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What are the Best Practices for Measuring Learning Agility, Cognitive Ability, and Personal Inventory and How are Companies Currently Using Them?

Lauren Sims
Cornell University

Jiayu Tao
Cornell University

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Abstract

[Excerpt] Research shows that the careful use of talent assessments can result in increased productivity, cost savings and better retention of top employees. As a result, nearly two-thirds of recruiting executives are considering their organizations' assessment and selection capabilities as one of their top three near-term priorities and are increasing their budgets by an average of 15%. Unfortunately, many HR professionals are unaware of the value of formal assessments and the types of assessments that have proven to be most effective.

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What are the best practices for measuring learning agility, cognitive ability, and personal inventory and how are companies currently using them?

Introduction

Research shows that the careful use of talent assessments can result in increased productivity, cost savings and better retention of top employees.[1] As a result, nearly two-thirds of recruiting executives are considering their organizations' assessment and selection capabilities as one of their top three near-term priorities and are increasing their budgets by an average of 15%.[2] Unfortunately, many HR professionals are unaware of the value of formal assessments and the types of assessments that have proven to be most effective.

Assessment Methods

To select effective assessment methods, it is necessary is determine which specific types of assessment will be the most beneficial to your overall corporate or business strategy. [3]

Learning Agility

These assessments measure learning-agile leaders. Those who are able to solve complex problems, easily adapt in a constantly changing world and thrive on change.

CHOICES Questionnaire: a multi-rater assessment given by Korn/Ferry, used to determine mental agility, people agility, results agility, and change agility. This test is the most commonly used measure of learning agility and provides results that are not based on one's possibly biased perception of their learning agility [4].

viaEDGE: an online, self-report evaluation that measures self-awareness in addition to mental, people, results, and change agility. A study of 1000 people from 12 organizations found that viaEDGE provides both convergent and divergent reliability and adequate internal consistency without having an adverse impact [4, 5].

Learning Agility Indicator: an online, self-report assessment that measures a person's preference for exploring, imagining, and examining, which are all aspects of learning agility [4].

Learning Agility Simulation: an evaluation designed to more objectively measure learning agility by measuring a participant's observing, connecting, and assessing abilities while he or she completes various online exercises and simulations [4].

Cognitive Ability Tests

These assessments measure a variety of mental abilities, such as verbal and mathematical ability, reasoning ability and reading comprehension.[1]

Wonderlic Cognitive Ability Tests: a test created in 1936, designed to measure an individual's general cognitive ability. Today, the test is often given to prospective employees to evaluate their learning and problem-solving skills. The score is generated based on the number of correct answers given in the allotted time. [6]

Talent Q Elements Tests: a collection of three different tests: numerical, verbal, and logical. These tests can be administered together or separately, depending on the job position and role. Talent Q Elements tests are used in the hiring process of supervisors, managers, and any other high-level positions.

Personality Inventory
Personality tests that assess traits relevant to job performance have been shown to be effective predictors of subsequent job performance. [1]

       The Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI): provides a comprehensive, business-based assessment of personality. It is specifically designed to predict occupational success and can be used for both selection and development.[7] A 2003 meta-analytic review of 43 studies found that the HPI is an effective predictor of job performance for many different jobs, including customer service representatives, hospital administrators, department managers, and police officers. [8]

       StrengthsFinder: an online assessment of individual talent that identifies areas in which a person has the greatest potential for building strengths. StrengthsFinder provides a starting point in identifying specific personal talents, and the related supporting materials help people discover how to build on their talents to develop strengths.[10]

       Personal Characteristics Inventory (PCI): a test based on the Five-Factor Model of personality. Areas evaluated by this big five personality test include: agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.[7]

Market Practice

- Mondelez International and Verizon use **CHOICES Questionnaire** to select successors.
- PepsiCo and Mercedes-Benz use **Wonderlic Cognitive Ability Tests** in their hiring processes.
- General Mills and Johnson & Johnson use **Hogan Personality Inventory** to select candidates.

Criteria for Selecting and Evaluating Assessment Methods

Properly identifying and implementing formal assessment methods used to select employees is one of the more complex areas for HR professionals to learn about and understand. This is because understanding selection testing requires knowledge of statistics, measurement issues and legal issues relevant to testing. To make informed decisions about what assessment methods to implement in their organizations, HR professionals need consider to the following important criteria:[1]

- **Validity:** Is the assessment method useful for predicting job performance?
- **Adverse impact:** Do members of protected groups, including minorities, women and employees over age 40, systematically score lower than others?
- **Cost:** What is the expense of developing, administering and maintaining the assessment?
- **Candidate reactions:** Do candidates react positively or negatively to the assessment?

Limitations

- Self-report errors and applicant faking can create misleading or inaccurate results[7]
- Learning agility is a relatively new concept; therefore, methods used to measure it are still being validated
- There is no single "best test." Culture, language, and the goals of testing must be considered carefully to select assessment methods

Conclusion

Talent assessment has been shown to have many benefits for employers and can be used both to select employees and to develop employees. There are several methods and assessments that are popular among companies to measure employee learning agility, cognitive ability, and personality. Although these assessments are validated and successful for some companies, it is necessary for each company to carefully select its assessment methods based on its unique needs and culture, and should ensure that assessments translate across all of the locations where they will be used. Companies should pay particularly close attention to the legal frameworks across geographic locations, potential adverse impacts for employees, transferability across regions, and candidate and employee reactions.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

A list of CAHRS Partner recommendations for the development and implementation of assessments. Specifically:

- Determine right from the beginning whether the organization believes that individuals can truly change their behaviors based upon the results of these assessments or whether additional "selling" must be done to line management. Do not underestimate the number of times you may need to "sell" your program, especially to line managers in technical organizations.
- Make sure that assessments are linked to the core HR processes of performance management, succession planning and employee development.
- Put together a well-thought-through marketing plan to ensure that line managers understand what assessments can and can't do as well as buy into the regular use of assessments when making their key staffing decisions.
- Be very clear about who, specifically, is responsible for both acting upon as well as tracking an individual's progress against his/her assessment results.
- Take steps to ensure that rogue managers are not using assessment instruments haphazardly (and in some cases, illegally) when they may not be appropriately trained and/or educated in their use/abuse.
- Ensure that users understand the difference between evaluating cognitive skills and adaptability vs. knowledge, skills and expertise.
- Take specific steps to ensure that HR Business Partners aren't acting as intentional or unintentional "blockers" to a Center of Excellence (COE) team developing an overall assessment methodology and framework.
- If you choose to segment assessments by level (eg, skill assessments at lower levels, cognitive at mid levels, potential/adaptability at higher levels), make sure you decide up-front whether you plan to use these to identify and select like-minded individuals (eg, strong alignment to the company's "way") or as instruments for development. Saying one thing but doing another, especially in the area of personal assessments, will almost certainly lead to distrust.
- Understand whether your organization is looking for a simple assessment which is "…quick, dirty and cheap…" or a more sophisticated instrument that can be used for longer-term career planning purposes.
- Don't underestimate the difficulty of accommodating the complexity of the need against the desired simplicity of solution. That is, while a more complex assessment instrument may be more robust, it may be extremely difficult to scale.
- In certain parts of the world, you need to be aware that the content of an assessment (ie, the actual questions asked) may quickly be memorized and shared with individuals who have not yet taken the assessment thereby negating the value of the assessment. This is especially true as it regards assessments of specific technical knowledge.