

GLOBAL RECRUITMENT: UNITY WITH LOCAL COLOR

BY ED HURST, MANAGING DIRECTOR AUSTRALASIA, KENEXA[®]

Increasing numbers of Kenexa[®] clients are asking us to work with them to implement a global approach to recruitment, assessment and selection. This is extremely exciting and offers a range of benefits—but what is driving this trend?

The movement to a global model is often a result of a recognition that similar jobs exist in different parts of the world, encouraging organizations to strive for consistency, enhanced efficiency and progress toward a globally-determined strategy rather than perpetuating divergent local practices.

Global assessment and selection also fits naturally with a 'shared services' or 'HR consulting' model—particularly when assessment techniques are designed to meet wide-ranging needs. By investing globally, it becomes possible to implement highly effective and cutting edge solutions. The advent of assessment technology that dovetails naturally with recruitment technology clearly encourages such a unified mindset because investing in such technology is generally an enterprise-wide (or at least regional) decision.

Another driving force in this field is the advent of genuinely international roles that span different territories and which can only be delivered successfully with a global mindset. So what are the key factors in enabling international assessment solutions to be effective?

The first thing we have found is the critical importance of working with the experts and stakeholders in local markets to understand what works, rather than simply seeking to impose a global approach. Although it is perfectly legitimate for people at the centre of a business to work toward a consistent strategy, this can backfire if not implemented sensitively. We have frequently found that local ownership, nuances and experience make a big and important difference, even within a global solution.

The starting point should always be an objective understanding (based on job analysis) of what truly leads to successful performance and results in each market. This need not be a recipe for 'watering down' the global strategy—rather, it suggests that global principles can be successfully implemented with 'local color.'

One example from our experience of how globally-consistent assessment methods can be applied flexibly 'on the ground' is related to an assessment center project in Hong Kong: If a Western-designed group exercise had simply been 'parachuted' into the local environment without any adjustment, most candidates would have been scored down for being passive or unassertive. In fact, when judged locally, they were being strong but respectful. It is not that the local market requires less assertiveness—merely that it manifests itself differently. Any global approach to selection needs to understand such dynamics.

A related issue is the attributes and competencies that we are seeking in candidates. Too often, global firms put together models that seem to be universally applicable, but which, in fact, impose subtle, culturally-specific (or simply incomprehensible) expectations. Since these models are supposed to lie at the heart of assessment processes, it is unfortunate that these issues lead either to locally-irrelevant decisions or even a tendency to disregard the global model.

It is much better to create a truly global framework in which the requirements of each part of the world can be successfully accommodated, in which language is accessible everywhere, focuses on directly observable behaviors and allows cultural flexibility about the details of how people demonstrate positive behavior.

Another strong idea is assessing candidates for 'culture-fit' (both in terms of organizational and local cultures), rather than allowing the sole criterion to be job-fit. Linking assessment solutions to culture and engagement surveys can be very powerful ways of achieving this outcome.

When hiring people into truly international roles, a key consideration is the attributes that enable someone to thrive in such a challenging and potentially vague role. Although there is naturally a lot of variation, we generally find the following traits to be of vital importance: flexibility, empathy, cultural sensitivity, independence and resilience. All of these qualities are very readily assessed using modern, objective methods.

When hiring for international roles, some of our clients are also looking beyond the actual applicant and considering how meeting the needs of their families can make or break an international appointment. This delicate but powerful area is often of critical importance.

Overall, this is a space in which much can be achieved—but only if we blend an appreciation of the value of a global strategy with a clear awareness of how to implement it flexibly in different parts of the world. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ed Hurst

As the leader of Kenexa's Australasia business and consulting lead for the Asia Pacific, Ed Hurst has a particular focus on delivering clients' strategic goals through world-class people solutions. His background is in business psychology—with extensive experience in large, global organizations. He worked for many years in the assessment and development field, frequently at the highest levels of organizations, including leading the Assessment and Development Centres Practice of a large consulting firm. His expertise is founded on extensive front-line consulting work, in which he contributed extensively to job analysis, assessment centers, leadership development, executive assessments, coaching and a range of development techniques. He has also established himself as a key player in the employee engagement and survey arena—linking such initiatives to business results and wider people strategy. During his time at Kenexa, Mr. Hurst has focused heavily on unifying solutions within employee surveys, assessment and talent management to deliver much more powerful results than previously possible.

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