

## **DEMYSTIFYING PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENTS**

It was a mere ten years ago in South Africa that the debate over the applicability of psychometric testing raged.

The question of bias towards tested candidates and language barriers within the testing material formed key components of this debate.

Today however psychometric testing forms part of nearly every blue chip company's human resources strategy. With hundreds of new products now available this has become a growing market within the human resources product and services industry.

The term Psychometric assessment is frequently used in the business of recruitment and development but not many people out there understand what is meant by the term.

In the past a psychological test has conjured up thoughts of intelligence testing which immediately evokes feelings of extreme anxiety. However this could not be further from the truth as psychological tests cover every aspect of an individual's functioning including behaviour, intellectual potential, interests, motivation, attitudes, and emotions.

Basically a psychometric test is an objective, scientific process for assessing an individual's intellectual ability, personality style, developmental potential and needs. It is mainly used for the purposes of recruitment and selection, promotions, organisational restructuring, succession planning, careers counselling or retrenchment.

A psychological test is actually not a test at all, but rather a questionnaire designed to give information about a person's personality and behaviour so that these can be predicted for future performance. You cannot study for a psychological test nor can you fail one. Each individual has a unique set of characteristics which define who we are and the tests merely give us an insight into who that person is and what their needs are.

What most managers need to know is what the individual's current level of functioning is as well as the individual's potential for future development. By testing a person they can establish what a person is capable of in order to ensure the best fit between the individual, the job and the company.

If a test comes back with a negative result it does not necessarily mean that the person lacks good abilities, it simply means that the fit to that job may not be ideal. Everyone has an ideal job out there, it is just a matter of matching the right job with the right person, where the person can grow and develop. Assessments help the individual to identify what that ideal job would be.

Psychometric assessments should never be used by themselves but in stead in conjunction with the interview, performance appraisals, reference checks, CV's, etc, (as) a holistic approach. As most companies know, the cost of recruitment and executive search is high and the testing process takes the subjectivity out of the interview and results in more informed and scientific decisions.

Most psychometric tests take two fundamental design principles into account: they need to be valid and they need to be reliable. In order for a test to be valid it needs to measure what it claims to be measuring and for it to be reliable it needs to measure the same function consistently over time. If a test does not have proven validity and reliability it will be difficult to believe the results. An individual's score in itself does not mean much by

itself. It needs to be compared to a norm group which is a sample of the population relevant to that individual's age, qualifications, race, sex, etc

The law has very clear guidelines with respect to the use of psychometric tests and who can administer them and interpret them. The test battery can only be selected by a registered psychologist and administered by a trained professional who must be registered with the Health Professions Council. All results can only be interpreted and communicated to the client or candidate by a registered psychologist and is treated with extreme confidentiality.

Psychological tests therefore play a very important role in the fast paced and competitive business world of today and if used by correctly trained and experienced persons, can make a huge difference to a company's bottom line.

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