Psychometric Assessments - A Useful Tool for Selection and Development.

With the significant costs of "dehiring", as well as those associated with hiring and training a new employee, organizations have sought ways to improve the accuracy of their hiring decisions and the effectiveness of their in-house human resources development. As many organizations are learning, psychometric assessment can contribute significantly to these activities. However, psychometric assessment must be applied appropriately and used thoughtfully.

Which test?

Finding the right kind of test is not easy. Although there are hundreds of test purveyors making lofty claims about the accuracy of the tools they are selling as well as extolling the simplicity, straightforwardness, and easy interpretation of their psychometric tests, appearances can be misleading. How does the consumer know which test to use?

While no psychometric test will predict human behavior with 100% accuracy, some are definitely better than others. You will want to use psychometric tests that have good predictive validity (to what degree does it predict on the job performance), content validity (does it measure what it purports to measure) and reliability (are the results consistent from one time to the next). If the test vendor does not provide specific information regarding these performance criteria, it immediately calls into question the legitimacy of the test itself.

Whether you are doing a leadership assessment in-house or using an outside consultant, the first thing you need to do is to create a competency model, skills list or, in the case of a selection assessment for a specific role, undertake a job analysis. This will enable you to determine the relevant skills and attributes for which you need to test. You can then look at the various psychometric assessment tools to see which ones evaluate those particular skills and attributes. In addition, effective executive assessment professionals work with their clients to ensure a shared understanding of the qualities to be measured, and any organizational environment factors that would affect the job success, such as organizational culture.

Psychometric assessment tests may be administered by paper and pencil, or on-line. Depending on your need, you should determine how a test can be administered, e.g., you may have a candidate in Saskatchewan who needs to be assessed remotely. Can the psychometric testing be done on-line?
Generally, psychometric assessment techniques will aim to identify an individual's orientation in three broad areas: abilities, personality and style, and interests. Competent executive assessment specialists will employ rigorous standards to select the best, most statistically robust psychometric tests available in each of these areas and apply them in the right way.

**What do the results mean?**

Psychometric tests fall into three categories in terms of accessibility. There are some psychometric tests that can be purchased, administered and interpreted by human resource managers with no special training. These are commonly called "A level" tests. There are also "B level" tests that require a degree in psychology or specific training in test interpretation. “Level C” tests require the person administering them to have a Ph.D. in psychology and/or specific training and experience. While the last two levels require professional interpretation or specific training to interpret results correctly, even so-called “A level tests” can cause problems for the layperson. If, for example, you decided to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (a measure of style preference) to gauge interpersonal communications skills on the job, an undifferentiated result (where a candidate did not clearly fit into any of the personality "types") would be very difficult for a layperson to interpret.

One can also run into problems when a psychometric test generates results that hint at "clinical issues" i.e.: are suggestive of psychological instability. Misinterpretation of these kinds of results, especially if they influence a hiring decision, can have significant consequences for the user if the hiring decision is challenged. Getting the expertise of a professional trained in organizational psychometric assessment is a good investment, particularly for hiring initiatives.

**How do I use the results?**

Development assessments can be targeted to identify an individual's key strengths, as well as areas for development that could negatively impact on a person's ability to demonstrate their full potential. This can be an efficient way to target training and development resources.

In a selection assessment, discussion with the executive assessment professional regarding the results can support accurate interpretation and application of the results to the hiring decision data. Used early on in the hiring process, psychometric assessment data can suggest areas for “digging” during the interview phase or later on, when checking references. The executive assessment professional can even design behavioral interview questions for this purpose, based on assessment findings. Used after interviewing, psychometric assessment results can serve as a vehicle to clarify questions or concerns raised during the interview. Executive assessment results can also assist in the "on boarding" process after an individual is hired. Human resources and hiring managers can determine areas of strength to leverage, and areas for additional support and coaching.

Most human resource professionals recognize that selection and development initiatives should not be based on one approach. Interviewing, reference checks, work history and performance data, as well as the use of psychometric assessment should all be part of such undertakings. This will ensure that data is available from multiple, independent sources thereby providing a system of checks and balances that strengthens the process. Psychometric assessment can be a valuable part of this tool kit.
HERE ARE SOME DO'S AND DON'TS TO HELP GUIDE YOU:

**DO** make sure you have a clear understanding of what qualities (i.e.: competencies or occupational requirements) you want to measure. Doing a competency or job analysis is a smart first step.

**DO** find out how the psychometric testing is administered and whether that format meets your needs (e.g. on-line assessment)

**DON'T** use tests without other supporting data. Psychometric assessment tests should always be used in conjunction with structured behavioural interviews, reference checks, and other data gathering methods.

**DO** remember that human behaviour is the outcome of the interaction between personality and environment. This means that you must consider the context of the work environment as well as the person. A person may be very successful in one organization but unsuccessful in a different organization as a result of a poor fit with the culture, boss, etc.

**DON'T** expect any psychometric test to predict human behavior with complete accuracy. Psychometric tests aren't magic. They should be used as guides, not deciding factors and as with most other things, if it looks too good to be true it probably is.

**DO** seek out the advice and expertise of an executive assessment specialist, if you have any concerns about your ability to deal with the challenges of psychometric assessment. They can help make assessment a useful tool for selection and development.