

The Importance of Weighting Selection Criteria



Steve Walton MAPS
Organisational Psychologist
Fenchurch

When used correctly, numerical scales are an effective way to rate a candidate's interview or other assessment performance and quickly calculate their standing against fellow candidates. However, the accuracy of each candidate's final score will depend on the "weight" applied to selection criteria.

Arriving at accurate recruitment decisions typically involves measuring a candidate's capability or potential against the selection criteria and applying a numerical rating to their interview or other assessment performance. Whether you use a 1-5, 1-7 or 1-10 rating scale, the task of determining the highest ranked candidate becomes that much easier when you are able to add or average each candidate's scores to obtain an overall picture of their performance.

A problem that sometimes occurs when using numerical rating scales is that a candidate scoring very well on less important criteria and poorly on essential criteria may achieve a greater total score and therefore end up being ranked higher in the order of merit than more suitable candidates.

This type of problem signifies that each selection criterion should have a different value depending on its relative importance in the execution of a job. It is the process of "weighting" selection criteria to reflect their relative value that allows rating scores to be added or averaged without distorting the final outcome.

Unfortunately most weighting decisions tend to be a matter of guesswork, which ultimately detracts from the accuracy and defensibility of selection decisions.

What to Consider When Weighting Selection Criteria

There appear to be four key determinants of a selection criterion's value based on research into job-analysis approaches for determining the relative contribution of work behaviours to performance outcomes. These include:

Relative Importance – Decision-makers familiar with the inputs and outputs of a role, the environment in which it operates and its current context will be able to determine which selection criteria contribute most to successful job performance. The highest priority or *weight* would naturally go to the most important criteria.

Consequence of Failure – Decision-makers may also determine how damaging failure from incompetent or delinquent behaviour would be in relation to each selection criterion. The consequences or cost of failure may take into account such things as injury to people, damage to property or equipment, disruption to colleagues or other work areas, customer dissatisfaction, diminished brand perception, legal liability, and so on.

Time Spent in Performance - The time spent engaged in the activities associated with a particular selection criterion will also indicate its value. Of course, time spent in performance should be calculated as a function of a selection criterion's *Relative Importance* and *Consequence of Failure* so that the time spent on critical tasks or demonstrating important behaviours is weighted more heavily.

Time to Achieve Competence - For some selection criteria there will be a period of orientation and gaining of job specific knowledge, skill and experience that contributes to a

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person's eventual effectiveness in a role (e.g. familiarisation with culture, customers, products or services, technology, procedures, etc.). Due to the organisation's greater investment and increased exposure to risk, a selection criterion is considered more important the longer it takes a person to become competent on-the-job. Once again, this figure should be calculated as a function of a selection criterion's *Relative Importance* and *Consequence of Failure* so that time spent developing competence in critical areas is given greater weight.

Why Weight Selection Criteria?

Making accurate, defensible hiring decisions is important to public and private organisations alike and while the accuracy of public sector selections may be guaranteed through a process of independent review, private organisations also understand that maintaining a positive brand perception in the candidate market demands a transparent and objective recruitment process that delivers correct, justifiable outcomes.

Adopting a structured approach to weighting selection criteria offers a number of benefits, including:

- **Precision** when short-listing, correctly including or excluding candidates and thus saving time and resources in the selection process to follow.
- Increased **accuracy** in your rating and ranking of candidates, particularly in volume recruitment projects.
- Selection decisions are more **defensible**, especially in situations where hiring choices are open to review.
- Greater **consistency** is achieved across recruitment projects.

How to Rank Candidates

Once the selection criteria have been weighted, a candidate's capability or potential against the selection criteria may be assessed and scored. A 5-point rating scale is usually the simplest to use, with a score of 1 representing low performance and a score of 5 indicating the highest assessed performance.

Ranking starts by multiplying a candidate's score for a particular selection criterion by the weight for that criterion (e.g. Score 4 x Selection Criterion Weight 0.8 = Weighted Score 3.2). Then, add the Weighted Scores for all selection criteria to obtain a candidate's Total Weighted Score.

Finally, rank the Total Weighted Score for each candidate from highest to lowest to identify the most suitable candidate(s).

How to Calculate Selection Criteria Weight

Fenchurch Corporate Psychology has developed an online calculator that simplifies the task of assigning "weight" to selection criteria. Readers are invited to contact us at www.fenchurch.com.au/contact/ for **free use** of the calculator.