

# Resumés, interviews and the role of employment testing

By SIMON LIVINGSTONE

**C**HOOSING the 'right' person for the job is a big responsibility. It can be time consuming and expensive and there are few guarantees the person selected will be the all-round, capable, dedicated, long-term employee the employer hoped for.

So, what is the key to choosing the most appropriate person for the job the first time?

There are several sources of information which provide a complete picture of an applicant's prospects of being a success.

Often employers use the techniques of examining resumes and references, contacting referees and conducting interviews as guides for making the employment decision. But some studies of selection techniques have found these approaches on their own are not always reliable.

There are many examples of employees interviewing very well and being offered jobs, but when they actually commence employment the manager finds the new staff member either cannot perform many of the desired tasks, or cannot perform them to the desired standard.

**PROBLEMS WITH REFERENCES:** References are used widely by employees seeking work in Australia. One problem employers face when using references as a guide or measure is that all references state good traits or behaviours about the employee. If any unfavourable comments were to be present in a reference, the applicant would be unlikely to include it in the application. What is not said in references can be important information for the new employer to know.

From a future employer's perspective, important and possibly relevant information is often not included in the reference. References are very much an indication of people's opinions and thus quite often biased. With the develop-



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ment of computer packages and photocopiers, it is now quite easy for prospective applicants to tamper with references and possibly fabricate their own. Employers need to be cautious if they have not sighted the original reference.

**PROBLEMS WITH RESUMES AND CVs:** Resumes are used by applicants similarly to references: as a tool to entice the employer into offering them the position. For this reason, the information provided may not always be completely accurate. If the employer makes an employment decision based solely on the information provided by the applicant in a resume, then disappointment in the final outcome is possible. What resumes do not show is whether the applicant will be able to complete the tasks required.

Employers should always pry for further clarification of claims made by the applicant such as dates and lengths of employment and whether the job title and skills specified are correct and

accurate. It is interesting to read resumes that state an employee was employed for two years, when closer examination reveals it was really only two seasons. Quite a difference.

**USE OF REFEREES:** The use of referees is a better and more reliable way of finding out a prospective employee's true work potential. By using this method an employer is able to contact nominated previous employers of the applicant and ask questions which can result in an in-depth discussion. This check is useful to confirm details which the applicant has stated on his or her resume.

Details such as previous employment dates, job title, duties performed, experience and skill, and possibly reasons why the person left that job, can all give the new employer a better and more accurate picture of the applicant. Although a better employment check than just using references, this process can still be quite subjective. After all, different managers may have different

opinions on the performance of an applicant in different jobs.

**THE INTERVIEW:** The interview is a device used to decide the suitability of potential candidates applying for jobs. But interviewing in many cases tends to be a rather artificial process. This procedure may seem free of problems and complications, but this is not always the case. Those involved in the selection process often only meet once at the time of the interview for only a short period.

During this period, the interviewers are expected to be totally objective and not have any biases. But employers involved in conducting interviews may fall into the trap of not really knowing why they prefer a particular candidate. Maybe they are influenced by the firm handshake of the applicant or their appearance at the interview.

In some cases irrelevant information may get top priority or have major influence, while important information may actually be ignored. In another situation, it may be just one aspect of the interview, or one piece of information, that dominates the decision to employ the person. In other situations, the interviewers may not have a complete description of the job to be performed, nor a profile of the person they seek. In spite of possible shortfalls, it is likely the interview will remain an important part of the selection process.

**EMPLOYMENT TESTING:** Employment testing can be an effective way to sample an applicant's skills and abilities and provide some indication as to how successful, or otherwise, the applicant would be in performing the employment functions. Unlike many interviews, employment tests are less likely to be subjectively evaluated as the outcome is the completion of a specific task. The test is not constructed for the interviewers to assess characteristics such as appearance, mannerisms and dress. A well-devised employment test can be an important component in a successful selection program.

The use of employment tests can be another aid for the manager to help assist in decision making. Clearly, a test should be used to supplement, rather than replace, an interview. A suitable test can be designed around the specific

employment position on offer. For a position such as overseer or assistant manager on a farm where computing will form a significant portion of the successful applicant's job function, the selection process may include a test which assesses the applicant's familiarity with computers. The test or tests which employers use should constitute an accurate measure of the individual's computer skills.

The test that needs to be developed must be valid. A suitable employment test for a station hand whose job description and duties require that he or she be competent in welding may involve a welding test. For an applicant for the job of mechanic, the test should provide an accurate measure of the individual's mechanical skills and abilities.

If an employer decides to use some form of employment testing as part of a selection strategy, the short-listed applicants need to be informed prior to interview about the test they will be required to complete and what will be involved with the process.

**RISKS:** The conventional recruitment and

selection process carries few risks as far as any possible claims of discrimination are concerned. An employer just needs to carefully think through the types of questions he or she may ask.

But, there are some risks involved with using employment testing as a selection tool. For example, there could be a problem if an employer requests, as part of a test, that a potential employee demonstrates he or she can shoe a horse and during the test the person is injured. A similar situation could arise if a manager sets up an employment test which involves the operation of a piece of machinery and, as part of that demonstration, the employment applicant is injured. That is when the potential employer is at risk.

Employee testing can be used successfully by managers as another selection tool, but the process must be carefully thought through. When incorporated with the usual selection processes of resume and interview, the employment test can help a manager recruit the most suitable person to complement a business.

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Ground Floor, 50 Leichhardt St, Spring Hill 4000 • Email: [itbris@clements.com.au](mailto:itbris@clements.com.au) • Pte: (07) 3831 7966 • Fax: (07) 3831 7044

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