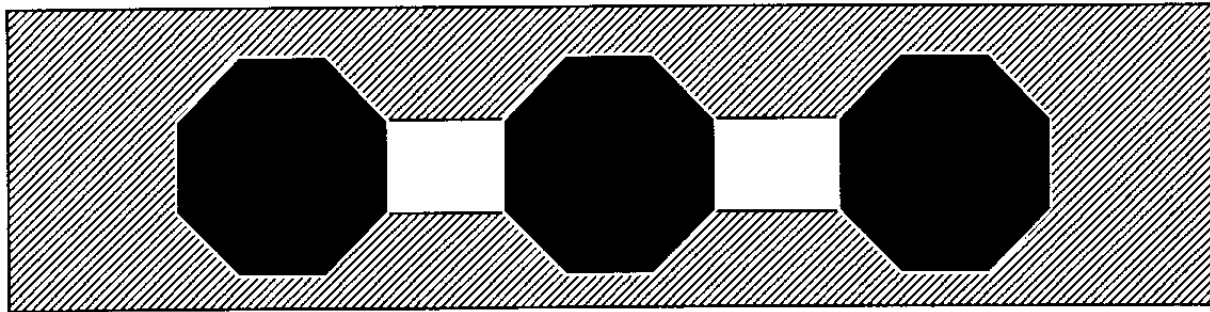


The Accomplishment Record for Selecting Human Resources Professionals

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The use of psychological testing as part of an employment selection process has been perceived by some employee groups, particularly professionals, as unnecessary, irrelevant, and an invasion of privacy (Hough, 1984). Professionals prefer to let their record speak for itself and, in effect, argue what psychologists have long advocated: that the best indicator of future performance is past behavior.

In response to these objections, Hough (1984) developed the accomplishment record (AR) method as an alternative to traditional psychological testing for selection and promotion decisions affecting professionals. The AR method results in self-reported descriptions of accomplishments in highly relevant, behavioral job dimensions. This technique has been used successfully in selecting attorneys (Hough, 1984), physicians (Tarico, Altmaier, Smith, Franken, & Berbaum, 1986), librarians (Hough, Keyes, & Dunnette, 1984), and public sector professionals (Hough, Dunnett, Bartlett, Goldstein, Keyes, King, Weiss, Levine, & Buxton, 1980).

The AR method is based on a content validation strategy. Content validity relies on a measure that contains representative elements of the job in question; that is, applicants are tested on their abilities to perform tasks that are actually part of the job. Content validity has the advantage of focusing directly on skills necessary to perform a job and requires a job analysis to assure that the skills being tested for are relevant to successful job performance. Considerable effort has been expended to assure content validity of the AR (Hough, 1984;

Hough et al., 1983; Tsui & Milkovich, 1987).

In addition to demonstrated value in predicting job success, the AR approach has substantial "face validity," in that professionals responding to it report the task as appropriate and relevant. Face validity refers to the extent to which an assessment procedure *looks* valid. Face validity, although not critical in the technical sense, is nevertheless important to ensure a positive attitude toward both the testing and the organization and to reduce the likelihood that the selection instrument or procedure will be litigated.

This paper examines the AR method as a way to select professional human resources (personnel) managers. First, it reviews AR as an alternative to paper-and-pencil tests. Next, it presents a framework for analyzing the personnel department's activities as reflecting job behaviors for a personnel manager. A form using the AR method is suggested for a personnel manager's position, and a completed form for one of the key human resources activities is included as a guide.

Paper-and-pencil Tests: An Alternative

The AR method is an alternative to traditional paper-and-pencil tests in personnel selection in that it consists of a sub-set of life history (biographical information. Fleishman (1988) has indicated that these background data-measures yield substantial power (cross-validated validity coefficients are in the low .40s against performance and attrition criteria), having been shown to predict a range of criteria from managerial progress to theft behavior. Further-

more, a number of researchers have concluded that the predictive power of background data measures is sufficient to consider it one of the few legitimate alternatives to standardized testing for personnel selection (Reilly & Chao, 1982).

The AR method, as an example of the application of biographical, personnel-history data measures, is very promising. It appears to tap a component of an individual's history that is not measured by typical bio-data inventories — it does not correlate with honors, grades, quality of schools attended, or prior activities and interests. On the other hand, it is related to self-perceptions of success, hard work, and self-assurance. As expected, the AR also correlates with the length of time a person has practiced his or her profession.

Another difference between the AR approach and more traditional background information is the static versus dynamic nature of predicted potential. Background information is a static predictor; a person scoring low on a background information inventory can do little to alter his or her predicted potential. In contrast, those scoring low on an AR protocol can be given feedback concerning areas of inadequacy. Such feedback can also be used to formulate both individual and organizational plans that may improve opportunities for accomplishments in key areas, thus enhancing the individual's potential for promotion (Hough et al., 1983). As such, the AR method is a dynamic predictor of potential instead of a static one.

Briefly, the AR approach evaluates professionals on the basis of their experience and achievements in key job-specific tasks. Typically, professional candidates are asked to describe major accomplishments illustrating their competence in each key job-related area. In describing accomplishments, individuals are asked to provide a general statement of what was accomplished, a precise description of the activities performed in accomplishing the task, the amount of time involved, any formal recognition of achievement (awards, citations, etc.), and the name and address of a person who can verify the information provided on the AR form itself.

AR: Procedures and Principles

The procedures and principles of the AR approach are based on three other methods: 1) the behavioral-consistency method (Schmidt,

Caplan, Bemis, Decuir, Dunn, & Antone, 1979); 2) the critical incident method (Flanagan, 1954); and 3) the Loevinger and Wessler (1970) method of scoring written sentence-completion protocols in which each protocol is a specific unique statement.

• Behavioral consistency

The behavioral-consistency approach provides a format for the AR method inventory. Developed at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (Schmidt et al., 1979), it requires applicants to describe their major achievements in several job-related areas. These areas are behavioral dimensions rated by experienced supervisors as showing maximal differences between superior and minimally acceptable performers. The applicant's achievement statements are evaluated using anchored rating scales for which the anchors are achievement descriptors whose values, along a behavioral dimension, have been reliably determined by experts.

• Critical incidents

The critical incident method provides a procedure for a job analysis that yields behavioral job dimensions and definitions for the AR inventory. Critical incidents are those that have proved to be the key to effective job performance. They do not involve routine activities but rather ones that make the difference between success and failure. In applying this technique, critical incidents are recorded in the form of stories or anecdotes about a person's handling of certain situations, and from these data a composite picture of job behavioral is developed.

• Loevinger and Wessler scoring protocol

Loevinger and Wessler (1970) provide a method of scoring written sentence completion protocols in which each protocol is a specific, unique statement. Their scaling method is used with AR items. A variety of studies have used this scoring method successfully (especially Hough and her series of studies). In summary, then, the AR approach is based on research from a variety of sources.

Personnel Department Tasks and Activities

One of the basic steps in the AR method is identifying key job dimensions. For the human resources manager, this requires examining important tasks within the department. Briefly, there are several conceptual bases of personnel department activities. The specialization theory

holds that personnel departments were formed in response to organizational growth or the need for specialized expertise. In contrast, the strategic contingency perspective suggests that such departments develop in response to critical contingencies in the firm's external environment (Jacoby, 1983; Kochan & Cappelli, 1984), for example, labor relations, equal employment opportunity, health, security, or safety considerations. A third perspective, the strategic human resource management view, emphasizes the connection between human resource activities and the organization's business strategy. In this view, the department's activities are designed to foster the achievement of the organization's business objectives (De Bejar & Milkovich, 1986; Dyer, 1984a; Tichy, Fombrun & Devanna, 1982).

Recently, a multiple constituency approach has emerged. This perspective views the personnel department as responsive to a variety of constituencies or stakeholders (e.g., managers and employees), each of which has demands and opinions regarding the department's effectiveness (Tsui & Milkovich, 1987). This approach assumes that each constituency pursues the fulfillment of its self interests. For example, executives would typically expect the department to engage in activities that help achieve business objectives, whereas managers may be particularly interested in such activities as finding qualified applicants and solving employee problems. Employees' concerns may be related to their personal and career needs.

Regardless of the perspective, research on personnel department activities must attend to the distinction between organization-wide human resource issues and those unique to different organizational levels (Dyer, 1984b). Indeed, researchers have observed that managers at different organization levels (i.e., corporate, business, operating) encounter different strategic issues and, consequently, undertake different personnel activities (Lorange, 1980; Schendel & Hofer, 1979).

With this in mind, the AR method presented here focuses on personnel activities at the operating level; that is, those personnel departments involved in the actual delivery and implementation of products and services. Such departments may be viewed in contrast to corporate or business unit levels, which are more concerned with the design of strategies and policies.

Key Personnel Department Activities at the Operating Level

Employing the multiple constituency approach, Tsui and Milkovich (1987) surveyed over 1,700 individuals (148 executives, 847 managers, 884 employees) in 150 organizational units to determine their perspective on the key tasks and activities of their personnel departments. While there were some differences among these constituencies, the researchers found the following important personnel department tasks and activities, rated from most important to least:

- (1) staffing/human resources planning,
- (2) organization/employee development,
- (3) compensation/employee relations,
- (4) employee support,
- (5) legal requirements/compliance
- (6) labor/union relations,
- (7) policy adherence,
- (8) administrative services.

It is interesting to note the similarity between this list, developed for operating personnel departments, and the specialties of the personnel administration and industrial relations field as defined by the American Society of Personnel Administrators (1984):

- (1) staffing — screening, interviewing, recruitment, testing, personnel records, job analysis and descriptions, staffing tables, promotion transfers;
- (2) personnel maintenance - counseling, personal appraisal inventories, turnover, health services and accident prevention, employee benefits;
- (3) labor relations — negotiations, contract administration, grievances, arbitration;
- (4) training/development — job training, supervisor training, manager and executive development, retraining;
- (5) compensation — wage and salary surveys, incentive pay plans, profit sharing, stock ownership, controls;
- (6) employment communications — house organ, handbooks, attitude surveys and feedback analysis;
- (7) organization — structural design, innovation, conflict resolution, overcoming resistance to change;
- (8) administrative — explanation and interpretation of options, assistance in change;

- (9) personnel policy and planning — defining organizational goals, policy guidelines and strategies, manpower needs forecasting;
- (10) review, audit, research — evaluation of policies and programs, experimentation, cost/benefit studies.

It would appear that job specialties defined for the whole of the human resources/personnel

field are consistent with and reflected in job activities performed by relatively small personnel departments at the operating level. A logical extension of this thinking leads one to conclude that job content of the personnel manager generalists positions at these operating levels is reflected in the identified activities. Personnel managers are often involved with staffing and recruiting; compensation and benefits adminis-

Figure 1. Example of an accomplishment record for human resources professionals.

RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT Please describe past accomplishments that illustrate your knowledge, skill, and abilities in each of the factors listed below. For each factor give a general statement of what you accomplished, a precise description of exactly what activities you performed in accomplishing the achievement, the time period in which these activities were performed, any formal recognition of the achievement (e.g., awards, citations), and the name and address of a person who could verify this information.	
1) STAFFING/HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING • Staffing plans • Succession planning • Testing • Recruitment efforts	2) LEGAL REQUIREMENTS/COMPLIANCE • Accommodation • Affirmative action • Compliance with laws
3) ORGANIZATION/EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT • Organizational design • Training Programs • OD efforts • Needs assessment	4) LABOR/UNION/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS • Negotiation • Labor/management meetings • Grievances • Administer labor contracts
5) EMPLOYEE SUPPORT • Counseling • Accident prevention • Health services	6) COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS • Pay policies • Resolve pay problems • Salary surveys • Performance appraisal • Benefit policies and administration
7) POLICY ADHERENCE • Discipline procedures • Attendance and leave policies • Policy development	8) ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES • Communication • Orientation • Handbooks • Attitude surveys

tration; compliance with internal policies and procedures and external regulations and laws; training and development; counseling and other employee relations activities; and the general administrative services provided by the department. Where a union is present, these personnel managers may also be involved with grievances, labor contracts, and arbitration.

Accomplishment Record Inventory for Personnel Managers

With these key job dimensions in mind, an AR inventory for personnel manager generalist

positions at the operating level (e.g., a plant personnel manager) was developed and is illustrated in Figure 1. As presented, the form is generic and is not a substitute for a job analysis of a personnel manager position. Each organization should review the inventory and, based on a thorough analysis of its own personnel management positions, develop job-related activities pertinent to its own circumstances.

The AR procedure embodied in this form may provide a first step in helping an organization identify key job activities of its personnel

Figure 2. One of the eight dimensions of the accomplishment record for human resources managers and an example of a response.

Organization/Employee Development
Time Period: 1992-1993
General statement of your accomplishment: <i>I was given the responsibility of developing a sales training program (Fundamentals of Sales) for our sales personnel.</i>
Description of exactly what you did: <i>I developed a needs analysis survey to identify specific training needs in the company. As part of this effort, I administered a 45-item questionnaire that I generated based on extensive interviews with key individuals in the sales department. Based on the needs analysis data, I formulated learning objectives and then developed a five day training program around the following key topic areas: time and territory management; communication skills; pre-call and appointment-making skills; the planned sales call including in-depth coverage of developing a creative opening, overcoming objections, and closing the sale; using visual sales aids; customer relations and complaint handling procedures; and the psychology of selling. This program was developed based on the American Management Association's "Principles of Professional Salesmanship" but was extensively revised and tailored to our organization's needs and terminology. The program incorporated case studies, role plays, product presentations, discussions, and audio-visual displays, written assignments, in-basket exercises and other simulations, and product demonstrations. To ensure transfer of the training to the job, Sales Managers were given a 1/2 day executive overview of the program and were provided with specific procedures on how they could reinforce the concepts and skills their employees were expected to acquire in the program. The program was evaluated along the following dimensions: participant reactions as measured by a post-seminar questionnaire; learning as measured by a sales and product knowledge test given before and after the seminar; behaviors exhibited on the job as observed by sales managers; and results as determined by increase in sales dollars and number of new customers adjusted for territory when compared with another sales group that did not receive the sales training. On a nine-point scale evaluating the overall effectiveness of the program the participants rated the program 8.6; there was a 40% increase in knowledge in sales and product knowledge from pre-seminar test scores to post-test scores but only a 3% increase in test scores for a sales group not attending the seminar; behavioral observations by the sales managers indicated that 89% of the salespersons who were trained were demonstrating 64% of the identified skills for those individuals not trained; sales dollars increased 72% after training compared with a 14% increase in sales for individuals not trained by our program and number of new customers increased 105% for the trained salespersons versus a 26% increase in new customers for untrained salespersons.</i>
Awards or formal recognition: <i>Received letter of recognition from Executive Vice President of Sales and a \$6,000 bonus in large part due to the success of this one program.</i>
The information verified by: <i>Leslie Mayer of _____</i>

management positions. The AR can then give an organizational recruiter a way to match relevant job requirements with candidates' experiences. Figure 2 is an example of an accomplishment written by a human resources professional. The AR would be scored by expert consensus on the specific accomplishments provided by the candidates. These evaluations are then used to rank the candidates. More detailed scoring procedures are illustrated in Loevinger and Wessler (1970), Hough (1984), and Hough et al., (1983).

While this tool has been discussed primarily within a selection context (i.e., the applicants list their accomplishments in these job-related areas), the AR procedure may also be useful in a performance appraisal setting. For instance, a personnel manager could be asked to identify his or her accomplishments over the last year in each of these areas and bring this information to the performance review discussion with the supervisor.

As presented here, the AR inventory differs from empirically keyed biographical inventories (Owens, 1976) in that information is weighted on the basis of judgment rather than on empirically estimated validities. The judgmental weighting is based on implicit or explicit hypotheses about what is important in a specific personnel management position.

The AR procedure described, which addresses specific job-related behaviors that are important to personnel managers at the operating level, has been positively received by professionals in a variety of jobs. It has been used effectively in selecting professionals and may prove useful in the performance appraisal process. When used in the performance appraisal process, the standards and expectations of the organization and/or supervisor are made clear. When used for selection purposes, the inventory contributes information about a person not identified by more traditional methods of testing, and as such can contribute to a fuller, more accurate personnel evaluation.

Dr. Von Bergen, an industrial psychologist and professor, has worked for over 20 years in business management applying psychological principles to industrial situations; Dr. Soper is a frequent consultant to management in work motivation and counseling and has published extensively in these fields.

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susceptible to unethical ensnarement. The wheeler-dealer group will no doubt always be with us, and its ethics will continue to trouble the business community. This in itself is a good reason for not letting the issue of business ethics drop completely out of sight.

As American business organizations enter the 21st century, corporate executives should be ever watchful that the drive for improved competitiveness also incorporates ethical sensitivity and social responsibility. Although there is, per se, no conflict between the two, future business leaders need to be careful that their efforts to be competitive and profitable do not cause them to embrace values that tarnish their ethics.

Dr. Kumar's research interests include international dimensions of organizational behavior, cultural diversity in work groups and interpersonal influence tactics; he has published in the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology, and other journals.

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