

Inc.

7 Tips for Using Personality Assessments to Hire

By Kay McFadden
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Personality assessments, also known as behavioral or predictive assessments, are more than qualifying a candidate for a slot, says Dr. Todd Harris, Director of Research for the Predictive Index (PI), which has been providing behavioral assessments to organizations of all sizes around the globe since 1955.

"We call it 'seeking a multi-level match,'" says Harris. "By that, we mean you're not just hiring someone for a job; the person needs to fit in other ways. There's the job, there's the fit between the individual and the manager, there's the company culture, and finally, there's the surrounding community."

Chuck Mollor, Managing Partner of MCG Partners, a leadership, sales and talent consulting firm, certified and a licensee of the Predictive Index (PI) adds, "The insight gained by understanding the behavioral strengths, tendencies, motivations and drives of people you are hiring impacts not only job and cultural fit, but how you on-board, manage performance, develop and engage your people."

But to choose the right tool and maximize its benefits, employers often must begin by broadening how they think of the process. Here are seven things to consider when deciding to use or not use personality assessments.

1. Great Executives Aren't Necessarily Great At Hiring.

"Research has shown that the people most confident in their abilities to predict and measure who will be successful at a given company or role actually tend to be the least good at it," says Harris. "There's an over-confidence with a direct correlation to lack of hiring success, whether the business is big or small."

Many leaders and business owners have great confidence in their abilities because of what they've achieved, and deservedly so. Just be aware it doesn't equal smart hiring. Additionally, small businesses can be further hampered by the lack of a fully functioned, in-house HR department.

So an assessment furnishes perspective, balance and fairness. "The data is unequivocal," says Harris. "If you use a consistent, well-validated approach versus a gut decision, you will make better hires over the long run. This is beyond dispute."

2. Hiring Is About Needs, Not Likes.

This may sound like a variation on the above, but it's actually a radical reworking of how assessments can help your business.

Stephen Shapiro is the author of four books on workplace innovation. His latest work is *Personality Poker*, which was inspired by the premise that executives gravitate to people who think like them – and that's a problem. "Everyone thinking the same way creates efficiencies," says Shapiro, who formerly led a 20,000-person innovation practice at Accenture. "But today you want innovation and growth to be competitive, and that can't happen in a monolithic culture."

"When you're an entrepreneurial organization, you especially need to make sure you hire people with a broad range of styles," says Shapiro. "So instead of weeding out people that don't fit, the recognition today is that different roles require different characteristics."

3. Assessments Can Provide Good ROI.

Every manager knows the cost of employee turnover is high. Still, that often had to be balanced against the costs of assessments and accompanying services. In the mid-2000's, the online world exploded. Assessments came within easy reach. Second, a proliferation in online job postings, even those a company didn't advertise, have flooded businesses with job-seekers in recent years. The resulting uptick in equally qualified applicants necessitates more tools for sorting them out.

4. Assessments Still Need Expert Assistance.

It's clear almost any manager can give and interpret a personality assessment. But that doesn't mean it's a good idea. For starters, there are legal concerns.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued criteria regarding the design and evaluation of assessments. So has the Supreme Court in its 2009 ruling, *Ricci v. DeStefano*. While hiring a third party doesn't absolve a business from liability, it underscores the necessity of using people with substantial knowledge in this area.

Many assessments, like PI, now tailor their products for all business sizes, and have scaled fees accordingly. At MCG Partners, PI Consultants will train key managers at a client firm to administer and analyze in-house for a starting fee of about \$7,000, including unlimited use of a job profiling tool.

5. Assessments Alone Are Not Enough.

Assessments are not a magic one-stop solution. There are multiple factors that can impact your performance and you need multiple steps in the hiring process to make an informed decision. "You need to consider the whole person – education, expertise, roles, organizations worked for, accomplishments and behavior when hiring a person, Mollor says. As Shapiro puts it, "The hiring process needs to consider the business process."

6. So How Do I Choose an Assessment?

This question was put to Harris, who's an Industrial Psychologist. He suggested the following checklist:

- What is the assessment designed to measure and accomplish, and how will that benefit the organization?

- Does the assessment come with an accompanying job analysis tool that allows for the thorough identification of a job's requirements?
- Is the assessment free of bias with respect to the respondent's age, gender or ethnic group?

- Is the assessment reliable? That is, are people's scores on it consistent and repeatable over time?
- Is the assessment valid? That is, does it effectively predict important workplace behaviors that drive metrics such as sales, customer satisfaction and turnover?
- Is documentation supporting questions above available in the form of a technical manual or equivalent document?
- Is research on questions above ongoing?
- What are the key "implementation issues" such as cost, time it takes to complete the assessment, data security, scalability across the organization, ongoing support from the vendor/consulting firm (does the vendor/consulting firm understand your business challenges), and degree of client self-sufficiency/knowledge transfer?

7. Assessment Starts Before, During and After Assessments.

Once you commit to assessment, assess your current staff, and the critical strengths, weaknesses and needs of your organization, roles and business. That way, you'll find an assessment that fits the need.

"The first step is defining the job challenge," says Shapiro. "Einstein said if he had an hour to save the world, he'd spend 59 minutes identifying the problem and one minute saving it." Assessments also can elevate the interviewing process – the "during" part.

"The information from these tools can be used to ask more informed questions that help you dig deeper," says Mollor. He reminds managers that the same assessment must be administered to all candidates (at that particular round of interview) for the same job to be non-discriminatory.

Finally, assessments should be a guidepost and not a fixed label.

"It's important for a business to keep in mind that both the person and more so the job and its role are not static these days," says Harris. "They are dynamic and malleable and evolve over time. People increasingly want to put their own signature or stamp on a job. Savvy organizations allow them to do that and realize in some ways those targets they are trying to hit are moving targets."