Hiring Friendly, Dependable and Productive Workers

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SELECT PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Hiring employees who are friendly, come to work on time, work well with others and perform their job effectively is a key objective of any successful organization. Accomplishing this in a fast, accurate and cost-effective manner is also critically important.

At Select International, we've been helping organizations hire safe, productive employees for almost 20 years. We've taken the experience, learning and research that results from assessing over 1 million people a year and condensed it into our newest assessment Service*Fit*®.

This paper describes the research that went into Service*Fit*®, what type of employees should be assessed using Service*Fit*® and the type of results you can expect.

Who is Service*Fit*® Meant For?

Service*Fit*® was designed to be a short, easy to administer, accurate and fair method for screening candidates for a broad range of service positions. The factors measured in Service*Fit*® make it ideally suited for any job in the service industry; from call center representative to retail worker, from food service personnel to hospitality staff. Service*Fit*® incorporates the key characteristics associated with success in almost any type of service job so it is effective at accurately screening a wide range of positions.

After conducting thousands of job analyses, hundreds of empirical studies and listening to the feedback from numerous organizations, we distilled those factors most critical for making an accurate hiring decision into Service*Fit*®.

What Makes an Employee Service*Fit*®?

Our experience and research, as well as findings from countless other researchers, has led us to the conclusion that to be considered a good service employee, one needs to be:

- Friendly
- Dependable
- Productive

In addition to these three core characteristics, organizations want employees who:

- Come to work on time
- Stay with the organization

By providing fair, accurate and reliable measures of these critical factors, Service*Fit*® allows organizations to screen out candidates who are not likely to succeed and focus their time and energy on hiring those that are.

Risk Factors vs. Competencies

At its core, Service*Fit*® is designed to be a powerful tool that helps companies hire the 'right' person by avoiding hiring the 'wrong' one. To accomplish this, Service*Fit*® uses Risk Factors as opposed to more traditional assessments that focus on competencies. The difference, while subtle, is an important one. With competencies, the assumption is that the higher candidates are on a particular competency, the better they will be at whatever that competency measures. So, for instance, take a competency such as written communication. Someone at the lowest end of the scale is likely to have difficulty putting together sentences that are even understandable. The top end of the sale would be characterized by individuals who are fluent, articulate and can communicate complex thoughts and emotions in a captivating manner. If you are hiring a writer, then you would want someone at the highest end of that scale, because higher is clearly better.

Risk factors, on the other hand, are useful when someone must meet a minimum threshold to even have the possibility of being successful on the job. Risk factors capture the minimum standards that are necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, for outstanding job performance. The key difference between competencies and risk factors is that, with competencies, candidates scoring the highest are always considered the best. Risk factors measure the basic characteristics that make it possible to do the job. Risk factors capture whether or not a candidate has 'enough' of a given attribute to not behave in a manner that is detrimental to the organization.

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So, for instance, Stress Tolerance Risk describes how likely an individual will be able to handle the stressors one encounters in the service industry, such as dealing with an upset customer. Risk Factors make more sense than competencies in this case because, for example, hiring an ill-tempered individual would be very harmful to an organization's quality of service and general reputation. An employee who is easily upset and becomes impolite is an individual who is a high risk for losing customers and future business. By avoiding 'high risk' individuals, an organization can significantly improve the overall service quality of their organization.

ServiceFit® measures the following five Risk Factors:

1. **Stress Tolerance Risk** – Individuals labeled as high risk in this area are less likely to be able to handle stressful situations and stay calm under pressure.

2. **Productivity Risk** – Individuals deemed a high productivity risk are unlikely to stay on task, follow through or consistently meet performance expectations

3. **Quality Risk** – Individuals determined to be high risk in this area are more prone to make careless mistakes and have trouble following instructions.

4. **Absenteeism/Tardiness Risk** – Individuals who are a high absenteeism/tardiness risk are more likely to be late, miss or skip work.

5. **Turnover Risk** – Individuals who are deemed a turnover risk have demonstrated a history of leaving companies and are unlikely to be a stable employee.

The following section describes these Risk Factors in more detail.

Stress Tolerance Risk

Working with other people, working in environments with disgruntled customers and being under pressure to meet productivity goals can be stressful. Individuals who have difficulty managing stress effectively, or who have tendencies to become easily irritated or angered, are more likely to respond to the demands of the job in a manner that can render them ineffective under pressure (O'Connell, 1999; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992).

Individuals who manage stress effectively tend to remain calm and collected; those who do not may lose their ability to think rationally and may act inappropriately for the situation. **Stress Tolerance** not only influences the manner in which individuals react to stressful situations, but also their attitudes towards the job in general. Those who are more easily stressed may find the work arduous and unpleasant, ultimately resulting in burnout and turnover. Additionally, individuals who are easily stressed out may not interact effectively with others (e.g., co-workers, customers).

Productivity Risk

In the service industry, it is important to focus on factors that make an individual a dependable and productive employee. Dependable employees are those who can be counted on to do what is expected of them, to be productive, meet deadlines and to follow through on obligations.

Across occupations, acting responsibly is of utmost importance. Following the rules, remaining on-task, working hard and making well thought-out judgments all contribute to being a high-quality worker. A key factor that contributes to these behaviors is the trait, Conscientiousness. People who are highly conscientious are hard workers; they want to do the right thing, are more apt to abide by rules, and follow through on commitments. Individuals who are low in conscientiousness may disregard commitments, shirk their duties, and, in some cases, actively rebel against authority.

Numerous meta-analyses have demonstrated that conscientiousness is a robust predictor of performance across a wide range of positions (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006). Conscientious individuals are known to be hardworking, detail-oriented, thorough, organized and careful. All of these traits are of great benefit to workers in nearly every situation imaginable, whether it is for jobs that are closely-monitored or jobs with limited supervision.

Locus of Control is another personality trait that can differentiate people who act responsibly from those who do not. Individuals who have an *internal* locus of control believe they have control over what happens to them. As such, they are much more likely than individuals with an *external* locus of control to take action to prevent negative situations. In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control perceive that many things are out of their hands and they may not intervene or take action when needed (Spector, 1982; Jones & Wuebker, 1993). Individuals with external locus of control are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Storms & Spector, 1987) and treat customers poorly (Perlow & Latham, 1993) than individuals with internal locus of control. Moreover, individuals with external control are also more likely to burnout and turnover, as may they feel little or no control over their work situations (Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994).

Quality Risk

Simply put, some individuals are more likely to make mistakes than others. There are a multitude of reasons for this, some of which are more cognitive (i.e., lack of understanding or made bad decision making). In many settings, however, the primary reason for errors is due to the fact the individual just wasn't paying enough attention to details or following standard operating procedures. These individuals tend to have low *Attention to Detail*. Individuals who are higher in Attention to Detail are able to keep their attention focused on task-relevant information while working. The customer service representative who enters the incorrect shipping information for a customer order was most likely not paying attention to what he was doing at the time vs. not understanding what he was supposed to do. These errors result in rework, defects, poor service, and returned merchandise. They are also, in many cases, hard to pinpoint to a single individual, and may go unnoticed until it's too late.

The research indicates that previously described factors conscientiousness and locus of control, as well as and attention to detail, are all related to Quality Risk.

Absenteeism Risk

Absenteeism refers to time an employee is not on the job during scheduled working hours, except for a granted leave of absence, holiday or vacation time.

There are two costs associated with absenteeism:

- **Direct costs** – wages and benefits paid during the absence

- **Indirect costs** – staffing, scheduling, re-training, lost productivity, diminished moral, turnover and opportunity cost

Estimates of the cost of absenteeism range from $400 - $2,500 per day (CCH, Inc., 2002). Corporations in the United States are said to lose over $8,000 per person annually (Wilkerson, 1998). Moreover, research has shown that absenteeism is related to reduced organizational productivity and overall quality (Viswesvaran, 2002).

As with anything there are multiple causes of absenteeism. Absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover are often referred to as 'withdrawal behaviors.' Absenteeism could be an indicator of withdrawing effort from work tasks, as well as the social and interpersonal work environment (Viswesvaran, 2002).

Despite the myriad of reasons that can contribute to poor attendance, some employees are much more likely to have consistently higher levels of absenteeism than others (Harrison & Price, 2003).   Research suggests that the same sets of individual differences that drive absenteeism are also related to productivity and interpersonal problems. Thus, many of the same characteristics discussed earlier are related to absenteeism, including conscientiousness (Conte & Jacobs, 2003) and stress tolerance (e.g., Salgado, 2002).

People who are more stress tolerant are less likely to experience stress, frustration and emotional problems that could negatively influence their work.

Individuals who tend to get stressed out easily and become negative and cynical manner are more likely to have low satisfaction with the job and their supervisor and are therefore more likely to seek 'relief' from those negative feelings by not coming to work, by 'faking' an illness, etc. (Iverson & Deery, 2001; George, 1989).

Conscientiousness also clearly plays a role in that individuals who are more conscientious are more likely to feel obligated to come to work, even if they don't feel great, if they are unhappy, or they have some personal problems because of their sense of duty and responsibility to their employer or their co-workers (Conte & Jacobs, 2003; Bernardin, 1997).

By using a combination of factors including stress tolerance, conscientiousness, as well as past behavior measures of previous absenteeism and views of acceptable rates of absenteeism, Service*Fit*® provides a stable and strong predictor of an individual's risk of absenteeism and tardiness.

Turnover Risk

Turnover is one of the most frustrating problems that companies face. Employee turnover is extremely costly, whether it is involuntary turnover, such as terminations due to poor performance, or voluntary turnover, such as resignations. According to a conservative estimate by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, average turnover replacement costs employers $13,996 per employee (Mulvey, 2005). For an organization with 10,000 employees, a turnover rate of 30% would cost the company $14 million more than if the turnover rate was 20%. At first glance, these figures may seem high. However, when one factors in the cost of replacing the lost employee, the revenue lost while the job remained unfilled, and the partial productivity during the first year of employment, the numbers start adding up.

Hiring qualified candidates through a fair and accurate selection system helps reduce involuntary turnover, because the individuals who are hired tend to be more competent, able to perform the job and tend to be better corporate citizens. However, focusing only on potential and ability may result in an employee who can perform well in the job, but is not a good fit for the job or the organization from a motivational standpoint.

One of the paradoxes that many organizations face is that employees who are highly qualified have many options available to them, which may result in a higher likelihood of those employees voluntarily leaving the organization. In order to reduce both involuntary and voluntary turnover, it is critical to look at the complete profile of the individual, including the motivational fit to the job and organization.

As was the case with absenteeism, certain applicants have a higher propensity for turnover than others. Some of these factors have to do with more underlying characteristics of the individual, such as those discussed earlier, and others are more situational in nature.

For instance, Barrick and Zimmerman (2005) found that new hires are less likely to leave the company if they: a) are referred by a current employee; b) have friends and relatives working in the organization; and c) have longer tenure in their previous job. Additionally, applicants with a history of short tenure in previous jobs are likely to repeat their past behavior and thereby are more prone to change jobs after a short period of time (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). Research has shown that inclusion of biographical information add considerably to the predictive ability of selection assessments over personality-based assessments alone (Mount, Witt, & Barrick, 2000).

Research has linked previously discussed characteristics such conscientiousness and stress tolerance to turnover. Interestingly, while individuals who are low in conscientious tend to have higher levels of turnover (Salgado, 2002), there is evidence that people who are very high in conscientiousness may experience higher levels of turnover (Timmerman, 2006). The reason for this is that in some jobs, e.g. call centers, individuals with high levels of conscientiousness put too much pressure on themselves to meet the demands of the job and end up burning out and leaving the organization.

Service*Fit®* builds on a strong research base to create a Turnover Risk index that will help identify individuals who are likely to leave the organization early in their tenure (e.g., in the first 90 days on the job). By not hiring high Turnover Risk individuals,

organizations can significantly improve their overall retention rates. Our experience has shown that simply following a strategy like this can help reduce early tenure turnover anywhere from 10% to 50% (O'Connell & Kung, 2007; Doverspike, Kung, O'Connell, & Durham, 2006; Lawrence, Doverspike, & O'Connell, 2004).

Potential Factors

In addition to Risk Factors, Service*Fit®* includes two additional factors that indicate a candidates' potential in service and/or sales-related jobs. These two indexes are called Service Potential and Sales Potential. These Potential factors work in a similar fashion to the Risk Factors, in that they are designed to screen out candidates who would not do well in a service or sales-related job. They are assessed using self-report, personality-based questions, as well as responses to situational judgment items that are designed to assess how individuals would behave in customer service and sales related situations. Service*Fit®* provides a separate rating for Service Potential and Sales Potential. In this way, it can be useful for jobs that require a high level of customer service skills and for jobs that require customer service skills *and* influencing skills.

Service Potential

Recent research has focused on employee service performance as one of the key factors that contributes to desirable customer outcomes. Studies have shown that high service quality is related to more favorable customer evaluations, higher customer satisfaction, and higher likelihood of future purchases and patronage (e.g., Borucki & Burke, 1999; Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989). Customer retention is important for service organizations, as acquiring a new customer can cost up to eight times more than retaining a current customer. Moreover, existing customers can serve as a potential source for new customers (Schnieder et al., 1998). High quality employee customer service is related to higher customer satisfaction and increased customer loyalty. One of the key solutions for improving service quality has focused on selecting the right individuals.

Service orientation is a key factor for selecting in employees who behave in a courteous, considerate, and tactful manner, are sensitive to and able to recognize others' needs, and are able to communicate accurately and pleasantly. Service orientation has been shown to be a reliable predictor of service-related job performance criteria (Hogan, 1984; O'Connell, Quist, Kung, & Reeder, 2009). Moreover, research has shown that individuals

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low in service orientation are more likely to be socially inept and engage in rude and tactless behaviors. Identification of individuals with these characteristics is valuable, as hiring ill-mannered individuals for service-related jobs can be very detrimental to the organization.

Moreover, some individuals may have better customer service knowledge, or knowledge of how to effectively interact with customers/clients. Using situational judgment questions, in which candidates are asked how they would respond in various service-related situations, Service*Fit®* is able to identify individuals who may lack this important type of knowledge. For example, a candidate thinks it is acceptable to get angry with disgruntled customers would not be a desirable job candidate in the service industry.

In addition to service orientation and customer service knowledge, there are other attributes that make certain employees more likely to engage in positive service-oriented behaviors. Two traits, conscientiousness and stress tolerance, are incorporated into determining Service Potential. **Conscientious** individuals are dependable, responsible, organized, hardworking and achievement-oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1991). These characteristics tend to make these individuals more likely to do what is expected of them in work settings. Studies have linked conscientiousness to service-related criteria across multiple studies (Frei & McDaniel, 1998; O'Connell, et. al., 2009). Further, there is evidence that **Stress Tolerance** is related to job performance in jobs that involve considerable interpersonal interaction, particularly jobs that involve helping and taking care of others (Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998).

Research has shown that use of a customer service assessment that measures the various traits discussed here, such as service orientation and conscientiousness, has been successful in reducing turnover and absenteeism and improving performance and productivity for entry-level customer service and sales positions (O'Connell & Sanchez-Ku, 2005)

Sales Potential

Some types of service jobs include a sales component, in that employees are expected to not only provide good customer service, but to also provide information about and perhaps influence customers to purchase additional products/services (e.g., upselling). In this way, it may be desirable for candidates to possess some level of influencing skills, or the ability to persuade others. Obviously, this does not apply to all jobs, but for some, it

is a very important part of work responsibilities. For these types of jobs, the **Sales Potential** factor is particularly useful. While some people are especially good at influencing, other people simply are not equipped for that type of interface, either due to personality differences or lack of general skills for such interactions. Service*Fit®* uses situational judgment items to assess how candidates would behave in situations that would require them to use their "power of persuasion." For jobs that require influencing, individuals who dislike or are ineffective in these situations would not be recommended as ideal candidates.

Another key trait involved in assessing Sales Potential is **Achievement Orientation**, or the extent to which an individual is driven to succeed. It is usually associated with competitiveness and goal achievement, as well as the fear of failing. Research has shown that achievement orientation is related to better sales performance. This factor was a key predictor of sales performance in four different studies (O'Connell, Lawrence, Reeder, 2008). Individuals with high achievement orientation enjoy competition, challenges and the opportunity to stand out and gain rewards for personal accomplishments. Characteristics such as these allow individuals to succeed in jobs that require selling and influencing others.

All these interconnected aspects were taken into consideration when creating two separate **Potential Factors** that can be used in conjunction with a specific work context and job requirements. For example, if the job of interest does not require employees to influence others, an individual who scores high in Service Potential but low in Sales Potential would still be a viable candidate for that job. In this way, Service*Fit®* is able to identify individuals who would likely be unsuccessful in jobs that require high levels of customer service skills and jobs that require the combination of customer service and influencing skills.

Work Environment Factors

Service*Fit®* also includes 21 customizable job characteristics referred to as 'work environment factors'. These are essentially characteristics that may be required for the job in question, for instance, 'work weekends and holidays' or 'consistently interact with customers'. Candidates are asked whether they are willing to work in a job that contains these requirements. They are not included in any of the risk factors and are not considered when making an overall recommendation regarding the candidate. However, they give decision makers valuable information about a candidate's willingness to meet the requirements of the job.

For instance, a 'recommended' candidate (in terms of risk factors) who was unwilling to spend the majority of workday on the phone would not be considered a viable candidate, if in fact, the job required individuals to spend most of their shift on the phone. The lack of candidate-job fit would be enough to exclude that candidate for consideration for the position.

Summary

By combining key risk factors, potential factors and work environment factors, Service*Fit®* provides a fair and accurate means of making better hiring decisions in a broad range of organizations. The assessment content of Service*Fit®* has been adapted and concentrated from longer, more in-depth assessments that have proven to be strong predictors of performance. The results are consistent, fair and powerful. Including Service*Fit®* as part of the selection process can significantly increase productivity, quality and performance of the entire workforce.

Legal Defensibility

As with all of its assessment systems, Select International developed Service*Fit®* to comply with professional standards as presented in the **Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing** (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), the **Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures** (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc., 2003), and the **Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures**, 1978.

In addition, Service*Fit®* was designed to evaluate, assess and serve as a fair predictor of relevant job performance for members of various demographic groups, including all individuals identified as members of 'protected groups,' as defined by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1978, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

Over the past 15 years, Select International has developed and implemented selection and assessment solutions for over 200 clients and conducts over 1 million assessments per year. In addition, Select has conducted over 100 empirical validation studies to evaluate the quality of its systems and remains active in applied, professional research. During this time period, Select has participated in a number of legal reviews by corporate attorneys, independent law firms, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the Office of Federal Contract Control Programs (OFCCP). Selection and assessment systems developed by Select International have consistently met the standards and scrutiny of these reviews.

No client of Select International has failed to successfully defend a selection or assessment system developed by Select International against claims of discrimination or unfair hiring practices.

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