



# Merit Systems Protection Board

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 29, 2009

## **NEW MSPB REPORT EXPLORES HOW JOB SIMULATIONS CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE SELECTION**

Employee assessment and selection is a hot topic in the Federal Government right now. How can agencies ensure that they are hiring the best candidates? The optimal approach would be to hire all qualified applicants and evaluate their actual performance over time to determine the best qualified, and separate those who are not. However, this is not a practical solution. The next best thing may be to evaluate applicants' performance on exercises that replicate as closely as possible different responsibilities of the job, and job simulations could help do just that.

A job simulation is an assessment that presents applicants with realistic, job-related situations and documents their behaviors or responses to help determine their qualifications for the job. Job simulations include, but are not limited to, work samples, situational judgment tests, assessment centers, and job tryout procedures. In its 2009 report, "Job Simulations: Trying Out for a Federal Job," the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) explores how job simulations can be used to improve employee selection efforts.

In this report, the MSPB finds that job simulation assessments can be an effective tool to evaluate applicant qualifications. They have many advantages, including relatively high levels of validity, better person-to-job fit because of the realistic job preview, a greater degree of fairness, and generally positive applicant perceptions. As Chairman

McPhie points out, “Job simulation assessments can be a critical measure in ensuring that agencies are selecting the best candidates.”

Nonetheless, job simulations may not work in every situation. The potentially high resource cost to develop and administer them is a key drawback. Therefore, it is important for agencies to have a good assessment strategy in place that helps them identify which assessment tools—simulation or non-simulation—will best help them distinguish the most qualified candidates in a given hiring situation.

This report identifies a number of factors for agencies to consider when making decisions about their assessment process. It also presents a practical, 5-step assessment strategy that agencies should consider adopting. The Chairman believes the strategy will “help agencies develop and implement an assessment program that assists them in selecting employees on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, as set forth in the merit system principles.”

The Merit Systems Protection Board is an independent, quasi-judicial agency that protects Federal merit systems and the rights of individuals within those systems. The MSPB Office of Policy and Evaluation conducts studies of the Federal workforce and makes recommendations for its improved efficiency and effectiveness. To request a printed copy of the report, e-mail [STUDIES@mspb.gov](mailto:STUDIES@mspb.gov); call (202) 653-6772, extension 1350, or write: Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20419. The report may also be downloaded from the MSPB’s website at [www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov).

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