

S E L E C T W H I T E P A P E R

RECONSIDER SHORT ASSESSMENTS

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In today's labor market, companies are in fierce competition for high quality talent. Several economic shifts in local candidate pools are creating unique challenges for recruiters. Unemployment rates have dropped significantly over the past 12 months and generally speaking, turnover rates have increased. These challenges have led talent acquisition professionals to rethink hiring processes. Oftentimes, the logical solution is to consider dropping well-developed and validated in-depth assessment systems in favor of shorter screening assessments. This is appealing because (1) it makes rational sense that candidates would appreciate a shorter test experience and (2) a short assessment earlier in the hiring funnel may seem like it will reduce Time in Process – an important consideration when attempting to get talent onboard quickly.

However, do short assessments accomplish these goals? Just because an increase in applicant reactions and decrease in Time in Process seems logical, do the data support the idea that shorter assessments lead to these outcomes? Further, what sacrifices are made when you use a short assessment? While shortening the assessment might seem like a good way to solve some of the problems we face in the current labor market conditions, doing so may not provide the intended benefits and could potentially cause more headaches. Here are some reasons why you might regret shortening your assessment:

1. Reliability

Shorter assessments almost always include less item content. Fewer items means you are either (1) reducing the number of questions that are used to measure a specific competency (mile wide; but inch deep strategy) or (2) you are completely removing the measurement of a

specific competency (mile deep; but inch wide strategy; to be discussed in point #2). If you are measuring the same number of competencies, but doing so with fewer items; you have less information available to understand each person's precise 'level' on each of the important competencies. Think of an analogy about using a ruler. A typical ruler has measurements every 1/8" – as such, it is effective in measuring to that level of precision. If you remove items from a scale, it is like removing those 1/8" tick marks, but still trying to measure with that level of precision. Imagine a ruler that only has a measurement every one inch – how consistently could you measure the length of an object to a 1/8" level of precision? Fewer test items in a scale will still provide an indication of a person's level on a competency, but to get to the level of precision necessary to really understand someone's relative fit for the position, it usually takes a fair number of test items to make accurate decisions.

2. Competency Measurement

If you were convinced from point one that measuring the same number of competencies, but doing so with fewer items is a bad idea; your next strategy may be to measure only the most important competencies and save time by cutting out less important competencies from the assessment. The challenge with this approach is that you now know less about several of the factors that determine success on the job. Different people are poor performers or turnover for different reasons. If you build a narrow assessment, you will not know information about why someone may have challenges on the job. If you want to have success obtaining and retaining talent, it is important to measure as many of the competencies that determine success in your work environment as possible.

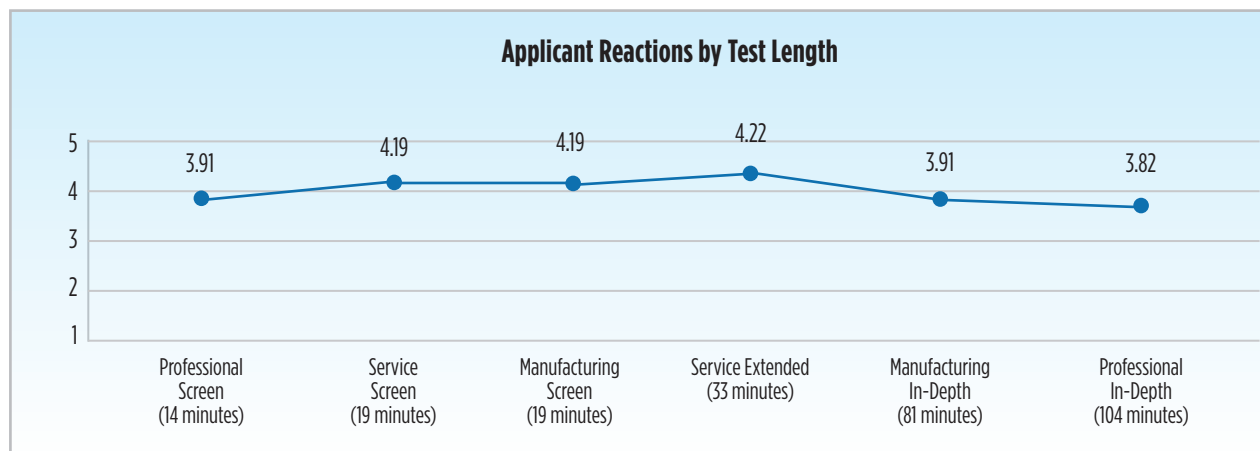
You may not set restrictive cut scores on every competency, but collecting that information may make the difference in your ability to understand who is most likely to succeed and stay in your organization.

3. Validity

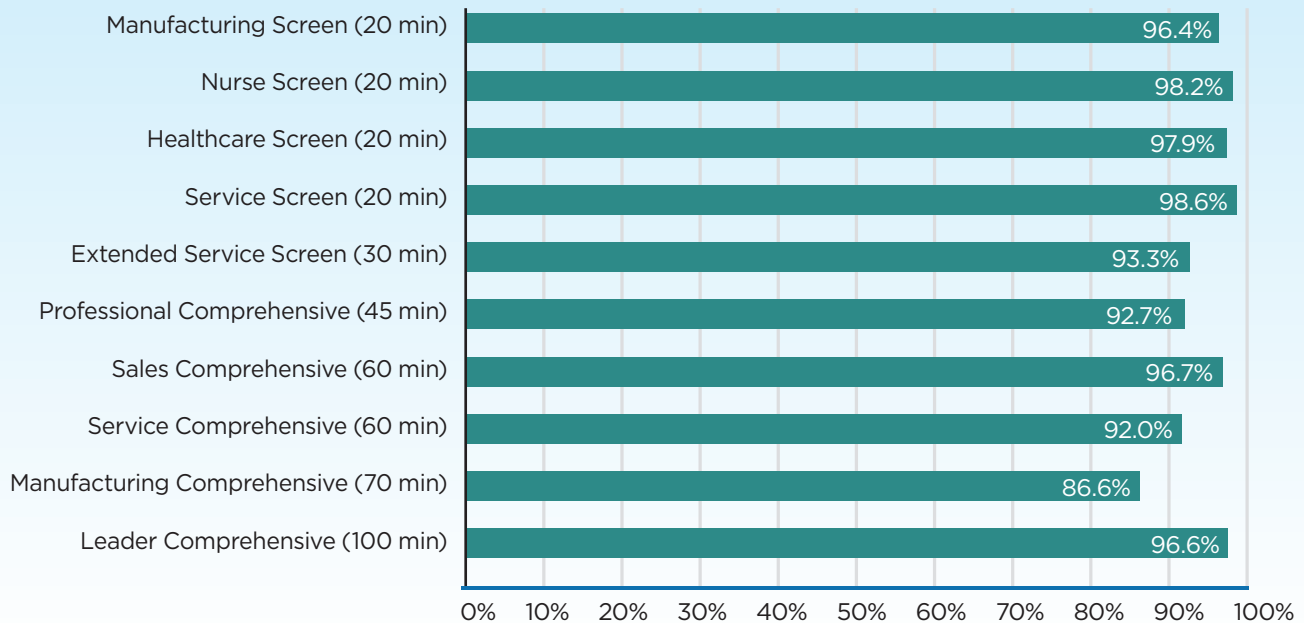
The validity (or predictive accuracy) of the decisions you make using your assessment is closely tied to the first two points. In order to make accurate decisions you need BOTH precise measurement and coverage of as much of the key attributes that lead to high performance and low turnover. When reliability is low and/or competency measurement is narrow, so is the ability of the assessment to guide you towards the best decisions about who will perform at the top level and stay on the job. So, while using a short assessment seems logical, it may exacerbate your challenges. You may be able to provide candidates with a shorter experience, but you are losing precision and coverage. This means that you are less able to pick the candidates who are most likely to perform at a high level without leaving. Ask yourself - is that an acceptable tradeoff?

4. Applicant Reactions

As HR professionals and recruiters continue to consider short assessments, they often make an implicit assumption that short assessments are preferred by job candidates. Is this really the case? There is reason to believe that the opposite could be true. Research on applicant reactions over the past 25 years has consistently shown that candidates like processes where they are given an opportunity to “show their stuff.” Candidates react well to selection systems they feel have collected enough information to show who they really are. Our research suggests that because of this, candidates really do not prefer short assessments over assessments that collect enough information to allow the organization to make an INFORMED decision. In a recent study, Select International investigated candidate reactions to various length assessments. Candidates preferred 30-40 minute assessments MORE than they prefer 15 minute assessments. Candidate preferences did start to drop after an hour and a half, but the reactions were still quite high and not much different than the reactions to 15 minute assessments.



Completion Rates by Assessment Type




5. Completion Rates

Conventional wisdom held by those considering short assessments is that candidates will drop out of the selection process if asked to complete a long assessment. The thinking in these times of low unemployment rates is that candidates have options and so they will not invest or engage in a process that takes more time to complete. As such, if an in-depth assessment is used, candidates will not complete the assessments and, instead, will apply for positions that are “easier” to get. This assertion assumes that candidates are only concerned with “getting any job,” but in reality candidates oftentimes want to make an informed decision about you AND want you to make an informed decision about them. When there are alternatives available, candidates care more about getting a job that is a good fit. They actually do typically prefer to make sure everyone involved in the hiring process has accurate information so that the best decision is made. This idea is supported when we look at our completion rates across tests of varying lengths. Simply put, when candidates start a Select International assessment, an overwhelming majority of them

complete it – regardless of length. This evidence supports the idea that longer assessments are every bit as engaging as short assessments. In the end, candidates just want the best fitting job available and they are more than willing to complete longer assessments if it helps everyone make the best decision about their future.

6. Job Fit/Retention

When applicants are sparse, the idea of keeping them all in the hiring process sounds like a great idea. However, in all hiring processes, there is attrition and some of this attrition is good. When candidates are asked to commit to the next phase of a hiring process and they don't complete it, it's very possible that candidate wasn't the right fit for the job in the first place. Hiring talent is a bi-directional decision process. Organizations are collecting information about candidates; but also, candidates are collecting information about organizations. Everyone involved in this process is attempting to make a decision about fit. Just like in a multiple hurdle selection process, organizations cut candidates after stages in the hiring process;



sometimes candidates ‘cut’ organizations during the hiring process. It is intuitive to think that this is bad, but consider this for a moment. You are providing information about your organization throughout the hiring process. If a candidate realizes that she or he is not a fit for the organization and decides not to continue, isn’t this a positive outcome? In the end, the candidate, who perhaps knows her/himself better than the recruiter, has determined the she or he is not a good fit. This is a valid selection decision and a process success – not a problem. Making it “easier” and less comprehensive allows candidates who may have realized they are not right for the position to stay in the process and could be hired only to turnover soon thereafter.

If you are thinking about dropping an in-depth assessment in favor of a short screening assessment, consider the following analogy: Think of the flow of personnel through your talent systems as the flow of water through a kitchen sink. The faucet is your selection system – you control the rate of flow into the sink basin with the faucet, as you control the flow of talent into your organization with your hiring process. The drain in your sink represents turnover. To keep the water level where you need it to be in the basin, your faucet needs to react in step with the amount of water leaving the system. When the unemployment rate is high, it is as if the drain narrows and less water escapes the basin, as such, your faucet needs to slow down the flow of talent into the system. When unemployment rate is low, the drain widens causing organizations to have to open the faucet and allow a greater flow of candidates into the system.

Many people think the best way to increase the flow of candidates is to remove or replace stages of the hiring process. Think about what happens in this case: If you remove or replace parts of your hiring process, you are not learning as much about the characteristics of the candidates that are flowing into your system. This means you are making less informed decisions that can continue to widen your drain. You may not be letting the right people into

your organization which makes the flow out even faster. Before long, your faucet will be on ‘full blast,’ but your drain has widened to the point that you cannot keep up with the flow out of the basin and the water level drops.

In these challenging recruiting times, we need to try to increase the flow into the system, while simultaneously working to narrow the drain to keep the water level where we want it. Oftentimes the best way to do this is not to replace an in-depth assessment with a short assessment, rather, it is to adjust the way you make decisions with the in-depth assessment AND simultaneously, learn more about reasons for employee turnover and work to retain current employees. Keeping the in-depth assessment allows you to continue to learn detailed information about each candidate and that information can be used to help with onboarding, development, and retention.

In sum, remember these points when looking for ways to adjust your hiring process:

- Short assessments are typically not as psychometrically sound as longer assessments.
- Short assessments are likely to reduce the amount of information you have to make informed decisions.
- Short assessments could inhibit your ability to find the best talent within your candidate pool.
- Candidates do not react negatively to assessments, regardless of test length.
- Once they start, candidates are highly likely to complete assessments, regardless of test length.
- Not all candidate attrition is bad; many times it indicates poor job fit.
- Don’t forget to focus on employee retention, too. Keeping good employees is just as important as finding high quality new hires.