

Executive Appointments

Can psychometric tests tell me anything new?

Your Questions Answered

GILL PLIMMER

I've never used psychometric testing when hiring – what on earth can it tell me about a candidate I don't already know and can't work out for myself?

Louise Trance, managing director of UK Recruiter, a forum for hiring agencies and personnel departments in the UK

I'd never hire anybody without one. Most people are utterly blown away by the difference it can make.

According to Spencer and Spencer's Iceberg Model, only between 10 per cent and a third of a person is visible in an interview, and given that a lot of people making hiring decisions are inexperienced interviewers, they may get even less.

Psychometric tests provide data about a person on more than you can see or hear in an interview alone. They give you an insight into different facets of the candidate's personality in a more objective way.

In an interview you're assessing the candidate according to what they tell you. They may answer questions in a way which tells you what they think you want to hear.

A psychometric test still relies on

the responses of the candidate but the best products in the field question the candidate in such a way that they get beyond what they would like you to believe. They have in-built "lie detectors".

For example, if you ask "are you a good manager" in an interview, of course the interviewee is going to say yes. A good psychometric test can ask the question over and over again in different ways so that the candidate corners themselves into being more honest than they perhaps intended.

People can give the answer they think employers want but if they are inconsistent a decent test will show it up. That said, there are occasions when I've told people to sit it again and be more honest.

It's also a good way of checking yourself as an interviewer; we all have prejudices and instant likes and dislikes and a psychometric assessment can make you sit back and objectively analyse a person. According to some research (Springbett, 1958) 85 per cent of the outcomes of interviews are decided in the first two or three minutes; well obviously they shouldn't be.

It's worth investing in the right product, though. The ones I use take up to 40 minutes for a candidate to answer and cost as little as £250 a

person. Compare that to the average £7,000 it costs to recruit someone and it's a low-cost tool – especially if you compare it to the expense of getting an appointment wrong.

Of course, you shouldn't just use psychometric testing. The more tools you use the better. You should use competency-based interview questions; use role play and real-life exercises; and consider verbal and numerical testing. The more techniques you use, the more you will discover about how the candidate would behave on the job.

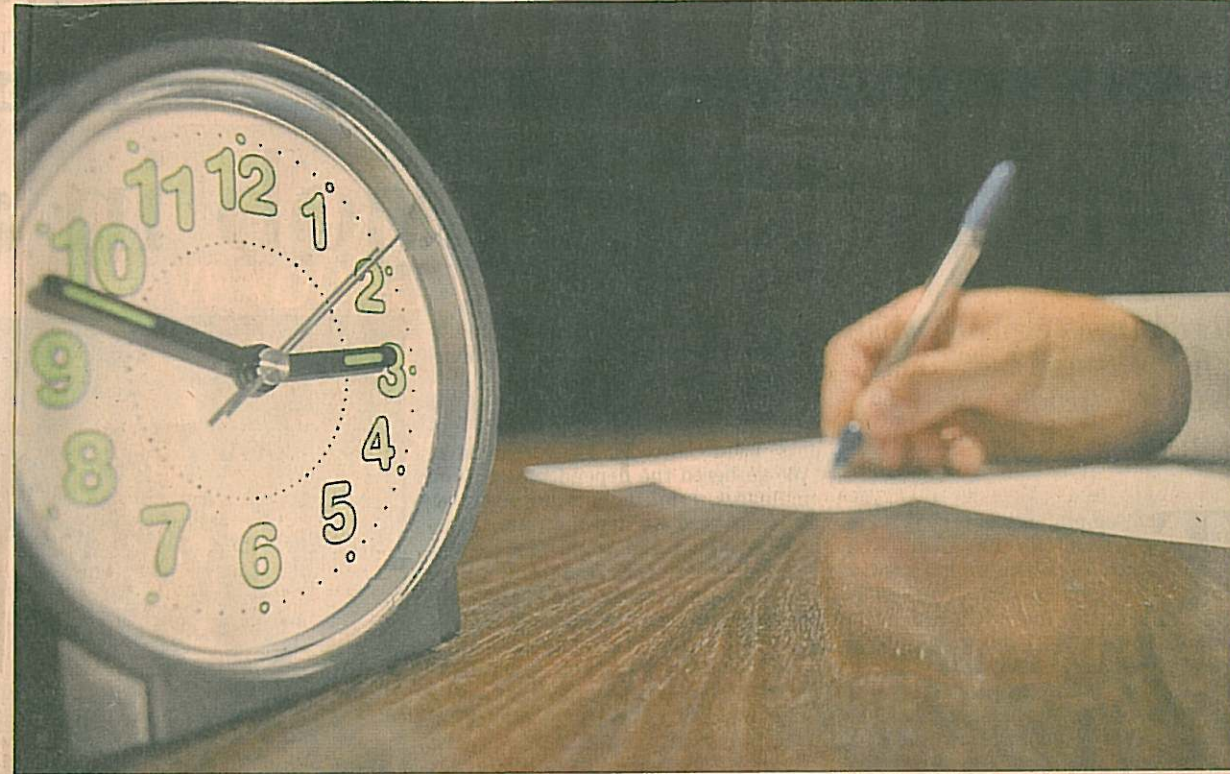
Helen Pitcher, chairman of Iddas, a boardroom effectiveness consultancy, says:

Psychometric tests help you peel back several more layers than you get from even the best double-digging in interviews.

We use psychometrics to look at what people are like in terms of relationships; thinking style; their drivers and motivations; and the type of culture that will fit them best.

It also helps to understand their leadership techniques and whether they will make good team players and are easy to manage.

It can also highlight inconsistencies. People who try to give you the best view of themselves



Under pressure: testing can help peel back the layers of a candidate's personality

Alamy

in a psychometric test or who are good at singing their own song in interviews will be shown up.

If someone tells you in a psychometric test that they are highly persuasive but then goes on to say they are highly competitive, undemocratic and don't listen well, you can begin to see that this candidate may be directive and dictatorial. They are contra-indicative qualities.

Their sheer force of personality may take people along with them initially but they are unlikely to prove persuasive in the long run as people will start to feel as if they are being manipulated rather than persuaded.

That said, the tests should never be used on their own but in conjunction with interviews and discussions.

What they give you is additional

data that you can benchmark against a similar population of people at that level. If you can benchmark, you can calibrate your questions at interview.

NEXT WEEK: 'When I'm being interviewed, should I always ask the interviewer something at the end?' E-mail your recruitment questions – or suggested answers to next week's query – to: recruitment@ft.com