

SUCCESS FACTORS IN SYSTEM OPERATOR SELECTION

PSP Metrics has specialized in the assessment of candidates for system operator/load dispatcher positions in electric utilities and ISOs/RTOs for more than 50 years. We have conducted five large-scale validation studies comparing actual job performance of hundreds of system operators to PSP test results. Consistently, PSP has found that applicants need to have a particular set of aptitudes, interests and work behaviors in order to succeed on the job.

While specific success factors have changed over the years, as the job itself has changed, PSP has been able to continuously improve its accuracy rate in system operator selection. At present, we believe that our selection program is the most accurate, thorough and defensible one of its kind available in North America. The methods used by PSP meet or surpass all professional and governmental standards for employee selection procedures.

BACKGROUND

Selecting successful system operators is more difficult than many employee selection problems due to three factors. First, situations do not repeat frequently in the control room setting. Second, it is impossible to predict all of the problems that can arise on the job. Third, usually a relatively small number of system operators work in any one control center. In addition to these difficulties, the job itself has a long learning curve that often involves expensive and extensive training programs. Thus, it takes a great deal of time before a manager knows for certain if an operator will succeed. This time period often exceeds 12 months.

New Systems Operations Center, Connecticut Light and Power. Photo by Al Ferreira Photography.



In selecting system operators, most managers want to answer four questions:

- ❖ Can the candidate do the job?
- ❖ Will the candidate do the job?
- ❖ Will the candidate get along with others?
- ❖ Is there room for the candidate to grow?

PSP's assessment process helps to answer these important questions accurately and objectively, using our proprietary database of successful system operators for benchmarking. These benchmarks, or norms, were updated in 2003, and include separate standards for electric utilities and ISOs/RTOs.

CONCLUSIONS

PSP's 2003 validation study for success factors in system operator selection demonstrates that measurable success factors for the job have changed since 1994. These changes are consistent with changes in the job itself over the years. In addition, system operators continue to have higher aptitude, work interests and work behavior scores than does the general employee population. Moreover, the average test scores for system operators in 2003 are higher than they were in 1994.

It is clear that it takes more to succeed as a system operator today than it did in 1994. This is true for both electric utilities and ISOs/RTOs. As a consequence, PSP's standards for system operator selection have been updated and revised to reflect the aptitudes, work interests and work behaviors needed for on-the-job success. Armed with this latest research, PSP will continue to provide objective and accurate screening tools for the electric power industry.