HOGAN

How to Assess Assessments

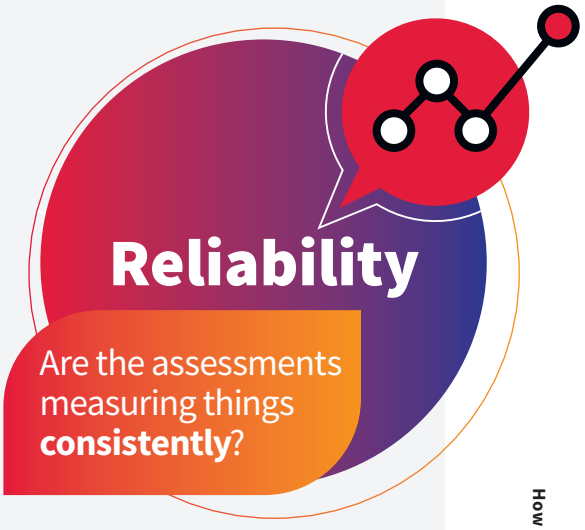
Making Informed decisions about selection and development assessments

On a recent flight, I spoke with a gentleman who is a general manager in a manufacturing company. When I explained that I work for an assessment company, his eyes widened, and he excitedly said he had used an assessment for 10 years and that the assessment "had never gotten it wrong." When I asked what he meant, he said the assessment confirmed his perceptions of the candidates from interviews. Intrigued, I asked how he had chosen the assessment from the wide variety available. He said he liked "the assessment guy." When I asked about the science behind the assessment, he indicated that (a) he didn't even realize there were other selection assessments out there, and (b) that he didn't care so much about the science as long as he liked "the assessment guy" with whom he worked. As disturbing as the conversation was to me as the CEO of a science-based assessment provider, I didn't find his approach to using assessments to be all that uncommon.

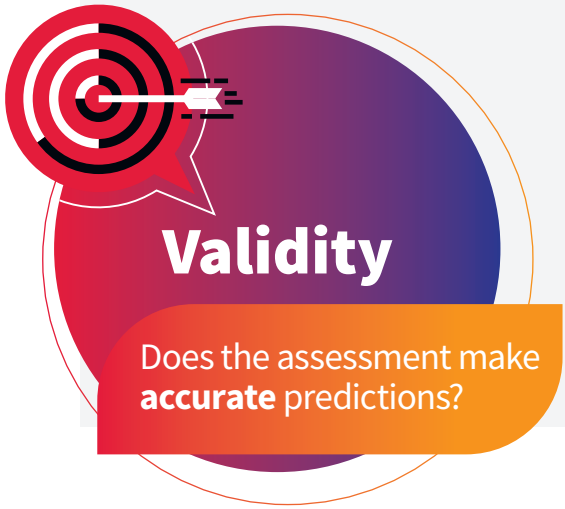
My seatmate was an engineer, someone taught to understand, use, and value science. I have no doubt that his education covered statistical concepts such as correlation, reliability, and validity. I'm equally sure he used those and other statistical methods in his work daily, because he builds highly technical, engineered products. Nonetheless, he didn't seem to see the connection between using good measurement to get good quality human performance like he saw the connection between good measurement and the quality of his product's performance. Why? Perhaps he, like many of us, thinks he is a good judge of character. He's not. We're not. If we were, the 40% rate of divorce for first marriages in the US would be lower. We often fool ourselves into believing we can make highly accurate predictions about whether a candidate will be effective at a job. We can't. Or, perhaps we think people are relatively easy to understand. They aren't.

Fortunately, there are brilliant people creating assessments that can predict outcomes like job performance, turnover, leadership potential, etc. Therefore, you don't have to get too deep into the science to use them appropriately and make better decisions about talent. You just need to know what to look for. There really are only 3 concepts you need to understand to make good decisions about which assessments are right for your company and purpose.

First, is job relatedness. That simply means, do you understand what the job really requires? What are the abilities, skills, and characteristics that one needs to possess to do the job well? Job relatedness is an important scientific and legal standard, because it helps determine whether an assessment measures what is important for success on the job. That standard is important because it prevents the use of race, gender, or other irrelevant characteristics to make decisions about someone's occupational future. The process to establish job relatedness is called job analysis. There are volumes written about it and courses taught about it. However, what you need to know is that any reputable assessment provider will have a job analysis process and they will be able to explain to you how it works and how it supports use of their assessments for specific purposes. If your assessment provider doesn't have a well-documented job analysis process or can't provide evidence that it is relevant for the purpose in which you are interested, find another provider. You likely will end up in court with the one you have.



Second, is reliability. Reliability is simply about whether the assessment measures things in a consistent way. For example, imagine that you want to measure an adult's height, but all you have is a rubber ruler that may stretch when used. You measure the person's height multiple times and get a different height each time. Clearly, the person isn't growing or shrinking. You have an unreliable, or inconsistent, measure of height. The same simple idea applies to assessments. If assessments are measuring enduring characteristics, like extraversion for example, then they ought to measure the same quantity of those characteristics if you measured them again and again.



Third is validity. A valid measure is one that helps you make accurate predictions. For example, horoscopes are not valid measures of overall health, lifetime income, or shoe size; we can't make accurate predictions about those things based on whether we know a person is a Virgo or

Libra. Now suppose you create an assessment to predict job performance and you have 8 colored cards that you ask the assessee to stack in order of his or her color preferences. There is no evidence that this assessment predicts job performance, measures personality, predicts light sensitivity, or even that it measures color preference for that matter, even though it appears to measure that. The vendor may call it gamified or indicate that it uses neuropsychology. Those terms mean nothing in terms of prediction. Ask for documented scientific evidence that it will help you make the predictions you need to make.

Let's take a practical example to show how these 3 concepts matter. Assume you have a backache and you call the doctor. She prescribes a pill before asking any questions about your pain; in other words, she hasn't yet established that the effect of the pill she is prescribing is related to what ails you. Next, she tells you that the pill sometimes works and sometimes doesn't, so you shouldn't be surprised if your pain doesn't subside; the pill is unreliable. Finally, you ask whether there is published scientific evidence that this pill reduces the type of pain you are experiencing. She says no, but she goes on to say that she knows it will work; you should simply trust her. She produces no evidence that supports her prediction that this pill will help you. Are you going to take those pills that are unrelated to your condition, unreliable about producing results, and have not been shown to help with your condition? If not, you shouldn't choose an assessment either that doesn't meet the standards of job-relatedness, reliability, and validity.

You may think you neither have the expertise nor the time to evaluate whether an assessment will be useful. After all, it looks like it measures personality or preferences or abilities. You may have completed it yourself and agreed with the results. However, choosing an assessment that appears to measure a construct without confirming job-relatedness, reliability, and validity would be like taking a pill just because it looks like medicine.

No organization would invest in a new product or acquisition just because someone says they know it will be a good investment. Organizations want a rigorous business case that shows an investment is likely to pay off. They need not have a lower standard for making predictions about people, and credible assessment vendors will welcome with nerdy glee questions about job-relatedness, reliability, and validity. Start asking questions about these three important assessment issues to help sort those who say their assessments are effective (hint: they all do) from those who can prove it. You will be able to eliminate a startling number of assessment providers simply by asking the questions. Any assessment that is not supported by written, understandable job-relatedness, reliability, and validity information that is related to the use you have in mind should be eliminated from consideration immediately. Remember, assessment decisions affect people's lives for better or worse. Please choose for better.

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