

Using measurement to predict performance

Traditional tests tombstones, not guideposts

When discussing an individual's job performance, have you or your colleagues ever observed, "With his qualifications and experience, he should have been able to . . ."? Or, "Her tests showed that she was more than qualified for the position, I can't understand why she's having these difficulties."? Or, even more perplexing, "How can we explain that some of our least experienced people are among the top performers?"

Too often, testing and other assessment criteria fail to predict job performance. How, then, do we utilize measurement to find the right people, with the right skills and capabilities, and identify the best way to help them increase their personal effectiveness and business results?

The goal of testing should be the enabling of all the people who work with us to achieve their best possible performance based on their attributes, capabilities, role and accountabilities.

Essence of measurement

Why do tests and forms of assessment (measurement) fail to predict future performance?

The essence of measurement is not to identify where the individual is; it's to determine what is required to move the individual to where they are capable of going.

To determine how successful their selection or training is, firms are more often than not seeking new ways of testing or measuring individual performance and knowledge. This form of forensic testing is excellent for academic institutions, accreditation, and for balance sheets but offers little real information on where each individual's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth are found.

In short, traditional tests and performance measurements are little more than eulogies, written as tombstones that are laid to rest in archives of employment files around the world.

Existing testing identifies where the

TRAINING



**NORMAN L.
TRAINOR**

individual is.

However, what testing needs to determine is whether the individual is right for the job, (capabilities and attributes) and has or can acquire the competencies to perform at their best. What the assessments need to provide are the guideposts and milestones that the individual uses to ensure that they achieve that potential.

In past articles I've referred to some of the work my colleague Geoff Davidson of sales.org Inc. has been doing in improving learning effectiveness with his clients. In recent years Davidson has earned a reputation as a leading practitioner of business applications for adult learning and decision making principles. His teams have established an enviable track record of increasing the learning and performance results for both individual contributors and their organizations.

New, innovative standard

Over the past few months I have enjoyed the opportunity of working together with Geoff as this experience, expertise, and energy has been directed at building a new and innovative standard of assessments, created specifically for measuring, managing and directing the development of professional skills & capabilities.

Davidson explains the company's interest and enthusiasm in developing

these assessments as the result of his experience over the past 25 years.

"I have become increasingly excited by the commitment to personal growth I find in almost every individual contributor. Together these individuals make up small and large organizations, and are the very people we are depending on to lead those firms into the next millennium. As individuals, they need our help in determining which paths to take. Unfortunately, that same experience that excites me frequently reminds me that organizations often do a disservice to those committed contributors by failing to deliver the help and support needed for developing and improving the capabilities of either the individual or the organization."

The foundation of these assessments began with measuring core communication and negotiating skills and capabilities. The most current version of these original tests can be found on the sales.org Inc. Web site at <http://www.sales.org>. These include the current "Best Salesperson on the Web Contest" based on the company's "Professional Sales Skills & Capabilities Assessments" for measuring competencies in the recruiting and selection of effective salespeople.

"Extending the basic listening, questioning, and soft skills assessments into measurement of more technical competencies was not originally planned. This became possible when Stoney Kudel and Teri Paoli of CIBC first approached me, to consider the development of a new form of integrated assessment of complex financial adviser skills," Davidson says.

"I was impressed by the values that both share with the Bank, and their strong commitment to selecting, developing, and supporting the best and most professional team of financial advisers in the industry. Nonetheless, I had no illusions that this would be an easy task. We weren't being asked to test simple skills

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

or competencies, we were being asked to evaluate individual's on their capabilities to deal with varying degrees of complexity across several skills and competencies."

Davidson continues, "In other words, the assessments aren't focused on determining whether the individual 'knows their stuff', but instead measure whether the person knows when, where and how to use it. And, while that may have been enough of a difference in measurement for most people, Stoney and Teri wanted to ensure that the tool was used to build and improve the quality of their financial advisers - providing a specific action plan that the individual and their manager would follow to improve job capabilities and performance."

CIBC assessments

The first of these, the "Financial Adviser Skills & Capabilities Assessments" was introduced at CIBC in 1997. Kudel explains the value of this implementation: "We all understood the reasons for evaluating the attributes and capabilities of our employees to help them gain self-awareness and empower them towards their own personal development. Traditionally these evaluations are completed to identify where the employee is in their development, and not with the thought of establishing a process of action and development plans for the employee or their coach to impact professional development and business growth.

These test results become tombstones, marking the point in the individual's career that the evaluation was given. In order to ensure that our results could

help to empower the employee towards action and development, we worked with sales.org Inc. to establish the Skills & Capabilities Assessments as guideposts — marking the achievements and milestones on a journey of self discovery, learning and growth," Kudel says.

"We have also worked closely with other teams in CIBC to ensure that the information we collect is being integrated into the design and delivery of new learning programs wherever opportunities have been identified. These assessments are much more than a snapshot in time, they are becoming roadmaps showing where we are, where we are going to, and the shortest path to get there."

Davidson often introduces the Assessments with the obvious statement that, "You cannot manage what you do not measure". He generally closes with the less apparent observation, "Once you can measure it, it becomes incumbent upon you to establish the systems and structures to manage it well."

The work of sales.org Inc. with professionals like Kudel and Paoli, help to offer hope to organizations and individuals who have found that the testing and accreditation programs currently in use have not helped to focus, select, and deliver measurable improvements in either training or performance. Their efforts help to demonstrate that the next generation of testing can and must be much more

Testing needs to identify where the individual is now and it must provide a learning and growth plan that maps the direction for both the organization and the individual.

With new approaches like the Skills & Capabilities Assessments, managers and employees can find the tools needed to ensure that the best decisions are being made in selecting and completing the learning and development to achieve continuous improvement and sustainable competitive advantages.

As a training consultant I have often faced the challenge of determining what the learning needs for organizations are. Other times I have the dilemma that the training program I'm being asked to provide can only address obvious symptoms, not the underlying gaps that exist in basic core skills, behaviours, processes and techniques.

These new measurements and action plans takes much of the mystery out of developing the right training, and provide an ongoing evaluation process that will help to measure, benchmark, and manage training effectiveness.

Norman L. Trainor is a principal in The Covenant Group, an educational company specializing in individual, team and organizational learning. He is also the author of The 8 Best Practices of High Performing Salespeople. For more information, contact Arlene McKinley at (416) 304-1766, or fax (416) 955-0418.

This article first appeared in the
November 16th, 1998

HR Reporter CANADIAN

Reprinted by permission
