

# HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR TALENT SELECTIONS WITH ASSESSMENTS

A N E B O O K

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INTRODUCTION	3
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## CHAPTER 1

ASSESSMENT TYPES & PROVIDERS	4
Optimizing Selection Decisions	5
Types of Assessments	5
Assessment Providers	7

## CHAPTER 2

EVALUATING ASSESSMENTS	8
How to Decide on an Assessment	9
Reliability and Validity	9
Attendance & Reliability	9
Types of Validation Evidence	10
Limitations and Concerns	12
Practicality	12
Legal Concerns	12

## CHAPTER 3

IMPLIMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES	14
How to Evaluate Providers	15
Key Takeaways	16
Vendor Questions & Guidelines	17
Helpful Resources	19





## INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, assessments have become a mainstream tool that many companies utilize to optimize their selection process. When used appropriately, assessments can greatly reduce the cost of a bad hire, which has been estimated to be between 90 to 125 percent of an employee's annual salary. Due to the huge ROI potential of assessments, their use has continued to grow over the years, and now, according to most usage estimates, around 80 percent of organizations consisting of more than 100 workers employ assessments as part of their external hiring process. Assessments are used throughout the selection process – initially to screen candidates early on in recruitment, or narrow down the candidates chosen to

interview and as well as a last hurdle for making tough decisions. Cumulative research has generally shown that when companies utilize assessments appropriately, the selection process is more effective. Using assessments, employers often hire higher performers who are less likely to leave, while also increasing efficiency through the elimination of poor-quality candidates.

With so many different types of pre-employment assessment tools and vendors available, deciding which assessment to use can be a daunting process. Furthermore, pre-employment assessments are not part of a regulated industry, and the quality of assessments can be vastly varied. In fact, it is estimated that there are over 2,500 different assessments available from over 400 vendors. Unfortunately, many of these assessments lack scien-

tific credibility and evidence confirming that they predict job performance well. How can you be sure that an assessment provider is offering you the right tools that will work for you and your organization?

The purpose of this eBook is to orient you on how to methodically evaluate and select assessment tools and suppliers, by providing you with a substantive background on assessments to enable you to make informed decisions and utilize assessments appropriately. Often, assessments are oversold on their universal ability to predict job performance, decrease turnover and increase fit. Conversely, their perhaps main value proposition is undersold—which is their usefulness in enhancing the hiring decision making process by providing structure and insight about candidates before they interview.

# ASSESSMENT TYPES & PROVIDERS

C H A P T E R O N E





# OPTIMIZING SELECTION DECISIONS

Traditional methods of selection, such as resume screening and interviews, are often focused on experience. Resume screening is inherently riddled with issues, as resumes contain inconsistent and unstandardized data. People use different words to describe the same activities and may enhance or leave key information out, making it very hard to interpret and consistently compare candidates.

After an experience-based interview, hiring decision-makers are often more comfortable assessing whether someone has the right level of experience to do the job. However, being able to perform the work is only a portion of what decision-makers need to know to make an informed determination. How people will do their job and work with others will be critical components in their overall success in the role. For example, how will they come to a decision? How will they interact with others, especially in stressful times? How will they positively influence the company culture and climate? These soft skills are generally thought of as the differentiating factors between good employees and great employees with leadership potential. These softer skills are generally hard to measure in an interview, as by nature, people are presenting the best—and often rehearsed—version of themselves.

To make good hiring decisions, interviewers need to be astute, unbiased evaluators with a vast understanding of personality and behaviors. This is not often the case; and assessments can be used to help guide decision-makers in these areas. Assessments provide interviewers and hiring decision-makers with specific behavioral tendencies, which can lead to better prediction of future job performance and organizational fit aligned with future business and talent strategies. For example, the most utilized method for succession planning and development is often the 9-box, which juxtaposes employee potential vs. performance. If we just rely on traditional experience-based selection criteria, we are missing out on a good portion of how future leaders are chosen and evaluated—including their potential.

## TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

### Knowledge Tests

Tests of critical knowledge areas related to the role; these are generally technical and are often used when licensing or certification is required for the role. Professional, scientific or technical roles are often best suited for this type of assessment.

### Skill-Based Assessments

These aptitude assessments provide diagnostic feedback on the employee/candidates' skill level for key skills related to job performance. For example, there are several tests for computer skills, programming skills or language skills. The difference between a knowledge and a skill is that knowledge is an understanding of information in a given content area or concept, and a skill is applying that knowledge to a job task. Therefore, skill tests are often best used for technical, administrative or service-based jobs.



## Cognitive Tests

Evidence indicates that measures of cognitive ability predict performance in most jobs. In fact, some studies have indicated that these tests predict job performance as well as competency-based interviews, and well beyond personality measures. Research suggests that about 26 percent of job performance can be explained by cognitive ability . Unfortunately, research also shows that minorities often score lower on these measures, and this can lead to systematic discrimination. These tests are considered legally defensible, because of evidence that they do predict job performance, and there are ways to alleviate discrimination in practice (e.g. using race-based norms). More importantly, as previously mentioned, the ability to do a job is only partial information. These cognitive measures do not tell us whether a person WILL do the job. Therefore, they almost always needed to be paired with a non-cog-

nitive assessment. Applicant reactions to these assessments are another concern, as the types of questions on these assessments (e.g. vocabulary, arithmetic, spatial reasoning) may not seem directly relevant to many jobs.

## Personality Tests

Generally, personality is assessed through self-report questionnaires, in a variety of formats (e.g. multiple choice, true/false, rating scales, etc.). Research shows that personality is predictive of job performance and behaviors, accounting for about 20 to 30 percent of the variance in performance . It is important to bear in mind, that the personality constructs being measured and the role have a very significant impact on the observed relationship. Many assessments are related to the Big Five model of personality, as it is one of the most well-researched personality measures. There are several versions of big five assessments that researchers have put online for free.

The IPIP-300 is one of the best examples of these free assessments.

## Assessment Centers, Job Simulations & Work Samples

This grouping of assessments measure how a candidate performs on activities relevant to the tasks performed on the job. These types of assessments should only be used if knowing how to perform the job activities is required at the time of hire. In other words, task performance cannot be trained or developed. If that is the case, this type of assessment can be very useful, but often costly to develop.

## Integrity Tests

Integrity tests are often used to screen entry-level employees for honesty, dependability and a willingness to follow rules. For entry-level jobs, these tests often do predict job performance and do not show discrimination . However, they are often

very narrow in focus and generally evaluate a person's willingness to follow rules, which is a typical personality construct. This narrowed focus limits the usefulness, as they do not provide insight into customer service or initiative, which are often appropriate constructs for entry-level jobs.

## Situational Judgment Tests

These tests are scenario-based assessments where candidates are presented with situations similar to what they might face on the job, and various options for actions to take. Candidates are asked to pick the best option or rank the options in terms of effectiveness. The more relevant these tests are to the job under consideration, the favorably perceived they are by applicants as they can easily see the relevancy of the assessment.

## Biographical Data

Biographical data assessments assess a person's past behaviors, to predict future behaviors. Biodata measures often include items about past experiences and behaviors that reflect personality, attitude, interests and skills. Questions generally reference occurrences or actions in a person's past or ones that have been observable and therefore are objective or factual in a sense. Biodata assessments are typically very long if they are broad-based, as the purpose of them is to find long-term trends in a person's past behaviors. Applicants may dislike the time required to take these assessments and may not feel they are relevant for the job. Research has shown that when used in conjunction with other types of assessments, biographical measures often provide additional predictive evidence

# ASSESSMENT PROVIDERS

## Direct Publishers

Direct publishers have developed and marketed the assessments. While intimately familiar with their own assessments, these providers generally focus on how to fit their solution into your situation and often focus on how their assessments are better than the competition. If you go directly to the publisher, you will need to be the one to evaluate the assessments. Most direct publishers will require their clients/customers to either have some minimum educational requirements (e.g. advanced degrees in psychology) or to have gone through a certification. This approach provides organizations with the most ownership of the assessment process, and in most cases is the most economical.

## Consulting Firms

Consulting firms will often offer a few different assessments from different providers. This offers you some flexibility, comparison and alignment to your situation. Consulting firms also have the added benefits of scale and scope, with additional implementation and project management expertise and resources. This will, of course, come with a consulting fee based on the scope of the project.

## Independent Consultants

Much like consulting firms, independent consultants offer the same flexibility and perspective, and generally will offer a few different assessments. They may or may not be affiliates of one or more assessment publishers. They may offer a good solution to an organization where the scope of the project is smaller, and the organization is trying to reduce spend — but want to have some guidance and assistance with implementation.

# EVALUATING ASSESSMENTS

C H A P T E R T W O





# DECIDING ON AN ASSESSMENT

The first step to evaluating assessments is to align the assessment with your particular use case. Assessments are developed with different purposes in mind, and they should only be used for what they were intended. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was not developed to select employees and should not be used for that purpose; even the test publisher warns against this. There are a number of assessments specifically designed for development purposes (e.g. DiSC) and vocational choice that should also not be used for selection. Several assessments that are available can be used for both selection and development; and they generally have different respective reports.

When using assessments for selection/promotion, all processes employed and decisions made must be defensible from a scientific and legal perspective. An organization must be able to provide evidence that people who do better in their selection process in fact perform better on the job. From a legal perspective, all applicants, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity should have an equal chance of being selected. In other words, the process should not discriminate.

To decide what assessment will work best for your situation, you first must establish what you are trying to predict. What is the specific business problem you are trying to solve? If you are trying to predict job performance, you first must define what that is. Is it sales, or managerial? Or perhaps you want someone to create a long-term strategic vision? Maybe you want someone to bring in creative ideas? Or perhaps it's a combination of them. If there are multiple criteria, then you should also decide on what the different priorities are, and how they stack up against each other.

To fully match your situation and the context of the work, a job analysis should be conducted. Job analysis is a methodology to understand the nature of the role. Generally, information is gathered from a variety of sources (job incumbents, stakeholders and subject matter experts) through interviews and surveys to determine the job tasks, duties, responsibilities and performance metrics, as well as the characteristics that lead to success — such as knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies. The output of this work is generally a detailed role profile. While an in-depth overview of job analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, some resources on conducting a job analysis are provided on in Appendix A

In addition to establishing a thorough understanding of the role (e.g. through job analysis or similar progress), it is critical that as a buyer of assessments, you pay close attention to the scientific rigor on how the assessments were developed. At minimum, the assessment tool should have documented evidence demonstrating its validity and reliability in relevant situations to your own. This information is typically reported out in a technical manual provided by the assessment provider.

# RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Validity tells you that the assessment is measuring what it is supposed to measure. Whatever the type of assessment tool you are evaluating, it is critical that the assessment is validated. Validation is a process for establishing and documenting the appropriate use of the assessment as a tool in the selection process.



[Image 1]  
Example types of job performance that assessments can predict

Reliability indicates that the assessment will consistently assess the same thing each time, and you aren't getting fluke results. When considering an assessment, both reliability and validity must be judged as they are independent of each other, and you can have one but not the other. You can have a reliable but not valid assessment where you are consistently testing the same thing, but it is not what you want to assess. You can also have a valid but not reliable assessment where the overall average scores align with what you want to assess, but the individual scores are inconsistent.

Finally, when the test is consistently measuring what you want it to, you have a reliable and valid assessment. A popular analogy for the relationship between validity and reliability is to think of a bull's-eye target.

Reliability is generally evaluated in two ways: internal consistency and test — re-test reliability. Internal consistency relates

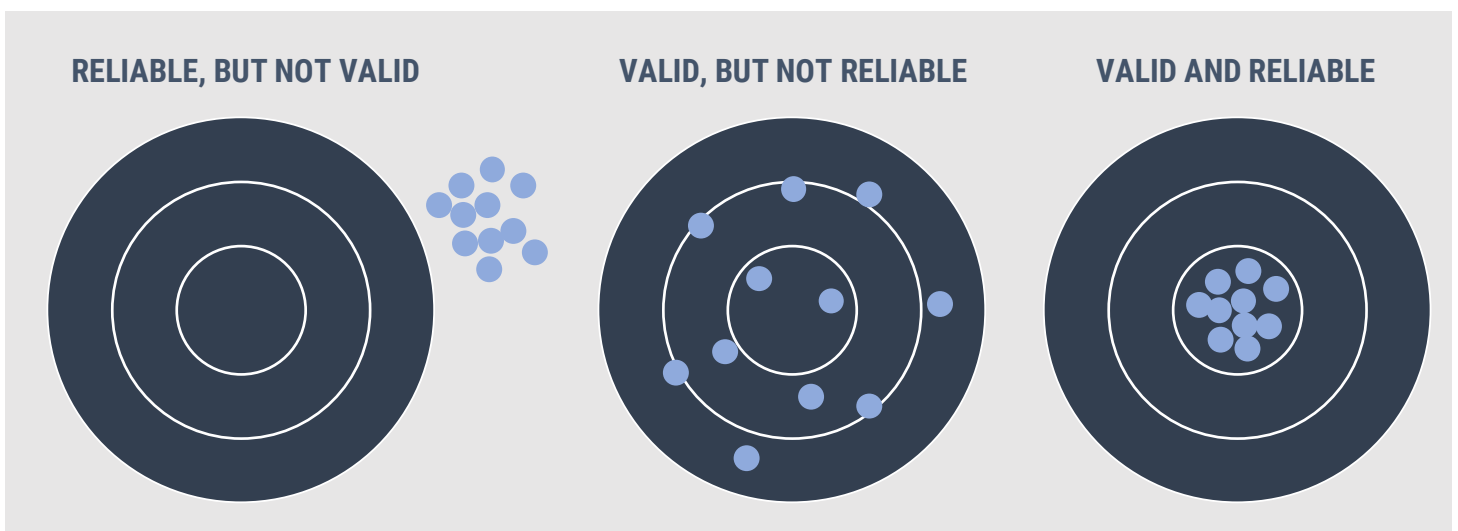
to the questions in the assessment, and if the questions are related to each other as expected. If you take a psychometric assessment, you will often notice many questions appear to be measuring the same thing; this is by design to help determine whether the assessment is getting an accurate measurement of the concepts. Test-retest is a measure of consistency of responses over time. It answers the question, are people responding to questions the same way each time they take the test? Generally, this is established by examining the relationship of an individual's scores from a first assessment and a second administration of the same assessment sometime later (such as in six months).

Reliability scores are generally measured on a scale between 0 and 1, on a coefficient called Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha coefficients between .70 and .80 are widely considered adequate for personality measures. The more important a decision is, the higher reliability should be.

## TYPES OF VALIDATION EVIDENCE

### Construct Validity

Construct/content validity examines how well a test relates to other assessments measuring the same constructs (convergent validity), or the degree it is not related to assessments it should not be (divergent validity). For example, extroversion is often related to higher job performance for sales professionals. To establish that a newly developed assessment does in fact measure extroversion, correlations between another test of extroversion would be used to show that they are measuring the same construct. In the development of a new measure, you would expect several (e.g. typically three to five) indicators of convergent and divergent validity in order to establish adequate construct validity.



[Image 2]  
**Reliable, but not valid:** Consistently measuring the wrong thing

[Image 3]  
**Valid, but not reliable:** Measuring the right thing, but inconsistently

[Image 4]  
**Reliable and valid:** Consistently on target

## Criterion-Related Validity

Criterion/predictive validity measures how accurate an assessment tool is at predicting a certain outcome. This is generally thought of the most powerful type of validation evidence for an assessment. For example, in the case of assessments, this is generally how well someone will perform on the job. Predictive validity is established when a test is given first, and then at some later point, job performance data is collected. Unfortunately, these studies are not often conducted, due to the resource demand that is required.

## Concurrent

The most common type of validation study is a concurrent study and is often used as a practical substitute for predictive validity. Current job incumbents are given the assessment, and the results are related to their current job performance or other important outcomes (e.g. tenure).

## Reporting Validity

Validity should be reported out as a quantitative metric, either as a percentage or a validity coefficient. Percentages show increases in the number of successful hires with the assessment tool, or a percentage of turnover reduction. Percentages are easy to interpret but can only be used with highly objective data (e.g turnover, sales volume, customer service issues handled)— which is not always available and may not offer a comprehensive or complete view of performance.

For more subjective job performance criteria, such as managerial performance ratings, problem solving abilities, teamwork or competencies, validity coefficients are often used. This type of measurement is generally a correlation coefficient ranging from 0 (which indicates no relationship) to 1.0, which indicates perfect prediction. Prediction of job performance is multifaceted, with several state and trait-based influences, and it is rare to see predictive validity above .4. There are some general rules of thumb to interpret the meaningfulness of these validity coefficients . Acceptable range of coefficients fall between .15 and .60, with a majority of established assessments falling between .20 and .40.

Test publishers should be continuously updating their assessments, conducting validation studies and updating norms. Typically, every 10 years, a test publisher should release updated validation studies that are either local or generalized studies. Local validation studies are made up of participants from a single organization, whereas generalized studies include participants in similar roles and across organizations. When assessing the

[Image 5]  
Reporting validity should be a quantitative metric such as a correlation coefficient within a range

<b>VALIDITY COEFFICIENT RANGE</b>	<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSESSMENT TOOL</b>
BELOW .10	NOT USEFUL
.11 TO .20	SLIGHTLY USEFUL, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES, AND PREDICTABILITY SHOULD BE INTERPRETED WITH CAUTION
.21 TO .35	USEFUL
ABOVE .35	VERY USEFUL



validity of an assessment for your situation, it is important to consider how similar the validation study is to your specific case. If you are a large pharmaceutical company picking an assessment for a sales executive, you would not want to use validation evidence from a mid-sized logistics company.

## LIMITATIONS AND CONCERNS OF ASSESSMENTS

The concept of faking personality tests, especially in high-stakes environments (e.g. pre-employment) has received a lot of research attention. Most research indicates that while people can distort assessments, few people can accurately fake assessments. For example, they may try to distort some of their answers, but won't do it enough to substantially change how their personality is reported. The way the assessments are constructed and scored, one would have to be extremely knowledgeable about the assessment and scoring system. Most assessments report out an assessee validity score, which shows the individual's response consistency, and may have impression management scales. Furthermore, in application, research indicates that job applicants do not typically intentionally distort their assessment responses. This may in part be a result of applicants being made aware that most assessments have distortion scales. One of the largest studies examining applicant faking on assessments showed that even after being denied employment, applicants did not substantially change their personality assessment scores when reassessed a second time for employment.

## PRACTICALITY

Practicality of an assessment is really determined by the situation and is subjective. However, appropriate consideration should be given to several factors including length, time, cost, effectiveness and ease of administration and scoring. In short, candidates, for obvious reasons, prefer shorter tests that take less time. The cost of the assessment also needs to be balanced with the expected returns, as well as the context. Most assessments today are administered online, but many cognitive assessments require an onsite administration in a proctored environment.

Assessments must also be able to be administered to diverse populations, including disabilities and those that speak other languages. Organizations should have in place procedures for dealing with requests for accommodations. This could include providing applicants with multiple testing locations, interpreters and internet access

## LEGAL CONCERNS

Test developers should provide evidence that the test does not contain bias based on race or sex. In other words, the test is related to outcomes in a similar manner for all individuals. This does not mean that the test will have similar results for different groups of people, but that it is not a biased indicator of an outcome of interest. For example, in a typical employment decision context, more women than men will score low on a test of upper-body strength, but the test would not be considered biased if women and men with similar scores achieved similar performance on the job.



[Image 6]  
 In the scenario to the right, adverse impact would be established because the selection ratio is 66%

Male (unprotected)	Female (unprotected)
100 ASSESSED	75 ASSESSED
50 HIRED	25 HIRED
50% SELECTION RATIO	33% SELECTION RATIO
<p>In the above scenario, the company would have to hire six more women to avoid adverse impact.</p>	

In the United States, adverse impact needs to be shown to establish discrimination. An assessment has adverse impact if the assessment score results in hiring proportionately fewer protected group members than majority group members. The standard rule is the 80 percent rule, where if the ratio of hired to not hired between protected and unprotected is less than 80 percent, there is evidence of adverse impact. For example, adverse impact would be established in the below scenario, as the selection ratio is 66 percent.

# IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES

C H A P T E R T H R E E





# HOW TO EVALUATE ASSESSMENT PROVIDERS

## Determine What You Are Trying to Predict

Gather and review existing information/documentation about the role. Consider performance outcomes of the role and future business strategies. Also, if there are incumbents currently in the role, what characteristics lead to success — or to failure? What separates the good from the great? If there are gaps in understanding what successful performance looks like in the role, or if people are not aligned, we recommend conducting a job analysis to close the gaps.

## Examine Multiple Assessments

It can help determine which assessment(s) align best for the role(s), your situation, budget and organization. For example: How closely does the personality assessment match my specific needs? Will it predict the performance I am looking for? Do the constructs align with my competency models? Do the constructs align with my training and development programs? Do the constructs align with my selection procedures? How am I going to measure the impact of assessments? What other measures am I going to include? How am I going to store the data? Test data, including answers, raw scores and reports, should be confidentially maintained. All test data, recommendations and conclusions should only be disseminated to authorized individuals for job-related purposes.

## Use Multiple Assessment Methods

When considering assessments, it all goes back to the kind of performance you are trying to predict. Ultimately, job performance generally comes down to several different types of performance. For example, if someone knows a lot about accounting but is not a team player, the person may not be a good fit for your organization. Therefore, an easy way to enhance your selection success is to combine multiple types of assessments. At a very basic level, think of a typical recruitment breakdown of 'can do' and 'will do.' The 'can do' components are often the hard skills — the knowledge and skills. Job knowledge tests, interviews and simulations are great indicators. The 'will do' are the soft skills — the behavioral tendencies or competencies that are more easily understood through psychometric assessments. When personality tests are combined with other types of assessments (e.g. cognitive ability, job knowledge, simulations, etc.), you greatly reduce the chance of selecting an employee who does not have the right knowledge, skills and abilities for a position.

## Administer Assessment Before Interview

Assessments and interviews are complementary. Assessments often uncover aspects of the individual that may not surface in an interview. As well, a structured behavioral interview is a great way to confirm strengths, as well as further explore weaknesses. If you are using a valid assessment, there still is chance that parts of the assessment for an individual might be inaccurate. Addressing those in the interview allows the candidate to potentially compensate. Assessments are inherently limited in that they are a brief snapshot of how the person responded at that particular time. Therefore, we recommend

administering assessments sometime after the first initial screening, but before the final interview. This saves you money in assessment fees by not assessing all applicants, and allows you to add in specific follow up questions to the interview as a result of a candidate's assessment results.

## Measure the Impact of Assessments

You must have the ability to effectively measure job performance for psychometric testing to make the largest impact during the hiring process. If you are not able to measure performance against specific job tasks, the ROI of psychometric testing investment is difficult to see.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Clearly define your “use case”. What are you trying to achieve in your unique situation  | 2) Ensure a vendor has appropriate credentials and follows industry standards   |
| 3) Only use scientifically based assessments that have 1) current validation studies (no more than 10 years old) demonstrating acceptable predictive validity evidence (.20 or above) and reliability (.70); 2) A distortion scale; 3) The ability to provide normative data — be cautious of pass/fail assessments (especially with personality-based ones) and favor assessments that provide normative data that is relevant to your organization (e.g. industry and region) |   |
| 4) Follow established guidelines and procedures ensuring legal compliance (e.g. EEOC).  | 5) Use multiple complementary assessment methods — this ensures individual result validity                                |
| 6) Integrate assessments early in the process (e.g. before interviews) to complement and enhance selection procedures.  | 7) Follow up on assessment predictions by examining and evaluating their utility through ongoing validation and feedback. |



## ASSESSMENT VENDOR QUESTIONS & GUIDELINES

The most important thing to consider when evaluating an assessment provider is to ensure that they understand your particular use case. Assessment providers should be asking you about what drove you to consider assessments, what your expectations for the assessment outcomes are — and asking details about the role, your company and business strategy. Additionally, you want to ensure the vendor has the right credentials and will follow the right steps to protect you legally, as well as ensure you get the most out of your assessments.

### 1. What assessments are you affiliated with?

Ideally, the provider will be associated with multiple assessments from multiple providers to provide you with a best fit for your situation.

### 2. What will your process be for determining the best fit assessment(s) for my situation?

You are looking for the vendor to go through some sort of job analysis or discovery process in order to determine what assessment would work best for your situation.

### 3. What is your process to evaluate the performance of the assessment in my situation?



You are looking for the provider to have a standardized process to continually evaluate whether the assessments result in what was expected.

#### **4. What professional associates are you/your organization aligned with?**

The vendor should be aligned with professional associations, which often have published ethical, procedural and statistical guidelines that members adhere to. Examples include the American Psychological Association (APA), Society of Industrial/Organizational Psychology (SIOP) and British Psychological Society.

#### **5. What are your credentials and experience? Can you provide references?**

Most assessments have minimum educational experience (e.g. a masters in psychology) or certification requirements in order to purchase or administer. Ensure that the vendor has met these requirements.

#### **6. Do you have a technical report that describes the development and validation of the test?**

Beyond ensuring that the vendor is utilizing scientific assessments, you also want to ensure the test manual follows professional guidelines. Good assessment validation reports should be organized according to the standards outlined in the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures or the Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures.

#### **7. When were these validation studies conducted?**

Ensure the test has recent validation studies. Does the personality assessment provider supply technical reports containing validity studies using the personality tests in organizations? The general rule of thumb is that validation studies expire after 10 years.

#### **8. What were the validity coefficients?**

Based on the type of assessment and performance outcomes/criteria, you should expect a good assessment to have above .25. You should also ask or see if they did any adjustments/corrections on the coefficients to correct for range restriction (lack of variance or reliability of the criterion/outcome variables). It is generally acceptable to perform these procedures, but it is something to keep in mind; especially if you are going to do your own local validation study.

#### **9. What was the sample size?**

Ensure adequate sample sizes. Generally, you want at least 30, depending upon the similarity to your role/situation. Typically, the more people in the study the better, and most assessment publishers will have validation studies involving several hundred.

#### **10. What is the reliability of the assessment?**

Reliability should be above .70

## 11. What roles/jobs were included in the validation study?

What adverse impact studies (by race and gender) have been done? Can you show that the test is not biased?

## 12. How will you establish that the assessment is valid and effective in my organization, for my roles?

You are looking for a standard validation process to utilize for your specific organization. This can be a local validation or generalized approach.

## 13. How will the test be administered, scored and interpreted?

Does the assessment utilize cut-off scores — or make recommendations for selection? What is the process for establishing or confirming recommended cut-off scores?

## 14. Has the assessment ever been legally challenged? What was the outcome? What support will be provided by the publisher/provider in the event of a legal challenge to the use of the test?

Looking for assessment development being upheld in court. It's important to note that the inappropriate use of the assessment is the fault of the user, and not indicative of the assessment. You are also looking for the publisher/provider to provide support in the event of a legal challenge.

## 15. Was this assessment reviewed by an outside source? Was it peer-reviewed?

Ideally, you want an assessment that is peer-reviewed. Many (but not all) assessments are reviewed in Buros' Mental Measurements Yearbook.

# HELPFUL ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

[U.S. Office of Personnel Management](#)

[Uniform Guidelines on Selection Procedures](#)

[O\\*Net](#)

[Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology](#)

[The Society for Human Resource Management](#)