

Resume Reviews: Everyone is doing it...but how useful is it?

Author: Kristin Delgado, Ph.D.

Real-world resume reviewing is a complex task where individuals must make judgments from different types of information in varying formats to decide whether the applicant moves on to the next step of the hiring process. While resume screening is viewed as common initial screening practice, research has indicated it is generally unreliable and less valid compared to other screening practices, such as structured interviews and selection assessments (e.g., Cole, Feild, & Stafford, 2005).

Are Resume Reviews Reliable?

Research has shown that recruiters integrate resume information very differently and the reliability of such practices is quite low. Fritzsche and Brannick (2002) found that recruiters use inconsistent strategies and that those strategies change over time. They concluded that resume screening is an unreliable process and that “interviews appear to be granted as much by luck and whim as by merit.” Other research (Bretz et al., 1993; Kinicki, Lockwood, Hom, & Griffith, 1990) has found that recruiters and managers vary in how they process and use informational cues from applicants to reach hiring decisions. More recently, Seibert, Williams, and Raymark (2010) found that recruiter judgments of resumes were not consistent across recruiters, but also inconsistent internally, meaning that the recruiters varied in how they evaluated different applicants. So, not only do resume screening judgments vary from recruiter to recruiter, judgment processes vary within the recruiters themselves from applicant to applicant. These studies further provide evidence that idiosyncratic patterns exist among recruiters’ evaluations of job applicants, and reliance on such unreliable methods alone should be limited.

Are Resume Reviews Fair?

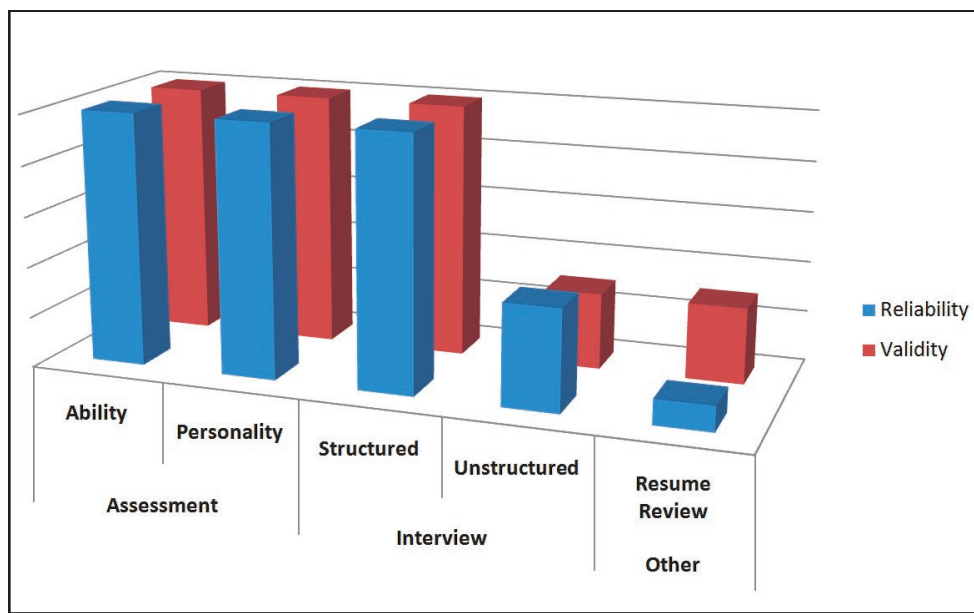
One of the issues associated with resume screening that contributes to its unreliability is that some screeners may have difficulty remaining impartial during the screening process. Confirmation biases, or when individuals tend to look for and remember information that verifies their expectations, operate to maintain stereotypical beliefs and prejudices (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). In this way, people seek out information that supports or maintains their current conceptualizations. Similarly, people also may distort or ignore information that does not support their beliefs.

For example, Cole, Field, & Giles (2004) found that recruiter and applicant gender influenced judgments regarding applicant resume qualifications. They found that women applying for jobs that require “masculine” qualifications (e.g., supervision of others) and men applying for jobs that require “feminine” qualifications (e.g., nurturing, communal involvement) tend to be more stereotypically judged as poor fit by recruiters. This was found to be more of the case during the resume evaluation process. However, in an interview context, where there is personal interaction, the existence of biases were made more salient and were more likely to be addressed. Therefore, in the interview context, applicant information was more carefully considered and resulted in more impartial judgments. When limited amounts of information is available, like in the resume screening stage, individuals faced with making judgments will be more likely to rely on biased or stereotypical information. In contrast, during the interview process, there is more information available to help make judgments. Interaction with the applicant not only allows the recruiter to assess important factors, such as appearance, speech, poise and interpersonal competence, it also provides an opportunity to fill in information gaps from the initial screening. With more information at their disposal, individuals do not need to rely as heavily on their preconceived notions and are better equipped to make less biased judgments. Moreover, resume screening may influence judgments made at subsequent hiring stages. Some research suggests that interviewers adjust their interviewing behavior in order to confirm first impressions that they may hold about the candidates (Dougherty, Turban, & Callendar, 1994), or that interviewers may use the interview to confirm first impressions based on resumes.

The Big Picture

Taken together, research indicates that the reliability and validity of the types of resume information that recruiters use to infer attributes about candidates do not hold up under scientific scrutiny (Thoms & McMasters, 1999). Therefore, other screening practices (see Table 1 on the following page for an overview of various selection methods) should be implemented in order to ensure that job relevant information is being used in the appropriate way to select the best candidates, as well as to ensure the legal defensibility of the hiring process as a whole.

Table 1. Comparison of Reliability and Validity of Common Selection Methods



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