

INDUSTRY:
Manufacturing & Customer Service

SOLUTION:
In-Depth vs. Screens

Applicant Reactions: Does Test Length Really Matter?

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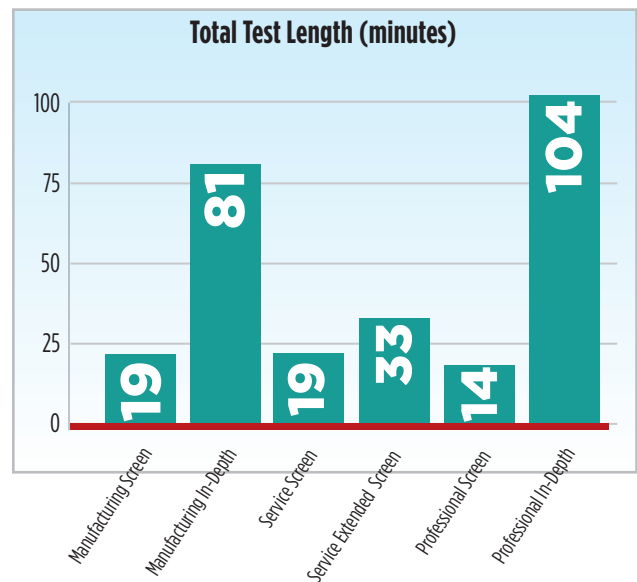
THE SITUATION

Applicants' reactions to selection procedures is a topic that many organizations monitor and value. Research has shown that when individuals have positive reactions to the assessments that are used to select employees into the position of interest they will be more likely to accept job offers, refer the organization to friends, purchase goods and service from the organization (even if not offered the job), and less likely to take legal action against the organization. Clearly the benefits mentioned here of positive applicant reactions have the potential to greatly impact organizations. As such, organizations have started to implement tools that they believe will be perceived positively by individuals applying to the position(s) of interest. One hypothesis that has been greatly discussed, but not examined extensively in the literature, is the notion that assessment length is related to applicant reactions. Specifically, it is believed that the longer an assessment is, the more likely it is to elicit negative reactions from applicants.

While this idea makes logical sense when thinking about potential burnout and fatigue, there are many factors that this hypothesis does not seem to capture. For example, longer assessments provide the applicant greater opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This likely translates into feelings of fairness, which would ultimately be a desirable reaction. Also, the ability to collect additional data using a longer assessment provides a more accurate portrayal of the applicant's potential which would ultimately lead to more accurate decision making and stronger validity of the test. Further, longer assessments are more likely to contain engaging and interactive components, such as, simulations or game-like features. These types of simulations tend to elicit positive reactions from candidates especially when they are also face valid and job related. Therefore, there may be reason to believe that longer assessments do not necessarily lead to negative reactions.

THE SOLUTION

To test whether or not test length negatively impacts applicant reactions, researchers from Select International conducted a study comparing applicant reactions across six assessments of varying lengths. Specific comparisons between short and long assessments within the same job family were also conducted. The assessments that were examined were a Manufacturing Screen, Manufacturing In-Depth, Service Screen, Extended Service Screen, Professional Screen, and Professional In-Depth. The typical time it takes to complete each assessment is provided in the table below:



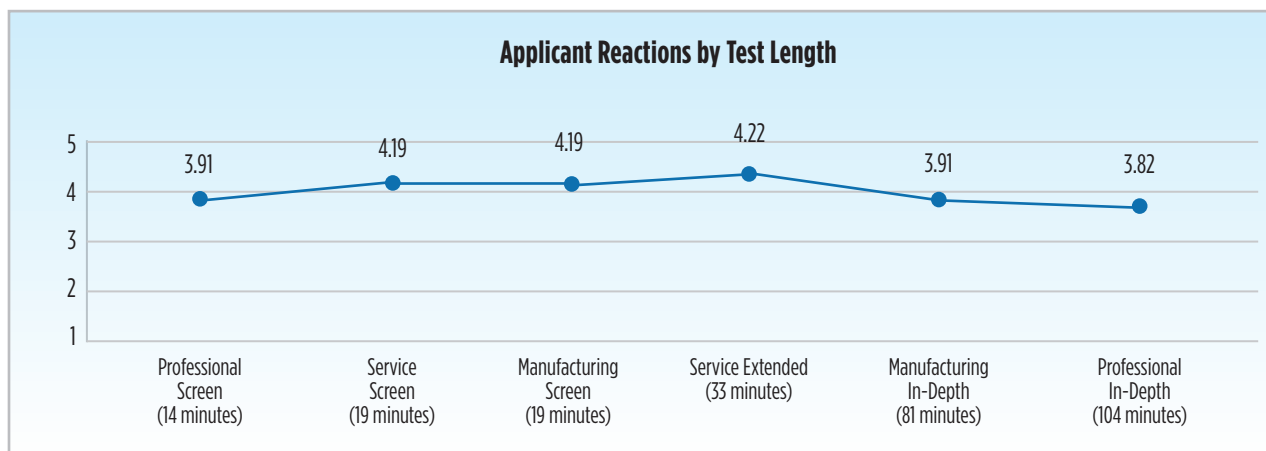
As you can see, the assessments that were included in the study ranged in length from 14 to 104 minutes. These tests have been administered to approximately 2,000 (Professional In-Depth) to 185,000 (Manufacturing Screen) job candidates across two job families and levels.

OUTCOMES

The figure below depicts the average applicant reaction score for each assessment in order of test length (i.e., shortest test is to the left and longest to the right). You can see that applicant reactions are relatively the same except they tend to take a dip for the Professional In-Depth assessment, which was the longest assessment coming in at around 100 minutes. Our results revealed a small statistical effect indicating that test length does not have a large practical impact on applicant reactions.

In fact, when exploring this finding deeper by conducting individual comparisons between assessments of different lengths within the same job family (i.e., Manufacturing Screen compared to the Manufacturing In-Depth and the Service Screen compared to the Service In-Depth) and level (i.e., Professional Screen compared to Professional In-Depth) results revealed that test length had no practical effect on reactions except when comparing the Manufacturing Screen with the Manufacturing In-Depth. In this case a medium effect was found. Therefore, only when comparing the shortest manufacturing assessment with the longest manufacturing assessment was an effect revealed.

However, the greatest differences are observed when asking individuals to respond to the item “I think I performed well on this assessment.” Individuals taking the Manufacturing In-Depth assessment rated this item lower than those taking the Manufacturing Screen, but this is likely because the longer assessment is, in fact, more difficult. It includes a greater focus on cognitive measurement that is more difficult to respond to than the primarily personality measures included in the screening tool. Compare these results with those to the item “People who do well on this assessment will probably do well on the job,” for which we found the means to be nearly identical between two tests. Therefore, while a medium effect was revealed when comparing these two tests it is primarily driven by the fact that the Manufacturing In-Depth assessment is more difficult and candidates are acknowledging that. However, candidates find the predictive potential of both assessments as equal, indicating that while they feel they may have performed more poorly on the longer assessment they still see the value in the tool, which of course is a positive finding.



CONCLUSION

Our results shed light for those practitioners who have been stuck between a rock and hard place when it comes to the applicant reaction by test length debate. Is the potential gain of a few positive candidate reactions worth the loss of validity by implementing a shorter assessment? Our results suggest that practitioners do not need to worry about longer assessments having a negative impact on applicant reactions at least until test length exceeds 100 minutes, at which point we do see a slight dip in reactions. Overall, this should ease the minds of practitioners who want to implement longer assessments for the increased validity and to obtain more data to gain a better overall picture of the applicant.