

level implied among the categories. The categories are merely different, and none is higher or lower than the others. For example, each job title could represent a different category, with a different number assigned to it: managers = 1, clericals = 2, sales = 3, and so forth. Clearly, the numbers do not imply any ordering among the categories (sales is not "better" or "worse" than clericals).

Ordinal. With ordinal scales, objects are rank ordered according to how much of the attribute they possess. Thus, objects may be ranked from best to worst or from highest to lowest. For example, five job candidates, each of whom has been evaluated in terms of overall qualification for the job, might be rank ordered from 1 to 5, or highest to lowest, according to their job qualifications.

Though useful for making clear distinctions between objects, rank orderings represent only relative differences among objects; they do not indicate the absolute levels of the attribute. Thus, the rank ordering of the five job candidates does not indicate exactly how qualified each of them is for the job, nor are the differences in their ranks necessarily equal to the differences in their qualifications. The differences in qualifications between applicants ranked 1 and 2 may not be the same as the differences between those ranked 4 and 5. Moreover, forcing objects to be ranked creates the appearance that the differences between two objects (for example, between applicant 1 and 2) are "real" and significant, when in fact those differences may be trivial. A good example of this is annual rankings of business schools, where a switch from second to first place (and vice-versa) is touted as noteworthy, when in fact the differences between the two schools are probably not meaningful.⁴

Interval. Like ordinal scales, interval scales allow us to rank order objects. However, the differences between adjacent points on the measurement scale are now equal in terms of the attribute. If an interval scale is used to rank order the five job candidates, the differences in qualifications between those ranked 1 and 2 are equal to the differences between those ranked 4 and 5.

In many instances, the level of measurement falls somewhere between an ordinal scale and an interval scale. That is, objects can be clearly rank ordered, but the differences between the ranks are not necessarily equal throughout the measurement scale. In the example of the five job candidates, the differences in qualifications between those ranked 1 and 2 might be slight compared with the differences between those ranked 4 and 5.

Unfortunately, this in-between level of measurement is characteristic of many of the measures used in staffing. Though it is not a major problem, it does signal the need for caution in interpreting the meaning of differences in scores among people.

Ratio. Like interval scales, ratio scales have equal differences between scale points for the attribute being measured. In addition, ratio scales have a logical or absolute true zero point. Because of this, how much of the attribute each object possesses can be stated in absolute terms.