

Selecting Nurses Based on Behavioral Characteristics

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Originally published in AORN Journal Vol. 75, Number 3, March 2002. ©AORN.

As the pool of available and qualified nurses shrinks, hiring the right person becomes even more important, particularly in the surgical services department, which has one of the largest expense budgets in most hospitals. Although some nursing education programs are beginning to see the value of adding a perioperative elective, this probably will not meet the immediate needs of many health care facilities, especially as the United States is experiencing a nursing shortage and nursing school enrollment is less than the projected need.¹

The cost of recruiting, especially in the perioperative area, is higher than most hospital executives realize. The average cost of turnover can be calculated as 25 percent of an employee's annual salary plus 25 percent of the cost of benefits provided.² Typically benefits are approximately 30 percent of an employee's annual salary. If this formula is applied to an employee earning \$30,000 annually, the cost of hiring and training the employee is approximately \$9,750 (i.e., [$\$30,000 \times 25$ percent] + [$\$30,000 \times 30$ percent $\times 25$ percent]). This formula only reflects an orientation period of two weeks, but training a perioperative nurse can take up to six months. Given the salary of the new nurse and the additional cost of the preceptor's decreased productivity during training, the cost of replacing perioperative staff members may be significantly higher than that of other employees.

Job Profiling

One of a manager's biggest problems is determining which RN or new graduate should have an opportunity to learn perioperative nursing skills. Many surgical services managers and directors have developed a sixth sense about who will make it; however, this sense is difficult to translate into an objective hiring method that is acceptable to the human resources department. In addition, poor hiring decisions may lead to human and fiscal costs, as well as discipline, labor and customer problems.

Job profiling is a method of validating the intuition of surgical services managers and directors. A job profile determines behavioral characteristics required for given positions. These characteristics or traits often are seen in top performers in the facility, but they may be difficult to articulate. The job profiling process, when used in conjunction with other human resource methods (e.g., a structured interview), is objective, reliable, repeatable, and

relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of one poor selection (Figure 1).³

Consultants, counselors and trainers have used behavioral methodology for improving communication and relationships and managing conflict successfully for many years. One study of nurses found that there was a significant correlation between personality and job satisfaction among intensive care, non-intensive care, and perioperative nurses.⁴ This research was initiated because of high turnover rates among perioperative nurses and the educational costs associated with developing competent replacements.⁵ Another study found that low job satisfaction among nurses is correlated to high turnover.⁶

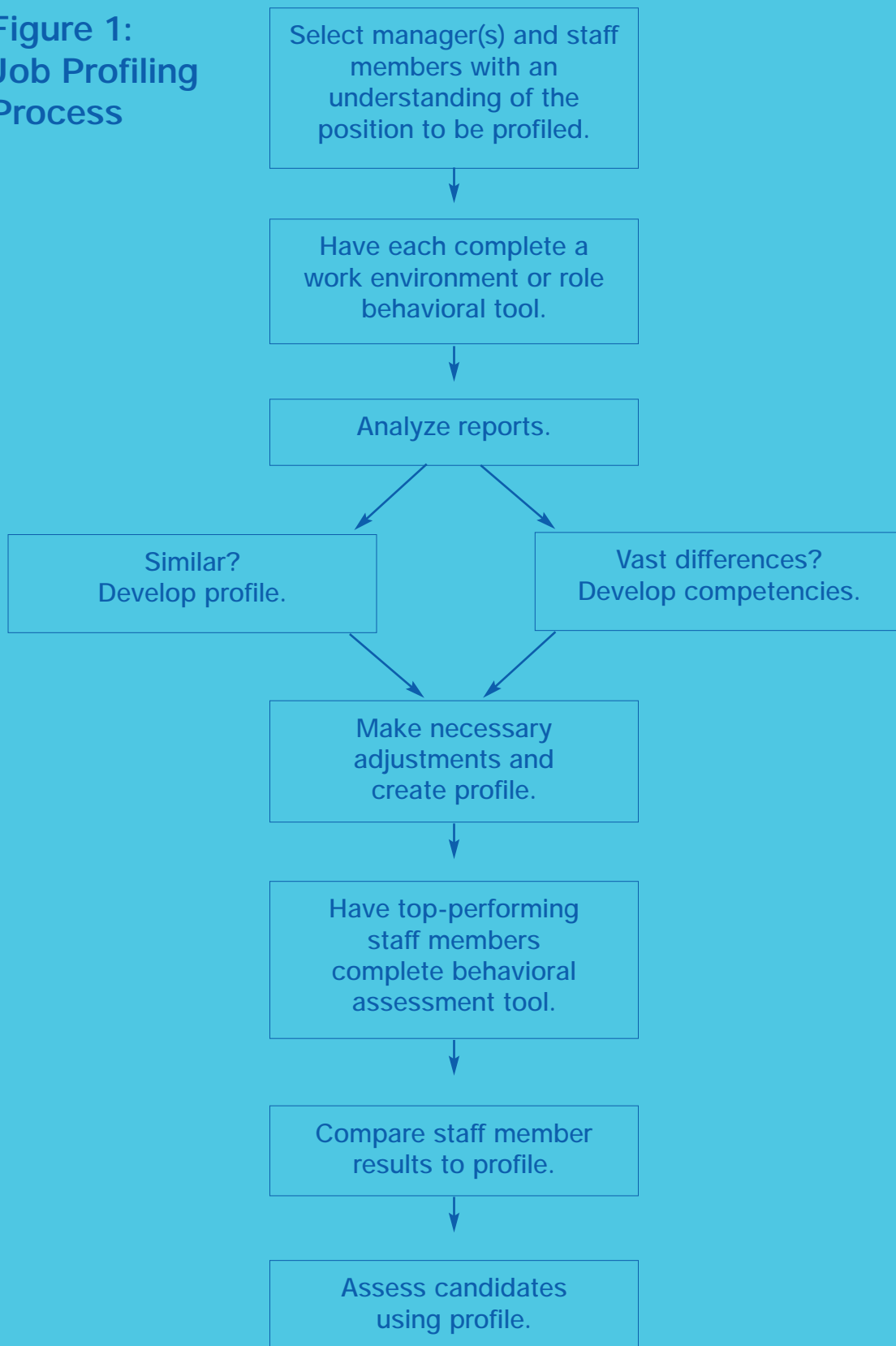
Creating a Job Profile

Although many tools can be used to create a job profile, one of the oldest and most researched behavioral models is the dominance, influence, steadiness/supportiveness, and compliance/conscientiousness (DISC) model. The DISC model used today was developed by William Moulton Marston.⁷ It describes four quadrants that are placed at right angles to each other (Figure 2).

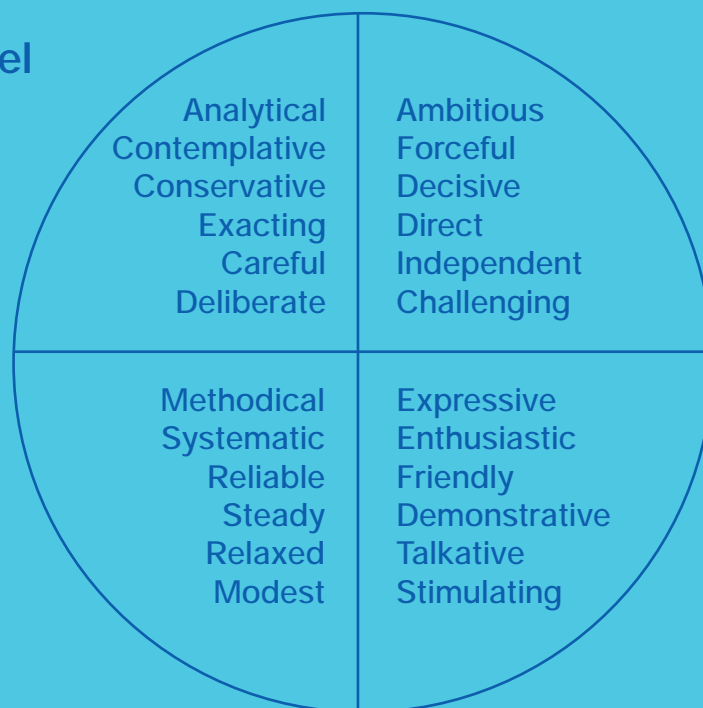
Creating a job profile using the DISC methodology requires creating a DISC model for the job position that uses a work environment or role behavior tool. These tools ask about behavioral characteristics required to succeed in the position (e.g., job requires following directions, task-oriented concentration, expediting action, analysis of facts and data). An analysis of this information helps create a profile of behavioral characteristics required for the position. Individuals selected to complete the tool usually are managers or nursing staff members who are considered to be top performers. These top performers can be determined based on performance criteria developed for competencies or evaluations. Although the job profile can be created for a generalist—in larger ORs, where differentiation has created different behavioral types, profiles should be developed for specialty team members. If there are discrepancies in the DISC profile created by the work environment or role behavioral tool, group members can resolve them by examining requirements and identifying competencies that demonstrate required behaviors.

In one profile, composite characteristics identified by perioperative RNs in three facilities and behavioral characteristics expected by perioperative managers mirror one another. This profile indicates that the ideal perioperative nurse will display a calculated, conservative approach to the job in the dominance factor of the DISC model. The influence factor is indicative of a nurse who is matter-of-fact, factual and logical. The steadiness/supportiveness factor shows a nurse who is stable, steady and consistent, and

**Figure 1:
Job Profiling
Process**



**Figure 2:
DISC model**



the compliance/conscientiousness factor describes an individual who is systematic, accurate and exacting.

To test the reliability of the profile, a DISC behavioral assessment tool is used to compare the newly created profile to known top performers in the organization. The behavioral assessment tool consists of simple written surveys that require approximately 10 minutes for the employee to complete. It also acts as a validation method because it compares organizational achievers to the profile.

Applying the Profile to Candidates

After the profile has been validated using staff member information, it can be applied to candidates interested in perioperative training. Job profiling is not meant to replace the regular interview process. It is an additional tool to help the organization and the candidate make decisions. If a candidate feels strongly about working in the OR but the profile does not support his or her being successful in the role, the manager can talk to the candidate about the stress of the perioperative environment and the history of successful perioperative nurses. Rather than being hired and beginning training, these candidates can opt to follow a perioperative nurse for a few days to see what perioperative nursing really entails. This frequently will be enough to help the candidate realize that he or she is not behaviorally suited for the perioperative environment.

Job profiling is an objective methodology for selecting candidates that outlines the attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by successful practitioners. As health care facilities hire new graduates or inexperienced personnel to train on the job or through off-site training programs, hiring the right individual becomes more important. Considering how much it costs to train a perioperative nurse, it is worth the effort to get the right person in the right job the first time.

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