

Make “intelligent” hires

Use assessment instruments as a tool – By Brian Duggan, CHRP



Adam Gregor / 123RF

Hiring and keeping the right people is critical for business success. It is well known that poor hiring and retention practices result in unnecessary costs, sub-par performance and frustrated leaders.

This brief article positions the use of ‘intelligences’ as one way to become more effective in engaging talent. This strategic HR practice aligns business goals, leadership style, focus on critical roles and a multi-faceted approach to assessing candidates.

The key message is that if hiring managers consistently ask questions designed to understand the person from

the perspective of ‘intelligences’ the result will be a more comprehensive assessment of the candidate. This approach minimizes the ‘gut feel’ and enhances the ‘consistent information’ related to the candidate.

What do we mean by ‘types of intelligence’?

The measurement of ‘intelligence’ has been developed over many years starting with the ‘Intelligence Quotient’ that many of us experienced in school. More recently there has been an emergence of approaches to measure ‘Emo-

tional Intelligence’ ‘Social Intelligence’ and ‘Executive Intelligence.’

We are familiar with the Intelligence Quotient, the mental capacity to master new information, reason, understand, solve problems and use language. It measures how ‘smart’ a person is from an intellectual perspective.

Emotional Intelligence is generally recognized as the capacity to understand and manage emotions, recognize the emotions of others, manage relationships and deal with emotional situations appropriately. For example, the measurement for Impulse Control can indicate the ability to manage emotions in adverse situations; Social Responsibility typically indicates an interest in the common good balanced with their own success.

Social Intelligence assesses self and social awareness. This includes the personal beliefs, hopes, desires and attitudes that influence a person’s behavior in social situations. It can indicate if a person is comfortable dealing with new or diverse social situations; if they can understand and respond to social cues.

Executive Intelligence is the critical thinking that guides a person’s decision-making and behavior in relation to working with people, accomplishing tasks and adapting behavior to meet changing situations. This refers to the ‘critical aptitudes’ that guide a person’s

Check your own ‘intelligences’

What assumptions are you making when reviewing applications? What is your emotional reaction to what you see in front of you? Is it more important to get the right person or any person?

Here are some general interview questions that can assess candidates for their intelligences:

Executive Intelligence

- Tell us about a complex decision-making situation that you were involved in. What was your role, your actions, who was involved, what were their concerns, what were the assumptions; what was the outcome of the decision?

Emotional Intelligence

- Tell us about what motivates you and about a time when you were fully engaged in your work.
- Tell us about a time when you received feedback that was critical of your performance. What did you do, what was the outcome?

- Can you tell us about a time when you were in disagreement with the direction of a project or team effort? What were you thinking and what did you do?

Social Intelligence

- Can you tell us about a recent work situation that was new to you; how did you understand the expectations, fit in, work with the others; discover what was important to understand? How did you gain this awareness?

Intelligence

- In your last role what were the key concepts that you had to master and how did you go about doing this?

behavior and asks: Does the person easily understand and integrate the opinions of others into decision-making? Is the person aware of the impact of false assumptions in making decisions?

Using ‘intelligences’ to hire and engage the best talent

The hiring process

Asking ‘intelligence’ questions starts with the initial contact from applicants: does the documentation present the respect, professionalism and approach that fits your business; do resumes come with cover letters; is the applicant expressing confidence about enhancing your business or is it ‘all about them’?

Corroborate the information gathered from resumes and interviews

Reference checks are a sometimes neglected but essential practice to verify the information that candidates provide in their resumes and interviews. When conducting reference checks it is recommended that you ask the reference questions similar to those asked of the candidate. For example, ask for examples of when the candidate received negative feedback (how did they respond), managed complex problems (did they apply knowledge, look at all facets of the issue, challenge assumptions), learn and integrate new information. Do the reference checks provide consistent information of the candidate’s behavior?

If the preferred candidate claims to be involved with a community group ask permission to verify this involvement. Many hiring managers, when possible, check their own contacts to verify the ‘story’ of the candidate. It is appropriate to check the candidate’s involvement in social media to assess if how they present themselves to you is consistent with their ‘online’ presentation.

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Hiring is just the first step

Hiring the new employee is just the first step. Engagement in the first three to six months is a major factor in long-term retention.

Providing formal and informal performance feedback is a key retention strategy. It is significant that most employers have a ‘probationary’ period before the new hire becomes permanent. Your understanding of the employee’s ‘intelligence’ can continue through this period.

Maintaining a consistent pattern of questioning and feedback is a way to further verify the information gathered in the hiring process. The key question is: during the first six months of employment does the employee demonstrate the behaviors, values and capacities that were expressed during the hiring process? As I get to know the new employee do I see evidence of the ‘intelligences’ I need?

Emotional Intelligence

- When receiving feedback does the employee take it ‘personally’ or accept it as valid and use it to improve?
- Does the employee accept the responsibility to change behavior?

Executive Intelligence

- Has the employee demonstrated an understanding of the value of other points of view?
- Does the employee demonstrate the ability to challenge personal assumptions and to see issues from multiple angles?

Social Intelligence

- Has the employee engaged with others on the team?
- How does the employee relate to people at different levels of the organization?
- Does the employee understand the important issues of your customers and adjust behavior accordingly?

Intelligence

- Does the candidate grasp and apply the concepts and processes of the new role?
- Does the candidate apply previous knowledge to current problems?

Finding, hiring and keeping talented employees is essential for business success. No one knows your business like you do! Using an approach that focuses on a broad view of the candidate from the perspective on ‘multiple-intelligences’ will lead to better hiring results and more business success.

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What about using assessment instruments?

Consultants and vendors promote instruments and methods that claim to assess candidates from any perspective imaginable! All of these instruments claim validity and reliability. Indeed, experience shows that candidates, when they are authentic in completing an instrument, do see the results as an accurate presentation of themselves.

The key to using 'intelligence' instruments in hiring is that the instruments are seen as one of many, rather than the tool to objectively measure the person's capacity. By their nature assessment tools give a snapshot of the person. This snap-shot needs to be validated by the candidate's view of themselves and the experience of others.

This being said, assessment instruments can indicate specific areas of further questioning. For example, the Emotional Intelligence instrument could indicate low 'Impulse Control'. This could mean, among other things, that the person under emotional distress 'flies off the handle' or 'eats too much'. These are vastly different responses to the same thing! Assessment instruments can be used to support the other lines of questioning and to engage the candidate in a conversation about their 'intelligences'.

Making a decision

To achieve consistency it is important to ask questions that probe for validation of the candidate's 'story' when checking references, speaking with the person who referred the candidate and the interview team. Use assessment instruments as a tool rather than the answer.

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