Test-taker reactions to online completion of the OPQ32i

SHL Research Report

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OPQ Online Feedback

This study is part of an ongoing programme of research exploring the impact of online administration and, in particular, remote administration. Previous work (Bartram and Brown, 2002) showed that OPQ32i data are not biased in any way either by online administration or by the absence of a local test administrator. The present research considers candidates' perceptions of completing the ipsative version of the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ32i) online.

The present report describes the results from 54 feedback forms completed by test-takers after they had completed the OPQ32i online. All those taking OPQ32 online for one of SHL's client organisations, SyBlue, were invited to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire after they had responded to the OPQ32. Every candidate received the feedback form and a pre-paid envelope to post it back to SHL. Questionnaires were completed anonymously, and there was no means of relating feedback responses to OPQ32 data.

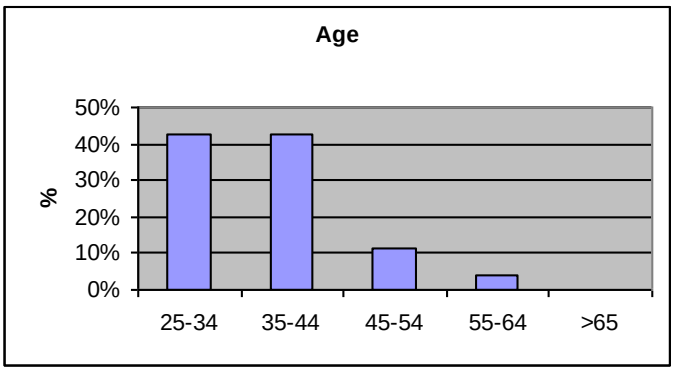
SyBlue is an executive search and recruitment consultancy specialising in middle to senior level appointments. The way in which SyBlue uses the psychometric assessment is unique in the headhunting market place. Whilst in theory other head-hunters could utilise similar objective techniques, on the whole it goes against the industry norm where head-hunters pride themselves on their ability to judge people over the phone and face to face in interview. In fact, research into interviewing suggests that most people are very poor at predicting future job success and those who interview for a living are not necessarily any better than anyone else.

Results

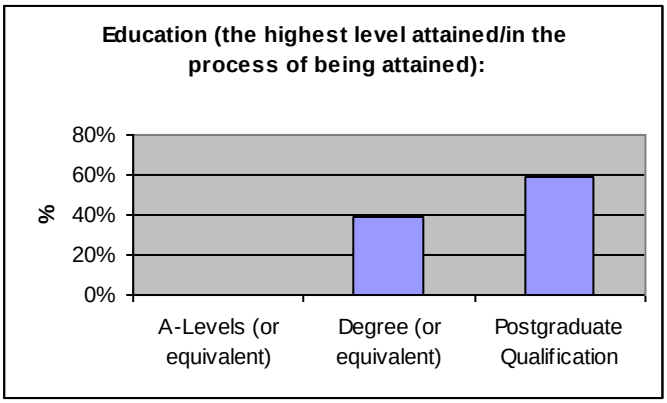
Biographical information

The background information collected was candidates' age, education and years of work experience.

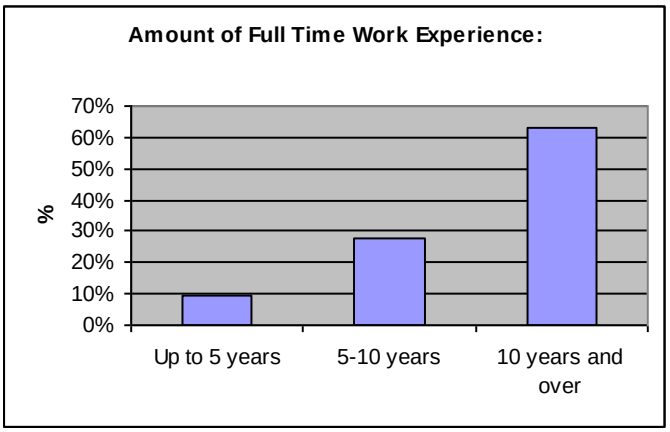
43% of respondents were between age of 25 and 34, 43% between age of 35 and 44, 11% between age of 45 and 54 and 4% between age of 55 and 64.



39% of respondents had a degree or equivalent and 59% had a postgraduate qualification.



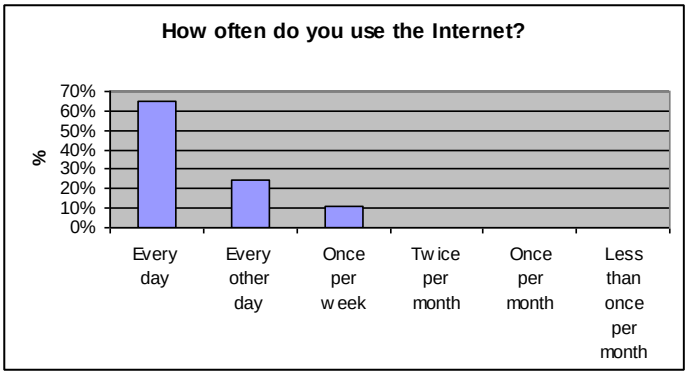
Only 9% of respondents had less than 5 years of work experience, with 28% having 5 to 10 years and 63% - over 10 years of work experience.



Section A: Internet Access

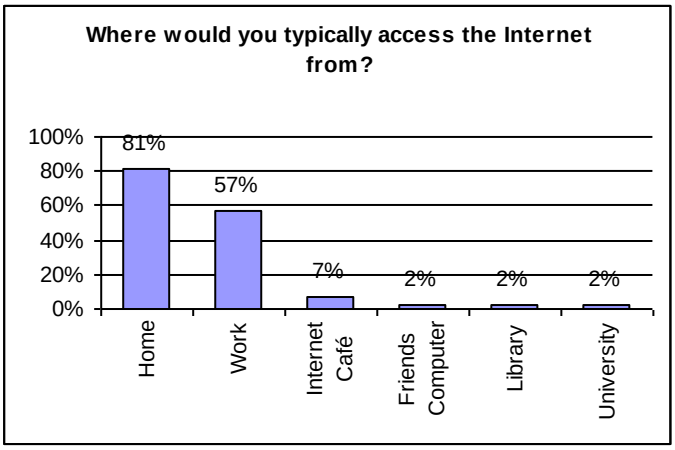
The first section of the questionnaire asked questions about general usage of the Internet. The majority (94%) said that they could easily gain access to the Internet.

65% of the respondents use the Internet every day, 24% - every other day and 11% once per week. None of the respondents use the Internet less frequently than once per week.



30% described their level of Internet skills as high, 61% as average and only 9% as low.

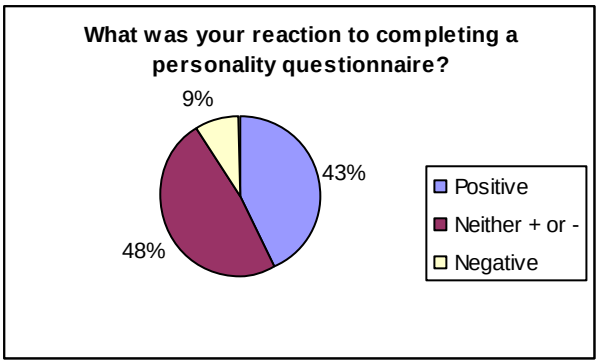
The places from which people typically access the Internet were: home (81%) or work (57%), with 48% of respondents accessing the Internet from both home and work. Other options mentioned were: Internet Café (7%), friend's Computer (2%), library (2%) and university (2%).



Section B: The OPQ32 Questionnaire

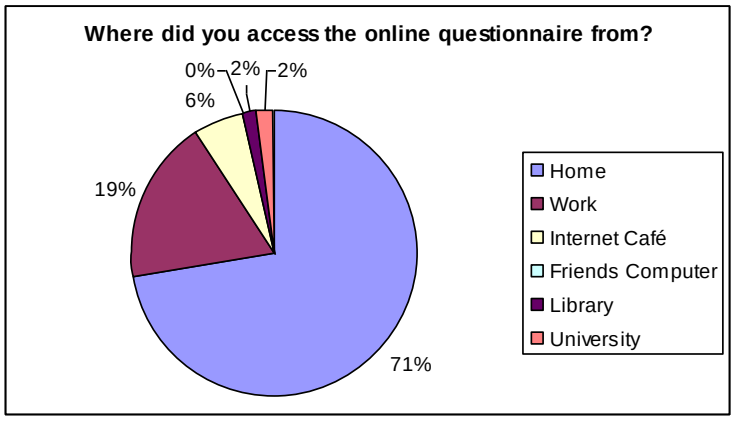
In this section respondents described the experience they had completing the OPQ32.

They reported generally positive or neutral reaction to completing the personality questionnaire. 43% described their first reaction to completing a personality questionnaire as positive, 48% - as neither positive or negative and only 9% as negative.

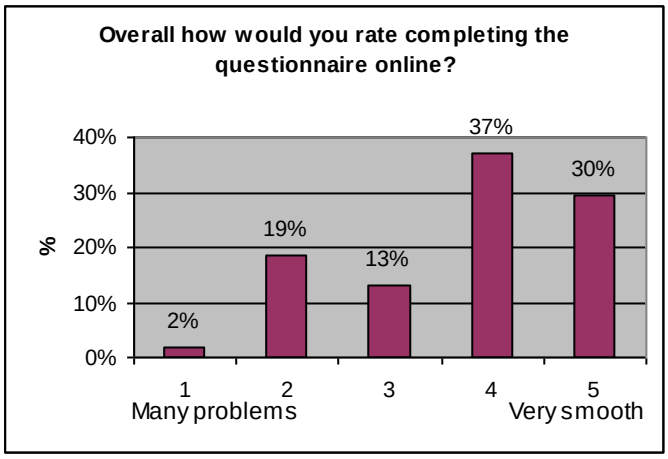


The fact that the questionnaire was completed online did not make any change to the reaction of 69% of respondents. However, 28% reported that this improved their view of it while 4% expressed increased concerns. The concerns mentioned were to do with security of data transmission over the Internet.

The majority of people accessed the questionnaire from home (72%), 19% accessed it from work and 10% from elsewhere (6% Internet Café, 2% Library and 2% University).



We asked them to rate the process of completing the OPQ32 online on the scale from 1 (Many problems) to 5 (Very smooth). The ratings had the following bi-modal distribution:



For people that had problems the main issues were:

- 7% mentioned that the site crashed or was down,
- 9% were unhappy with the speed (slow page-download),

- 6% had issues with timing out and having to reconnect,
- 6% did not like the fact that they could not go back and review their answers.

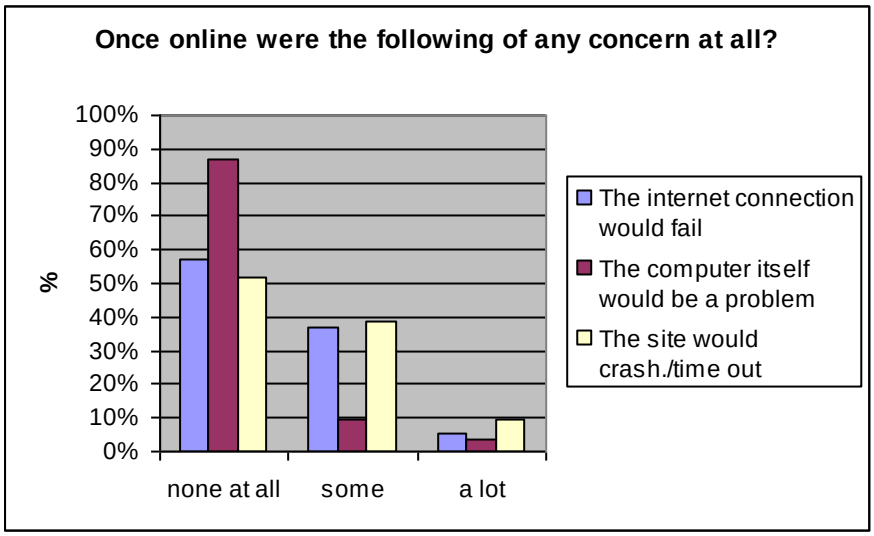
Generally the respondents felt that they had enough reassurance prior to going online. 89% of respondents felt reassured by the introductory e-mail they got and 74% were happy with verbal reassurance provided by the client organisation's consultants.

- 37% said that an opportunity to complete some practice questions beforehand would have made them more comfortable,
- only 7% felt they needed advice or clarification once online,
- 11% of respondents would like a telephone help-line to be available for such advice/clarification.

In fact the client informed candidates both by email and verbally that they could ring if they experienced problems. This support would only, of course, be available during normal working hours.

Section C: The Technology

The graph below shows that people were generally not concerned about the computer itself. 87% had no concerns at all that the computer would be a problem. Those who expressed some concerns were mainly people that used computers at library, Internet café etc.
The respondents expressed more concerns about the site crashing or/timing out (39% expressed some concerns and 9% had a lot of concerns) and Internet connection failing (37% - some, 6% - a lot).



Section D: Administration mode

In this section we sought feedback from candidates on what it was like to complete OPQ32 unsupervised. In particular, we were interested in whether candidates were seeking any assistance.

96% of candidates said they did not seek the views of others while answering the questionnaire. Those who did (n=2, 4%) said that they asked their partners for an opinion as to which choice better suited them. One respondent said this only

occurred for one question and the other respondent said that it happened a number of times.

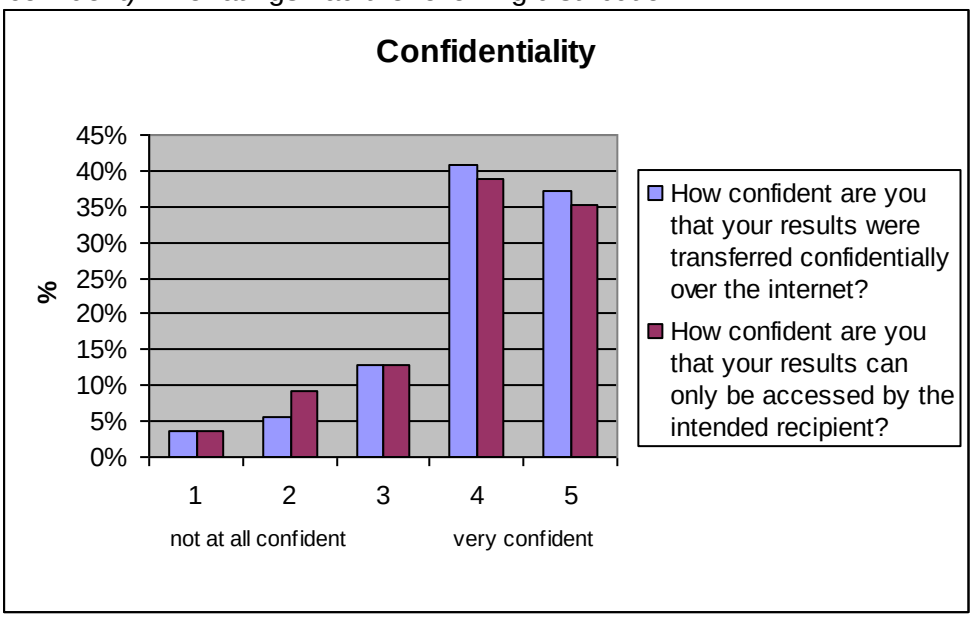
96% of respondents said that they would not get someone else to help complete an online questionnaire in a selection situation in the future.

19% of respondents expressed concerns that other applicants might seek assistance in completing the questionnaire, 37% said that they were not concerned and 43% said that this possibility had not occurred to them. Respondents who had expressed concerned said that experienced people might know how to answer questions to fit job requirements, which would put truthful applicants at a disadvantage.

Section E: Confidentiality of results

We asked how confident candidates were that their results would be transferred confidentially over the Internet and would only be accessed by the intended recipient.

The respondents rated their confidence on the scale from 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (very confident). The ratings had the following distribution:

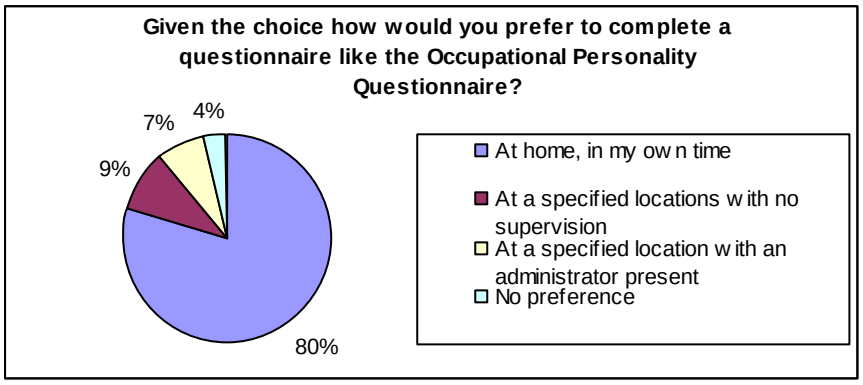


Generally, the majority of respondents felt fairly confident about the confidentiality of their data.

Section F: The test administration environment

We asked the candidates how they would prefer to complete a questionnaire like the OPQ in terms of administration mode and test medium.

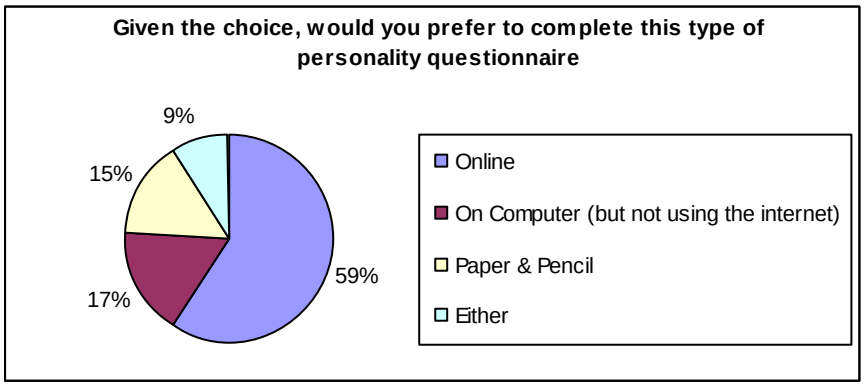
- 80% of respondents would prefer to complete such a questionnaire at home, in their own time,
- 9% at a specified location with no supervision,
- only 7% would prefer an administered session.



Regarding the test medium:

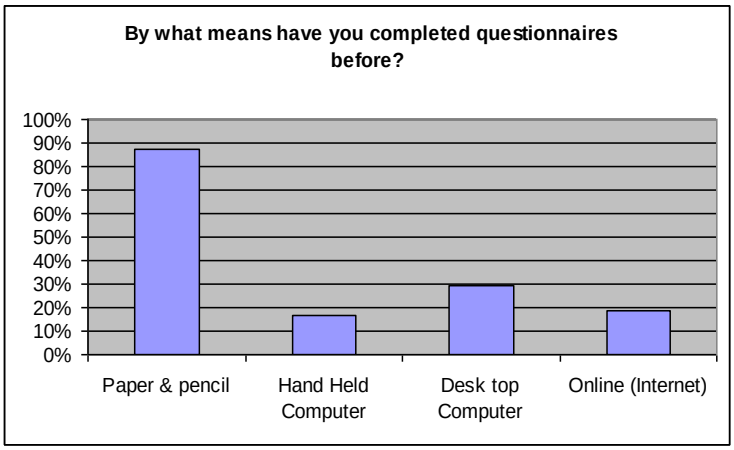
- 76% of respondents preferred computer (59% online and 17% offline),
- 9% had no preference
- 15% preferred paper & pencil.

One respondent mentioned that paper & pencil test would take less time to complete because of slow page download over the Internet.



Section G: Previous Experience of Personality Questionnaires

The majority of the candidates had completed personality questionnaires before (96%).



Out of candidates that have completed such questionnaires before 90% had completed paper & pencil questionnaires, 17% have had experience with handheld computers, 31% with desktop computers and 19% have completed online questionnaires.
58% said that there was an administrator present on the previous occasions.

General Comments

We invited people to give us some open feedback on the whole process. The following present all the comments received categorised under six headings.

1. Time
    - *Questionnaire took longer than I was expecting. Time provision should be warned.*
    - *Too many questions - 30 to 50 questions should be sufficient to establish what is required*
    - *A touch long I thought*

2. Design
    - *Once you answered a question you could not revert to it*
    - *[Need] to read instruction carefully - the system would not let you go back and change response*
    - *Most and Least columns are not clearly marked*

3. Process and technical
    - *The process was very smooth and it only timed out twice but I logged back very quickly*
    - *Time allowed is too short - I had to log back in during the process*
    - *[Need a] warning to allow a few days in case of server being down*
    - *Prefer P&P - it takes less time to complete (delays in opening pages)*
    - *Impressed by how quick feedback was.*

4. Security
    - *The site was not secure, so I was not sure how secure my data was*
    - *I have concerns about access via public Internet connection*

5. Information and support
    - *More details on how my results are analysed or would be used*
    - *How the information will be used by the client*
    - *Once I had finished I felt I needed to speak to someone; would be nice to have a call line.*

6. Comments specific to the OPQ32i or personality assessment:
    - *It has been of positive benefit and influence.*
    - *Was pleased with the outcome and felt it to be very representative*
    - *I did not find explanations very accurate for some points. Generally they were accurate. Also I felt that it's easy to manipulate the answers.*
    - *Questions need to be interpreted in the context in which they were answered and not have conclusions drawn from the number of times a response is given to a particular outcome*
    - *A skilled person can manipulate results to suit the occasion.*
    - *For several questions responding correctly was impossible because it forced a choice between equally ranked options.*

Discussion

Technical problems were one of the main issues for test-takers. This accords with previous research. Mead (2001) reported that 81% of users (not test-takers) of the 16PF online version were satisfied or quite satisfied with it. The main reasons for satisfaction were noted as remote administration and the quick reporting of results. The reported rate of technical difficulties was the main factor that separated those who were satisfied from those who were not. Reynolds et al (2000) also noted a heightened awareness among test-takers of technological and time-related factors when completing the test online rather than offline. They also noted more positive perceptions of applicants towards internet-based testing than traditional testing.

There was a clear preference in the present study for computer-based administration over paper and pencil, with most people saying they would prefer to complete such inventories online despite some of the technical difficulties encountered with the Internet. There was also a clear preference for working remotely rather than at a supervised location. This latter finding is contrary to some previous research. Sinar and Reynolds (2001) reported applicants showing a preference for supervised rather than unsupervised web-based testing. It is likely that such differences in preference will be affected by the function and context of testing.

It is useful to consider the comments made by candidates and some of the more negative findings in order to see how the experience can be improved in future. While only a minority of candidates encountered problems, there are some indicators here of where improvements could be made.

- More emphasis needs to be placed on candidates reading instructions, and the option to return to the instructions should be provided.
- While the client organisations provided a telephone help-line to support candidates having problems, some candidates did not avail themselves of this. In addition, candidates may work on questionnaires outside normal office hours, when personal support is available from the client organisation.
- A clearer indication should be given of how long candidates need to set aside in order to complete the questionnaire should be provided.
- Candidates need to be made aware, if they are not already, of potential technical problems with the Internet and be provided with clear instructions for managing these (e.g. what to do if the connection is lost).

SyBlue worked hard with SHL to develop a briefing email that was both instructive and encouraging for candidates, and that contained sufficient guidance to limit the number of queries without over-burdening the candidate with information. The results suggest that this has been generally successful in setting the scene for candidates. For the future, it would be worth adding some more advice on managing connection problems or timeouts when these occur out of office hours (i.e. recommending the candidate not to persist but to call for advice the next day).

Overall, the feedback we received from these 54 candidates is very positive. It suggests that they had a good experience completing the OPQ32i and found the feedback interesting and beneficial.

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Sinar, E.F., & Reynolds, D.H. (2001). Applicant reactions to Internet-based selection techniques. Paper presented at the 16th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, San Diego, CA