

It is often assumed that validity is only important to Occupational Psychologists or recruiters. If research shows that candidates want to be placed in the right role, is this a view that can no longer be supported?

What are the current trends?

In 2019, the average number of applications for graduate programs continued to rise (1). However, recently released data from the UK Institute of Student Employers shows that graduate vacancies are forecast to increase by just 3% this year (2). Valid methods of selection are required; those that can help identify the best talent whatever the volume of candidates.

Candidates are casting their net widely when it comes to making applications and 2019 research data shows us that UK students consider an average of 29 employers in their job search. (1). Candidates are making applications to numerous organizations at any one time so it's perhaps unsurprising then that 30% of all applications reviewed are incomplete (1).

These trends highlight the importance of ensuring that candidates are engaged throughout the selection process and that recruiters are mindful of the overall length of an assessment process.

Who cares about validity?

Validity, the extent to which the assessment method is useful for predicting job performance, is at the heart of what Occupational Psychologists care about. If an assessment cannot predict performance in the job role, how can we justify return on investment?

We know companies care about validity when they are recruiting. The higher the validity of the assessment method being used, the better it will predict how a candidate will perform in the role.

However, **what evidence do we have that candidates care about this side of things?**

We surveyed 1,000 applicants (2) that had recently (in the last 6 months) applied for a job role via an online selection process.

The two factors cited as being most important to candidates were that:

1. The assessment process results in a job that they want to stay in
2. The process ensures they are selected for a role to which they are well suited

These two most highly-rated factors both relate to validity; they are concerned with being able to predict who will do well in the job role.

The research also asked a group of 200 recruiters across different organizations a similar set of questions regarding what was important to them and it was on these two factors that the largest differences were seen. The most important factor to recruiters was that the online process motivated candidates to want to work for the organization. This research shows that there appears to be some disconnect between recruiter and candidate perceptions in the selection process.

Is there a need for speed?

In 2019, research (3) found that respecting a candidate's time was the third-biggest contributor to a positive interview or recruiting experience, cited by 40% of job seekers surveyed. Failing to respect candidates' time was shown to be the number one cause of a negative experience (45%) and the second most common reason a candidate drops out of an employer's interview process (16%).

Another 2019 study (4) surveyed 1,500 US adult workers across all job types from all major industries. 24% of respondents stated that the time needed to complete a job application was the most important part of the process to them. Nonetheless, the top priority for 60% of participants was that the process is easy and straightforward.

Our research, however, found that establishing a candidate's 'need for speed' was more subtle.

When candidates chose which factor was most important to them from a list of twelve factors, assessments which are quick to complete was placed tenth out of a list of twelve choices. The most important were those concerned with validity as has been previously evidenced.

However, we found that candidates were much more concerned about assessment time when the length of time they would find reasonable to spend on an assessment process was investigated. Our data demonstrated that candidate drop-out typically increases as the assessment time lengthens. 80% of candidates are willing to spend 30 minutes on an assessment process. At 60 minutes, recruiters can lose up to 50% of their applicants (2).

Our research also found that 84% of recruiters rated 'It's important that an assessment screens candidate quickly' as being of high importance to them.

These findings, together with the data on what is important to candidates, show that it can be easy to underestimate just how important it is to have short and rigorously valid assessment tools for candidates and recruiters alike.

A question of balance

If an assessment is too short, candidates can feel like they've not been given enough opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities or fit for the role. Likewise, there may be less inclination to trust results that are immediate as this may imply that the necessary time to review responses has not been taken and the candidate may think they have not been given fair consideration.

If the assessment process is too long, candidates will drop out of the process, or provide so much information that it is costly and timely for recruiters to review.

Whilst clearly recruiters must respect job seekers' time, this 'need for speed' must be balanced by ensuring that decision-makers receive enough information to make a reliable and informed decision. However, this raises the question of making assessments short at the expense of their validity. How do we deal with this trade-off?

(1) The Must-Know Student Recruitment Trends for 2019. Published by Oleeo and Universum

(2) Institute of Student Employers. (2019). The ISE Pulse Survey 2020: Taking the temperature of the graduate labour market. London: Institute of Student Employers.

(3) MacIver, R, Herridge, K, Kavanagh, M., Jeffery-Smith, L, and Fung, K. Are you switching on or switching off your applicants? Applicant and Recruiter Perceptions of Online Recruitment. 2018 Survey., Published by Saville Assessment.

(4) Recruiting Daily Market Research, 2019.

(5) 2019 Job Seeker Survey Report. Perceptions of Recruiting. Trendicators Survey Report. HR Research & Insights by Engage2Excel