

# Soft skills, hard benefits.

Assessing the key predictors of successful hires.



# Resign yourself to this reality.

Want to hire a superstar? Good luck. Odds are you'll fail.

We're sorry to have to present these painful truths, but facts are facts:

46% of newly hired employees will fail within 18 months.\*

Only 19% achieve unequivocal success.†

The numbers are absolute torture to anyone charged with finding and keeping talent.

\* Source: "Hire for Attitude" Forbes, January 23, 2012

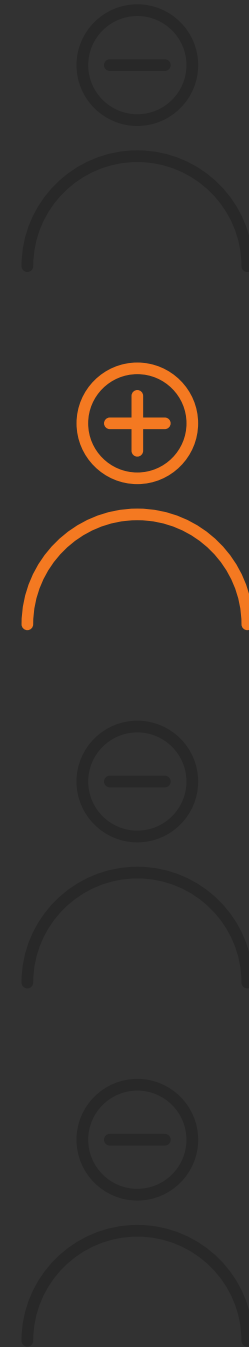
† Source: "Hiring for attitude: Research & tools to skyrocket your success rate" Mark Murphy, Leadership IQ, 2012

# Hiring well is hard.

**On the other side of this coin is some good news. When you get good at hiring, you keep employees much longer, customer satisfaction catapults, and profits boom.**

*The goal is clear. The path to achieving it remains quite blurry.*

HR professionals tend to do what they know how to do. Review resumes. Interview. Assess the hard skills new hires must have. Maybe toss in a personality test. New hires come and new hires go.



# 'Soft skills' are the hard part.

Research has proven over and over again that proficiency in a short list of competency areas, which focus on soft skills, are the true predictors of success in almost every job.

The predictors are professionalism; interpersonal skills; problem solving and adaptability; personal value commitment. For those who manage people or projects there are other predictors such as setting goals; assigning tasks and providing feedback. For executives and leaders, predictors include the ability to set a course and motivate others.

These are what matter most in hiring.

Unfortunately, HR and other decision makers in the hiring process 'go with their gut' on these important success drivers. And it doesn't work. Let's look at what does.



# How do you predict success?

You know what could go wrong, right?

That person... He or she dressed perfectly.  
Great answers. Warm smile. Cool customer.

The candidate seemed so ideal for the job.  
Then, they accepted the offer. And joined  
the organization. And poisoned it.

Productivity suffered. Client relationships got rocky.  
Morale took a dive. The happy ending came when  
their employment finally ended.

Why you couldn't see this coming.

There are a number of reasons why the hiring  
process is so unpredictable.

- Soft skills, such as professionalism and interpersonal communication, are seldom given their due.
- The assessments most commonly used are not job-specific, they're generic.
- The predictive validity of most personality tests is questionable.
- Meaningful reports from past managers and coworkers are rarely available.

How should the process work?

It's time to demand that your hiring process becomes far more accountable. Bring on the new rules.

- Identify a meaningful set of soft skills for each job – and assess them.
- Every job requires specific skills (and specialist jobs within some industries are even more specific). Assessment criteria must be equally specific.
- Use objective data and predictive talent analytics.
- Use detailed references from former managers and coworkers for every hire – they're your most critical success predictors.



# The key to predicting future performance: past performance.

It's not a theory. Nor is it an opinion. It's a proven fact. At SkillSurvey, we built our entire company on the scientific fact that prediction of on-the-job success is based upon access to reliable and valid data on past work performance.

It's an approach that empowers you to make hiring decisions based on what matters most: the competencies proven to be critical to job success. Let's take a look at them.

Professionalism

Interpersonal  
skills

Problem solving  
and adaptability

Personal value  
commitment





Professionalism tops the list of success predictors. Have we stated the obvious? Yes. Professionalism is the “price of entry” for most positions (unless you value unprofessional workers).

But how do you define professionalism? Clearly professionalism in a customer-facing sales role differs from someone behind-the-scenes developing products, stocking the store, or cleaning it.

Predictors of professionalism should therefore be job-specific. However, a variety of skills apply to professionalism across the board:

- Dependability
- Following instructions
- Work ethic

For some positions, professionalism might include:

- Ability to stay on top of industry trends
- Command of certain software tools
- Commitment to health & safety (critical in oil & gas industries, for instance)

The most telling indications of a candidate’s professionalism come from fellow professionals’ views on what it was like working with your candidate.



Professionalism

Interpersonal  
skills

Problem solving  
and adaptability

Personal value  
commitment

Managing others



# 2

Can personality tests provide insights regarding a candidate's interpersonal skills? Yes.  
Can they reveal how well the candidate worked in team situations in prior jobs? Not very well.  
You need a better source of data.

However talented the candidate may be, having interpersonal skills like the following will make him or her far more likely to succeed:

- Listening
- Relationship-building
- Collaboration

How might these skills help candidates succeed in a helpdesk position? Engineering? Nursing?

How effectively a doctor or a nurse communicates with patients is critical to their outcomes, the overall patient experience and, ultimately, hospital and provider ratings.

Similarly, a construction project manager's ability to communicate the importance of safety standards to his team can be critical to their wellbeing.

Once again, realize that job-specific evaluations are invaluable. The evaluation of past managers, coworkers, and direct reports are pure gold. Recent research shows other people's evaluations of soft skills are significantly more predictive of work performance than a candidate's self-ratings.

Professionalism

Interpersonal  
skills

Problem solving  
and adaptability

$$\frac{a + b}{c}$$

Personal value  
commitment

Managing others

Leadership

# 3

Problem solving and adaptability are also top predictors of success. Essentially, every job calls on some degree of problem solving; specifically, the employee's ability to assess and analyze issues and identify solutions. What's more, every job requires adaptability to changing conditions.

These are essentially problem solving or cognitive abilities, such as:

- Analyzing and summarizing information
- Making decisions
- Adapting to change

You'd imagine that an engineer would need these skills, but a machine operator might as well. In higher education, staff are adapting to a host of new online tools and resources because their students have embraced them.

The more you're able to assess problem solving and adaptability based upon the challenges of a specific job, the better you'll be able to predict a candidate's success.

Interpersonal  
skills

Problem solving  
and adaptability

Personal value  
commitment

Managing others

Leadership



# 4

As someone relied upon to evaluate and hire talent, you must assess a candidate's personal values such as ethics and honesty (or lack of).

Your goal is to understand to what degree the applicant possesses:

- Integrity
- Respect for diversity
- Adherence to standards and policies

There are positions that provide employees with access to sensitive, personal, financial or security data. A candidate's commitment to values and ethics is a key driver of your own risk exposure.

The bad news here: standard background checks and personality assessments typically do not measure a candidate's personal values. It's estimated that approximately 30% of all candidates attempt to fake their way through personality tests. On the Internet, it's easy to find books, videos and resources that teach you how.

Again, your true metric is past job performance.

Hiring someone to be placed in a position of power?

If so, you're probably going to need to assess two additional competencies and apply them to predict job success.



and adaptability

Personal value  
commitment

Managing others

Leadership



# 5

A great number of positions demand management skills, and for many of those that don't, you probably hope a new hire could be future management material.

Your goal is to understand to what degree the applicant possesses skills in the areas of:

- Selecting and retaining talent
- Leading a team
- Holding others accountable

Management is slippery territory. While many jobs clearly demand management skills, many others will call on them at times.

Project managers are a great example. They may not directly manage a team, but they will obviously require management skills to successfully lead team-based projects.

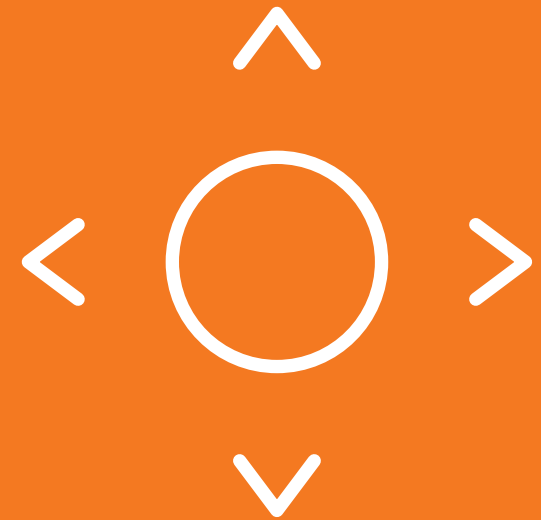
Do your current interview and hiring processes help you to evaluate management skills based on the requirements of the actual position? They should.



Personal value  
commitment

Managing others

Leadership



# 6

The truly high-profile jobs – where leadership is required – call for an even larger set of competencies. And predictability is often even more evasive.

When you're looking for leaders, you aim to understand how well the candidate handles:

- Setting direction
- Managing change
- Motivating others

The list above is just the beginning. With leadership, specific roles call for specific skills.

Think for a second about your organization's C-suite. Do you have a vacancy for a CIO, CEO, COO or CFO? As you know, using the exact same criteria for assessing candidates for each of these vital roles is bound to result in some very expensive mistakes. Drill down to specifics of the job and the assessment gets more predictive.

> > > > > > > > > > > > > >

The future of your  
organization depends  
upon assessing the  
past performance of  
your job candidates.

## Conclusion

**Traditional assessment and hiring techniques aren't working. Organizations are still plagued by high turnover, mediocre performance, and hiring inefficiency. The root of the problem lies in:**

- Leaving the assessment of soft skills to 'gut feel' during the interview.
- Overestimating the significance of education and experience.
- Relying on general tools instead of job-specific reference feedback.
- Over-reliance on personality tests and other measures that use self reports.

In short, too many HR departments and hiring teams are still measuring the wrong things in the wrong way – or not measuring at all.

If you can correct this, your hiring will become far more predictive of success. And you'll find it easier to identify the stars who consistently perform well, stay for years and contribute to overall business success.

If you only take one thing away from this brief guide, we hope you take away this idea:

**Use of a scientific system to assess past work performance is the single best predictor of future job success.**

That's why access to job-specific evaluations from past managers and coworkers are so important.

In short, talent analytics is here – and it's helping progressive companies build world-class workforces in every industry.



# Predict success with talent analytics.

SkillSurvey is laser-focused on introducing the predictive power of past work performance to your hiring process.

SkillSurvey Reference™ and our Pre-Hire 360® process provides predictive insights about candidates based upon data from the managers, coworkers and direct reports who have worked with your job candidates. Our library of hundreds of job-specific surveys maps to thousands of unique jobs and captures the precise soft skills needed for success in each.

Our validity studies of over 22,000 new hires have revealed that reference feedback available through the Pre-Hire 360® process in SkillSurvey Reference helped organizations reduce first-year turnover by 35.5%.

Try our [ROI calculator](#) today to discover the impact online reference checking can have on your hiring process.

Web: [www.skillsurvey.com](http://www.skillsurvey.com)

Email: [info@skillsurvey.com](mailto:info@skillsurvey.com)

EBK-008 - Soft Skills Hard Benefits  
© SkillSurvey, Inc. - SkillSurvey® and Pre-Hire 360® are registered trademarks and SkillSurvey Reference™ is a trademark of SkillSurvey, Inc. SkillSurvey Reference™ is a patented solution. For more information see [www.skillsurvey.com/patents](http://www.skillsurvey.com/patents).  
EBK-008-04-17-17