Personality Tests

HR Insights

Personality tests are questionnaires designed to reveal aspects of an individual's character. As many as 60 percent of workers are asked to complete personality tests as part of the hiring process.

While many companies use personality tests for career development, 22 percent of employers use them to assess candidates' personality traits (for example, persuasiveness, detail orientation and conscientiousness) during the hiring process. There are thousands of personality tests available, but the quality of these tests varies along with the potential legal risks associated with them.

Benefits of Personality Tests

The following are the benefits of using personality tests in the workplace:

- **Better placement**. Personality tests can help identify individuals who may excel at certain jobs. For example, those who score high in empathy may do well at jobs in customer service.
- **Strengthen the interview**. When coupled with a good interview, personality tests can help you gain more insight into candidates' abilities.

Drawbacks of Personality Tests

There are many disadvantages, though, of personality tests in the workplace.

- **It may screen out qualified candidates**. For many jobs, there isn't a mainstream personality that fits the job type. Personality tests may also exclude talented candidates who think outside the box.
- **It may cause flawed results**. Candidates may respond based on what they **think** the employer wants rather than on their true personalities; therefore, results aren't always accurate.
- **The purpose of the test may not fit into your hiring process.** Many of today's most popular personality tests were not designed to be used in the hiring process. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was created for career development and training, not for hiring. Therefore, using it in the hiring process can lead to skewed results.
- **There may be legal risks**. Personality tests can result in claims of discrimination. Some individuals have successfully sued employers on the grounds that their personality tests discriminated against individuals with mental illnesses and violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For example, questions such as, "Over the course of the day, do you experience many mood changes?" could discriminate against individuals with bipolar disorder or depression. Including questions like this on your company's personality test could open the door for future lawsuits.

What Employers Can Do

In order to mitigate your legal risk, consider taking the steps below:

- Measure your test's validity. Make sure your personality test is a valid predictor of job performance and has a high reliability, meaning that it will produce the same results if the same person takes it twice. Tests should measure traits that will remain stable over time.
- Conduct an internal analysis of your personality test with the help of legal counsel to determine any risks.
- Review current and previous Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) lawsuits regarding personality tests and remove any questions that have been viewed as discriminatory.
- Make sure personality tests are just a component of the hiring process. Do not allow results from personality tests alone to exclude a candidate.

For more information on recruitment and hiring strategies, contact Tilson HR today.

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