

Prior work experience matters when evaluating job applicants... doesn't it?

3-MINUTE READ

“ Here’s why a CV fixture could get a surprise retirement. ”

The vast majority of recruiters and recruitment sites ask for evidence of prior relevant job experience from candidates, who in turn expect to be asked. Yet maybe a rethink is in order.

Research into the accuracy of prior job experience as a predictor of newcomer success delivered a finding both surprising and definitive: there is virtually no correlation between an applicant’s experience and how successful they are, either in training or on the job, or even in their retention.

These conclusions emerged from a [massive meta-analysis](#) of studies carried out by van Iddekinge et al and published in the journal *Personnel Psychology*. Factors that talent acquisition people imagine would certainly make a difference in the value of prior job experience in predicting success once hired, in fact, generally made none. For example, the relevance, length, or number of prior work experiences made no difference.

One implication of these surprising findings is that organizations should reconsider the practice of screening out applicants who have little or no prior experience. This would widen

applicant pools considerably, and particularly for non-traditional job seekers (for example, mothers entering the workforce for the first time in their 30s or 40s).

Instead of looking at the length or relevance of previous work experience, organizations should invest in assessing what really matters in making selection decisions:

- What *job-relevant knowledge and skill* did a candidate master in previous roles?
- How *effective* were they in situations representative of those likely to occur on the target job?

Assessing those critical credentials requires more than just asking an applicant to check a box. Years of experience don’t matter; what one did or learned during previous work experiences -- that’s what counts.

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Source: Iddekinge, C.H., Arnold, J.D., Frieder, R.E., & Roth, P.L. (2019) "A meta-analysis of the criterion-related validity of pre-hire work experience", *Personnel Psychology*, 72, 571-598.