

Background

Psychometric testing – good or bad for business?

Recruiting a new member of staff can be one of the most important decisions any company makes. It's widely acknowledged that the way employees work and interact with each other affects the day-to-day success of a company. New employees have to be able to fit in with existing staff members and existing systems. Get the decision right and you can ensure continuity. Get the decision wrong and you could harm the whole running of a department or organization. It is no wonder so many companies are turning to psychometric tests to help them choose their latest recruit.

Psychometric tests are ways of measuring a person's abilities or personality in a structured way, and are usually presented as multiple-choice tests. They are used by employers to get an overview of a candidate and to measure their suitability for the role. There are obvious advantages of using this type of testing. It tends to provide a fair and objective method of measuring potential recruits. The test results can provide a good insight into the candidates' current abilities and their future potential. They are quick to administer and easy to score due to the standardized scoring system. This means that despite the initial investment required to train the staff who are administering them, they are actually extremely cost-effective as they simplify and shorten the expensive recruitment process and help to ensure that companies employ the right people the first time round. In addition they can also be a good way to help candidates improve their levels of self-awareness and can encourage them to seek improvement in areas they are not scoring well in.

Despite the benefits, some people question the use of psychometric tests. Jason Sindall, an HR specialist claims that there are drawbacks and these tests should not be relied on exclusively. 'These tests should be seen as one source of information only. They should not cloud your judgement, but give

you one line of questioning that you can use in the interview. The worry is that these tests will lead to recruiters making up their minds about people before they meet them. Remember that if the test score shows that someone seems to have the necessary leadership traits, this does not mean they have the experience that will enable them to take advantage of their natural personality traits effectively.' It's also possible that candidates can 'learn' how to do the tests by studying the question types in advance. This will affect the outcome of the tests as there is a real possibility that candidates could give the answers that they know the employer will want, rather than honest answers.

Companies that do decide to use them in their recruitment process find that there are many different tests available and care needs to be taken when choosing which one to use. Jason Sindall explains that 'the chosen test has to be relevant for the job in question and it needs to have been professionally developed and proven to be reliable.' Assessors also need to have extensive training to enable them to interpret the data accurately. Sindall suggests that it is best to use more than one test with candidates. 'This will allow you to compare the results and will help you spot any inconsistencies or contradictions.'

So are these tests accurate? Well in a recent experiment conducted by the Personnel Today magazine, results suggest that they are. During the experiment, three HR managers were given three psychometric tests. All three of the guinea pigs were able to recognize themselves in the results and were surprised by the accuracy of the findings. So the overall message is that these tests seem to be a reliable way of getting information about potential new employees, but they should not be the only factor in the recruitment process. HR managers should still rely on their own instincts and trust their own judgements to help them make a final decision.

Reading file 8

Exercises

1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 What is a psychometric test?
- 2 Have you ever taken one?
- 3 How might psychometric tests be useful for a company?

2 Read the text quickly and compare your answers in 1 with the information in the text.

3 Read the text again and decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- 1 Psychometric testing can help a company select a new member of staff.
- 2 The tests are extremely time-consuming.
- 3 The results of the tests can also help the candidate.
- 4 There is a concern that the tests could give recruiters the wrong idea about a candidate.
- 5 It is impossible for a candidate to lie on the test.
- 6 There are many different types of psychometric test.
- 7 Ideally, candidates should do only one test.
- 8 In the experiment, the results showed that the tests are unreliable.

4 Read the text again, then work with a partner and complete the following table with advantages and disadvantages of psychometric testing.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• can measure the current abilities and future potential of a candidate	

5 Match 1–8 to a–h to form collocations, then refer to the text to check your answers.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 to rely | a any inconsistencies |
| 2 to measure | b on your own instincts |
| 3 to provide | c up your mind |
| 4 to cloud | d data |
| 5 to make | e a good insight |
| 6 to interpret | f an experiment |
| 7 to spot | g your judgement |
| 8 to conduct | h someone's / something's suitability |

6 Work with a partner. Using the text to help you, write definitions for the collocations you formed in 5.

7 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

8 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.

- 1 Are psychometric tests common in your country?
- 2 Would you use psychometric tests in your recruitment process if you were an employer? Why? / Why not?
- 3 How do you think companies can best avoid recruiting under-performers?
- 4 How can employers ensure that good employees stay with their companies?