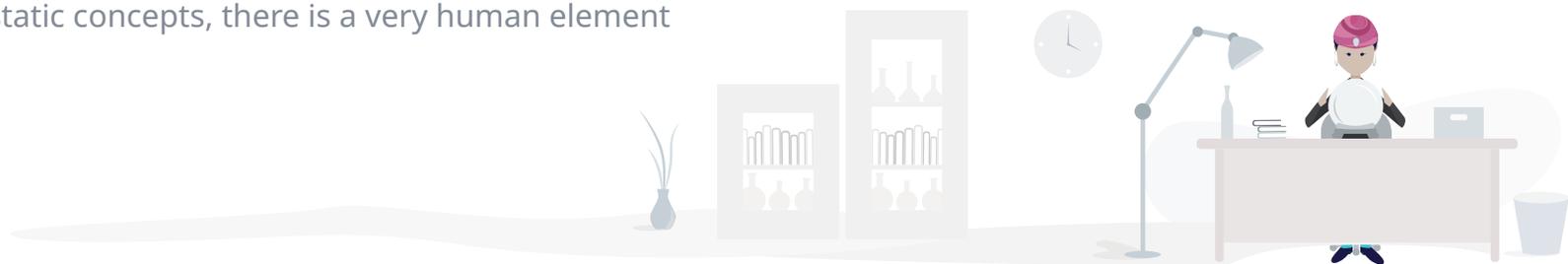
When should personality assessments be used?

Now that you understand how tests are made and what they should be used for, the only remaining question is when exactly do you use them? The best practice is:

- Between the screening call and the interview

- Between interview 1 and 2 for interview with multiple rounds

Regardless of which timeline you choose to follow, every candidate should be assessed at the same point in the process to ensure an even playing field. This also allows you to compare traits and strengths across all your candidates in a fair manner and should inform the interview questions you choose to ask.

One approach to avoid is giving an assessment as the last activity in the hiring process. When used correctly, assessments should inform the interview process, not be the decision maker between who does and doesn't get a job. If you don't tie assessment results into the interview itself, not only are you using tests in a discriminatory manner, but you're losing the value of probing areas of strength or weakness during the interview that might lead you to make a better hiring decision.

Conclusion

Hiring is getting harder and predicting future performance is never easy. Pre-hire assessment can help light the way to a deeper, fairer understanding of your candidates. From informing interview questions, to designing a tailored onboarding, to ongoing career development, assessments can provide the insight and recommendations to take your talent management strategy to the next level. And the power of assessments goes beyond just helping you make the right hire from a group of candidates. Companies who routinely use pre-hire assessments report:

• Lower turnover rates especially in the first 3 months

• Quicker hiring with a deeper understanding of the new employee

• Higher engagement as people are sorted into the right roles

• Higher productivity from matching the best management approach to the candidate

• Stronger teams with everyone understanding each others' communication styles

Don't fall victim to hiring mistakes when pre-hire assessments provide a better way to recruit. Learn who your candidates are before they start their first day of work and grow a workforce strong enough to achieve your company's mission.

Notes

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6   Lahey, Z. (2015). The Pros and Cons of Pre-Employment Screenings - Aberdeen. Retrieved from https://www.aberdeen.com/hcm-essentials/the-pros-and-cons-of-pre-employment-screenings/

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