

Test/Survey Authoring

In order for organizations to make the best hiring/promotion decisions, provide effective developmental feedback to employees, and correctly capture employee perceptions, high quality assessments are critical.

Constructing assessments is a rather complex and technical undertaking and requires a scientific approach to ensure that all psychometric criteria and legal requirements are met. Most companies have internal expertise in the content areas covered by the assessments, but they may not have the technical expertise to create valid tests and surveys. In addition to the authoring expertise required, organizations also need to have assessment results reported in an impactful way – information that can be used to effectively develop talent and/or improve organizational effectiveness.

Censeo consultants have over 30 years experience in developing valid assessments and reports that meet measurement objectives and business needs across a variety of industries. This includes many different kinds of assessments, which can be grouped into two broad categories – tests (e.g., knowledge and skills) and surveys (e.g., 360/multi-rater, employee opinion).

Typical Project Steps

The scope of Censeo's consulting services in this area range from providing technical counsel and reviewing assessments authored internally, to taking the lead role in creating new tests and surveys. Our approach varies depending on the client's needs and the types of assessments being developed. The steps listed below are applicable to tests and surveys in different ways, but the basic approach for authoring a sound assessment is generally the same.

1. Clarify the objectives for the assessment and the context in which the results will be used.

You can't write a good assessment unless you know its objectives. Questions to be addressed include: What are the objectives for the assessment and what are we trying to accomplish? Will the results be used to make administrative decisions (e.g., selection, certification)? Who will receive the results and how will the results be reported? The assessment objectives drive all subsequent project steps.

2. Develop an "assessment blueprint" (content to be included, dimensions, item types, etc.).

Based on clearly defined assessment objectives, a sound game plan, or "blueprint," is developed which defines the content areas to be covered (dimensions,

key topic areas, etc.), and the number and types of items that will be used. This plan helps ensure that the assessment covers the targeted areas in sufficient depth, and that the right kinds of data are collected.

3. Draft items, response scales, instructions, scoring and development suggestions.

The blueprint provides the basis for drafting the assessment content. In this step, adhering to several important psychometric principles – item construction, response scales, scoring schemes, and many other matters – will ensure the assessment is accurate and valid. This step can also include developing content to help those who receive the results get the most out of the assessment initiative – beyond just the scores to meaningful development or improvement actions. For example, Censeo encourages clients to include targeted learning resources in knowledge tests, development actions in 360 surveys, and suggested improvement actions in employee surveys.

4. Review the assessment with internal subject matter experts and conduct a pilot.

When a new assessment is developed based on clear objectives, a good blueprint, and adherence to psychometric principles, the assessment will likely be of high quality. However, it's still important to take two additional actions. First, the assessment should be reviewed by internal subject matter experts who will critically evaluate it in terms of defined criteria. Second, a pilot of the assessment should be conducted with a representative sample of those who will complete the assessment when it is launched. Feedback is collected after both activities and changes are made as appropriate.

5. Determine administrative procedures and process for reporting and using assessment results.

Censeo helps clients resolve a number of administrative and reporting issues in launching assessment initiatives. With respect to administration, one issue is how will the assessment be delivered – online or via paper. Increasingly, companies are looking to Internet-based solutions for reasons of ease, speed and cost. Another issue is who can take the assessment, and when? Is completing the assessment optional, or required? Must it be administered in a proctored setting? When the assessment is a test of some kind used for selection purposes, it is critical how these matters are resolved, and also critical that consistent administration procedures be followed, including provisions to maintain test security.

There are also many issues to be resolved with respect to reporting and using the results. Who will have access to the results? What aggregate group reports will be useful in addition to individual reports? How will historical data be maintained and accessed later? One of the advantages of Internet-based assessment platforms, as long as they are robust and have many configurable options, is that, once these administration and reporting issues have been resolved, the decisions can be operationalized so they are executed in an automated and consistent manner.

6. As appropriate, conduct item analysis and validation studies.

Censeo conducts many different kinds of statistical research studies for clients to ensure that their assessments are of high quality, that they meet business needs, and that they will withstand legal scrutiny if they are ever challenged. For assessments like selection tests, this may involve formal validation studies to prove that the tests are correlated with job performance, and that they don't discriminate against protected groups. For assessments used for development purposes, like knowledge assessments, the analysis may involve statistical techniques to show the relationship between the assessment and the learning objectives in a training program. Item analysis techniques can be used to identify ways to make any type of assessment better, including knowledge tests, multi-rater surveys and employee surveys.

For more detailed information on Censeo's approach to developing tests, 360 surveys and employee surveys, visit our "Downloads and Resources" web page (<http://www.censeocorp.com/downloads/index.asp>) and reference the following white papers:

- Guidelines for Writing Effective Tests
- Developing an Effective Multi-Rater Survey and Conducting a Successful Campaign
- Developing an Effective Employee Survey

Key Benefits

Censeo's Ph.D.-level Industrial-Organizational Psychologists have extensive training and experience in authoring valid tests and surveys for a variety of purposes. We readily understand the complexities involved in designing and delivering assessments, and create value for our clients by:

- Developing assessments that meet specific measurement objectives and business needs.
- Developing impactful individual reports that contain suggested development or improvement actions, and powerful group reports for understanding aggregate strengths and weaknesses.
- Following a fast, efficient development cycle, saving significant time and internal resources.
- Providing sound advice and counsel during all phases of an assessment initiative.

Censeo Corporation is a human resource consulting firm offering consulting services and Internet-based assessment products. The company's mission is to help clients maximize their investment in human capital by collecting and then strategically using accurate and valid information about competencies and work preferences. For more information, visit www.censeocorp.com, e-mail info-request@censeocorp.com or call 407.645.1600 x150.