

# Talent selection in the cloud

*New assessment  
center technology is  
making hiring and  
talent selection efforts  
more effective, efficient  
and scalable*

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# Talent Selection in the Cloud

*Moving from traditional assessment center approaches to virtual and online assessment center technology, organizations are making efforts to hire top talent more effective, efficient and scalable.*

*Technology is revolutionizing assessment center capabilities, transforming best practices and changing the way solutions and simulations are developed and administered.*

## **Shift towards technology**

The consequences of selecting the wrong people are well known, including higher costs associated with turnover, lost revenue opportunities due to lower productivity and lower employee morale and engagement.

Finding and selecting talent has never been more competitive. Increasingly, organizations are looking to leverage the latest assessment tools and technologies to evolve their assessment centers, hire more successfully and differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Moving assessment centers from on-site to online can help employers find and select top talent, provide a better candidate experience and improve retention — all while reducing costs.

## **What is an assessment center?**

Assessment centers can be defined as a set of coordinated activities that involve multiple simulations of actual job situations, with challenges that are used to assess critical success factors for the role through observation, using trained assessors who integrate multiple observations of participant behavior.

Assessment centers provide an opportunity to place employees in new roles or unfamiliar job environments to broaden their experiences and strengthen skills and competencies. For prospective employees, assessment centers provide an overall measure of potential or readiness for a targeted position. Assessment centers are high touch, provide personalized, behavioral feedback and can support a process of learning and reflection. Finally, they often result in customized and actionable development plans.

## **Technology enhancements in assessment centers**

Technology enhancements now make it possible to create highly realistic web-based assessment experiences that simulate a day in the life on the job of a busy professional and effectively gather information on a candidate's likelihood of success in a new or stretch role.



*The level of realism is growing to the point where a technology-enhanced simulation feels very similar to the actual work environment, where the absence of these technology-driven activities would seem unrealistic.*

Online assessment centers can simulate today's technology-influenced work environment with e-mails, video, mobile devices, virtual e-rooms for group discussion and engaging personalized correspondence. The level of realism is growing to the point where a technology-enhanced simulation feels very similar to the actual work environment, where the absence of these technology-driven activities would seem unrealistic. For candidates, technology-enhanced assessment centers provide a unique, engaging and interactive experience where they are exposed to a realistic preview of the role.

Virtual assessment centers create a realistic role experience through a series of job-related activities in a simulated organization. The participant's personalized desktop is modeled after a traditional office computer with software including emails, calendar, background materials and a company server, including archived files. Participants, stakeholders and assessors interact in real-time from anywhere in the world. Role plays, work challenges, tests and other assessment tools effectively replicate important elements of the job role, allowing employers to observe people's behavior in real-time instead of basing evaluations of capabilities and decisions on only hearing people talk about what they have done in the past or might do in the future.

However, the fundamental best practices of traditional assessment centers should still serve as the foundation. Simulations must be designed to imitate important elements of the actual job or role, work environment and culture. During the simulation, trained assessors observe and evaluate participant behavior, measuring against role-specific impact profiles. Assessors identify strengths and opportunities for development which are the basis for focused, actionable development planning. Also, readiness recommendations may be documented with performance criteria-based feedback reports to inform the talent management process.

### **Benefits over traditional assessment centers**

A-state-of-the-art virtual assessment center provides both hiring organizations and candidates with significant benefits over traditional assessment centers. For employers, it can provide more accurate information about a participant's strengths, development needs and readiness for a new role. It will yield a consistent evaluation of actual behavior, providing role feedback and specific examples of how the person performed. Web-enabled and in the cloud, virtual assessment experiences can be delivered consistently across large employee populations with candidates and assessors located anywhere.



*Due to the close parallel between the activities in the technology-enhanced assessment center and those required for success on the job, the data generated may be even more robust and accurate than in traditional centers, resulting in an even better assessment.*

When participants are provided with a realistic view on what a day in the life on the job looks like, in the case of external selection for example, they have a better understanding of the role, organization and industry. This leads to higher engagement and better performance on the job, and it reduces the likelihood that they'll leave the company. For organizations, improved assessment and selection translate to increased productivity and higher retention.

### **Benefits to the organization**

- Scalable, standardized process that can be implemented globally
- Assesses real behavior
- Highly predictive
- Increases effectiveness at finding and hiring top talent
- Identifies individual strengths and development needs that can be addressed during the onboarding process
- Significantly reduces costs
- Significantly reduces turnover
- Improves engagement and productivity
- Ease of stakeholder involvement

### **Benefits to participant**

- Better understanding of role, organization and industry
- Familiar technology
- Dynamic, engaging hiring experience
- Real people, real interactions
- Behavioral, meaningful and actionable feedback
- Higher engagement and better on-the-job performance

Due to the close parallel between the activities in the technology-enhanced assessment center and those required for success on the job, the data generated may be even more robust and accurate than in traditional centers, resulting in an even better assessment. Technology also allows for all data to be instantly captured, stored electronically and linked to HRIS systems for performance management integration.

### **Impact on participants**

In addition to the quality of the evaluation, applicant reactions are a critical component of the assessment experience.

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*Participants are overwhelmingly positive about technology-enhanced "day in the life" assessment experiences.*

These reactions are related to important organizational-employee outcomes such as trust, fairness and applicant performance<sup>1</sup>. Negative applicant reactions to testing can result in a variety of negative results including an unfavorable view of the organization, decreased motivation, decreased validity and possible increased legal challenge.

Based on participant reaction surveys BTS has conducted in technology-enhanced assessments, participants are overwhelmingly positive about technology-enhanced "day in the life" assessment experiences. Participant feedback also reflects positively on the fact that the organization is investing in technologically advanced assessment tools and processes. In addition, the assessment serves as a realistic job preview as the applicant's understanding of the job, organization and industry increases as a result of the assessment.

## Participant reactions to online assessment<sup>2</sup>

Level of understanding of the position...	Substantial	Moderate	Limited
Before	38%	50%	13%
After	82%	17%	1%

**Realistic Job Preview**

  

Reflections on the experience...	Agree	Neither	Disagree
It was clear to me that the activities were related to this job role	98%	1%	1%
My experience today increased my desire to be in this job role	92%	7%	1%

  

Reflections on the organization...	Agree	Neither	Disagree
I think highly of organizations that use professionally developed selection tools such as this assessment	94%	6%	1%
I would be proud to join a firm that requires Candidates to meet high standards like these	98%	1%	1%

**Engagement**

Ultimately, employers and candidates alike view technology-enhanced assessment centers as a market differentiator for recruiting and selecting top talent.



*Generation Y has a different set of values and needs from other generations in the workforce, expecting higher pay, more flexible work environments, faster advancement and a strong sense of purpose.*

### **Case in point: An unforgettable selection experience for Generation Y**

A global financial services firm had a goal of hiring over 100 entry-level sales professionals in 13 national markets within two months. The challenges they were faced with included a dispersed geographical territory, a very short timeframe, and a recruiting population exclusively from Generation Y (college recruits).

Generation Y has a different set of values and needs from other generations in the workforce, expecting higher pay, more flexible work environments, faster advancement and a strong sense of purpose. They are competitive, effective at multitasking and have grown up with technology. They expect to have access to the same state-of-the-art technology on the job that they do in their personal lives. To ensure they could engage and select from this new generation, the financial service firm needed to reexamine some of the practices that have worked with previous generations of employees.

To provide the elements of engagement, excitement and market differentiation that the organization desired, as well as to address the multitasking, technology-focused nature of Generation Y, a web-based selection experience was designed and deployed to simulate a day in the life on the job. In a two-hour simulation, each candidate was presented with:

- A highly realistic email inbox
- A calendar of scheduled and unscheduled time
- Account records of clients and prospects
- Electronic folders with supporting documents
- Incoming and outgoing phone calls with trained assessor playing prospects and clients
- A meeting with an assessor playing their manager

These assessments were delivered as part of a two-day recruiting experience, held simultaneously across 13 regions. At the end of each experience, the employer went through an integration session where assessment results were discussed, candidate performances were evaluated and selection decisions were made. The result was the selection of the most qualified candidates for each region within a compressed timeframe.



*Technology-enhanced assessment centers provide organizations with a consistent, accurate, scalable and cost-effective selection process, leading to better retention and a more engaged and productive workforce.*

The financial services firm was able to meet its aggressive hiring goals and tight timetable, yet provide an unforgettable experience for their candidates — one that demonstrated their commitment to leveraging state-of-the-art technology. The employer was also able to use the information resulting from the assessments to provide valuable behavioral feedback to hired candidates and to create targeted training for the first day at work, as opposed to having to wait months for a manager to determine their strengths and development needs.

## **Conclusion**

With the demand for top talent greater than ever, finding and selecting the right people has never been more important.

Leveraging the latest tools and technologies to move assessment center capabilities from on-site to online will enable employers to find and select talent more efficiently and effectively. Technology-enhanced assessment centers provide organizations with a consistent, accurate, scalable and cost-effective selection process, leading to better retention and a more engaged and productive workforce. Candidates will enjoy a more dynamic and interactive hiring experience, get a clearer understanding of the job to be done and perceive the organization as differentiated in the employer marketplace.

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<sup>1</sup> Celani, A., Deutsch-Salamon, S. & Singh, P. (2008). *In justice we trust: A model of the role of trust in the organization in applicant reactions to the selection process*. *Human Resource Management Review*, 18, 63-76. Hausknecht, J.P., Day, D.V., Thomas, S.C. (2004). *Applicant reactions to selection procedures: An updated model and meta-analysis*. *Personnel Psychology*, 57, 639-683.

<sup>2</sup> Data collected from approximately 5,700 participant reaction surveys conducted by BTS





### **About BTS**

Business strategy, no matter how well researched and articulated, is only as good as its execution. For 25 years, BTS has been partnering with clients to accelerate strategic alignment and building execution capability to deliver business results. The global leader in strategy implementation, BTS develops and delivers high-impact experiential learning initiatives that drive alignment, mindset and capability around strategic priorities.

### **About Advantage Performance Group**

Advantage Performance Group, a subsidiary of BTS USA, is a professional services firm providing creative learning and consulting solutions that equip individuals, teams and organizations to be the best at what they do. We help leaders lead, sellers sell and businesses flourish. Have you called Advantage yet?

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