



Umbrella Summary

Situational Judgment Tests

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

What is a situational judgment test?

A situational judgment test (SJT) is a hiring tool that measures knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics by assessing test takers' responses to various job-related situations. They are typically administered in paper-and-pencil or video format, and each item presents a scenario and various potential responses or actions to take. Instructions tend to fall into one of two categories: knowledge or behavioral tendency. Knowledge instructions require judgments about the efficacy of different options, and they ask test takers to choose, for example, the best option, the best and worst option, or the most effective option. Behavioral tendency instructions require test takers to anticipate how they would behave in the presented situations by asking which option the person would most likely perform or which options they would most likely and least likely perform.

What do SJTs measure?

When they are designed to measure specific constructs, SJTs most often target leadership skills and interpersonal skills, with fewer targeting teamwork skills, personality (e.g., conscientiousness, adaptability, integrity), and job knowledge (Christian, Edwards, & Bradley, 2010). Although SJTs are not typically designed for the purpose of measuring cognitive ability, research shows that they are strongly correlated with cognitive ability scores, especially when knowledge instructions are used (McDaniel, 2007). SJT scores are also significantly correlated with the "Big Five" personality factors (agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and openness to experience), in some cases to a greater degree when behavioral tendency instructions are used (McDaniel, 2007). Thus, independent of what SJTs may be intended to measure, they are associated with cognitive ability and personality, and that relationship depends on the type of instructions provided.

Why are SJTs valuable?

SJTs are valuable because they are positively associated with subsequent job performance of candidates (McDaniel, Hartman, Whetzel, & Grubb, 2007). SJTs are maximally effective when they are developed on the basis of a job analysis (McDaniel et al., 2001) and when the construct targeted by the SJT is conceptually aligned with the type of performance assessed (e.g., using an SJT that focuses on leadership skills when predicting leadership or managerial performance)

(Christian et al., 2010). In addition, there is preliminary evidence that video-based SJTs are stronger predictors than paper-and-pencil SJTs (Christian et al., 2010).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ SJTs can be useful hiring tools that lead to higher performance among new hires.
- ▶ SJTs are not intended to improve turnover, and there are no meta-analyses assessing that connection. Because they lead to better performance, it is possible that SJTs may reduce involuntary turnover caused by poor performance, but research is needed to test that question.
- ▶ An SJT should be developed on the basis of a job analysis and, as with all hiring assessments, should not target knowledge, skills, or situations that will be covered in training or learned on the job.
- ▶ Due to the technical requirements involved in developing and validating an SJT, it is recommended that agencies consult with an expert for assistance.

References

Christian, M. S., Edwards, B. D., & Bradley, J. C. (2010). Situational judgment tests: constructs assessed and meta-analysis of their criterion-related validities. *Personnel Psychology, 63*, 83–117.

McDaniel, M. A., Hartman, N. S., Whetzel, D. L., & Grubb, W.L. (2007). Situational judgment tests, response instructions, and validity: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 60*, 63–91.

McDaniel, M. A., Morgeson, F. P., Finnegan, E. B., Campion, M. A., & Braverman, E. P. (2001). Use of situational judgment tests to predict job performance: A clarification of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(4), 730–740.

Author(s)

Megan Paul, PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Suggested Citation

Paul, M. (2020, February 26). *Umbrella summary: Situational judgment tests*. Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development. <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella/situational-judgment-tests>

For general information about Umbrella Summaries, visit <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella-summaries-faq>

For more information about the QIC-WD, visit qic-wd.org or contact: Michelle Graef, Project Director, at mgraef1@unl.edu.

This Summary was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, Grant #HHS-2016- ACF-ACYF-CT-1178. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Health and Human Services.