

Providing Better Service to Hiring Managers

The State of Washington DOP Approach to Position-Specific Recruiting and Score Banding (Narrowing the Candidate Pool via Use of Skills and Abilities)

Neil Davidson, with the help of many others.

Since the first of the year there has been considerable discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of score banding among the IPMAAC Internet discussion group participants representing many governments (ipmaactalk@ipmaac.org). I would like to submit that the State of Washington Department of Personnel (DOP) is using a methodology that cleverly captures the intended strengths of traditional banding while avoiding the weaknesses that are all too frequently associated with it; a methodology that offers excellent service to State of Washington department managers.

The basic features of the State of Washington Internet based employment system are described in an article that appeared in the Spring 2002 issue of Public Personnel Management entitled, "Great Candidates Fast: On-line Job Application and Electronic Processing – Washington State's New Internet Application System." The article was written by Brad Bingham and Sherrie Ilg, two of the architects behind the system, and myself, in the role of reporter and fan. Considerable help was provided by Julia Graham of the DOP in refining and making significant additions to the article prior to publication. INET has been featured at four national conferences as the state-of-the-art process for recruitment and assessment in the public sector. In 2003, INET received a Governor's Award for Quality and Performance, as well as a first-place win by the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO). In summary, the employment service is a sophisticated Internet based employment system of open continuous training and experience examinations that are available to the applying public by going to <http://hr.wa.gov/statejobs>. Upon completing the Applicant Profile (the yellow sheets in the handout) and Training and Experience examination (the blue sheets in the handout) and pressing the Submit Button, an applicant instantly receives an electronic notice as to whether or not the examination was passed, and if it was passed, his/her score. Rank standing on the register is not provided since that will constantly change as people are hired from the

register and new applications are received. A hiring manager with a vacancy can be considering the application within 15 minutes of its submission. The completed Applicant Profile stays on the system and can be updated at any time. The profile can be used for multiple recruitments.

Before I talk about the heart of the system's operational model, I would like to talk about some contextual matters.

Contextual Matters

The State of Washington for many years has had a reputation for providing the applying public with very useful information on which to base an apply/not apply decision. The approach facilitates providing quality employment services to approximately 200 employment sites distributed geographically over a large state. For this part of my presentation, I will be referring to the announcement, classification specification, and examination for Human Resources Consultant 2 that is in your handout material. While a paper version, the documents appear exactly as they would appear on the screen if you were applying on-line and about 90% of the State of Washington's applicants do apply online, although paper versions of the forms are available. I picked this classification because it is in our field and many IPMAACers can relate to it and because you may know people in our field who might like to pursue employment with a very progressive agency in the great Pacific Northwest. Also, since the folks in Olympia, Washington have been, once again, wonderfully cooperative in letting me report on their progressive systems, I thought I should give them some recruiting exposure in exchange. They currently have one opening on the Assessment Team for a Human Resource Consultant 4. If you are interested, please see me and I can get you some contact information.

To give this section more salience, I would like to point out that our good friend and solid IPMAAC contributor, Bryon Baldwin, recently completed the forms. As a consequence, he is now working for the State of Washington in Olympia for Melia Olsen rather than for the California Department of Justice.

Please note the **CLICK HERE** notation on the front of the announcement. Clicking on it gives you the class specification for more detailed information about the positions. You have a hard copy of that in the packet.

On the front side of the announcement, notice the “SPECIAL NOTES” section toward the bottom of the sheet. This section clearly conveys the fact that Human Resource Consultant 2 positions are widely distributed geographically; that more information is available about the agencies that employ them by going to <http://access.wa.gov/government/awstate.asp>; and that some jobs may require a work schedule outside the traditional 8-5 workweek, with occasional evening and weekend requirements.

At the top of page two of the announcement, notice the “DESIRABLE QUALIFICATIONS” section. By that listing of competencies the State is clearly conveying to the potential applicant that professional level qualifications are needed.

At the bottom of the second page of the announcement are several features I really like. One section identifies locations where computer terminals are available for use and the other section lets people with disabilities know that arrangements for accommodation are readily available.

Note on page 4 of the application, the map of Washington State broken up into regions. People can designate the regions of the State they might consider working in. That is a convenience to the applicant and saves managers the inconvenience of considering people who don't wish to relocate. The yellow section is what most of us would consider to be an application. The State of Washington DOP considers it to be an Applicant Profile and it can be used for many recruitments.

In the Special Skills Section on the second sheet of blue paper the applicant is presented with a vehicle for identifying relevant education and experience. This section gives the applicant the opportunity to identify aspects of the work they are qualified for and conversely areas of the work they are not qualified for or are not interested in pursuing. This section is a very convenient vehicle for the applicant to show what aspects of work they do not wish to pursue so that they are not bothered by unwanted invitations to interview and it saves hiring managers time and trouble in finding people on the register who wish to be considered.

At the bottom of Special Skills Section, Page 3 is a very important section called “Conditions of Employment.” It gives the applying public an opportunity to indicate that they would prefer not to be considered for

positions with certain features, i.e. involves working in a prison setting, requires a thorough background check, requires a polygraph test.

The next section is the Education & Training Exam. Please note in the first paragraph the statement that the information given must be consistent with reported education and experience. That is an important concept and I will touch on it later.

Notice the degree of specificity in Question 1-04. This is quite typical of the State of Washington's approach to designing qualification questionnaires. They go to considerable length to make sure the applying public understands what the employer is looking for and conversely what is not qualifying.

Processing and Scoring

When the applicant has completed the questionnaire and presses the "Submit" key, the responses are scored in relationship to a Subject Matter Expert prepared scoring key. In a job analysis process the Subject Matter Experts have identified the competencies that go with each category of positions and the score weightings that go with each competency. Instantly a total score is compiled and presented to the applicant on his or her screen.

When the HR staff in an appointing department has a position to fill they can browse a group of applicants (we will refer to the group as a band although the State of Washington doesn't use the word "Band") and screen the candidates for most jobs with up to six skill sets. Sorting with up to six skill sets is a systems limitation and a project is now underway that will do away with that restriction. In a sequential application of skill sets the HR agent in a hiring department can actually watch on the screen the qualifications narrow the group to be considered (band) down to a closer and closer match to the specifications of the position to be filled. Essentially, hiring management is controlling the size of the pool (band) by applying job related criteria. The hiring department can balance the closeness of the match in relationship to the number of candidates that they can conveniently interview. In my view it is management's active involvement in making and applying decisions about the number of candidates to be interviewed in relationship to closeness of qualification fit that gives the system extremely high acceptance ratings among hiring managers. The computer screen is constantly reminding hiring management that the dynamic on the screen is

attributable to the input of SMEs they, themselves, have nominated to be involved.

DOP Assistance

Hiring departments in need of specialized services in conjunction with certifications have access to those services through the very impressive DOP Recruitment and Selection Team managed by Melia Olsen. Each department in the state government has a Human Resources Consultant on her team designated as a (go-to) contact person on recruitment and assessment matters. If, after applying six skill sets, the hiring department still has too many candidates to adequately consider, the team in Central HR may develop supplemental screening tools (such as a resume or telephone screen or a simplified Experience and Training (E&T) exam, or another skill set to further refine and narrow the applicant pool.

The Team is also available to address quality control issues. For example, if hiring management is concerned that a number of people seem to have overstated their qualifications, the team is available to survey the list with additional questions and may remove names from the list when it is found that people have been too expansive in their claimed qualifications. Earlier, I mentioned looking at the relationship between education/experience on the Applicant Profile and claimed skill sets on the T&E questionnaire. Melia's team is prepared to do that checking. Often it is found that people were truly confused about the qualification level the state was seeking. In that case, the posted examination can be redesigned and specific examples of what the state is looking for might be added.

Seeking Feedback

A critical piece in the process is the systematic collection of feedback from the hiring departments (How are we doing?). Recruitment Consultants in the Department of Personnel are in frequent contact with HR representatives in the hiring departments but there is also a more structured collection of feedback. After the papers in your handout packet that are associated with the HR Consultant 2 recruitment, you will see a "Quality of Referral Survey" printed on pink paper. This is a form designed for on-line posting to hiring departments and serves as a conduit of information from the hiring departments back to the DOP. Those of you in the audience who work for

government staffing agencies, if you don't already collect feedback from your departments, you might want to consider something like this survey instrument for your own use. Aside from the usefulness of the information collected, just the fact that the instrument is available says something very positive about the DOP and its philosophy of service to the operating departments of the state government. Please take a minute to glance over the survey instrument because I would like to talk about certain, specific questions on it. Of course, the question of overall importance is question 2-01, "I am satisfied with the referral of candidates I received." But, notice question 2-04 "The referral included an adequate number of diverse candidates." Just having that question on the sheet reinforces for the managers, the state's desire to achieve and maintain a diverse workforce. By the way, all indications are that the state is doing very well in achieving diversity and the on-line application system is supporting that very important goal. Notice the survey section entitled "Recruitment Process Options." Notice in particular question 3-03, "When I receive a referral that includes unqualified or unsatisfactory candidates, I feel that I have practical and effective options for removing those candidates from the referral." The statement of that option serves to remind hiring managers that they can have the DOP remove unqualified candidates from the list. It also reminds the operating departments of the DOP strong service commitment to stakeholders.

Discussion

Many of the shortcomings associated with banding are related to giving hiring managers too many names to conveniently consider. That almost encourages hiring managers to take inappropriate short cuts to pare down the pool (band) to a convenient number. It also tends to build resentment because of the appearance that Central HR is finessing its work off to the hiring departments.

What the State of Washington's system so cleverly does, is enable the hiring departments to adjust the pool (band) of candidates to consider, to a number that can be conveniently and thoroughly processed and the adjusting is done with job analysis derived criteria. The process respects a manager's time and desire to conduct a thorough final hiring process.

The site itself constantly reinforces sound hiring principles: that people in underutilized protected class groups need to be included at every opportunity; that the staff of the DOP is available to help structure the final hiring process; that qualifications claimed need to be checked by contacting references and past employers, that as many people as time permits need to be interviewed.

Changes are Coming

As if the State of Washington's system wasn't already exciting enough, the folks in Olympia, Washington are hard at work doing a major software and hardware conversion to make it still better.

The passage of the Personnel System Reform Act in 2002 eliminated the statutory requirement of the "Rule of 7" for candidate referrals and opened the door for the Department of Personnel Director to adopt new rules to eliminate other barriers to hiring the best qualified candidates. These rules become effective this July. Highlights include:

- ❑ Ability for state agencies to use the centralized on-line application and screening process or a decentralized process.
- ❑ Candidate screening based on position specific requirements, rather than those identified for a broad job classification.
- ❑ Desirable qualifications to be used unless there are specific legal requirements.
- ❑ Based on job analysis of key talents needed.
- ❑ No classification-based testing requirements.
- ❑ Each candidate pool will be one unranked list (unless there are candidates on state layoff lists).
- ❑ Individual state agencies determine whether and how to provide promotional preferences to permanent classified employees.
- ❑ Candidate referrals are decentralized to individual agencies.
- ❑ Agencies determine how many names to refer, no longer bound by a centrally mandated "Rule of 7."

The State of Washington DOP is currently involved in completing two major initiatives:

- Configuring an electronic recruiting system (SAP e-Recruiting) and developing new recruiting tools to enable the recruitment for all jobs electronically in an even more efficient manner than INET.
- Creating a Qualifications catalog populated by competencies (KSAs and behaviors) that will directly impact recruitment, selection, and assessment and aid employers in identifying training needs and performance management objectives.

The limitation of 24 competencies for applicants and 6 search and sort competencies for hiring managers are systems limitations due to the fact that the current system is a not always happy marriage between the Internet and a State of Washington mainframe. The new system, SAP e-Recruiting, will be completely Internet based and the systems imposed limitations will disappear. That will enable the State of Washington to host a powerful matrix of talents that the candidates can offer, to compare with talents that managers need at the work site and the matching will be done right to the position level rather than the classification level. The new approach will enable people who would like to work for the State of Washington to maintain a posting of their talents on the system so that they can be contacted and encouraged to apply for specific openings when there is a match. The State of Washington will be able to include in the search, posted resumes so that when a match is made the person can be electronically notified that they might wish to file an application. The power of the system will enable the DOP to easily check to make sure that they are maintaining a sufficient inventory of talent for the needs of the hiring departments.

The changes in recruiting & selection are intended to allow state agencies the flexibility to set recruitment policy and processes that best meet their unique and ever changing business needs. The central DOP will serve as a strategic partner and consultant to agencies as they implement the new options available with decentralization. The centralized recruitment and selection staff will move from very transaction based (processing applications for broad job classes) to more targeted position-based recruitment and assessment services.

Final Comments

The State of Washington's system strikes a beautiful balance between keeping hiring manager time investment to a minimum and maximizing the

qualifications of the applicant pool, management is considering. Essentially they are addressing the needs that banding is intended to offer, i.e. speed and flexibility but, in the process, they are maintaining sound civil service hiring principles. With the sequential application of skill sets, managers are considering the most qualified candidates; the candidates who can best perform the work of the state.

Acknowledgements

I am a firm believer in acknowledging the contributions of people who are taking pioneering steps to advance organizational staffing. To that end I would like to acknowledge the great help of Melia Olsen who manages the very progressive State of Washington Recruitment and Selection Team. Melia helped me better understand the bigger picture of the State of Washington DOP approach to customer support. I would like to thank Dan Masden who runs the department support function for Melia on a day-to-day basis. Dan was active with IPMAAC during an earlier stint with the State of Washington. Now that he is back, I hope he re-involves himself with our professional group. IPMAAC would certainly gain by it. I would like to thank Mary Carlson who is the SAP e-Recruiting Project Manager. Mary helped me better understand the advances that will be gained from the conversion from INET to e-Recruiting. Eden Teachout helped me understand how a hiring department HR representative would actually experience the dynamics of the system on the screen as candidates approach the narrow end of the funnel as skill sets are applied. Finally, thanks to Sherrie Ilg who was one of the principals in the design of the original system and is heavy involved in the change over to the new system. I am in awe of her talents with software.

Respectively submitted:

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POST SCRIPT: I WOULD BE HAPPY TO PROVIDE READERS WITH COPIES OF THE HANDOUTS REFERED IN THIS

PRESENTATION THAT WERE DISTRIBUTED TO THE AUDIENCE AT THE 29TH IPMAAC CONFERENCE. THE HANDOUTS CONSIST OF THE COMPLETE STATE OF WASHINGTON APPLICANT PROFILE FORM FOR HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTANT 2; THE COMPLETE EXAMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE; AND THE “HOW ARE WE DOING” STATE OF WASHINGTON DOP HIRING DEPARTMENT SURVEY FORM.

JUST SEND YOUR REQUEST TO ME AT THE ADDRESS PRINTED ABOVE OR SEND ME AN EMAIL AT galleoninc@aol.com. I WILL NEED YOUR U.S. MAILING ADDRESS. I SHOULD ALSO MENTION THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT DOCUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU ON THE STATE OF WASHINGTON EMPLOYMENT WEBSITE <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/statejobs>.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS. IF I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWERS, I WILL CONTACT THE FOLKS IN OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON ON YOUR BEHALF. HOPE TO SEE EVERYONE IN LAS VEGAS FOR THE 30TH IPMAAC CONFERENCE.