

Testing Before Investing: Hiring Future Leaders

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Succession planning, or developing leaders from within an organization, is a multi-step process. Research has shown that benefits to organizations that invest in developing incumbent staff members are two-fold - higher employee morale and higher employee engagement. However, to develop current employees into future leaders, organizations must first recruit, retain, and engage highly motivated staff.

As the healthcare industry transitions to a customer-satisfaction oriented field it is necessary for HR executives to stay ahead of the times and hire competent *and* personable nurses. Traditional hiring methods that include clinical knowledge tests and interviews are useful to ensure that competent nurses are hired; however, these methods generally lack the means to ensure that nurse applicants have the interpersonal skills and decision making abilities to successfully engage with and care for their patients. Due to the competitive climate of the field, and the drawbacks of traditional hiring methods, alternative practices such as personality/behavioral testing and situational judgment tests are quickly gaining popularity. These alternative testing methods benefit the hiring executive by providing insight into the more consistent and critical characteristics of an applicant before undertaking the expenses related to installing them as new staff.

So, how does an organization make the jump from just hiring candidates to hiring qualified, best-fit future leaders?

The first of two steps involves establishing the right hiring tools for evaluating candidates. To illustrate the importance of this process, the results of the largest and most comprehensive research study in the history of nursing will be used. The study spanned four medical facilities, over 40 nurse subject matter experts (NSMEs), and 838 nurses. The focus was to create and validate, then analyze the effectiveness of pre-employment assessments in predicting job performance of nurses. Due to the complementary aspects of each, three assessment types were investigated: clinical job knowledge, personality/behavioral, and situational judgment, which were then combined to create the Prophecy Healthcare© assessments. The methodology used in the study evaluated each assessment's "content validity" (job analysis and job-test linkages) and "criterion-related validity" (statistical correlations between test scores and job performance ratings).

The beginning phases of the development process included nurse job analyses at the four medical facilities. The job analyses resulted in the identification of 169 traits that are found to be significant factors of nurse job performance. Once identified, the participating NSMEs analyzed these traits and reduced them to 19 observable aspects of nurse job performance (see Table 1).

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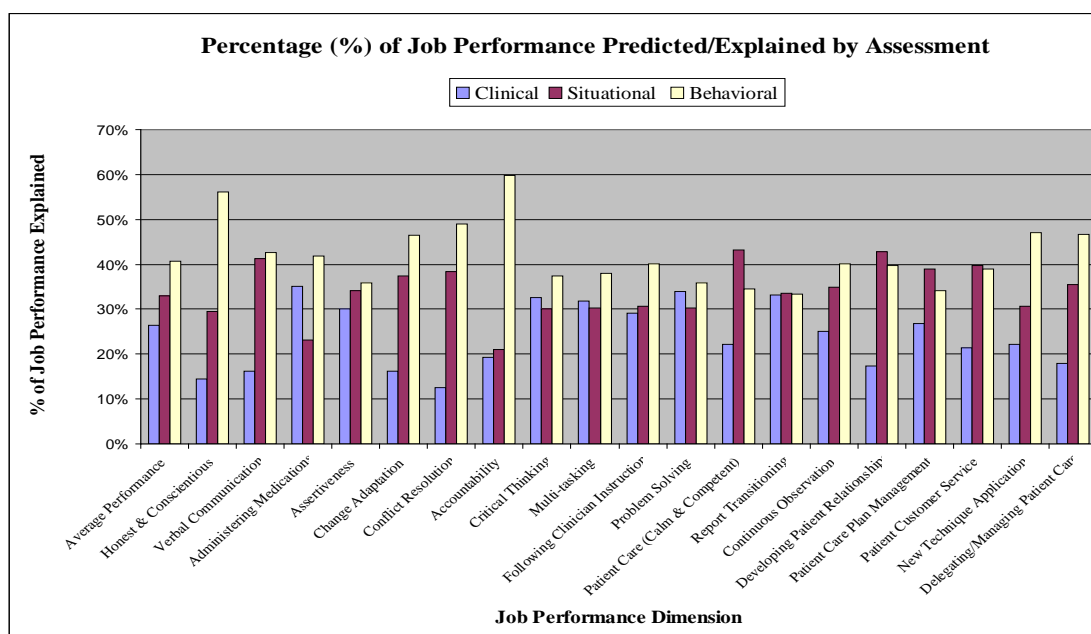
Table 1. Job Performance Rating Survey Dimensions (19).

Job Performance Rating Survey Dimensions (19)	
Honest & Conscientious	Problem Solving
Verbal Communication	Patient Care (calm & competent)
Administering Medications	Report Transitioning
Assertiveness	Continuous Observation
Change Adaptation	Developing Patient Relationships
Conflict Resolution	Patient Care Plan Management
Accountability	Patient Customer Service
Critical Thinking	New Technique Application
Multitasking	Following Clinician Instructions
Delegating/Managing Patient Care	

These 19 aspects became the foundation for a Job Performance Rating Survey (JPRS), which was subsequently used as the criteria factor in the study’s validation processes. Nurse supervisors at the participating medical facilities rated their current nurse staff on each trait found on the JPRS, and ratings were later correlated to test scores on each of the three assessments.

Overall, the results of the study indicated that the three assessments successfully correlated with the 19 dimensions included on the JPRS, with each test gravitating towards various aspects of job performance (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of Job Performance Predicted/Explained by Assessments



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Here is an example illustrating the effectiveness of these validated pre-employment nurse assessments in action. In early 2012, during the standard interview process, a Nurse Manager from a large medical center in the southwest faced a challenging situation. A nurse applicant who completed the trilogy of validated assessments passed the clinical competencies and also scored well on the situational assessments. However, in the behavioral section, the attitude graph red-flagged the “hostility” character trait.

Due to the applicant’s high aggression scores, a standardized set of interview questions were administered by the nurse manager to further investigate the potential issue. By the third question on the list, the interviewee was visibly upset, slammed a fist on the table and exclaimed, “Look, I’ve gone to my anger management classes and have already handled my issues. Can we move on from this topic?”

It goes without saying that the nurse manager had no need to continue the interview. While this applicant could have scored high enough to be hired using traditional testing methods, the comprehensive nature of these three interwoven assessments indicated a serious red-flag that would have otherwise been undetected. The interviewing nurse manager attributes the assessment trilogy to saving their medical facility from hiring a future liability.

The aforementioned research study further showed that when optimally weighted (applying 26.4% weight to the Clinical, 32.9% weight to the Situational, and 40.7% weight to the Behavioral), the resulting combined assessment has a very high correlation to overall job performance ($r = .67$ to all job dimensions, combined). This strong validity was only possible using a selection strategy that measured the “whole person”: book knowledge, interpersonal competence, and personality.

In a different case study, one of the largest healthcare systems in Texas conducted a side-by-side comparison of a leading, *non-validated* interpersonal assessment tool and the assessment tool mentioned in this research study. Expecting for both assessments to turn out the same results, the findings were astounding. All applicants were given both versions of the interpersonal assessments. Nine out of ten applicants failed the non-validated interpersonal assessment, while eight out of ten applicants passed the assessments validated for nurses.

Given that the Texas healthcare system expected fewer caregivers to pass the validated assessment - as “validated” is sometimes mistaken to mean more difficult - they were surprised that the non-validated assessment indicated for qualified nurses to be denied a job opportunity because of using an education tool in the wrong capacity. The use of non-validated assessments during a hiring practice puts organizations in a precarious situation in terms of litigation exposure for adverse impact claims.

Once the proper pre-employment hiring tools are in place, the second step to develop future leaders involves retaining and engaging these employees. In a study conducted for the Harvard Business Review, career experts Timothy Butler and James Waldroop found that matching people to jobs that resonate with the activities that make them truly happy, reduced employee turnover dramatically.¹ In the healthcare arena, matching a caregiver’s innate personality traits with demands of different units can have the same positive effect. As many healthcare professionals can attest, each hospital unit has its own “personality.” For example, the fast-paced, ever-changing environment of an ER unit contrasts immensely from the quiet, more predictable atmosphere of a Mother-Baby Unit. Using the assessments investigated in this study to find the best job fit for caregivers, a large medical facility in the southwest realized a 95% retention rate.

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A central way to engage employees is to invest in their future.² Some assessment tools, including the one used in this research study, deliver leadership reports. The leadership report in this example identifies caregivers who possess basic leadership skills while highlighting areas for further improvement. Nursing coordinators and clinical educators can use assessment tools to pinpoint developmental needs of individual employees, and provide a road map of the most beneficial kinds of training & development on an individual, or departmental, level.

In order to be successful in the competitive medical climate, facilities must look at their hiring process as a means to set their facility up for future success. Establishing the right hiring tools for pre-employment assessing and then maintaining employee engagement through personal development sets facilities up for reliable options for internal succession planning.

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Dan is the CEO of Biddle Consulting Group, Inc., a firm that specializes in the areas of EEO/AA compliance and test development/validation. BCG has a staff of over 40 employees located in Folsom, California and maintains several hundred AAP clients and over 1,000 testing clients in the public and private sectors. Dan has worked as an expert consultant/witness in over 100 EEO-related cases (state, federal, and circuit court of appeals) involving disparate impact theory and analysis, job analysis, and test development/validation. He is a member of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) and holds a Certificate of Competency in Occupational Testing from the British Psychological Society. His degrees include a B.S. Organizational Behavior from the University of San Francisco and Masters and Doctorate degrees in Organizational Psychology from Alliant University. He has authored numerous articles, books, and software programs in the areas of disparate impact, test validation, job analysis, and EEO analysis, and has conducted hundreds of training seminars in these areas.

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Ron is the CEO of Prophecy Healthcare. He created the only validated, pre-employment assessment in healthcare compliant with the EEOC federal guidelines for employee selection procedures that accurately predicts the likelihood of success of candidates providing vital hiring data to managers, before making the

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hiring decision. Ron earned his Nursing Degree from Lewis A. School of Nursing in NY and Bachelor of Science in Nursing from University of Phoenix. Starting his healthcare career as an RN, and working as a senior nurse recruiter and Director of Healthcare, Ron brings a well-rounded thought process to the importance of healthcare competency testing. In 2003, Ron founded NurseTesting.com, the first online pre-employment testing company exclusive to the healthcare industry. Ron specializes in leading and motivating teams, creating unique corporate cultures and brands, developing successful sales strategies, and optimizing resources for Internet start up.

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