



CHAPTER 9

Selecting and Placing Human Resources

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

- Define *selection* and explain the use of selection criteria and predictors.
- Diagram the sequence of a typical selection process.
- Discuss the reception and application phases of the selection process.
- Identify two general and three controversial types of tests.
- Discuss three types of interviews and several key considerations in the selection interview.
- Construct a guide for conducting a selection interview.
- Explain how legal concerns affect background investigations of applicants.
- Discuss why medical examinations, including drug testing, may be useful in the selection process.

HR TRANSITIONS

The Search for Useful Selection Tests

One industrial psychologist notes that “it used to be, you would hire someone, and if they didn’t work out, fine. That’s not the case anymore. This is a competitive work environment and there is much less room for mistakes in hiring. When you make a hire, you need to be right.” Testing is being used to increase the chances of being right. If a test that was 100% accurate at identifying good-performing employees and eliminating poor performers could be given to applicants for a job, what would it be worth? Apparently quite a bit, as reflected by the growing frustration employers feel at hiring poor-performing employees. Preemployment testing has boomed to be an industry with revenues over \$2 billion yearly. Tests are being used for everything from hiring tow truck drivers to fire chiefs, and they are widely viewed as useful selection tools.

One example of when testing is used is illustrative. When Lori Miller had to hire 40 child-care workers for the new child-care center at Boeing, she had only 4 weeks to do it. Because she did not have time to see all 200 applicants in action with small children, Miller ultimately did as many employers are doing: she used a test to help her pick the “best” 40. The test Miller used was designed for selecting child-care workers, and she used the test score and a follow-up personal interview with those applicants to make her decisions.

The popularity of using tests for selecting employees has grown. There are all kinds of tests: honesty tests, loyalty tests, personality tests, skill tests, leadership tests, genetic tests, drug tests, accident-prone tests, and others. Trends in the use of tests also suggest that more companies are asking more different kinds of potential employees to take tests. More than half of the organizations surveyed in one study require skills tests for hourly workers, 23% ask management candidates to take a skills test, and about 20% ask both management and hourly applicants to take a personality test.

Of course, the perfect test does not exist. There is always room for error; in

the right person in the right job, civil libertarians are worrying that probing a job seeker’s personality or genetic makeup has the potential for violating individual privacy rights. If an applicant refuses to take a test, it is usually grounds not to hire, and that worries the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Genetic tests that are used to guard against excessive future medical expenses are especially troublesome. As a spokesperson for the ACLU notes, “We all have mutant genes. We will be creating a class of unemployable people if genetic testing becomes the norm.”

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fact, “accuracy” is really about what is an *acceptable level of error*, not complete accuracy. Tests are only one part of the information-gathering process necessary for effective selection of employees, but they are not the only part of the selection process. For this reason, it is highly recommended that tests be only one element in the decision to hire or not hire.

But while many managers are embracing testing as a tool for putting

the number of employees at work who steal, use drugs, lie, and fail to perform up to standards. But these advantages accrue only if each test used is valid, if it has been interpreted correctly by someone trained to do so, and if it is used as one source of information along with other sources. In summary, testing is a useful but problematic part of selection.¹

“Selecting qualified employees is like putting money in the bank.”
JOHN BOUDREAU

Selection

The process of choosing individuals who have relevant qualifications to fill jobs in an organization.

Selection is the process of choosing individuals who have relevant qualifications to fill jobs in an organization. Without qualified employees, an organization is in a poorer position to succeed. A vivid case in point is athletic organizations like the Dallas Cowboys, Atlanta Braves, and Los Angeles Lakers, who fail or succeed on their ability to select the coaches, players, and other employees to win games.

Selection is much more than just choosing the best available person. Selecting the appropriate set of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)—which come packaged in a human being—is an attempt to get a “fit” between what the applicant can and wants to do, and what the organization needs. The task is made more difficult because it is not always possible to tell exactly what the applicant really can and wants to do. *Fit* between the applicant and the organization affects both the employer’s willingness to make a job offer and an applicant’s willingness to accept a job. Fitting a person to the right job is called **placement**.

Placement

Fitting a person to the right job.

More than anything else, placement of human resources should be seen as a *matching process*. Gaps between an individual’s skills and the job requirements are common factors that lead to rejection of an applicant. How well an employee is matched to a job affects the amount and quality of the employee’s work. This matching also directly affects training and operating costs. Workers who are unable to produce the expected amount and quality of work can cost an organization a great deal of money and time. Estimates are that hiring an inappropriate employee costs an employer three to five times that employee’s salary before it is resolved.² Yet hiring mistakes are relatively common.

Good selection and placement decisions are an important part of successful HR management. Some would argue that these decisions are the *most* important part. Productivity improvement for an employer may come from changes in incentive pay plans, improved training, or better job design; but unless the employer has the necessary people with the appropriate KSAs in place, those changes may not have much impact. The very best training will not enable someone with little aptitude for a certain job to do that job well and enjoy it.

To put selection decisions in perspective, consider that organizations on average reject a high percentage of applicants. In some situations about five out of six applicants for jobs are rejected. Figure 9–1 depicts the reasons why employers most often reject applicants. Perhaps the best perspective on selection and placement comes from two traditional HR truisms that clearly identify the importance of effective employment selection.

- “*Good training will not make up for bad selection.*” The implication here is that when the right people with the appropriate KSAs are not selected for jobs, it is very difficult for the employer to recover later by somehow trying to train those individuals without the proper aptitude, interests, or other KSA deficiencies.
- “*If you don’t hire the right one, your competitor will.*” There is an opportunity cost in failure to select the right employee, and that cost is that the “right one” went somewhere else.

FIGURE 9–1 *Reasons Applicants Are Selected or Rejected*

The Nature of Selection

Already having the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) may be very important for a new employee to do a job well. For example, specific KSAs may be used to hire people for a given job: math skills, ability to weld, or a knowledge of spreadsheets. Job analysis can provide the basis for identifying appropriate KSAs if it is done properly. People already in jobs can help identify the most important KSAs for success as part of job analysis. These KSAs can be used to place an applicant in a suitable job based on how well their KSAs match.

However, specific KSAs may not be *necessary* immediately in some jobs; they can be taught on the job. In fact, for certain jobs it may be good selection strategy to deemphasize the precise matching of applicants' specific KSAs to a job and focus on more general predictors of success.³ For example, if an employer hires at the entry level and promotes from within for most jobs, specific KSAs might be less important than general ability to learn and conscientiousness. Ability to learn allows a person to grasp new information and make good decisions based on that job knowledge. Conscientiousness might include thoroughness, responsibility, and an organized approach to the job. Figure 9–2 shows some situations when focusing on specific KSAs is a better approach for selection decisions, and when relying on general intelligence and conscientiousness may be better. Whether an employer uses specific KSAs or the more general approach, effective selection of employees involves using *criteria* and *predictors* of job performance.



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Picking Selection Tools

Review this discussion of factors affecting the choice of selection tools and identify the selection tools relevant for a small bank to use in selecting a teller.

FIGURE 9–2 Selection Strategy Choices

Closely Match Job/Person KSAs for Selection When:	Use General Predictors for Selection When:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New employee will be closely monitored so that performance problems will be obvious. ● KSAs brought to job are more important than what employees learn on the job. ● Few changes will occur in the jobs—and the changes will be gradual when they occur. ● One job candidate clearly has greatly superior KSAs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employees work independently, having a high degree of autonomy and low structure, which requires conscientiousness to succeed. ● KSAs learned on the job are more important than those brought to the job. ● Many changes and much problem solving are necessary, and employees must learn very quickly, using creative approaches. ● Several job candidates are virtually equal in key KSAs.

SOURCE: Adapted from Orlando Behling, “Employee Selection: Will Intelligence and Conscientiousness Do the Job?”, *Academy of Management Executive*, February 1998, 83.

Criteria, Predictors, and Job Performance

At the heart of an effective selection system is knowledge of what constitutes appropriate job performance and what characteristics in employees are associated with that performance.⁴ Once the definition of employee success (performance) is known, the employee specifications required to achieve that success can be determined. A **selection criterion** is a characteristic that a person must have to do the job successfully. A certain preexisting ability is often a selection criterion. One example is the criterion *appropriate employee permanence*, which considers that a person must stay in a job long enough for the employer at least to break even on the training and hiring expenses incurred to hire the employee. Figure 9–3 shows that ability, motivation, intelligence, conscientiousness, appropriate risk, and permanence might be good selection criteria for many jobs.

To predict whether a selection criterion (such as “motivation” or “ability”) is present, employers try to identify **predictors** as measurable indicators of selection criteria. For example, in Figure 9–3 good predictors of the criterion “appropriate permanence” might be individual interests, salary requirements, and tenure on previous jobs.

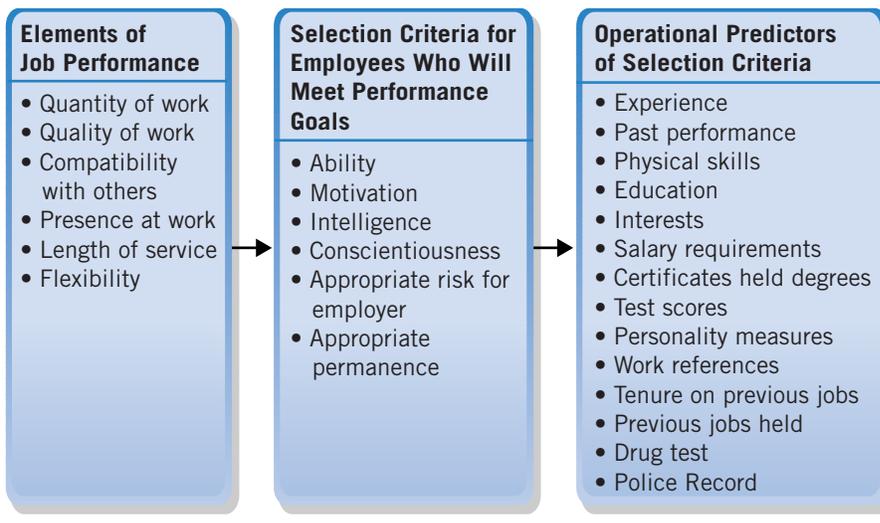
The information gathered about an applicant should be focused on finding predictors of the likelihood that the applicant will be able to perform the job well. Predictors can take many forms, but they should be job related, valid, and reliable. A test score can be a predictor of success on the job only if it is valid. Previous experience can be a predictor of success if it is related to the necessary performance on the current job. Any selection tool used (for example, application form, test, interview, education requirements, or years of experience

Selection criterion

Characteristic that a person must have to do the job successfully.

Predictors

Measurable indicators of selection criteria.

FIGURE 9-3 *Job Performance, Selection Criteria, and Predictors*

required) should be used *only* if it is a valid predictor of job performance. Using invalid predictors can result in selecting the “wrong” candidate and rejecting the “right” one.

VALIDITY Validity is the correlation between a predictor and job performance. As mentioned in Chapter 5, validity occurs to the extent that a predictor actually predicts what it is supposed to predict. Validity depends on the situation in which the selection device is being used.⁵ For example, a test designed to predict aptitude for child-care jobs might not be valid in predicting sales potential in a candidate for a sales representative.

RELIABILITY Reliability of a predictor is the extent to which it repeatedly produces the same results, over time. For example, if the same person took a test in December and scored 100, but upon taking it in March scored significantly higher, the test would not be highly reliable. Thus, reliability has to do with *consistency*, and predictors that are useful in selection should be consistent.

Combining Predictors

If an employer chooses to use only one predictor (for example, a test) to select who will be hired, the decision is straightforward. If the test is valid and encompasses a major dimension of a job, and the applicant does well on the test, he or she can be hired. This is the *single predictor* approach. Selection accuracy depends on how valid that single predictor is at predicting performance.

However, if more than one predictor is being used, they must be combined in some way.⁶ Two different 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.

- **Combined approach:** In this approach predictors are combined into an overall score, thus allowing a higher score on one predictor to offset a lower score on another. The combined index takes into consideration performance on all predictors.

Figure 9–4 shows how adding more predictors can affect the applicant pool. When several predictors are used, only in the common area shared by the circles will “qualified” candidates be found. But given that no predictor is 100% accurate, each eliminates good candidates. Having too many predictors—especially those with lower accuracy rates—may actually harm the quality of selection decisions.⁷ It is important to ensure that only predictors that genuinely distinguish between successful and unsuccessful employees are used.

Administering the Selection Process

Selecting employees is an important HR activity, but there are certain administrative issues that relate to doing it well: selection and the law, assigning responsibility for selection, and selection and employer image.

Legal Concerns with Selection

Generally, employers use a variety of preemployment steps and predictors to ensure that applicants will fit available jobs.⁸ However, employers may not discrim-

FIGURE 9–4 *Effect of Adding Predictors to the Selection Process*

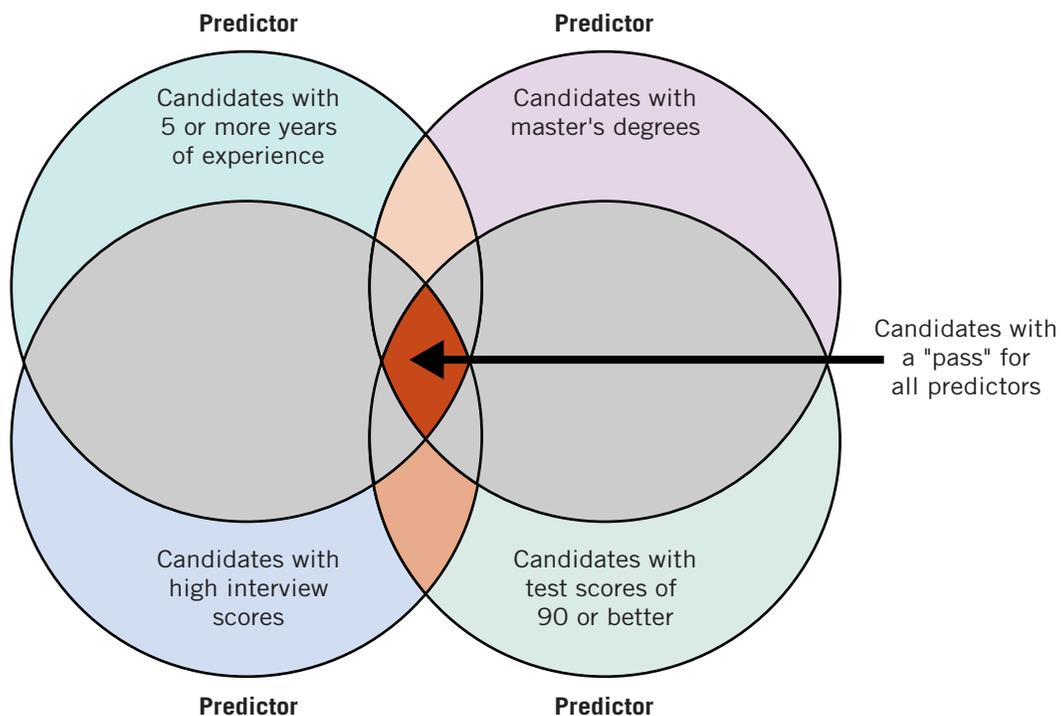


FIGURE 9-5 *Employment Application Policies*

- Applications are accepted only when there is an opening.
- Only persons filling out application blanks are considered applicants.
- A person's application ceases to be effective after a designated date.
- Only a certain number of applications will be accepted.
- People must apply for specific jobs, not "any job."

inate or otherwise refuse to hire applicants for any reasons that are against the law. Selection is subject to all the equal employment opportunity (EEO) concerns covered in previous chapters. The interview itself is becoming a minefield. One major problem is that there is no standard list of taboo questions, but only general areas about which one cannot ask. Small business owners and managers often are the worst offenders. One of their most common errors is to ask a woman about child-care arrangements, which assumes women are always the ones responsible for child rearing.

It is increasingly important for employers to define carefully exactly who is an *applicant*, given the legal issues involved. If there is no written policy defining conditions that make a person an applicant, any persons who call or send unsolicited resumes might later claim they were not hired because of illegal discrimination. A policy defining *applicant* might include the aspects shown in Figure 9-5.

It is wise for an organization to retain all applications for three years. Applicant flow data should be calculated if the organization has at least 50 employees.

Selection Responsibilities

Organizations vary in how they allocate selection responsibilities between HR specialists and managers. Until the impact of EEO regulations became widespread, selection often was carried out in a rather unplanned manner in many organizations. The need to meet EEO requirements has forced them to plan better in this regard. Still, in some organizations, each department screens and hires its own employees. Many managers insist on selecting their own people because they are sure no one else can choose employees for them as well as they can themselves. This practice is particularly prevalent in smaller firms. But the validity and fairness of such an approach may be questionable.

Other organizations have the HR unit do the initial screening of the candidates, while the appropriate managers or supervisors make the final selection. As a rule, the higher the position within the organization, the greater the likelihood that the ultimate hiring decisions will be made by operating managers rather than HR specialists. Typical selection responsibilities are shown in Figure 9-6 on the next page. These responsibilities are affected by the establishment or existence of a central employment office.

CENTRALIZED EMPLOYMENT OFFICE Selection duties may be centralized into a specialized organizational unit that is part of an HR department. In smaller organizations, especially in those with fewer than 100 employees, a full-time employment specialist or unit may be impractical.

The employment function in any organization may be concerned with some or all of the following operations: (1) receiving applications, (2) interviewing



LOGGING ON . . .

LawInfo Forum

This website provides information on legal issues and their effect on selection. Because this website is a discussion forum, topics will continually change.

<http://www.lawinfo.com/forum/face-to-face.html>

FIGURE 9-6 *Typical Selection Responsibilities*

HR Unit	Managers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides initial employment reception ● Conducts initial screening interview ● Administers appropriate employment tests ● Obtains background and reference information ● Refers top candidates to managers for final selection ● Arranges for the employment physical examination, if used ● Evaluates success of selection process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requisition employees with specific qualifications to fill jobs ● Participate in selection process as appropriate ● Interview final candidates ● Make final selection decision, subject to advice of HR specialists ● Provide follow-up information on the suitability of selected individuals

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) termination interviewing, and (9) maintaining adequate records and reports.

There are several reasons for centralizing employment within one unit:

- It is easier for the applicant to have only one place in which to apply for a job.
- Contact with outside applicant sources is easier because issues can be cleared through one central location.
- Managers can concentrate on their operating responsibilities rather than on interviewing.

With centralization also comes the expectation that better selection may result because it is handled by a staffing specialist. An advantage for applicants is that they may be considered for a greater variety of jobs. Also, selection costs may be cut by avoiding duplication of effort. Additionally, it is important that people well trained in government regulations handle a major part of the process to prevent future lawsuits and costs associated with them.

USING TEAMS FOR SELECTION The widespread use of teams presents an interesting selection variation. To be successful, teams have to be allowed to control their destiny as much as possible, which means they should be involved in selecting their teammates. When teams hire new members, they have a vested interest in making sure those persons are successful.

However, a good deal of training is required to make sure that teams understand the selection process, testing, interviewing, and legal constraints. Further, a selection procedure in which the team votes for the top choice is inappropriate; the decision should be made by consensus, which may take longer.

The Selection Process

Most organizations take certain common steps to process applicants for jobs. Variations on this basic process depend on organizational size, nature of jobs to be filled, number of people to be selected, and pressure of outside forces such as

EEO considerations. This process can take place in a day or over a much longer period of time. If the applicant is processed in one day, the employer usually checks references after selection. Often, one or more phases of the process are omitted or the order changed, depending on the employer.

The selection process shown in Figure 9-7 is typical of a large organization. Assume a woman applicant comes to the organization, is directed to the employment office, and is received by a receptionist. Some firms conduct a job preview/interest screen to determine if an applicant is qualified for open jobs before giving out an application form. Next, the receptionist usually gives the individual an application form to complete. The completed application form serves as the basis for an interview or a test. After the interview or test, the applicant may be told that she does not fit any position the company has available. However, if she does appear to have appropriate qualifications, her background and previous employment history may be checked and/or an additional, more in-depth interview may be conducted. If responses are favorable, the applicant may receive a conditional offer of a job, provided she passes a medical and/or drug test.

FIGURE 9-7 Selection Process Flowchart



Reception and Job Preview/ Interest Screening

In addition to matching qualified people to jobs, the selection process has an important public-relations dimension. Discriminatory hiring practices, impolite interviewers, unnecessarily long waits, inappropriate testing procedures, and lack of follow-up letters can produce unfavorable impressions of an employer. Providing courteous, professional treatment to all candidates during the selection process is important because for most applicants a job contact of any kind is an extremely personal and significant event. A job applicant's perception of the organization, and even about the products or services it offers, will be influenced by the reception stage of the selection process. Whoever meets the applicant initially should be tactful and able to offer assistance in a courteous, friendly manner. If no jobs are available, applicants can be informed at this point. Any employment possibilities must be presented honestly and clearly.

In some cases, it is appropriate to have a brief interview, called an *initial screening* or a *job preview/interest screen*, to see if the applicant is likely to match any jobs available in the organization before allowing the applicant to fill out an application form. For instance, in most large organizations, this initial screening is done by someone in the employment office or in the HR department. In most situations, the applicant should complete an application form after the screening.

The screening is intended to determine if the applicant is likely to have the ability to perform available jobs. Typical issues might concern job interests, location desired, pay expectations, and availability for work. One firm that hires security guards and armored-car drivers uses the screening interview to verify whether an applicant meets the minimum qualifications for the job, such as having a valid driver's license, being free of any criminal convictions in the past five years, and having been trained to use a pistol. Because these are required minimum standards, it would be a waste of time for any applicant who could not meet them to fill out an application form.

Computerized Screening

The job preview/interest screen can be done effectively by computer as well. Computerized processing of applicants can occur on several different levels. Computers can search resumes or application blanks for key words. Hundreds of large companies use types of "text searching" or artificial-intelligence (AI) software to scan, score, and track resumes of applicants. Some firms using these techniques include Sony Corporation, Coca-Cola, IBM, Paine Webber, Nations Bank, Avis Rent A Car, Microsoft, Pfizer, Shell Oil, and Staples.⁹ Companies note that computerized screening saves time and money. It also helps with better placement, thereby reducing turnover. The HR Perspective discusses scannable resumes.

A second means of computerizing screening is conducting initial screening interviews electronically. Coopers & Lybrand, a large accounting and management consulting firm, holds initial screening interviews for college students on an Internet site. Students answer 40 questions, their answers are scored, and they are told at that point whether they qualify for a face-to-face interview. The firm estimates that it eliminates 25% of its 5,000 initial applicants in this way.¹⁰

Finally, computer-assisted interviewing techniques can use tools such as videotape scenarios to which applicants react. For example, Nike uses computer-



LOGGING ON . . . **Selection Assessment System**

An example of a firm providing computer-based selection assessment systems is found here.

<http://www.selector-pas.com.au/>

HR PERSPECTIVE

Scanning Scannable Resumes

Scannable resumes certainly save time and money, and some argue that they “make everyone equal.” But of course, some applicants for jobs try to beat the scanning system. The trick, some think, is to list every conceivable skill and to guess which words the computer uses to search. Some applicants use as many buzzwords and as much industry jargon as they can. Of course, it is also possible to pick the wrong words. Some job counselors suggest including in resumes the words that employers use in their help-wanted advertisements.

Employers worry that playing games may cause them to miss a qualified candidate. But some critics point out that selection is not an exact science. Good candidates also

are missed when their resumes are submitted “on paper” instead of electronically.¹¹

Some scannable key words used to hire for a marketing or sales position follow as an illustration:

- Advertising
- Budget Preparation
- Business Communications
- Copywriting
- Cost-Benefit Analysis
- Customer Service
- Data Processing
- Database Analysis
- Database Management
- Direct Marketing Promotion
- Direct Sales
- Distribution
- Entrepreneurial
- Financial Markets
- Forecast Inventory

- Information Distribution
- Inventory Control
- Market Analysis
- Market Research
- Market Specialists
- Marketing Collateral
- Marketing Expense Control
- Marketing Plans
- Marketing Strategies
- Marketing Support Functions
- Order Placement
- Organizational Skills
- Product Sourcing
- Productivity Measurement
- Promotion
- Public Relations
- Reporting Systems
- Sales
- Sales Training Programs
- Service-Orientation

assisted interviewing as part of its high-technology selection process. For example, 6,000 applicants responded to ads for 150 positions. After answering eight questions over the phone, 3,500 applicants were screened out. The rest had a computer-assisted interview at the store and finally a personal interview. As part of the computer-assisted interview, applicants watched a video showing three scenarios for helping a retail customer, and they were asked to identify the best scenario. A printer in the next room printed the applicants’ responses. Thus, the computer helped screen for people who lost their temper, and it made suggestions to the interviewer on areas to probe in the interview.¹²

Realistic Job Previews

Most job seekers appear to have little information initially about the organizations to which they apply for jobs. Consequently, the information applicants receive from prospective employers in the recruiting/selection process often is given considerable weight in their decisions whether to accept jobs. Information on pay, nature of the work, geographic location, and opportunity for promotion is important to almost everyone. In addition, information on job security is particularly important to blue-collar applicants.

Some employers oversell their jobs in recruiting advertisements, making them appear better than they really are. The purpose of a **realistic job preview (RJP)** is to inform job candidates of the “organizational realities” of a job, so that

Realistic job preview (RJP)

The process through which an interviewer provides a job applicant with an accurate picture of a job.

they can more accurately evaluate their own job expectations. By presenting applicants with a clear picture of the job, the organization hopes to reduce unrealistic expectations and thereby reduce employee disenchantment and ultimately employee dissatisfaction and turnover. A review on research on RJPs found that they do tend to result in applicants having lower job expectations.¹³

A recent court case is of interest here. A federal appeals court heard and upheld an argument that a woman who was fraudulently lured into her job had her career derailed by the employer. The employee (a lawyer) claimed she left the environmental law department of one law firm to head the start-up environmental law department of another firm, but that department never materialized. This and similar rulings should serve as warnings to employers not to exaggerate opportunities.

Application Forms

Application forms are widely used. Properly prepared, like the one in Figure 9–8, the application form serves four purposes:

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

Many employers use only one application form, but others need several. For example, a hospital might need one form for nurses and medical technicians, another form for clerical and office employees, another for managers and supervisors, and another for support persons in housekeeping and food-service areas.

The information received on application forms may not always be completely accurate. This problem is discussed in greater detail later, but an important point must be made here. In an attempt to prevent inaccuracies, many application forms carry a statement that the applicant is required to sign. In effect, the statement reads: "I realize that falsification of this record is grounds for dismissal if I am hired." The statement has been used by employers to terminate people. In fact, in a recent court case, the court held that when a company can show it would not have hired an applicant if it had known the applicant lied on the application form, the employee's claim of discriminatory discharge will not stand.

Application forms traditionally have asked for references and requested that the applicant give permission to contact them. Rather than asking for personal or general references, though, it may be more useful to request the names of previous supervisors on the application form.

EEO Considerations and Application Forms

Although application forms may not usually be thought of as "tests," the Uniform Guidelines of the EEOC and court decisions define them as employment tests. Consequently, the data requested on application forms must be job related. Illegal questions typically found on application forms ask for the following:

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

FIGURE 9-8 Sample Application Form

Today's Date _____				
Application for Employment An Equal Opportunity Employer*				
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?		
Are you willing to relocate? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Are you willing to relocate 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 Locations 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	Convictions will not automatically disqualify job candidates. The seriousness of the crime and date of conviction will be considered.	
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 & 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? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If yes, give dates:	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? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If yes, explain:	
*We are an Equal Opportunity Employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, gender, age, national origin or disability.				

The reason for concern about such questions is that they can have an adverse impact on some protected groups. For example, the question about dependents can be used to identify women with small children. These women may not be hired because of a manager's perception that they will not be as dependable as those without small children. The high school graduation date gives a close identification of a person's age, which can be used to discriminate against individuals over 40. Or, the question about emergency contact might reveal marital status or other personal information that is inappropriate to ask. See the HR Perspective for examples of how some firms deal unethically with these issues.

One interesting point to remember is that although many employers must collect data on the race and sex of those who apply to fulfill requirements for reporting to the EEOC, the application blank cannot contain these items. As discussed in Chapter 6, the solution used by a growing number of employers is to have applicants provide EEOC reporting data on a separate form. It is important that this form be filed separately and not used in any other HR selection activities, or the employers may be accused of using applicant information inappropriately.

Weighted Application Forms

One way employers can make the application form more job related is by developing a weighted form. A job analysis is used to determine the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) needed for the job, and an application form is developed to include items related to the selection criteria. Then weights, or numeric values, are placed on possible responses to the items based on their predictive value. The responses of applicants can be scored, totaled, and compared.

One interesting example involves a company that had very high turnover among sewing machine operators. It hired a consultant, who took the applications of 100 successful operators who stayed with the company and 100 operators who left or were fired. He identified 10 variables that differentiated the two groups. Some were unusual; one variable identified was that the better performing sewing machine operators weighed more than 300 pounds and did not own a car, among other factors. Based on this analysis, a weighted application form was developed, but its usefulness could be questioned.

To develop a weighted application blank, it is necessary to develop questions that differentiate between satisfactory and poor performing employees and that can be asked legally. But there are several problems associated with weighted application forms. One difficulty is the time and effort required to develop such a form. For many small employers and for jobs that do not require numerous employees, the cost of developing the weights can be prohibitive. Also, the form must be updated every few years to ensure that the factors previously identified are still valid predictors of job success. However, on the positive side, using weighted forms enables an employer to evaluate and compare applicants' responses numerically to a valid, job-related set of inquiries.

Resumes

One of the most common methods applicants use to provide background information is the resume. Resumes, also called *vitae* by some, vary in style and length. Technically, a resume used in place of an application form must be treated by an employer as an application form for EEO purposes. Consequently,

HR PERSPECTIVE

Ethical Issues in Interviewing Women

All HR professionals and most, if not all, managers know the laws and regulations on equal employment. Yet what actually occurs in an interview frequently deviates dramatically from the legally permissible. For years the actual substance of what occurs in many interviews has been a dirty little secret, with no one willing to own up to the sorts of illegal inquiries frequently made of candidates.

Most impermissible areas of inquiry appear to be directed at women. Most typically, the concerns of the interviewer are a young woman's childbearing plans and child-care situations. Managers have great curiosity about such matters because they believe it may affect performance; but how is such information—unlawful if not clearly job related—obtained?

One large manufacturing firm (and a huge federal contractor) uses the simple expedient of having a low-level personnel clerk ask the candidate about her choice of health-insurance plans. An executive from the firm says, "During a lull between interviews, I have a clerk ask whether the applicant wants individual, husband-and-wife, or family coverage, and in choosing an option, the candidate will usually tell the clerk everything we need to know."

Another questionable technique

is used by a large financial-services firm, which takes the job candidate to lunch at a nice restaurant. Given the informal atmosphere, the applicant is more easily caught off-guard by a personal inquiry. Typically the prospective supervisor and an assistant eat lunch with the candidate and begin to discuss their children.

One of the firm's supervisors says: "I'll say something like: 'Our car-pool arrangements got messed up this morning and I was almost late for work.' Then I ask the applicant if anything like that ever happens to her. And almost always, the information I want will just come pouring out. The candidate will say something like no, she has no children, isn't even married, or doesn't want children. Or she'll tell me how she's a single mother with two little girls and is always having a problem with car pools and sitters. This tells me what I need to know."

Some employers—often in an informal or cocktail setting—will ask directly about a woman's family situation, putting the candidate in an extremely delicate position. If the female applicant refuses to answer the question, citing its illegality, she runs a very real risk of alienating the interviewer and wrecking her chances of being hired. If she answers the question truthfully, the information may prove fatal to her candidacy.

Many women respond falsely to these illegal inquiries, rationalizing that since the questions are unlawful, they are morally entitled to offer untrue responses. Said one woman, the divorced mother of two children, one of whom is severely handicapped: "Even though I'm a very reliable worker, I knew if I told the truth, I wouldn't get the job, and I needed this job badly. So I said I wasn't married—which was true—and I had no intention of having children—which is sort of true because certainly I don't plan to have any more children . . . I got the job. I figured that my kids were none of their business, so it didn't matter what I told them. Once I was hired, what could they do?"

When disobedience of any law becomes as widespread as it apparently has in these examples, increased enforcement with stiffer penalties probably will not work. Both interviewers and candidates probably would become even more skilled at evading the law—to everyone's detriment.

The best approach is to encourage discussion and education on the subject. If both interviewer and candidate can get beyond the gamesmanship and focus on the optimum fit between the job and the person, everyone will benefit.¹⁴

even if an applicant furnishes some "illegal information" voluntarily on a resume, the employer should not use that information during the selection process.¹⁵ Because resumes contain only information applicants want to present, some employers require that all who submit resumes complete an application form as well, so similar information will be available on all applicants.¹⁶

**BNA****485.20.10****Employee Eligibility**

The basic requirements for employers to confirm employment eligibility under IRCA are discussed here. The I-9 form is available at 485.40.

Individuals who mail in resumes may be sent thank-you letters and application forms to be completed and returned. Appendix D contains some suggestions on resume preparation.

Immigration Requirements

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, as revised in 1990, requires that within 72 hours of hiring, an employer must determine whether a job applicant is a U.S. citizen, registered alien, or illegal alien. Those not eligible to work in this country must not be hired. The *I-9 form* is used by employers to identify the status of potential employees. Many employers have applicants complete this form during the application process. Others have individuals submit the documents on the first day of employment. Employers do have a responsibility to make sure that documents submitted by new employees, such as U.S. passports, birth certificates, original Social Security cards, and driver's licenses, "reasonably appear on their face to be genuine."¹⁷

Selection Testing

According to the Uniform Selection Guidelines issued by the EEOC, any employment requirement is a "test." The focus in this section is on formal tests. As Figure 9-9 shows, various kinds of tests can be used. Notice that most of them focus on specific job-related aptitudes or skills. Some are paper-and-pencil tests (such as a math test), others are motor-skill tests, and still others use machines (polygraphs, for instance). Some employers purchase prepared tests, while other employers develop their own tests.

Many people feel that formal tests can be of great benefit in the selection process when properly used and administered. Considerable evidence supports this claim. Because of EEO concerns, many employers reduced or eliminated the use of tests a few years ago, fearing that they might be judged discriminatory in some way. However, test usage appears to be increasing again. One recent survey showed that 48% of employers use psychological testing, and 65% said they use some kind of skill testing. The job skills most often tested include typing and data entry and proficiency in accounting or engineering.¹⁸

Interpreting test results is not always straightforward, even if the test is valid. Individuals trained in testing and test interpretation should be involved in establishing and maintaining a testing system. Furthermore, the role of tests in the overall selection process must be kept in perspective. Tests represent only one possible data source.¹⁹

Ability tests

Tests that assess learned skills.

Aptitude tests

Tests that measure general ability to learn or acquire a skill.

Work sample tests

Tests that require an applicant to perform a simulated job task.

Ability and Aptitude Tests

Ability tests assess the skills that individuals have already learned. **Aptitude tests** measure general ability to learn or acquire a skill. The typing tests given at many firms to secretarial applicants are commonly used ability tests. Other widely used tests measure mechanical ability and manual dexterity.

A type of ability test used at many organizations simulates job tasks. These **work sample tests**, which require an applicant to perform a simulated job task that is part of the job being applied for, are especially useful. Having an applicant for a financial analyst's job prepare a computer spreadsheet is one such test.

FIGURE 9–9 Possible Tests Used for Selection

Note: *General aptitude tests are also known as mental ability tests.

Requiring a person applying for a truck driver's job to back a truck to a loading dock is another. 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 faced by people holding that job. The key for any work sample test is the behavioral consistency between the criteria in the job and the requirements of the test.

Mental ability tests measure reasoning capabilities. Some of the abilities tested include spatial orientation, comprehension and retention span, and general and conceptual reasoning. The General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB) is a widely used test of this type.

Mental ability tests
Tests that measure reasoning capabilities.

Assessment Centers

An assessment center is not necessarily a place; it is composed of a series of evaluative exercises and tests used for selection and development. The assessment uses multiple exercises and multiple raters. In one assessment center, candidates go through a comprehensive interview, pencil-and-paper test, individual and group simulations, and work exercises. The candidates' performances are then evaluated by a panel of trained raters. It is crucial to any assessment center that the tests and exercises reflect the job content and types of problems faced on the jobs for which individuals are being screened.²⁰

Psychological/Personality Tests

Personality is a unique blend of individual characteristics that affect interaction with the environment and help define a person. Historically, predictive validities have tended to be lower for personality tests used as predictors of performance on the job. However, some studies have shown that carefully chosen personality tests that logically connect to work requirements can help predict the interpersonal aspects of job success.²¹ For example, a person's ability to tolerate stress might be a valid concern for a police officer, emotional stability for a nuclear plant operator, and a "people" orientation for a social worker.

There is a never-ending list of characteristics that can be used to differentiate human beings. The multitude of different personality traits has long frustrated psychologists, who have argued that there is a relatively small number of underlying *major* traits. The most widely accepted approach to these underlying personality traits (although not the only one) is often referred to as the "Big Five" personality traits. The Big Five can be considered generally useful predictors of training success and job performance.²² The Big Five are:

- *Emotional stability*: This is the extent to which a person does *not* suffer from neurosis, depression, anger, worry, and insecurity.
- *Extroversion*: Sociable, gregarious, talkative people are considered extroverted.
- *Agreeableness*: People who are cooperative, good natured, softhearted, tolerant, and trusting score high on the agreeable dimension.
- *Openness/Experience*: This describes people who are flexible in thought and open to new ideas, broad minded, curious, and original.
- *Conscientiousness*: This is the extent to which a person is achievement-oriented, careful, hardworking, organized, and responsible.

As noted earlier in the chapter, conscientiousness has been found to be related to job success across most organizations and occupations. Extroversion predicts success in jobs requiring social interaction, such as many sales jobs. The usefulness of the other three varies depending on the kind of job and organization. When used in selection, psychological or personality testing requires that a solid link be made with job relatedness.²³

Polygraph and Honesty Testing

Several types of tests have been devised to assess honesty. These include polygraph tests and paper-and-pencil honesty tests. Both are controversial.

POLYGRAPHS AND THE EMPLOYEE POLYGRAPH PROTECTION ACT 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 incorrectly, the body's physiological responses will "reveal" the falsification through the polygraph's recording mechanisms.

As a result of concerns, Congress passed the Employee Polygraph Protection Act. The act bars polygraph use for preemployment screening purposes by most employers. However, 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 continue to use polygraphs as part of internal investigations of theft or losses. But the polygraph test should be taken voluntarily, and the employee can end the test at any time.

HONESTY TESTS Individuals who take honesty tests answer “yes” or “no” to a list of questions. Sample questions include:

- Would you tell your boss if you knew another employee was stealing from the company?
- Is it all right to borrow company equipment to use at home if the property is always returned?
- Have you ever told a lie?
- Have you ever wished you were physically more attractive?

Firms use honesty tests to help reduce losses due to employee theft. With pre-employment polygraph testing no longer allowed, a growing number of firms have turned to such tests. These firms believe that giving honesty tests not only helps them to screen out potentially dishonest individuals, but also sends a message to applicants and employees alike that dishonesty will not be tolerated.

Concerns about the validity of honesty tests continue to be raised. Many firms using them do not do validation studies on their experiences.²⁴ Instead, they rely on the general validation results given by the test developers, even though that practice is not consistent with the EEOC’s Uniform Guidelines.

Honesty tests are valid as broad screening devices for organizations but may not be as good at predicting whether a single individual will steal. Also, the use of these tests can have a negative public-relations impact on applicants. A final concern is that the types of questions asked may constitute invasion of individual privacy.

QUESTIONABLE TESTS Some *very* questionable tests are used in employee selection. For instance, graphology, psychics, and blood types all have been used by various employers.

- *Graphology*: Graphology is a type of “test” in which an “analysis” is made of an individual’s handwriting. Such characteristics as how people dot an *i* or cross a *t*, whether they write with a left or right slant, and the size and boldness of the letters they form supposedly tell graphologists about the individuals’ personalities and their suitability for employment. The cost of a handwriting analysis ranges from \$175 to \$500 and includes an examination of about 300 personality traits. Formal scientific evaluations of graphology are not easily found. Its value as a personality predictor is very questionable, but it is popular in France, Israel, and several other countries.
- *Psychics*: Similarly, some firms use psychics to help select managerial talent. The psychics are supposedly able to determine if a person is suited for a job both intellectually and emotionally. However, most businesses would not want anyone to know that they used “psychic advisers.”
- *Blood type*: If using psychics in selection seems outlandish, how about blood type as a predictor of personality? In Japan, many people think blood type is an excellent predictor. Type O blood supposedly indicates a person who is generous and bold; type A, one who is industrious; type B, one who is impulsive and flexible; and type AB, one who is both rational and creative. A manager at Mitsubishi Electric chose people with type AB blood to dream up the next generation of fax machines. One Japanese nursery school divides children based on their blood types.²⁵

There is a lack of formal evidence that handwriting, psychics, or blood type are valid as performance predictors. Some experts have even commented that there may be ethical problems in using these techniques for employee selection.

Selection Interviewing

Selection interview

Interview designed to identify information on a candidate and clarify information from other sources.

A **selection interview** is designed to identify information on a candidate and clarify information from other sources. This in-depth interview is designed to integrate all the information from application forms, tests, and reference checks, so that a decision can be made. Because of the integration required and the desirability of face-to-face contact, the interview is the most important phase of the selection process in many situations. Conflicting information may have emerged from tests, application forms, and references. As a result, the interviewer must obtain as much pertinent information about the applicant as possible during the limited interview time and evaluate this information against job standards. Finally, a selection decision must be made, based on all of the information obtained in the preceding steps.

The interview is not an especially valid predictor of job performance, but it has high “face validity”—that is, it *seems* valid to employers and they like it. Virtually all employers are likely to hire individuals using interviews.²⁶

Some interviewers may be better than others at selecting individuals who will perform well. There is very high *intrarater* (the same interviewer) reliability, but only moderate-to-low *interrater* (different interviewers) reliability. Reliability is the ability to pick the same qualities again and again in applicants. Interrater reliability becomes important if there are several interviewers, each selecting employees from a pool of applicants.

EEO Considerations and Interviewing

The interview, like a pencil-and-paper test and an application form, is a type of predictor and must meet the standards of job relatedness and nondiscrimination. Some court decisions and EEOC rulings have attacked the interviewing practices of some organizations as discriminatory.

An interviewer making a hiring recommendation must be able to identify the factors that shaped the decision. If that decision is challenged, the organization must be able to show justification. Everything written or said can be probed for evidence in a lawsuit. Lawyers recommend the following to minimize EEO concerns with interviewing:

- Identify objective criteria related to the job to be looked for in the interview.
- Put criteria in writing.
- Provide multiple levels of review for difficult or controversial decisions.
- Use structured interviews, with the same questions asked of all those interviewed for a specific job.

Types of Interviews

There are six types of selection interviews: structured, situational, behavioral description, nondirective, stress, and panel interviews. Each type is discussed in this section.

Structured interview

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

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW The **structured interview** uses a set of standardized questions that are asked of all applicants. Every applicant is asked the same basic questions, so that comparisons among applicants can more easily be made. This type of interview allows an interviewer to prepare job-related questions in

advance and then complete a standardized interviewee evaluation form. Completion of such a form provides documentation if anyone, including an EEO enforcement body, should question why one applicant was selected over another. Sample questions that might be asked of all applicants for a production maintenance management opening are as follows:

- Tell me how you trained workers for their jobs.
- How do you decide the amount of work you and the maintenance crew will have to do during a day?
- How does the production schedule of the plant affect what a mechanic ought to repair first?
- How do you know what the needs of the plant are at any given time and what mechanics ought to be doing?
- How did you or would you go about planning a preventive maintenance program in the plant?

As is evident, the structured interview is almost like an oral questionnaire and offers greater consistency and accuracy than some other kinds of interviews. The structured interview is especially useful in the initial screening because of the large number of applicants in this step of the selection process. Obviously, it is less flexible than more traditional interview formats, and therefore it may be less appropriate for second or later interviews.

Even though a series of patterned questions are asked, the structured interview does not have to be rigid. The predetermined questions should be asked in a logical manner, but the interviewer can avoid reading the questions word for word down the list. The applicant should be allowed adequate opportunity to explain answers clearly. The interviewer should probe until he or she fully understands the applicant's responses.

Research on interviews consistently has found the structured interview to be more reliable and valid than other approaches.²⁷ The format for the interview ensures that a given interviewer has similar information on each candidate, so there is higher intrarater reliability. Also, the fact that several interviewers ask the same questions of applicants has led to better interrater reliability.

Regardless of the type of interview used, interviewers from time to time receive some very "unusual" responses from some job candidates. The HR Perspective describes some of the stranger responses.

Frank and Ernest



HR PERSPECTIVE

Job Interview Horror Stories

Job interviewers encounter some amusing (and sometimes unbelievable) responses during interviews and on applicants' resumes. Here are some examples of how applicants have represented themselves:

"I went to college to party and socialize."

"I failed the bar exam with relatively high grades."

"It is best for employers that I not work with people."

"Applicant showed up in a bathing suit for the interview. She said she didn't think I would mind."

"Responsibility makes me nervous."

"The company made me a scapegoat—just like my three previous employers."

"The new graduate came to the interview wearing sunglasses and licking a lollipop. He said, 'This is my style; you can take it or leave it.'"

"The candidate tilted his chair and put his feet on the interviewer's desk."

"The candidate fell asleep during her interview."

"Please don't misconstrue my 14 jobs as 'job-hopping.' I have never quit a job."

"Applicant claimed to have graduated 'cum laude,' but did not know what that meant. She was proud of her GPA; however—it was a 2.1."³⁰

Situational interview

A structured interview composed of questions about how applicants might handle specific job situations.

SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW The **situational interview** is a structured interview that is composed of questions about how applicants might handle specific job situations. With experienced applicants, the format is essentially one of a job knowledge or work sample test.

Interview questions are based on job analysis and checked by experts in the job so they will be content valid. There are three types of questions:

- *Hypothetical:* Asking applicant what he or she might do in a certain job situation
- *Related to knowledge:* Might entail explaining a method or demonstrating a procedure
- *Related to requirements:* Explores areas such as willingness to work the hours required and meet travel demands

For some situational interviews job experts also write "good," "average," and "poor" responses to the questions to facilitate rating the answers of the applicant. The interviewer can code the suitability of the answer, assign point values, and add up the total number of points an interviewee received.²⁸

Behavioral description interview

Interview in which applicants give specific examples of how they have performed or handled problems in the past.

BEHAVIORAL DESCRIPTION INTERVIEW When responding to a **behavioral description interview**, applicants are required to give specific examples of how they have performed a certain procedure or handled a problem in the past. For example, applicants might be asked the following:

- How did you handle a situation in which there were no rules or guidelines on employee discipline?
- Why did you choose that approach?
- How did your supervisor react?
- How was the issue finally resolved?

Like other structured methods, behavioral description interviews generally provide better validity than unstructured interviews.²⁹

NONDIRECTIVE INTERVIEW The **nondirective interview** uses general questions, from which other questions are developed. It should be used mainly in psychological counseling, but it is also used in selection. The interviewer asks general questions designed to prompt the applicant to discuss herself or himself. The interviewer then picks up on an idea in the applicant's response to shape the next question. For example, if the applicant says, "One aspect that I enjoyed in my last job was my supervisor," the interviewer might ask, "What type of supervisor do you most enjoy working with?"

Difficulties with a nondirective interview include keeping it job related and obtaining comparable data on various applicants. Many nondirective interviews are only semiorganized; the result is that a combination of general and specific questions is asked in no set order, and different questions are asked of different applicants for the same job.

STRESS INTERVIEW The **stress interview** is a special type of interview designed to create anxiety and put pressure on the applicant to see how the person responds. In a stress interview, the interviewer assumes an extremely aggressive and insulting posture. Those who use this approach often justify its use with individual who will encounter high degrees of stress on the job, such as a consumer-complaint clerk in a department store or an air traffic controller.

The stress interview is a high-risk approach for an employer. The typical applicant is already somewhat anxious in any interview, and the stress interview can easily generate a very poor image of the interviewer and the employer. Consequently, an applicant that the organization wishes to hire might turn down the job offer. Even so, many interviewers deliberately put applicants under stress.

PANEL INTERVIEWS Usually, applicants are interviewed by one interviewer at a time. But when an interviewee must see several people, many of the interviews are redundant and therefore unnecessarily time consuming. In a **panel interview**, several interviewers interview the candidate at the same time. All the interviewers hear the same responses. On the negative side, applicants are frequently uncomfortable with the group interview format.

Interviewing Basics

Many people think that the ability to interview is an innate talent, but this contention is difficult to support. Just because someone is personable and likes to talk is no guarantee that the person will be a good interviewer. Interviewing skills are developed through training. Some suggestions for good interviewing follow.

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW Effective interviews do not just happen; they are planned. Pre-interview planning is essential to a well-conducted in-depth selection interview. This planning begins with selecting the time and place for the interview. Sufficient time should be allotted so that neither the interviewer nor the interviewee feels rushed. Also, a private location is important, so that both parties can concentrate on the interview content. The interviewer should review the application form for completeness and accuracy before beginning the interview and also should make notes to identify specific areas about which to question the applicant during the interview.

Nondirective interview

Interview that uses general questions, from which other questions are developed.

Stress interview

Interview designed to create anxiety and put pressure on an applicant to see how the person responds.

Panel interview

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

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW An important aspect of the interview is control. If the interviewer does not control the interview, the applicant usually will. Control includes knowing in advance what information must be collected, systematically collecting it, and stopping when that information has been collected.

Having control of the interview does not mean doing extensive talking. The interviewers should talk no more than about 25% of the time in an in-depth interview. If the interviewer talks more than that, the interviewer is the one being interviewed.

Questioning Techniques

The questioning techniques that an interviewer uses can and do significantly affect the type and quality of the information obtained. Some specific suggestions follow.



LOGGING ON . . .

Monash University Professional Development Centre

Item banks for questions used for selecting applicants for different academic and general staffing positions can be accessed at this website.

<http://www.cc.monash.edu.au/pdc/pitintv.html>

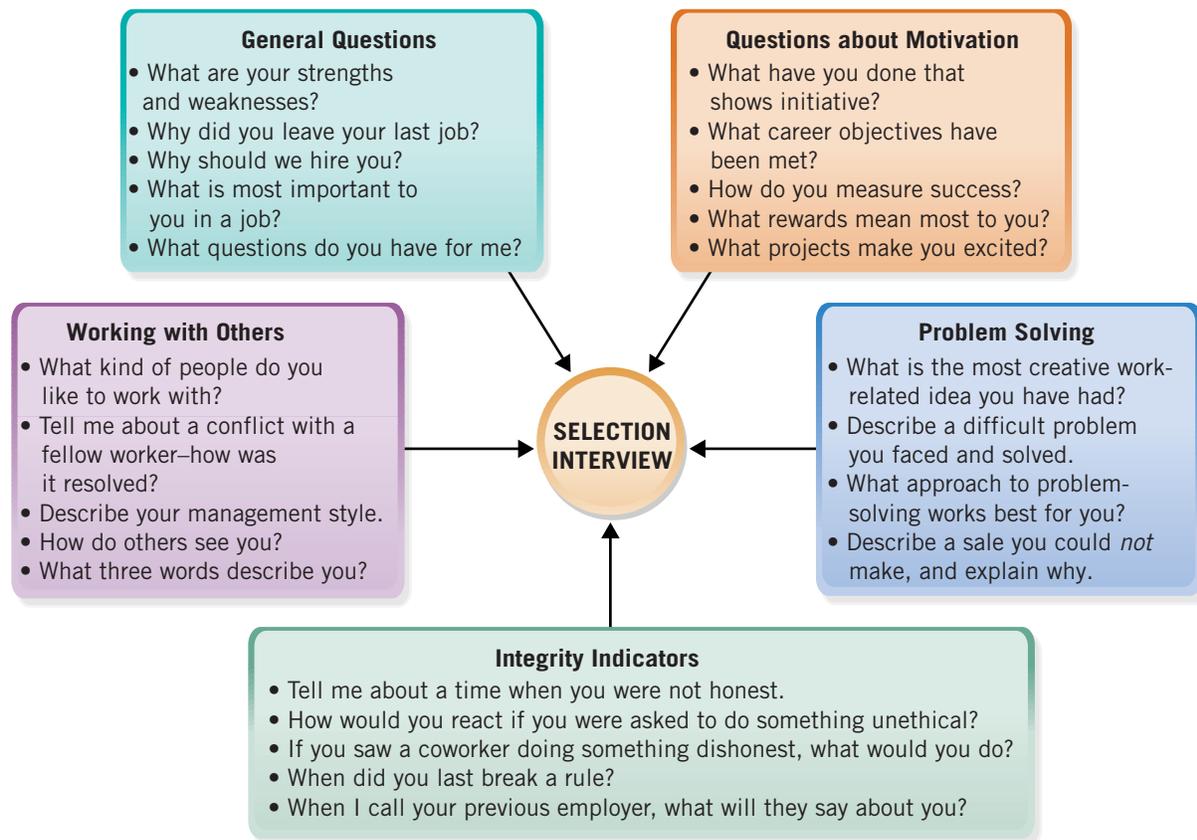
GOOD QUESTIONS Many questions an interviewer asks assume that the past is the best predictor of the future, and it usually is. An interviewer is less likely to have difficulty when questioning the applicant's demonstrated past performance than when asking vague questions about the future.

Some types of questions provide more meaningful answers than others. Good interviewing technique depends on the use of open-ended questions directed toward a particular goal. An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered yes or no. *Who, what, when, why, tell me, how,* and *which* are all good ways to begin questions that will produce longer and more informative answers. "What was your attendance record on your last job?" is a better question than, "Did you have good attendance on your last job?" because the latter question can be answered with a simple yes, which elicits less information. Figure 9–10 lists questions that are often used for different purposes in selection interviews.

POOR QUESTIONS Certain kinds of questions should be avoided:

- *Questions that rarely produce a true answer:* An example is, "How did you get along with your coworkers?" This question is almost inevitably going to be answered, "Just fine."
- *Leading questions:* A leading question is one to which the answer is obvious from the way that the question is asked. For example, "You do like to talk to people, don't you?" Answer: "Of course."
- *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 they are on the application form.
- *Obvious questions:* An obvious question is one for which the interviewer already has the answer and the applicant knows it. Questions already answered on the application blank should be probed, not asked again.
- *Questions that are not job related:* All questions asked should be directly related to the job for which the interviewee has applied.

LISTENING RESPONSES The good interviewer avoids *listening responses*, such as nodding, pausing, making casual remarks, echoing, and mirroring. A friendly but neutral demeanor is appropriate. Listening responses are an essential part of everyday, normal conversation, but they may unintentionally provide feedback to the applicant. Applicants may try to please the interviewer and look to the

FIGURE 9–10 *Common Selection Interview Questions by Areas*

interviewer's listening response for cues. Even though the listening responses may be subtle, they do provide information to applicants.

Problems in the Interview

Operating managers and supervisors most often use poor interviewing techniques because they do not interview often or have not been trained to interview. Some common problems encountered in the interview are highlighted next.

SNAP JUDGMENTS Ideally, the interviewer should collect all the information possible on an applicant before making a judgment. Reserving judgment is much easier to recommend than to do, because it is difficult not to form an early impression. Too often, interviewers form an early impression and spend the balance of the interview looking for evidence to support it. This impression may be based on a review of an individual's application blank or on more subjective factors such as dress or appearance. Consequently, many interviewers make a decision on the job suitability of applicants within the first four or five minutes of the interview.

NEGATIVE EMPHASIS As might be expected, unfavorable information about an applicant is the biggest factor considered in interviewers' decisions about overall



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suitability. Unfavorable information is given roughly twice the weight of favorable information. Often, a single negative characteristic may bar an individual from being accepted, whereas no amount of positive characteristics will guarantee a candidate's acceptance.

HALO EFFECT Interviewers should try to avoid the *halo effect*, which occurs when an interviewer allows a prominent characteristic to overshadow other evidence. The halo effect is present if an interviewer lets a candidate's accomplishments in athletics overshadow other characteristics, which leads the interviewer to hire the applicant because "athletes make good salespeople." *Devil's horns* (a reverse halo effect), such as inappropriate dress or a low grade point average, may affect an interviewer as well.

BIASES Interviewers must be able to recognize their personal biases. Interviewers tend to favor or select people whom they perceive to be similar to themselves. This similarity can be in age, race, sex, previous work experiences, personal background, or other factors. As workforce demographics shift, interviewers will have to be even more aware of this "similarity bias."

The selection of an applicant who falls below standards, and the rejection of an applicant who meets standards, indicate that personal bias may have influenced a selection decision. An interviewer should be honest and consider the reasons for selecting a particular applicant. The solution to the problem of bias lies not in claiming that a person has no biases, but in demonstrating that they can be controlled.

CULTURAL NOISE The interviewer must learn to recognize and handle *cultural noise*—responses the applicant believes are socially acceptable rather than factual responses. Applicants want jobs; to be hired, they know they must impress the interviewer. They may feel that if they divulge any unacceptable facts about themselves, they will not get the job. Consequently, they may try to give the interviewer responses that are socially acceptable but not very revealing.

An interviewer can handle cultural noise by not encouraging it. If the interviewer supports cultural noise, the applicant will take the cue and continue those kinds of answers. Instead, the applicant can be made aware that the interviewer is not being taken in. An interviewer can say, "The fact that you are the best

pitcher on your softball team is interesting, but tell me about your performance on your last job.”

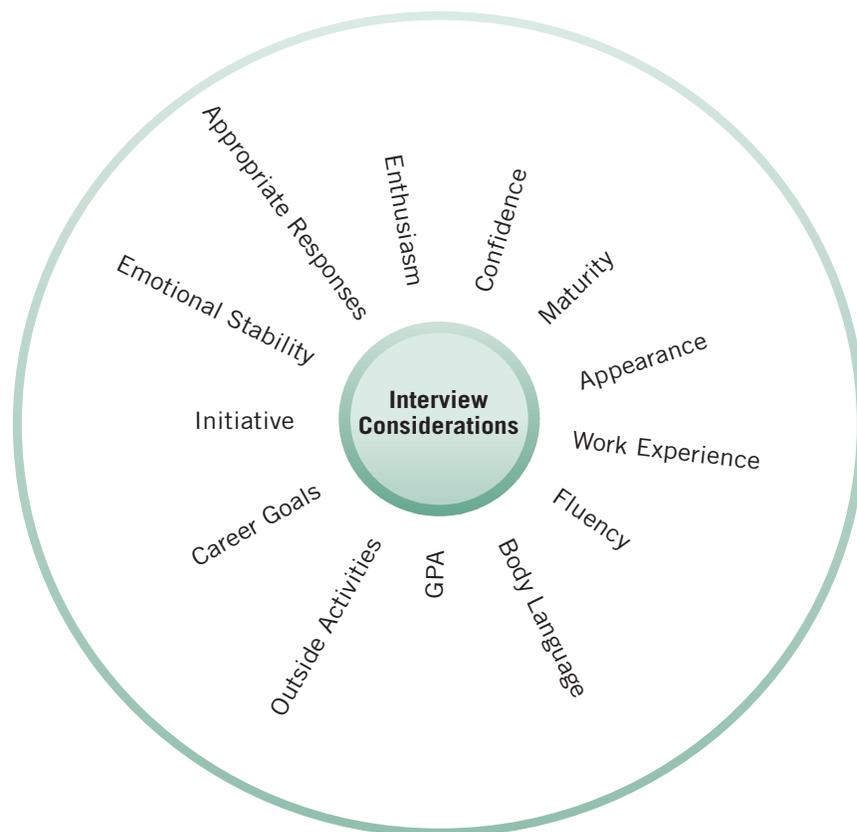
What Interviewers Evaluate

Overall, interviewers look for evidence that an applicant is well rounded, competent, and successful. The factors most often considered are presented in Figure 9–11. These variables do not include all possible criteria that may be taken into account; a wide variety of other variables may be considered, depending on the job and the interviewer.

Background Investigation

Background investigation may take place either before or after the in-depth interview. It costs the organization some time and money, but it is generally well worth the effort. Unfortunately, applicants frequently misrepresent their qualifications and backgrounds. According to one survey of employers, the most common false information given is length of prior employment, past salary, criminal record, and former job title.³¹

FIGURE 9–11 *Factors Interviewers Consider in the Interview*



Many universities report that inquiries on graduates and former students often reveal that the individuals never graduated. Some did not even attend the university. Another type of credential fraud uses the mail-order “degree mill.” To enhance their chances of employment, individuals purchase unaccredited degrees from organizations that grant them for a fee—as one advertisement puts it, “with no exams, no studying, no classes.”³²

It is estimated that many resumes contain at least one lie or “factual misstatement” (see Figure 9–12). The only way for employers to protect themselves from resume fraud and false credentials is to request verification on proof from applicants either before or after hire. If hired, the employee can be terminated for falsifying employment information. It is unwise for employers to assume that “someone else has already checked.” Too often, no one took the trouble.³³

Types of References

Background references can be obtained from several sources. Some of the following references may be more useful and relevant than others, depending on the jobs for which applicants are being considered:

- Academic references
- Prior work references
- Financial references
- Law enforcement records
- Personal references

Personal references, such as references from relatives, clergy, or family friends, often are of little value; they probably should not even be required. No applicant will ask somebody to write a recommendation who is going to give a negative response. Instead, greater reliance should be placed on work-related references from previous employers and supervisors.

FIGURE 9–12 *Common Misrepresentations on Resumes and Applications*



Legal Constraints on Background Investigations

Various federal and state laws have been passed to protect the rights of individuals whose backgrounds may be investigated during preemployment screening. States vary in what they allow employers to investigate. For example, in some states, employers can request information from law enforcement agencies on any applicant. In some states, they are prohibited from getting certain credit information. Several states have passed laws providing legal immunity for employers who provide information on an employee to another employer. Some legal issues are discussed next.

THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974 The most important law passed to protect the privacy of personal information is the Federal Privacy Act of 1974, which applies primarily to government agencies and units. However, bills to extend the provisions of the Privacy Act to private-sector employers have been introduced in Congress at various times. Under the 1974 act, a government entity must have a signed release from a person before it can give information about that person to someone else.

FAIR CREDIT REPORTING ACT Many employers check applicants' credit histories. The logic is that if individuals have poor credit histories, then they may be irresponsible. This assumption may be questioned, however, and 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 a copy of the report.³⁴

RISKS OF GIVING REFERENCES ON FORMER EMPLOYEES In a number of court cases, individuals have sued their former employers for slander, libel, or defamation of character as a result of what the employers said to other potential employers that prevented the individuals from obtaining jobs. Two examples illustrate why employers should be careful when giving reference information.

- An executive at one firm remarked that a former employee was a “sociopath.” The former employee sued and won \$1.9 million in a judgment against the employer and the executive.
- Over \$500,000 was paid by both an airline and an insurance company to settle lawsuits on references given on former employees.

Because of such problems, lawyers advise organizations who are asked about former employees to give out only name, employment date, and title; many organizations have adopted policies restricting the release of reference information.³⁵

RISKS OF NEGLIGENT HIRING The costs of failing to check references may be high. Some organizations have become targets of lawsuits that charge them with negligence in hiring workers who committed violent acts on the job. Lawyers say that an employer's liability hinges on how well it investigates an applicant's fitness. Prior convictions and frequent moves or gaps in employment should be cues for further inquiry. Details provided on the application form by the applicant should be investigated to the greatest extent possible, so the employer can show that due diligence was exercised. Also, applicants should be asked to sign releases authorizing the employer to check references, and those releases should contain a statement releasing the reference givers from any future liability actions.³⁶



BNA

3685.10–3685.40

Employment References

Some of the legal issues associated with references, along with a reference consent and release form, are discussed here. Also state laws on references are available at 3690.

Clearly, employers are in a difficult position. Because of threats of lawsuit, they must obtain information on potential employees but are unwilling to give out information in return. However, many employers hope that changes may eventually result in a reversal of this situation. One can speculate that we are not too far away from the day when the courts will say that Employer A has the duty to divulge negative information to Employer B on the basis of need to know.

Reference-Checking Methods

Several methods of obtaining reference information are available to an employer. Telephoning a reference is the most-used method, but many firms prefer written responses.

TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECKING Many experts recommend using a structured telephone reference-check form. Typically, such forms focus on factual verification of information given by the applicant, such as employment dates, salary history, type of job responsibilities, and attendance record. Other questions often include reasons for leaving the previous job, the individual's manner of working with supervisors and other employees, and other less factual information. Naturally, many firms will provide only factual information. But the use of the form can provide evidence that a diligent effort was made.

WRITTEN METHODS OF REFERENCE CHECKING Some organizations send pre-printed reference forms to individuals who are giving references for applicants. These forms often contain a release statement signed by the applicant, so that those giving references can see that they have been released from liability on the information they furnish. Specific or general letters of reference also are requested by some employers or provided by applicants.



LOGGING ON . . . Background Checking Service

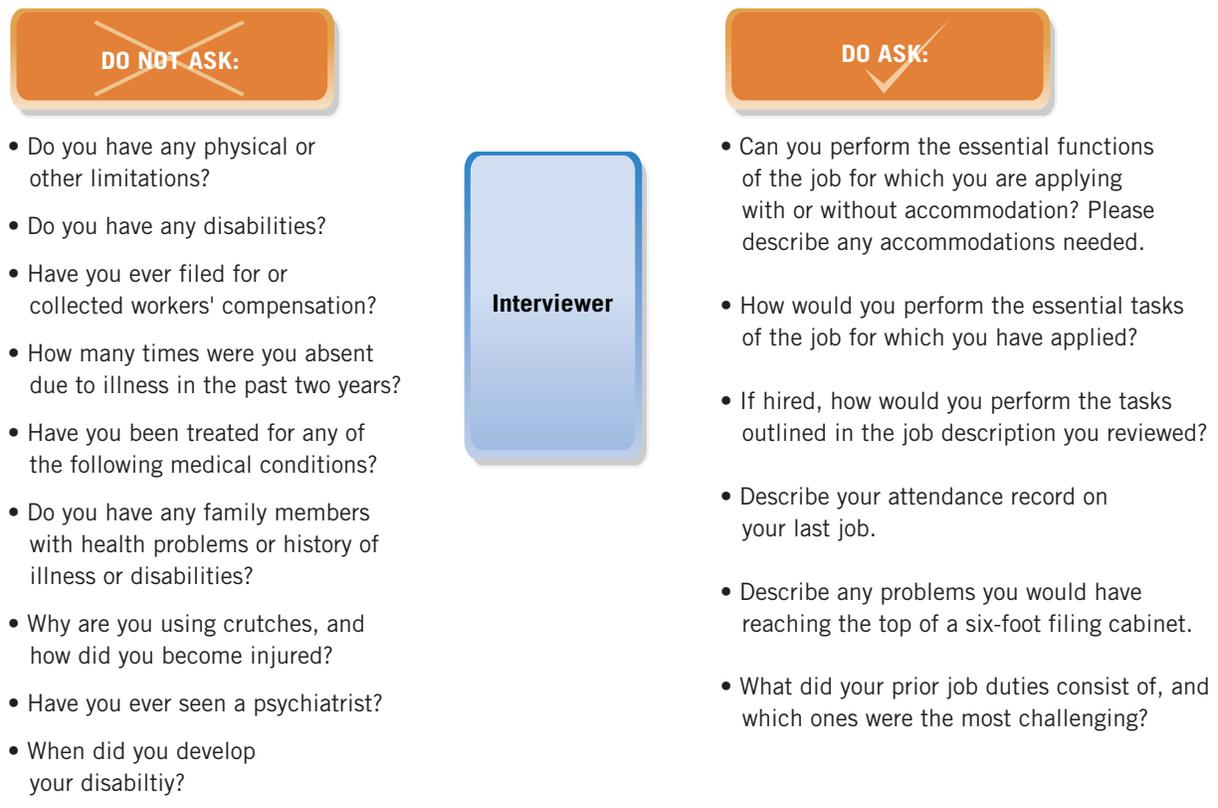
An example of a firm that conducts background checks for employers can be found here.

<http://www.emc-corp.com/>

Medical Examinations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits a company from rejecting an individual because of a disability and from asking job applicants any question relative to current or past medical history until a conditional job offer is made. Figure 9-13 shows proper and improper questions about disabilities. The ADA also prohibits the use of preemployment medical exams, except for drug tests, until a job has been conditionally offered.

DRUG TESTING Drug testing may be a part of a medical exam, or it may be done separately. Using drug testing as a part of the selection process has increased in the past few years, though not without controversy. Employers should remember that such tests are not infallible. The accuracy of drug tests varies according to the type of test used, the item tested, and the quality of the laboratory where the test samples are sent. If an individual tests positive for drug use, then a second, more detailed analysis should be administered by an independent medical laboratory. Because of the potential impact of prescription drugs on test results, applicants should complete a detailed questionnaire on this matter before the testing. Whether urine, blood, 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 established.

FIGURE 9-13 Questioning an Applicant About Disabilities

Drug testing also has legal implications. In a number of cases, courts have ruled that individuals with previous substance-abuse problems who have received rehabilitation are disabled and thus covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Also, preemployment drug testing must be administered in a nondiscriminatory manner, not used selectively with certain groups. The results of drug tests also must be used consistently, so that all individuals testing positive are treated uniformly. An applicant for a production-worker position who tests positive should be rejected for employment, just as an applicant to be vice-president of marketing would be.

Challenges to drug testing are less likely to succeed in the private sector than in the government sector. The Fourth Amendment (relating to search and seizure) fails as an argument by employees because the government is not involved.

GENETIC TESTING Another controversial area of medical testing is genetic testing. Some large companies currently are using genetic tests and many more are considering their use in the future. However, the general public disapproves strongly of their use.

Employers that use genetic screening tests do so for several reasons. First, the tests may link workplace health hazards and individuals with certain genetic characteristics. Second, genetic testing may be used to make workers aware of genetic problems that could occur in certain work situations. The third use is the

most controversial: to exclude individuals from certain jobs if they have genetic conditions that increase their health risks. Because people cannot change their genetic makeup, the potential for discrimination based, for example, on race or sex is very real. For instance, sickle-cell anemia is a condition found primarily in African Americans. If chemicals in a particular work environment can cause health problems for individuals with sickle-cell anemia, African Americans might be screened out on that basis. The question is whether that decision should be made by the individual or the employer.

Summary

- Selection is a process that matches individuals and their qualifications to jobs in an organization.
- Predictors are used to find criteria of job applicants that make them more likely than others to do well.
- Because of government regulations and the need for better coordination between the HR unit and other managers, many organizations have established a centralized employment office as part of the HR department.
- The selection process—from reception through initial screening, application, testing, interview, and background investigation to physical examination—must be handled by trained, knowledgeable individuals.
- Application forms must meet EEO guidelines and ask only for job-related information.
- All tests used in the selection process must be valid, and employers should use valid predictors to identify candidates who can meet important job criteria.
- Selection tests include ability and aptitude tests, assessment centers, and general psychological/personality tests. Also, selection tests should relate directly to the jobs for which individuals apply.
- Controversial tests used to select employees include polygraph examinations and honesty tests.
- From the standpoints of effectiveness and EEO compliance, the most useful interviews are structured, situational, behavioral description, and panels, although nondirective and stress interviews are also used.
- Sound interviewing requires planning and control. Applicants should be provided a realistic picture of the jobs for which they are applying. Good questioning techniques can reduce interviewing problems.
- Background investigations can be conducted in a variety of areas, but concerns about individual privacy must be addressed.
- Care must be taken when either getting or giving reference information to avoid the potential legal problems of defamation, libel, slander, and negligent hiring.
- Medical examinations may be an appropriate part of the selection process for some employers, but only after a conditional job offer has been made.
- Drug testing has grown in use as a preemployment screening device, in spite of some problems and concerns associated with its accuracy and potential for discrimination on the part of employers.

Review and Discussion Questions

1. Why do many employers have a specialized employment office?
2. You are starting a new manufacturing company. What phases will you go through to select your employees?
3. Agree or disagree with the following statement: “A good application form is fundamental to an effective selection process.” Explain your conclusion.
4. Discuss the following statement: “We stopped giving tests altogether and rely exclusively on interviews for hiring.”
5. Make two lists. On one list, indicate what information you would want to obtain from the screening interview; on the other, indicate what information you would want to obtain from the in-depth interview.

6. Develop a structured interview guide for a 20-minute interview with a retail sales clerk applicant.
7. How would you go about investigating a new college graduate's background? Why would this information be useful in making a selection decision?
8. Discuss how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has modified the use of medical exams in the selection process.

Terms to Know

ability tests 292	panel interview 299	selection interview 296
aptitude tests 292	placement 278	situational interview 298
behavioral description interview 298	predictors 280	stress interview 299
mental ability tests 293	realistic job preview (RJP) 287	structured interview 296
nondirective interview 299	selection 278	work sample tests 292
	selection criterion 280	

Using the Internet



Defining Hiring Specifications

The president of the company has expressed concerns about the selection process being used for staffing. He has asked you, the HR manager, to define the selection criteria being used for staffing and prepare a memo for him. The senior members have come up with questions regarding the process. Answer the following questions for the senior staff. Use the following website to assist you:

<http://www.appliedhrsolutions.com/>

Questions

1. List six job analysis techniques currently used for selection.
2. From the analysis techniques used, what criteria should be developed for the job?
3. List four measurement methods used for each of the criteria.

CASE

Selecting Manufacturing Employees

In the United States, Toyota uses a selection assessment test designed to hire individuals to be employed as Toyota auto workers. Called the "Day of Work," this test is the most grueling part of a hiring process that can take months. At Toyota plants in Kentucky and West Virginia, the Day of Work is used regularly. Starting at 6:30 a.m., applicants work on a simulated assembly line for 4 hours and then spend several hours inspecting parts for defects. They also participate in a group problem-solving session and take

written tests. This is all necessary just to be *considered* for a job at Toyota.

Another process is used by Carrier Corporation, which makes compressors for air conditioners with its workforce of 150 at its Arkadelphia, Arkansas, plant. If someone wants a job there, he or she must complete a six-week course before even being considered for employment. The selection process weeds out 15 of every 16 applicants and provides Carrier Corporation with a top-quality workforce. High

school graduates take a state test for job applicants first. Only one-third advance to the next step. References are closely checked, and then the applicants are interviewed both by managers *and* by the assembly-line workers with whom they will work. Those applicants who have satisfactory interviews take a six-week course that meets five nights a week for three hours, with some extra Saturdays. Attendees learn to read blueprints, do math (including metric calculations and statistical process control), use a computer, and engage in problem solving with others. At the end of the course, the applicants have not been hired (or paid) and have no assurance that they will be.

But this approach does not work everywhere or all the time. During a year, Lincoln Electric considered

more than 20,000 job applicants and rejected most of them—yet it has empty positions that it *needs to fill*. Very few of those who applied at Lincoln Electric could do trigonometry (even at the high school level) or read technical drawings. Those skills were needed for even entry-level work.³⁷

Questions

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with Toyota's "Day of Work" approach.
2. When using teams to interview applicants, as Carrier Corporation does, what potential problems might exist with the use of invalid predictors and interrater reliability?

Notes

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