

CASE STUDY

How Mercy Health reduced the impact of bias in the hiring process

Standardized assessments yield more diverse hires

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OVERVIEW

Overview

The challenge

Misperceptions and unconscious bias can lead hiring teams to inadvertently turn away strong candidates for health care roles.

The organization

Mercy Health is a regional health ministry of Trinity Health comprised of five hospital campuses and over 800 hospital beds that implemented standardized hiring screenings in 2010.

The approach

Identify key skills and competencies for entry-level jobs, then use standardized tests and objective screening questions to limit implicit biases and ensure consistency during recruiting.

The results

Since standardizing screenings, Mercy has improved the quality of hire (reduced first-year turnover), and also increased the number of non-white hires by 20 percentage points, from 18% to 38%. The initiative also helped reduce time-to-fill for open positions.

20%

Percentage point increase in non-white hires.

SOLUTION

Solution

How Mercy Health used standardized selection to hire more diverse staff

Mercy Health is a five-hospital regional health care system in Western Michigan, with over 800 beds. The remainder of this publication details their approach to implementing standardized screening to diversify their talent pipelines.

The three components

The hiring and onboarding protocol at Mercy Health involves three key components.

01 Identify skills and competencies needed for specific roles

02 Assess candidate skills and competencies with objective tests and standardized interview questions

03 Incorporate objective assessments into hiring decisions and career planning

THREE COMPONENTS TO AN EVIDENCE-BASED HIRING PROCESS

01 Identify skills and competencies needed for specific roles

Mercy Health partnered with a local consulting firm, Metrics Reporting, Inc., to analyze the skills and competencies needed for their open roles. Instead of analyzing every single role across the organization, the team grouped roles into job families based on job characteristics defined by O*NET—the Department of Labor’s publicly available database of knowledge, skills, abilities, and work activities. Twenty-two O*NET job families covered 95% of Mercy Health’s employees.

Mercy Health Job Families



Source: "About O*NET," O*NET Resource Center, 2020; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.



IDENTIFY SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR SPECIFIC ROLES

They then isolated the key skills and competencies for each job family. Based on O*NET’s Generalized Activities of Work (GWAs), they identified job-specific competencies for each of the 22 job families, and industry-specific competencies which span across all job families. They mapped foundational competencies, like listening or critical thinking, to occupational competencies to determine the impact of various foundational competencies on job performance for each role.

Foundational competencies

Cognitive

- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Reading
- Speaking
- Listening
- ...

Character

- Initiative/
perseverance
- Teamwork/
citizenship
- Responsibility
- ...

Physical

- Vision
- Dexterity
- Steadiness
- Coordination
- ...

Linking

Foundational competencies are linked to occupational competencies to establish their relationship to job performance



Occupational competencies

Job-specific competencies – also known as Tasks of Work Behaviors – are job-specific work activities

Industry-wide competencies – industry-specific work activities that are common across multiple jobs

THREE COMPONENTS TO AN EVIDENCE-BASED HIRING PROCESS

02 Assess candidates with objective tests and standardized questions

In addition to employing evidenced-based skills assessments, the team designed a series of standardized interviewing guides for recruiters and hiring managers, which helps to ensure a consistent candidates interview experience.

Elements assessed during Mercy Health West Michigan’s Hiring Process

Competency	Assessed via
Reading prose	Reading procedures, training texts, emails ¹
Reading documents	Reading charts, graphs, forms ¹
Quantitative reasoning	Test of basic math skills ¹
Perception	Standardized recruiter interview
Service orientation	
Active learning	
Office administration	
Time management	Standardized hiring manager interview
Influence	
Teamwork	
Critical thinking	
Overall Fit Index - conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, etc.	Based on subset of 15 personality traits and facets that relate to job performance
References	Overall score from Skill Survey references

1. Tests performed via ETS WorkFORCE® assessments

Source: Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

03 Incorporate assessments into hiring decisions, career planning

Scores on the assessments outlined in Step 2 are banded and combined to provide the recruiters with a five-star rating scale that indicates the overall fit of a candidate for the job family requirements. Hiring teams can use results from the assessments to inform decisions about hiring and onboarding.

Uses of assessment results

Selection

Assessment results determine whether a candidate progresses in hiring process. The results of the assessments are used to calculate an overall candidate score, which hiring managers can use to make evidence-based candidate selections.

Onboarding and future development

For candidates ultimately selected for hire, assessment results inform onboarding and on-the-job training, and serve as the foundation for the staff member's "career portfolio"—the skills and competencies they have today and those they wish to grow in the future.

Results

Hiring a more diverse workforce

Mercy Health has seen remarkable results since moving to their evidence-based selection screening process. They reduced first-year turnover, which suggests their process is identifying candidates who are a better fit for the organization. Interestingly, the process is actually faster than the previous process, noted by a decreased time-to-fill for open roles. Ultimately, the organization is hiring more diverse staff than it was initially. Leaders at Mercy Health attribute the increase in diversity to the more evidence-based hiring process, which helps limit the effect of unconscious bias in hiring decisions. 

18.7% First-year turnover (reduced from a baseline of 25.3%)¹

20% Percentage point increase in non-white hires (from 18% to 38%)²

6.6% Percentage point increase in total non-white workforce makeup (from 13.4% to 20%)²

6 days Decrease in time-to-fill (37 days to 31 days)¹

1. As of 2015.
2. As of 2016.

Source: "Mercy Health Recognized for Workforce Diversity Initiatives," Talent 2025, March 27, 2018; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Related

 CHEAT SHEET
Implicit Bias
<https://www.advisory.com/research/hr-advancement-center/cheat-sheets/2020/implicit-bias>

 CHEAT SHEET
Inclusion
<https://www.advisory.com/research/hr-advancement-center/cheat-sheets/2020/inclusion>

 HireReach
HireReach is a grant funded initiative in West Michigan that is helping 26 organizations implement evidence-based hiring based on the Mercy Health West Michigan model.
hirereach.org/

 OUR TAKE
The Executive's Role in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
<https://www.advisory.com/Research/HR-Advancement-Center/Expert-Insights/2020/DEI>

 BLOG POST
10 takeaways: How to build a racially diverse workforce
<https://www.advisory.com/research/health-care-advisory-board/blogs/at-the-helm/2020/07/racially-diverse-workforce>

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