

7

Selecting Human Resources

After you have read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Summarize the importance of realistic job previews and application screening efforts to the selection process.
- Diagram the sequence of a typical selection process.
- Discuss how validity and reliability are related to selection.
- Identify three types of selection tests and legal concerns about their uses.
- Contrast several types of selection interviews and some key considerations in conducting these interviews.
- Specify how legal concerns affect background investigations of applicants and use of medical examinations in the selection process.
- Describe the major issues to be considered when selecting candidates for global assignments.

Using Virtual Worlds for Selection



Some employers are experimenting with a virtual online community to screen possible hires. The program allows job candidates to create a computer-generated image to represent them and to communicate with employers as if text-messaging. The image is called an “avatar.” The avatar can be used to interview or to attend virtual job fairs. Company representatives also create avatars. The interactions among these creations in a virtual environment become the basis for screening decisions.

Those who are less tech-savvy are finding that they can shoot themselves in their virtual feet. Some people have a difficult time designing and controlling their avatars. For example, one candidate spent 6 hours working on his avatar and could not figure out how to make him sit in a chair; he finally decided to let him sit on top of the chair instead. Other candidates’ avatars at an online job fair began floating in the air.

It is not just applicants who have difficulties.

Company representatives are not used to recruiting in the virtual world either. One consulting company partner’s avatar slumped over by accident and looked like it had gone to sleep during an interview. Mishaps involving avatars are usually viewed as amusing. The mistakes can even be icebreakers. One candidate attending the job fair tried to hand a copy of his résumé to a Hewlett-Packard employee and instead handed her a virtual beer. Luckily they both laughed it off, and the candidate was given an opportunity to continue the interview process.

Using this virtual interaction is cheaper than holding an actual job fair. Higher-ups in the company who might want to attend can do so easily as avatars. Job seekers seem to be much more relaxed in the virtual environment than they would be at a real job fair, since they have time to think

before they type their responses rather than having to think and talk at the same time.

Employers say they do not view this as a replacement for traditional selection, but rather as an additional step that can help narrow the field of candidates for some jobs. “This is really a supplement to our regular recruiting practices,” says a manager for Hewlett-Packard.¹

Some would argue that picking the right people for the jobs that need to be done is the most important part of human resource management.² Certainly for a business that depends on good people and good performance for the organization to succeed, its importance is very high. For an organization that is failing, improvement may need to come from many different sources, but it is difficult to imagine appropriate changes coming without some new competent people to carry out those changes. In athletic organizations that are not doing well, it is the selection of new coaches and players that creates improvements, if any are to come, and the continued selection of good athletes and coaches that allows ongoing success.

SELECTION AND PLACEMENT

Selection is the process of choosing individuals with the correct qualifications needed to fill jobs in an organization. Without these qualified employees, an organization is far less likely to succeed. A useful perspective on selection and placement comes from two HR observations that underscore the importance of effective staffing:

- “*Hire hard, manage easy.*” The investment of time and effort in selecting the right people for jobs will make managing them as employees much less difficult because many problems are eliminated.
- “*Good training will not make up for bad selection.*” When people without the appropriate aptitudes are selected, employers will have difficulty training them to do those jobs that they do not fit.³

Placement

The ultimate purpose of selection is **placement**, or fitting a person to the right job. Placement of human resources should be seen primarily as a matching process. How well an employee is matched to a job can affect the amount and quality of the employee’s work, as well as the training and operating costs required to prepare the individual for work life. Further, employee morale is an issue because good fit encourages individuals to be positive about their jobs and what they accomplish.⁴

Selection and placement activities typically focus on applicants’ knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), but they should also focus on the degree to which job candidates generally match the situations experienced both on the job and in the company. Psychologists label this *person-environment fit*. In HR it is usually called **person/job fit**. Fit is related not only to satisfaction with work but also to commitment to a company, and to quitting intentions.

Selection The process of choosing individuals with the correct qualifications needed to fill jobs in an organization.

Placement Fitting a person to the right job.

Person/job fit Matching the KSAs of individuals with the characteristics of jobs.

Lack of fit between KSAs and job requirements can be classified as a “mismatch.” A mismatch results from poor pairing of a person’s needs, interests, abilities, personality, and expectations with characteristics of the job, rewards, and the organization in which the job is located. Five mismatch situations are:⁵

- Skills/job qualifications
- Geography/job location
- Time/amount of work
- Earnings/expectations
- Work/family

Mismatches related to skills/job qualifications and amount of work/time required are likely to cause a person to change jobs to improve fit. The other kinds of mismatches have more to do with conflicts of interests. What makes placement difficult and complex is the need to match people and jobs on multiple dimensions.⁶

People already working in jobs can help identify the most important KSAs for success as part of job analysis. The fit between the individual and job characteristics is particularly important when dealing with overseas assignments because employees must have the proper personalities, skills, and interpersonal abilities to be effective in the international environment.

In addition to the match between people and jobs, employers are concerned about the congruence between people and companies, or the **person/organization fit**.⁷ Person/organization fit is important from a “values” perspective, with many organizations trying to positively link a person’s principles to the values of the company. Organizations tend to favor job applicants who effectively blend into how business is conducted. Person/organization fit can influence employees’ and customers’ beliefs about the organization, making this fit a key selection consideration.



LOGGING ON

HR-Guide.com

This website offers links to HR websites relating to selection and staffing resources, including information on methods, best practices, tests, and software programs. Visit the site at www.hr-guide.com.

Selection, Criteria, Predictors, and Job Performance

Regardless of whether an employer uses specific KSAs or a more general approach, effective selection of employees involves using selection criteria and predictors of these criteria. At the heart of an effective selection system must be the knowledge of what constitutes good job performance. When one knows what good performance looks like on a particular job, the next step is to identify what it takes for the employee to achieve successful performance. These are called selection criteria. A **selection criterion** is a characteristic that a person must possess to successfully perform work. Figure 7-1 shows that ability, motivation, intelligence, conscientiousness, appropriate risk, and permanence might be selection criteria for many jobs. Selection criteria that might be more specific to managerial jobs include “leading and deciding,” “supporting and cooperating,” “organizing and executing,” and “enterprising and performing.”⁸

To determine whether candidates might possess certain selection criteria (such as ability and motivation), employers try to identify **predictors of selection criteria** that are measurable or visible indicators of those positive characteristics (or criteria). For example, as Figure 7-1 indicates, three good predictors of “permanence” might be individual interests, salary requirements, and tenure on previous jobs. If a candidate possesses appropriate amounts of any or all of these predictors, it might be assumed that the person would stay on the job longer than someone without those predictors.⁹

Person/organization fit

The congruence between individuals and organizational factors.

Selection criterion

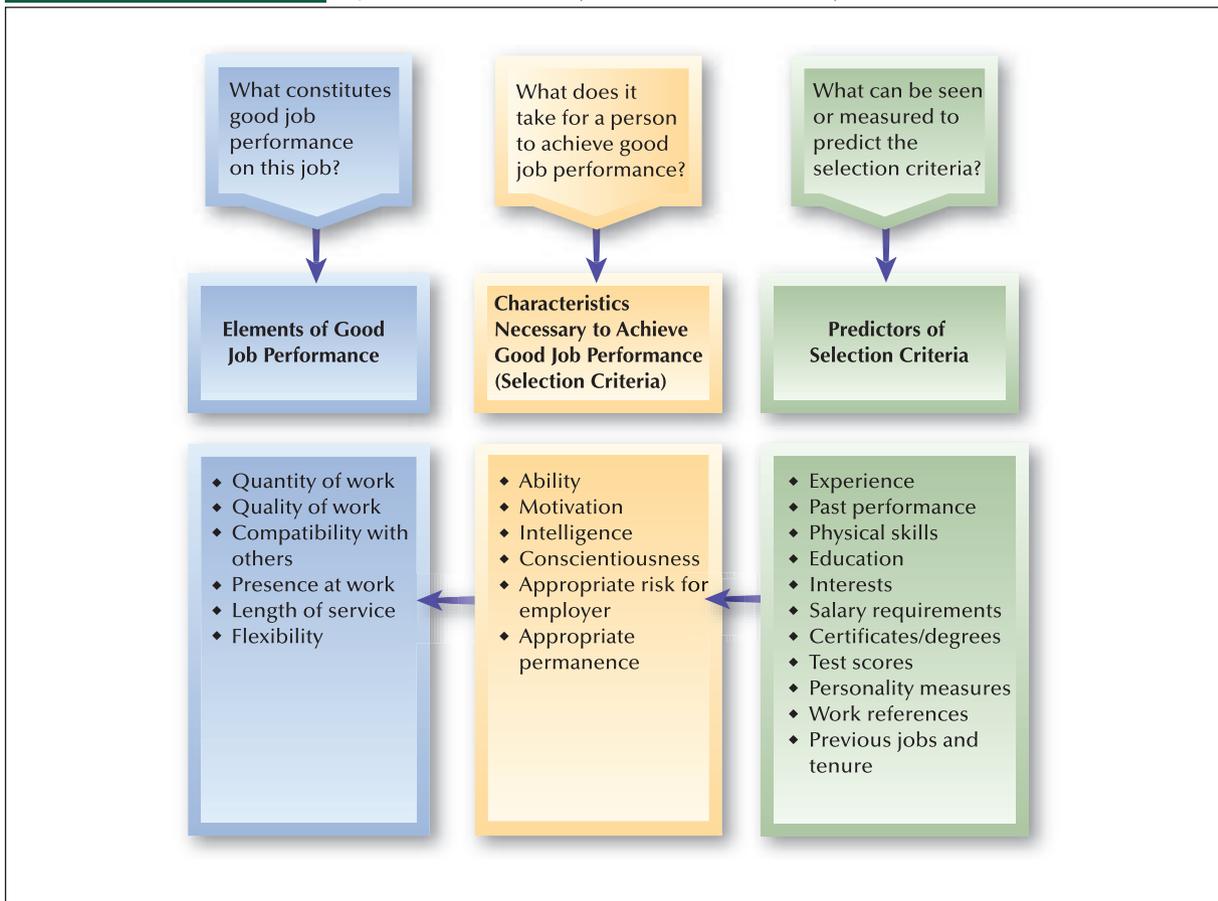
Characteristic that a person must possess to successfully perform work.

Predictors of selection criteria

Measurable or visible indicators of selection criteria.

FIGURE 7-1

Job Performance, Selection Criteria, and Predictors



The information gathered about an applicant through predictors should focus on the likelihood that the individual will execute the job competently once hired. Predictors can be identified through many formats such as application forms, tests, interviews, education requirements, and years of experience, but such factors should be used only if they are found to be valid predictors of specific job performance.¹⁰ Using invalid predictors can result in selecting the “wrong” candidate and rejecting the “right” one.

Validity

In selection, validity is the correlation between a predictor and job performance. In other words, validity occurs to the extent that the predictor actually predicts what it is supposed to predict. Several different types of validity are used in selection. Most validity decisions use a **correlation coefficient**, an index number that gives the relationship between a predictor variable and a criterion (or dependent) variable. Correlations always range from -1.0 to $+1.0$, with higher absolute scores suggesting stronger relationships.

Concurrent validity is one method for establishing the validity associated with a predictor. Concurrent validity uses current employees to validate a predictor or “test.” As shown in Figure 7-2, concurrent validity is measured when an employer tests current employees and correlates the scores with

Correlation coefficient

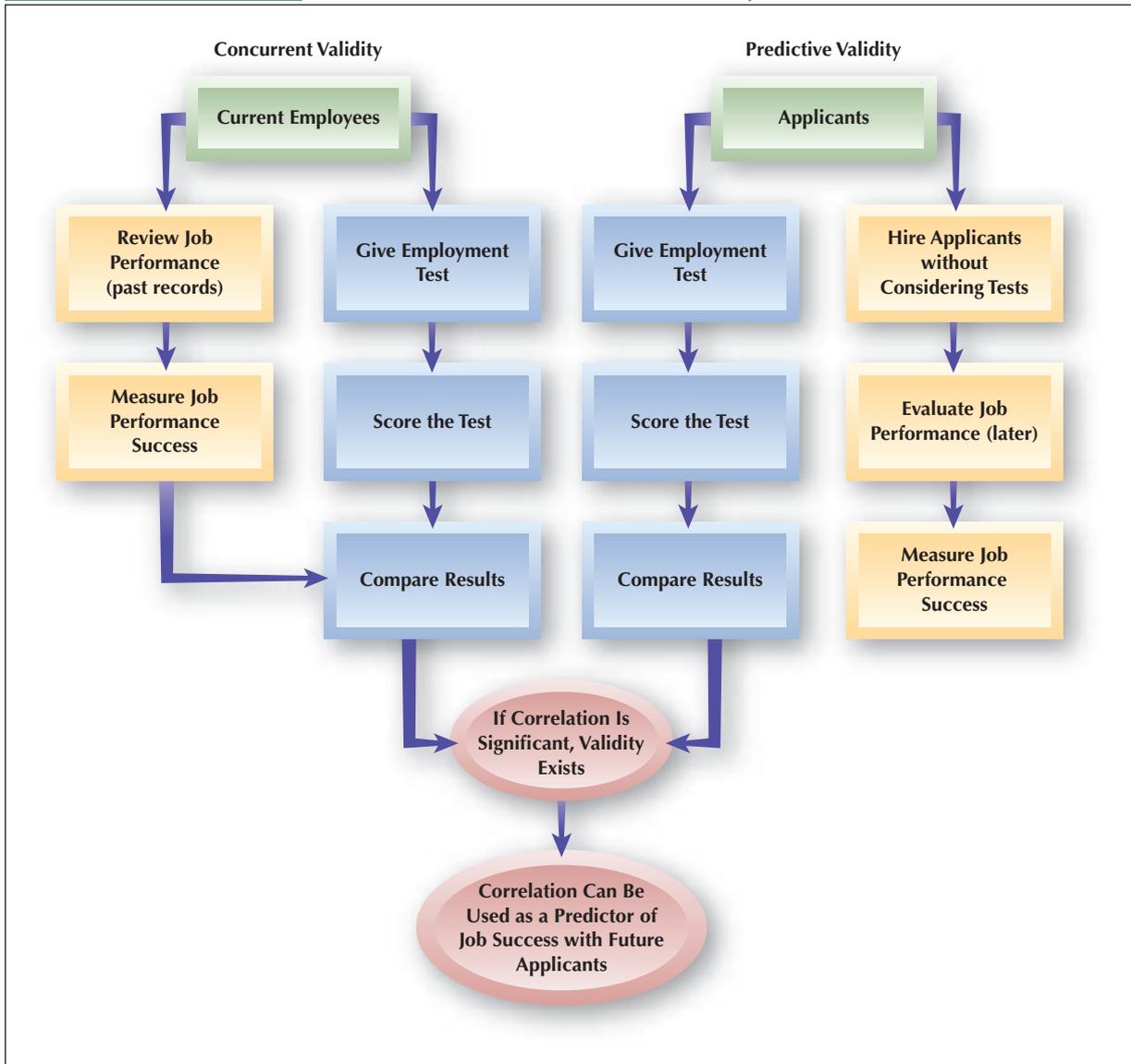
Index number that gives the relationship between a predictor variable and a criterion variable.

Concurrent validity

Measured when an employer tests current employees and correlates the scores with their performance ratings.

FIGURE 7-2

Concurrent and Predictive Validity



their performance ratings on such measures as their scores on performance appraisals.

A disadvantage of the concurrent validity approach is that employees who have not performed satisfactorily at work are probably no longer with the firm and therefore cannot be tested. Also, extremely good employees may have been promoted or may have left the company for better work situations. Any learning on the job also might confound test scores.

Another method for establishing criterion-related validity is predictive validity. To calculate **predictive validity**, test results of applicants are compared with their subsequent job performance (see Figure 7-2). Job success is measured by assessing factors such as absenteeism, accidents, errors, and performance appraisal ratings. If the employees who had one year of experience at the time of hire demonstrate better performance than those without such

Predictive validity

Measured when test results of applicants are compared with subsequent job performance.

experience, then the experience requirement can be considered a valid predictor of job performance. In addition, individual experience may be utilized as an important “selection criterion” when making future staffing decisions.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has favored predictive validity because it includes the full range of performance and test scores. However, establishing predictive validity can be challenging for managers because a large sample of individuals is needed (usually at least 30) and a significant amount of time must transpire (perhaps one year) to facilitate the analysis. Because of these limitations, other types of validity calculations tend to be more popular.

Reliability Reliability of a predictor or “test” is the extent to which it repeatedly produces the same results over time. For example, if a person took a test in December and scored 75, and then took the same test again in March and scored 76, the exam is probably a reliable instrument. Consequently, reliability involves the consistency of predictors used in selection procedures. A predictor that is not reliable is of no value in selection.

Combining Predictors

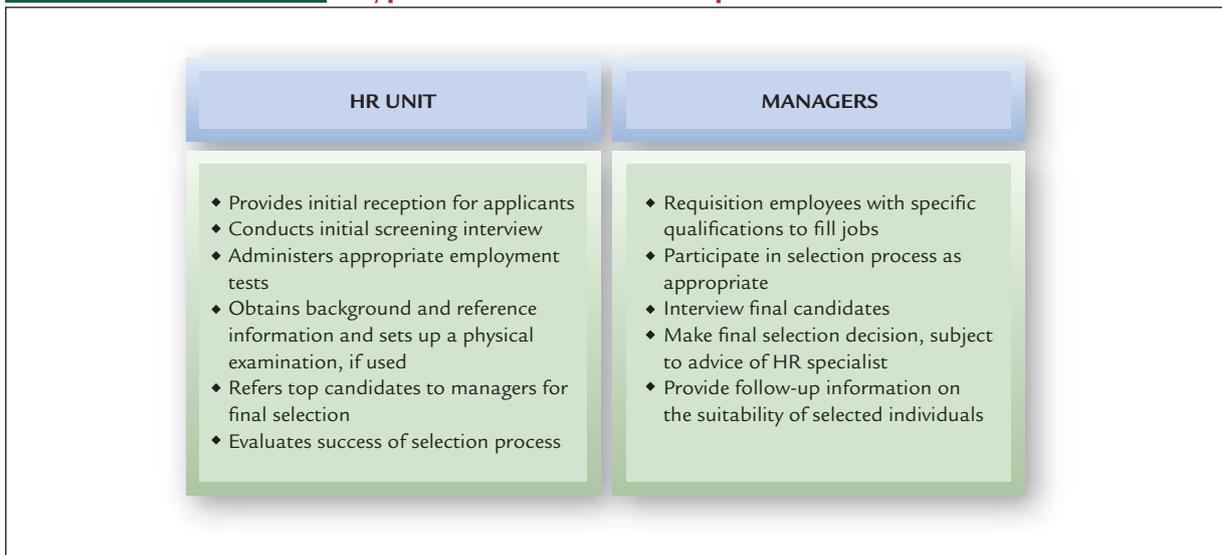
If an employer chooses to use only one predictor, such as a pencil-and-paper test, to select the individuals to be hired, the decision becomes straightforward. If the test is valid and encompasses a major dimension of a job, and an applicant does well on the test, then that person should be given a job offer. When an employer uses predictors such as “three years of experience,” “possesses a college degree,” and “acceptable aptitude test score,” job applicants are evaluated on all of these requirements and the multiple predictors must be combined in some way. Two approaches for combining predictors are:

- *Multiple hurdles:* A minimum cutoff is set on each predictor, and each minimum level must be “passed.” For example, in order to be hired, a candidate for a sales representative job must achieve a minimum education level, a certain score on a sales aptitude test, and a minimum score on a structured interview.
- *Compensatory approach:* Scores from individual predictors are added and combined into an overall score, thereby allowing a higher score on one predictor to offset, or compensate for, a lower score on another. The combined index takes into consideration performance on all predictors. For example, when admitting students into graduate business programs, a higher overall score on an admissions test might offset a lower undergraduate grade point average.

Selection Responsibilities

Selection is a key responsibility for all managers and supervisors in a company. However, organizations vary in how they allocate selection responsibilities between HR specialists and operating managers. The typical selection responsibilities are shown in Figure 7-3. The need to meet EEO requirements and the inherent strategic implications of the staffing function have caused many companies to place greater emphasis on hiring procedures and techniques and to centralize selection in the HR department. In other companies, each department (or its management team) screens and hires its own personnel. Managers, especially those working in smaller firms, often select their own employees

FIGURE 7-3

Typical Division of HR Responsibilities: Selection

because these individuals directly impact their work areas. But the validity and effectiveness of this approach may be questionable because of lack of training in selection among operating managers.

Another approach has HR professionals initially screening the job candidates, and the managers or supervisors making the final selection decisions from the qualified applicant pool. Generally, the higher the positions being filled, the greater the likelihood that the ultimate hiring decisions will be made by operating managers rather than HR professionals.

Selection responsibilities are affected by the existence of a central employment office, which is often housed within a human resources department. In smaller organizations, especially in those with fewer than 100 employees, a full-time employment specialist or group is impractical. But for larger firms, centralizing activities in an employment office might be appropriate.

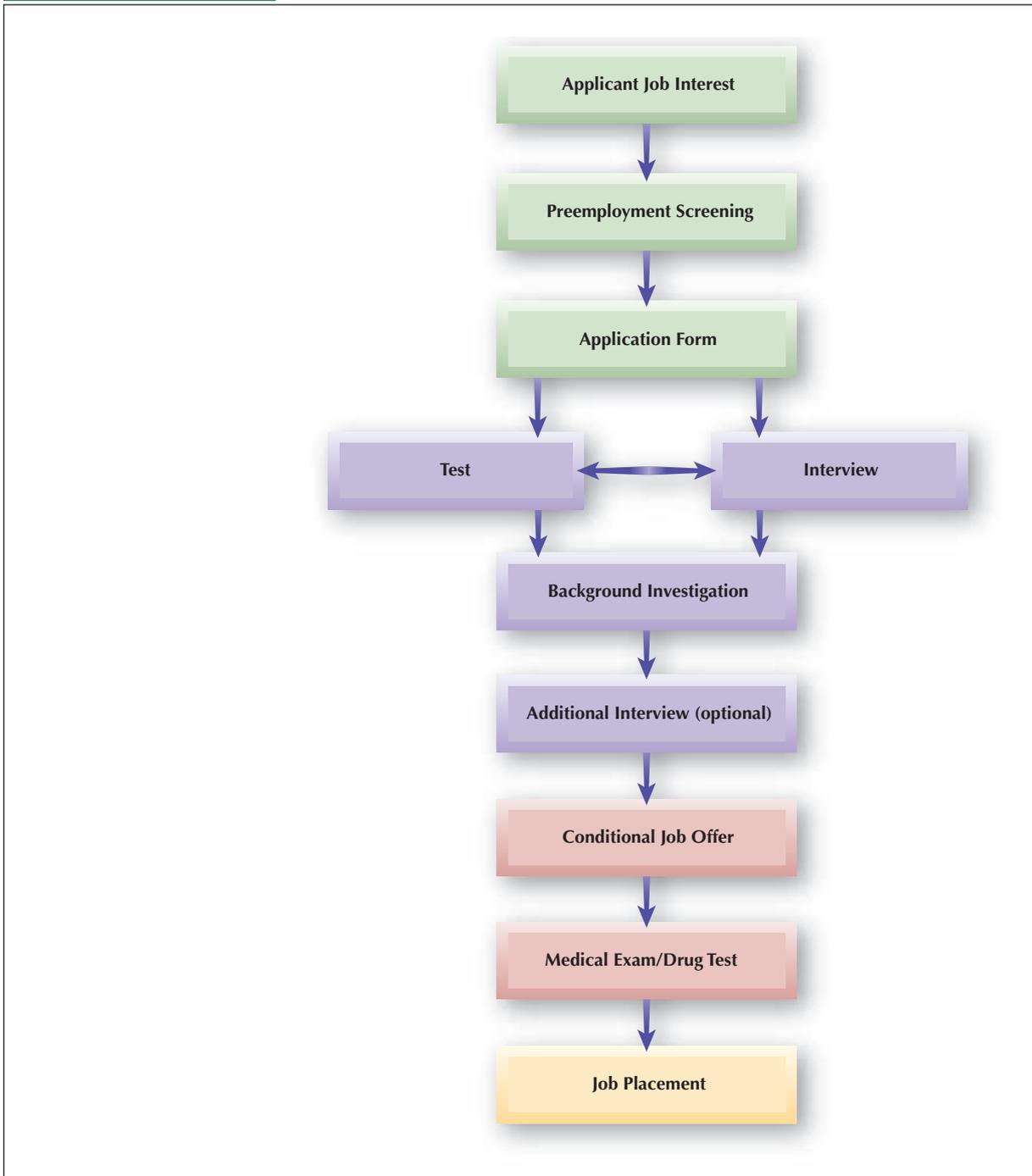
The employment function in any organization may be concerned with some or all of the following activities: (1) receiving applications, (2) interviewing the applicants, (3) administering tests to applicants, (4) conducting background investigations, (5) arranging for physical examinations, (6) placing and assigning new employees, (7) coordinating follow-up of these employees, (8) conducting exit interviews with departing employees, and (9) maintaining appropriate records and reports.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

Most organizations take a series of consistent steps to process and select applicants for jobs. Company size, job characteristics, the number of people needed, the use of electronic technology, and other factors cause variations on the basic process. Selection can take place in a day or over a much longer period of time, and certain phases of the process may be omitted or the order changed, depending on the employer. If the applicant is processed in one day, the employer usually checks references after selection. Figure 7-4 shows steps in a typical selection process.

FIGURE 7-4

Selection Process Flowchart



Applicant Job Interest

Individuals wanting employment can indicate interest in a number of ways. Traditionally, individuals have submitted résumés by mail or fax, or applied in person at an employer's location. But with the growth in Internet recruiting, many individuals complete applications online or submit résumés electronically.

Regardless of how individuals express interest in employment, the selection process has an important public relations dimension. Discriminatory hiring practices, impolite interviewers, unnecessarily long waits, unreturned telephone inquiries, inappropriate testing procedures, and lack of follow-up responses can produce unfavorable impressions of an employer. Job applicants' perceptions of the organization will be influenced by how they are treated.

Realistic Job Previews Many individuals know little about companies before applying for employment. Consequently, when deciding whether to accept a job, they pay particularly close attention to the information received during the selection process, including compensation data, work characteristics, job location, and promotion opportunities. Unfortunately, some employers make jobs appear better than they really are. **Realistic job previews** provide potential employees with an accurate introduction to a job so that they can better evaluate the employment situation. Indeed, a realistic job preview can directly enhance individual training and clarify a job role. Also, in global assignments, the use of realistic job previews increases individual confidence and improves decision making about an expatriate position.

A company should consider several strategies when developing a recruiting brand and conveying it to potential employees via realistic job previews. The brand of the company should establish in the minds of recruits the company's overall purpose for being in business, and it should honestly portray the jobs that are performed by individuals already employed in the firm. A project director of a recruiting firm suggests that a firm should evaluate its own strengths and develop a list of employment benefits that would make the company attractive to potential employees. These points may include building human capital, good compensation, and ethics and social responsibility. At the same time, a company needs to convey the less attractive aspects of work, such as difficult work schedules or extensive travel. However, any negative job attributes can be outweighed by the positive factors already covered.

Truth-in-Hiring Lawsuits Recruiters may exaggerate promotional opportunities, pay, or even the company's financial position in an attempt to hire a candidate. However, a candidate who leaves a good job to accept a position and later discovers such exaggerations may choose to sue the company for misrepresenting the job. In some cases, recruiters feel such pressure to "sell" the company that they "oversell" it. The best way to avoid truth-in-hiring lawsuits is to use the realistic job preview correctly.¹¹

Preemployment Screening

Many employers conduct preemployment screening to determine if applicants meet the minimum qualifications for open jobs before they have the applicants fill out an application.

Electronic Assessment Screening The use of electronic preemployment screening or assessment has grown. Much of this screening utilizes computer software to review the many résumés and application forms received during the recruiting and selection process. Large companies often use different types of software to receive, evaluate, and track the applications of many potential employees.

When a job posting generates 1,000 or more applications, which is not unusual with large companies or in difficult economic times, responding to each would be a full-time job. Electronic screening can speed up the process.

Realistic job preview

Process through which a job applicant receives an accurate picture of a job.

Cheating on Electronic Assessments



Many retailers make applicants take an assessment online before interviewing them. If they do not do well on this “test,” they will not be interviewed. Such tests also are given at in-store kiosks so hiring managers can interview high-scoring persons before they leave the store, but 90% of the time these tests are done online. These assessment tests ask applicants to agree or disagree with statements such as “You have to give up on some things that you start” or “Any trouble you have is your own fault.”

The tests cut the amount of time store managers spend interviewing and can improve the levels of measured results in areas such as sales performance, turnover, safety, and so on; but the tests also create a culture of cheating and raise questions for some applicants about their “fairness.” Anton Smith took such a test when he applied for hourly work at a sneaker store, but before taking it, he had a friend do a little digging online to find an unauthorized answer key. Then when he took the test, Anton had a good idea how to answer the 130 statements in it. He was hired, but he does not think the test was useful.

The test Smith took is called UNICRV, which is used by about 16% of major retailers. The company that designed it believes the incidence of cheating is low and does not affect the benefits to retailers of using it. CVS Caremark is pleased with the test, according to its head of HR, who says, “I think our field organization is happy with the quality of the candidate.”

The more critical the test is to getting a job, the more applicants will try to “game” it. They may take it several times, compare notes with other test takers, consult an online cheat sheet, or have a friend take it for them. Mark Scott took the UNICRV test when applying at Circuit City and did not get hired. A friend told him the test disqualified him. He applied to another chain that uses the test, but this time he had a friend who coached him because the friend had taken and passed the test many times. Scott was hired immediately. He observed that the test process “weeds out people who are honest and selects those who lie.” Opportunities to cheat with electronic assessments exist, and people certainly will find them.¹²

This may take several forms: disqualification questions; screening questions to get at KSAs and experience; valid assessment tests; and background, drug, and financial screening. Some of the assessments might include auditions for the job that are based on simulations of specific job-related tasks. For example, in a call center, candidates are given virtual customers with service problems, and branch manager candidates demonstrate their ability to foster relationships with virtual clients and to make quick personnel decisions with virtual employees.¹³

A good strategy is to use simple electronic assessment early to cut down the number of applicants before requiring applications or interviews. That leaves a much more qualified list of remaining applicants with which to work.¹⁴ However, such assessments have a down side as well, as shown in the HR Perspective.

Application Forms

Some employers do not use preemployment screening prior to having applicants fill out an application form. Instead, they have every interested individual complete an application first. These completed application forms then become

the basis for prescreening information. But collecting, storing, and tracking these forms can create significant work for HR staff members.

Application forms, which are used universally, can take on different formats. Properly prepared, the application form serves four purposes:

1. It is a record of the applicant's desire to obtain a position.
2. It provides the interviewer with a profile of the applicant that can be used during the interview.
3. It is a basic employee record for applicants who are hired.
4. It can be used for research on the effectiveness of the selection process.

Many employers use only one application form for all jobs, but others use several different forms depending on the position. For example, a hotel might use one form for management and supervisory staff and another for line employees.

Application Disclaimers Application forms should contain disclaimers and notices so that appropriate legal protections are clearly stated. These recommended disclosures include:

- *Employment-at-will*: Indicates the right of the employer or the applicant to terminate employment at any time with or without notice or cause (where applicable by state law)
- *Reference contacts*: Requests permission to contact previous employers listed by the applicant on the application form or résumé
- *Employment testing*: Notifies applicants of required drug tests, pencil-and-paper tests, physical exams, or electronic or other tests that will be used in the employment decision
- *Application time limit*: Indicates how long application forms are active (typically 6 months), and that persons must reapply or reactivate their applications after that period
- *Information falsification*: Conveys to an applicant that falsification of application information can be grounds for serious reprimand or termination

EEO Considerations and Application Forms An organization should retain all applications and hiring-related documents and records for 3 years. Guidelines from the EEOC and court decisions require that the data requested on application forms must be job related. Though frequently found on application forms, questions that ask for the following information are illegal. (See Appendix D for review.)

- Marital status
- Height/weight
- Number and ages of dependents
- Information on spouse
- Date of high school graduation
- Contact in case of emergency

Most of the litigation surrounding application forms has involved questions regarding the gender and age of a potential employee, so special consideration should be dedicated to removing any items that relate to these personal characteristics. Concerns about inappropriate questions stem from their potential to elicit information that should not be used in hiring decisions. Figure 7-5 shows a sample application form containing questions that generally are legal.

FIGURE 7-5

Sample Application Form

Application for Employment An Equal Opportunity Employer*				Today's Date _____
PERSONAL INFORMATION			Please Print or Type	
Name (Last)	(First)	(Full middle name)	Social Security number	
Current address	City	State	Zip code	Phone number ()
What position are you applying for?		Date available for employment?	E-mail address	
Are you willing to relocate? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Are you willing to travel if required? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Any restrictions on hours, weekends, or overtime? If yes, explain.		
Have you ever been employed by this Company or any of its subsidiaries before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Indicate location and dates		
Can you, after employment, submit verification of your legal right to work in the United States? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Have you ever been convicted of a felony? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <small>Convictions will not automatically disqualify job candidates. The seriousness of the crime and the date of conviction will be considered.</small>		
PERFORMANCE OF JOB FUNCTIONS				
Are you able to perform all the functions of the job for which you are applying, with or without accommodation? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, without accommodation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with accommodation <input type="checkbox"/> No				
If you indicated you can perform all the functions with an accommodation, please explain how you would perform the tasks and with what accommodation.				
EDUCATION				
School level	School name and address	No. of years attended	Did you graduate?	Course of study
High school				
Vo-tech, business, or trade school				
College				
Graduate school				
PERSONAL DRIVING RECORD				
This section is to be completed ONLY if the operation of a motor vehicle will be required in the course of the applicant's employment.				
How long have you been a licensed driver?		Driver's license number	Expiration date	Issuing State
List any other state(s) in which you have had a driver's license(s) in the past:				
Within the past five years, have you had a vehicle accident? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Been convicted of reckless or drunken driving? If yes, give dates: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Been cited for moving violations? If yes, give dates: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Has your driver's license ever been revoked or suspended? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If yes, explain:		Is your driver's license restricted? If yes, explain: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
<small>*We are an Equal Opportunity Employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, gender, age, national origin, or disability.</small>				

Résumés as Applications Applicants commonly provide background information through résumés. When the situation arises, EEO standards require that an employer treats a résumé as an application form. As such, if an applicant's résumé voluntarily furnishes some information that cannot be legally obtained, the employer should not use that information during the selection process. Some employers require those who submit résumés to complete an application form as well.

Regardless of how the background information is collected, companies should be dutiful about checking the truthfulness of the information presented on résumés and application forms. Various accounts suggest that a noteworthy percentage of applicants knowingly distort their past work experiences. For example, former RadioShack CEO David Edmondson resigned after it was determined that he had embellished his educational background.¹⁵



LOGGING ON

UniformGuidelines.com

For a free resource on the use of selection procedures and tests to ensure compliance with federal laws, visit this website at www.uniformguidelines.com.

Immigration Verification

Businesses are required to review and record identity documents, such as Social Security cards, passports, and visas, and to determine if they appear to be genuine. It is illegal to knowingly hire employees who are not in the country legally. The consequences for offending businesses are high; penalties range from \$375 to \$16,000 per incident and 6 months in prison. If HR personnel know they are working with fraudulent documents, corporate liability exists, and seizure of assets and criminal liability for top management can occur.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) can audit the records of a business to make certain there has been compliance with employment eligibility laws and rules. Such audits may come from employer filings of government labor documents, disgruntled employees, identity theft complaints, or suspicious patterns of activity.¹⁶

Employers must use the revised form I-9 for each employee hired after 1986 and must determine within 72 hours whether an applicant is a U.S. citizen, registered alien, or illegal alien. A government program called E-Verify is run by the Department of Homeland Security to help with this process. The use of E-Verify is mandatory for government contractors or subcontractors.¹⁷

An employer should have a policy to comply with immigration requirements and to avoid knowingly hiring or retaining illegal workers. I-9s should be completed, updated, and audited.

SELECTION TESTING

Many different kinds of tests can be used to help select qualified employees. Literacy tests, skill-based tests, personality tests, and honesty tests are used to assess various individual factors that are important for the work to be performed. These useful employment tests allow companies to predict which applicants will be the most successful before being hired.

However, selection tests must be evaluated extensively before being utilized as a recruiting tool. The development of the test items should be linked to a thorough job analysis. Also, initial testing of the items should include an evaluation by knowledge experts, and statistical and validity assessments of the items should be conducted. Furthermore, adequate security of the testing instruments should be coordinated, and the monetary value of these tests to

the firm should be determined. For example, Gerber Products Company was found to be using preemployment selection tests for entry-level positions that did not have sufficient evidence of validity. The tests were negatively impacting minority applicants. Gerber paid 1,912 minority and female applicants \$900,000 in back pay and interest.¹⁸

Ability Tests

Tests that assess an individual's ability to perform in a specific manner are grouped as ability tests. These are sometimes further differentiated into *aptitude tests* and *achievement tests*. **Cognitive ability tests** measure an individual's thinking, memory, reasoning, verbal, and mathematical abilities. Tests such as these can be used to determine applicants' basic knowledge of terminology and concepts, word fluency, spatial orientation, comprehension and retention span, general and mental ability, and conceptual reasoning. The Wonderlic Personnel Test and the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB) are two widely used tests of this type. Managers need to ensure that these tests assess cognitive abilities that are job related.¹⁹

Physical ability tests measure an individual's abilities such as strength, endurance, and muscular movement. At an electric utility, line workers regularly must lift and carry equipment, climb ladders, and perform other physical tasks; therefore, testing of applicants' mobility, strength, and other physical attributes is job related. Some physical ability tests measure such areas as range of motion, strength and posture, and cardiovascular fitness. As noted later, care should be taken to limit physical ability testing until after a conditional job offer is made, in order to avoid violating the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Different skill-based tests can be used, including **psychomotor tests**, which measure a person's dexterity, hand-eye coordination, arm-hand steadiness, and other factors. Tests such as the MacQuarie Test for Mechanical Ability can measure manual dexterity for assembly-line workers and others using psychomotor skills regularly.

Many organizations use situational tests, or **work sample tests**, which require an applicant to perform a simulated task that is a specified part of the target job. Requiring an applicant for an administrative assistant's job to type a business letter as quickly as possible would be one such test. An "in-basket" test is a work sample test in which a job candidate is asked to respond to memos in a hypothetical in-basket that are typical of the problems experienced in that job. Once again, these tests should assess criteria that are embedded in the job that is to be staffed.

Situational judgment tests are designed to measure a person's judgment in work settings. The candidate is given a situation and a list of possible solutions to the problem. The candidate then has to make judgments about how to deal with the situation. Situational judgment tests are a form of job simulation.

Assessment Centers An assessment center is not a place but an assessment composed of a series of evaluative exercises and tests used for selection and development. Most often used in the selection process when filling managerial openings, assessment centers consist of multiple exercises and are evaluated by multiple raters. In one assessment center, candidates go through a comprehensive interview, a pencil-and-paper test, individual and group simulations, and work exercises. Individual performance is then evaluated by a panel of trained raters.

It is crucial that the tests and exercises in an assessment center reflect the content of the job for which individuals are being screened, and the types

Cognitive ability tests

Tests that measure an individual's thinking, memory, reasoning, verbal, and mathematical abilities.

Physical ability tests

Tests that measure an individual's abilities such as strength, endurance, and muscular movement.

Psychomotor tests

Tests that measure dexterity, hand-eye coordination, arm-hand steadiness, and other factors.

Work sample tests

Tests that require an applicant to perform a simulated task that is a specified part of the target job.

Situational judgment tests

Tests that measure a person's judgment in work settings.

of problems faced on that job. For example, a technology communications organization used a series of assessment centers to hire employees who would interact with clients. The company found that these centers improved the selection process and also provided new employees with a good road map for individual development.

Personality Tests

Personality is a unique blend of individual characteristics that can affect how people interact with their work environment. Many organizations use various personality tests that assess the degree to which candidates' attributes match specific job criteria. For instance, a sporting goods chain offers job applicants a Web-based test. The test evaluates their personal tendencies, and test scores are used to categorize individuals for the hiring decision. Many types of personality tests are available, including the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Myers-Briggs test.

Although many different personality characteristics exist, some experts believe that there is a relatively small number of underlying *major* traits. The most widely accepted approach to studying these underlying personality traits (although not the only one) is the “Big Five” personality framework. The Big Five traits are generally considered to be useful predictors of various types of job performance in different occupations. The factors are shown in Figure 7-6.

FIGURE 7-6

Big Five Personality Characteristics



Several of the Big Five traits are related to dimensions such as burnout and accident involvement in both work and nonwork contexts.

Faking Personality Tests “Faking” is a major concern for employers using personality tests. Many test publishers admit that test profiles can be falsified, and they try to reduce faking by including questions that can be used to compute a social desirability or “lie” score. Researchers also favor the use of “corrections” based on components of the test to account for faking—a preference that also constitutes a strong argument for professional scoring of personality tests.²⁰ Another possibility is use of a “fake warning,” which instructs applicants that faking can be detected and can result in a negative hiring impression.

Honesty/Integrity Tests

Companies are utilizing different tests to assess the honesty and integrity of applicants and employees. Employers use these tests as a screening mechanism to prevent the hiring of unethical employees, to reduce the frequency of lying and theft on the job, and to communicate to applicants and employees alike that dishonesty will not be tolerated. Honesty/integrity tests can be valid as broad screening devices for organizations if used properly. About 28% of employers use honesty/integrity testing.²¹

However, these instruments have limitations. For instance, socially desirable responding is a key concern; some questions can be considered overly invasive, insulting, and not job related; sometimes “false positives” are generated (or an honest person is scored as “dishonest”); and test scores might be affected by individual demographic factors such as gender and race.

Polygraphs The polygraph, more generally and incorrectly referred to as the “lie detector,” is a mechanical device that measures a person’s galvanic skin response, heart rate, and breathing rate. The theory behind the polygraph is that if a person answers a question incorrectly, the body’s physiological responses will “reveal” the falsification through the recording mechanisms of the polygraph. As a result of concerns about polygraph validity, Congress passed the Employee Polygraph Protection Act, which prohibits the use of polygraphs for preemployment screening purposes by most employers. Federal, state, and local government agencies are exempt from the act. Also exempted are certain private-sector employers such as security companies and pharmaceutical companies. The act does allow employers to use polygraphs as part of internal investigations of thefts or losses. But in those situations, the polygraph test should be taken voluntarily, and the employee should be allowed to end the test at any time.



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Controversies in Selection Testing

Two areas in selection testing generate controversies and disagreements. One is the appropriateness of general mental ability testing, and the other is the validity of personality testing for selection.

General mental ability testing is well established as a valid selection tool for many jobs, but since some minority groups tend to score lower on such exams, there is considerable controversy over whether such tests *ought* to

be used.²² When these tests are used, the case for business necessity must be made, and the instrument used should be validated for the organization using it.

Personality testing for selection flourished during the 1950s. More than 60% of large companies at one time used it for selection.²³ Sears, Standard Oil, and Procter and Gamble used such testing extensively. But in the 1960s researchers concluded that personality is not a good tool for selection, and the use of these tests dropped drastically. In the 1990s, interest in research on personality as a selection tool resurfaced and vendors began selling personality-oriented selection tests. But a seminal research article appearing in *Personnel Psychology* concluded that personality explains so little about actual job outcomes that we should think very carefully about using it *at all* for employment decisions.²⁴ The study of personality continues in psychology, and as it evolves, the role of personality in selection will undoubtedly continue to be controversial.²⁵

SELECTION INTERVIEWING

Selection interviewing of job applicants is done both to obtain additional information and to clarify information gathered throughout the selection process. Interviews are commonly conducted at two levels: first, as an initial screening interview to determine if the person has met minimum qualifications, and then later, as an in-depth interview with HR staff members and/or operating managers to determine if the person will fit into the designated work area. Before the in-depth interview, information from all available sources is pooled so that the interviewers can reconcile conflicting information that may have emerged from tests, application forms, and references.

Interviewing for selection is imperfect and should be focused on gathering valid information that has not been gained in other ways.²⁶ Because selection interviewing is imperfect, the focus must be on techniques that minimize errors and provide the best information.²⁷

Some companies have excessive interview time requirements. For example, one company requires applicants to bring their lunch and spend hours on simulated work tasks, several with tight deadlines.²⁸ However, a court case in California held that temporary employees were owed overtime pay for time spent in job placement interviews.²⁹ Although this case dealt with staffing firm employees, the message is that there may be a limit on how long the employment interviewing process can reasonably go on.

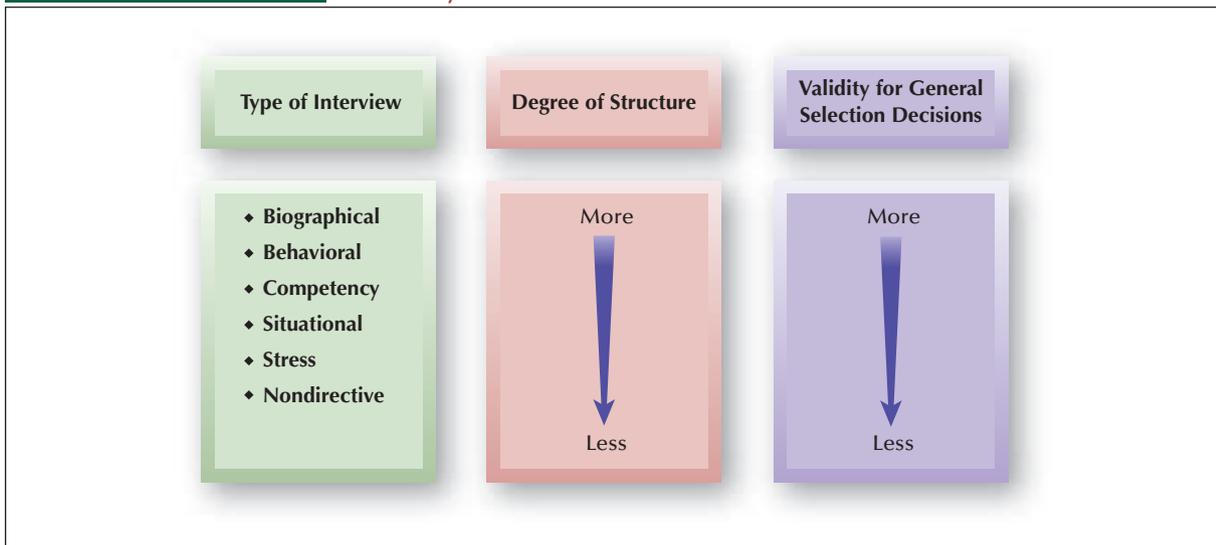
Inter-Rater Reliability and Face Validity

Interviews must be reliable and allow interviewers, despite their limitations, to pick the same applicant capabilities again and again. High *intra*-rater reliability (within the same interviewer) can be demonstrated, but only moderate-to-low *inter*-rater reliability (across different interviewers) is generally shown. Inter-rater reliability becomes important when each of several interviewers is selecting employees from a pool of applicants, or if the employer uses team or panel interviews with multiple interviewers.

Employers prefer to use interviews over other selection activities because they have high “face validity” (i.e., interviews make sense to employers). It is often assumed that if someone interviews well and the information obtained in

FIGURE 7-7

Validity and Structure in Selection Interviews



the interview is useful, then the individual will be a good hire.³⁰ However, an unstructured interview does not always provide much actual validity, causing a growth in the popularity of structured interviews.

As Figure 7-7 shows, various types of selection interviews are used. They range from structured to unstructured, and they vary in terms of appropriateness for selection.

Structured Interviews

A **structured interview** uses a set of standardized questions asked of all applicants so that comparisons can be made more easily. This type of interview allows an interviewer to prepare job-related questions in advance and then complete a standardized interviewee evaluation form that provides documentation indicating why one applicant was selected over another.³¹

The structured interview is useful in the initial screening process because many applicants can be effectively evaluated and compared. However, the structured interview does not have to be rigid. The predetermined questions should be asked in a logical manner but should not be read word for word. The applicants should be allowed adequate opportunity to explain their answers, and interviewers should probe with additional questions until they fully understand the responses. This process can make the structured interview more reliable and valid than other interview approaches.

Structured interviews—in any of several forms, including biographical, behavioral, competency, and situational—are useful when making selection decisions. The structured format ensures that a given interviewer has similar information on each candidate. It also ensures that when several interviewers ask the same questions of applicants, there is greater consistency in the subsequent evaluation of those candidates. In fact, it has been recommended that structured interviews be utilized in selection efforts for federal jobs because individual work performance can be better forecasted. However, companies might have to provide additional guidance to enhance interviewers' implementation of this structure.³²

Structured interview

Interview that uses a set of standardized questions asked of all applicants.

Biographical Interview A *biographical interview* focuses on a chronological assessment of the candidate's past experiences. This type of interview is

widely used and is often combined with other interview techniques. Overall, the process provides a sketch of past experiences.

Behavioral Interview In the **behavioral interview** technique, applicants are asked to describe how they have performed a certain task or handled a problem in the past, which may predict future actions and show how applicants are best suited for current jobs. A recent study showed that “past behavior” interviews are better at identifying achievement at work than are situational interviews, because they focus on what applicants have actually done in real situations rather than on what they think they might do in hypothetical situations.³³ An example of a behavioral interview line of questioning might be: “Tell me about a time when you initiated a project. What was the situation? What did you do? What were the results?”

Competency Interview The *competency interview* is similar to the behavioral interview except the questions are designed to provide the interviewer with something against which to measure the applicant’s response. A *competency profile* for the position is often utilized, which includes a list of competencies necessary to do that particular job. Using competencies as a benchmark to predict job candidate success is useful because interviewers can identify the factors needed in specific jobs. However, these interviews take time and sometimes benefit articulate or impression management-oriented people. Interviewers must be trained in spotting strong answers for the competencies in question.³⁴

Situational Interview The **situational interview** contains questions about how applicants might handle specific job situations. Interview questions and possible responses are based on job analysis and checked by job experts to ensure content validity. The interviewer typically codes the suitability of the answer, assigns point values, and adds up the total number of points each interviewee has received. A variation is termed the *case study interview*, which requires a job candidate to diagnose and correct organizational challenges during the interview. Situational interviews assess what the interviewee would consider to be the best option, not necessarily what they did in a similar situation.³⁵

Less-Structured Interviews

Some interviews are done unplanned and are not structured at all. Such interviewing techniques may be appropriate for fact finding, or for counseling interviews. However, they are not best for selection interviewing. These interviews may be conducted by operating managers or supervisors who have had little interview training. An *unstructured interview* occurs when the interviewer improvises by asking questions that are not predetermined. A *semistructured interview* is a guided conversation in which broad questions are asked and new questions arise as a result of the discussion. For example: What would you do differently if you could start over again?

A **nondirective interview** uses questions that are developed from the answers to previous questions. The interviewer asks general questions designed to prompt applicants to describe themselves. The interviewer then uses applicants’ responses to shape the next question. With a nondirective interview, as with any less-structured interview, difficulties for selection decisions include keeping the conversation job related and obtaining comparable data on various applicants. Many nondirective interviews are only partly organized; as a result, a combination of general and specific questions is asked in no set order, and different questions are asked of different applicants for the

Behavioral interview

Interview in which applicants give specific examples of how they have performed a certain task or handled a problem in the past.

Situational interview

Structured interview that contains questions about how applicants might handle specific job situations.

Nondirective interview

Interview that uses questions developed from the answers to previous questions.

same job. Comparing and ranking candidates is thus more open to subjective judgments and legal challenges, so they are best used for selection sparingly, if at all.

Stress Interview A **stress interview** is designed to create anxiety and put pressure on applicants to see how they respond. In a stress interview, the interviewer assumes an extremely aggressive and insulting posture. Firms using this approach often justify doing so because employees will encounter high degrees of job stress. For example, it might be appropriate in selecting FBI agents or people for high-stress, high-pressure customer complaint positions, but it is not appropriate for most positions. The stress interview can be a high-risk approach for an employer because an applicant is probably already anxious, and the stress interview can easily generate a poor image of the interviewer and the employer. Consequently, an applicant the organization wishes to hire might turn down the job offer.

Who Conducts Interviews?

Job interviews can be conducted by an individual, by several individuals sequentially, or by panels or teams. For some jobs, such as entry-level jobs requiring lesser skills, applicants might be interviewed solely by a human resource professional. For other jobs, employers screen applicants by using multiple interviews, beginning with a human resource professional and followed by the appropriate supervisors and managers. Then a selection decision is made collectively. Managers need to ensure that multiple interviews are not redundant.

Other interview formats are also utilized. In a **panel interview**, several interviewers meet with the candidate at the same time so that the same responses are heard. Panel interviews may be combined with individual interviews. However, without proper planning, an unstructured interview can result, and applicants are frequently uncomfortable with the group interview format. In a **team interview**, applicants are interviewed by the team members with whom they will work. This approach can improve team success, but training is required to educate team members about the selection process, and consensus over the hiring decision should be established.³⁶

Effective Interviewing

Many people think that the ability to interview is an innate talent, but this contention is difficult to support. Just being personable and liking to talk is no guarantee that someone will be an effective interviewer. Figure 7-8 lists questions commonly used in selection interviews.

Interviewing skills are developed through training. A number of suggestions for making interviewing more effective are:

- *Plan the interview.* Interviewers should review all information before the interview, and then identify specific areas for questioning. Preparation is critical because many interviewers have not done their research.³⁷
- *Control the interview.* This includes knowing in advance what information must be collected, systematically collecting it during the interview, and stopping when that information has been collected. An interviewer should not monopolize the conversation.
- *Use effective questioning techniques.* Utilize questions that will produce full and complete answers that can be evaluated based on job relatedness.

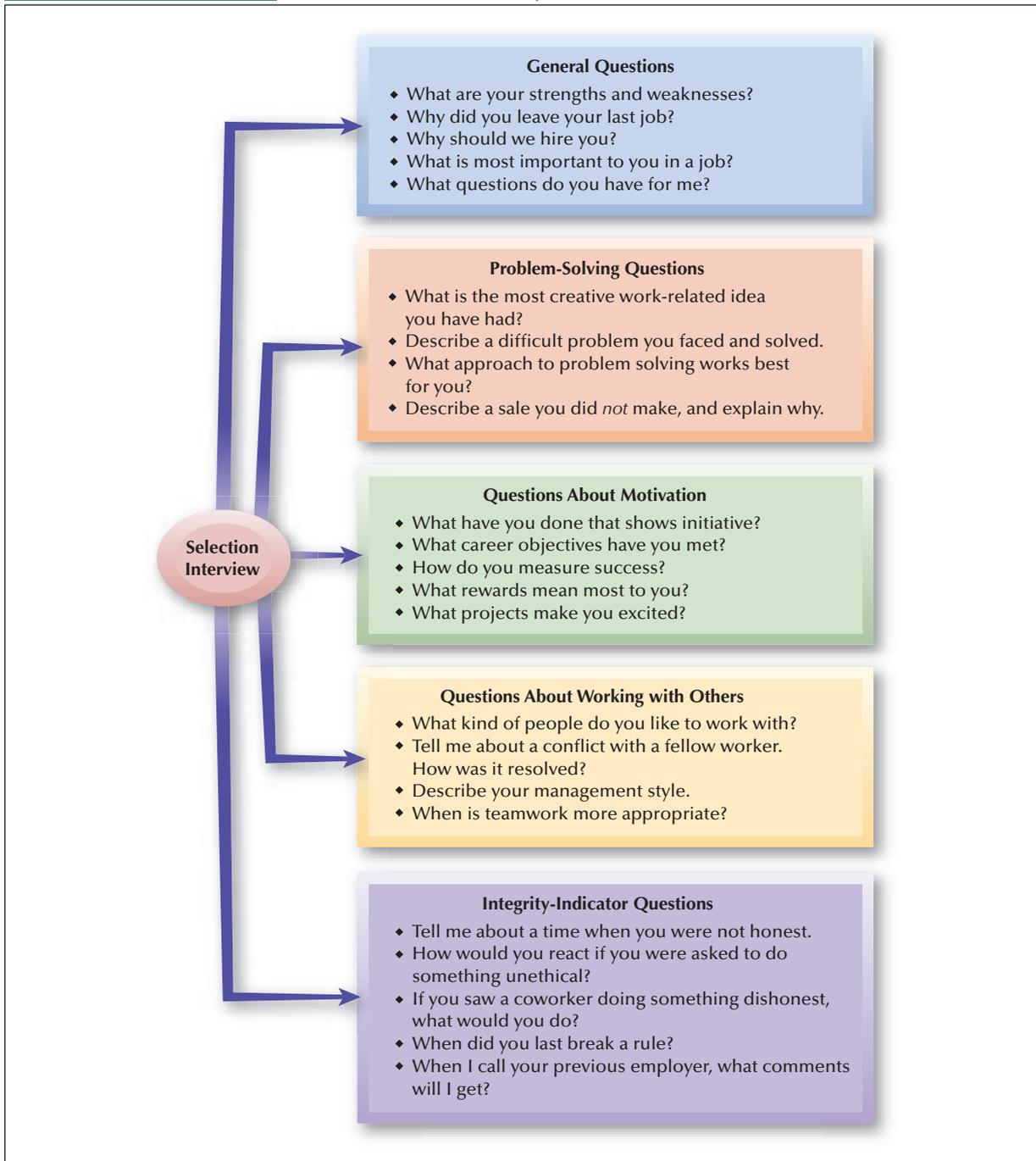
Stress interview Interview designed to create anxiety and put pressure on applicants to see how they respond.

Panel interview Interview in which several interviewers meet with candidate at the same time.

Team interview Interview in which applicants are interviewed by the team members with whom they will work.

FIGURE 7-8

Questions Commonly Asked in Selection Interviews



Questions to Avoid The following are kinds of questions that should be avoided in selection interviews:

- *Yes/no questions:* Unless verifying specific information, the interviewer should avoid questions that can be answered “yes” or “no.” For example, “Did you have good attendance on your last job?” will probably be answered simply “yes.”

- *Obvious questions:* An obvious question is one for which the interviewer already has the answer and the applicant knows it.
- *Questions that rarely produce a true answer:* Avoid questions that prompt a less-than-honest response. An example is “How did you get along with your coworkers?” The likely answer is “Just fine.”
- *Leading questions:* A leading question is one to which the answer is obvious from the way the question is asked. For example, “How do you like working with other people?” suggests the answer “I like it.”
- *Illegal questions:* Questions that involve information such as race, age, gender, national origin, marital status, and number of children are illegal. They are just as inappropriate in the interview as on the application form.
- *Questions that are not job related:* All questions should be directly job related.

Listening Responses to Avoid Effective interviewers avoid listening responses such as nodding, pausing, making casual remarks, echoing, and mirroring. The applicant might try to please the interviewers by examining the feedback provided. However, giving no response to an applicant’s answers may imply boredom or inattention. Therefore, interviewers should use friendly but neutral comments when acknowledging the applicant’s comments.

Problems in the Interview

Operating managers and supervisors are more likely than HR personnel to use poor interviewing techniques because they do not interview often or lack training. Several problems include:

- *Snap judgments:* Some interviewers decide whether an applicant is suitable within the first two to four minutes of the interview, and spend the rest of the time looking for evidence to support their judgment.
- *Negative emphasis:* When evaluating suitability, unfavorable information about an applicant is often emphasized more than favorable information.
- *Halo effect:* The *halo effect* occurs when an interviewer allows a positive characteristic, such as agreeableness, to overshadow other evidence. The phrase *devil’s horns* describes the reverse of the halo effect; this occurs when a negative characteristic, such as inappropriate dress, overshadows other traits.
- *Biases and stereotyping:* “Similarity” bias occurs when interviewers favor or select people that they believe to be like themselves based on a variety of personal factors. Interviewers also should avoid any personal tendencies to stereotype individuals because of demographic characteristics and differences. For instance, age disparities may be a concern as younger executives are interviewing more senior personnel. Additionally, applicants’ ethnic names and accents can negatively impact personal evaluations, and older workers are sometimes less likely to get interviewed and hired than are younger applicants.³⁸
- *Cultural noise:* Interviewers must learn to recognize and handle cultural noise, which stems from what applicants believe is socially acceptable rather than what is factual.

Other problems that can occur in the interview are demonstrated in the HR Perspective.

Common Interview Mistakes

Bad hiring based on bad interviewing is expensive. It causes poor performance and higher turnover, and results in employing people who are not engaged. Both employers and employees agree that they made the correct hiring decision about *half* of the time. The other half of the decisions were wrong—they were bad choices. At least some errors are due to silly or useless questions that interviewers seem to favor when they have not been properly trained. For example:

- If you were a tree (or a fruit, or an animal, or whatever), what kind would you be?
- Do you like knives?
- How do you make a peanut butter sandwich?
- What is your favorite song?
- What would you do if I gave you an elephant?
- Do you have a girlfriend for me?

There is absolutely no evidence that these and similar questions will help an interviewer pick the best person for the job.

Recent surveys show that illegal questions, as well as stupid ones, are a problem. For example, 32% of interviewers did not know that asking a candidate's age

is illegal, 40% did not know it is illegal to ask about marital status, and 44% did not know it is illegal to ask about plans to have children.

Good interviewer behavior can create positive feelings toward the job and the organization. Interviewers who are warm, know the job and company, and have a sense of humor are most successful. With that in mind, how well do these comments from interviewees reflect on their interviewers' behaviors?

- The interviewers were not knowledgeable.
- The interviewer was unenthusiastic and unfriendly.
- She was texting while interviewing.
- The interviewers were arrogant and vague.
- She asked, "Do you like me as a woman?"
- He asked, "What is your natural hair color?"
- He asked, "How strong is your marriage?"
- The interviewer was not smiling.

The interview is the first step in an employment relationship. Questions about trees, songs, or hair color and unfriendly or ignorant remarks from interviewers reduce the chances that the relationship will ever commence.³⁹



BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

Failure to check the backgrounds of people who are hired can lead to embarrassment and legal liability. Hiring workers who commit violent acts on the job is one example. While laws vary from state to state, for jobs in certain industries, such as those that provide services to children, vulnerable adults, security, in-home services, and financial services, background checks are mandated in some states. Nationally background checks are required for people with commercial drivers' licenses who drive tractor-trailer rigs and buses interstate.

Negligent Hiring and Retention

Lawyers say that an employer's liability hinges on how well it investigates an applicant's background. Consequently, details provided on the application form should be investigated extensively, and these efforts should be documented.

Negligent hiring occurs when an employer fails to check an employee's background and the employee later injures someone on the job. There is a potential negligent hiring problem when an employer hires an unfit employee, a background check is insufficient, or an employer does not research potential risk factors that would prevent the positive hire decision. Similarly, **negligent retention** occurs when an employer becomes aware that an employee may be unfit for employment but continues to employ the person, and the person injures someone.

Many organizations use outside vendors that specialize in conducting background checks because such outside firms can provide these services much more efficiently and effectively. Background checks have some concern that the information reported might be inaccurate or outdated. For instance, a woman was denied employment by a company because a background report provided by an outside firm contained adverse information. However, after getting the report corrected, she was hired by the company. Consequently, the information provided in criminal record checks should be used judiciously and with caution.

A number of companies are using personal Web pages and the Internet to perform background checks on employees. Many believe that websites provide a more "in-depth" snapshot of a job candidate's individual characteristics, regardless of the information that has been submitted to the company through traditional means with the application form or résumé. Online network sites such as MySpace and Facebook are used to obtain personal information, some of which involves sexual activity, drug use, and other questionable behavior.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, much of the information on personal Web pages appears to be difficult to erase or alter, so some candidates and employees just have to live with less-than-flattering content once it is posted. Also, damaging information can be posted about individuals by anyone on the Internet, further complicating the process of performing fair and legitimate background checks if this information is utilized in job selection.

Background information can be obtained from a number of sources. Some of these sources include past job records, credit history, testing records, educational and certification records, drug tests, Social Security numbers, sex offender lists, motor vehicle records, and military records. Running background checks on every applicant is very expensive. Employers sometimes check only the two or three finalists or the candidate who has received a contingent offer.⁴¹

The need for background checking can be found in a wide range of positions: pharmacy students, school teachers, janitors, bank tellers, and so on.⁴² Consider a car salesman who sexually assaults a young woman while on a test drive. If the salesman failed to tell his employer he was a convicted sex offender, does the employer have the responsibility to do a background check to find out? Probably. Nothing will guarantee that an employee will not commit a violent act at work. But employers can reduce the risk by following a lawful process to screen applicants for signs that a person is not appropriate.⁴³

Negligent hiring Occurs when an employer fails to check an employee's background and the employee injures someone on the job.

Negligent retention Occurs when an employer becomes aware that an employee may be unfit for work but continues to employ the person, and the person injures someone.

Legal Constraints on Background Investigations

Various federal and state laws protect the rights of individuals whose backgrounds may be investigated during preemployment screening. An employer's most important action when conducting a background investigation is to obtain from the applicant a signed release giving the employer permission to conduct the investigation.

Safeguards are appropriate in background checks because although employee screening has become a big business, it is not always an accurate one.⁴⁴

When a candidate is an internal candidate, blemishes are likely known. But when candidates come from outside the company, problems are more likely to be hidden, at least at first.⁴⁵

Fair Credit Reporting Act Many employers check applicants' credit histories. The logic is that poor credit histories may signal, either correctly or incorrectly, a certain level of irresponsibility. Firms that check applicants' credit records must comply with the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act. This act basically requires disclosing that a credit check is being made, obtaining written consent from the person being checked, and furnishing the applicant with a copy of the report. Some state laws also prohibit employers from getting certain credit information. Credit history should be checked on applicants for jobs in which use of, access to, or management of money is an essential job function. Commonly, financial institutions check credit histories on loan officers and tellers, and retailers conduct credit checks on cashiers and managerial staff. But unnecessary credit checks may be illegal, according to some EEOC cases.⁴⁶

Medical Examinations and Inquiries

Medical information on applicants may be used to determine their physical and mental capabilities for performing jobs. Physical standards for jobs should be realistic, justifiable, and linked to job requirements. Even though workers with disabilities can competently perform many jobs, they sometimes may be rejected because of their physical or mental limitations.⁴⁷

ADA and Medical Inquiries The ADA prohibits the use of preemployment medical exams, except for drug tests, until a job has been conditionally offered. Also, the ADA prohibits a company from rejecting an individual because of a disability and from asking job applicants any question related to current or past medical history until a conditional job offer has been made. Once a conditional offer of employment has been made, then some organizations ask the applicant to complete a preemployment health checklist or the employer pays for a physical examination of the applicant.⁴⁸ It should be made clear that the applicant who has been offered the job is not "hired" until successful completion of the physical inquiry.

Drug Testing Drug testing may be conducted as part of a medical exam, or it may be done separately. Use of drug testing as part of the selection process has increased in the past few years.⁴⁹ If drug tests are used, employers should remember that their accuracy varies according to the type of test used, the item tested, and the quality of the laboratory where the test samples are sent. Because of the potential impact of prescription drugs on test results, applicants should complete a detailed questionnaire on this matter before the testing. If an individual tests positive for drug use, then an independent medical laboratory should administer a second, more detailed analysis. Whether urine, blood, saliva, or hair samples are used, the process of obtaining, labeling, and transferring the samples to the testing lab should be outlined clearly and definite policies and procedures should be established.⁵⁰

References

References provided by the candidate are of very limited predictive value. Would someone knowingly pick a reference who would speak poorly of them?

Of course not.⁵¹ Previous supervisors and employers may provide a better prediction. Good questions to ask previous supervisors or employers include:

- Dates of employment
- Position held
- What were the job duties?
- What strengths/weaknesses did you observe?
- Were there any problems?
- Would you rehire?



LOGGING ON

VirtualHRScreening.com

Through its website, this company offers employers comprehensive risk assessments of applicants including background checks, employment references, drug screening, and criminal histories. Visit the site at www.virtualhrscreening.com.

Work-related references from previous employers and supervisors provide a valuable snapshot of a candidate's background and characteristics. Telephoning references is common. Managers should consider using a form that facilitates the factual verification of information given by the applicant. Some organizations send preprinted reference forms to individuals who are giving references for applicants. These forms often contain a release statement signed by the applicant, so that those providing references can see that they have been released from liability on the information they furnish.

Making the Job Offer

The final step of the selection process is offering someone employment. Job offers are often extended over the telephone. Many companies then formalize the offer in a letter that is sent to the applicant. It is important that the offer document be reviewed by legal counsel and that the terms and conditions of employment be clearly identified. Care should be taken to avoid vague, general statements and promises about bonuses, work schedules, or other matters that might change later. These documents should also provide for the individual to sign an acceptance of the offer and return it to the employer, who should place it in the individual's personnel files.

GLOBAL STAFFING ISSUES



Staffing global assignments involves making selection decisions that impact (or take place in) other countries. When staffing global assignments, cost is a major consideration because establishing a business professional in another country can run as high as \$1 million for a 3-year job assignment. Further, if a business professional quits an international assignment prematurely or wants to transfer home, associated costs can be even greater. "Failure" rates for global assignments can run as high as half of those sent overseas in some situations.

Types of Global Employees

Global organizations can be staffed in a number of different ways, including with expatriates, host-country nationals, and third-country nationals. Each staffing option presents some unique HR management challenges.⁵² For instance, when staffing with citizens of different countries, different tax laws and other factors apply. HR professionals need to be knowledgeable

about the laws and customs of each country represented in their workforce.⁵³ Experienced expatriates can provide a pool of talent that can be utilized as the firm expands operations into other countries.

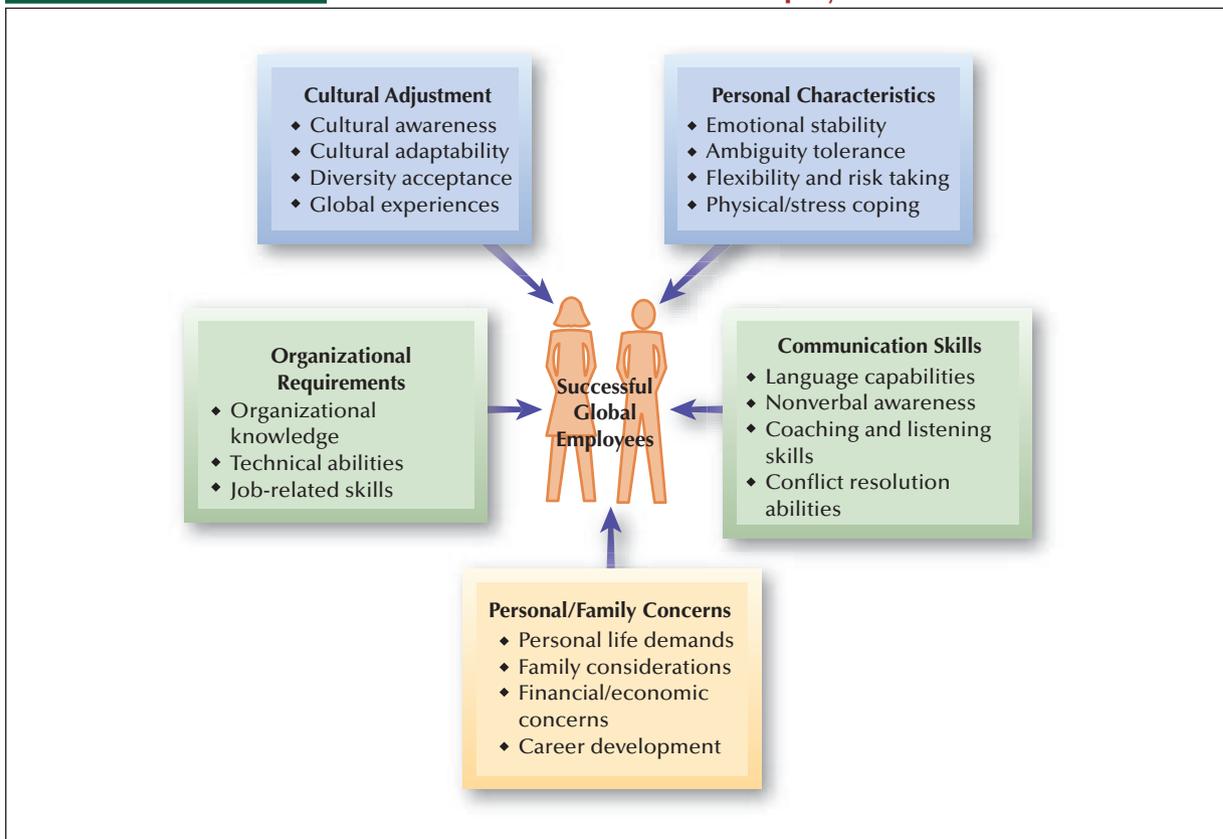
Selection Process for Global Assignments

The selection process for an international assignment should provide a realistic picture of the life, work, and culture to which the employee may be sent. HR managers start by preparing a comprehensive description of the job to be done. This description notes responsibilities that would be unusual in the home nation, including negotiating with public officials; interpreting local work codes; and responding to ethical, moral, and personal issues such as religious prohibitions and personal freedoms.⁵⁴ Figure 7-9 shows the most frequently cited key competencies for successful global employees. The five areas are as follows:

- *Cultural adjustment*: Individuals who accept foreign job assignments need to successfully adjust to cultural differences.
- *Personal characteristics*: The experiences of many global firms demonstrate that the best employees in the home country may not be the best employees in a global assignment, primarily because of personal characteristics of individuals.
- *Organizational requirements*: Many global employers find that knowledge of the organization and how it operates is important.

FIGURE 7-9

Selection Factors for Global Employees



- *Communication skills:* Expatriate employees should be able to communicate in the host-country language both orally and in writing.
- *Personal/family concerns:* The preferences and attitudes of spouses and other family members can influence the success of expatriate assignments.

A growing issue for U.S. firms that hire individuals to fill jobs in other countries is the need for adequate background checks. Global companies want to ensure that their employees have acceptable work histories and personal characteristics. To satisfy this demand, a number of firms have begun to specialize in preemployment screening of global employees.

Some countries have varying government-controlled employment processes that require foreign employers to obtain government approval in order to hire local employees. Many countries such as the United States and Australia require foreign workers to obtain work permits or visas.

For U.S.-based firms, the assignment of women and members of racial/ethnic minorities to international posts involves complying with U.S. EEO regulations and laws. Also, most U.S. EEO regulations and laws apply to foreign-owned firms operating in the United States.

LEGAL CONCERNS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

Selection is subject to a number of legalities, especially many of the EEO regulations and laws discussed previously. Throughout the selection process, application forms, interviews, tests, background investigations, and any other selection activities must be conducted in a nondiscriminatory manner. But three areas deserve special mention: defining who is an applicant, applicant flow documentation, and selection for “soft skills.”

Defining Who Is an Applicant

Employers are required to track applicants who apply for jobs at their companies. It is increasingly important for employers to carefully define exactly who is an applicant and who is not, because many employers are required to track and report applicant information as part of equal employment and affirmative action plans. It is also important because employers may be negatively affected by individuals who claim to have applied for jobs but really just want to file lawsuits. Any person who is interested in a position should be considered an applicant even if no formal posting of the job opening in question has been made, the person has not filed any sort of formal application, and the person does not meet the minimum qualifications for the job.

The EEOC and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) have agreed on this definition of “applicant” to be used when an application has been submitted electronically. An applicant is a person who:⁵⁵

- Has expressed interest through the Internet or electronically and is being considered for a specific position by the employer.
- Has identified that he or she has the basic position qualifications.
- Does not remove his or her interest in the position at anytime during the selection process.
- Has been ranked using “hit features” by employer software or other data techniques that are not linked to assessment qualifications.

Applicant Flow Documentation

Employers must collect applicant data on race, sex, and other demographics to fulfill EEO reporting requirements. Many employers ask applicants to provide EEOC reporting data in a flow form that may be attached to the application form. It is important that employers review this flow form separately and not use it in any selection efforts to avoid claims of impropriety. Because completing the form is voluntary, employers can demonstrate that they tried to obtain the data.

Selecting for “Soft Skills”

Selection in its “scientific” form is about finding valid predictors of what will be needed on a job and picking people who score high on those predictors. These “hard skills” include cognitive skills, education, and technical skills. But these skills may not predict the difference between adequate and outstanding performance. Some argue that “soft skills” provide an important part of the ability to do a job successfully.⁵⁶ What are “soft skills”? They are noncognitive abilities that are complementary to outstanding job performance. Examples might include:

Empathy	Leadership
Openness	Integrity
Cooperation	Ethical behavior
Interpersonal style	Effort
Conscientiousness	Emotional intelligence

But selection for soft skills is haphazard.⁵⁷ Unlike hard skills, these skills may have to be inferred from past behaviors or from an interview.⁵⁸ Tests may be available to help with some soft skills, but the basic process presented in this chapter still must apply. First, identify KSAs, competencies, and job functions through job analysis. Next, decide how those will be identified in an applicant (tests, interviews, experience, etc.). Then use structured behavioral interviewing done by trained interviewers incorporating competency-focused questions. Finally, choose those applicants who are strong in the areas necessary to do the job.⁵⁹

S U M M A R Y

- Selection is the process that matches individuals and their qualifications to jobs in an organization.
- Placement of people should consider both person/job fit and person/organization fit.
- Mismatches in fit can occur because of skills, geography, time required, earning expectations, and work/family issues.
- Predictors linked to criteria are used to identify the applicants who are most likely to perform jobs successfully.
- The selection process—from applicant interest through preemployment screening, application, testing, interviewing, and background investigation—must be handled by trained, knowledgeable individuals.
- Truth-in-hiring lawsuits may arise from overselling a job.
- Employers are using electronic preemployment screening to cut down applicant pools.
- Application forms must meet EEO guidelines and must ask only for job-related information.
- Selection tests include ability tests, assessment centers, personality tests, and honesty/integrity tests. Some are controversial.

- Structured interviews, including behavioral and situational ones, are more effective and face fewer EEO compliance concerns than do unstructured interviews and nondirective interviews.
- Interviews can be conducted individually, by multiple individuals, or by technology. Regardless of the method, effective interviewing questioning techniques should be used.
- Background investigation can be conducted in a variety of areas. Both when requesting and when giving reference information, employers must take care to avoid potential legal concerns such as negligent hiring and negligent retention.
- Global organizations can be staffed by individuals who are expatriates, host-country nationals, or third-country nationals.
- Selection factors for global employees include cultural adjustment, personal characteristics, communication skills, personal/family concerns, and organizational requirements.
- Selection decisions must be based on job-related criteria in order to comply with various legal requirements.
- HR professionals must be careful to properly identify, track, and document applicants.
- Selecting for “soft skills” must follow the model used for more visible skills.

CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITIES

1. Develop a set of soft skills necessary for a college professor’s job.
2. Put together a structured interview for hiring assistant managers at a large retail store.
3. How would you do a complete background investigation on applicants to minimize concerns about negligent hiring?
4. Your Accounting Manager has decided that a behavioral interview to select accountants will solve many hiring problems. What can you tell the manager about this type of interview and whether it is likely to be effective? Check www.job-interview.net and other sources to gather information.

HR EXPERIENTIAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Your insurance company recently entered into a business contract with a company in the financial industry that requires extensive background checks for all your existing employees and future applicants who will be doing work associated with the contract. Previously your company conducted only employment verification checks in the hiring process. The management team discussions have raised questions and concerns about issues that need to be considered as the company develops and implements a more extensive background screening

protocol. Resources to help you identify issues, best practices, and requirements can be found at www.hire-safe.com/Employment_Background_Check_Guidelines.pdf.

1. What concerns does your company need to consider in following background check guidelines?
2. Discuss with the management team the steps your company needs to take to ensure that it complies with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

C A S E

Full Disclosure on Sex Offenders?

Megan's Law provides that all states are now required to have all convicted sex offenders register so that residents are aware of their presence in a neighborhood. The law is named for Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old who was raped and murdered by a twice-convicted pedophile who moved to her New Jersey neighborhood. He lured her to his house with the promise of showing her a puppy. Megan's Law raises issues around the use of criminal registries in hiring and employee management.

Several issues are involved for an employer in dealing with Megan's Law and employees. For example, in Michigan, the Attorney General released the names of 200 registered sex offenders who had been using MySpace (some in violation of the terms of their parole). Some employers found that the list included the names of some of their employees and had to confront the very real problem of what to do about it.

The presence of a convicted sex offender presents conflicting obligations and concerns. Employers want (and need) to protect other employees and customers from harm based on negligent hiring and negligent retention issues. But is this person a threat? What if the person has an exemplary work record? In some states, it is illegal for employers to use any information found on the Megan's Law website for purposes of employment.

Perhaps the easiest way to proceed would be to keep from hiring convicts in the first place, but federal law limits an employer's ability to do that. The EEOC says that the use of conviction records in employment decisions has an adverse impact on African American and Hispanic males. Using a blanket prohibition against convicts in hiring may allow a plaintiff to demonstrate a disproportionate impact on protected categories of applicants.

Is an employer *required* to check the registry? It depends on the job. Generally the answer is "no," but for certain jobs there is an obligation to check. Those jobs include positions in health care facilities and hospitals (e.g., nurse or aide), day cares and schools (e.g., teacher or aide), security (e.g., guard), social and mental health facilities (e.g., social or mental health worker), taxi and bus services (e.g., drivers), and recreational facilities (e.g., fitness trainer). Virtually any position with access to potential victims is a job with the potential for problems.

Two of the names on the Michigan list presented some difficult management decisions. In one office equipment company, a 34-year-old office equipment repair technician was paroled after serving a 7-year sentence for attacking women on jogging paths. His previous employer offered to rehire him as a field technician who would travel to other offices to repair business machines, as he had been an excellent employee with outstanding repair skills.

In the other case, a new employee was found to be on the list. He was an African American who had served 10 years for child pornography possession. He is driving a school bus for a church and has thus far been a model employee, although he did not list his conviction on the application form even though the question was asked.⁶⁰

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss what a manager should do in each of the two Michigan cases.
2. What circumstances might lead you to make different decisions in different cases under Megan's Law?

S U P P L E M E N T A L C A S E S

Strategic Selection: A Review of Two Companies

This case shows how Hallmark and United Health Group use selection as part of their strategic approach to HR. (For the case, go to www.cengage.com/management/mathis.)

Selecting a Programmer

This case demonstrates how using a test after a pool of candidates has already been interviewed can present some difficulties. (For the case, go to www.cengage.com/management/mathis.)

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