

APPLICANT SUITABILITY MATRIX (ASM)

Enhances Work Performance and Health and Safety of Disability Support Workers

Recent research by the University of Adelaide has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Applicant Suitability Matrix in the recruitment and selection of Disability Support Workers. This paper is a summary of the full research report by Reid-Dicks, Kirby and Harries (2017).

Disability Services, part of the South Australian Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, wanted to enhance their recruitment process to employ Disability Support Workers who were more suited to the role. An internal investigation had found that Disability Support Workers employed at the organisation experienced poorer health, wellbeing and safety outcomes than other groups. This was evidenced through high rates of sick leave, workplace injuries (both physical and mental) and leave associated with WorkCover claims. The organisation had also identified a number of psychosocial hazards including interpersonal conflict, poor communication between team members and a lack of teamwork. In addition, Disability Services wanted to enhance the performance of Disability Support Workers and improve the quality of client care provided.

To improve the health, safety and performance of Disability Support Workers the organisation introduced the Applicant Suitability Matrix (ASM) into the recruitment and selection process. The ASM allowed the organisation to gain insight into the personality preferences, values and beliefs of candidates applying for the role, and differentiate more suitable applicants. It was identified that the organisation needed Disability Support Workers who not only had the necessary job skills, but also had an alignment of personal values (e.g. respect for clients), and personality preferences (e.g. calmness under pressure, emotional stability) for the role. In addition, it was recognised that Disability Support Workers should be placed in positions that were suited to their personality and capacities to ensure they had the best chance of success in the role (e.g. employees highly susceptible to stress and anxiety should not be placed in high stress environments such as those with clients with challenging behaviours).

After using the ASM for approximately two years the organisation compared work performance and health and safety outcomes for 154 Disability Support Workers, 85 of which were employed prior to the introduction of the ASM (forming the pre-screening group) and 69 of whom were employed following the introduction of the ASM (forming the post-screening group).

RESULTS

IMPROVED HEALTH AND SAFETY OUTCOMES

Disability Support Workers who were employed after the introduction of the ASM, compared to those employed before had:

- Significantly less sick leave (4.8 days less)
- Significantly less unplanned leave (5.2 days less)
- Fewer days of leave due to work cover claims (16 days less)



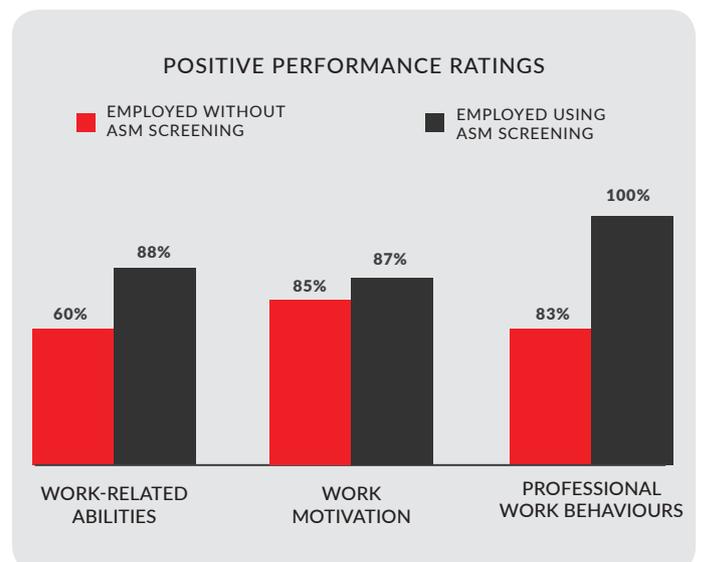
*Results are based on averages over the first 18 months of employment

ENHANCED WORK PERFORMANCE

Disability Support Workers employed after introduction of the ASM were found to have higher manager ratings of performance as measured across three broad areas:

- *Work-related abilities* – Knowledge and skills, verbal communication skills; ability to learn and apply skills; coping with physical and emotional job demands; supporting client needs; dealing with critical situations, resolving issues, recovering from stress-related incidents
- *Work motivation and reliability* – Interest and motivation, reliability in attendance, completing tasks and following procedures
- *Professional work behaviours* – Empathy, contribution to positive team culture, professional behaviour towards clients, co-workers and managers

The most significant differences between those employed before the introduction of the ASM and after, were that those employed after were more likely to be empathetic, communicate well, and have more positive interactions with clients and their team. All of which are key to the Disability Support Worker role.



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T 1300 777 233
E safeselectsupport@convergeintl.com.au
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Furthermore, Disability Support Workers employed after the introduction of the ASM had a significantly higher proportion of “Well above expectations” ratings on all performance items. Particular improvements were noted across the following performance indicators:

- Client interactions
- Empathy towards feelings of clients
- Capacity to deal with critical situations
- Capacity to recover from stress related incidents at work
- Contribution to positive team culture
- Reliability in completing job tasks

IDENTIFICATION OF KEY PERSONALITY PREFERENCES SUITED TO THE ROLE

Through using the ASM, Disability Services were able to identify key personality preferences suited to the Disability Support Worker role. Specifically, those who indicated a strong tendency to be patient on the ASM were more likely to be rated highly by their manager in regards to their engagement at work and contribution to their team. Also, those who were identified using the ASM as having a strong tendency to be calm and emotionally stable were found to have less sick leave and work cover claims than other employees.

ENHANCED RECRUITMENT PROCESS AND SUITABILITY OF CANDIDATES

As part of the study, hiring managers were interviewed about their experience of the introduction of the ASM to the recruitment process. They reported the following:

- **More thorough and informative recruitment process**
The ASM enabled interviewers to gain a deeper understanding of the candidates’ responses and motives. *“People could give you the right answers, what you want to hear, but when it comes to the psychometric that sorts them out a bit better...Better guide about what the person is thinking not what the person is saying”.*
- **Increased suitability**
 - Higher calibre of final candidates ‘who wanted to be there’
 - An overall improvement in the general workforce, with less people identified as ‘high risk’
 - Reduction in turnover, as a result of more suitable employees
- **Improved fit with team culture, and enhanced team cohesion**
Recruitment of employees with personality traits that positively impact teamwork (e.g. altruism, patience, conscientiousness, compassion and flexibility). In contrast, identification and exclusion of candidates with personality traits likely to negatively impact on teamwork (e.g. hostility, self-centredness, stubbornness).
- **Characteristics of suitable/unsuitable employees**
Recruitment of candidates who have personality traits likely to easily adapt to the Disability Support Services environment.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of the ASM led to the enhanced health, safety and performance of Disability Support Workers. Through introducing the ASM, Disability Services recruited more suitable employees and identified significant improvements in the below areas for new employees:

- Decreased amount of WorkCover claims
- Decreased amounts of sick leave
- Decreased amounts of unplanned leave
- Higher manager ratings of performance

The ASM also allowed managers to better identify the ideal personality characteristics of Disability Support Workers, and gain further insight and understanding into the personality, values and behaviour of candidates, to make more informed recruitment decisions.



Further Information

This paper is a summary of the full research report:

Reid-Dicks, I.; Kirby, N. & Harries, J. (2017). Evaluating the effectiveness of psychological screening in improving the recruitment of Disability Support Workers, University of Adelaide, Australia.

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E safeselectsupport@convergeintl.com.au
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