

The Hiring Paradox:

How to Consistently Find the Right Person for the Right Job

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How many times have you hired someone who has all the eligibility for the job, including the right education, training and experience, but that person just did not eventually perform well? If your organization is typical, you've had this experience many times and thus have experienced what we aptly call the *hiring paradox*.

This tells us that there are other significant factors, other than eligibility, that help determine job performance. I call these *work suitability factors*. In the past 20 years, the importance of work suitability factors has become increasingly recognized and many organizations have experimented with ways to assess suitability before hiring employees.

Emotional Intelligence and Suitability Factors

"*Emotional intelligence*" is a popular term that is used to indicate personality traits that help a person to be successful. Many researchers are finding that EQ (Emotional Quotient), also known as EI (Emotional Intelligence) plays at least as important if not more important role in a person's career success as IQ, or even job experience.

However, emotional intelligence is actually just a series of personality traits related to how a person interacts with others, what motivates the person, and what attitudes a person holds. Whether we call it personality or emotional intelligence isn't the point. These factors have a dramatic effect on the performance of individual employees for their organization.

By understanding the key personality factors related to performance, organizations benefit in two ways.

- First, they are more able to identify the real performance issues and thus have a higher

probability of developing better performance for existing employees.

- Secondly, and more importantly, the organization is much more likely to keep people who are good performers. This reduces the cost of employee turnover (studies estimate the cost of employee turnover to be one to three years' salary), while at the same time generating better performance.

The biggest challenge is to determine exactly which aspects of personality relate to success *for a particular job*.

The "One-Size, Fit-All" Syndrome

Frankly speaking, different positions require different traits and thus the traits related to success for one position are quite different than the traits related to success for another position.

This makes the process of assessing personality much more complex than simply identifying a set of traits that enables someone to perform well. For example, the traits necessary for success in customer service are very different than the traits necessary for management, sales, administration, or a technical position.

Each of those areas has a general set of traits that usually relate to success for that role. However, even within those basic roles, the traits required for success can significantly vary according to the specific duties of the position. Even with the same job title, duties and performance expectations can vary and thus the traits necessary for success must also vary.

Therefore, we cannot make any realistic conclusions about personality or emotional intelligence factors unless those factors have been selected and *calibrated* or *tailored* for the specific job. If we wish to predict job success, our search of key personality success

factors must focus on the performance requirements of a particular job.

The Total Job Performance Factors

Before we begin to explore customizing personality factors for specific jobs, we need to step back and reflect on what other factors may relate to job success. Our research indicates that there are other suitability factors besides emotional intelligence or personality that play an important role in job success. These other factors focus more directly on “job fit” and are best measured in terms of *work preferences* can be classified into three categories:

- task preferences;
- interests; and,
- work-environment preferences.

These preferences play a strong role in the person’s level of focus, motivation, and commitment *to the particular job*. Simply put, *a person who enjoys the tasks that are required to do the job, who has an interest in the subjects of the job, and who is comfortable in the specific work environment is far more likely to perform effectively.*

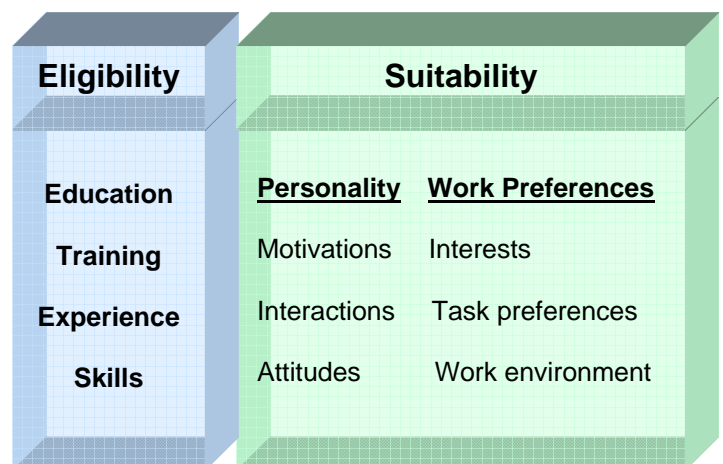
By analyzing the job, we can then determine if the person’s natural inclinations correspond with the position. If the person’s work preferences differ significantly from the tasks, interests and work environment required by the job, a dislike of the job as well as poor performance is the likely result. Such mismatches are likely lead to higher employee turnover costs in addition to poor performance costs.

Work preferences are important because they give us more specific information that helps us interpret personality factors. For example, we can analyze a person’s personality to see if s/he is motivated but it only tells us if the person is motivated in general. It does not tell us if the person will be motivated *to do a particular job*. Thus, understanding person’s work preferences in combination with personality can give

a much deeper insight into performance for a particular job.

The ability to predict job performance is dependant upon identifying as many of the critical factors that relate to job performance as possible. If you only assess eligibility, you are probably assessing less than half of the critical factors. If you assess emotional intelligence or personality you may discover another quarter of the critical factors. If you measure work preferences (including the three categories) you could find the remaining quarter. **If you assess all these things, you are very likely to get a much better insight into performance.**

Total Job Performance Factors



Now that we have identified all the key areas that relate to job success, how do we measure them? The truthful answer is, with “Great Difficulty”.

The Pitfalls of Interviews and the Interview Process Itself

Many organizations are reasonably adept at assessing *eligibility factors*. Most of the time, one can verify experience, examine their educational records and test their skills. However, assessing suitability factors is much more difficult. In many cases the task of assessing suitability is allocated to the interview. Unfortunately, interviews are not an effective way to

measure suitability and moreover they are very subjective.

Interviews have several inherent weaknesses for assessing suitability, to wit:

- Interviews are rarely based upon a comprehensive weighted list of suitability factors designed for the particular job (as discussed above);
- Even if this list were carefully developed, it would be extremely difficult for the interviewer to accurately quantify those traits;
- In addition, even if the interviewer is highly intuitive, quantifying traits to this extent would be nearly impossible;
- Interviewees can and may deliberately attempt to deceive the interviewer;
- On the other hand, it is a proven fact that *interviewers are biased* themselves. Research clearly shows that interviewers routinely give favorable responses to people who are similar to them, and less favorable responses to people who are different; and,
- This problem is further compounded by the fact that most interviewers are interviewing for jobs that they themselves would not wish to do and thus, the suitability traits required for the job are often very different from the traits of the interviewer. In short, the interviewer's own personality gets in the way of accurately assessing others, especially for a wide variety of different jobs.

Although interviewing is very important in order to help assess eligibility, *it is much more limited in assessing suitability effectively*. Interviews nearly always involve a game of hide and seek which is very difficult to achieve reliable results.

The interviewee aims to get the job. The interviewer aims to discover the true behaviors of the interviewee. The interviewee aims to tell the interviewer what s/he thinks will be viewed as the

best response. The interviewer aims to determine how much of what the person is saying reflects his/her real behavior and how much is related to just trying to get the job. Even when the interviewer has a clear understanding of the traits required for the particular position (which, by the way, is rarely the case), it places an almost impossible burden on the interviewer to accurately make such subtle discernments in the context of specific traits for the specific job. In the end, the whole process is very likely to come down to how well the interviewer 'likes' the candidate rather than how well the candidate fits the suitability requirements of the job.

While some interviewers may be much more insightful than others, it is very unlikely that an interviewer can accurately identify **all the necessary** factors and memorize them in relationship to all the candidates

Some people can be quite perceptive in this way. However, it is not a question of being able to identify a particular quality of a person. Rather the interviewer must be able to routinely and methodically assess a full range of qualities and the magnitude of those qualities in relationship to different performance requirements. This is far more complex and challenging.

"...If we hope to predict job performance, we need a way to assess key personality or emotional intelligence factors that relate to success for a particular job. In addition we need a way to assess key work preferences including task preferences, interests, and work environment preferences. This information, combined with understanding the person's eligibility for the position will at least give us a comprehensive set of factors that have the potential to predict job performance with reasonable accuracy..."

The Art and Science of Determining the Job's Suitability Factors

Once you have considered all the main categories of factors, the key to being able to predict job success is **to accurately determine the critical factors related to the particular job**. That is, there is no single set of factors that can be used to predict job success for all jobs. *One-size does not fit-all.*

The first step for doing this is to analyze the job. What are the person's duties or responsibilities? What tasks are required? Don't stop there.

The second step is to thoroughly understand what makes good performance. It is best to view this in terms of results. For example, one result a person in a customer service position may be required to achieve is a positive customer relationship. Usually there are around 3-7 key performance criteria that can be used to measure this result.

The third step is to analyze what would make a person able to achieve those results for each of the suitability and eligibility categories. For example, in relationship to eligibility, what education, training, experience, or skills do we think are necessary to achieve the key performance factors? In relationship to work suitability, we would ask: *"What personality traits (including motivation, interactions with others and attitudes) are related achieving these results."* In relationship to Work preferences, we would ask: *"What task preferences, interests and work environment preferences are necessary to achieve these performance results?"*



About the Author

John Suermond has 19 years experience in selection, recruitment, leadership development and succession planning. John is a Senior HR Management Consultant with [Harrison Assessments International](http://www.harrisonassessments.com) and has specialized expertise in individual assessments related to position analysis tailored to specific client requirements. He has been based in Asia for the last 30 years advising international and domestic companies as well as conglomerates on how to optimize their human capital by leveraging his deep understanding of human resources principles and practices in maximizing individual talents.

Since different factors require different magnitudes for different jobs, the final step is to determine the degree as to which each factor significantly affects job's performance itself. For example, the degree of *self motivation* required for a management position may be significantly **higher** than for an administrative position even though the same factor is required. Hence, care must be taken in assigning weightings to these levels for your total job performance factors. Included in this is the weighting between Eligibility, Suitability and Interview scores.

By the way, suitability factors are not only important when selecting and hiring employees, but are also critical when developing employees. Since these factors are critical to performance, they must be carefully considered when training or developing employees as most of the difficulties in developing the performance of employees are related to less tangible issues rather than technical skills or professional experience.

Needless to say, by taking the suggested approach, you can begin to formulate the factors that truly relate to good performance for a particular job and help you *consistently* find the right person for the right job by avoiding traps of the hiring paradox.

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