

# Fast way to find the right person

Psychometric tests can help recruiters pare down potential interview candidates from a pile of CVs, writes Frank Dillon

WHEN Julie-Anne Lawlor advertised two vacancies recently, she was flooded with applications. Lawlor, human resources manager at ECDL, a computer training firm, posted notices on the Recruit Ireland and Fas websites for one senior and one junior position in the finance department. She received 170 applications.

"In my 10 years as a recruiter, I've never seen such a high level of response," she said. "We originally advertised the positions in September last year and had a low response rate. So we didn't proceed at the time but, when we advertised again this July, we were inundated."

About 80% of the applicants had lost their jobs and most of the remainder indicated they felt insecure in their current positions, according to Lawlor.

"Some of the candidates were vastly experienced, including former heads of finance, and some people applied for both positions," she said.

Faced with a mammoth task, Lawlor and her colleagues screened the applicants with a template that included qualifications and experience. They favoured the candidates who had personalised their applications with good cover letters.

"We are a small organisation of 25 people so having the right personality fit was important to us," said Lawlor. "Applicants who told us something about themselves stood out. We shortlisted eight people for each role and were very happy with the results we got."

With vastly more jobseekers than positions available, recruiters are working harder these days, says Paul Mullan, founder of consultant Measurability.

"You might think that with reduced job activity in the market, human resources managers and recruiters would be idle," he said. "Ask any company currently recruiting and they will tell you the complete

opposite. Advertised jobs are creating headaches for HR departments because of the sheer volume of applications."

More candidates means it is more difficult to select the right person. So new approaches are needed. "Traditional selection techniques lack objectivity and quite often result in hiring the person with the best interview skills rather than the best ability and fit for the role," said Mullan.

Rather than sifting through applications and setting up numerous interviews, psychometric testing should be used in the initial phase of recruitment, he believes.

Such tests, which measure traits such as motivation, values, interpersonal skills and judgment, provide a much better picture of the candidates, he says.

"Research has indicated that a combination of structured interview and psychometric testing leads to enhanced recruitment decisions," he said. "Ability tests, personality questionnaires and online sifting tools have been increasing in popularity over the last decade in Ireland."

Debra Condren, founder of Manhattan Business Coaching and author of *Ambition Is Not a Dirty Word*, agrees. "Psychometric testing eliminates the guesswork about who this person is," she said.

"It's fast, reliable, valid, virtually eliminates subjective hiring bias and it's demonstrably cheaper than turnover costs associated with hiring the wrong person."

The beauty of psychometric testing is that it provides a rich picture of a personality, showing how this person would fit into the organisation. "It answers questions like, is this the kind of person who needs a lot of solo time, only occasionally coming together with a team to spark ideas off each other?" said Condren.

"Is this person more of an entrepreneurial maverick or more of a conservative, old-school type — or a blend of both — and



HR managers are being swamped with applicants, forcing them to work harder than ever to find the right people

does this person have good emotional control and a stable, balanced personality?"

Many companies make the mistake of hiring on the basis of educational qualifications. They assume candidates come with, or can be indoctrinated with, the appropriate traits, she says. "It is more cost effective to hire people with solid personality traits and then train them in the knowledge and skills needed to do specific jobs," she said.

Psychometric testing is just one tool in the armoury of overstretched recruiters. Joe Ungemah of talent assessment firm SHL says methods such as job simulation are now being used.

"Applicants are invited to view a website or attend an assessment day where they experience tasks similar to what they would encounter if they were placed in the job," he said.

"By assessing what a candidate would actually do on the job, organisations can screen candidates for behaviours that are aligned to the way they work."

Candidates also benefit from having a chance to find out what they would be required to do. They often opt out of the application, especially if the role requires a great deal of repetition, according to Ungemah.