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SERIES

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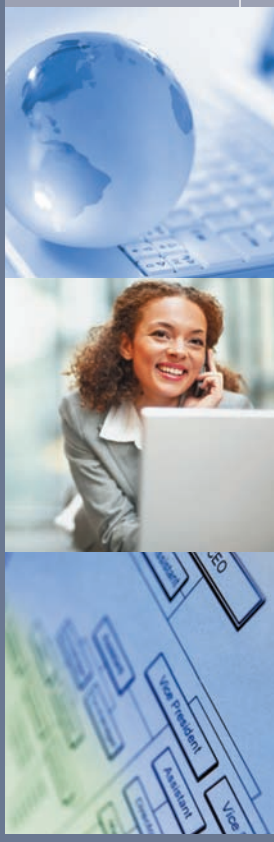
Handbook of Workplace Assessment

Evidence-Based Practices for Selecting and Developing Organizational Talent



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Handbook of Workplace Assessment

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Douglas H. Reynolds, Editors

Foreword by Allan H. Church and Janine Waclawski

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Foreword

Welcome to the newest volume in the Professional Practice book series of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). We are very excited about this volume and the contribution that we believe it will make not only to the series overall but also to the field in general.

The idea for this book came out of one of our first editorial board meetings at an annual SIOP meeting about six or seven years ago. The approach during our years as series coeditors was to call our board together (since we typically had a quorum at the annual conference) to meet and discuss the trends and practices we were seeing in the field. We talked about sessions we had seen at the conference that were good, bad, or ugly and used these thoughts as fodder to brainstorm ideas for what we hoped would be great future volumes for this series. For the most part, the output of those brainstorming sessions came to fruition in the form of several volumes of which we are very proud. This book is one that we have had a lot of passion and anticipation for since those early days. However, we also recognized that completing this task would require a lot of effort, insight, and dedication to put together under the right volume editors. Luckily for us, it all fell into place under the editorship of John Scott and Doug Reynolds. They have done a fantastic job of surveying the simultaneously broad and deep field of assessment and putting it all together in one place under a simple yet elegant framework.

Talent identification and assessment is one of the most critical issues facing organizations today. From our vantage point as practitioners (one of us as an organization development specialist and the other as a human resource generalist), we see this as a major challenge. A good or bad hire in isolation can have a long-lasting organizational impact (think about your personal

experiences here), and in the aggregate, its impact is profound: it determines not only the organizational culture but also ultimately its success or failure. In this way, assessment is key to our practice as I-O professionals. The concept behind this volume is to provide internal and external practitioners with a much-needed compendium of tools and techniques for effective and accurate assessment.

Our previous volume examined talent management. This time the focus is on the assessment itself and truly understanding what works and for whom. We believe this book will be helpful not only to I-O practitioners working in the assessment arena but also to other professionals who are engaged in assessing or hiring activities in corporations. As with previous volumes, our aim is to provide practical solutions grounded in research and applied experience. We believe this volume does just that. The Appendix alone is a gold mine of information for anyone interested in assessment—not to mention the main content of the volume. In our opinion, John and Doug have made a major contribution to the field with their efforts. We sincerely appreciate their dedication to making this edition a reality. Thanks, guys!

Pound Ridge, New York
May 2010

Janine Waclawski
Allan H. Church

Preface

There has been a marked trend over the past few years for organizations of all sizes to streamline their workforces and focus on selecting and retaining only the "best and the brightest" employees. Couple this with the skills gap that will soon emerge due to the magnitude of baby boomer retirements, and it is no surprise that organizational priorities have been steadily shifting toward talent acquisition and retention. As organizational consultants, we are continually engaged in dialogue about how assessments can best be leveraged to achieve a company's talent management objectives. Specifically, human resource (HR) and line leaders want to know if assessments should be used and, if so, what specific instruments would be applicable, whether they can be administered online, whether they need to be proctored, what the costs are, whether there are specific legal constraints, whether they can be implemented in multiple languages in multiple countries, how an assessment program should be managed, how to know if the process is working, and what the expected return on investment is. And these are just a few of the questions that need to be answered to ensure that an assessment program meets stakeholder needs, achieves the organization's goals, and has a positive impact on its bottom line.

The field of assessment has advanced rapidly over the past decade due in part to advancements in computer technology. By leveraging technology, organizations can reach across the boundaries of language, literacy, and geography to reliably assess a vast catalogue of candidate skills and abilities. Organizations can now harness the capabilities of sophisticated, Web-based assessment tools to simulate actual work environments—effectively measuring candidates' ability to perform under real-life conditions. Technological advances have also fostered a number of assessment methodologies such as adaptive testing that have led to significant improvements in measurement precision and efficiency.

Despite these advances, there remain some fundamental questions and decisions that each organization must grapple with to ensure it is maximizing the potential of its assessment program and taking advantage of well-researched theories and state-of-the-art practice. This book presents sound, practical guidelines that are steeped in empirical research for implementing an assessment process that will effectively drive an organization's critical talent decisions.

The Audience

This book is designed for a broad readership, from HR professionals who are tasked with implementing an assessment program to assessment professionals and practitioners of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology, who advise, build, validate, and implement assessments. In addition, this book is intended for the users of assessments, including hiring managers and organizational leaders, who are looking for direction on what to assess, what it will take, and how to realize the benefits. This book is also intended for assessment researchers as well as instructors and graduate students in disciplines such as I-O psychology, HR management and organizational behavior, consulting psychology, and organizational development.

Overview of the Book

This book is divided into four parts: it examines frameworks for organizational assessment; assessment for selection, promotion, and development; strategic assessment programs; and advances, trends and issues. The Appendix provides examples of the types of tests and assessments currently available for use in the workplace.

The foundational chapters contained in Part One are designed to provide readers with a thorough understanding of what should be assessed and why and how to ensure that assessment programs are of the highest quality and reflect the latest thinking and practice in the field. Part Two is devoted to the specific applications of workplace assessment and covers a variety of positions where high-volume or high-stakes decisions need to be made. The chapters in this part emphasize

examples of current best practices in assessment to help practitioners understand, apply, and evaluate the success of these practices in their own work contexts. The focus is on assessment systems in place today and that are needed in the future as business needs change. The chapters address the application of assessments to clerical, professional, technical, sales, supervisory and early leadership, and managerial and executive positions. In addition, a chapter addresses the special case of police and firefighter selection.

Part Three highlights some of the key strategic applications of assessment that organizations rely on to boost their competitive edge. The chapters focus on succession management, staffing for organizational change (downsizing, mergers, and reorganizations), assessing for potential, and global selection. The chapters in Part Four cover a wide range of advances, trends, and issues: technology-based delivery of assessment, the legal environment, alternative validation strategies, addressing flaws in assessment decisions, and the strategic use of evaluation to link assessment to bottom-line organizational priorities.

A brief description of each of the chapters follows.

Part One: Framework for Organizational Assessment

Kevin Murphy sets the stage in Chapter One by discussing broad dimensions of individual differences that are likely to be relevant for understanding performance effectiveness and development in the workplace and delineates two general strategies for determining what to assess in organizations. In Chapter Two, Fritz Drasgow, Christopher Nye, and Louis Tay outline the characteristics and features that differentiate outstanding assessment programs from mediocre systems and provide information that practitioners can use to move toward state-of-the-art measurement in their organizations. The next six chapters examine the most commonly assessed characteristics in the workplace: cognitive ability, personality, background and experience, knowledge and skill, physical performance, and competencies. These chapters highlight the challenges faced in accurately and fairly assessing these characteristics and detail advances in the field and the state of practice for their measurement.

Michael McDaniel and George Banks kick off these topics in Chapter Three with a review of the research and practice in the use of general cognitive ability tests in workplace assessment. They trace the history of intelligence testing from its roots to modern applications and detail the merits of cognitive ability assessment for selecting and developing top talent. In Chapter Four Robert Hogan and Robert Kaiser provide a compelling look at the use of personality assessment, why it is so misunderstood, and how it can be leveraged to predict significant outcomes. Leaetta Hough follows in Chapter Five on the assessment of background and experience; she addresses factors affecting this tool's validity and provides empirically based recommendations for improving its accuracy in predicting behavior. In Chapter Six Teresa Russell highlights the different types of knowledge and skill measures and offers some innovative ideas for measuring both declarative and procedural knowledge and skills.

Deborah Gebhardt and Todd Baker focus in Chapter Seven on assessments used for selecting candidates for strenuous jobs. There are many critical applications of these assessments in both the public and private sectors where failure to meet physical demands can have a significant impact on job performance and safety. Finally, Jeffery Schippmann rounds out Part One with a groundbreaking and forthright portrayal of the evolution of the role of competencies in assessment programs.

Part Two: Assessment for Selection, Promotion, and Development

Judith Komaki opens this part with a fictional but very realistic account of an HR manager who is asked to produce a valid test of managerial skills on a shoestring budget. The frustrations and complexities of finding an off-the-shelf test that maps onto the required skills are brought to light in this engaging and perceptive chronicle. Wanda Campbell follows in Chapter Nine by drawing on her experience leading nationwide testing consortia to detail the use of assessment procedures for selecting, promoting, and developing individuals across a variety of technical