



Psychometric Testing - The Future of Successful Hiring

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Abstract : *The word "psychometric testing" is often met with apprehensive sentiments. Furthermore, if this word is used in conjunction with the field of human resource management, the response often ranges between wariness and total abhor. The debate on the subject of using psychometric testing in HRM has been perpetual. This paper is an attempt to present the origin, essential characteristics, significance, types, merits and demerits of psychometric testing in the field of HRM.*

Keywords: *Psychometric testing, Hiring, Human Resource Management, Recruitment.*

1. Introduction

Psychometric testing is a blend of personality, aptitude, numeric/ reasoning ability and emotional intelligence tests. In the field of HRM, psychometric testing can be employed for measuring a wide spectrum of an individual's attributes such as motivation, values, working style, response to different situations etc. The use of psychometric tests in the recruitment and selection process could determine the compatibility of a potential candidate to a specific job. A profound understanding of the candidate could be achieved.

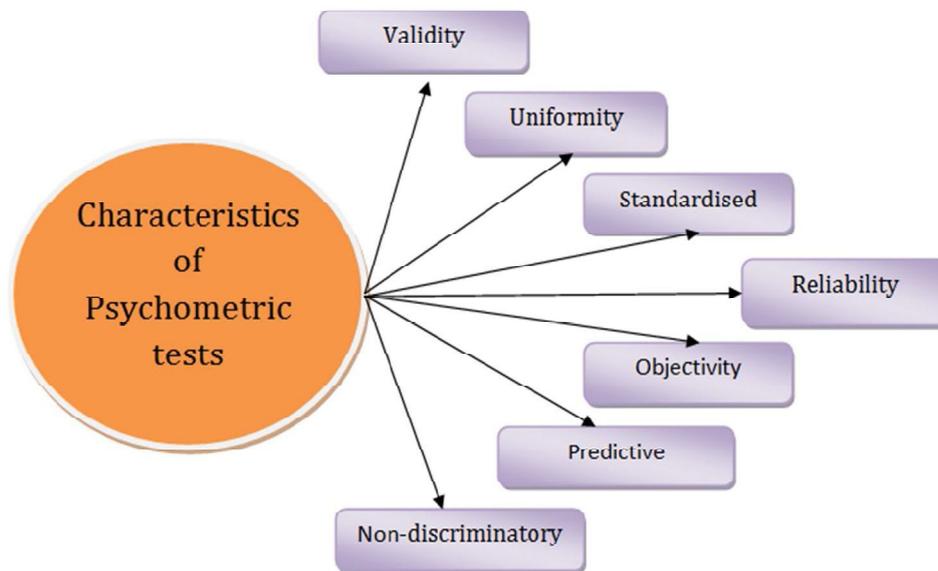
1.1 Origin of Psychometric testing in the field of HRM

The modern psychometric test originates when Charles Darwin's cousin, Sir Francis Galton, who lived from 1822 to 1911, and was captivated by differences among individuals. Sir Francis went on to

show that objective testing could offer consequential data pertaining to human attributes. Eventually, James Cattell first coined the term 'mental test' in 1890. Fifteen years afterward, Alfred Binet initiated the first modern intelligence test. The popularity of psychometric testing augmented throughout the twentieth century and as of today, psychometric testing is considered a standardised assessment model for predicting human behaviour.

Psychometric testing, in the current day, is extensively used in several organisations for a wide spectrum of activities such as recruitment, selection, training needs analysis, leadership development, succession planning etc. Nevertheless, owing to the speculation and legal complexities regarding its usage, it is primarily used in the hiring stage.

1.2 Essential characteristics of psychometric testing



Validity: Tests must be valid in terms of its content and process.

Uniformity: Tests should comprise of the same steps even while administered by different practitioners.

Standardized: Tests must be administered under controlled conditions.

Reliability: Intrinsic errors must be minimized or quantified.

Objectivity: Test scores must not be influenced by personal beliefs or values

Predictive: Accurate prediction of performance must be possible.

Non-discriminatory: Discrimination on the basis of gender, culture etc., must be avoided.

1.3 Significance of hiring the right candidate

Appraising potential candidates for recruitment and/or development, generally poses two questions: What to appraise and how to appraise?

The “what” question would suggest that skills, knowledge needed for a job and

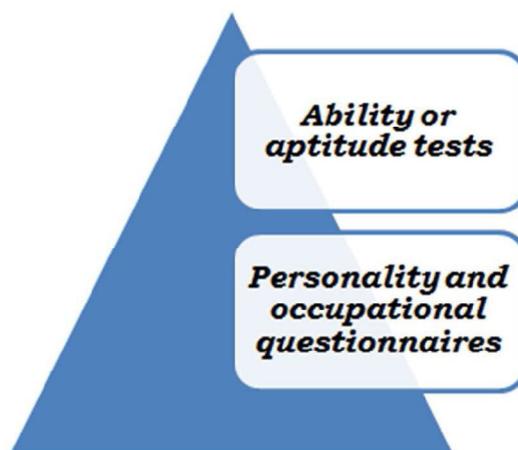
common traits needed irrespective of the job or role. The “how” question, however, addresses the techniques and combination of personality tests to be employed to assess the traits and skills needed for the job.

Recruiting the right candidate for a position in an organization calls for making use of a series of techniques that

screen potential candidates for desirable characteristics that are pre-requisites for a job. This can be achieved and/or ascertained both through traditional hiring methods as well as psychometric tests. However, psychometric tests hold a superior stand in terms of accuracy in predicting desirable traits in potential employees.

According to a research conducted by Leadership IQ, nearly a whopping 50% of employees do not deliver the standard needed within the initial 18 months of employment. Additionally, an estimate by experts indicates that one incorrect hiring decision could result in a loss of 20 to 200 percent of the annual salary for the job.

2. Categories of Psychometric Tests



Psychometric assessments are commonly categorized as the following:

2.1 Ability or aptitude tests aim to quantify the intellectual competence, analytical and logical reasoning abilities in definite areas. Consequent performances at work, using work relevant skills, are estimated.

Commonly, ability or aptitude tests cover the following:

<i>Verbal ability</i>	Measure of spelling, grammar, ability to follow instructions and understand analogies.
<i>Numeric ability</i>	Measure of fundamental mathematics and number sequences
<i>Abstract reasoning</i>	Measure of ability to identify logic in a pattern and devise a solution.
<i>Abstract reasoning</i>	Measure of ability to identify logic in a pattern and devise a solution.
<i>Spatial ability</i>	Measure of ability to picturise three-dimensional objects displayed in two-dimensional images.
<i>Mechanical reasoning</i>	Measure of physical and mechanical knowledge.



2.2 Personality and occupational questionnaires are designed to gauge the approach by which a person does task, his/her response or behaviour pattern in certain situations and attitudes, preferences etc.

3. Why use psychometric tests/Problems of traditional hiring methods

Traditional hiring methods predominantly rely on information obtained from resumes and personal interviews. Such information may be misleading if the resume is prepared in an impressive manner using appropriate wording, font, spelling and grammar. Interviews also do not divulge the true characteristics of a potential applicant in circumstances where the candidate is an extrovert and agreeable by nature. Other factors such as the interviewers' first impression and stereotyping candidates also perturb the hiring process. Consequently, psychometric testing offers the possibility of hiring potential employees who are not just superficially promising but also possess the skills and personality necessary for the job.

3.1 Psychometric tests – Merits

- **Equal opportunity**

The key role of recruitment and selection as a process within an organization is to employ the most suitable candidates from the available pool of job applicants. This cannot be achieved if the selection techniques used are not consistent for all the applicants. Psychometric tests are designed in a way that equal and fair opportunity is bestowed upon all candidates.

- **Provide a comprehensive behavioral and cognitive profile**

A general attempt of assessing a potential applicant's profile in terms of his/her behavior (response in certain circumstances) and cognitive skills (Brain based skills). The behavioral profile includes characteristics such as the ability to communicate, empathize, set goals etc. On the other hand, cognitive skills are the core skills that are required to complete different tasks. A comprehensive profile of the candidate in terms of his/her behavioral characteristics and cognitive abilities can be drawn up using psychometric tests.

- **Ascertain job- person fit**

Based on the comprehensive profile of the candidate and job description, job analysis and job specification data, a prediction pertaining to the compatibility between the person and the job can be made.

3.2 Psychometric tests – Demerits

- **Results may not be conclusive as they are open to interpretation and may be influenced by the practitioners' intellect and prejudices.**

The nature of psychometric testing in terms of the results presented is mostly qualitative. Consequently, the ways in which the results are interpreted are subject to bias, prejudices, beliefs and the mindset of the practitioner. Hence, they may not be conclusive.

- **Can never be used as a stand-alone technique.**

The focus and purpose of psychometric testing is primarily on ascertaining the abstract skills of potential applicants. Therefore, they cannot be used as a stand-alone technique as they do not throw light on the technical skills and abilities possessed by the candidate.



4. Conclusion

The paper aims to describe what psychometric testing is and how it may be applied for hiring potentially beneficial and desirable employees for an organisation. The diverse range of testing tools that are available may be used in appropriate combinations to predict the performance of potential candidates. The individual behaviour, attitude and skills of candidates with reference to how they would apply in specific work situations may be forecasted. The mindset of the assessor greatly influences the results of psychometric tests. The abstract nature of the responses as well as the way the responses are perceived by the assessor may leave the results in a cliff hanger position. It is therefore, essential that the psychometric testing process is strictly standardised and used along with other

traditional hiring practices such as interviews.

It may be conveniently said that psychometric testing could be used across a wide spectrum of staff recruitment process. The wide range of psychometric testing tools, some of which are quite popular and sought after such as the OPQ32, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Activity Vector Analysis, Big Five Personality Traits etc., are used at various organisations to optimise the recruitment process.

Keeping in mind the comparative merits and demerits of psychometric testing and specific needs of the recruiter, and appropriate tool for testing may be employed in combination with other traditional hiring methods to hire successfully.

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