



## Increasingly, applicants' fates sealed before live interview

By Ariana Eunjung Cha

The 10 young men and women were there to impress.

Decked out in their best suits, they were vying for hourly work as sales associates, ride operators, drivers and cooks at Universal Studios Hollywood theme park and its adjoining retail unit. When asked their favorite movie, they mentioned ones they knew were produced by Universal. When asked what they detested most about their previous jobs, they said not much. And when asked what single word would describe them best, several quickly offered "happy."

On the surface, they all seemed promising. But recruiter Nathan Giles knew better.

Even before the candidates had stepped through the door for the group interview, their fate had been largely determined by a computer. They had taken a 50-minute online test that asked them to rate to what degree they agreed or disagreed with statements such as, "It's maddening when the court lets guilty criminals go free," "You don't worry about making a good impression" and "You could describe yourself as 'tidy'."

A score in the "green" range for customer service gave an applicant an 83 percent chance of getting hired, "yellow" a 16 percent chance and "red" a 1 percent chance.

Over the past few years, personality assessment tests have moved from the realm of experiment to standard practice at many of the nation's largest companies, including the Albertson's grocery chain and retailers such as Neiman Marcus and Target. A recent survey found that about 30 percent of all companies use personality tests in hiring. To many companies, the tests are as important, if not more important, than an applicant's education, experience and recommendations.

Some firms give the computer the power to conduct the first screening of candidates and do not bother interviewing applicants unless they score above a certain level. Universal, however, prefers to put everyone through an interview on the chance that assessments are wrong.

Usually they aren't.

"In almost every case, the results of the test are what we see in their interviews," said Giles, who has been at his job for two years.

Universal said the online exams have made a measurable difference in the quality of its workforce. Employee retention and customer satisfaction levels are up, while absenteeism and theft are down...

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