



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Online employer roundtable
Evolving candidate
engagement

No. 10

Wednesday 10th
February 2021
10am - 11:30am

Overview

Initial changes to candidate engagement, as a result of the national health crisis, were born out of necessity. With offices unlikely to open until 2022 and remote working expected to remain core to business operations ([see roundtable 9](#)), how do organisations build and maintain relationships with candidates for the benefit of their talent pipelines?

And as we get to grips with this, we must ask how candidate engagement can evolve alongside remote candidate journey?

Attendees of the tenth roundtable include:



With many more attending...

AZETS
AAT
Clarion Futures
AstraZeneca

Pinsent Masons
Manchester MET
Sparks
Motus Commercial
Virgin Media

1

Communicating your organisation and brand story is now key to virtual candidate engagement. Many of the experiences available to candidates to explore a company's ethos and culture have been diminished, and sharing their story is one way in which organisations can convey that information and promote multiple apprenticeships across a variety of different standards at the same time.

2

Organisations looking to build out their talent pools in line with the growth their industry has experienced, have identified candidate perception as a barrier for doing so, particularly in more technical industries such as engineering and manufacturing.

3

Some of the methods used to improve candidate preparation for interviews and assessment have had adverse impacts on the process. Scripted and repetitive answers were reported as some of the key challenges.

4

Parents' evenings have made a return but this time to early talent hiring. Where parents provide such a big influence on candidates, involving them in the hiring and onboarding process has seen many benefits in both candidate engagement and decision-making.

5

Video remains the champion of the remote hiring process but with a twist for a couple of attendees. Asking candidates to present walkthroughs on subjects that appeal to them has been effective in assessing skills.

6

Start date uncertainty has seen organisations trying a variety of methods to keep pending talent engaged. From consistent communication and the sharing of onboarding material, to Christmas presents and regular phone conversations. All have played their part.

Always on engagement



It has never been more important for organisations to maintain an 'always on' approach for their candidates. Whether looking to promote their brand, build relationships or grow their talent pipelines, being always on has proven to engage candidates year-round, regardless of opportunity availability.

Building this approach has been easier for some more than others.

The conversation



According to one attendee, the move to an always on approach has been supported by the recent and high candidate engagement in the financial service sector. Where interest is so popular, maintaining a virtual presence has been a great way to capture that interest and convert it into engagement. Utilisation of candidate careers sites has been essential in driving results however, where their own corporate website hadn't seen the same success.

Another attendee agreed that candidate careers sites are far more effective than corporate sites. Where converting interest into engagement is concerned, social media takeovers have also been a great way to add personality to their brand and make it more approachable.

The ability to communicate a brand's story has been a huge benefit to being always on too according to one attendee. Where modern candidates are interested in topics like the environment, charity work and company culture, the ability for attending organisations to communicate how their company is closely related to those topics has been invaluable.

Negative industry perceptions have revealed themselves in the scale-up of some attendees' operations within last year. According to organisations from these industries, many candidates didn't seem to understand what it meant to work in areas such as aviation, telecoms and insurance.

Some attendees had seen positive results using parents/carer(s) as industry or brand advocates to beat perception issues and build confidence in candidates. Parents' evenings and Q&A sessions had both been well received and had great turnouts, said the attendees. Once that relationship with both the parent/carer(s) and the candidate had been formed, it was far easier to keep and to build on, they said.

Another attendee had taken this a step further by working with the parents of current apprentices to inform the future candidates and parents. An activity that had seen much praise and positive feedback.

Post-application engagement & screening



Most organisations know that candidate engagement doesn't stop once their applications has been placed. Care and attention must be paid to the needs of the candidates as they progress through screening, assessment, interview and on-boarding . The changes employed by organisations adapting to remote working, however, have been met with new challenges to overcome.

The conversation



Although video assessments have made it possible to continue reviewing candidate skills and strengths remotely, one attendee expressed issues around the process. Having released some interview questions publicly to aid in candidate preparation, they were receiving extremely scripted video answers from candidates in return. This had made it very difficult to assess the candidates as their interactions weren't engaging, honest or a true reflection of them. In addition to this, asking questions that weren't on the public list resulted in candidates 'crumbling' during face-to-face virtual interactions.

Another attendee understood but recommended rephrasing the video assessment to overcome the problem after their success in asking candidates to make a video about something they are interested in. They had asked candidates interested in automotive and engineering roles to make videos of them talking through an automotive engineering procedure. Candidates were reported as being more at ease, engaged and confident, allowing the employer to better assess their skills and qualities. This method had proved so successful that it has now replaced their first stage interview as common practice.

One attendee agreed with putting candidates in roleplay style scenarios for assessing skills after they had asked their applicants to take part in scenario-based problem-solving activities. Often candidates would be placed in a scenario that they understood but given a selection of different methods and communication channels to complete the scenario. This had given candidates the freedom to react in ways they felt comfortable, and the employer the opportunity to assess through and action processes in the candidates.

For one attendee, methods to extract honest candidate assessments start with the more classic approach of a simple Q&A session, followed by a work trial. They understood that many of the insecurities of candidates are simply a result of not knowing or understanding aspects of the company or the job. Giving the candidate the opportunity to flip the interview around, and try out the role and organisation, had given them the confidence to engage in more of a two-way conversation. This made assessment much simpler and more effective for the attendee.

Mind the gap

- dealing with preboarding and onboarding



Changing timeframes to candidate starts and onboarding has become commonplace for many organisations. Keeping talent 'warm' and engaged until a start date has been confirmed is a familiar challenge, but developments have been made to the ways in which organisations are doing this.

The conversation



For one attendee who makes candidate offers in May for a September start date, an extended onboarding process has worked for keeping candidates engaged. Beginning the mental digestion of onboarding materials at an earlier date had allowed candidates to better prepare for starting their positions and had offered them the chance to raise queries before starting. Virtual events such as quiz nights and parents' evenings had worked well to fill the gaps in learning and create more colloquial environments too.

Another attendee who had been forced to move March 2020 job offers back to September 2021 starts had offered a simple and human approach to maintaining candidate interest, contacting the candidates regularly to update them via phone, sending them Christmas presents during the festive period, and also assisting them in finding other temporary jobs in the interim. These efforts were likely to retain 80% of the original candidates offered the position.

Other attendees agree that simple, regular candidate contact goes a long way to maintaining engagement. Presentations and webinars with company experts offer interesting ways for soon-to-be new starters learn about the organisation and interesting topics that the roles within cover. There was agreement in the room that you can't over communicate with candidates at this stage, it was generally regarded that the more communication the better it was.

One attendee however, had struggled to maintain attendance for the previously mentioned events particularly with candidates that were less socially mobile. This was even the case for events that were built for and targeted directly at them. The group filled in explaining that personal 1-2-1 style interactions were best placed at reversing this attendance gap. Where confidence in these group are lower than most others, offering a personal experience and direct communication allowed employers to stay in touch and work on those confidence issues directly.

This issue was explored by the attendees further who agreed that less socially mobile candidates are less likely to admit when there is a problem. When met with technical issues, these candidates were likely to give up as opposed to finding alternative routes to success in the tasks they had been given.

One attendee had found that the negative perception of apprenticeships by the candidate's family members was a huge barrier to their applicants pushing through the assessment and onboarding phase. This attendee had looked into shared workspaces in order to extract them from these environments and build a suitable work area for them where they could get the help they needed to progress.

More from the roundtable...

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You can also catch up on our previous discussions via our [resource hub](#).

If you're looking for more in-depth insights into candidate behaviour, we're pleased to be able to offer you our own research into the world of early talent – read more [here](#).