

Normally, ratio scales are involved in counting or weighing things. Staffing has many such examples of ratio scales: Assessing how much weight a candidate can carry over some distance for physically demanding jobs such as firefighting or general construction is an example. Perhaps the most common example is counting how much previous job experience (general or specific) job candidates have had, where zero is a meaningful number (indicating no job experience).

Objective and Subjective Measures

Frequently, staffing measures are described as either objective or subjective. The term "subjective" is often used in disparaging ways ("I can't believe how subjective that interview was; there's no way they can rate me fairly on the basis of it"). Exactly what is the difference between so-called objective and subjective measures?

The difference, in large part, pertains to the rules used to assign numbers to the attribute being assessed. With objective measures, the rules are predetermined and usually communicated and applied through some sort of scoring key or system. For example, consider a basketball game, where the total points a team receives is an objective measure. In employment contexts, most paper-and-pencil tests are considered objective. The scoring systems in subjective measures are more elusive and often involve a rater or judge who assigns the numbers. For example, consider a gymnastics competition, where the total points a team receives is a more subjective measure, depending on how the gymnasts are rated by each judge. In employment contexts, many employment interviews fall into this category, especially those wherein the interviewer has an idiosyncratic way of evaluating people's responses, one that is not known or shared by other interviewers.

In principle, any attribute can be measured objectively or subjectively, and sometimes both are used. Research shows that when an attribute is measured by both objective and subjective means, there is often relatively low agreement between scores from the two types of measures. A case in point pertains to the attribute of job performance. Performance may be measured objectively through quantity of output, and it may be measured subjectively through performance appraisal ratings, yet these two types of measures correlate only weakly with each other.⁵ Undoubtedly, the raters' lack of sound scoring systems for rating job performance is a major contributor to the lack of obtained agreement.

It thus appears that whatever type of measure is used to assess attributes in staffing, serious attention should be paid to the scoring system or key. In a sense, this requires nothing more than having a firm knowledge of exactly what the organization is trying to measure. This is true for both paper-and-pencil (objective) measures and judgmental (subjective) measures, such as the employment interview. It is simply another way of emphasizing the importance of standardization in measurement.

Scores

EXHIBIT