The New Normal for Talent Assessment - 2020 and Beyond

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In the last decade, people involved with talent assessment have been answering the question; ‘What will talent, and talent assessment, look like in 2020 and beyond?’ Recent events are likely to have made organizations rethink.

Saville Assessment, a Willis Towers Watson Company, interviewed a number of talent assessment leaders from a range of global organizations about the impact Covid-19 is having on their talent agenda.

In this article, we look at what’s happening now, what might be next, and offer some practical considerations for moving forward.

1. Significant reductions in hiring

What’s happening?

Some sectors have needed to significantly reduce external recruitment, at least in the short term. A 50% reduction in external hiring between January and June compared to the previous year was typical.

They have needed to focus their attention and resources on positions which are ‘mission critical’; often executive roles and specialist roles within IT.

Outside of these mission-critical roles, organizations have become more internally mobile. Internal talent has had first consideration for vacancies that have arisen, and redeployment was a common theme. One organization had quickly transferred a team of customer facing staff, during the lockdown of non-essential retail, to their contact center which was facing increased demand.

What might be next?

A focus on internal mobility is likely to continue at least in the short term. Where organizations continue to hire, and recruitment freezes begin to thaw, the number of applicants will far outweigh available roles.

This could put an increased pressure on recruiters and talent acquisition specialists. Processes will be under strain from larger applicant volumes, a new wave of talent in the market resulting from job losses will increase competition, and many talent acquisition teams will be expected to deliver more, with tighter budgets and less resources.

Many of the organizations we spoke with discussed the importance of gathering quality data from their screening and selection process. It will be critical that processes going forwards not only engage candidates, but the data elicited from them adds real value to identifying who are most likely to perform well in the role.

Things to consider

- Internal talent mobility – build processes and structures to make movement across departments simple, allowing you to respond to fluctuations in market demands.
- Assess for behavior - considering behaviors in your assessment processes will help you manage your pipeline better and ensure you are recruiting the people who are most likely to thrive in your roles.
- Assess wisely and get data that matters – more than ever, talent assessment processes need to give you the data you need for timely, accurate decision making.

- Put the odds in your favor– using assessments with proven reliability and predictive power is going to increase your chances of making the right hire. This is essential for your mission-critical roles and important for selecting from your crowded talent pools.

2. Virtual Recruitment

What's happening?

Hiring for senior roles has been easier to adapt where largely the process has involved replacing an in-person interview with a video interview.

Early-careers and volume recruitment has proved more challenging where scheduled assessment centers could no longer take place. Key challenges for moving this to an online setting were finding suitable technology, connectivity, and digital security.

The adaptation to virtual recruitment put a spotlight on the (often overlooked) recruiter experience and how to keep them engaged when delivering several back-to-back assessments online. In response, many of the organizations we spoke to have updated their training and guidance materials to support their people.

What might be next?

It is clear organizations are missing the benefits of physically bringing candidates into their buildings and immersing them in their working environment. Organizations are therefore looking at creative ways to offer this in the recruitment experience. It is likely many innovations in this area will start to be discussed in case studies and at industry events.

The sudden move to 100% virtual delivery will give many organizations a ‘pause for thought’. There will have been pros and cons to the adaptions put in place. Organizations will reflect on how they can potentially maximize the value of their hiring process across key metrics with a more blended approach.

The organizations that have adapted efficiently, maintained the caliber of their applicant pools deal, and helped candidates and assessors adequately prepare for the assessments, will benefit.

Things to consider

- Review your processes critically – does the virtual assessment give you the insight you need or is there a better way?
- Have you got the right technology? For obvious reasons, many organizations have put temporary solutions in place. Now could be the time to review whether the technology you have is fit for purpose or if investment is needed.
- Provide guidance for candidates and assessors so they are as prepared as possible for the nuances of remote selection exercises. Our research shows this is critical for candidate (and recruiter) experience.

Video Interviewing from Saville Assessment

Why is this such a great solution for recruiters around the world?

Customisable questions that can be tailored to the role

3. Working Effectively in a Virtual World

What's happening?

A hot topic amongst the organizations we spoke with was how to effectively manage their workforce in a new virtual landscape. Many organizations had managed the transition for business continuity extremely well but need to ensure business growth is sustainable with this new way of working.

'What makes a good remote manager?' is a common question that organizations are grappling with, but it's not just management that's in focus. There's a recognition that all colleagues within organizations need to take responsibility for creating an inclusive and collaborative culture in which people feel engaged and motivated.

What might be next?

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many 'office-dwellers' having their eyes opened to the benefits of home working. Organizations are bracing themselves for significant numbers of flexible working requests. Employers who demand that colleagues must be physically present in their offices going forwards may have a challenge. The lens has therefore shifted from crisis management of virtual working (e.g. making sure people have the technology they need) to the longer-term impact on employee experience.

This will need some careful thought. Will a different management approach be needed? How do we create development opportunities which replicate the benefits of shadowing/hearing experienced colleagues on the phone in an open-plan office? Are different behaviors needed to deal with the new working environment? All these questions are very relevant and will need to be thought through.

Things to consider

- Core to what makes successful performance for a role is still critical, despite the setting.
- Depending on what comes out of this work, you may need to update your learning and development interventions to reflect these changes.
- Don't let the current situation stop your development interventions. In fact, this is the time when they are most needed and could be most impactful. But, just as you have to review your selection processes to ensure they work virtually, make sure the interventions you are delivering will be impactful in a virtual environment.

4. Coping with change

What's happening?

Change and transformation isn't new, but the current pace is unparalleled. Digital Transformation has been a key accelerator as organizations and their people adapted to a new world of work. There has been an amplified focus on understanding how well equipped employees are to navigate change and how organizations can better support their people.

Exploring this concept, they agreed there is a need to assess and develop people for their 'grit', 'emotional resilience', 'being comfortable with ambiguity', 'agility' and 'adaptability'.

What might be next?

The conversations that organizations are having about how well equipped their people are to navigate change will continue. To ensure they move in a productive direction, they need to focus on what is it they are trying to identify, and how they can reliably measure it.

It will be important to keep these conversations rooted in the prediction of workplace performance and potential, particularly if organizations are looking to update talent frameworks.

Things to consider

- Organizational transformation is here to stay. Understanding the dynamics of your people and supporting them through change will be important.
- Agility (responding positively to change) and resilience (maintaining drive to see it through) are critical to being effective in transformation.

- Using a model that is rooted in workplace performance and potential will help to identify both capacity for change and overall workplace effectiveness.

Introducing
'Resilient Agility'
from Wave

5. Leading Through Uncertainty

What's happening?

Depending on the impact of Covid-19, some organizations are looking to their leaders to navigate business continuity; some are needing leaders to create a path for emerging successfully and others are using it as an opportunity to reimagine their organization rather than reset to what it was before.

At the start of the pandemic, leadership activity focused on the skills required for crisis leadership, leadership agility, and inspirational/motivational leadership. The focus is now taking issues which had previously felt very strategic and future-focused and making them a reality. Some organizations had concerns that remote working would make this more difficult.

What might be next?

Organizations will be looking at how leaders can move from doing a great job of managing the crisis to assessing what's next in helping the organization emerge successfully.

More than ever, leaders have a critical role in ensuring a positive employee experience during what is undoubtedly a very challenging time. As with other areas of the organization, at leadership level, businesses will want to futureproof their leadership pipelines.

Things to consider

- Think about how to reimagine the organization moving forward, rather than returning to where it was and what you will need from your leaders to do this.
- Look at ways to develop leaders and build an increased self-awareness to better equip them to drive trust and stay connected with their teams. Do this in a way that facilitates open and honest dialogue.
- Keep development activity in line with organizational outcomes, objectives and results.
- Look at both individual and group strengths at leadership level to create a shared sense of identity and purpose in leadership teams and make everyone aware how collectively they can emerge successfully by playing to each other's strengths and supporting challenge areas.

We'd like to give our thanks to everyone who spent time talking to us. 2020 has been a challenging year for talent assessment professionals and we have been struck by the energy and positivity our contacts have attacked these challenges with.

If you would like to discuss any of the content shared in this piece, please get in touch