

## Psychometric profiling and training grows online

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**Psychometric tests have been around for decades, but it is largely in the past few years that employers have used them extensively as a recruitment, and increasingly a development, tool.**

Yet there have been few notable developments in the basic tools being used – core models have remained pretty static. True, validity techniques, most notably the use of meta-analysis, where results of a number of studies are combined to identify key trends, have advanced, but it is electronic delivery that has spurred the market on.

"Providers have been focusing on making tools a practical HR proposition and there has been a stampede to deliver tests online," says James Bywater, chief psychologist at SHL.

### Next stage of evolution

John Henderson, lead learning consultant at Oxford-based psychometric specialists OPP, says tests are now ready for the next stage of evolution. "Although online methodology is a more convenient way to deliver standard existing questionnaires, we aren't really seeing providers harnessing the power of online delivery for more interesting questionnaire styles. This has to be the next step."

SHL has focused its efforts on creating more bespoke solutions for employers. It has developed tests called Talent Screens (see case study below), which help sift through candidates at the first stage of selection to identify those suited to the specific culture and values of the organisation.

"We've been working with Shell, Marks and Spencer, and some of the big banks, to create bespoke tests delivered online or via the phone. We've seen some impressive results, with higher quality candidates going forward for high volume jobs," says Bywater.

And, although tests have traditionally been seen as a recruitment tool, there is a growing number of tests being used to help develop staff throughout their careers. For example, they are being used far more in talent management to identify potential and help develop skills. And new tools are being developed to meet these needs.

Robertson Cooper, for instance, recently developed a product called Leadership Impact, which, using online questionnaires, enables managers to see the impact their leadership style has on the motivation, wellbeing and performance of their team.

"This gives managers information on their signature strengths and helps them recognise how best to motivate and lead their team," says managing director Ivan Robertson.

Catherine Hick, managing director of test provider TMS Development International, says employers are looking to psychometrics to develop leadership and teambuilding skills. "No-one forgets the adrenalin rush of being in a perfectly matched team when it flexes its combined talent, succeeds and actually has fun doing so. For the future, I see the focus very much on supporting people who want to build great teams – psychometric tools can really help."

Accessibility is vital

Accessibility is also a key priority for providers. Hogrefe, for example, recently launched a service for customers who want to train their staff in test administration and interpretation.

Called Instant Access, it offers users training credits that they can exchange for formal British Psychological Society training if they want to take on and handle administration and interpretation roles themselves.

"This helps companies who might be inexperienced in using advanced psychometrics quickly get the access and the qualifications they need," says Hogrefe's chief psychologist Wendy Lord.

With training in mind, Henderson says that there could be more developments on the horizon.

"This is largely due to more tests being used in a multinational or multicultural context. This means we need to look at how equivalent certain tests are in different languages and cultures across the world. Research needs to be done to create some pragmatic guidelines for users," he says.

So although psychometric test models have seen little change, a push for better accessibility, training and finding new ways to use tests mean the market is certainly not standing still.

Case study: Marks and Spencer

Store managers at Marks and Spencer (M&S) wanted a more efficient recruitment process that would reduce costs and improve the calibre of people taken on.

The organisation identified the need for a sifting tool for shop floor staff that would ensure that those invited for interview had the right skills and attitudes to succeed. SHL worked with M&S to develop Talent Screener, a series of job relevant, scenario-based and attitudinal questions that measure the innate qualities that SHL and M&S had identified as necessary for success in the roles in question.

"We worked very closely with SHL on the development of these questions to ensure they were relevant and psychometrically sound, as well as fair and capable of providing valid indications of potential performance," says Mark Thomas, an organisational development consultant at M&S.

Job applicants are now 'pre-screened' over the phone using the 12 scripted questions provided by Talent Screener. The process has delivered a 33% increase in applicants screened out early in the process which means M&S now interviews fewer but, in its view, higher-quality candidates. This has led to a 61% reduction in cost per applicant hired, saving M&S more than £1.5m in recruitment costs in two years.

More than three-quarters of those who scored highly in the initial screening went on to be rated as 'exceeding' or 'outstanding' in their first six-month appraisal