



6 ways to know which solutions really predict performance

The testing and assessment industry has aggressively expanded over the last two decades to include numerous solutions from hundreds, if not thousands of HR consultants, I/O psychologists, and technology vendors. But, one size does not fit all when it comes to testing and assessment solutions. The degree of difference between various available solutions is often dramatic. In this paper, we highlight six key areas for you to consider when evaluating testing and assessment solutions.

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1. Aim for objectivity and consistency

From both a legal and practical position, objective and consistent methods are the “Holy Grail” of the hiring process. They ensure all candidates and employees tested are treated fairly and equally (read: objectively and legally). But it’s important to understand why and how objectivity and consistency actually deliver more value than subjectivity.

The more a testing solution relies on data and removes opinion (no matter how educated or professional the opinion) from the process, the more objective, and therefore predictive, the result. While it is an acceptable and valid practice to have consultants define a “profile for comparison” and interpret each test result for you, this method introduces potential subjectivity to the process, and, as the amount of subjectivity increases, the accuracy of the results will decrease. Some technology-based solutions have the advantage of delivering an objective and consistent feedback mechanism independent of subjective interpretation.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Start by asking your solution provider how they ensure that the testing and assessment process is both objective and consistent. First, request and review the vendor’s technical manual and/or validation document to understand how the test is comprised and best used. Second, decide with your human resources department how the assessment will be used in the hiring process. Considerations such as the placement of the assessment in the screening process (i.e., pre-interview and post reference check), and for which positions/departments will the assessment be used are critical decisions that will ensure consistency in the process.

Finally, and most importantly, understand every step in the benchmark creation process, and remember the motto, “What you put in is what you get out.” If you are using a consultant/subjective model, then educate yourself on how competencies are built and the critical correlation to your strategic goals. For a more objective approach, understand why an incumbent sample is used, and track performance data on those incumbents for future assessment.



2. Understand that all solutions are not equal

How do you differentiate between independent consultants, technology vendors, and hybrids of the two?

What kind of test is used?

There are numerous test types in the marketplace today, including honesty and integrity, skills/aptitude, personality inventories, and behavioral assessments, but how do you identify which one is for you? You do not need a Ph.D. to select the right assessment, but you must be aware of how different types of assessments deliver widely differing results.

Who is offering the test?

Behavioral assessments have traditionally been delivered through consultants and more recently offered through technology (or in some cases, a hybrid of the two). Which is the best fit for your organization? Be sure to consider the flexibility, scalability, and response time of any solutions you are considering.

What is measured?

It is important to be very specific when evaluating testing solutions (i.e. customer service ability, sales aptitude, or general skills such as typing). The next step is to dig deeper and understand what skills or behaviors are being measured and if they will relate back to your positions and goals.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Request a copy of your vendor's technical manual. The technical manual should provide a detailed analysis of what the assessment is designed to measure. Also, ask your vendor for specific references of other companies who shared your goals when they embarked on a behavioral assessment program. Determine, by speaking to those references, the impact the assessment has made on their organization.



3. Realize that data is king

When evaluating testing and assessment solutions, you should determine how data is used as part of the process. Test-related data can come in several forms depending on application, and each will have a range of values for various organizations.

First, does the assessment solution use actual test results to compile a custom “ideal profile” for each of your jobs or positions? Often, when a custom “ideal profile” is not established, “normative” data is being used. In essence, this means that your candidates will be compared to society as a whole, and not your incumbent top performers. Obviously, this is a less than desirable solution which carries significantly less predictive capability. Using actual data from top and low performers in your environment will increase the objectivity of your process.

Second, you should determine if performance data from your environment would be used in an on-going fashion to validate and further refine the predictive nature of the test being used in your specific environment. This will ensure that your results are directly linked to performance or hard facts.

Lastly, you should discover whether compliance data like adverse impact will be tracked for your company by the vendor. Using subjective tools, like the resume, is one of the most common non-automated methods of determining whether an applicant progresses through the process—thus also making it a major issue in adversely impacting minority groups.¹ Be sure that your objective, automated data is easily accessed over time.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Start by taking a look at your existing appraisal systems to determine if performance and productivity-related data exist today to support the testing process. If you have little or no data, ask how your test provider can help. If you do have data, investigate how this information will be used to support your desired result. For example, if you are looking to increase the quality of hire in the position of “loan originator” and your desired result is to see an increase in the rate of closed loans, you should have data in these areas to compare to assessment results (and the assessments should relate to increased performance).



4. Don't presume that online is always online

Many providers of testing solutions will indicate that their solution is "online," but what does that mean, and will it be flexible enough to scale across your organization?

You should investigate further what this means. In many cases, it simply means that the test can be taken over the web or that reports are automatically emailed to users. While these may be adequate solutions, more robust online solutions provide full control over the test and assessment process. These solutions allow HR professionals and hiring managers to log in and administer tests and/or evaluate assessment results in real time based on user rights you define. This is ideal for the company seeking to own the process and deploy testing throughout the enterprise.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Start by asking multiple vendors what their definition of "online" means. Ask for a demonstration of any technology promised and dig into the logistics of how it would work with multiple positions or geographies.

5. Know that no solution is an island

Like most solutions in business, testing and assessment rarely operate in a vacuum. There are other systems, such as applicant tracking, performance management and human resource information systems, that may need to communicate or share data with your testing and assessment solution. Find out if your assessment vendor can communicate with your current systems.

If integration with any of your HR systems is essential to your desired result, you'll need to seriously consider a technology-based solution. In this space, there are vendors that provide a platform with a wide variety of solutions to choose from, others that allow for flexible integration based on well-defined interfaces, and still others that cannot integrate.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Start by defining all of the existing systems that support your hiring and development process and identifying how critical each is to your desired result. If for example you are interested in a solution that will help your field sales managers evaluate candidate fit to the position based on all related data from any location; you'll want a solution that can provide assessments, resumes, background check results, and review notes in one environment. You should investigate thoroughly how your solution provider can support this process and if there are others that have successfully done so. One final suggestion is to ensure that the behavioral assessment solution is XML compliant, the standard to which most leading HR systems are complying, which allows data between systems to be seamlessly transferred.

6. Demand reliable, valid, predictive, legal results

By definition, no provider should be in the business if they are not providing testing and assessment vehicles that are reliable, valid, and predictive indicators. However, there is disinformation out there, and it is important to ensure that you understand what these terms mean so that your due diligence is most effective when evaluating a testing solution provider.

To the new user, the above terms may seem synonymous with each other and may be summed up in one word—accuracy. However, the difference between the four is huge, and critical to understand to use assessments correctly. The U.S. Department of Labor document titled “Testing and Assessment: An Employer’s Guide to Good Practices” provides detailed guidelines for testing and assessment that includes a comprehensive discussion of these terms.² Here are some simple definitions:

- **Reliable**—Reliability refers to how dependably or consistently a test measures a characteristic. If a person takes the test again, will he or she get a similar test score, or a much different score? A test that yields similar scores for a person who repeats the test is said to measure a characteristic reliably.
- **Valid**—Validity refers to what characteristic the test measures and how well the test measures that characteristic. Validity also describes the degree to which you can make specific conclusions or predictions about people based on their test scores. In other words, it indicates the usefulness of the test.
- **Predictive**—A predictive testing solution should be one that can show a positive relationship between test performance and some indicator of job performance (this is also referred to as criterion-related validation). In other words, individuals who score well on the test tend to perform better on the job than those who score poorly on the test. If the criterion is obtained at the same time the test is given, it is called concurrent validity; if the criterion is obtained later, it is called predictive validity.
- **Legal**—The EEOC is responsible for enforcing federal laws regarding discrimination, the most common issue in the legal context of testing. While too broad a topic to cover in this paper (the Uniform Guidelines serve as an excellent reference source), your test solution provider should be able to share their method and data for ensuring that the test(s) being administered will not provide a biased result that would discriminate. That kind of outcome is commonly called an adverse or disparate impact.

How to address this issue with your vendor

Start by reviewing the technical terms related to testing in the public domain guidelines and requesting technical manuals and validation information from your test solution provider. Also, probe to determine how the test will be validated in your environment and whether that process will impact your time and investment. Assessment providers should readily offer to prove the effectiveness of a hiring assessment through either a validation study or subsequent analysis of the impact of their assessments on meaningful business results.³

Find the right people for the right jobs

With so many testing and assessment solutions on the market today, knowing what you want out of your solution will help you get the most out of it. While all companies are different, one objective is consistent: helping the right people find the right fit in your organization is key to your success. How you find those people depends on applying the testing and assessment methodology that works best for you. Your technology partner should have the knowledge, flexibility, and objectivity you need to make this process more effective, so you can better select, retain, and develop the right talent across the entire employee life cycle and, over time, completely transform your business.

To learn more, visit
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1 Dr. Kristina Dorniak-Wall, "Avoiding biases and adverse impact in predictive hiring," Workforce Scientist, May 24, 2017.

2 Biddle Consulting Group, "Uniform guidelines on employee selection procedures," 2015.

3 Corvitus, "10 considerations for choosing the right assessment provider," March 10, 2017

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641 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10011

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