Derek Torrington, Laura Hall,
Stephen Taylor and Carol Atkinson

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

recommended that test data alone should not be used to make a selection decision, but should always be used as part of a wider process where inferences from test results can be backed up by information from other sources.

Problems with using tests

A number of problems can be incurred when using tests:

1 A correlation coefficient of $r = 0.4$ is comparatively good in the testing world and this level of relationship between test scores and performance is generally seen as acceptable. Tests are, therefore, not outstanding predictors of future performance, getting it 'right' in around 4 out of 10 cases.

2 Validation procedures are very time consuming, but are essential to the effective use of tests. There are concerns that with the growth of online testing, new types of tests, such as emotional intelligence tests, are being developed without sufficient validation (Johnson and Guetal 2013).

3 The criteria that are used to define good job performance in developing the test are often inadequate. They are subjective and may account to some extent for the mediocre correlations between test results and job performance.

4 Tests are often job specific. If the job for which the test is used changes, then the test can no longer be assumed to relate to job performance in the same way. Also, personality tests only measure how individuals see themselves at a certain time and cannot therefore be reliably reused at a later time.

5 Tests may not be fair as there may be a social, sexual or racial bias in the questions and scoring system. People from some cultures may, for example, be unused to 'working against the clock'. Tests also require a high facility with the language in which they are constructed. With many countries experiencing increasing levels of migrant workers, this may be problematic. In the Theory into Practice section, we consider alternative types of test which may address this problem.

ACTIVITY 9.2

In what ways could you measure job performance for the following?

- A data input clerk.
- A mobile plumber.
- A call centre operator.
- A supervisor.

Group selection methods and assessment centres

Group methods

The use of group tasks is to provide evidence about the candidates' ability to:

- get on with others;
- influence others and the way they do this;

- express themselves verbally;
- think clearly and logically;
- argue from past experience and apply themselves to a new problem;
- identify the type of role they play in group situations.

These features are difficult on the whole to identify using other selection methods and one of the particular advantages of group selection methods is that they provide the selector with examples of behaviour on which to select. When future job performance is being considered it is behaviour in the job that is critical, and so selection using group methods can provide direct information on which to select rather than indirect verbal information or test results. The use of competencies and behavioural indicators, as a way to specify selection criteria, ties in well with the use of group methods.

There is a range of group exercises that can be used including informal discussion of a given topic, role plays and groups who must organise themselves to solve a problem within time limits which may take the form of a competitive business game, case study or physical activity.

Group selection methods are most suitable for management, graduate and sometimes supervisory posts and CIPD reports that they are used by 24% of organisations. One of the difficulties with group selection methods is that it can be difficult to assess an individual's contribution, and some people may be unwilling to take part.

ACTIVITY 9.3

To what extent does a person's behaviour on these group selection tasks accurately reflect behaviour on the job? Why?

Assessment centres

Assessment centres incorporate multiple selection techniques, and the group selection methods outlined above form a major element, together with other work-simulation exercises such as in-basket tasks, psychological tests, a variety of interviews and presentations. Assessment centres are used to assess, in depth, a group of broadly similar applicants, using a set of competencies required for the post on offer and a series of behavioural statements which indicate how these competencies are played out in practice. Even assuming that the competencies for the job in question have already been identified, assessment centres require a lengthy design process to select the appropriate activities so that every competency will be measured via more than one task. Assessment centres have been proven to be one of the most effective ways of selecting candidates probably due to the use of multiple measures, multiple assessors and predetermined assessment criteria. Thornton and Gibbons (2009) present a detailed evaluation of the validity of assessment centres in selection.

A matrix is usually developed to show how the required competencies and the activities link together. In terms of running the centre, sufficient well-trained assessors will be needed, usually based on the ratio of one assessor for two candidates to ensure that the assessor can observe each candidate sufficiently carefully. Lists of competencies and

associated behaviours will need to be drawn up as checklists and a careful plan will need to be made of how each candidate will move around the different activities – an example of which is given in Table 9.2. Clearly candidates will need to be very well briefed both before and at the start of the assessment at the centre.

At the end of the procedure, the assessors have to come to an agreement on a cumulative rating for each individual, related to job requirements, taking into account all the selection activities. The procedure as a whole can then be validated against job performance rather than each separate activity. The predictive validities from such procedures are not very consistent, but there is a high 'face validity' – a feeling that this is a fairer way of selecting people. Reliability can also be improved by the quality of assessor training, careful briefing of assessors and a predetermined structured approach to marking. The chief disadvantage of these selection methods is that they are a costly and time-consuming procedure, for both the organisation and the candidates. The time commitment is extended by the need to give some feedback to candidates who have been through such a long procedure which involves psychological assessment – although feedback is still not always provided for candidates. Despite this, the benefits of assessment centres mean that they remain firm favourites as a selection method for certain types of role.

Table 9.2 An example of the scheduling of events based on an assessment centre for a professional post (central government)

Day 1 Times	**Activity**	**Who is involved**
9.30–10.00	Introduction to centre	All
10.00–10.45	General discussion – given topics	All
10.45–11.15	Coffee	
11.15–12.00	General intelligence test	All
12.00–12.30	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates A, B, C
12.30–1.30	Lunch	
1.30–2.00	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates B, E, C
2.00–2.45	Spatial reasoning test	All
2.45–3.15	Coffee	
3.15–4.00	Personality test	All
4.00–4.30	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates C, F, D
Day 2 Times	**Activity**	**Who is involved**
9.30–10.15	Verbal reasoning test	All
10.15–10.45	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates D, A, F
10.45–11.15	Coffee	
11.15–12.00	Critical thinking test	All
12.00–12.30	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates E, B, A
12.30–1.30	Lunch	
1.30–3.00	In-tray exercise	All
3.00–3.30	Coffee	
3.30–4.00	One-to-one interviews (30 min each)	Candidates F, D, E

Note: Based on six candidates (A, B, C, D, E, F) and three assessors.

Final selection decision making

The selection decision involves measuring the candidates individually against the selection criteria defined, often in the person or competency specification, and not against each other. A useful tool to achieve this is the matrix in Table 9.3. This is a good method of ensuring that every candidate is assessed against each selection criterion and in each box in the matrix the key details can be completed. The box can be used whether a single selection method was used or multiple methods. If multiple methods were used and contradictory information is found against any criterion, this can be noted in the decision-making process.

When more than one selector is involved there is some debate about how to gather and use the information and about the judgement of each selector. One way is for each selector to assess the information collected separately, and then for all selectors to meet to discuss assessments. When this approach is used, there may be some very different assessments, especially if the interview was the only selection method used. Much heated and time-consuming debate can be generated, but the most useful aspect of this process is sharing the information in everyone's matrix to understand how judgements have been formed. This approach is also helpful in training interviewers.

An alternative approach is to fill in only one matrix, with all selectors contributing. This may be quicker, but the drawback is that the quietest member may be the one who has all the critical pieces of information. There is a risk that not all the information available may be contributed to the debate in progress.

Validation of selection procedures

We have already indicated that test scores may be validated against eventual job performance for each individual in order to discover whether the test score is a good predictor of success in the job. In this way we can decide whether the test should be used as part of the selection procedure in future. The same idea can be applied to the use of other individual or combined selection methods. Yet, despite the cost involved in selecting potential employees, few firms formally evaluate the success of their selection methods (CIPD 2015).

Table 9.3

Selection criteria	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4
Criterion a				
Criterion b				
Criterion c				
Criterion d				
Criterion e				
General comments				

SUMMARY PROPOSITIONS

9.1. Selection is a two-way process. The potential employer and the potential employee both make selection decisions.

9.2. The use of technology and AI is increasing in selection, but the importance of the applicant experience and the value of face-to-face interaction should not be overlooked.

9.3. Selection criteria are derived from person specifications and competency profiles and are essential to a structured and effective shortlisting process. Values are of increasing importance in the selection process.

9.4. A combination of selection methods is usually chosen, based upon the job, appropriateness, acceptability, time, administrative ease, cost, accuracy and the abilities of the selection staff.

9.5. The most well-used selection methods are application forms, interviews (including those conducted by video and telephone), tests, group selection procedures, assessment centres and references. The use of online methods continues to increase.

9.6. A procedure for selection decision making needs to be agreed which can integrate all the selection information available.

9.7. Selection methods should be evaluated for their effectiveness.

GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. It could be argued that the selection process identifies candidates who are competent in the selection process rather than candidates who are most competent to perform the job on offer. Discuss this in relation to all forms of selection.

2. 'It is unethical and bad for business to make candidates undergo appraisal at a selection assessment centre without providing detailed feedback and support.' Discuss.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Will Artificial Intelligence change the face of selection?

As we have seen in this chapter, selection decisions rely on data gathered from applicants using a variety of methods. For decades, humans have used these data to consider its match to job descriptions and person specifications in an attempt to predict who will perform well in a job. But as we have also seen in this chapter, the pace of technological change is rapid and Artificial

Intelligence (AI) promises (or threatens depending on your point of view) to revolutionise selection processes.

While many AI processes are some years away from being mainstream, they are nevertheless reasonably straightforward adaptations of the electronic Applicant Tracking Systems that many organisations already use. The scale of investment in the field is huge: there are currently hundreds of HR-tools using AI and machine learning (the capacity of systems to improve from experience without being programmed to do so) and large and small tech firms alike are pumping millions into improving these and developing more. There are many current examples. First, software for the automated analysis of video interviews that tracks facial expressions to indicate suitability in relation to body language and tone of voice. Second, psychometric matching programmes that analyse application form completion and eliminate applicants using too many backspaces/delete as this might indicate lack of decisiveness. Third, systems that tailor psychometric tests to needs of job, delivering 70% reduction in recruitment time and improved performance of new employees. Others include predictive analytics about likely performance of applicants and chatbots to conduct initial interviews. The potential for automation is seemingly endless and in many cases is demonstrating positive results. For example, Unilever has adopted AI in its (volume) graduate recruitment using gamified psychometric testing, AI analysed video interview and algorithm-driven selection process. 80% of new appointments are judged to be performing well in role and it has the most diverse group of new recruits ever. AI may, however, be less effective for specific, niche roles.

In many ways, AI is to be welcomed, given the widespread recognition of the subjective nature of many current selection processes. AI algorithms can be completely objective and offer the opportunity to eliminate bias, creating diversity in selection as Unilever has found. Care is nevertheless needed as initial programming is done by humans, who should take care not to perpetuate their own (often unconscious) biases in selection algorithms. Care is also needed as the machines learn: if their analysis of current top performers identifies these as young, white men (possibly because of the shortcomings of current selection processes) then these characteristics will be built into developing algorithms and perpetuate bias. Human oversight will be needed, although it may in time be possible to train systems to recognise and 'correct' for potential biases.

Ultimately there are two possible scenarios: humans use and are informed by technology and AI *or* AI takes over and makes people largely redundant. The first one is probably more likely, given that the applicant experience is important and human involvement is fundamental to this. Intuition is also still considered to be important, although this can be controversial. Nevertheless, AI will change HR roles, possibly for the better as the more routinised aspects will be removed, but numbers of jobs will almost certainly reduce. HR needs to rethink its role in the selection process and how it will continue to add value.

Questions

1. What are the benefits and draw backs in using AI in selection?
2. How accessible is AI to firms that are not large and well-resourced?
3. How will AI change the shape of HR activity?

Source: Adapted from Jefferys (2017).