

DCIF Project – Evaluation Tool 3: Evaluating Candidates Throughout the Hiring Process

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Tags

Who is this tool for?

High Priority:

- Hiring Managers
- Hiring Committee Members

Practical Information:

- Direct Line Managers

Useful to Know:

- **DEI** and HR Professionals

What guidance does this tool provide?

- How to use equitable approaches to evaluating resumes, interview performances, and other assessments

Take home points

- When evaluating candidates, be creative in your evaluation methods by focusing on attributes related to the job and bona fide occupational requirements (the must-haves)
- When approaching evaluation methods, ground the process in equity and, as much as possible, ensure candidates are asked the same the set of questions and evaluated based upon on the same criteria
- Understand that while consistency in the evaluation process is important to mitigate biases, to truly be equitable, you must modify the hiring and evaluation process if an applicant requests an accommodation
- Inquiring about past work history and lack of work experience can be uncomfortable, both for the employer and employee. Have an open conversation with a neutral tone to help engage in meaningful dialogue about candidates' personal and professional development

Evaluating Applicants' Resumes

Investigating Hard and Soft Skills

According to LinkedIn, employers are increasingly relying on personality tests and soft skills to make hiring decisions¹. This can unfairly bar people with disabilities from accessing employment opportunities.

- For example, consider a highly qualified Insurance Specialist who is denied a position because the interviewer felt they didn't make enough eye contact during a recorded video interview. Or consider a person with a history of depression applying for a Bank Teller job, who was not hired because of how they answered a question about "energy level" during the day.

At times, hiring committees and evaluation processes may inadvertently screen out candidates with disabilities based on attributes that are not related to fundamental job requirements.

Pop Up: In fact, job candidates with disabilities are more likely to make a positive first impression on prospective employers when they promote technical skills, like data analysis, rather than soft skills, such as their ability to lead others.²

Because of this, businesses may forego selecting candidates who have both the skills and the potential to excel on the job.³

Our recommendation?

Do not emphasize soft skills unless they are absolutely necessary to perform the essential duties of a job.⁴ Challenge yourself to move away from typical expectations – things like 'everyone makes eye contact,' or 'everyone wants to greet you with a hard handshake.'

- For example, a Financial Advisor may require strong interpersonal and communication skills when providing financial products or services to customers, whereas a Financial Analyst or Trader may require skills in statistics or mathematics.

At the same time, remember that evaluating hard skills through structured assessments can also pose barriers to applicants with disabilities. Using standardized testing alone may not be an optimal tool to assess diversity in skill or thought, or whether a person is the best candidate for the job.⁵

To ground your decision in equity, always bring yourself back to the bona fide occupational requirements (the must-haves) of the job.

Examining an Applicant's Past Work History

Some employers may believe that limited work experience or extended periods of time away from work are a reason not to hire a candidate with a disability.

Time away from work can happen for a variety of reasons, and many of them enhance the candidate rather than make them less employable. Candidates could have sought support for episodic disabilities, had a disability flare up which they treated, or simply needed to decompress after experiencing burnout or emotional distress. All of these things ensure a candidate is ready and committed to work when they return.

As inquiring about past work history can sometimes be difficult, consider the following tips:⁵

- Ask about time away from work openly. Many candidates will express that COVID-19 changed the course of their life and they are adjusting and adapting
- Frame your questions in a neutral tone so candidates do not feel like time away from work is viewed as negative
- Ask about personal or professional development, as well as any other accomplishments they may have been engaged in the past

Above all, remember that limited work experience often reflects how the candidate was unable to find an inclusive and accommodating workplace. Limited work experience should not be indicative of their performance or commitment to work.

Equitable Approaches to Evaluating Interview Performance

To find the best candidate for the job, a hiring committee should focus on an evaluation process that is grounded in equity. This means that as much as possible:^{4,6}

1. The same set of questions are posed to all candidates
2. The same set of evaluation criteria are used with all candidates
3. The same process for deliberation takes place for all candidates

While consistency in the evaluation process is important to mitigate biases, to truly be equitable, you must modify the hiring and evaluation process if an applicant requests an accommodation.

- For example, some questions might be phrased with language that is not accessible to candidates with developmental disabilities. Abstract questions can be a barrier to many applicants⁷. Be prepared to rephrase questions to be more direct and as much as possible, use plain language. Better yet, build in and account for accommodations that either might be asked for, or have been asked for in the past, to ensure the process is inclusive.

Using Assessment Tools and Resources

Depending on your industry and organization, more structured tools for assessment may be appropriate. For example, a candidate evaluation rubric can be used to ensure that each candidate is assessed fairly. When designing an evaluation rubric, keep these three points in mind:^{8,9}

- The evaluation rubric should be mapped onto the **bona fide occupational requirements** (the must-haves) for the position
- The weighting of specific competencies should be collectively decided upon by the hiring committee before any assessments occur
- The completion of evaluation rubrics should be used to document non-discriminatory reasons for hiring or not hiring each candidate

In addition to utilizing evaluation rubrics, it is highly recommended that hiring committees standardize the practice of taking detailed notes during the recruitment and interviewing process.¹⁰ If you adopt this practice, be transparent with candidates about why you are taking notes. They ensure that decisions do not hinge upon the committee's memories of the assessment and allow for a fairer assessment of candidates during the deliberation period.

References

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