

## Best Practices in Talent Assessment

### A Positioning Paper by Harrison Assessments Int'l

By Dan Harrison, Ph.D.

Assessing people for jobs is the most important task of any organization. The quality of assessment ultimately determines the performance of new hires as well as the ability of the organization to effectively develop employees. It affects every important aspect of the organization's success including management effectiveness, sales volume, customer retention and productivity. Assessment is not merely one of the functions of the Human Resource Department. It is the essential foundation for effective talent acquisition and talent management.

High quality assessment used at the point of hire enables you to have the greatest impact on performance and productivity in your organization. High quality assessment of applicants during the recruitment process results in less time and money spent on training and developing employees. This enables management to focus on important strategic issues. Good assessment reduces training costs, minimizes losses due to poor decisions, increases employee retention and can even provide a foundation for better teamwork.

Effective assessment also provides huge benefits for employee development. Assessing existing employees makes employee development much more efficient and effective. Good assessment can enable employees to clearly understand their performance in relationship to the job requirements. This can be a great boost to employee motivation. It can also provide managers with a means of pinpointing the development areas that will provide the greatest impact on performance. Harrison Assessments™ Talent Solutions System even goes a step further by providing managers and coaches with effective tools for encouraging and enlisting top performance as well as providing guidelines for developing specific job success behaviors. In addition, reports also help employees to better understand how to apply their strengths for their career development. These are key areas that promote talent retention and motivation.

### Formulating the success factors for the specific job

The first challenge of effective assessment is to fully understand the job and formulate the success factors. Without a clear understanding of the job and the job success factors, assessment cannot be effective. It is essential to understand the tasks performed, the responsibilities, the key performance factors and the requirements that relate to effective performance. The Harrison Assessments System provides a comprehensive list of typical factors for each specific job as well as additional optional factors that can be included.

Assessment...  
is the essential  
foundation for  
talent acquisition  
and talent  
management.

Assessing a person against job factors is much more challenging and much more complex than merely assessing a person. It is essential to determine the key success factors for the specific job, including how important each of those factors are in relationship to each other. In addition, it is essential to determine how having different levels of a job success factor affects the overall performance. This is a complex process requiring sophisticated calculations, which can best be achieved through extensive job research and computer technology.

There are two basic categories of job requirements: Eligibility and Suitability. Eligibility factors include previous experience, education, certifications, skills, abilities and reference checks. Suitability factors include attitude, motivation, integrity, interests, work preferences, fit with the company culture and fit with the manager.

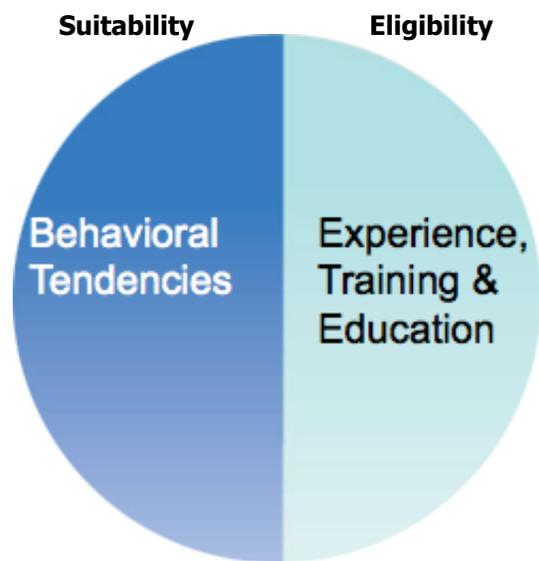
### Assessing Levels of Eligibility

Many organizations assess eligibility factors by setting minimum requirements. However, few organizations systematically formulate eligibility factors in order to score each applicant's level of eligibility. It is not enough to ascertain that the applicant meets the minimum requirements. All that does is eliminate the people who don't meet the requirements. It does nothing to assess the remaining people who do meet the minimum requirements. Therefore, it is essential to quantify each candidate's **level of eligibility**. This is the only way in which you can effectively compare candidates to each other and to integrate the eligibility score with the behavioral score.

First, you need to determine what the eligibility factors are. For example, you may require previous experience in the same job, previous experience doing similar tasks that the job requires, certain educational levels, or skills such as typing speed or the ability to use software packages. The Harrison Assessments enables you to select from a comprehensive list factors and then weight them according to how important they are.

Your next task is to score different levels of each factor. This is much more effective than just listing minimum level of requirements. For example, if you are looking for previous experience in the same job, and you set your minimum requirement for 2 years experience, you may want to score that factor in the following manner:

- Less than 2 years – reject this candidate



**Eligibility – can** the person perform.

**Suitability – will** the person perform.

- 2 years – give 50% for this factor
- 3 years – give 70% for this factor
- 4 years – give 85% for this factor
- 5+ years – give 100% for this factor

By using gradient scoring, you are able to quantify the person's experience and obtain a score for each factor. By weighting the factors in relationship to each other, you are able to obtain an overall eligibility score.

## Assessing Levels of Suitability

For most jobs, suitability factors are about 50% of the job success factors. Therefore, effectively measuring suitability is an essential part of assessment. However, suitability is much more difficult to measure than eligibility. The first challenge is to determine which suitability factors relate to job success for a particular job. However, even when that is determined, to accurately assess job suitability you also need to formulate how different levels of each suitability factor will impact job success. For example, you may determine that self-motivation is an important factor for job success for a particular job. But you still need to quantify how each level of self-motivation will impact success in order to calculate the results. For example, if the person scores a 5 out of 10 on self motivation, you need a means to designate how that will impact overall job success for the specific job. For some jobs, the more self-motivation the person has the better. However, for other jobs, a moderate level is enough and high levels do not relate to increased performance. Each level of each factor needs to be scored according to its impact on performance. That is why HA contains significant research regarding suitability factors and their impact on performance for different job types and for different jobs. Without this, it is nearly impossible to assess behavior effectively.

Suitability factors are behavioral and are much more difficult for people to change than eligibility factors. This makes it even more important to accurately assess behavior during the recruitment process. Most organizations hire people for their eligibility and then try to develop their suitability. And in many cases fire them for their lack of suitability. Since behavior is fundamentally more difficult to change than eligibility, it is better to hire people who already have the suitability for the job.

To illustrate different aspects of suitability, here are some examples of job behavior factors that could be relevant to a specific job. These are just a small sample of more than one hundred important suitability factors that could relate to job success.

- What types of things will an applicant or employee accomplish or put off?
- What motivates them?
- How will they communicate, influence and lead?
- How well they can handle autonomy, freedom and responsibility?

- How much initiative will they take?
- How much will they persist when faced with obstacles?
- How innovative will they be?
- How much will they accept and respond appropriately to feedback?
- To what degree will they become autocratic, dogmatic, dictatorial or controlling?
- How much will they resist change and/or be rigid?
- What behaviors will they exhibit under stress?
- How much will they be blunt or harsh in their communications?
- How much will they tend to be blindly optimistic, impulsive, illogical or easily influenced?
- To what degree will they avoid difficult decisions?
- How well will they organize and handle details?
- How much will they be scattered or chaotic in their approach to projects or planning?
- How much will they seek to learn, grow and excel?
- What kind of recognition do they need?
- As a leader, how well will they provide direction?
- How well will they enforce policy and standards?
- How likely are they to steal?
- How well do they handle conflicts?
- How reasonable will they be when assessing the value of their contributions to the company?

## Using Interviews to Assess Job Behavior

In the past, interviews have been used as the primary means assess attitude, motivation, and job behavior. However, even if interviewers are extremely intuitive, there are many reasons why accurately assessing job behavior using only an interview process is nearly impossible.

1. Interviewers do not have access to a real behavioral success formula. There are dozens of behavioral factors that either promote success or inhibit success for any one job. Interviewers rarely have access to a job formula that identifies the behavioral success factors, weights the success factors against each other. And formulates how different levels of these success factors impact job performance.
2. Even if the interviewer has access to such a formula, the interviewer would need to accurately assess specific levels of each applicant's behavior for each of the job success factors.



3. Some people are skillful at being interviewed. However, being skillful at an interview usually does not relate to job success and therefore it often confuses the interviewer into thinking that such skillfulness will translate to job success. To make interviewing even more difficult, job applicants now have access to extensive information and training related to how answer specific questions and how to “ace” the interview.
4. The interviewee aims to tell the interviewer what he/she thinks will be viewed as the best response. The interviewer aims to determine how much of what the person is saying reflects genuine attitudes and behavior and how much is related to just trying to get the job. This in itself is extremely difficult to resolve in the short period of the interview.
5. Interviewers are biased. Research clearly shows that interviewers routinely give favorable responses to people who are similar to themselves, and less favorable responses to people who are different from themselves. In the end, the result is very likely to come down to how well the interviewer likes the candidate rather than how well the candidate fits the behavioral requirements of the job.

Many interviewers claim insights into the personality of applicants and certainly some interviewers are quite perceptive. However, predicting job success is an entirely different matter. It is not sufficient to perceive a particular quality of a person. Rather, the interviewer must be able to accurately assess the magnitude of each of dozens of qualities in relationship to a complex formula of behavioral requirements for a particular job. This is nearly an impossible task without the aid of significant research and tools.



Assessment research shows that interviewing has a moderate ability to predict job success. However, this doesn't mean that interviewers can predict job behavior. The moderate ability to predict job success comes as a result of exploring the candidate's resume, previous experience, education, and job knowledge rather than the interviewer's ability to predict job behavior. If you believe that interviewer can predict job behavior, I suggest you try an experiment. Have your interviewers conduct the interview without ever seeing the resume and without discussing past experience, education or skills. Then have them write down their job success prediction. Later, you can compare this prediction to actual job performance. In fact, conducting interviews in this way would be so difficult that I doubt anyone would even attempt it.

In comparison, an effective job behavior assessment can obtain a moderate level of predictive accuracy for job performance on its own, without any knowledge of eligibility or any interview. This is a significant achievement because the eligibility has not been factored into the prediction. However, the value of job behavior assessment is much greater than simply its ability to predict job success on its own. By using an effective job behavior assessment at the interview, the interviewer obtains the tools to transform the interview into a genuine discussion about

the person's real fit for the job as well as the person's likely level of job satisfaction. Thus, using the results of a behavioral assessment during the interview process greatly increases the ability to predict job behavior. When this approach is combined with a systematic assessment of eligibility, the ability to predict job performance is increased even further.

...a prediction of success can have greater than 95% accuracy.

## Job Behavior Assessments As Compared To Personality Assessments

Personality Assessments have been available for about 60 years. Some of them have obtained a great deal of validation research. However, it is important to understand that they are not actually job behavior assessments and such validation is not relevant to job performance. In most cases, the validation simply means that the assessment favorably compares with other means of assessing personality. Many people are fooled into thinking that this large amount of research indicates that they are valid and useful tools for job assessment. In fact, many of those assessments specifically state that the instrument does not predict job performance. It makes no sense to use an assessment for job selection that was never designed for the workplace and has no ability to predict job performance. Some people say that they can effectively use personality assessments for employee development. However, this also makes no sense. The main point of employee development is to improve performance and if an assessment does not measure the factors that relate to job performance, how can it significantly help to develop employees?



## What Are the Key Factors of an Effective Job Behavior Assessment?

There are several key factors that enable a behavioral assessment to effectively predict performance. These include:

- The ability of the assessment to measure at least 100 traits
- A questionnaire that is work focused
- The ability to detect false answers and to pierce self-deception
- Performance research that is used to create job success formulas for specific jobs
- Reports that are job specific, numerically quantified and easy to understand
- The ability to weight and integrate eligibility score and job behavior assessment scores

## Measuring a Sufficient Number of Traits

It is not practical to develop a separate behavioral assessment for each job or even each job type. Therefore, nearly all job behavior assessments assess people using one questionnaire and then try to evaluate the answers for different jobs. However, our research has shown that less

than 25% of the traits measured in a behavioral questionnaire relate to job success for any one job. Therefore, to be effective, a job behavior assessment needs to measure many different traits in order to have a sufficient number of traits that relate to job success for any one given job.

Most behavioral assessments measure only 10 to 30 traits and consequently only a few traits will actually relate to job performance. This is not nearly enough to predict job success. Most vendors will try to cover this problem by using all or most of their traits for every job. However, this further confuses the assessment result by introducing factors that do not directly relate to job success. They often show norms for each trait related to different job types such as managers. Even if managers have higher scores than the average person on a specific trait, it doesn't indicate that the trait is related to performance. High performing managers could easily have the same average score on that trait as low performing managers. Consequently, that trait would not relate to job success. Using norms in this manner is merely a distraction from the essential goal of identifying the traits that differentiate high performing managers from low performing managers.

There is no benefit to hiring people who fit the profile of an average manager. No company wants to hire average employees and they would be very unhappy if they knew they were using an assessment that was designed to do so. They would also be unhappy if they knew that three quarters of the factors used to assess behavior for their specific jobs were completely unrelated to job success.

In order to effectively measure job success, job behavior assessments must measure at least 100 different traits and each job needs to have a formula or template of at least 20 traits that relate to performance. In addition, each trait must have its own formula regarding how different amounts of that trait impact performance. Finally, each trait must be weighted against the other traits according to its impact on performance. That is why the Harrison Assessments system measures 156 traits and is built on a body of research that relates to job performance.

The need to measure more than 100 traits creates a great challenge for job behavior assessments. Measuring more than 100 traits would normally require more than a full day of testing. However, in this age of talent competition, few qualified applicants are willing to spend a full day for one job application. Harrison Assessments has overcome this problem by creating the SmartQuestionnaire in which there are 16 groups of 8 statements. In each group, the 8 statements are ranked against each other. In addition, each statement appears in 2 different groups, enabling the computer to cross-reference all of the answers against each other. By comparing each statement to every other statement on the questionnaire, a total of 8103 comparisons are obtained. This is equivalent to 2,701 multiple choice questions and more than a full day of multiple choice testing!

## Work Focused Questionnaire

One of the most obvious but often overlooked issues about job behavior assessment is having a questionnaire that focuses on work related issues. Job-related questions are much more effective because they focus on the goal of job behavior assessment rather than requiring a step of personality measurement that then has to be interpreted in terms of job behavior. Consequently, questionnaires that focus on work related issues are much more likely to predict job success. Having the questions more focused on job-related issues also provides the benefit of making the assessment research much more transferable across cultures. Generalized personality questions nearly always have culturally influenced significance that makes answers to such questions quite different across cultures. Research related to questionnaires that focus on personality factors rather than work related issues are not likely to be transferable across cultures. In addition, questionnaires that are job related are also much more legally defensible. If it can be easily seen that the questions directly relate to job requirements, most of the legal issues are resolved.

## Overcoming self-deception and/or intended deception

One of the biggest challenges of any behavioral assessment is to determine how truthfully the person has answered the questions. How can an assessment determine if the person has given truthful answers? Many personality assessments attempt to determine this by offering to answer seemingly opposite options along with an additional answer option called "in between." If there are too many answers of "in between," the results are considered invalid. While this may provide a slight indication of answer reliability, it is an extremely weak method. In many cases the most truthful answer may in fact be "in between." Therefore, this method is not reliable.

There are several important interconnected ways to overcome the problem of untruthful answers. First, it is best to provide answer options that need to be ranked rather than rated or scored. Forced ranking requires the person to designate their priorities.

The previous section described how Harrison Assessments uses computer cross-referencing to reduce the time required to complete the assessment. However, the cross-referencing has an additional benefit that is essential to accurate assessment. It determines if the person's answers are consistent with themselves. If a person answers untruthfully when ranking a large number of statements, it is extremely difficult to maintain a high level of consistency. Even if the person were to remember all the rankings exactly, it would still be difficult to meet or exceed the consistency requirement. Each statement appears two times and each time it appears it is ranked against other statements that are completely different. To maintain consistency, the person would have to mentally perform thousands of cross-references. If the answers are less than 80% consistent for lower level job and 90% consistent for more senior jobs, HA



considers that either the person has not paid sufficient attention to the answers or has deliberately attempted to deceive the assessment. In either case, the results are not considered valid.

Harrison Assessments has further mechanisms that prevent and detect deception. The questionnaire only includes statements relating to positive behaviors. Therefore, all of the statements are generally perceived as desirable. In addition, even if the person attempts to give the desirable answer, their own behavior patterns dictate which answers they consider desirable. For example, if a person tends to be very frank and direct, they will consider this tendency to be their virtue as well as a desirable answer.

The HA system includes a further layer of lie detection by analyzing the paradoxical relationships between the behavioral tendencies. Through extensive analysis, more than 50 negative behavior patterns can be determined without asking any negative questions and without the person having the slightest awareness that they have revealed their negative behavior. If the person attempts to deceive the assessment, the negative behavioral patterns will become more exaggerated making them appear as poor candidates.

## Job Specific, Numerically Quantified, and Easy to Understand Reports

If a behavioral assessment report simply describes the person's behavior or personality, each interviewer or interpreter will assign their own meaning to the behavior or personality trait, usually based on their own bias rather than a formula of job success factors. This seriously detracts from the benefits of job assessment. The report must be focused on the specific job requirements and provide an overall score related to the suitability of the person's overall behavioral patterns in relationship to the specific job. This must be such that it is easy to understand and not left to the interpretation of the person reading the report.

## Performance Research

A job behavior assessment must be based on performance research. Since the assessment is applied to many different jobs, there needs to be research that reveals which behaviors relate to job success. Without such research, how can anyone know how to interpret the results in relationship to a particular job? As stated previously, more than 100 factors must be measured in order to find a couple of dozen factors that relate to job success for a specific job. The research must focus on the factors that differentiate high performers from low performers. Without such research, there is no good way to find success factors and it is virtually impossible to determine how different levels of each related factor will impact job success. In addition, only performance research enables you to accurately weight the success factors against each other according to their level of impact on job success. Harrison Assessments has a large and ever expanding body of research related to success factors for a wide variety of jobs.

The research must include a sample of good performers as well as poor performers. If the sample only includes good performers, there is no way to determine which factors differentiate good performance from poor performance, how to formulate different levels of each success factor, and how to weight the success factors in relationship to each other.

## Integrating Eligibility and Job Behavior Assessment Scores

Assessing only minimum eligibility requirements and then assessing behavior is a frequent mistake that seriously limits the value of assessment. If you eliminate the candidates who don't meet the minimum requirements and then administer behavioral assessments for the final candidates, you will not achieve a complete assessment of eligibility or a systematic means of integrating the eligibility and suitability results. By scoring eligibility of the candidates who meet the minimum requirements, you can then combine the eligibility score with the behavioral score in a systematic fashion. Otherwise, each interviewer is left to determine how the behavioral assessment will impact the overall result. This is an impossible task if the eligibility scoring is not systematically predefined. Harrison Assessments provides a complete system for scoring eligibility and weighting the eligibility score with the behavioral score to achieve an overall score. This systematic approach produces controlled and reliable decision-making based on a complete view of the job requirements. Without this, individual interpreters can only guess at how each factor will impact the overall assessment result.

## Summarizing the Value and Challenges of Assessment

Effectively assessing both job behavior and job eligibility is the essential foundation necessary to hire, retain and develop top talent. Assessment needs to quantify levels of eligibility as well as job success behaviors. To do so requires a job success formula. Interviewing does not effectively assess job behavior unless it is conducted using a job behavior assessment.

Effective job behavior assessment requires the ability to measure more than 100 traits, a questionnaire that is work-focused, the ability to detect false answers and/or self-deception, a specific job success formula derived from performance research and clear reports that do not require interpretation.

Harrison Assessments meets all of the standards mentioned above providing a powerful tool for assessment. It enables you to build a strong foundation for your talent selection, retention and development.

### **HA is the only assessment method that:**

- Uses a full spectrum of behavioral assessments, including personality, interests, work environment preferences and task preferences.
- Uses a high-tech questionnaire that provides the equivalent of a full day of testing in only 30 minutes.

- Uses a technological consistency detector that provides an extremely reliable validation of the authenticity of the answers.
- Can be *effectively* applied without professional interpretation.
- Uses the power of paradox to decipher subtleties and complexities of personality related to job performance.
- Offers complete customization to specific job requirements.
- Offers a complete research database of success traits for different position types.
- Delivers cost-effective high correlation with actual job performance.