

predictive of subsequent job performance (which, as we will see, is often the case), it may be somewhat limiting to use biodata scores only for initial assessment decisions. Thus, although biographical information is as much a substantive assessment method as it is an initial assessment method, because it shares many similarities with application blanks, we have included it in this section. Nevertheless, it should also be considered in deliberations about which substantive assessment methods are to be used.

Biographical information has some similarities to background tests (see the section on reference and background checks). Biodata and background checks are similar in that both look into an applicant's past. However, the two types of selection methods differ in their general purpose and measurement. First, whereas a background check is often used to turn up any "buried bones" in an applicant's background, biodata is used to predict future performance. Second, whereas reference checks are conducted through checks of records and conversations with references, biodata information is collected by survey. Thus, biodata inventories and background checks are distinct methods of selection that must be considered separately.

The type of biographical information collected varies a great deal from inventory to inventory and often depends on the job. For example, a biographical survey for executives might focus on career aspirations, accomplishments, and disappointments. A survey for blue-collar workers might focus on training and work experience. A biodata inventory for federal government workers might focus on school and educational experiences, work history, skills, and interpersonal relations. As can be seen from these examples, most biodata surveys consider individual accomplishments, group accomplishments, disappointing experiences, and stressful situations.²⁷ The domains in which these attributes are studied often vary from job to job but can range from childhood experiences to educational or early work experiences to current hobbies or family relations.

Measures

Typically, biographical information is collected in a questionnaire that applicants complete. Exhibit 8.5 provides example biodata items. As can be seen, the items are quite diverse. It has been suggested that each biodata item can be classified according to 10 criteria:

- *History* (does the item describe an event that occurred in the past or a future or hypothetical event?)
- *Externality* (does the item address an observable event or an internal event such as values or judgments?)
- *Objectivity* (does the item focus on reporting factual information or subjective interpretations?)
- *Firsthandedness* (does the item seek information that is directly available to the applicant rather than an evaluation of the applicant's behavior by others?)