

# Psychometric assessments

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Psychometric assessments can be used as a type of capability-based assessment to inform selection decisions as part of the recruitment process. Care should be taken to ensure assessments are fit-for-purpose. This means that the hiring manager understands why a particular assessment has been chosen and is clear up front about how the results will be used (e.g. to inform probing in subsequent assessments, as part of the selection decision etc.).

The main types of psychometric assessments used in recruitment are:

- cognitive ability tests
- personality questionnaires.

Information about these is available below.

Reputable test publishers conduct rigorous studies on their psychometric assessment tools before they are released and technical manuals are available containing evidence to support the validity and reliability of tests.

In some circumstances you may need to make workplace adjustments to psychometric assessments for people with disability. Speak to HR or your supplier about options for adjustments.

See: **Talent Acquisition Scheme** for information about sourcing services to provide and administer approved psychometric assessment tools.

## Appropriate use

Psychometric assessments used in recruitment and selection are designed to determine if candidates have the capability and suitability to meet the role requirements and challenges. They are not designed to identify personal or confidential information about individuals.

The results of psychometric assessments should never be used on their own to select a candidate for a role but should be used to inform decisions about which candidates are best suited to the role and the needs of the agency. Psychometric assessments are developed for specific purposes, and their use should be consistent with that purpose.

## Benefits of using psychometric assessment

The main benefits of psychometric assessments are that they:

- allow candidates to demonstrate talents that may not be directly observable otherwise
- are reliable – accurate across different times
- are valid – measure what they claim to measure
- are objective – well-designed psychometric assessments are standardised, meaning they are administered and scored in a consistent manner, leaving no room for assessor bias
- are one of the best predictors of future individual job performance when used in combination with a behavioural interview or work sample task.

## Cognitive ability tests

Cognitive ability tests are objective standardised tools that are used to identify the extent to which a candidate's reasoning abilities match those required to perform the role. Tests chosen must be matched to role requirements.

Some common types of cognitive ability tests include:

- Numerical reasoning – measures the ability to use numbers in a logical and efficient way
- Verbal reasoning – measures basic vocabulary, verbal fluency and the ability to reason using words
- Abstract reasoning – measures the ability to understand new logical problems and use information outside the range of previous experience to solve them

- General cognitive ability – non-verbal test that measures problem-solving, logical ability and ability to identify logical connections
- Mechanical aptitude – measures the ability to understand and apply mechanical concepts and principles to solve problems.

### Advantages

### Drawbacks

- | Advantages   | Drawbacks   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High validity in measuring capability</li><li>• Many assessment tools readily available – some in different languages</li><li>• Useful for large candidate pools and bulk recruitment campaigns</li><li>• Tests of abstract reasoning and general cognitive ability are likely to be culturally fair</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can cause anxiety for candidates, especially some diversity groups</li><li>• May not be accessible for all candidates</li><li>• Can be hard for hiring managers to understand</li></ul> |

## Personality questionnaires

Personality questionnaires are particularly useful to gauge a candidate's likely level of fit for a role or team. They measure relatively stable behavioural tendencies and work style preferences. Personality questionnaires are well-established useful tools to support hiring decisions.

Personality questionnaires can be used to assess how a candidate is likely to handle work-related tasks such as managing stakeholders, working in teams, complying with rules and regulations, leading others, coping with stress and pressure etc.

Personality questionnaires do not measure what the candidate has the ability to do, but rather how they prefer to behave in the workplace. Personality influences performance because people are usually more motivated in a role if they are doing something they prefer doing. That is, people enjoy work environments that allow them to be themselves.

If a candidate's personality profile is not aligned to a particular role, this does not mean they cannot do the job: many people learn to manage their natural tendencies to perform effectively at work. However, working in a role that requires behaviour that does not come naturally (e.g. a reserved person in a sales role) tends to be less rewarding and enjoyable, and increases the likelihood that a person will leave the organisation.

## How to use the results of personality questionnaires

Personality questionnaires are useful for highlighting areas which require further verification during an interview or reference check. They can also be useful when deciding between two or more candidates who meet the requirements of the role. Once the successful candidate has commenced work, personality questionnaire results can be used to identify development needs and inform development planning.

Because personality questionnaires measure preferences and tendencies, they should generally not be used to screen out candidates during the recruitment process. An exception is where a validation study has demonstrated that a particular personality profile correlates with high performance in a role. Where a validation study provides strong support for the validity and job relatedness of a particular personality characteristic or profile, a candidate's lack of fit with the characteristic or profile for a particular role could reasonably be used as the basis for excluding the candidate.

Personality assessments need to be considered together with other information when making a selection decision. Using personality questionnaires together with cognitive ability tests, interviews and work samples will increase the likelihood of hiring the person best suited to the requirements of the role.

## Emotional intelligence questionnaires

Emotional intelligence assessments can provide insight into a candidate's fit with the culture of the team and broader organisation. They can also be mapped to capabilities with an emotional and behavioural component, such as resilience, self-management, communication, collaboration and people management.

The results of emotional intelligence assessments should be considered in conjunction with other sources of evidence about a candidate's capabilities and behavioural preferences. Emotional intelligence assessments can identify areas which can be probed further during interviews or referee checks and may differentiate between candidates.

## Situational judgment tests

Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs) evaluate the candidate's judgement using scenarios that are realistic job previews. The scenarios can be presented in writing or through a video or audio format. They differ from work sample tests because the candidate is not required to provide a worked example, but instead selects the most appropriate response to each scenario from a range of pre-determined options in a multiple-choice format.

Situational Judgement Tests may be purchased 'off the shelf' or customised for the organisational context. The development of a customised SJT involves a job analysis including the identification of critical incidents at work where a decision must be made and consultation with subject matter experts to establish the most effective responses in each situation. Development of SJTs should be done by qualified and experienced specialists in organisational behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

# How to use the results of situational judgment tests

Situational Judgement Tests can be selected 'off the shelf', or customised, to assess a broad range of capabilities and knowledge. Unlike most other psychometric assessments, each SJT measures something different according to the scenarios they contain, so a selection should be made with care.

The validity of SJTs for predicting job performance depends on a close match between the scenarios and the requirements of the role for which the candidate is being assessed. After a SJT has been in use for a period of time, a validity study should be carried out to establish that the tool adequately predicts job performance, to check for adverse impact and to identify any content that may require adjustment.

<sup>1</sup>See M. R. Barrick and M. K. Mount, "The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A metaanalysis," *Personnel Psychology* 44 (1991): 1–26; J. L. Holland, "Exploring careers with a typology: What we have learned and some new directions," *American Psychologist* 51 (1996): 397–406; J. Hogan and B. Holland, "Using theory to evaluate personality and job-performance relations: A socioanalytic perspective," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88 (2003): 100–112; and R. P. Tett, D. N. Jackson, and M. Rothstein, "Personality measures as predictors of job performance: A meta-analytic review," *Personnel Psychology* 44 (1991): 703–742.