

Talent Assessment

Assessment for Hiring, Promotion and Development



RIGHT VIEWPOINT™

Throughout corporate America, the demand for skilled talent is on. With a slowdown in the rate of workforce growth, the looming retirement of baby boomers, and the globalization of labor, companies are facing an unprecedented competition for the best and the brightest—a high stakes effort to attract and retain promising high-potential employees. And that remains true even in today's economic downturn.

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There's one tactic that, if approached correctly, can go a long way toward helping companies ensure they have the talent they need. It involves creating systematic assessment methods for hiring, promoting and developing leaders throughout the organization. The right techniques can ensure not only that companies hire the right people for the right jobs, but that there also is a critical alignment between employee skills and the organization's business, culture and values. Additionally, they can help businesses identify the best candidates quickly—before competitors beat them to the punch.

Companies that don't use effective assessment methods may end up in an untenable competitive position. The reason: They're likely to find they're unable to hire the best candidates, develop a viable talent pool, or retain valued employees. And that, in turn, can hurt—perhaps cripple—their ability to meet strategic objectives and thrive in a competitive marketplace. In addition, organizations with unsuccessful hiring and promotion practices face higher expenses, due to the cost of recruitment and training, as well as decreased productivity and overall efficiency.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT

The key to success is forging an effective assessment strategy. How can companies do that? Right Management recommends following these six best practices:

1. Understand your talent profile.

You need to pinpoint the unique set of characteristics that drive your business strategy success—the qualities and attributes dictated by your organization’s culture and values. One way to accomplish that task is by studying your strategy and culture to determine the kind of employees needed to make your strategy work. Another is to evaluate the characteristics of top performers already in your company, since those traits are likely to be predictors of success in that job. Finally, it is also important to “reverse engineer” the talent profile, using forward-looking business plans and strategic directions, as well as a view of how the culture will need to look in the future. These talent profiles can then be embedded into job/role descriptions, to ensure that they account for both current and future success requirements.

In addition, whether the organization needs to fill positions quickly to meet current needs or build talent to address future capability demands, it’s important to evaluate the whole person—including knowledge areas, experiences, behaviors, motives, values and personality traits—and not just technical skills. After all, it is a lot easier to develop technical abilities than hard-wired, deeply ingrained behavioral traits. Indeed, it is critical to determine those essential characteristics that are hardest to change, since it may prove challenging and costly to address them once the person is on board.

Best Practices for Assessment

1. Develop a Talent Profile
2. Use Your Talent Profile as a Guide
3. Customize the Selection Process
4. Speed and Efficiency Are Critical
5. Use Savvy Interview Techniques
6. Employ Assessments for Multiple Purposes

Once an individual has been hired, your job is not done. You need to continue to use assessments after the person has started working to help identify their development goals. For example, if an assessment reveals that an employee is, say, less skilled in the ability to work with a team, then managers can help that person to address those gaps, before it becomes a performance issue.

2. Use the talent profile to guide where you look for job candidates.

In the name of efficiency, companies often keep their searches to a few top business schools, thinking they’ll find the smartest talent there. That’s a counter-productive

approach. If you're looking for the whole person—and not just one trait—then you're better off extending your search to second and third tier schools. Why? While you'll undoubtedly find candidates with exceptional-school smarts at a handful of A-list schools, they may very well lack many of the key qualities you've pinpointed. At other places, you're more likely to find high-potential candidates with the full range of necessary characteristics. Companies should also routinely do a talent sourcing audit—evaluating the sources of top performers so that resources can be re-directed to them and away from areas that have not produced the talent required. While simple enough to perform, it's surprising how many organizations don't take the time to do it.

3. Adopt a customized selection process.

Of course, you can use off-the-shelf tools for screening out bad employees. For identifying high performers, however, a more tailor-made assessment is crucial. For example, you can create a customized set of online tools for evaluating candidates that incorporates the specific talent profile of a particular job in an organization. After candidates answer a set of questions about themselves, those responses are meshed with the requirements of the talent profile. The result is a considerably more accurate way of predicting the suitability of a candidate and likelihood he or she will have the traits needed not just for the position, but to fit the organization as well.

4. Keep speed and efficiency top of mind.

The competition for talent typically means that the best talent is taken “off the market” by those organizations that are better and faster at finding top talent ahead of their competitors. For that reason, companies need to design a customized system that identifies the most critical attributes of top employees early on in the qualifying and screening phases of the process and pinpoints other, less key features later on. That means focusing initial screening on areas that are the most difficult to train, while addressing other aspects of the profile that can be more easily developed afterwards. The result: Companies can streamline the process without sacrificing accuracy.

5. Incorporate savvy interview techniques.

Certainly, companies still need to include in-person interviews in their overall assessment activities. But, it's important to know just how to conduct an effective interview and integrate that process with your talent profile.

One approach is to conduct different types of interviews. The first should be done as part of the qualifying and screening process and can be relatively short, focusing on motivations, values, key skills and traditional “knock out” items, such as salary requirements and willingness to relocate. At some point, another interview will be conducted, this time by the hiring manager. Where this meeting is placed within the interviewing sequence depends upon how the organization likes to involve their managers. Some companies prefer to hold off until the end, so that only the most qualified candidates will be interviewed. Other companies prefer to involve their managers earlier in the process, to ensure that they get the chance to see the broader slate of candidates. Regardless of approach, it is typically the manager who

evaluates the candidate's experience and functional capabilities and how well he or she matches the role being applied for, as well as the likelihood that the candidate will fit into the current team.

What types of questions should you ask? Preliminary interviews should zero in on an applicant's competencies so it can be determined how the person will behave once he or she is hired. For example, a hiring manager interviewing a candidate for a technical project would validate that the person understands the functional aspects of the job and also collect relevant motivational information to determine how well the candidate will be satisfied with the job design, tasks and opportunities. Other interviews would delve even deeper, asking questions that could reveal such important issues as how the candidate interacts with colleagues and works in a team.

Training is also key. All interviewers involved in the process should be taught proper interview techniques, learning how to get the most information in the least amount of time. That's especially important because today's savvy job candidates generally can tell if they are being interviewed by a professional or someone who has not been trained for the task. The impression they have of the process can have a significant impact on their decision to accept any offer of employment.

6. Employ assessments for multiple purposes.

In many organizations, there are a number of silos within the human resources function. One area might be responsible for staffing, another, development, and yet another, succession planning. And it's likely that each will use a different assessment process. Instead, assessments should be designed with one set of criteria and a single, integrated talent management strategy. Not only does the approach make for a more efficient and accurate process across the organization, but it's also considerably less expensive.

CONCLUSION

In today's competitive climate, companies have to do everything they can to hire, promote and develop the right talent in the right jobs. By following these six best practices for employee assessment, organizations will boost their ability to find and retain top leaders. In addition, they will:

- Ensure a critical alignment between employee skills and the organization's culture, values, and business direction.
- Create an integrated talent management strategy for all their efforts, from leadership development to succession planning.
- Pinpoint the most efficient sources for finding new talent.
- Develop a more cost-effective talent management process.

CASE STUDY

Standardize Assessment for Organizational Impact (and Compliance!)

For major corporations with offices spread across multiple locations, a key to successful implementation of an assessment process is the use of standard tools and processes. This means making sure the system is applied uniformly throughout the company.

For example, a Fortune 500 multinational bank recently needed to enhance its bench strength among general manager candidates. The reason: To meet the needs created by rapid growth. Inexperienced leaders had been quickly propelled into significant assignments for which they lacked adequate preparation. Some positions, in fact, had remained vacant for long periods because there was no available leadership talent to fill the jobs.

While the bank had designed a high-potential program for the organization's two highest leadership levels, its assessment process, integration of data, and report writing were viewed as time consuming. Working with Right Management, the company developed a streamlined process that would be applied consistently across the firm's international operations. To that end, customized leadership assessment processes were designed to fit the desired leadership profiles. In addition, internal coaches across the organization's global offices received consistent implementation training. And Right Management provided leadership coaching when needs could not be met by internal coaches. Right Management is now working with the company to design and implement a similar process for middle management.

RESULTS

- The length of time leadership positions have remained vacant has been reduced by over 70%
- The CEO has directed that the program be implemented by all lines of business in all geographies.
- The retention rate of participants 12 months after implementation was 97%.

About the Authors

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About Right Management

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