Tests & Consequences: A Two-Part Saga
Part 2: The Test that Assessed the Wrong Thing

Customers frequently call us and say, "You have several tests for the same rank. How do I choose one?" While we can't tell you which test to administer (yes, we know your life would be easier if we could), we can tell you how to decide which test to use.

Step 1: What do the results of your job analysis say? It is critical to base the selection of your test on the results of a job analysis. A job analysis is a systematic process used to identify the tasks, duties, responsibilities, and working conditions associated with a job and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics required to perform a job. You might be thinking to yourself, "Don't you guys perform your own job analyses? Why can't we just use yours?" Well, you can and you can't.

We have performed our own job analyses during the development of each test, but it is your responsibility to ensure that the position you are testing for is the same as the position studied during the development of the test. For entry-level tests, you want to ensure you are choosing the right test for the job and that you meet legal requirements. When it comes to promotional tests, you want to consider that different departments may have different requirements. In a smaller police department, for example, there are fewer staff members and, as a result, different ranks may be responsible for a greater variety of tasks. In smaller departments, Captains may be responsible for budgeting tasks, while in larger departments it Lieutenants may be responsible for this duty.

This is why you want to make sure that the test you are selecting is assessing KSAPs that are necessary for your job. This is not so much the case with entry-level tests, but it is especially true for promotional tests. You need to make sure that the job we're calling entry-level police officer, for example, is the very same job you are talking about and that the areas we say are important for successful job performance are the same ones that are important for success in your locality.

How can you do this? Let's say you're thinking of using the PO-EL 101, which is one of our entry-level police tests. You would then need to compare the results of your own job analysis for entry-level police officer with the job analysis that was done for the development of the PO-EL 101. This can also be done by conducting a transportability study, which you can do yourself or use our transportability study service (TSS). TSS assists IPMA-HR test users in linking the original development and validation study.
to the job which the user wishes to apply the test. The results of a transportability study would tell you whether the KSAPs assessed by the test are substantially similar to those necessary for success on the job.

We swear that we're not trying to sell you stuff; it's actually the law. The Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures states that a thorough job analysis is needed for supporting a selection procedure and, if you are using a published test, you must link the original development and validation study to the job for which you want to use the test. And if you don't know what the Uniform Guidelines are, uh, you really should. Click [here](#) for a free copy. Our cut score handout and Test Administration Handbook also discuss them, but we've digressed.

So, you'll need to figure out if you have an up-to-date job analysis or whether you want to conduct a transportability study. Once you've decided those things, you'll need to get your hands on a copy of the original job analysis and validation study.

Where can you find the job analysis that was done for any of our tests? You can always find the results of each test's job analysis in that test's technical report. The technical report is that heavy document you might be using to prop your door open. No, it's not that thick, but it does take some time to read. Once you've read it though, you will have a better understanding of how the test was developed. Technical reports are complimentary and are available to those with a Test Security Agreement on file.

Once you've compared the results of your job analysis to ours or conducted your transportability study, you will be in good shape to choose a test. Just pick one that assesses the areas your job analysis or transportability study showed as being critical for success.

Step 2: Aside from consulting the results of your job analysis or transportability study, you will want to decide whether you want to incorporate other measures into your test process. This may include a physical ability test, an oral interview, a separate test of the candidate's writing ability, an assessment center with an inbox exercise, etc.

Since there are many different types of measures you could add on to the administration of a written test, let's talk about one measure in particular that you could pair with an entry-level test: The non-cognitive measure. With a few exceptions, IPMA-HR's written multiple-choice tests for entry-level positions are cognitive ability tests. We also offer non-cognitive measures.

Before we talk about non-cognitive measures, let's spend a little time understanding cognitive ability. General cognitive ability is the ability to think and process information. These abilities affect job performance through the role they play in the acquisition and use of information about how to do the job. Some examples of general cognitive processes include understanding, reasoning and intellectual capacity. It's been thought that individuals with higher levels of cognitive ability acquire new information easier and faster, and are able to use that information more effectively.

Not surprisingly, research has shown that cognitive ability is the best predictor of job performance. Still, it doesn't tell you everything you need to know about a candidate. What does cognitive ability tell you about how diligently someone works or their interest in the work itself?
Cognitive ability ignores these factors, yet conscientiousness and interest in work have been shown to be important predictors of job performance. Conscientiousness is an example of a non-cognitive ability. Using non-cognitive measures, such as biodata and interest questionnaires, can give you a fuller assessment of each candidate and help reduce adverse impact. Non-cognitive factors include affective, personal, and social variables that predict successful job performance. Examples include interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, cooperativeness, sense of responsibility, service-mindedness and conscientiousness.

A number of IPMA-HR tests include non-cognitive components. The PO-EL 200 Series includes a 30 question section titled "Interests" that will easily allow you to incorporate non-cognitive testing into your hiring process. For entry-level firefighter positions, both the FF-EL 201-NC and the FF-EL 301-NC include a 20 question non-cognitive section. Additionally, we offer two cost-effective biodata questionnaires: The PO-BDQ 201-NC for police and CO-BDQ 201-NC for corrections.

You may be wondering to yourself, how can you use a non-cognitive measure if you need to stick to the results of your job analysis? Well, are you sure that your job analysis does not indicate that interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, cooperativeness, sense of responsibility, service-mindedness and conscientiousness are important for success? If you're sure that these skills and attributes are not important, then you shouldn't use a non-cognitive measure. However, unless you're testing for the job of a robot, these factors will be important for successful job performance.

When choosing your tests, remember that it takes many attributes to perform on the job effectively, not just cognitive ability. The more you can assess about the person in advance, the better picture you'll get for how they'll perform on the job.

A Word About Reading Lists

A reading list is a list of books used by candidates to prepare for promotional tests. Typically, our reading lists contain approximately five to six books. Although we aim to minimize this number, it’s difficult to find books that assess all of the KSAPs that the job analysis showed are crucial for success on the job. Decreasing the number of books would most likely impact the validity of the test. To some extent, the smaller the range of books, the less the test will be able to predict success on the job.

Occasionally, we hear rumors that our customers don't distribute our reading lists to their candidates. We cannot force you to distribute the reading lists to candidates, but we can tell you that we would personally distribute the reading lists to candidates if we were administering the tests, and here’s why. While candidates may know the answers to some test questions based on their job experience, other questions talk about specific information that they might not get from job experience alone. You might be thinking that we're trying to teach to the test, but you would be wrong. The content for any one of our promotional tests is based on the results of job analysis and content validation study. We simply created questions that subject matter experts like you told us were important for successful job performance.

If you have reviewed the test, compared our job analysis to yours and you agree that everything is relevant, candidates need to study those books. Our promotional exams are, after all, knowledge-based tests. Unlike our entry-level exams, our promotional exams do require training and experience. Part of this training involves a study period, which, in itself, is an added benefit for the department. Why wouldn't you want your candidates to read all that job relevant, knowledge-rich material?

We know that the books are expensive and take a lot of time to read, but just remember that how well candidates do on the test is a indication of their commitment to the job and strong indication of how well they'll do on the job. If cost is an issue though, you might suggest that small groups of candidates purchase the books together. They can then circulate the books among themselves -
each studying one book at a time. This would cut down on the total cost tremendously.

We strongly recommend that the candidates have 60 to 90 days to study the books before they take the test, allowing an extra one to two weeks for candidates to obtain a copy of each book. It is important to remember that reading lists should not be posted year-round. Doing so would provide applicants with an unfair advantage. This would, in turn, invalidate the test results.

Finally, since new editions of books are published or go out-of-print, it is very important that you contact us before posting a reading list.

About Us

IPMA-HR is a non-profit organization devoted to human resource professionals in the public sector. We specialize in public safety tests for hiring and promotions to include police, fire, corrections, and telecommunicators. We provide over 3,000 departments in the United States, Canada, and the European Union with cost effective employment tests. We've been developing employment tests for over 60 years and we pride ourselves on the quality of our tests and the personal measures we take to ensure all of our clients are satisfied.

You can read more about the products and services we offer on our website and e-mail us at assessment@ipma-hr.org. You can also call us toll-free at (800) 381-8378. We're here from Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm Eastern. Please don't hesitate to contact us if there's anything we can do for you.

Sincerely,

The Assessment Services Department