



Can personality determine performance



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Evidence suggests that personality and motivation questionnaires should be a core part of your selection toolkit.

ISE Student Recruitment Survey 2019 shows the prevalence of selection tools used to 'screen out' graduates before they get to the more expensive face-to-face stages.

We were surprised to see the proportion of student employers surveyed who are using online applications (81%) and CV screening (56%), particularly given the strong evidence that these methods are very poor predictors of performance (Robertson & Smith 2001).

Methodology

To answer 'which selection methods should be used?' we analysed the 'utility' of different online screening tools - the benefit that is realised from identifying higher calibre candidates and the extent to which this outweighs the cost of using a particular assessment.

We calculated utility through modelling a typical graduate recruitment process and using a combination of:

- Data on how well different online screening methods predict work performance.
- Number of people to be assessed/hired.
- The 'cut score' (the score at which candidates achieving above on the assessment are passed and those scoring below are not), which can be typically used to fairly sift candidates using a particular online screening method. We based this on our own experience of assessing high volume graduate selection processes and the guidance of the British Psychological Society (Psychological Testing Centre, 2006).

Findings

The types of assessment we looked at were online applications/CVs, aptitude tests, situational judgement tests, critical reasoning tests and personality/motivation questionnaires. The most striking finding was that even though personality/motivation questionnaires have the highest 'utility' of the five online screening methods we explored in detail, they are the least commonly used.

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Our research found a combined score made from personality/motivation questionnaires and aptitude tests has the highest utility in terms of screening out candidates in a high-volume selection process. Yet very few student recruiters are using these assessments in combination.

It appears that choosing which assessment methods to use in student selection is not being informed by evidence.

Implications for selection

I regularly hear arguments against using personality/motivation questionnaires to screen candidates. The most common being:

- If we prioritise certain behaviours we will disadvantage certain candidate groups.
- We will not get diversity of thought.
- Candidates can distort their responses to ensure they are selected.
- As aptitude assessments are the most predictive tool it is better for us to set a higher cut score than introduce another assessment.
- Personality/motivation questionnaires take too long to complete.

None of these arguments stacks up against a well-designed, valid, and reliable personality/motivation questionnaire. It seems counter-intuitive that students are being recruited into organisations as leaders of the future without consideration as to whether their behavioural preferences makes them a good fit for the roles they will be taking on now, and in the future.

If you have not explored including a personality/motivation questionnaire in your candidate selection process the evidence suggests you absolutely should.