

Identifying the Right Leaders during Crisis Management

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So, you don't like the idea of hiring someone you haven't actually met? It's time to rethink that in order to stay ahead and learn to make a decision based on less than 100% information in order to survive.

However, that doesn't mean you need to make a risky decision. But it does mean you have to invest time up front to plan properly and to ensure that all the key stakeholders in the hiring decision are aligned and are open to adopting a new way of approaching talent acquisition.

Using a multi-step and multi-dimensional hiring process that includes a number of well-structured interviews, each with a different focus, personality or knowledge testing, and written case studies or presentations, is critical to giving you a good all round understanding of capabilities which will lead to you hiring the right individual.

You will need to create and stick to a timeline, potentially teach your team to learn to use new technology and embrace new interview techniques. Communication throughout the decision-making process and sharing of feedback will be essential. By having a robust and well-defined process, incorporating multiple elements, and gathering facts and feedback in a methodical way throughout the process, you will be able to support the right decision at the end to minimise the perceived risk.

Here's our guide on how to ensure you run a multi-dimensional recruitment process which will give you the confidence to hire.

1. Anchor your Purpose to Connect with the Right Business Leaders

‘Purpose’ is absolutely transformational and it’s time you started using it to your advantage in your hiring process. It is the ‘Why’ behind your organisation, the reason for your existence as a business and what will keep your leadership team and entire workforce engaged, and therefore productive, especially during challenging times.

Most people need to feel they are working towards a greater goal when they come to work. This particularly applies to Millennials who likely make up at least 50% of the workforce in 2020. They want to do a job that matters to them, and they need to understand how their role contributes to something they believe in.

To give you a competitive edge when hiring, especially remotely, your Purpose needs to be the new starting point for you to hire the right leader.

Candidates don’t put themselves through the discomfort of changing jobs, particularly in these uncertain times, based on a list of responsibilities or even the challenge of a start-up or a really interesting, change-focused opportunity. This is not enough for them to make that final leap of faith. You must establish that from the outset and connect with those individuals who are aligned to your Purpose.

Your Purpose is not your Vision or your Mission – these articulate what you want to achieve or become. In essence, Purpose describes the reason for an organisation’s existence entirely, and the journey it is taking. It is your fundamental ‘reason for being here’. Many companies have not yet articulated their Purpose

as it is a relatively new way of thinking. But to do so will give you competitive advantage. What is your Purpose as an organisation?

At Executives in Africa, we believe we can have a positive and lasting impact on Africa. We do this by providing our clients with the right business leaders who will unlock Africa’s potential.

This is our Purpose as an organisation. Individuals will either connect with this or they won’t, depending on if it aligns with their own personal ‘Why’, but we have hired a team who ‘feel’ this Purpose and, as a result, we have a highly motivated and loyal team who are passionate about what they do and that is evident in their work.

So, define your Purpose and make it central to that very first engagement with the candidate, or include at the beginning of an advert; *‘We believe we can have a positive and lasting impact on Africa’*.

If a candidate connects to that statement, we have their attention. We have a candidate who is listening and interested to find out more. We have an individual who is sufficiently motivated to put themselves through a rigorous process which will require them to invest time and effort to establish if they are the right person to deliver what you need.

Use your Purpose to secure the candidate’s attention, interest and commitment.

2. Plan your Interviews

Invest time up front to plan the interview process properly and to ensure that all the key stakeholders in the hiring decision are aligned. This might be a challenge when senior managers are focusing on crisis management, but it is key to secure a minimum of an hour of their time when they can focus and invest in setting this process up for success.

The critical input is to get your key stakeholders to agree the 4-5 most important behaviours and technical skills which will deliver 80% of the success in this role. This is easier said than done. It takes time to reflect and get it right.

What does good actually 'look like'? What would you 'see and hear' this person doing 2-3 months into the role to make you delighted that you had hired the right person? If you have not done this before, it is worth thinking about questions you can use to dig deep in this planning meeting to get the information you need out of them.

Next you need to allocate 2 or 3 of these areas to each interview in order to ensure the interviewer goes into enough depth to assess capability of each. Decide who is best to assess each of the key important behaviours and technical areas. Allocate a technical person to assess specific technical knowledge that is essential and design some challenging scenario-based questions. Allocate your Founder or CEO to assess strategic thinking and concurrently test stakeholder management.

Once you have agreed who your interviewers will be, check their capability around deep dive competency style interviewing. Remember, they are business leaders not professional interviewers, and they are likely very busy at the moment, but you can get them 80% up to speed with a bit of planning. Consider getting your HR team to do a crash course on Competency-Based Interviewing techniques with your key stakeholders in this process.

Plan each interview to allow around 15 minutes to cover 'settling' questions, then 20 minutes per area to be assessed and a final 10-15 minutes at the end for other broad areas and their questions. Make sure each interviewer knows to anchor to your Purpose by talking about why they joined the company and ensure they know to use the clear wording you have agreed around Purpose. This is critical for consistency of messaging to your candidate as well as keeping them connected to why they are talking to you.

Finally, give each interviewer a pre-designed interview structure for each competency and devise a basic marking guide. Plan to be able to make a data-driven hiring decision rather than anything based on gut feel. Build in a pre-booked slot straight after the interview for them to complete their notes and observations if they are not able to do it in real time.

3. Incorporate Psychometric and Cognitive Testing

These can be hugely informative but also need to be managed carefully to add value to your process and used at the right time. It is important not to allow your data-driven business leaders to place a disproportionate amount of weighting on these tests.

There are a wide variety of testing options and you should choose carefully and be mindful of the restrictions of each. Ideally, use them BEFORE the interviews in order to identify areas of possible concern which can then be further explored and tested at interview.

Behavioural testing will provide you with a deeper understanding of a candidate's natural behaviours. Often these are classified broadly into drive / collaboration, extroversion / analytical thinker, fast-paced / steady and finally their attitude towards risk / rule following. These need to be considered in relation to the requirements for success in the role.

Ideally, the test will show the relationship of dominance between these various behaviours and this can be one of the most useful insights if you understand how to use them. For example, the relationship between drive towards a goal and attitude towards risk.

In certain roles, such as a Finance Leader you may want a less risky personality, someone who will ensure governance and attention to detail and not rush decisions because they are more focused on achieving the goal.

However, your Sales Leader would probably require someone who is more

focused on the goal and won't be 'paralysed' in their decision making and in moving forwards by the fear of getting something wrong.

The note of caution is to recognise that people can flex out of their natural behaviours. Just because a profile shows an individual to be more of an introvert (analytical thinker) than an extrovert, does not mean they can't present to investors, for example. It will just take them outside of their comfort zone and they will likely need to incorporate techniques such as practicing their presentation in order to deliver.

Conversely a natural extrovert is more likely to 'wing it' and therefore prepare less, so there are pitfalls to both. The key is to understand what personality type you have and their level of awareness when considering the needs of the role.

Finally, on behavioural testing, consider the impact this will have on your natural first impressions of a candidate at interview and prepare your interviewers accordingly. A natural extrovert can easily pull the wool over your eyes with their charm and natural warmth which could mask lack of capability and depth. Equally, be prepared to spend more time with a more introverted personality to set them at ease at the beginning of an interview in order to understand their full capabilities rather than making a snap decision.

Cognitive testing can be super insightful into verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning capabilities. Where they are administered effectively, they can provide a fact-based test that your business leaders will love as it will give them the confidence to hire someone they have not yet met.

3. Incorporate Psychometric and Cognitive Testing (cont)

However, in practice, especially during lockdown, we have found that candidates are often unable to create the right 'exam' conditions and ensure a stable internet connection to give a true reflection of capability.

Where you get a low result, take time to understand if this was due to the wrong test environment rather than assuming it is a reflection on cognitive skills.

Such a simple thing like using a laptop keypad instead of a separate mouse in a timed test will have a significant negative effect on the results. Either arrange a re-set of the test under better conditions or make a note to test quick thinking and their reasoning skills in one of the interviews.

4. Case Studies and Presentations

Incorporating the Case Study Interview as part of the final stages of a virtual multi-interview process gives you an excellent and practical insight into a candidate's actual work product, interactions (through the in-person presentation) and thought processes.

While Case Study Interviews were once exclusively the domain of aspiring Management Consultants, they are now being used everywhere from tech companies to NGOs and form a great addition to the virtual interview process. Based on a real business situation, you can assess how a candidate studies the problem, performs analysis, and comes up with recommendations.

These Case Study Interviews are particularly well suited to presenting to a mixed Panel of interviewers. In real time, your Panel can listen to the presentations and then interrogate them on their assumptions, on the practicalities of their recommendations and the challenges they would anticipate in implementing the strategy.

In just one Case Study Interview, you can analyse Presentation Skills, Problem Solving Approach, Commercial Awareness, Operational Understanding, People and Change Management and even Stakeholder Management / Influencing Skills by pushing back on some of their ideas and seeing how they handle it.

5. Always Utilise Live Video Interviewing

We have all become familiar with meeting clients and colleagues on MS Teams, Zoom, BlueJeans or good old Skype! In these unprecedented global times of lockdown, video meetings have already become the norm in place of a telephone call. Why would we now not apply that to every candidate interview, even the shorter screening interviews?

Video interviews allow you to have real-time interaction with your candidates and to benefit from nonverbal communication indicators which you don't have the benefit of from a telephone call. You will see a candidate's body language, facial expressions, and overall appearance. These clues can help you piece together a picture of how they would fit into your company.

Remember this is a two-way assessment, especially if you have approached them about a role rather than them actively applying to a job. This is not only about you assessing them but also about them assessing you. You will enhance the candidate's experience through video calling by engaging them quickly, particularly for Millennials as this is their preferred way of interacting.

You can also assess a candidate's ability to navigate technology which is fast becoming part of the new normal. Equally, remember they will be assessing your Management Team's ability to seamlessly operate technology so do ensure you get your Interviewers to run test calls with you before they go live.

There is nothing worse than a 'mis-start' to an interview; you want these candidates to turn into long-term employees, so you need to set a strong foundation and company image well before they are hired. First impressions count after all.

A huge benefit of video interviewing is how quickly you can make it happen. Currently, speed is of the essence in decision making stay ahead of the competition, and this applies equally to accessing the best talent. The use of video will enable you to engage with the prospective candidate without the hassle of co-ordinating travel. Not only does this reduce the time-to-hire as it allows greater freedom to schedule interviews, but it also reduces the spend on unnecessary travel.

Creating a connection with candidates who you only meet via video interviewing really is possible. Your business leaders are becoming more and more familiar with this form of communicating, so don't underestimate the positive impact their recent experiences will have had on their confidence to make a decision based on the new video 'face to face' experience with a candidate.

6. Maintain Momentum

While the hiring process should never be rushed, maintaining momentum minimises the chance to allow doubt to creep in. Many candidates will have been approached out of the blue and asked to consider leaving their current position in favour of your company. In your eyes, it may seem like a no-brainer, but in their eyes, it can feel like a huge leap of faith.

Hopefully you will have addressed this by connecting your Purpose with their 'Why' from the outset and with presenting them with a well thought through and thorough interview process, incorporating a range of different challenges and tests.

However, you can just as quickly lose a candidate who is the perfect fit for your critical leadership role if the process is stalled or does not run smoothly. So, keep their motivation and enthusiasm for your opportunity by maintaining momentum in the process.

Again, the secret is planning. Pre-book slots in diaries with the key decision makers for every stage of the interview process weeks in advance, including a final meeting for decision making and setting deadlines to get offer letters out.

Whilst we all know that not every recruitment process goes to plan, experience shows that it is often the challenge of securing diary availability of senior leaders at late notice, which leads to delay. So, book them up well in advance and work towards that.

Equally, by running a defined and well-planned recruitment process, ideally which has included proactively mapping the market rather than just relying on an advert response, your decision makers should feel much more confident to make a final decision.

The comfort of knowing that the due diligence has been done and that a defined process has been followed will avoid them thinking 'what if there's someone better?'. Aim to put them in a position where they are confident they have already seen the best and where they can therefore make the appointment decision.

7. Use Virtual Tours to Engage the Candidate... and their Spouse!

Virtual tours of the environment increase candidate engagement as it gives them a behind the scenes impression that they may not have seen otherwise. As we know, hiring candidates who are a cultural fit with your company and who will inspire your team, will improve employee engagement and therefore productivity.

Video is also a great way to give candidates a realistic understanding of the role they are being considered for as you can customise a Pre-Recorded Video showing the realities of the situations that arise in the day to day running of the business. Providing a job preview should not be about glorifying the workplace but about giving a realistic impression so that the candidate can also leave the hiring process if they think the role or environment is not for them.

Arrange a more informal zoom meeting with key members of their prospective new team, ideally using ambassadors who are really aligned to your Purpose. Taking the interview outside of the virtual 'formal' interview room involves putting candidates in a more relaxed, social setting with some of their potential colleagues and gives them a chance to engage informally. With the spotlight off them, this is an excellent chance to watch how someone handles themselves. Do they jump into new situations? Are they friendly? Do they take the time to really listen and learn about others?

Do not underestimate the power of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the individual's decision making process. Candidates need to feel comfortable with the 'environmental' factors before they can move on to making decisions about

a new career challenge which will sit higher up under Esteem or even Self Actualisation. It is therefore critical to ensure that the lower level considerations around Physiological Needs and Safety Needs for both them and their families have been addressed properly.

If relocation is involved, then a key consideration is addressing concerns around the absolute basics like food, water, shelter, health and security in that location, both for the candidate and anyone who will relocate with them. As each country presents unique living challenges, this often falls more heavily on the traveling spouse, upon whom cultural differences could be more burdensome.

If an employee has children who are going overseas, providing information to assure them of adequate and appropriate education options must be a prime consideration. Even pets can often come into play in the decision-making process and should not be overlooked!

Consider taking your candidate and their spouse on a virtual tour of the surrounding area, showing examples of housing and schools that they may consider. Arrange an informal meeting between the spouse of the candidate and other spouses of the senior management team so they can get a true insight into what daily life is like in that location and the resources available to them. Everything you would normally do at a last stage 'country' visit can be done by virtual means. Indeed, you are likely to end up with a more thorough overall process than you previously had!

8. Be Efficient with the Offer Letter

This is where all your hard work and planning comes to fruition, and it is critical to maintain momentum and a continued good impression by getting the offer out quickly and by getting it right first time. There should be no surprises at this stage.

Anticipate how you are going to deal with an online approval of the Offer Letter rather than having to wait for a physical signature.

Ensure the Offer Letter is clear and customized in line with what has been discussed at the latter stages of the process and that all benefits and allowances are clearly laid out as well as any one-off payments. Try to anticipate any questions such as what relocation expenses will be covered by the company if this is relevant, and the resources and support that will be provided. Also be willing to be flexible and negotiate; this will help the employee and their loved ones feel supported to make an informed decision.

9. Don't forget to Tie Up Loose Ends

Finally, a signed Offer Letter is not the end of the process. Reference checks are one of the best insurance policies in any hiring process. Once you have a verbal acceptance of an offer you can request references. Sense check who these are and try speaking to them directly if at all possible, to satisfy yourself on their capabilities and how the individual has responded in certain work situations rather than just asking for a written reference.

Put reminders in your diary to check in with your candidate post-resignation to check that has gone smoothly and then have weekly calls to check if there is anything you can support them on in advance of them starting. Provide support with relocation and visas if relevant. The key is to keep communicating.

And be ready for them on day one so you start as you mean to go on. Plan a comprehensive induction and work out how you will do this remotely if needed and how you will get them set up to work from home if lockdown is still being enforced.

Summary

Making a remote hiring decision does not have to be as risky as you might have previously thought. Through good planning, it is actually likely that many companies will create a far more rigorous and multi-dimensional recruitment processes during these unprecedented times than they would otherwise have done.

We have to embrace new ways of working across all areas of our business in order to survive. Those companies who innovate around hiring and talent acquisition will most certainly be in a position of advantage. By keeping critical hiring on track, companies can demonstrate that they are adaptable to the times, innovative, forward thinking and that they embrace technology.

Executives in Africa are experts in remote assessments of Candidates; in our ten-year history we have completed our Search Process via virtual video interviews in 99% of cases, supported by additional assessments.

We have assisted our Clients in the successful identification of over 550 candidates into critical leadership and strategic roles across 41 countries in Africa. We have achieved this without physically meeting most of the Candidates we have selected and still, over 90% of EIA placed business leaders remain in their roles for at least a year.

We can support you at this time with any, or every, element of our full Search Process including;

- Defining your 'Why' to attract Talent
- Talent Mapping
- End to End Assessment Design
- Providing Outsourced Interview Capabilities
- Providing Interview Training on CBI Techniques
- Sitting in on Interviews with your Panel
- Recommending a suitable Behavioural / Cognitive testing system
- Helping with a Marking System
- Salary Advice

Success and growth as the world starts moving on from this current phase depends, in large part, on what you do now. So, think long-term and invest now in the right business leaders who will set you up for a successful future.

For more information on why we believe that Executives in Africa are the right organisation to support you to find the best business leaders for your business in Africa during this globally unprecedented time, please contact:

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