Global assessment: Achieving scale and managing risk

How to create a globally-aligned assessment process
We design and deliver innovative online psychometric assessments, training and consultancy, to help organisations make better, more informed decisions about their people.

The heart of what we do

Our desire to simplify how organisations use and apply assessment is at the heart of everything we do. This influences the way in which we design and develop our assessments, training and consultancy services. It also affects how we choose to price our services and how we work with our clients.

We have an elegantly simple portfolio of assessments which deliver valuable insight into the skills and behaviours, abilities and motivation of people at work. All our psychometric assessments are constructed with a commitment to scientific rigour, practicality and flexibility.

We have a wide range of training programmes aimed at equipping HR professionals with the necessary skills to use and implement objective assessment effectively in the workplace.

Our consultancy services provide practical, expert and flexible talent management solutions. Our expertise lies in transforming psychological theory into an applied, practical business context.

The Talent Q way

We believe we have a refreshingly different approach to working with clients – open, committed and passionate – and whilst we have a strong technical and psychometric pedigree, we’re pragmatic and practical in our solutions.

Our global footprint

We work with national and international organisations across all sectors. With a network of partners in over 50 countries and with assessments in over 40 languages, we’re able to deliver assessment, training and consultancy solutions to clients across the world.
**Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing staff in an interlinked world</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rise of global assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How ‘global’ can your assessment process really be?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How easy is it to export a successful assessment practice from one culture to another?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhering to legislation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action plan for success</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further reading</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sourcing staff in an interlinked world

Globalisation is the process by which national economies and cultures are becoming integrated through trade, communication, transportation and immigration.

The business opportunities and benefits that stem from globalisation - such as access to wider markets and cost reductions through economies of scale - have led many organisations to expand their international operations. Developments such as the collapse of communism, deregulation and increasing capital mobility have fuelled global trade and made it easier for firms to locate and invest abroad, and repatriate profits.

However, globalisation affects not just ‘where’ companies do business but ‘how’ they do it. With global sourcing, organisations can not only achieve savings in their production costs, they can also exploit global efficiencies by centralising the purchase of goods and services.

Assessment is one such service. Every business knows the importance of recruiting the right people. Many also recognise the value of assessing potential new recruits, by identifying which of them will be successful in the role. Increasingly, employers want to better understand how they can achieve this on a global basis.

This paper highlights the rise of global assessment and the advantages that employers can gain by standardising and professionalising the purchase and use of assessment worldwide. It examines the challenge of exporting a successful assessment practice from one culture to another and it recommends a practical action plan for creating a globally-aligned assessment process.

Ultimately, the success of any organisation depends on its people. Sourcing the right assessments - so that the right employees can be appointed around the world - should therefore be a top priority.

The rise of global assessment

Multinational employers recognise the benefits of standardising core operations and processes across their different countries. IT, finance and marketing were the first to cross national borders.

Now, it’s HR’s turn. Global organisations which had previously retained autonomous, country-level HR teams are now starting to develop and implement more consistent HR processes, including recruitment and assessment.

There are three reasons for this:

- Firstly, the ability to exploit cost advantages. International collaborations, joint ventures, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions have increased the global capacity of many organisations. Others have grown organically, to capitalise on the business opportunities in emerging markets. Some, with international clients, have expanded in order to provide a seamless service across countries. For all of these organisations, access to larger markets means a higher demand for their products. Plus, extending their global reach enables them to benefit from the economies of scale that can be achieved by standardising processes such as assessment. For example, they can make global purchases, rather than using separate applicant tracking systems and buying their assessments piecemeal from different providers in different markets. This not only saves management time in coordinating the activities of separate providers, it also allows meaningful and consistent cross-country comparisons to be made.

- Secondly, talent has become a global commodity. Although recruitment practices and strategic talent management models differ within different companies, multinational organisations are increasingly taking a more holistic view of their labour markets. With shared HR and assessment processes, it becomes much easier to facilitate international movements and assignments. Some organisations still recruit locally, either for each local operation or for where the need is globally. Others will recruit globally, either for specific local markets or for any location worldwide. Whichever approach is adopted, there is growing recognition of the need to provide a consistently positive candidate experience.
The third reason why assessment is now a global concern is that it has become much easier to replicate successful practices for screening job applicants in different parts of the world. This may have been an aspiration in the past but the national, cultural, legal, economic and technological challenges made it simply too difficult to coordinate and deploy assessment on an international scale. Developments in technology, transport and communications have accelerated the pace of globalisation and led to the rise of global work teams. Now, with the advent of global applicant tracking systems and assessment providers, the barriers to global assessment are gradually being broken down.

How ‘global’ can your assessment process really be?

It’s not practical to provide exactly the same assessments in every country worldwide. 100% global consistency may be an impossible dream. With a global applicant tracking system and assessment provider, you can standardise and professionalise the practice of assessment worldwide - but you will always need to adapt your process for certain markets.

The challenge is to identify what you can standardise - and which aspects of your assessment process need to be tailored to meet the requirements of different markets or different areas of your business. Some of the factors to consider are:

- **Whether you provide a common customer experience**
  If you have a consistent global brand, and reasonably consistent global values, you’re more likely to want to create standardised processes in each of your locations. This will impact on every aspect of your employer brand. Ideally, you’ll want to recruit people who are capable of providing a ‘consistent experience’ to local customers across different cultures. However, if you’re a conglomerate, with diverse businesses and brands - or if your business proposition differs across your markets - the way you deliver your products or service may be very different in each country. Even so, you could still gain efficiencies by creating commonalities in your assessment.

- **Whether your roles have similarities across your locations**
  If the expectations of performance and behaviour are common across certain role groups (for example, frontline staff or graduates) or if you have global talent mobility, then it makes sense to create a standard for your assessments. Again, even if the job roles in each country are quite different, you could still drive efficiencies by sharing the technology and assessment principles.

**Things to ask yourself:**

- How global is your business now? How global does it aspire to be? How global are your customers?
  How important is it that your people operate in a global way when interacting with customers?
- What are your main drivers for global assessment? Are you trying to drive revenue or control cost?
- How similar are the countries that you are trying to align? How similar are the nationalities? How similar are your business units in terms of their company history?
- Where are your local decision makers? Are you clear where the funds/budget will come from for each country and region? Have you got explicit agreement from those paying for it? Have you made this clear to suppliers?
- How will the costing of a more global assessment service work? Should you allow global or local pricing variations?
How easy is it to export a successful assessment practice from one culture to another?

Multinational companies will usually review the markets in which their assessment process is working well and then look to ‘export’ that model to other countries. By doing this, you can retain the essence and principles of best practice around the world but in certain markets you’ll need to make local adaptations.

Three issues will influence whether alterations are necessary. These are:

• **Legislation**
  You need to be mindful of the laws relating to employment, discrimination and data protection in different countries. For example, the United States and the United Kingdom have broadly similar laws on equal opportunities but other countries are less stringent in this area. In North America, employers have to contend with federal, state and local statutes, regulations and case law aimed at preventing discrimination (see below). The laws around data privacy protection include the EU/US Safe Harbor framework, which relates to how data is collected, stored and transferred in the Cloud.

• **Language diversity**
  The European Union alone has 23 officially recognised languages. So, it’s simply not feasible to create, translate and validate bespoke assessments in every one of your countries. Instead, global assessment providers have off-the-shelf assessments available in multiple languages, which offer a much more cost-effective option.

• **Differing expectations**
  Cultural value differences and economic differences will mean that your line managers - and your applicants - in different countries may have different expectations about assessment. For example, labour costs in India and China are much lower than in Western economies. The market for assessments is also less mature in these countries, so local managers may need to be convinced of the business benefits of assessment. Flexibility is therefore required if you want to export an assessment methodology across different continents.

Because psychometric assessment practice is more established in the United Kingdom and the United States, these countries are often the favoured starting points for anyone looking to implement a global process. Consequently, most multinationals choose to roll out either their US tests or their UK tests to other countries.

**Things to ask yourself:**

- How similar are your existing processes? How many applicant tracking systems, portals, assessment processes, agencies and competency models have you got globally?
- How many languages will you need to deal with? What is the minimum? What is the maximum?
- Who are your main global stakeholders? Specifically, what is the perspective of your Group Legal Function about what you are planning? What is the perspective of your Global Brand team? What is the perspective of your Global IT team?
- What steps have you taken to avoid the ‘Not invented here syndrome’? What adaptations/localisations are you prepared to make?
- What are the skill levels of your users in different countries – e.g. Interview skills, Assessment Centre skills, Psychometric testing expertise? How will you deal with these variations? Have you made sure the output/process is suitable for the sophistication of the audience?
- Have you arranged good project management? Have you scheduled a face-to-face initial kick off meeting? Have you planned a regular ‘drum beat’ of project meetings and good communication protocols (e.g. avoidance of long email trails, careful alignment of time zones, including tricky ones such as Arizona and Costa Rica)? Have you budgeted for full time project management e.g. full time for 1 year?
Adhering to legislation

Legislation in different countries presents a specific assessment challenge. For example, in the US, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 forbids employment practices that have an adverse impact against the ‘protected classes’ of national origin, sex, religion, colour and race. As a result, employers are not allowed to apply any requirement or condition that would lead to a considerably smaller proportion of a protected group getting the job. If you do, it has to be justifiable, otherwise it constitutes discrimination.

There is therefore an onus on organisations to show that the assessments they’re using are valid, job-related and fair. In other words, your assessments have to measure the specific qualities and characteristics that are essential for doing the job well.

Not doing this can have serious repercussions. For example, a class action invasion-of-privacy and employment discrimination lawsuit was filed in California in 1989 (Soroka v Dayton Hudson Corporation). The plaintiff applied for a security guard position with Target Stores and was asked to take a personality questionnaire. He contended that the test questions probed into his private thoughts and feelings and were not job related. The court agreed that some of the test questions did indeed invade the privacy of applicants because they asked about religious beliefs and sexual preferences. Target settled the lawsuit for over $2 million, without admitting wrongdoing or liability.

This highlights the importance of ensuring that your assessments are fair and justifiable for the job. If you conduct a thorough job analysis, you can then ensure that the questions you ask in your assessments are relevant to the skills required in the role. You can either use off-the-shelf assessments to evaluate candidates or you can blend together standard questions from different assessments. For example, a single ‘multi-method’ assessment might test a candidate’s situational judgement, verbal and numerical ability, personality and motivation. It can therefore be deployed once, rather than using different assessments at different stages of the selection process.

Whichever assessments you choose, it’s important to conduct validation research to confirm that the people who perform well in your tests go on to perform well in the job. Keeping documented evidence of this will help you if any legal challenge arises concerning your selection process.

Things to ask yourself:

- What specific advice have you been given from different geographies?
- Has your job analysis covered the geographies effectively? Where and how has this been documented?
- Have you involved major stakeholders either through job analysis or trialling? Both of these stages build commitment to the end process.
- Have you trialled and validated your assessment processes effectively?
- What form of Equal Opportunities monitoring for different groups will you need to put in place?
- What form of interim review will you schedule and when? What longer term follow up steps should you build in now?
- Have you researched other relevant legislation that might be impacted e.g. data protection, privacy, outsourcing, labour laws etc?
Action plan for success

Here are seven recommendations for creating a globally-aligned assessment process:

1. **Review your existing assessment arrangements**
   - What assessments in which countries does your organisation use? What ATS systems do you have and where? Is there scope to extend your use of assessment or to replicate successful practices across different countries? Is there any consistency in the critical tasks and important aspects of certain roles across different countries, such as frontline staff or graduates? Could your organisation benefit by creating broad global standards around assessment for local HR teams to follow?

2. **Get the buy-in to proceed from key stakeholders**
   - To create a globally-standardised assessment process, you’ll need to convince senior executives, local country managers and HR teams of the business benefits that can be achieved. This involves knowing where the ‘power’ lies in your organisation. To get these people onboard - and to reduce any resistance to change - create a business case that highlights the scale economies and shows the advantages of reducing the duplication of effort involved, in terms of managing different assessment providers in different markets. Also, consult your legal teams in each country and get them on board from the outset.

3. **Appoint the right partners**
   - Choose a global applicant tracking system and a global assessment provider. The right partners will not only be able to work together effectively, they’ll also advise and guide you through all aspects of the process. They’ll help you to manage the expectations of stakeholders and the business.

4. **Conduct a job analysis of your target roles**
   - The specific abilities, behaviour, character traits and competencies that candidates will need to perform a role effectively will reflect your organisation’s brand and values, which in turn will stem from the business strategy and how you’re positioned in the market. In any job analysis, you need to understand what ‘good’ looks like in the role. In other words, when people are performing well in the job, what are they actually doing and how are they behaving? What qualities will they need to continue to perform well in the future? Even if you already have a set of global competencies, you’ll need to know exactly what you want from your new recruits. This will help you to run a targeted attraction campaign and a focused assessment process. Ensure you use a representative sample of respondents in your job analysis and keep a detailed account of the activities you’ve undertaken to uncover the key skills required in the role.

5. **Select appropriate assessments**
   - Having undertaken your job analysis, you’ll know what qualities you want in your candidates. Your assessments should simply help you to screen applicants and quickly identify which of them are likely to perform well in the role. Take advice from your assessment partner about which particular assessments will be most appropriate. The options include ability tests (verbal and numerical reasoning tests and ‘checking’ tests), personality questionnaires and situational judgement tests. Used either individually or together, these can help you to more objectively shortlist who will be right for the role and for your organisation. Off-the-shelf tests can be brand-aligned and easily deployed in different languages. Bespoke assessments can be more specific to the role and quicker to complete.
   - In key markets, consider using a realistic job preview to help potential applicants decide if they’re right for the role before they begin the recruitment process. This is a short ‘self-evaluation’ assessment which takes potential applicants through various situations they might encounter in the workplace. By discouraging unsuitable candidates from applying, it can increase the quality of your applicants.
Whichever assessments you choose, ensure that they take account of the cultural dimensions of different countries; that they’re objective, fair and properly administered - and that they’ll integrate with your applicant tracking system. In North America, make sure your assessments are job-related and validated. At all times, you should aim to deliver a positive candidate experience.

6 Train local hiring managers

A standardised approach to global assessment can fail if hiring managers in your local countries conduct unstructured interviews. Those responsible for recruitment in each local market will undoubtedly have different levels of experience in interviewing candidates. Best practice is to provide them with training around equal opportunities and diversity. However, you also want to give them interview skills training, to ensure consistency and to stop them from asking irrelevant or unsuitable questions in their interviews. Some personality assessments create an ‘interview guide’ which recommends specific questions for each candidate, based on their test responses. This can be very useful in global applications because it helps local hiring managers to conduct more effective and more consistent interviews.

7 Evaluate and review the effectiveness of your assessment process

Capture data on the performance of new recruits in different countries using sales volumes, customer ratings, performance appraisal ratings, line manager feedback and other appropriate metrics. Are they performing as you expected? Does their performance correlate with their assessment data? Doing this will enable you to review and compare the impact in different countries. Also, analyse your retention rates. If people are leaving, find out why. Were the role requirements clear to them? Did they join with false expectations? A thorough review of your assessment process will provide valuable return on investment data. But, more than that, it can give you confidence that you’re selecting people in a way that’s candidate-friendly, objective, fair, rigorous and consistent.

Conclusion

The ability to identify and recruit talented employees is a crucial success factor for any organisation. As globalisation spreads and business become more multinational, a growing number of employers are now recruiting staff across different countries. Despite the cultural, legal, economic and technological differences that exist around the world, one thing will be entirely consistent across each of your markets. Every hiring manager and every local HR team will want to recruit individuals who are well-suited to the job, because those people will perform better and they’ll be more engaged. Local recruiters will also want to avoid the expense and disruption of hiring the wrong people.

The ability to assess candidates effectively - by predicting which of them will be successful in the role - should therefore be an important objective in every country. If you’re going to conduct assessment on a global basis, it makes sense to start by rolling out tests that have already proven to be successful in one key market. Best practice is therefore to adopt a step-by-step, pragmatic process to extend the use of successful tests and then adapt your use of assessments to suit the needs of specific countries. Certainly, economies of scale and other business benefits can be gained by coordinating your activity through a single global assessment provider.

Now that the infrastructure is available to support global assessment, international businesses have an opportunity to galvanise key stakeholders and to drive forward a more consistent way of working that will benefit the organisation and every future employee.
Further reading


