

What are Pre-Employment Tests?



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Published on www.lorman.com - April 2019

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What Are Pre-Employment Tests?

Written by Michael Mercer, Ph.D.

Pre-employment tests defined? What do *you* need to know?

They are tests that organizations give to job applicants to help them hire employees who are productive, dependable, and low-turnover.

What does research say about pre-employment tests?

Research on pre-employment assessments and other prediction methods indicate that these are the most effective method to accurately predict how an applicant may perform on-the-job, if hired.

In contrast, interviews typically are a lousy method to predict an applicant's job performance. Also, reference checks, unfortunately, are quite useless, because many companies refuse to reveal negative information about their former employees.

Why are these type of tests so accurate at predicting actual job performance?

Pre-hire tests that work well are created after doing in-depth research. The research is done find out which test questions work best in the test, plus make sure the test is both reliable and valid.

What is test validity and reliability?

Use these tests only if they were created using research to establish the test is both:

- (a) valid and
- (b) reliable.

Validity of a test means it accurately predicts or forecasts exactly what it is meant to predict.

For example, if one scale or section of the pre-employment test aims to predict if a job applicant is teamwork-oriented, then that test scale is valid only if accurately measures how much or how little an applicant likes teamwork. Or, if a test scale helps predict problem-solving ability, then that problem-solving ability section must be a valid or accurate measure of problem-solving ability. If a test scale helps predict theft/stealing concerns, then it needs to be a valid or accurate prediction of an applicant's possible theft/stealing behavior.

Reliability of pre-hire tests is different than validity

Reliability of a test can be established through research in a number of ways. In general, reliability means a test reliably or consistently measures what it is supposed to measure. For

instance, if multiple questions predict teamwork, then those teamwork questions must overall measure teamwork and not some other factor. Also, test-retest reliability means that if a job applicant takes the hiring test day and then takes the same test at a later date, such as a month later, then the applicant's scores should be the same in at both times.

In summary, use pre-employment tests only if they were created using research to establish the test is both valid + reliable.

What "assessments" are not hiring tests?

Pre-hire assessments are specially researched and created specifically for testing job applicants.

In contrast, some organizations mistakenly use "assessments" meant for training or teambuilding with current employees when they evaluate job applicants.

This is wrong to do – for a number of reasons. For instance, such "assessments" are not researched, designed, nor justifiable for testing job applicants. Also, if any question is raised about the use of such "assessments," the organization certainly may have a very hard time explaining why it used an "assessment" meant for training or team-building to evaluate job applicants.

So, only use tests that actually are researched and designed to test job applicants. Do not use "assessments" that are not researched, designed, meant for, nor justifiable in your evaluation of job applicants.

What types might I use?

Types of pre-employment tests can help you hire the best:

Mental Abilities Tests – help you predict job-related cognitive abilities

Behavior Tests – help you predict key interpersonal skills, personality traits + motivations

Dependability Tests – help you predict key factors, such as, honesty on test, work ethic, impulsiveness [may be linked to safety, accidents, & interpersonal conflict], stealing/theft concern and substance abuse concern

Can pre-employment tests “catch” job applicant who lies on test?

A correctly designed pre-employment test will detect – or find out – if an applicant lied by giving answers that may make the applicant seem “better or different” than the applicant really is.

In sharp contrast, “assessments” designed for training or teambuilding – and not for pre-employment testing – do not have such a built-in lie detector.

A good assessment can use number of methods to “catch” a job applicant who tries to answer its questions dishonestly. Perhaps the best method involves using a set of *truism questions*.

You will not “catch” a lying job applicant if you only rely on whether or not the applicant answered different versions of the same question the same. For starters, when test asks different versions of the same question, that is for (a) creating a scale on that topic and also (b) reliability. Here is why that will not catch a lying or dishonest applicant:

The liar could consistently answer those questions dishonestly.

Recommendation: Always ask the business/industrial psychologist who created the pre-employment test exactly how the test will “catch” or detect if an applicant answered questions to “pull the wool over your eyes.”

Learn more about Dr. Mercer’s Pre-Employment Tests

Michael Mercer, Ph.D., is creator of the 3 “Forecaster™ Tests” - pre-employment tests - and author of *Hire the Best & Avoid the Rest™*. He can be reached at www.MercerSystems.com.

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