

UNDERSTANDING HOSPITALITY EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-  
EMPLOYMENT TESTING IN DETERMINING SUCCESSFUL HIRES

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UNDERSTANDING HOSPITALITY EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-EMPLOYMENT TESTING IN DETERMINING SUCCESSFUL HIRES (98 pp.)

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The purpose of this study is to examine hospitality employers' perceptions of a successful hire, and its relationship with pre-employment testing. The first step to achieving this goal would be to determine criteria for defining a successful hire within the hospitality context. This proposed project would help gain insights into utilization and effectiveness of various pre-employment testing methods including drug, personality, integrity, and general mental ability (GMA) testing used in the hospitality industry. It would also explore whether and how these tests vary for frontline versus management employees and skilled versus unskilled employees.

Data was collected from one-on-one interviews of 10 hospitality managers in Ohio and thematic analysis was applied. The findings revealed that hospitality managers perceive inter-personal behavior and guest-service attitude as most important attributes of successful employees. Managers articulated difference in timing to determine a successful hire for frontline versus management level employees whereas no such difference was perceived for skilled versus unskilled employees. While background check and drug testing are perceived to be effective for all employees, managers felt that personality and GMA test results are more effective in determining successful management employees. Managerial implications are discussed.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
Person-Organization Fit Theory .....	6
Job Performance.....	7
Organizational and Work Engagement .....	8
Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention .....	9
Work Behavior.....	10
Person-Job Fit Theory.....	11
Job Performance.....	11
Job Satisfaction .....	12
Organizational Commitment and Intention to Quit .....	13
Pre-employment Testing.....	14
History of pre-employment testing .....	15
Drug testing.....	16
Integrity testing .....	19
Personality testing.....	21
General Mental Ability (GMA) testing.....	24
Measurement of Job Performance .....	27
Research Question .....	30
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	33
Human Subject Review.....	33

Sample Selection.....	34
Data Collection .....	34
IV. RESULTS .....	38
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents .....	38
Data Analysis .....	38
Main Themes .....	39
Characteristics of a Successful Hire .....	39
Interpersonal Behavior and Guest Service Attitude .....	40
Decision-making Ability.....	41
Ability to Follow Directions .....	42
Job Performance .....	42
Effectiveness of Pre-employment Test Results .....	43
Background Checks .....	44
Personality and GMA Testing .....	45
Drug Testing .....	46
Timing to Determine a Successful Hire.....	47
Frontline Employees .....	47
Management Employees.....	48
V. DISCUSSION .....	50
Limitations .....	54
Managerial Implications .....	54
Future Research .....	59
APPENDICES.....	62
APPENDIX A: KSU INSTUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM 63	

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM .....	65
REFERENCES.....	68

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pre-employment testing has gained in popularity over the last decade. Only 26% of large U.S. employers used pre-hire assessments in early 2000s. By 2013, the number climbed to 57% (Weber, 2015). There are hundreds of tests available to help employers in making decisions and many have been related to one or more critical employment outcomes such as increased employee retention and a more efficient and less time-consuming hiring process (Quast, 2011). Below is a summary of commonly used pre-employment tests:

- Integrity tests - assess attitudes and experiences related to a person's honesty, dependability, trustworthiness, reliability, and pro-social behavior. These tests typically ask direct questions about previous experiences related to ethics and integrity OR ask questions about preferences and interests from which inferences are drawn about future behavior in these areas (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2016).
- Personality tests - typically measure traits related to behavior at work, interpersonal interactions, and satisfaction with different aspects of work. Personality tests are often used to assess whether individuals have the potential to be successful in jobs where performance requires a great deal of interpersonal interaction or work in team settings (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2016).



There are numerous incentives to use pre-employment testing including savings in time and money spent on conducting separate screening interviews of large numbers of applicants; potential savings due to potentially avoiding poor hires; and possible reduction of employment-related lawsuits through effective screening techniques (Katunich, 2005).

Companies use pre-employment testing to find the candidates most likely to succeed in the open positions and to screen out those who are unqualified (Quast, 2011). They do not want to settle for people with minimum skills; companies want applicants who stand out in ability and workplace temperament, a new recruiting standard they say yields longer tenure and higher productivity (Weber, 2015).

Pre-employment assessments are viewed as a worthwhile investment, providing employers with some critical insights into a candidate's personality, attitude, and work ethic that may not come through clearly during the interview process (Shields, 2014). According to Mamula (2016) the need for such assessments is increasing. In the overall job market, for every job opening in 2008, there were 40 applicants and by 2016, the number of applicants for every open position had shriveled to 1.4, making it all the more important for employers to make the right choice.

However, use of pre-employment testing is not without its perceived downsides. Some researchers view psychological and personality tests as being ineffective; they perceive that no rules govern the analysis or validation of the test procedures, and that the test questions may violate the privacy rights of job applicants. More importantly, critics

of personality tests feel there is a risk that these tests can result in discrimination in employment decisions (Katunich, 2005).

The hospitality industry is one of the country's largest employers; it is estimated that about 15 million Americans are employed in the US hospitality (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016) sector and the average employee turnover in 2015 rose to 72.1 percent, up from 66.7 percent in 2014 (Ruggless, 2016). Labor expenses has always remained one of the largest single expense item for hospitality managers, accounting for more than one-third of the total operating cost. Employee turnover can cost an organization in several ways, including pre-departure costs, recruitment, selection, onboarding and training, and loss of productivity (Tolan, 2014).

Even with the advent of select-service properties, hospitality developers cannot avoid the human component of hospitality operations. While managing labor expenses is important, hospitality managers are also aware that employees are an integral part of the lodging experience. Moreover, the interaction between hospitality guests and employees has a significant impact on the customer experience and the success of the business operation (Jin-zhao & Jing, 2009).

Pre-employment testing programs can provide employers with more accurate, objective information helping in evaluating job candidates. Better information on candidates provides employers with the ability to accurately evaluate just how well-matched a particular candidate is to the job in question, greatly increasing the odds of hiring the right person for the job – one who will become a reliable, long-term employee.

Candidates that are poorly matched to a position can drive up costs associated with hiring and onboarding new employees (Lechner, 2015).

As the hospitality industry continues to deal with rapid expansion every year along with a high rate of employee turnover, hiring the right employees with the intention of retaining them is more important than ever. In addition, pre-hire assessments can demonstrate strong return on investment in many aspects of the performance of employees, including productivity, quality of service, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and sales (Hess, 2016).

There is a need to understand hospitality employer's perceptions on the role of pre-employment testing in determining a successful hire. It can be used to better understand the difficulties with recruitment procedures faced by employers. Moreover, it can help understand the importance of different skills and attributes needed in prospective job applicants.

The goal of this study is to understand hospitality employers' perceptions of the role of pre-employment testing in appointing a successful hire. The first step to achieving this goal would be to determine criteria for defining a successful hire within the hospitality context; an extant literature review revealed no current research on hospitality recruiters' perceptions of a successful hire, be it for front-line or management positions. The proposed project would help to gain insights into utilization and effectiveness of various pre-employment testing methods including drug, personality, integrity, and general mental ability (GMA) testing used in the hospitality industry and whether and

how they vary for frontline and management employees; skilled and unskilled employees. The long-term applied goal is to assist hospitality managers make effective hiring decisions that could result in increased employee productivity and improve job commitment. The results of the study could benefit hospitality organizations by increasing employee retention and reducing in costs associated with turnover. More efficient, less time-consuming hiring process and increased defensibility of the hiring process through the use of objective, validated metrics could also be expected outcomes from the results of this study.

Following the traditional format, this thesis will consist of a general introduction of the study, a review of literature, methodology used for data collection and analysis, research results, discussion of the findings, suggestions for future research, references, and appendices.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Person-Organization Fit Theory**

Chatman (1989) defined person-organization (P-O) fit as the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons. The author suggested that P-O fit is useful because it ameliorates the ability to predict the extent to which a person's values will change as a function of organizational membership and the extent to which he or she will cling on to organizational norms. Although there are numerous aspects of organizations and people which influence behavior and attitudes, P-O fit is a meaningful way of assessing person-situation interaction because values are fundamental and relatively perpetual and because individual and organizational values can directly be compared (Chatman, 1989).

Kristof (1996) has defined person-organization fit (P-O fit) as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occur when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both.” (p. 4-5). P-O fit is stated under two distinctions. One is the supplementary and complementary fit and the other is the needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. Supplementary fit exists when there is a similarity of relevant characteristics between an organization and a person. Complementary fit exists when there is a “congruence of individual and organizational values.” (p. 5). Needs-supplies fit occurs when an organization satisfies individuals’ needs, desire or preferences and demand-abilities fit

occurs when an individual has the abilities required to meet organizational demand (Kristof, 1996).

Moreover, P-O fit is known to depend on many intricate factors such as “self-selection, organizational selection, socialization, personal and work experiences, perceptions, personality, attitudes and type of organization” (Nicol, Rounding, & MacIntyre, 2011). In current literature, P–O fit has been associated with individual and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance and employee turnover (Goodman & Syyantek, 1999; Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991; Hoffman and Woehr, 2006).

### **Job performance**

P-O fit was found to help employees develop a sense of psychological ownership and consequently enhanced employee’s performance at work in a multinational pharmaceutical company in Taiwan (Han, Chiang, McConville & Chiang, 2015). In the context of higher education, online survey responses from 87 full-time faculty and staff employees of a public western US university’s business college indicated that individuals with higher P–O fit exhibit higher levels of in-role performance (Gregory, Albritton & Osmonbekov, 2010).

In a recent study of a Taiwanese financial services company, Ho, Wu and Wu (2014) considered consensus on strategy implementation as an important form of fit between an operational-level employee and the organization. In keeping with this theory, they suggested that consensus not only affected employees’ performance, but it also

amplified the incentive effect of performance measures in performance evaluation and promotion. Furthermore, in a study involving a Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company, senior executives were found to form high-quality relationships with new executives and facilitate and improve latter's performance. This is when senior executives believe – before and after their organizational entry – that these new executives fit well with the organization, even though new executives' own perceptions of person–organization fit were low (Hu, Wayne, Bauer, Erdogan, & Liden, 2016).

### **Organizational and Work Engagement**

The person-organization fit provides greater meaningfulness and psychological attachment, which lead individuals to a higher level of employee engagement (Memon, Salleh, Baharom, & Harun, 2014) and has a positive impact on organizational engagement as well as work engagement (Ünal & Turgut, 2015). The results of regression analysis of questionnaire responses from 285 employees in the service sector of Istanbul supported Ünal and Turgut's (2015) hypothesis that P-O fit had a positive contribution to organizational engagement as well as work engagement. With this in mind, they implied that congruity of individual and organizational values might encourage positive behavior in a work and organizational context. Thus, employees with high P-O fit may be willing to put in high levels of energy and be strongly involved in their work. At the same time, these employees may be willing to use their knowledge and abilities to contribute to the achievement of goals of their organizations and exert voluntary efforts to contribute to organizational success.

In addition, Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013) used data from six Indian organizations and a sample of 246 Indian managers to test their proposed hypothesis: “Employees who experience stronger P-O fit vis-à-vis their organization will display higher levels of engagement” (p. 30). The results of their study were consistent with their hypothesis.

### **Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention**

Individuals with lower levels of value congruence with their organizations are more likely to leave their organizations than those with higher congruence levels (Chatman 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Moreover, an individual, whose values are congruent with those of his or her organization would generate a favorable attitude towards the organization (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006) and would have the tendency to remain in the organization (Kim, Aryee, Loi & Kim, 2013; Schneider, 1987).

Vancouver and Schmitt (1991) investigated relationships between organization members' agreement on organizational goals and its impact on their attitudes and intentions. Using data from 356 principals and 14,721 teachers, each rating the importance of goals for their school, they found goal congruence was positively related to job satisfaction. By the early 2000s, there was sufficient evidence to test the strength of such effects. Verquer, Beehr and Wagner (2003) conducted a meta-analytic review of 21 studies on the relationship between P-O fit and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. They found mean correlations in the mid to high



0.20s for P-O fit with satisfaction and commitment, while the mean effect size between P-O fit and turnover intention was  $-0.18$ .

In addition, another meta-analysis of 121 studies (1967-2003) by Hoffman and Woehr (2006) revealed that the P-O fit was moderately related to turnover. Jung and Yoon (2013) found a similar result in a study of deluxe hotels in Korea. Their sample of 311 employees were provided with a voluntary survey and were asked by the researcher to complete self-administered questionnaires which were coded and multiple regression analyses were conducted to reach for the conclusion. In general, these findings have consistently shown that individuals with a strong P-O fit tend to stay longer in an organization.

### **Work Behavior**

A study using a sample of professional degree students by Judge and Bretz (1992) suggested that person–organization fit is positively and significantly associated with extra role behaviors. In addition, Sekiguchi (2007) conceptually developed propositions which suggested that employees who felt that their values were consistent with organizational values displayed positive behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, thus contributing positively to organizational performance.

Afsar (2016) longitudinally analyzed the relationship between P-O fit and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) in 357 nurses and 71 doctors in 3 government hospitals in Thailand. The results of the analysis indicated nurses' perceived fit in the hospital

positively influenced his/her engagement with IWB. Thus, employees' innovativeness can be enhanced by increasing their perceptions about P-O fit.

### **Person Job Fit Theory**

Person–job (P-J) fit refers to the congruence between personal traits of employees and characteristics of tasks and jobs (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996). Edwards (1991) outlined two basic conceptualizations of the P-J fit. The first is the demands-abilities (DA) fit, in which employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities are commensurate with what the job requires. The second is the needs-supplies (NS) fit, which occurs when employee's needs, desires, or preferences are met by the jobs that they perform.

A large body of empirical research has supported the effect of P-J fit and important work attitudes and behaviors. For example, P-J fit has been found to be positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational identification, task performance, contextual performance, and intention to quit (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Cable and Edwards, 2004; Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson, 2005). Researchers also studied the impacts of poor P-J fit on workplace behaviors, and they found that poor P-J fit could lead to job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, and high turnover intention (Boon, Den, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011).

### **Job Performance**

P-J fit not only affects work attitude and performance of an individual (O'Reilly, 1977) but also has a significant positive correlation with job-performance (Caldwell &

O'Reilly, 1990). Li and Hung (2010) administered survey questionnaires to 427 financial institution employees in Taiwan and found P-J fit to be an effective predictor of job performance and it partially mediates the relationship between information literacy and job performance. Lin, Yu and Yi (2014) surveyed 212 employees of ten life insurance companies in Taiwan and found that P-J fit directly affected the quality of job performance, and indirectly affected the quality of job performance through a sense of well-being.

Chi and Pan (2012) studied managers and subordinates in five Taiwanese banks in order to investigate the missing link between transformational leadership and task performance. The results implied that subordinate's perceived fit with their job mediated the positive relationship between manager's individual level transformational leadership and subordinate's task performance.

### **Job Satisfaction**

According to an early study by Caldwell and O'Reilly (1990), overall P-J fit is strongly related to a number of outcomes, including job performance and satisfaction. Their investigations, involving employees of a large consumer product company and an insurance company indicated the correlation between P-J fit and overall job satisfaction was positive but not significant. However, a meta-analysis of 172 studies by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson (2005) suggested a strong positive correlation between P-J fit and job satisfaction (.56).

Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001) collected survey data from 231 employees (104 office personnel and 127 drivers) of a national trucking company and used a direct approach to measure fit. They found a positive moderate ( $r = .46$ ) relationship between person-job fit and job satisfaction. The results further indicated that employees' perceptions of both P-J fit and P-O fit contribute equally to job satisfaction. In addition, Nur Iplik, Can Kilic and Yalcin (2011) examined the simultaneous effects of P-O and P-J fit on job attitudes of 158 five star hotels' managers in Turkey by applying correlation and regression analyses. Their findings indicated that P-O/P-J fit was positively related to organizational commitment, job motivation and job satisfaction of hotel managers.

### **Organizational Commitment and Intention to Quit**

Individuals who have higher perceptions of fit have been found to have more positive job attitudes, lower intentions to quit and turnover, and fewer stress-related symptoms (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996). Saks and Ashforth (1997) supported the theory by studying 350 members of two successive graduating classes of an undergraduate business program in an U.S university. The results of their regression analysis suggested that perceptions of P-J fit were positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational identification, and negatively to intentions to quit and stress symptoms.

Babakus, Yavas and Ashill (2010) examined the effects of customer orientation and servant leadership on frontline employees' burnout and, subsequently, on their turnover intentions. They also investigated in their study the intervening role of person-

job fit in the process. Data collected from 530 frontline bank employees in New Zealand served indicated that both customer orientation and servant leadership serve as significant resources for frontline service workers in coping with job stress and burnout. Second, the findings also indicated that P-J fit mediated role in transmitting the effects of customer relationship and servant leadership onto burnout and turnover intentions.

In addition, Tseng and Yu (2016) conducted a study using insurance salespeople to examine the impact of their subjective P-J fit on their intention to quit considering the fact that Taiwan's life insurance industry usually has a high salesperson turnover rate. They found that poor subjective person-job fit would significantly increase the salespeople's intention to quit.

### **Pre-employment Testing**

Pre-employment tests are assumed to be effective to select the right people for the company (Cho & Woods, 2000) and this process of predictive assessment typically involves either "screening in" applicants who possess desirable characteristics or "screening out" applicants who possess undesirable characteristics (Ryan & Laser, 1991). Proper screening is valuable in combating loss due to theft, injury, ineptitude, drug and alcohol abuse, insurance claims and negligent hiring lawsuits (Wang & Kleiner, 2004).

The "screening-in" function attempts to identify attributes that correlate with good job performance and is designed to verify information supplied by candidates on their resumes and applications (Doyle, 2016). Employers also are motivated to "screen out" applicants with negative traits. Employees who use illegal drugs or who have a

propensity for violence, for example, are not only likely to be less productive but they also are more likely to subject employers to monetary liability. In the screening-out function, employers attempt to identify applicants who have engaged in past undesirable conduct (Ryan & Laser, 1991). Companies are legally allowed to use these tests, as long as they do not use them to discriminate based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion, disability, or age (Doyle, 2016).

### **History of pre-employment**

According to Berger and Ghei (1995) employment testing in the United States began in the 1880s, when American employers turned to tests as an objective and scientific way to select employees for jobs that required special aptitudes, skills, and training. Tests incorporated a search for objective measures of intelligence, grounded in the widely held belief that "general intelligence" and similar traits were critical factors that could predict how well people would perform in new situations.

Pre-employment screening traditionally consisted of an interview, sometimes augmented by a reference check or an ability test until early 90's (Befort, 1997).

However, pre-employment screening rose in the 90s when a growing number of employers began using a large number of screening techniques (Befort, 1997).

Technological advances enabled employers to access substantial amounts of background information concerning applicants, such as their criminal records and credit histories (Rothstein, 1989). Newer forms of pre-employment screening include biographical data, structured interviews, assessment centers, cognitive tests, personality/interest inventories,

honesty/ integrity testing and realistic job previews (MacHatton, Van Dyke & Steiner, 1997).

Employers turned increasingly to pre-employment screening techniques to identify workers who either possessed the necessary skills for the job or were capable of attaining those skills through on-the-job training programs (Berger & Ghei 1995; Quant, 2011). The most significant factor that led to an increase in pre-employment screening activities was the fear of monetary liability for workplace-related injuries, which had a greater potential due to two recent developments: an increase in the incidence of workplace violence and the emergence of the negligent hiring tort (Levin, 1995).

According to estimates by the US Department of Labor, a bad hire can cost employers 30 per cent of the employee's potential first year earnings (Diaa, 2016). If pre-employment testing can be administered properly, they can lead to companies saving not only on time and on cost in selection process, but also decrease turnover, increase productivity, and improve morale (Quant, 2011).

### **Drug-Testing**

Employee drug testing grew from a relative rarity to a common practice in the United States as a part of a nationwide campaign against drug abuse that began in the 1980s (Gust & Walsh, 1989). According to Normand, Lempert and O'Brien (1994), by the mid-90's there were over 100 laboratories certified to perform drug tests, and several million employment-related drug tests were performed each year. They suggested that pre-employment drug testing greatly appealed to human resource managers as a number

of drugs have systematic and serious effects on employee performance in a wide range of tasks. In addition, they found evidence that marijuana use disrupts performance on divided attention and time estimation tasks.

Urinalysis is the most widely used test in pre-employment drug screening. Urine tests for drugs typically involve initial screening tests, with more intensive follow-up analyses (e.g., gas chromatography/mass spectrometry) for positive screening results (Murphy & Wright, 1996). These tests provide highly reliable and valid measures of the presence of the metabolites of drugs in urine, yielding accuracy levels of 99.7% when conducted in labs by qualified personnel (Crown & Rosse, 1988).

The use of drugs and alcohol appears to be related to a number of negative work-related outcomes, including job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and turnover, job instability, and counterproductive behavior (Newcomb, 1988). Many organizations uphold pre-employment drug testing as a means of maintaining safe, healthy and productive work environment (Kitterlin & Moll, 2013).

Normand, Salyards, and Mahoney (1990) evaluated the relationship between drug-test results and several aspects of job performance; specifically, absenteeism, turnover, injuries, and accidents. Results indicated that employees in the United States Postal Service who tested positive for illicit drugs had a higher rate of absenteeism and involuntary turnover. Positive drug-test results and measures of injury and accident occurrence were not found to be significantly related (Normand et al., 1990).



Studying drug testing in the hospitality context, Kitterlin and Moreo (2012) attempted to compare aspects of employee work performance in full-service restaurants with pre-employment drug-testing policies against the aforementioned aspects of work performance in full-service restaurants without pre-employment drug testing policies. The results indicated no difference between employee absenteeism, turnover, or accidents among establishments with and without pre-employment drug-testing policies. Similarly, in another study, Kitterlin and Moll (2012) assessed and explored the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of both management and employees in the foodservice industry regarding pre-employment drug-testing and its impact on work performance. Through the use of a phenomenological survey, qualitative data was collected then used to identify themes in participants' perceptions of such screening policies and their effects. The most prominent theme that emerged from analysis of participant responses was the perception that the result of a drug test was not indicative of an individual's work performance projections in foodservice.

Moreover, Kitterlin and Erdem (2009) found that employees in the full-service restaurant industry did not feel that pre-employment drug testing was necessary or beneficial to any parties involved relative to the costs. Responses suggested that restaurant industry employees did not feel that their work was complex, dangerous, or life threatening for the public; and thus, a drug test was unnecessary. In addition, participants indicated that pre-employment drug testing did not prevent substance abusers from entering the workforce, and that testing only limited the labor pool. Furthermore,

Kitterlin and Moll (2013) attempted to explore the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of full-service restaurant hourly employees and management staff in regard to pre-employment drug-testing policies in the full-service restaurant industry. They did not find any notable difference among employee attitude toward pre-employment drug testing policies based on employment level or presence of drug-testing policies at their current places of employment.

### **Integrity Testing**

Pre-employment integrity tests are used by companies to screen out potentially theft-prone job applicants, while selecting in the most dependable and productive applicants (Jones, Arnold, & Harris, 1990). Integrity tests are designed to screen-out high-risk candidates as a means to mitigate subsequent incidences of counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) and occupational offenses, such as theft, fraud, bribery, violence, and drug use (Murphy, 1993). To do so, integrity tests may include items with direct questions to job applicants regarding their attitudes toward CWBs in general and occupational offenses in particular (Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989).

Integrity tests may ask specific questions about attitudes toward theft, self-assessments of honesty, and admissions of unethical or illegal past behaviors (Ryan and Sackett, 1987). Accordingly, individuals who tend to identify with counterproductive behaviors, believe that such behaviors are prevalent or justifiable, are lenient toward their offenders, and/or have been involved in such behaviors themselves are predicted to have greater inclination toward engaging in such behaviors themselves in the future (Wanek,

1999). Strong pre-employment integrity tests are nondiscriminatory, they are relatively economical and they do not require any special training to administer. The results can be analyzed immediately using accompanying software and they are relatively inoffensive to job applicants. Existence of such tests has been connected to reduced costs in inventory shrinkage and missing funds in several organizations (Franklin, 1995).

An extensive meta-analysis by Ones, Viswesvaran, and Schimdt (1993) had shown integrity tests to be fairly strong predictors of job performance and counterproductive behaviors on the job, such as theft, disciplinary problems, and absenteeism. Furthermore, a study on a sample including 2,456 job applicants from 13 organizations in Israel from the following eight industry sectors: automotive, banking, pharmaceutical, food and beverage, insurance, permanent staffing, technology and communications, and retail were conducted by Fine (2010). The results reported significant correlation between integrity scores and self-reported counterproductive work behaviors across the eight different industries.

Brown, Jones, Terris and Steffy (1987) studied the impact of pre-employment integrity testing on employee turnover and inventory shrinkage losses in a major home improvement chain located primarily in the western United States for two years. Hiring employees who successfully passed the integrity test resulted in 50% reduction in the number of employee terminations for theft, illegal drug use, and violence over a five-year period and a savings in shrinkage losses that amounted to over two million dollars over a two year period.

Though integrity testing represents an additional expense in the hiring process, a study of a large hotel chain by Sturman and Sherwyn (2009) found that the savings in screening out potentially expensive employees more than made up for the costs of conducting the tests, based on a substantial reduction in workers' compensation claims. As the integrity tests asked individuals about their use of illegal drugs, the tests could be successfully used to screen out those who were inclined to use drugs at work. Also, by screening out dishonest employees, an integrity test reduced workers' compensation claims by reducing the number of fraudulent claims and decreasing the frequency of exaggerated claims.

Nonetheless, Camara & Schneider (1994) pointed out certain concerns about integrity testing that the construct of honesty or integrity still remained vague even after more than half a century of research and evidence for criterion validation of honesty or integrity tests was not very compelling. Some of the disadvantages of integrity testing are that a high chance that job applicants may try to positively manage their impression or even fake their response and the questions of the test if not well developed, may appear not be related to job or seem intrusive. Moreover, as all counterproductive behaviors are positively correlated with one another certain tests may screen out more candidates than necessary (Trimpin, 2013).

### **Personality Testing**

Personality-based tests assess the degree to which a person has certain traits or dispositions or predict the likelihood that a person will engage in certain conduct (Doyle,

2016). In contrast to integrity testing, they do not specifically try to detect theft or theft-related behaviors instead; they use measures of personality dimensions, such as reliability, conscientiousness, trustworthiness, and sociability, to predict a broad array of counterproductive behaviors (Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989). Personality tests seek to give employers a glimpse into each applicant's personality by evaluating a range of criteria—including creativity, motivation, technical skills and cognitive abilities (Begley, 2014).

The most prominent personality test framework used is the "Big Five" or "Five Factor Model". These are the five dimensions of personality that consistently emerge in empirical research: Openness to experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Emotional Stability (Norman, 1963). The Five-Factor Model personality taxonomy has been the most influential framework to examine the relationship between personality and job performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). Another popular personality evaluation is the Meyers-Briggs test which investigates whether the taker tends toward extroversion or introversion, sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving (Gluck, 2016).

Nowadays companies do not want to settle for employees with minimum skills; they want applicants to stand out in ability and workplace temperament, a new recruiting standard they say yields longer tenure and higher productivity (Weber, 2015). More and more hospitality firms administer personality tests to job candidates as well as current employees to pick up on their behavioral and cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

However, wrong assessment and wrong usage of these tests can be misleading (Cummings, 2005). Several employers assert that the ability to test candidates' personality traits allows for more successful placement of new employees within an organization and is related to less employee turnover—both ultimately leading to improved customer service (Begley, 2014).

The finding of a study by Cho, Woods, Jang and Erdem (2006) on 219 publicly traded hotel and restaurant companies in the U.S suggested that pre-employment personality tests were indeed effective in hiring the person who tends to stay with a company longer. They explained the phenomenon further from another viewpoint. According to Cho et al. (2006), passing pre-employment personality tests may give an applicant a stronger sense of belonging to the company and is also likely to motivate him/her to have a sense of commitment to the company through an individual's attachment, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Thus, those who pass pre-employment personality tests may be less likely to leave companies than those who are hired without being administered pre-employment tests.

In another study in the hospitality context Kim, Shin and Umbreit (2007) examined the effect of the Big Five personality dimensions on hotel employees' job burnout in eight lodging properties located in the state of Washington. A series of hierarchical regression analyses of data collected from 191 surveys suggested that agreeableness has a negative influence on exhaustion and cynicism, and a positive effect on professional efficacy in the hotel work setting. In addition, the relationship between

job attitudes and personality traits in a hospitality setting was explored by Silva (2006). A total of 159 non-management employees at two major hotel chains in the western US were surveyed. The results of the study implied that extraverted, conscientious, and emotionally stable individuals are more likely to be committed employees, and thus less likely to leave the organization.

### **General Mental Ability (GMA) Testing**

Gottfredson, (1997), defined GMA as the “ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, and learn quickly” (p. 1-12). In a selection context, the most widely used GMA testing is the Wonderlic Personnel Test, which usually consists of fifty items that measure verbal, numerical, and spatial abilities (McKelvie, 1989).

The measures of GMA are used to measure applicants’ intellectual capabilities and have been found to be the best predictor of job performance (Ree, Earles & Teachout, 1994). Research suggests that GMA predicts job performance across job complexity and job types (Schmidt, 2002). Hunter and Hunter’s (1984) meta-analysis showed that the correlation between GMA and job performance ranged from 0.58 for professional managerial jobs to 0.23 for unskilled positions. Their research also suggested that there is a significant correlation between GMA and performance in virtually all jobs with an average validity coefficient across jobs of 0.47. The only difference is that, for skilled jobs, the GMA–performance correlation is higher, while for semiskilled and unskilled positions, the correlation is lower. In their review of the

selection literature, Madera and Abbott (2012) found that measures of GMA provide employers with the best predictor of job performance when used as a selection tool.

In a hospitality context, Tews, Michel and Lyons (2010) examined the impact of GMA on job performance of entry-level service employees. Data were collected on 139 restaurant servers from multiple units of two large restaurant chains. The results suggest that GMA is significantly related to multiple dimensions of performance including service performance, sales performance, interpersonal facilitation, and job dedication. Moreover, data collected from 241 frontline service employees working at 19 units of a company that owns and operates approximately 120 midscale restaurants throughout the United States found similar results (Tracey, Sturman, & Tews, 2007). They found that both GMA and conscientiousness are important for predicting the performance of restaurant employees on the front line. However, general mental ability was a better predictor of performance for new employees, whereas conscientiousness was a better predictor of performance for experienced employees.

Tracey, Sturman, Shao and Tews (2010) studied the relative importance of GMA and personality traits for job performance among new and experienced line-level employees. Data collected from 241 employees including servers, hosts, and bartenders from 19 units of a company that owns and operates approximately 120 midscale restaurants throughout the United States was analyzed. GMA appears to be the best predictor of job performance among new hires. However, for experienced employees, GMA has less relevance (especially for the jobs with a high level of consistency and low



level of complexity) compared to personality. Thus, it appears that the relative importance GMA and personality traits for predicting job performance may change as employees' progress through different job stages.

Tews, Stafford, and Tracey (2011) examined the emphasis hiring managers placed on general mental ability (GMA) and personality (agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and extraversion) when evaluating applicant profiles for servers for a national restaurant chain. GMA was framed as either "intelligence" or the "ability to learn and solve problems." A total of 104 managers with hiring responsibilities from an organization that owns and operates approximately 120 casual-theme restaurants in the United States were surveyed. The results of the study imply that while GMA has been consistently demonstrated to be the strongest predictor of job performance, it was not highly valued by the managers in this study. Three of the personality dimensions including agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability were consistently emphasized more.

Another study in a hospitality context examined the emphasis that hotel managers place on applicants' attractiveness, GMA, and personality (Tews, Stafford, & Zhu, 2009). Three groups of hotel managers evaluated applicants' profiles for employment suitability for one of three jobs; front office associate, housekeeper, or maintenance engineer. The results showed that, across jobs, conscientiousness most strongly influenced the managers' suitability ratings, followed by agreeableness, GMA, emotional stability, openness, attractiveness, and extraversion. This study indicated that hospitality managers

value GMA less than managers in other industries, but they place similar emphasis on conscientiousness. In all, GMA was valued, but less than agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability.

The results of a study by Liu and Madera (2013) on 80 undergraduate students majoring in hotel and restaurant management who were participating in a job fair and were graduating seniors is consistent with the previous studies. The test of GMA was perceived by the students as more valid and fair for management-level positions than for hourly, non-management positions, whereas personality was perceived as equally valid and fair for both management and hourly, non-management job positions.

### **Measurement of Job-performance (JP)**

According to Schermerhorn (1989), job performance refers to the quality and quantity accomplished by individuals or groups after fulfilling a task. After a certain period of time, measurements of employees' job performance could serve as criterion for promotions, wage adjustments, rewards, punishments and evaluations. Cascio (2006) suggested that managers must set concrete goals, trace the fulfillment degree, and evaluate the teams' or employees' performance.

Methods used to evaluate individual performance can be broadly classified into (1) organizational records, and (2) subjective evaluations. Organizational records are perceived as more 'objective' than subjective evaluations that depend on a human judgment. Subjective evaluations are mostly based on criteria referenced judgments, where an individual is evaluated without reference to other individuals (i.e. ratings), or on

norm-referenced judgments, where an individual is evaluated in comparison to other individuals (i.e. rankings). In reference to subjective evaluations, the rating is typically done by the supervisor (Viswesvaran, 2001).

Borman and Motowidlo (1997) proposed two types of JP; task and contextual. Task performance refers to the proficiency with which an employee performs central job tasks (Campbell, 1990) while contextual performance refers to employee behaviors, that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the central job tasks are performed (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

Highlighting the most mentioned dimensions in their reviewed studies Carlos and Rodrigues (2016) proposed eight job performance dimensions. They found that task performance includes three dimensions: job knowledge, organizational skills, and efficiency; whereas the five dimensions of contextual performance are persistent effort, cooperation, organizational conscientiousness, personal characteristics and interpersonal and relational skills.

Robbins (1998) divided the measurement of job performance into job result, job behavior, and personal traits. According to Michel, Tews and Kavanagh (2014) service behaviors are best represented as a second-order construct composed of three first-order factors – assurance, responsiveness, and recommendation behaviors. Lee, Lain and Chen (1999) divided job performance into efficiency, efficacy, and quality. Efficiency refers to the employees' output rate and is the ability to accomplish tasks before deadline. Efficacy refers to the employees' goal accomplishment rate and proposals. Quality refers

to the employees' error rate and complaint rate, supervisor satisfaction, customer satisfaction and colleague satisfaction. They suggested that while applying this construct to measure hospitality employees' job performance, efficiency should refer to the employees' speed in customer service, efficacy should mean the accomplishment of tasks assigned by customers, and quality should mean the employees' performance in customer service.

While exploring the influence of self-esteem and role stress on job performance on 227 Turkish hotel employees, Akgunduz (2015) formed questionnaires based on two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance. There were 4 expressions related to task performance and 20 expressions related to contextual performance where the employees evaluated their own performances on the scale.

Baumann, Hamin, Tung, and Hoadley (2016) studied the drivers of job-performance at the individual worker's level in context to hospitality industry. They incorporated competitive attitude, willingness to serve and speed of "doing things" in addition to achievement and power as indicators of employee performance (self-perceived).

In the context of foodservice operations, high food quality and an accurate product that is produced in the shortest amount of time are important components of performance (Gupta, McLaughlin, & Gomez, 2007). In an attempt to study the effects of visual aids in food preparation on job performance, Madera, Dawson, Neal and Busch (2013) developed a food accuracy measure. Recipes for a specific dish were used and the

judges rated how closely and specifically the participants followed the recipe instructions using six items measured on a 7-point scale. In line with past research, the time of completion in minutes was used as the measure of temporal performance.

### **Research Questions**

Although there is sizeable research on pre-employment testing in the business and psychology literature, a significant lack of research in hospitality context is evident. Pre-employment test studies in hospitality context pre-dominantly focus on drug-testing in restaurant context. Although GMA, personality and integrity tests are extensively practiced in the overall industry there is considerable lack of researches in these areas.

Many of the existing studies in business and psychology literature focus on pre-employment testing as predictors of different job outcomes and behaviours (e.g. Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schimdt, 1993; Cho, Woods, Jang & Erdem, 2006; Normand, Salyards, & Mahoney, 1990). Considerable amount of the literature focuses on credibility, reliability and validity of these tests. However, there is no presence of studies discussing quality of hires in the literature. Hospitality being a customer-focused industry, bad hire does not only waste time and money but often results in the loss of customers due to bad service. With a global economy and very mobile workforce, recruiting the right employee for the right job is one of the most critical challenges today.

The proposed study intends to examine hospitality employers' perceptions of a successful hire, and its relationship with pre-employment testing. In addition to building on current theoretical knowledge, results may enable hospitality employers to justify the

implementation of pre-employment testing, select which tests to use, and/or adjust current assessment practices. It may help to address deep-rooted problems in the industry such as employee job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, and high turnover intention.

The end result can be a better understanding of pre-employment testing as a management practice, which is vital to both practitioners and researchers involved in personnel selection. The selection process can be cumbersome but it is well worth it to find the right candidate and potentially reduce turnover in the hospitality industry.

The overall objective of this proposed project is to gain insights in the personal perspectives of hospitality managers on successful hires and what influences these perspectives. Specific research questions explored in this proposed project include:

1. What metrics are used by hospitality employers to determine whether a hire is successful?
2. When is the determination made on whether a hire is successful? Does the timing vary for front-line versus management positions or skilled versus unskilled employees?
3. Do hospitality employers perceive individual pre-employment testing methods help make successful hires?
4. What is the perceived role of individual pre-employment testing methods in making successful hires?

5. How do pre-employment testing methods utilized vary based on whether the employee is frontline versus management? How does it vary for skilled versus unskilled employees?
6. Are pre-employment testing methods perceived to be more effective in making a successful hire for management positions versus front-line positions; skilled versus unskilled employees?

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Pre-employment testing as predictors of different job outcomes and behaviours (e.g. Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Cho, Woods, Jang & Erdem, 2006; Normand, Salyards, & Mahoney, 1990) has been extensively studied in the literature. However, no empirical study has focused on determining hospitality managers' criteria for a successful hire or the role of pre-employment tests in making effective hiring decisions. This is a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) seeking to better understand criteria that hospitality managers' use to determine success hires and their perceptions of the role of pre-employment testing methods in determining successful hires.

To gather data, one-on-one interviews were conducted in-person and over telephone with a convenience sample of 10 hospitality managers with hiring responsibilities, in Ohio. This chapter outlines the following subsections explaining the data collection procedure: human subjects review, sample selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

#### **Human Subject Review**

The researcher involved in this study has completed the human subjects training. The Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the methodology and data collection materials and approved the study, concluding that the risks and benefits to the participants in the research are no more or less than those encountered in everyday life.



### **Sample Selection**

The research aims to understand the perceptions of hospitality managers representing hotels and food service businesses in the state of Ohio. Managers with hiring responsibilities at limited or full-service hotels and casual or fine-dining restaurants were included in the study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit hospitality managers with hiring responsibilities. To be eligible to participate in the study, the hospitality property must be actively using at least one pre-employment testing method.

### **Data Collection**

In-depth interviews are appropriate when the researcher is trying to gain a holistic understanding of a specific issue from the interviewee's point of view (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This study utilized in-depth interviews, as the goal was to examine hospitality employers' perceptions of a successful hire, and its relationship with pre-employment testing.

Seven interviews were conducted over the phone and three were conducted face-to-face. Telephone interviews were found to 'stand in' for face-to-face interviews without reducing data quality in the same study (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Moreover, Hayden-Wade, Coleman, Sallis and Armstrong (2003) investigated the validity of 74 adults' version of their 7-Day physical activity recall over telephone and in-person interview. The results of their study concluded that the phone interviews were

comparable to and were as valid as the original in-person interviews. Thus, the in-person and telephone versions of the interviews could be used interchangeably.

Semi-structured interviews allow for gathering focused, qualitative textual data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) where the interviewer and respondents engage in a formal interview. Semi-structured interview questions also ensure that participants have the opportunity to speak about their pre-employment testing experience as comprehensively as possible. A question guide was used to ensure consistency. A series of open-ended questions encouraged respondents to articulate their criteria for determining successful hires and the role of pre-employment testing in determining the existence of these criteria. Using semi-structured interviews also allowed for comparing respondents' subjective answers to the existing literature. A conscious effort to phrase the questions in an open-ended and non-judgmental manner was made. The questions were informed by literature within the field of P-O fit and P-J fit associated with individual and organizational outcomes.

Prior to the commencement of each interview session, participants signed an informed consent form assuring their anonymity, voluntary participation, requesting permission to audio-record the interview.

Below is a list of sample interview questions:

1. Tell us about an incident from your experience when you realized that you have employed a candidate successfully for a particular job.

2. Please discuss the types of pre-employment tests (e.g. drug-tests, personality tests, mental-ability-tests, integrity tests etc.) you conduct before hiring for an open position.
3. Please explain the difference in the types of testing for frontline and management level employees.
4. Please explain the difference in the types of testing for skilled and unskilled employees.
5. How long does it usually take you to determine whether a hire is successful or not?
6. How does the timing vary for front-line versus management positions?
7. How does the timing vary for skilled and unskilled employees?
8. Do you think pre-employment test results are effective in determining the quality of a hire? Please elaborate on the role of specific tests you utilize.
9. Do you think pre-employment test results are more effective in determining quality hires in front-line position than management position or vice-versa? Please explain.
10. Do you think pre-employment test results are more effective in determining quality hires in skilled position than unskilled position or vice-versa? Please explain.

Data collection ceased when the point of data saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation can be confirmed when the researcher sees similar instances over and over

again, wherein no additional data are to be found that can develop properties of the data-category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All interviews were audio-recorded upon obtaining the participant's permission (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

At the conclusion of all the interviews, the recorded audio data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes (Rugg & Donne, 2011). Themes were determined after reviewing the transcripts, abstracting data, and developing matrices to organize themes generated from the in-depth interview questions (Fulkerson, Kubik, Rydell, Boutelle, Garwick, Story & Dudovitz, 2011).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

This study was designed to understand hospitality managers' perceptions of using pre-employment testing in determining successful hires. Their views on attributes of a quality hire, time taken to determine one and effectiveness of pre-employment test results to determine a successful hire were explored through semi-structured interviews. Ten managers with hiring responsibilities at hospitality properties using at least one type of pre-employment testing method were interviewed. This section contains the results of thematic analysis found as a result of the data collected using semi-structured interviews.

#### **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

As recommended by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), important contextual information was collected from all participants at the beginning of the interview (see Table 1). The 10 participants represented five hotels and five restaurants. As it was a criterion to participate in the study, all participants had hiring responsibilities and the properties they represented used at least one pre-employment testing. Seven participants used drug testing, four used personality testing, three used GMA, one used integrity testing, and six used background checking. Duration of employment in the industry ranged from three to 40 years. Duration of employment in their current organization ranged from one to 22 years. Six of the 10 participants perceived that they face high turnover of employees.

#### **Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis approach was used to cluster key themes discussed by the employers during the interview. Thematic analysis describes data in detail by identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes (patterns) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The five phases of thematic analysis that was followed included (1) Familiarization with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; and (5) Defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview responses were reviewed for insights and patterns.

### **Main Themes**

Three themes were evident from the participant interviews: characteristics of a successful hire, effectiveness of pre-employment test results, and timing to determine a successful hire. The participants of the study suggested that they find pre-employment assessment results highly useful. Drug testing and background checking were found to be helpful in screening out substance abusers and candidates with blemished past records. The participants considered interpersonal behavior, guest service attitude, decision-making ability, ability to follow directions and job performance as crucial attributes of a successful employee. They find that the timing to determine success between frontline vs. management employees varied; however, there was no such difference between skilled vs. unskilled employees.

### **Characteristics of a Successful Hire**

The participants of the study mentioned various attributes while speaking about qualities of a successfully hired candidate. Owing to the high turnover rate of the

business, candidates with the “right attitude” are highly sought after. Referring to the seven dwarfs, a restaurant manager expressed “you might have Happy....., but Sleepy isn’t going to make it here.” As another fine-dining manager described, “a true look of enthusiasm at the time of job-orientation can set a candidate apart from the others.”

Since the hospitality industry employs a large number of people with no prior experience, participants commented that expectations are trifling in most cases. One of the hotel managers expressed, “the industry is more culture-focused than responsibilities.” Participants felt that employees are recruited with an expectation to learn on-the-job with adequate training and practical guidance. A simple theory stated by an owner of a successful fine-dining chain was, “hire the best and develop the rest.” Key attributes perceived by hospitality managers with respect to a successful hire were interpersonal behavior, guest-service attitude, decision-making ability, ability to follow directions, and job performance.

**Interpersonal Behavior and Guest Service Attitude.** The participants considered relationships and communication with other people in the team crucial for determining quality hire for all positions. One of the restaurant managers described a bad hire in a management position as “not a very approachable person, didn’t understand the proper ways to talk to people” so she had to hire someone who was “tough but also easy to talk to.” Another restaurant manager asserted that, “dealing effectively with an hourly employee or even just working smoothly with co-manager to co-manager is important for a manager.” In the context of frontline positions, one fine-dining manager admitted, “the

first thing I notice is how they interact with our staff the most because I personally struggled with that, when I started in industry.” Most of them judge a frontline candidate by “the way they get along with people.” One of the hotel human resource managers summarized, “there’s no reason for people to be disrespectful towards people in general but you can still have the expectations from people and put them through in a professional and calm manner.”

Because hospitality is a customer-focused industry, ‘guest service attitude’ is one attribute that the participants unanimously mentioned when they described their successful hires in all positions. Candidates who are “ready to engage and be socializing with guest at all times” and “can handle guest complaints efficiently” are considered to be quality hires by the managers. Moreover, one hotel manager realized that her hire was successful through the employee’s “dedication and his commitment towards guests.” Another hotel manager articulated, “strong ability of that individual to take care of our guests” and “reception of highly positive feedback from our guests” led him to realize that he hired a competent frontline candidate for his hotel. “I have to rely on all of those employees to deliver our commitment to our guest,” general manager of a hotel enunciated. The last thing one would want to hear from the guest is “I like the food but I don’t like your staff.”

**Decision-making Ability.** A food service manager regarded employee’s decision-making ability to be crucial in order to succeed as “there is cash, there’s liquor and there’s food in daily operation so often employees have to work under stressful



situations.” Therefore, one of the participants regarded a successful restaurant manager as one who could “handle different situations whether its guest complaints, direct guest, or make decisions based on any given staff situation.”

According to a fine-dining restaurant manager, her quality hire in a managerial position “took over a tough situation in regards to guest complaints and has really got things moving.” A human resource manager of a hospitality group concluded, “candidates with maturity to handle and deal with certain situations is highly sought after.”

**Ability to Follow Directions.** Hospitality managers interviewed for this study did not put stress on previous experience of the recruited candidates while describing their success for frontline and unskilled positions. A hotel human resource manager described a quality frontline hire as “one who has no experience but is willing to take on all the extra training and is really dedicated.” Another food service manager delineated her successful server as one who “understood what was being asked of her and followed instructions.” As one restaurant manager stated, “they’re going do the things that we ask them to do” therefore “one who can’t pull the pieces together is not encouraged.”

**Job Performance.** Job performance emerged as another sub-theme under the attributes of a successful hire. Participants felt that employees’ quality could be evaluated by their job performance. By job performance, they collectively referred to task performance i.e. the proficiency with which an employee performs central job tasks

(Campbell, 1990). Job knowledge, organizational skills, and efficiency are different dimensions of job performance (Carlos & Rodrigues, 2016).

Job performance measures were different based on the employee's department and position. As stated by one of the hotel managers in the housekeeping context, "one can tell looking at a housekeeper's rooms, how they are cleaning, if they're thorough or not, it's very easy to judge that area." A guest service manager stated, "at the front desk area if someone is grasping the operating system fast, I can be assured." From a sales perspective, a general manager of a hotel stated, "they need a little bit more time so you can see if they're booking things and you know." A human resource manager of a fine-dining restaurant chain said, "on the line you have 12 people, they're elbow to hip all the time and they're back there and they all have to pull together, otherwise you know we're not going to be able to get meals out in 12-14 minutes and you need that coordination."

### **Effectiveness of Pre-employment Test Results**

Participants unanimously agreed that they find pre-employment testing methods helpful in making successful hires. A majority of the participants admitted that they do not entirely depend on the test results to make their hiring decision; rather, the tests help them with initial screening of candidates. They discussed the role of pre-employment tests as a tool to determine leadership skills, evaluate background information, and check substance abuse record of a candidate, all leading to lower employee turnover rate. For instance, one restaurant human resource manager stated, "before we started pre-

employment testing, our turnover rate was about 78% and then in the first year our turnover rate with new hires dropped to about 65%.”

While most managers conduct and rely on background check, personality, GMA and drug testing of employees, only one out of 10 reported using integrity testing. Neither of the participants mentioned integrity testing as an effective tool nor did they express any interest to employ it in the future. In addition, personal integrity was never mentioned by any of the managers as a competent quality for successful employees.

Two of the participants perceive that the test results are more effective to judge frontline-employees compared to management employee. Similarly, another two participants found that the test results were more effective to judge unskilled employees compared to skilled employees.

**Background Checks.** Several managers stressed the importance of background checking for frontline and unskilled employees. As one restaurant owner shared, “we don’t need them to be the best collard chopper or cold preparer in the world but if they’re background is proficient it’s ok.” Participants overwhelmingly preferred background check to other tests for frontline positions. One guest services manager at a hotel stated, “it can really kind of help gauge what kind of person they are, where you can’t necessarily look at a resume to figure out who this person is.”

Expressing concern regarding unskilled and frontline employees’ references, one of the hotel managers stated, “you’re not really getting quality references, you really don’t know much and so it’s really that last line of defense of who are you from your

background information.” Another human resource manager added, “if you’re just reading their application, it’s just anything on paper.... whereas actually sitting down and doing background screening gives us a more in depth understanding of actually who that candidate is and if that candidate meets our needs.”

One of the fine-dining managers talked about an incident where background check saved her from hiring dishonest candidates for a frontline position. She articulated, “I’ve had a couple that I would’ve hired that really did kind of fooled me I guess on the interactions that we had and once their background check came back, it was in a not so great light. It was like oh my gosh, you were not being honest with me at all. I thought I had this. So it has screened out a lot and just where they could’ve been more forthright with that information and chose not to which makes me believe they would be less forthright with other information.”

**Personality and GMA Testing.** Personality and GMA test results were found to provide valuable information in determining leadership skills of management employees by participants who utilized these tests. Four out of 10 participants used personality testing and three out of 10 used GMA testing in their organizations. Personality tests were perceived to predict the likelihood that a person will engage in certain conduct (Doyle, 2016) and GMA tests were perceived to predict employees’ ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, and learn quickly (Gottfredson, 1997).

As one hotel manager stated, “on the management level assessment, we are able to look at that person’s mental ability and skills to handle the responsibilities of a manager in our company before hiring.” Another restaurant manager stated with reference to personality tests, “I think there’s just a higher precedence that needs to be set for employees in general in hospitality to gauge leadership skills and I think that’s why there is such an important need to have the pre-employment tests in place.” One of the human resource managers summarized the importance of these tests by expressing, “you’re going to be spending more time and effort in training and putting all of your effort into getting them ready to lead a team, so testing obviously in management is very important.”

**Drug Testing.** During the interviews, both hotel and restaurant managers raised concerns regarding the high-rate of substance abuse in the hospitality industry and discussed how they use pre-employment assessments to address the issue. As one front-desk manager stated, “you can’t tell by meeting someone whether they are a drug user..... some people are very obvious about it and of course we shy away from those but sometimes people are good at hiding it too.” Pre-employment drug-testing results come into play at this point.

Research conducted in Australia and the USA indicates that hospitality employees, particularly those in the food service sector, have an exceptionally high rate of substance use in comparison with both the general population and other occupational

groups (Shani, 2016). Substance-abusing employees are 3.6 times more likely to be involved in work-related accidents or injuries (Kitterlin, Moll, & Moreno, 2015).

One human resource manager in a restaurant voiced concern, “we get candidates from all walks of life, and we definitely need to find the ones that are, I guess, safe to work with.” Another food-service manager articulated the effectiveness of pre-employment test results by stating, “test result gives you an insight to the individual as to possibility of temper situations, employee-theft and substance abuse and therefore, you can decide accordingly.”

### **Timing to Determine a Successful Hire**

A majority of the participants acknowledged that there is a difference in timing while evaluating the success of frontline versus management-level hires. However, they felt that there is no such difference for skilled and unskilled employees. Most of the managers also reported that there is hardly any difference in the types of testing they conduct for management versus frontline positions or skilled versus unskilled employees in the organization.

**Frontline Employees.** The participants of this study felt that approximately 30 to 90 days is appropriate to determine if a frontline candidate is successful. As one front-desk manager expressed, “some people fall out in the first few days. For frontline employees, the success rate would really be after about 30 days. In other words, maybe they progress on and they are doing well but it is after 30 days we discuss their performance and how they are doing and where things are and stuff like that. So by that

time we have a real good feel of how well they've adapted and what their long range potential might be.”

Another restaurant manager explained his method of evaluation for frontline employees: “at 60 days we expect that their training has been completed. We expect that they have felt more comfortable in their position, they are running the show independently at this point and we actually sit down with them and have them go through an open survey with their frontline manager talking about their onboarding, their training experience, how comfortable they are in their current role. Then we utilize that feedback to determine if, and obviously assessing their performance, if it's been a successful hire.”

Majority of the companies represented by this study's managers had a 90-day probation period for frontline employees when they are under observation. “We do have a 90-day observation period where attendance, any disciplinary actions are doubled within your first 90 days. So normally after your 90 days you can tell if somebody is going to be able to work out or not,” explained one of the guest services managers.

**Management Employees.** The participants unanimously agreed that management employees need a longer time to be evaluated as successful or not, than frontline employees. The average time mentioned was between 3 to 6 months. One of the human resource managers stated, “at the management level, I would think takes a little bit longer because of course the responsibilities and duties are a whole lot more involved and complicated than the frontline. Therefore, you would give a little bit more time say 6 months to let them get their feel and give them a chance to see if it is a quality

candidate that we hired at that time.” Another manager of a hotel added, “Management, I think, needs a little bit longer time like 6 months. They need to get comfortable in their positions. Depending on what position it is, you need to give them time to adapt to the position and see if there is going to be enough change.”

One of the restaurant owners explained the evaluation process of management employees, “they may do fine step by step by step as they go through different positions and they can get trained on those positions, but then when we actually pull them out to start managing shifts, that’s when it is. So initially its 3 months and if you are going to fall through I can probably tell in a short period. It takes at least 3 months just to get them acclimated to the position they are in. Then as we start to get them involved and engaged in managing shifts I would say it takes them a minimum of another 3 months to know whether or not we think they’ll be successful.”



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this research was to investigate criteria that hospitality managers' use to determine successful hires and their perceptions of the role of pre-employment testing methods in determining successful hires. The study also sought to determine the timing variation for front-line versus management positions and skilled versus unskilled employees before they are considered successful hires. Little research has been conducted to assess hospitality managers' perceptions as it pertains to the role of pre-employment testing in determining a quality hire.

One objective of this study was to investigate the metrics used by hospitality employers to determine whether a hire is successful. Because hotels and restaurants rely directly on their employees to deliver superior service, the employees can be a source of competitive advantage (Enz & Siguaw, 2000). From the results of this study, it was evident that hospitality managers perceive inter-personal behavior and guest-service attitude as most important attributes of successful employees. Other qualities that managers deemed important were decision-making ability, ability to follow directions, and job performance. This could be attributed to the fact that customer satisfaction, service quality, and customer loyalty are influenced considerably by the beliefs and actions of hospitality employees (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990).

In current hospitality literature, Shu, West, and Shin (2012) identified six core competencies that are important to the success of future managers in the hospitality industry by analyzing data collected from hospitality managers and students in the Southeastern United States. Six dimensions of the core competencies were hospitality skills, interpersonal skills, supervisory skills, food and beverage management skills, leadership, and communication skills. In contrast, the current study takes a holistic approach to capturing hiring managers' perceptions of a competencies needed of hospitality employees at all levels (i.e. management, frontline, skilled, and unskilled) and the role of pre-employment testing in evaluating these employees.

The next objective of this research was to determine the timing hospitality managers perceive to be appropriate to determine a successful hire. A major theme that emerged in the study was the difference in timing to determine a successful hire for frontline versus management level employees. While it was perceived to take between 30 and 90 days to determine if frontline employees were successful, participants felt they needed three to six months to determine if management hires were successful. This could be attributed to the fact that responsibilities and duties at the management level are generally a lot more intricate and complex than frontline positions. For example, because management employees have supervisory and leadership responsibilities, hospitality managers in this study may have perceived it takes longer to determine their success compared to those of frontline employees. However, there was no such perceived difference in time for determining if a hire is successful for skilled versus unskilled

employees. A possible reason for this could be managers' expectations of job outcomes from skilled and unskilled employees to be comparable in nature.

Another objective of this study was to investigate hospitality employer's perceptions on the effectiveness of pre-employment tests in screening of quality candidates. Drug testing was found to be useful in eliminating substance abusers and maintaining a safe workplace environment. This falls in line with the findings of Kitterlin and Moll (2012) who employed phenomenological survey to gather data from 91 management staff and 91 hourly employees in the food service industry. A prominent theme found in the responses of participants who provided favorable remarks toward the use of pre-employment drug-testing practice was that of "need for health, safety and responsibility" (p. 46).

Hospitality managers who participated in this study regarded personality and GMA testing as being more effective to evaluate management employees than frontline employees. This finding is similar to that of Liu and Madera's (2013) study with 80 undergraduate students majoring in hotel and restaurant management who were participating in a job fair. The students perceived the test of GMA as more valid and fair for management-level positions than for hourly, non-management positions.

Based on the results of this study, it is evident that hospitality managers consider background checking of all employees to be highly significant, as it was perceived that quality references were unavailable in most cases. Bahls (1999) reported similar findings, when pre-employment screening of several U.S. private-sector corporations was

studied. Most employers traditionally relied on references to provide information about the background and character of a potential employee, but a majority of former employers, fearing lawsuits, only provided neutral employment references. Thus, companies were left with no other devices to protect themselves against hiring a potentially dangerous employee, which led to a proliferation of background checks.

In this study, only one out of 10 hospitality managers administered integrity testing and none of them mentioned that integrity test helped them in evaluation successful candidates. It is possible that an explanation for this is lack of availability of reliable instruments to measure hospitality employees' integrity. Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau (2003) did find that ethical behavior or integrity was the most important competency to the senior level executives from hotel companies.

Lastly, this study investigated if pre-employment testing methods utilized, varied based on whether the employee is frontline versus management and skilled versus unskilled. Although two out of 10 hospitality managers reported employing different tests for management versus frontline employees and skilled versus unskilled employees, they did not feel, there was a need for different types of testing for different positions. Managers articulated that tests should be administered in the same way to all hospitality candidates. However, participants felt that questions for personality or GMA test should be designed based on the position. For example, tests designed specifically for sales positions should not be used for other positions. This is a new theoretical contribution to

the literature as no other studies have investigated if there is a need for different pre-employment tests based on employee's position.

### **Limitations**

Due to the design of this research, this study has the following limitations.

1. Only hotels and restaurants in Ohio were contacted, given time and financial constraints. Thus, results cannot be generalized beyond this geographic region. Results can also not be generalized to businesses other than limited or full-service hotels and casual and fine dining restaurants that were represented in this study.
2. Chances of bias exist for this type of qualitative in-depth interview and interpretive analysis in hospitality sector because the techniques majorly rely on investigator's interpretation (Kwortnik, 2003).

### **Managerial Implications**

This exploratory study sheds light on the perceptions of hospitality managers on the roles of specific pre-employment tests and identifies the qualities of a successful hire. The findings from the current study have a number of managerial implications for organizations that employ these assessments along with the ones that do not. Several of the sub-themes that emerged from the study suggest that inter-personal behavior, guest-service attitude, decision-making ability, ability to follow directions, and job performance are crucial attributes of a successful employee. These findings could furnish hospitality managers with useful information for planning marketing activities and personnel

training. Service attitude elements such as employees solving customer problems well and quickly, always thinking of the customer while serving, and offering appropriate service (Kuo, 2007) can be incorporated into training programs. In addition, importance should be given to developing inter-personal or social skills training of front-line employees, which may in turn lead to improved quality of service for the organization (Garavan, 1997).

Effective performance reviews should be designed by holding employees accountable for performance goals and their ability to follow instructions. Moreover, appropriate amount of decision-making authority to do the job well should be encouraged in daily operations. Boudrias, Gaudreau and Laschinger (2004) found that empowering employees to engage in decision-making while emphasizing rich work environments, diverse authority, information, resources and support, and providing the opportunity to learn, can improve their performance.

Hospitality managers' perceptions on the effectiveness of background-checks, and drug, GMA and personality tests were also researched in this study. While results of this research can inform hospitality industry hiring professionals who currently do not utilize pre-employment tests about the benefits associated with the adoption of these tests, it can inform professionals who utilize these tests but do not consider their results effective. According to the results of this study, background checking should be administered to protect hospitality employers from hiring a potentially dangerous employee and drug testing should be employed to avoid substance abusers and maintaining a safe workplace

environment. Moreover, well-devised personality and GMA tests should be implemented to determine leadership potential of management employees.

Based on the findings of this study, background testing was perceived equally important for all level of employees in the industry. A background check, coupled with checking employee references, can be a measure of exercising reasonable care to ensure that an employee is qualified to perform job duties in a responsible, safe and reliable manner (Kondrasuk, Moore, & Wang, 2001). Hospitality managers who do not practice background-checking, can start with criminal record searches, sex offender search, employment confirmation, education verification and professional references for potential employees. For example, for hourly workers, a basic social security and criminal record check would suffice. At the management level, one might consider additional screening, such as credit check and education verification. In recent times, companies also run social media background checks, wherein employers rate negative information more important than positive information (Madera & Chang, 2011).

Background checks can be challenging for small hospitality businesses as there is a complex menu of background checks from which to choose, and purchasing one can quickly become expensive. Costs vary based on the types of checks one might run and other factors, but basic criminal background checks could run from \$20 to \$100 per hire (Howard, 2017). Moreover, costs can rise if one is running checks in multiple states or performing screens that are more thorough (Howard, 2017). However, through sound background-checking policies and practices, hospitality businesses can both reduce

workplace violence and minimize resultant negligent hiring lawsuits (Kondrasuk, Moore, & Wang, 2001).

Because quality reference is not always available for a large pool of employees who have no prior work experience, background information can be used extensively to assess credibility of unskilled and frontline employees in hospitality. If negative information surfaces, hospitality employers may consider the type of incident, how serious the incident was, how long ago it occurred, and whether it relates to the job at hand. More than two thirds (69%) of employers run criminal background checks on all of their potential employees according to a 2012 survey by the Society of Human Resource Management (Adams, 2013). As studied by Wang and Kleiner (2004), effective background checks might protect employers from direct loss through employee theft, assault, abuse, illegal drugs, alcohol abuse, fraud, and bad driving.

Due to related high-costs, many managers reported that although they perceive results of drug testing as highly important, only seven out of 10 managers in this study employ drug testing. Drug testing typically costs \$50-\$80 or more for urine or saliva test performed at a laboratory and \$100-\$650 or more for a blood test or hair test (Ducey, 2016). Considering the potential cost savings from low employee turnover rate (Normand et al., 1990), hospitality managers can invest more resources in mandatory drug testing at pre-employment stage rather than testing on the job following to accidents or randomly. In a study by Kitterlin and Moreo (2012) employees who had tested positive in drug testing had a higher rate of involuntary turnover than employees who had



tested negative. In addition, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence estimates that drug abuse costs employers approximately \$81 billion each year (Howard, 2015).

According to the findings of this study, hospitality managers perceive both personality and GMA testing play crucial roles in determining leadership skills of a successful management employee. Thus, questions in these tests should be carefully designed to evaluate a management candidate's ability to lead a team. Personality testing in hospitality is often used in an attempt to screen for people who will be courteous, patient, and cooperative with guests (Corp, 2017). However, some companies are moving away from conducting personality tests due to its potential for open forms of discrimination and mixed results about the effectiveness of the personality screening process (Ravichandran, 2016). So, hospitality managers are cautioned from employing reliable tests.

Developmental attention of frontline employees can be placed on mastering those aspects of the job such as engaging with team members to make decisions, solving guests' problems, and performing leadership related activities. This falls in line with the findings of Tews et al. (2011) that restaurant managers who value personality and GMA test results equally, make effective hiring decisions.

However thorough a recruiting process might be, management can still end up with someone who underperforms or does not fit the organization. Results of this study suggest that hospitality managers perceive that 30 to 90 days versus three to six months is

a reasonable amount of time to judge a frontline employee versus management employees. This can help organizational policy-makers to decide how long probationary periods should be set based on the type of positions. In addition, this timeframe can act as a guideline in designing effective employee training programs and manuals. Lastly, hotels and restaurants may refrain from use of different timelines to evaluate skilled versus unskilled employees, as managers participating in this study felt the practice to be unnecessary.

### **Future Research**

The results of the study indicate the need for future research in this area. One suggestion for future research is to conduct a quantitative study involving a larger sample to increase generalizability of results. Specifically, a survey of attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of individuals employed in different industry segments such as casinos, resorts and timeshare may be beneficial. The results of this study indicated that hospitality managers did not use integrity testing. It is possible that the methods by which integrity testing is done need to be further researched and evaluated, because managers find them to be unreliable.

Another recommendation is to explore demographic differences in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the use of pre-employment testing. Comparisons could also be made between full-service and quick service restaurants or full-service and limited service hotels. The current study only evaluated the perceptions of management level staff. A recommendation for future research could include exploring the attitudes,

perceptions, and beliefs of hourly employees with respect of use of pre-employment testing methods in the hospitality industry.

**Table 1****Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
Average duration of employment in current organization	5 years
Average duration of employment in hospitality industry	14 years 4 months
Participants who use staffing agencies to hire employees	30%
Participants who practice drug testing	70%
Participants who practice personality testing	40%
Participants who practice GMA testing	30%
Participants who practice integrity testing	10%
Participants who practice background checking	60%
Participants who use different testing for frontline and management employees	20%
Participants who use different testing for skilled and unskilled employees	20%
Participants who perceived they face high turnover of employees	60%

Note. *n*=10

## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**KSU INSTUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM**

## APPENDIX A

### KSU INSTUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

RE: Protocol #17-133 - entitled "Understanding Hospitality Employers' Perceptions of Pre-Employment Testing in Determining Successful Hires"

We have assigned your application the following IRB number: 17-133. Please reference this number when corresponding with our office regarding your application.

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:

- Exemption 2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation

This application was approved on March 9, 2017.

*\*\*\*Submission of annual review reports is not required for Level 1/Exempt projects. We do NOT stamp Level I protocol consent documents.*

For compliance with:

- DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects (Title 45 part 46), subparts A, B, C, D & E

If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or includes activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted. [Visit our website](#) for modification forms.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

To search for funding opportunities, please sign up for a free Pivot account at [http://pivot.cos.com/funding\\_main](http://pivot.cos.com/funding_main)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at [Researchcompliance@kent.edu](mailto:Researchcompliance@kent.edu) or by phone at 330-672-2704 or 330.672.8058.

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**APPENDIX B**  
**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**



## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Study Title:** Understanding Hospitality Employers' Perceptions of Pre-Employment Testing In Determining Successful Hires

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Swathi Ravichandran and **Co-Investigator:** Ankita Ghosh

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of our time together today is to find out your perception of a successful hire. During our conversation, we will also explore the role of pre-employment testing in hiring a quality candidate.

#### **Procedures**

The purpose of this one-on-one interview is to gather information, in a permissive, non-threatening environment to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest. We will conduct a guided discussion to better understand how you think or feel about

1. *Hiring a successful candidate for a job*
2. *Usage of types of pre-employment tests (e.g. drug-tests, personality tests, mental-ability-tests, integrity tests etc.)*
3. *Types of testing used for frontline and management level employees.*
4. *Types of testing used for skilled and unskilled employees used.*
5. *Time taken to determine a successful hire.*
6. *Variation of determination timing for front-line versus management positions.*
7. *Variation of determination timing for skilled and unskilled employee.*
8. *Role of specific tests you utilize.*

The session should take about an hour. One-on-one interview participants are chosen based on shared characteristics that relate to the topic of the research. For this particular research participants must: a) be a hospitality manager in a hotel or a restaurant; b) be using at least one pre-employment test; c) provide informed consent.

### **Audio and Video Recording and Photography**

To be sure that your words are captured accurately, the discussion will be recorded but no one will know which person says any specific statement. We are using a digital recorder because your opinions are very important to us, and we need to know what you said.

### **Benefits**

This research may or may not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand pre-employment testing as a management practice and reduce turnover in the hospitality industry.

### **Risks and Discomforts**

This study does not present any foreseeable risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you. Confidentiality will be assured in that the participants' names will never be publicly associated with information they provide. Anonymity is assured because the transcription service does not identify participants.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Dr. Swathi Ravichandran at 330-672-7314 or Ankita Ghosh at 914-400-6876. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

### **Consent Statement and Signature**

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

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**Participant Signature**

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**Date**

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## REFERENCES

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