



TO TEST OR NOT TO TEST?

The ideal solution in recruitment is to match the 'right' candidate to the 'right' job in the 'right' organization. It is as much an art as it is a science. "Science?" I hear you say....well, yes we use scientific methods and tools as an adjunct to the total recruitment process.

The tools that are most widely recognized are the psychometric assessments – or 'tests' – the mention of which is likely to send some people into spirals. The most commonly used are those which assess ability and personality. Having said that, those are just a couple of many options.

Firstly we have to be clear exactly what we are assessing. An initial step in this process is to have an accurate, current and comprehensive job description. (And it is surprising how often we find that these do not exist). From that we select the most appropriate tools – that is the right tests - for the right role - for the right reasons. For example if we need to know how well an individual takes on board new information, and draws logical conclusions and inferences from that, then a basic test of verbal reasoning is not going to suffice.

And we can go further than this – for example we can extract the key competencies from a job description and generate customised:

- application forms
- structured interview questions, and
- specific reference checking questions

At Helium, we pride ourselves in offering a holistic, tailored and professional service. What is more important, from a client's perspective, is that this is highly effective. We know this because, compared to other recruiting firms, our candidates stay for a longer period in their new roles.

We can also generate "Ideal profiles" and validate those against the test results of existing position holders. A review of a recent Helium [case study](#) highlights how effective this can be. In this example, going through this process clarified to the client exactly what they should be looking for – and the best approach to achieve their business goals.

A fundamental rule in any assessment process is that standardised measures and guidelines must be observed. Only tests which have high levels of 'reliability' (demonstrate that results are consistent for various groups of people over time) and 'validity' (that is the test can be shown to measure what it claims to measure) should be used. Test scores are then compared to general population samples, or in some cases to more specific groups, such as an Engineering or a Senior Management

www.heliumnz.co.nz
Helium Work-Search Limited
L1, 70 The Terrace, P.O Box 1594, Wellington, New Zealand
Tel: +64-4-9162180 Fax: +64-4-9162187

'norm' group. We can also develop company norms from samples of existing staff. This has an added benefit that it highlights hidden strengths amongst the existing talent pool.

But can we really call this process scientific? There are examples where this doesn't work effectively. Let's explore a few of those. In simple terms, if the criteria mentioned above are not followed – that is, using valid, appropriate tests and having them administered and interpreted by qualified people – then mis-information results. It is also critical that participants receive feedback. This is not just a form of politeness – results need to be discussed in context and the individual given the opportunity to elaborate on the findings. In cases when these guidelines are not followed, it is easy to understand how 'Psych testing' is viewed skeptically, or held in disrepute. Helium's qualified staff ensure these processes are adhered to, with all tests interpreted and feedback/discussion held with candidates about their results.

In my experience, simply putting all candidates through the same class of tests "because those are the ones we always use" is nonsense. Unfortunately this is fairly common practice. But this is no different than if you went to see your GP and s/he suspected that you might have high cholesterol levels. S/he is not going to test you for arthritis – well, not exclusively anyway.

The test results can also be used to highlight individual training and development needs, and have great use in coaching programmes. They objectively identify areas of need and the same type of test can be re-administered post-programme to critically assess 'growth' or adjustment.

Tests can also be used in group settings (both as comparisons between individuals and also as consolidated group data). These can be used when working on areas of interpersonal conflict and dysfunctional group dynamics, for example. Different types of tests can also be used effectively in career planning, assessing stress levels, organizational culture and so forth – but more on that later!

Of course, by using Helium, employers have the distinct advantage of using a 'one stop shop' to complete both recruitment and testing services.

We trust that this has whetted your appetite and welcome your feedback. All queries and comments should be delivered to ann@heliumnz.co.nz

Ann Ryder
HR Services Practice Manager
Helium Work-Search Limited

www.heliumnz.co.nz
Helium Work-Search Limited
L1, 70 The Terrace, P.O Box 1594, Wellington, New Zealand
Tel: +64-4-9162180 Fax: +64-4-9162187