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## Selection Assessments for Acquiring and Developing Talent in the Healthcare Industry

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### Introduction

In today's economy, highly complex healthcare organizations are in a constant state of flux, and cannot afford to make wrong talent or people decisions. Yet turnover, and ineffective professional development and management continue to impede the accomplishment of the high outcomes we expect of these institutions and those who work therein. Turnover in this nation's health institutions translates into wasteful and unsustainable cost and people challenges. Little wonder, then, that strategic talent acquisition is becoming a key business initiative among those industries that seem to be getting this *people* part right.

Care is at the core of our health industries and so exists a natural proclivity for people who are interested in the welfare of others to seek work in such places. With an unprecedented pool of job applicants, why then is it that so many HR professionals in healthcare experience challenges in identifying job candidates who are best-suited for the job demands and the culture? Part of the answer may lie in the practices employed by HR, which have drivers in place to fill open positions quickly and cost-effectively. Add such an imperative to a barrage of résumés and limited resources, and the challenge of identifying, attracting and retaining top talent can be overwhelming.

Talent acquisition endeavors need help. If we look at best practices from those who are experiencing fewer people challenges, we can

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## KEY POINT

Selection assessments encompass the tools and technology to enable organizations to evaluate whether or not a candidate has the right attributes, behaviors and interests to perform a job in a unique culture.

learn about the value proposition of investing in selection assessments as a tactic for improving outcomes.

Hundreds of assessments abound, but those that are of greatest value provide validated, highly predictive information which can help organizations make more informed selection decisions, develop and manage people, and establish effective succession planning programs. Selection assessments encompass the tools and technology to enable organizations to evaluate whether or not a candidate has the right attributes, behaviors and interests to perform a job in a unique culture. Most often, such assessments combine subjective and science-based, or objective tools to determine a candidate's suitability for a position. Best-practice companies in industries both inside and out of healthcare are utilizing these powerful tools at every level in their organizations, from front line to senior executive. In fact, 77 percent of organizations across all industries now include some form of selection assessment in their overall talent acquisition strategy.<sup>1</sup>

In this report, we will review the current state of selection assessments and, specifically, their use within the healthcare industry for improving the quality of selection and hire, and uncovering development opportunities.

## Healthcare Industry Snapshot

The global medical industry is one of the world's fastest-growing fields, absorbing greater than 10 percent of gross domestic product of most developed nations. It encompasses a broad array of services offered in hospitals, ambulatory centers, physician offices, wellness centers, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers, diagnostic laboratories and imaging centers, ambulatory care centers, dialysis centers, and pharmacies. These services have given rise to prosperous companies that manufacture pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment and supplies, and involve our most prestigious healthcare educational and research institutions as key participants in this industry.

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<sup>1</sup> This information is based on current research by Bersin & Associates in the areas of talent acquisition.





## KEY POINT

The U.S. has the largest workforce – one in every 11 U.S. residents is employed in the healthcare industry.

Apart from using the services of medical professionals, this industry also contributes to the need for and use of expert services of public policy workers, medical writers, clinical research lab workers, IT professionals, sales / marketing professionals and health insurance providers.

Clearly the employment opportunities are plentiful. The U.S. has one of the largest medical and healthcare industries in the world, followed by Switzerland and Germany. The U.S.'s medical industry comprises more than 750,000 physicians and 5,200 hospitals; the U.S. experiences approximately 3.8 million inpatient visits and 20 million outpatient visits each day. Further, the U.S. has the largest healthcare workforce – one in every 11 U.S. residents is employed in the healthcare industry.<sup>2</sup>

The business environment in healthcare is more complex and challenging than in any other industry. Faced with voluminous private insurance plans, as well as practices that require specialized billing, government regulations, physician integration, electronic medical records, nurse shortages and the uncertainty surrounding healthcare reform, the industry is dealing with enormous and stressful challenges that impede its ability to achieve critical goals of improving patient outcomes, safety and satisfaction, while keeping costs at bay.

Healthcare is highly innovative and dependent on innovation to ensure the well-being of the human population. Innovation must be achieved through people. So, in an industry which is dependent on innovation and services to others, healthcare organizations are well-served to establish high standards with behavioral drivers in place to ensure that people with the highest suitability for these vital tasks are selected, developed and retained.

### Talent Management in Healthcare

Based on numerous discussions with HR professionals from hospitals across the nation regarding the challenges they face and the solutions they create for selecting, developing and managing people, we found their programs and processes to be fairly "immature." Our 2010 *Talent*

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.themedica.com/industry-overview.html>.



*Management Factbook*<sup>3</sup> also found healthcare to be one of the least mature industries when it comes to how it manages its talent overall.

According to our *Talent Acquisition Factbook*<sup>4</sup> research, when compared with other industries (including banking, business services, retail, technology and manufacturing), healthcare is in a state of “catch-up” as it pertains to how it acquires talent. Within talent acquisition, job postings in newspapers are still perceived as a sign of productivity. One healthcare HR professional indicated,

*“If it’s not in print, our leaders don’t perceive us as actively recruiting and it makes them uncomfortable.”*

Healthcare organizations spend more than any other industry on print and billboards to reach their desired candidate audiences – an impressive 13 percent of their external budgets. As compared with other industries, healthcare organizations have also been slow to integrate professional networks into their recruiting strategies. Social recruiting has barely penetrated this industry.



## KEY POINT

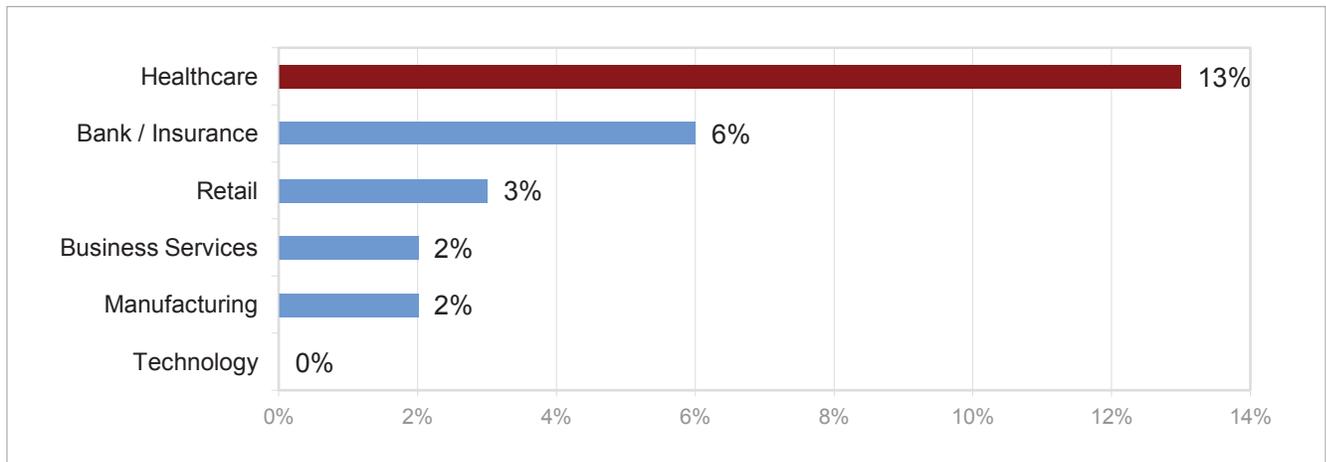
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<sup>3</sup> For more information, *Talent Management Factbook 2010: Best Practices and Benchmarks in U.S. Talent Management*, Bersin & Associates / Karen O’Leonard and Stacey Harris, September 2010. Available to research members at [www.bersin.com/library](http://www.bersin.com/library) or for purchase at [www.bersin.com/tmfactbook](http://www.bersin.com/tmfactbook).

<sup>4</sup> For more information, *The Talent Acquisition Factbook® 2011: Benchmarks and Trends in Spending, Staffing and Key Recruiting Metrics*, Bersin & Associates / Karen O’Leonard, November 2011. Available to research members at [www.bersin.com/library](http://www.bersin.com/library) or for purchase at [www.bersin.com/tafactbook](http://www.bersin.com/tafactbook).



**Figure 1: Percent of External Talent Acquisition Spending 2011 – Print / Newspapers / Billboards**



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2011.

Within performance management, the annual appraisal is still “king,” and ongoing feedback and development appears to be secondary at best. There is also a noticeable lack of trust and communication regarding talent across department silos, making it impossible to institute a culture that values and fosters talent mobility<sup>5</sup> – an essential state in many industries. According to a healthcare expert at Profiles International,

*“Healthcare and higher education have exhibited a much slower response to the need for change over time than have other industries. This is perplexing since science is so foundational to and inextricable from their missions.”*

The question must be posed as to why their first priority (that of sourcing, developing and retaining the very best employees) is not utilizing well-established, scientifically based tools (or instruments) in their selection processes. Mistakes here ripple throughout organizations, interfering with outcomes – and carrying costly and stressful consequences.

<sup>5</sup> “Talent mobility” is a dynamic internal process for moving talent from role to role – at the leadership, professional and operational levels. To achieve talent mobility, companies must adopt the principles of succession management at all ranks; provide transparent discussion of skills and potential, as well as organizational needs; and, focus on development across critical talent pools, based on business needs.



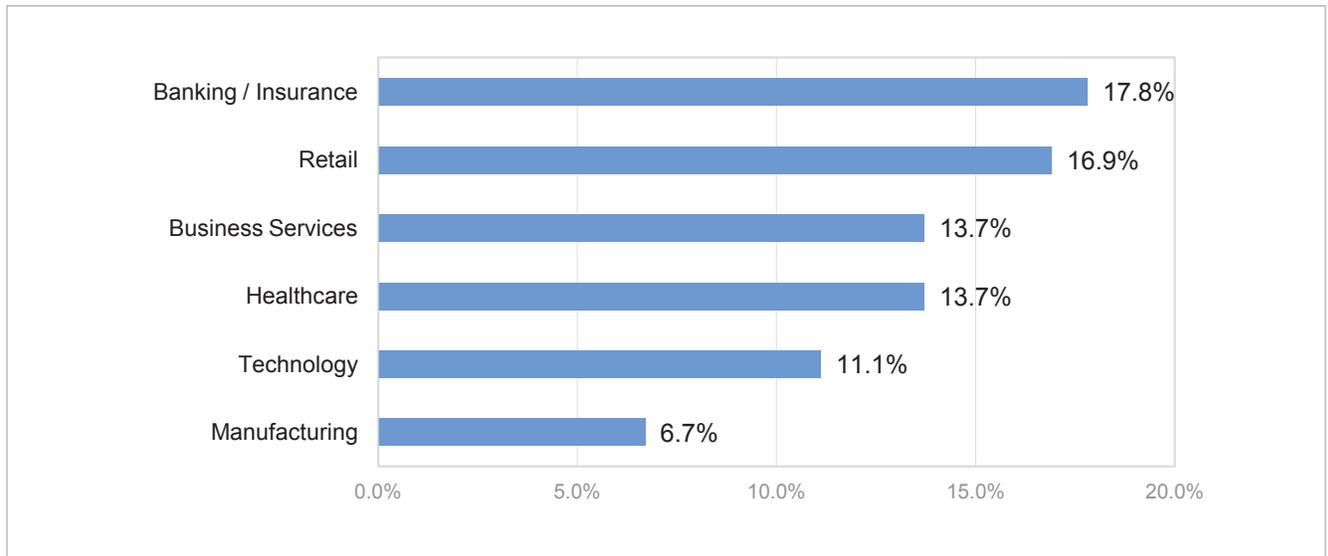
**KEY POINT**

Approximately one in every seven new hires in the healthcare industry leaves his / her job within the first 12 months.

**Using Assessments to Improve Quality of Hire**

People leave their jobs for a variety of reasons, including being a poor match with the job and / or culture, unrealistic demands, and differences with managers. When we looked at 12-month new-hire turnover (voluntary and involuntary turnover within the first 12 months of hire), even during today's tough economic times our research shows that roughly one in every eight new hires left the job within the first 12 months. When we examined new-hire turnover, specifically in healthcare, our research showed that number to be just slightly higher with one in every 7.3 new hires (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Twelve-Month New-Hire Turnover 2011 – By Industry**



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2011.

Many talent acquisition organizations are more closely reviewing new-hire turnover to determine key issues and trends. Some companies also conduct exit surveys to get additional insights. Sometimes new-hire turnover is a direct result of flaws in the recruiting and selection processes, which may meet the objectives of speed and cost-effectiveness, but fail in the more important and impactful objectives of ascertaining job and culture match.





## ANALYSIS

One of the main reasons that new hires fail is because companies are not as astute in recognizing the qualities that are crucial to successful job performance and thus fail at selection.

How can healthcare organizations improve the selection, development and retention of people best-suited for the work that needs to be accomplished? Our research shows that the use of selection assessments can play an instrumental role. One of the main reasons that new hires fail is because companies are not as astute in recognizing the qualities that are crucial to successful job performance and thus fail at selection. If one does not understand these crucial attributes, there is little likelihood that the net outcome will include the strongest candidates. Further, hiring teams are not gaining objective, reliable and predictive information on which to conduct revealing interviews – and often are not as well-schooled in how to interview candidates as the candidates are at being interviewed.

Validated assessments provide the kind of information that cannot be gleaned from résumés, interviews (even multiple interviews) or background checks. It seems as though it is the progressive companies which are successfully investing in science-based instruments that support their selection processes. Investments on this end of the equation save enormous sums when selection processes are anemic and fail to deliver the best people. Among the strategies and tools employed are selection assessments, 360-degree reference checks and team interviews, as opposed to a series of independent interviews.

At Genesis Healthcare<sup>6</sup>, a privately held post-acute and rehabilitation organization that has approximately 230 skilled nursing facilities (e.g., nursing homes) in about 13 states, the head of talent acquisition indicated,

*“The healthcare industry really hasn’t adopted process excellence, Six Sigma<sup>7</sup> techniques, measurements and metrics to get underneath what could make the quality of hiring better, as quickly as other U.S. businesses.”*

<sup>6</sup> Source: [www.geneshicc.com](http://www.geneshicc.com).

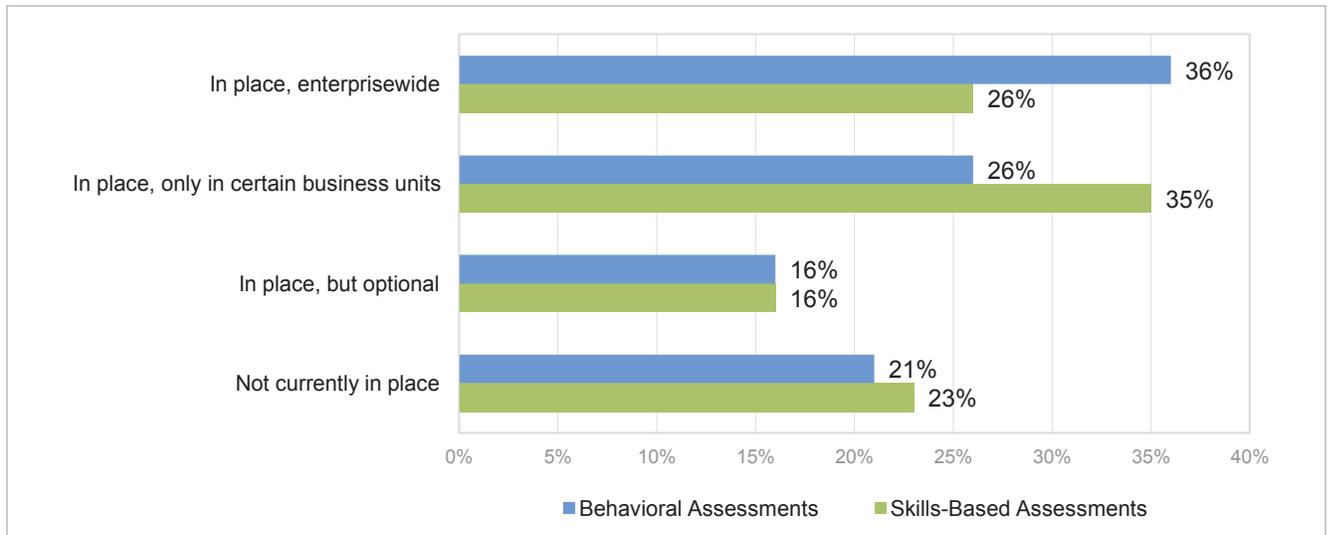
<sup>7</sup> “Six Sigma” is a rigorous, focused, high-impact process that uses proven quality principles and techniques to reduce process variance. For more information on Six Sigma, please visit <http://www.isixsigma.com>, which offers articles and easy-to-read examples of how to apply Six Sigma to any business process.

### Categories of Assessments

Selection assessments typically fall into one of two categories – skill or behavioral assessments. Behavioral assessments are gaining popularity as a vehicle for identifying fit<sup>8</sup> with job and culture demands. According to our research, 36 percent of organizations across all industries have implemented these assessments enterprise-wide.<sup>9</sup> While the majority of behavioral assessments are customized, many organizations are considering off-the-shelf instruments for measuring the skills of front-line workers.

- **Skill** – This type of assessment identifies the abilities required to perform in a job, including basic skills (e.g., math, computer), social skills, problem-solving skills, technical skills and resource management skills.
- **Behavior** – This type of assessment is often considered a personality test. These assessments are most commonly used to assess personality traits and behaviors that are applicable in candidate and employee selection and development.

Figure 3: Use of Selection Assessments by Type



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, *The Science of Fit: Using Psychology to Replicate High Performance*, Bersin & Associates / Josh Bersin, May 2011. Available to research members at [www.bersin.com/library](http://www.bersin.com/library).

<sup>9</sup> This information is based on current research by Bersin & Associates in the areas of talent acquisition.



## ★ BEST PRACTICE

Improving quality of selection requires an in-depth understanding of what are the essential qualities for successful performance in every position.

These assessments take several forms, including – job simulations, self-assessments, job-functional competencies and interview assessments. While the majority of organizations have implemented competencies and interview assessments, job simulations and self-assessments are more innovative approaches and are gaining in popularity. Two other areas offering innovation in assessments include online reference calls and video-interviews. Thirty-three percent of organizations are including online reference calls enterprisewide.<sup>10</sup>

### Creating Job Profiles

The process of attracting and retaining the best people is not simple, and should not be done hurriedly and cheaply. It requires an in-depth understanding of what are the essential qualities for successful performance in every position. Clearly, the best way to discover these qualities is to study them among the top and struggling performers. Such studies are highly illuminating and often can contradict long-standing assumptions gleaned from interviews with managers.

For companies that lack top performers, a performance model or profile should be developed as an initial means of understanding essential attributes required for each position. These attributes may be compiled into a job analysis that should be created by and among hiring managers, recruiters, HR professionals and the assessment professionals. The key attributes for a formalized job profile<sup>11</sup> or performance model include:

- Characteristics of the position;
- Organizational culture;
- Core competencies;
- Business model;
- Past barriers for success;

<sup>10</sup> This information is based on current research by Bersin & Associates in the areas of talent acquisition.

<sup>11</sup> “Job profiles” define the required skills, competencies, certifications, work experiences and other attributes required for success in a particular job or role.

- Team environment;
- Expectations; and,
- Career tracks / succession plans.

Once an organization successfully articulates its job profile, the company can seek an assessment that will be validated, reliable and predictive in ascertaining a candidate's fit with the position and culture demands. One healthcare provider we recently interviewed (*which is in the process of revamping its selection assessment strategy*) will include a combination of both online tools and industrial and organizational (I / O) psychologists. Although this organization has a strong relationship with I / O psychologists used for the past 20 years, the right candidates have not been well-placed in the right leadership positions. The organization's new strategy will include online assessments that focus on emotional intelligence<sup>12</sup>, as well as new assessment tools expressly for front-line and hourly workers.

After organizations define the skills and needs of their positions, it is essential that candidates are screened based on predefined criteria. This is time-consuming, and requires that recruiters sort their applications and interview selected candidates to ascertain whether they meet the required qualifications. A next and crucial step that companies utilize is to "screen-in" quality objectively, with assessments that measure predefined skills, behavioral traits and interests as a science-based means of ascertaining job and culture fit.



#### KEY POINT

Assessments that measure predefined skills, behavioral traits and interests are a science-based means of ascertaining job and culture fit.

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<sup>12</sup> "Emotional intelligence" is the ability of people to understand and manage their emotions, as well as those of others, leading to star performance. Emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in how employees meet the daily challenges they face, as well as how they improve to excel in increasingly difficult and complex roles.

## ***Case in Point: MSHA Uses Selection Assessments to Improve Recruiting***

Mountain States Health Alliance (MSHA) is a locally owned and managed healthcare system based in Tennessee. With 8,900 employees, the organization has grown significantly over the past year. During the first eight months of the fiscal year (starting July 1, 2010), the organization onboarded 1,105 new hires, surpassing the total number of new hires for the entire fiscal year in 2010.

Last year, in preparation for the rapid pace of hiring, HR leaders took a hard look at their recruiting processes. In many cases, managers had misjudged a candidate's fit for a role, leading to 30 percent turnover among new hires in the first 12 months. To reduce new-hire attrition, HR leaders implemented a new recruiting process utilizing a pre-employment assessment tool.

MSHA uses Profiles International's ProfileXT® (PXT) and Customer Service Profile (CSP),<sup>13</sup> which it implemented two years ago. The CSP tool is geared toward customer service roles, and is administered to certified nursing assistants (CNA), housekeepers and others in similar high-patient contact roles. The PXT is used for all other positions, excluding physicians and executives.

Using Profiles International's system, HR staff input job descriptions for every role. These job descriptions are used to match an applicant's experience, skills and qualifications against those for a particular role. Upon filling out a job application, the applicant completes the online assessment. If the applicant is a good match for the role (which is determined by a 70 percent score or above on the assessment), the résumé is forwarded to appropriate hiring manager for additional screening. Applicants who score below 70 percent are sent thank-you emails and the application process for that position ends for those individuals.

<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.profilesinternational.com/products/profilext.php>.

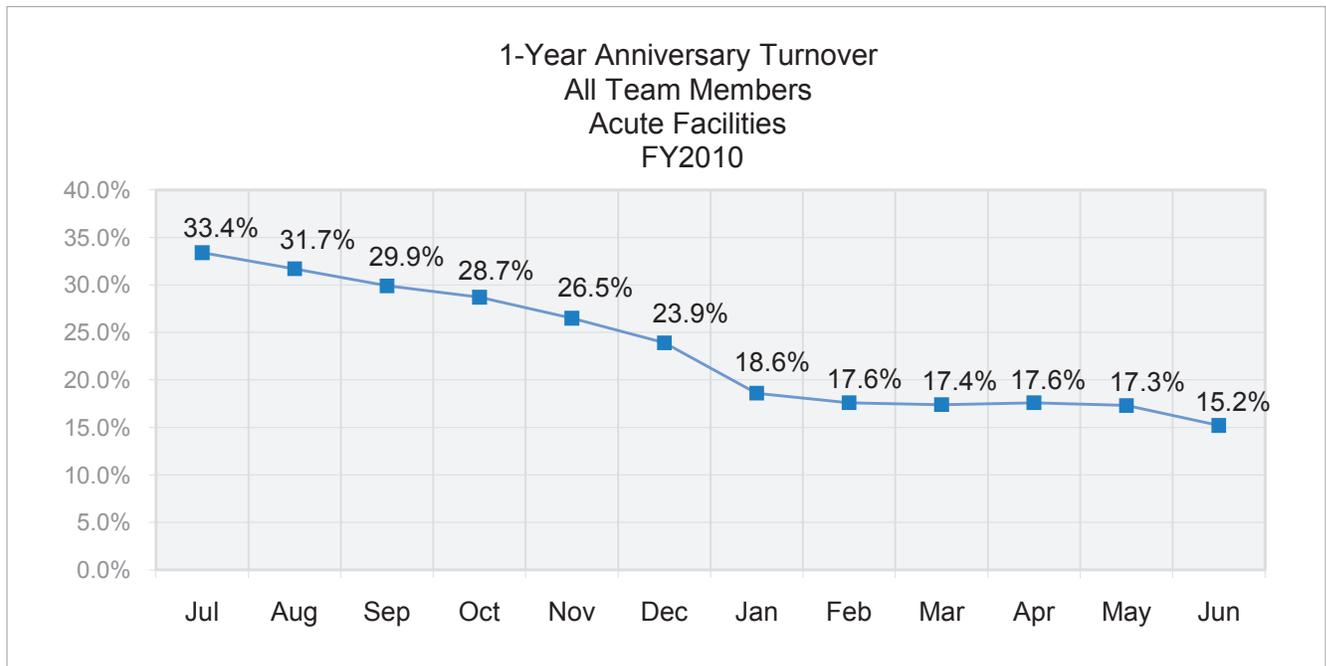
*Case in Point: MSHA Uses Selection Assessments to Improve Recruiting (cont'd)*

About 30 percent of applicants are turned down for the job to which they apply. If not a match for one job, however, the applicant may be a match for another. To hire someone who is not a match to a role (i.e., an internal candidate), the system CEO must approve. If such an exception occurs, a separate three- and 12-month evaluation takes place post-hire. This has only happened four times in the last two years.

The new assessment tool has saved a great deal of time and resources in the recruiting process. HR staff and managers no longer need to spend time reviewing and interviewing applicants who lack the necessary qualifications. As further evidence of the tool's effectiveness, the 12-month turnover rate among new hires has been cut in half – from 33 percent to 15 percent – leading to substantial savings in recruiting, onboarding and development costs. (See Figure 4.)

Also of importance is the organization's use of multiple assessment tools – to gather information from multiple sources for making selection decisions. For some positions, for example, candidates at MSHA also take skills assessments for measuring proficiency with Microsoft Word and Excel. A self-assessment approach is also used in which candidates evaluate their own fit within the culture by watching a video about MSHA, and about its mission, vision, values, culture, dress code, etc. This occurs before they even begin the interviewing process. 

Figure 4: One Year New-Hire Turnover at MSHA FY'2010



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2009.



**KEY POINT**

Best-practice companies of every size are providing objectivity to the hiring process by leveraging a variety of selection assessments consistently throughout their organizations, from executive-level positions to front-line workers.

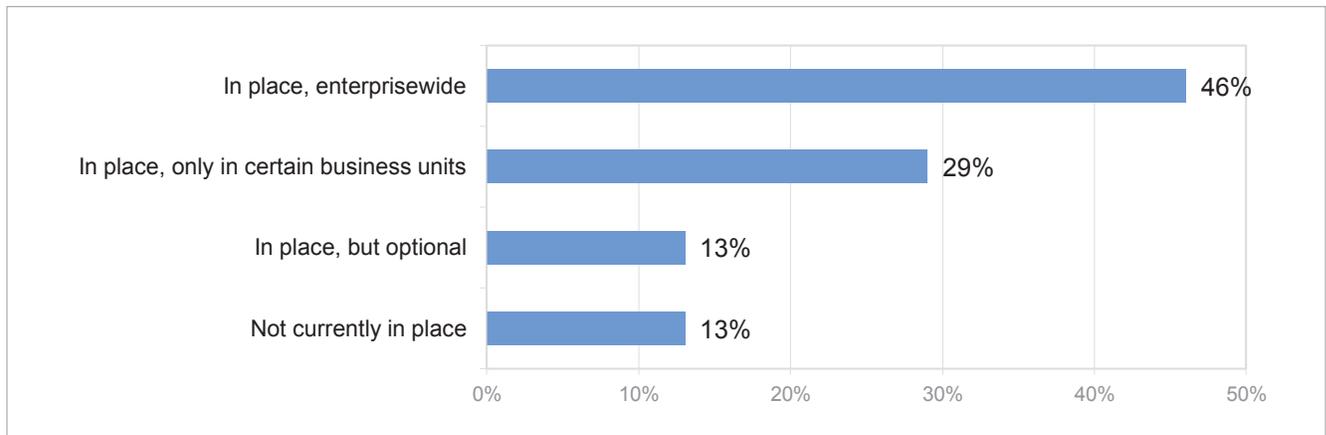
**Current State of Selection Assessments**

Selection assessments should be a critical component of any integrated talent acquisition strategy. In a competitive global market, identifying the right job candidate early in the recruiting process can help organizations improve productivity and retention, and reduce people problems.

Historically, assessments were viewed as a tool for *FORTUNE* 500 companies (such as NASA, Home Depot and Wells Fargo). Today, best-practice companies of every size are providing objectivity to the hiring process by leveraging a variety of selection assessments consistently throughout their organizations, from executive-level positions to front-line workers. Within healthcare, assessments are being used for jobs at the housekeeper level upward to physicians and chief hospital administrators. A “bad hire” can cost companies up to the employee’s annual salary and beyond – a price they can no longer afford to pay even during robust times.



**Figure 5: Current State of Selection Assessments**



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2009.

## Value of Assessments in Healthcare

In general, recruiter workloads are based on the type and complexity of the position. Our study found that recruiters are handling an average of 18 open requisitions, which includes all exempt and nonexempt positions.

Our interviews reveal that many recruiting departments are still operating lean and, as a result, some recruiters are being asked to take on more requisitions than usual. This is particularly the case in large organizations in which recruiters are handling nearly 29 open requisitions, on average. Large organizations typically hire for large volumes, some of which include similar positions, affording economies of scale.

## Increasing Number of Qualified Candidates

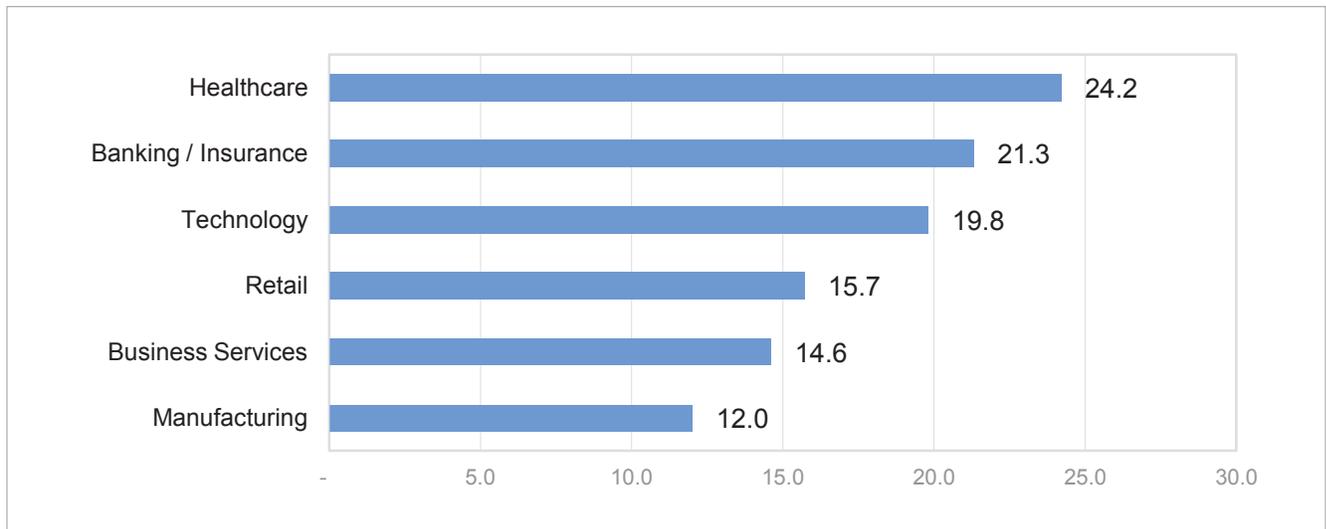
From an industry perspective, healthcare is among a small number of industries that assign the largest number of requisitions per recruiter. Healthcare companies often run very lean and many rely on operations to do some of the strategic hiring. For example, the recruiting staff may conduct sourcing, while the operations department conducts all interviews for the hiring of nurses and technicians. This structure allows recruiters to assume more positions.



### KEY POINT

Healthcare is among a small number of industries that assign the largest number of requisitions per recruiter.

**Figure 6: Open Requisitions per Recruiter 2011 – By Industry**



Source: Bersin & Associates, 2009.

Assessments in healthcare, as in other industries, should help recruiters identify candidates with the right skills and cultural fit for their positions. The assessment process, when used as a first step in screening applicants, identifies the qualified candidates, so that hiring managers are using their time with people best-suited for the job. *(For more information, see section, "Case in Point: MHS A Uses Selection Assessments to Improve Recruiting.")*



#### KEY POINT

"You use assessments to develop people and change culture in a non-threatening, constructive manner, guiding them *toward* the roles for which they are best-suited."

### Fostering Internal Talent Mobility

Another key value is the application of the selection assessment for existing employees. According to the head of talent acquisition at Genesis Healthcare, in addition to assessing external candidates, every incumbent has completed or will complete the assessment, so that promotions, deployments to other departments, etc. will be made with information to determine the likelihood of success. Such information will also be useful in succession planning.

It is important to implement the assessment process in a very safe, non-threatening manner. For example, through the assessments, one might learn that a high-performing nurse on the medical / surgical floor would not be as successful in an emergency room environment, which is marked by urgency and stress. As shared by a healthcare expert at Profiles International,

*“You use assessments to develop people and change culture in a non-threatening, constructive manner, guiding them toward the roles for which they are best-suited.”*

The senior vice president of HR at Sisters of Mercy Health System also shared that the use of assessments has been a positive experience, but is incredibly reliant on senior leadership communication and trustworthy behavior. This is necessary to protect against any feelings of fear that the results of the assessment could be a career derailer<sup>14</sup>. Having leadership support, delivering consistent messaging, and sharing success stories about the assessment process and positive career moves are critical in averting such concerns.

## Improving Performance

Assessments used with current incumbents can play a valuable role in improving performance. At Genesis Healthcare, the head of talent acquisition shared that there have been a number of examples wherein someone struggling in his / her role has been coached and developed toward better performance with use of the coaching reports that are provided from the assessments. An organization should evaluate on performance, not on assessment scores. Genesis Healthcare evaluates an employee’s assessment scores against his / her job performance on an annual basis, looking at employee turnover for his / her area of responsibility, as well as employee satisfaction, engagement, and customer or patient satisfaction.

## Other Benefits

Other benefits of selection assessments related specifically to recruiting, in general, include:

- Standardization of the selection process;
- Ability to more accurately predict performance;

<sup>14</sup> A “derailer” is a behavior or characteristic that could disrupt or spoil a person’s ability to be successful in his / her role or career, for example, a behavior or characteristics that could prevent a promotion.

### ★ BEST PRACTICE

Assessments used with current incumbents can play a valuable role in improving performance.



## KEY POINT

Our research shows that 28 percent of companies, across all industries, invest in I / O psychologists to assess job candidates.

- More reliable and objective information from which to interview and understand the candidates;
- Reduction in time to fill positions;
- Improved performance and retention rates; and,
- Accuracy and quality of hires.

## Best Practices in Selection Assessments

There are a number of best practices for implementing selection assessments. The following are brief descriptions of these practices.

1. **Job Analysis Profile** – Organizations need to begin by creating a job analysis profile. Before investing in the necessary tools and methods, companies need to understand their objectives and clearly identify the key attributes for each position. A key step in doing so is to evaluate top and bottom performers.
2. **Reputable Providers** – Organizations find a reputable assessment provider, one that can conduct either a local validity study or a transportability study if a company wants to use a test that has been validated in a different setting. Organizations should make sure that the providers are staffed with professionals, such as I / O psychologists with a strong background in assessment testing, and that the instruments are validated frequently and on adequate samples.
3. **Assessment Center** – Organizations can benefit from the creation of an assessment center that includes a multipronged approach for incorporating a variety of different instruments, as well as assistance from I / O psychologists. This approach will have a greater degree of success in uncovering variance in fit between candidates. Again, it is prudent to begin strengthening understandings about the attributes that are shared by top performers.
4. **Consistency** – Organizations need to use selection assessments consistently across all candidates for the same job. The goal of

<sup>15</sup> This information is based on current research by Bersin & Associates in the areas of talent acquisition.



implementing a standardized assessment can only be achieved through buy-in from business leaders, and the accountability of HR and hiring managers.

5. **Integrated Assessment Strategy** – Selection assessments should provide development information for employees and their managers.
6. **Validated Assessments** – Developing a clear understanding of which assessments are validated is challenging in today's market, with hundreds of solution providers emerging. Assessment providers must demonstrate the validity of their tools and ensure that it contains highly predictive information on which to help organizations make informed selection decisions.
7. **Train Your Staff** – Organizations need to educate their staffs on what assessments they will be using for various jobs, as well as on how to administer and best utilize the information obtained from the assessment. Results should be clear and concise so as not to require a professional to interpret the results of the assessment.
8. **Create Pre-Established Performance Metrics** – Organizations need to think about what they want to achieve with their assessment programs prior to investing in the tools and technology. Some of the most popular key performance metrics include time to fill, turnover and hiring manager satisfaction.

## Conclusion

Assessments are no longer limited to evaluating senior-level positions in large, successful corporations. Today's best-practice organizations of all sizes and industries recognize the returns on investment in evaluating job candidates at every level in the organization. A strategic assessment process will help organizations reduce turnover, increase productivity, and identify employees who can meet job and culture expectations. In order to achieve results, this process needs to be consistently evaluated, include a combination of both objective and subjective tools, and integrated with processes used to manage and develop employees.



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- **Tools** – Comprehensive tools for HR and L&D professionals, including tools for benchmarking, vendor and system selection, program design, program implementation, change management and measurement;
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- **Strategic Advisory Services** – Expert support for custom-tailored projects;
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- **IMPACT® Conference: *The Business Of Talent*** – Attendance at special sessions of our annual, best-practices IMPACT® conference.
- **Workshops** – Bersin & Associates analysts and advisors conduct onsite workshops on a wide range of topics to educate, inform and inspire HR and L&D professionals and leaders.

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