



Identifying the core values of animal technologists

How Decision Making Profiles can assist in recruitment and development.

What is a 'Decision Making Profile'?

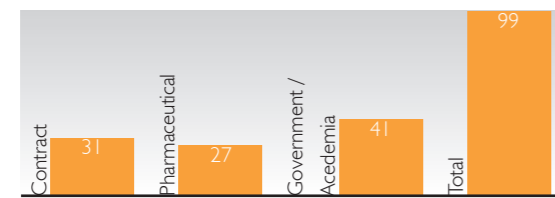
Agenda Resource Management has been using the Vindica Decision Making™ Profile as a part of its recruitment processes for the last two years. It measures a person's capacity to think and make value judgments. Values include attitudes, beliefs, likes and dislikes. To relate the value profile to job performance potential, we consider three measures:

1. The capacity to carry out certain specific tasks and functions defining a person's talent.
2. The degree of risk of a person's problems, which result from imbalances and lack of clarity in their value capacities.
3. The environment that offers the maximum opportunity for an individual to succeed.

The profile is an on-line questionnaire based on the concept of 'Axiometrics', which is the measurement of values evaluated on over 40,000 individuals.

How did we do it?

Agenda Resource Management sought to profile 100 candidates based in UK animal laboratory facilities. The 99 responses were from contract, pharmaceutical and government or academic research facilities.



Using a unique log-on password provided by Agenda, participants were presented with two sets of words or phrases. Participants were required to rank the elements of each set in order from 'good' to 'bad'. The questionnaires tested for one's value judgement in terms of the world and of self. There were no right or wrong answers; it measures the approach to making value decisions.

How values are ranked

Participants were not asked to make judgements about 'themselves', a process that is known as 'self-reporting'. The profile system checks for inconsistency in ranking the options and rejected any that were inconsistent. For example, one phrase to be ranked is 'I enjoy my work'. It is irrelevant whether or not the candidate does enjoy their work, what is important is how they value 'I enjoy my work' relative to the other phrases.

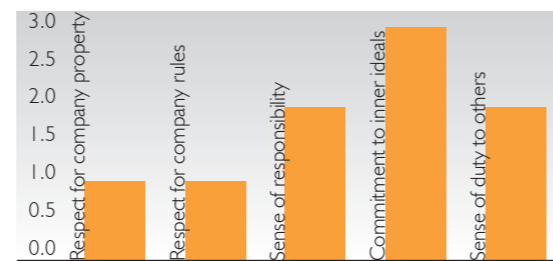
Can Animal Technologists be profiled?

Is it possible to identify the traits that make for the ideal Animal Technician? That is the question we posed ourselves. Given the changing context of the industry, where entrants tend to be short-term with many coming from untraditional and non-animal backgrounds, overseas staff who perhaps bring different approaches to animal care and agency staff engaged on much shorter timescales, the answer must be of real interest and value to the industry.

An additional concern is the need to actively screen out animal rights activists who intentionally set out to infiltrate the industry. Such activists have become increasingly sophisticated in their 'modus operandi' as the industry has raised its awareness of their tactics.

The profiling challenge

The challenge is not to identify the hard skills associated with the professional care of laboratory animals, but rather to identify the soft skills associated with attitude. The approach that Agenda adopted in this pioneering study was to evaluate personnel values that underscore behaviour and illuminate decision-making.

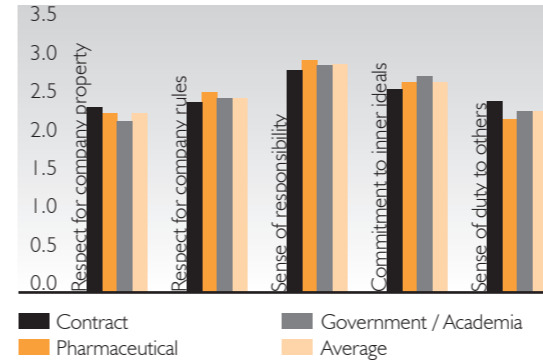


What results were achieved?

Two things were strikingly consistent in the profiles. There was a marked predominance of uncertainty and questioning regarding the participants own role coupled with a strong commitment to concerns about complying with systems and procedures.

Reliability Index Sector Results

One interpretation is that participants do not consider themselves as committed to a long-term career as an Animal Technician but are nonetheless quite determined to perform well in the role, especially with regard to compliance to company systems and rules. This would seem to suggest that a robust concern for the well-being of the animals, as well as respect for adherence to procedures, is complemented by a searching and questioning attitude to one's personal role. Interestingly, and not in contradiction, is the well-developed sense of self-direction exhibited by a significant number of participants.



It is note-worthy that a small minority exhibited a marked resistance and sense of frustration with the system within which they operate. Closer analysis identified that this group is predominantly employed in the pharmaceutical sector. A suggested interpretation is that this attitude derives from the same sense of lack of personal fulfilment that is common to the overall group but is heightened in this instance by frustration with the 'golden handcuffs' of a well rewarded position that is not easily replicated in the marketplace.

What is the profile of the ideal animal technologist?

To do this, we would need to define what an ideal technician should do and correlate profiles to performance. We would look for characteristics that are common to high performance and absent from low performance, and vice versa. Of course, a critical factor would be to define what constitutes high performance in the role, and in a way that would find acceptance across the different sectors. The following elements would seem to be universally applicable:

Personal Integrity: The role has a high level of implicit trust in the activities of the technician to ensure the best care of the animals and that scientific results are robust and not in any way compromised by the technician. There is often a very significant dependence on the outcome of a study with serious consequences, both personal and financial, if the results are compromised in any way.

Adherence to Standard Operating Procedures: Necessary to assure the standards of care of laboratory animals and critical to meaningful scientific results.

Sensitive to the well-being of the animals: Empathy and concern for animal well-being will ensure that any pain or discomfort to the animals as a result of studies will be minimised. It means that the technician will be alert and will react if the animals in their care exhibit any signs of distress. This may well be different than anticipated in study design, leading to improved design that reduces distress to animals. In certain cases, unexpected animal reactions might be significant to correct interpretation of test outcomes.

Interpreting risk in the employability profile

We cannot say that a good score will definitely mean that a person will always perform well. The profile will objectively and reliably measure the functions and capacities and translate the value capacities into performance functions and tasks. From these it defines patterns of people who do well, and those who have difficulty. Value talent is a measure of the ability to utilise intelligence, to access natural and learned skills and to control emotions. The profile that is produced describes the unique patterns that belong to the person.

There are three key things we can measure about a person's value capacities:

1. Which capacities are strengths?
2. Which capacities are potential blocks and can become red flags?
3. What is the risk of the block being a problem?

A Real Risk indicates that this capacity is likely to be unavailable for consistent decision making and problem solving. This person is subject to mistakes in judgment. How that impacts on the person's ability to perform their role will depend on whether or not this capacity is a critical element for successful job performance.

The Work Ethic Screen Results

INDEX	Excellent	V. Good	Good	Average	Poor
Attitude Toward Others	✓	-	-	-	-
Perfectionism	-	✓	-	-	-
Self Starting Ability	-	-	✓	-	-
Persistence	-	✓	-	-	-
Prejudice/Bias	-	-	✓	-	-
Attitude Towards Schedules	✓	-	-	-	-
Common Sense Ability	-	✓	-	-	-
Attitude Toward Authority	-	-	✓	-	-

Feeling undervalued: Regarding the low value that participants seemed to place on their personal role, it begs the question "is the profession of an Animal Technician undervalued?" If so, then individuals who are committed to performing well and giving of their best may indeed feel frustration and be questioning if they perceive that the role they are performing is not recognised as being of value.

Conclusions

The use of the Decision Making™ profile is not a basis to be used in isolation for recruitment or development decisions but it is a valuable and powerful tool to aid in evaluation. It also provides a documented, objective component to a well-balanced recruitment screening and personal development process that will satisfy regulatory demands.

The project showed that there are close similarities in the values of Animal Technologists across the 3 sectors. Managers can assess their teams and develop training processes to build on the strong values and support the values that appear blocked. Organisations can benchmark their values against the results of this project, against the industry as a whole or their specific sector.

A worthwhile enhancement of the study would be to correlate the findings against actual job performance or against the values of another profession.

The results of this profiling project were presented at the LASA Winter Meeting in November 2007 and our thanks go to all of the organisations that participated. If you would like more information please visit the Profiling section of the Agenda web site or contact: norman@agenda-security.co.uk



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