



Umbrella Summary

Job Knowledge Tests

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What are job knowledge tests?

In an employment context, job knowledge tests are hiring tools that assess candidates' knowledge of facts, principles, concepts, and other information that is important for performance of a job (Hunter, 1983). This knowledge falls into two general categories: (a) technical information and (b) the processes and judgmental criteria required to perform correctly and efficiently on the job (Hunter, 1983). Measures of job knowledge vary in the level of specificity of the content. Some measures are intended to test a candidate's knowledge of specific content for a specific job, whereas other measures are designed to assess broad categories of general knowledge that would be applicable to many jobs (Dye, Reck, & McDaniel, 1993). For example, commercially available tests of bookkeeping, accounting, or first aid knowledge might be appropriate for a number of different jobs in a variety of job settings. For child welfare positions, commercially available general knowledge tests that might be relevant include those that assess job candidates' typing skills, customer focus and orientation, or understanding of grammar, spelling rules, and proper sentence structure.

Why are job knowledge tests valuable?

Job knowledge has been shown to be highly correlated with job performance (Hunter, 1983). Not surprisingly then, tests of job knowledge have been demonstrated to be highly predictive of training success and slightly less predictive of subsequent job performance (Dye et al., 1993). The specificity of the test and the closeness of the connection between the test and the job in question make an important difference in the strength of these relationships (Dye et al., 1993). That is, when a job knowledge test is developed to assess specific knowledge needed for a specific job, and thus the content of the test closely matches the knowledge requirements of the job, the relationship between test scores and job performance (or training performance) have been shown to be higher than if the test assesses broad general knowledge (Dye et al., 1993). One implication of this finding is that a test that is developed specifically for the job in question will have greater value as a predictor than an "off-the-shelf" knowledge test. Finally, evidence suggests that the relationship between job knowledge tests and training success or job performance is greater for highly complex jobs than for less complex jobs (Dye et al., 1993). This is thought to be the case because of the increased knowledge and information synthesis demands inherent in more complex jobs (Dye et al., 1993).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Job knowledge tests are strong predictors of training success and job performance. Their use can lead to higher performance among new hires.
- ▶ Job-specific job knowledge tests are more effective than generalized job knowledge tests, particularly for complex jobs.
- ▶ Job knowledge tests are not intended to improve turnover, and there are no meta-analyses assessing that connection. Because they are associated with better performance, it is possible that job knowledge tests may reduce involuntary turnover caused by poor performance, but research is needed to test that question.
- ▶ A job knowledge test should be developed on the basis of a job analysis and should include standardized administration and scoring processes.
- ▶ Job knowledge tests should not target information that will be covered in training or learned on the job.
- ▶ For jobs that entail a significant training period, job knowledge tests are best suited for assessing basic prerequisites—fundamental knowledge or skills that will not be trained. For child welfare professionals, this may mean competencies like customer service knowledge, grammar, writing, or typing skills.
- ▶ As with all strategies used to make hiring decisions, job knowledge tests are subject to certain professional and legal guidelines. Due to the technical requirements involved in developing and validating a job knowledge test, it is recommended that agencies consult with an expert for assistance.

References

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Hunter, J. E. (1983). A causal analysis of cognitive ability, job knowledge, job performance, and supervisor ratings. In F. Landy, S. Zedeck, & J. Cleveland (Eds.), *Performance measurement and theory* (pp. 257–266). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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