

## Effective Use of Psychological Tests for Employee and Leadership Development

In a previous article in the HR Voice, we focused on using psychometric assessments for employee selection (Neault & Pickerell, 2006). This article will highlight important factors to consider when implementing an assessment strategy for your existing employees and management/executive team.

There are endless tests available to human resource professionals, some with “glitzy” marketing strategies than others. How can you sort through the hype to ensure a solid Return on Investment (ROI) for your testing initiatives? The following tips will help you navigate the maze...

1. **Why test?** Know your purpose before you even look at a test. What are you hoping to learn about your employees or leaders? What do you hope they will learn about themselves? Organizations use tests for such diverse initiatives as team-building and career/leadership development programs, performance coaching, and screening for Employee Assistance Program referrals (e.g., substance abuse, occupational stress, or depression).
2. **What tests are available?** Most test distributors have an online presence today (e.g., a website or full e-catalogue and online store). However, it can take days of browsing through websites and stacks of printed catalogues to generate a short list of tests to consider. This might be a stage where it's helpful to work with a consultant with specialized knowledge about testing but without an attachment to a particular “brand.”
3. **How do I choose?** Many tests have overlapping purposes, so it can be difficult to choose the most effective collection of tools to get your job done. Too many tests are a waste of the organization's money and the employees' time. Too few tests, however, might result in over-emphasizing one particular result. For example, one of our senior management clients had results on two different assessments that seemed to contradict each other – he scored moderately on the Extraversion scale on one assessment and on the Introversion scale on another. In exploring these results, he was able to finally understand why he needed a people-oriented job but also required some private space and quiet time at the end of the day – he described himself as an Extraverted Introvert. In making your choices, consider budget, time (to administer, score, and present the results), the specific purposes for assessment, and how the results will be used. Then, look carefully at the test profiles and scales (many online tests have sample reports) to select the battery of assessments that will most efficiently get your results. This impacts ROI.
4. **Who will conduct the testing?** Some tests are restricted for purchase and administration by “qualified” users. Typically, qualifications are assessed based on formal academic training in tests and measurements or specific training with a particular assessment tool. If you are planning to use one or two specific assessments with every employee in a large organization, it likely makes sense to hire an individual qualified to administer that test and interpret the results (or to send

one of your existing HR professionals for training. Contact us for more information about where training is available.) However, if you are planning on using a variety of tests, perhaps with small groups at a time, it might give you a better ROI to partner with an external psychometric specialist.

- 5. What ROI can we expect?** Of course, there's no "one size fits all" answer for this one. However, ROI calculations should definitely form part of your testing strategy. Begin by considering the costs of not testing your existing employees. Are you experiencing increased sick days – perhaps the Occupational Stress Inventory would reveal some important patterns to consider? Is retention an issue? Perhaps a clear commitment to career development within the organization would help – a comprehensive battery of career assessments can help individuals to identify career goals and provide concise information to aid HR managers and coaches with career pathing initiatives. Is performance coaching somewhat hit and miss? A well-chosen battery of assessments can help to pinpoint the specific problem before thousands of dollars are spent unnecessarily on coaching, enhanced supervision, or severance packages. Has teamwork ground to a halt? Perhaps a team-building workshop using an assessment of preferred personal style can help team members to voice their needs and learn how to accommodate diverse styles and preferences.

Use appropriately, psychological testing can be a valuable addition to your HR toolkit. However, with the excessive number of tests on the market today, selecting the right tests can be overwhelming. We hope that these tips help you get started.

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