



Gi Group Holding

Soft skills matter more than ever

Upgrading standards in the search and selection recruitment process



Introduction

The **Covid-19 pandemic** affected all of our professional and personal lives in multiple ways. Specifically with regard to our **professional development**, the pandemic has exponentially accelerated the need for new, and highly distinctive skills among managers. However, not only technical skills, in particular digital skills, but also that vital group of specific competencies known as "**soft skills**", which are a large and diverse group of **social and emotional, and advanced cognitive skills**. A recent McKinsey study entitled Soft skills, strong impacts published in May 2021 serves to highlight this fact.

In particular, the survey shows that companies have almost doubled their focus on soft skills, especially those related to **empathy and interpersonal relationships** in general.

Indeed, half of the respondents in the aforementioned study said they favour skills such as **leadership**, followed by **critical thinking** (48%) and **resilience & lifelong learning** (40%). If we compare these results with the 2019 survey, we can see that the skills that have grown the most are indeed social and emotional skills alongside advanced cognitive skills.

An increase in soft skills, as prioritised by companies surveyed by McKinsey
(change from 2019 to 2020)



(McKinsey study titled Soft skills, strong impacts)

And all this will have a decisive impact on employment over the coming years. In fact, Deloitte has shown that by 2030, **two-thirds of all jobs will be in 'soft skill intensive occupations'** compared to one-half in 2000. But there is more: the number of soft skill-intensive jobs will grow **more than twice as fast** as other types of jobs by 2030. According to the ANZSCO classification of occupations by soft skill intensity, the most intensive are Managers, Professionals, Engineers, ICT, Sales representatives, Office managers and Science technicians, among others.

“Skills, like effective confrontation, empathy, and patience are not soft skills. They are human skills, and they must be learned. Organisations often overlook their best internal leaders because they don't place enough value on these crucial interpersonal qualities. As a result, company leadership suffers.”

(Simon Sinek)

Source: Simon Sinek on LinkedIn: There's No Such Thing as "Soft Skills"

Traditionally those in charge of hiring in businesses have been very much focused on the leadership role interviewees being assessed by means of **KPIs and performance ratings**, where the focus is most definitely on hard skills, very much viewed as the “must have” skills with **far less emphasis on personal soft skill sets**.

Yet our changing times are introducing those same hirers to the notion that we must adopt a more **holistic way in evaluating potential candidates by exploring the “whole”** of what the candidate brings to the table. This results in **employees who will largely tend to be more satisfied and are more likely to stay**. Businesses can therefore **be more efficient on re-hiring** by finding the individual most suited to the role and to the company culture in the first instance. Indeed, **holistic hiring is a person-centred way** to seek new company member which assesses an individual above and beyond their professional hard skills and experience. In fact, it puts a much greater focus on assessing their “soft side” as a way to determine whether there is a **good match between the individual, the role offered and the company culture**.

Another interesting conclusion can be drawn from the latest survey carried out by Thomas International: HR decision makers place a fairly equal amount of value on hard skills (49%) and soft skills (51%). At the same time, they notice that there is a **far greater shortage of soft skills than hard** (43% compared to just 17% for hard skills). According to this research, **placing a greater value on soft skills in recruitment has a tangible link to the ability to bring new hires up to optimal productivity sooner, and also to improving the likelihood that valuable employees remain with the business**.

Source: The talent time bomb: the countdown to transforming your talent culture | Thomas International global research.



The previously mentioned study also highlights that three quarters of HR professionals are under pressure due to the competing needs to deliver speedily but also to deliver quality in the recruitment process. Two of the top three pressures are time related: 81% feel pressure 'to get recruits to optimal productivity more quickly', while 79% feel pressure 'to hire more quickly'.

Additionally, HR professionals are in agreement that if the recruitment stage is rushed, there is a danger that either the candidate quality match will not be guaranteed (38%), or the process will have serious repercussions on hiring costs (38%), or talent attrition will increase (25%).

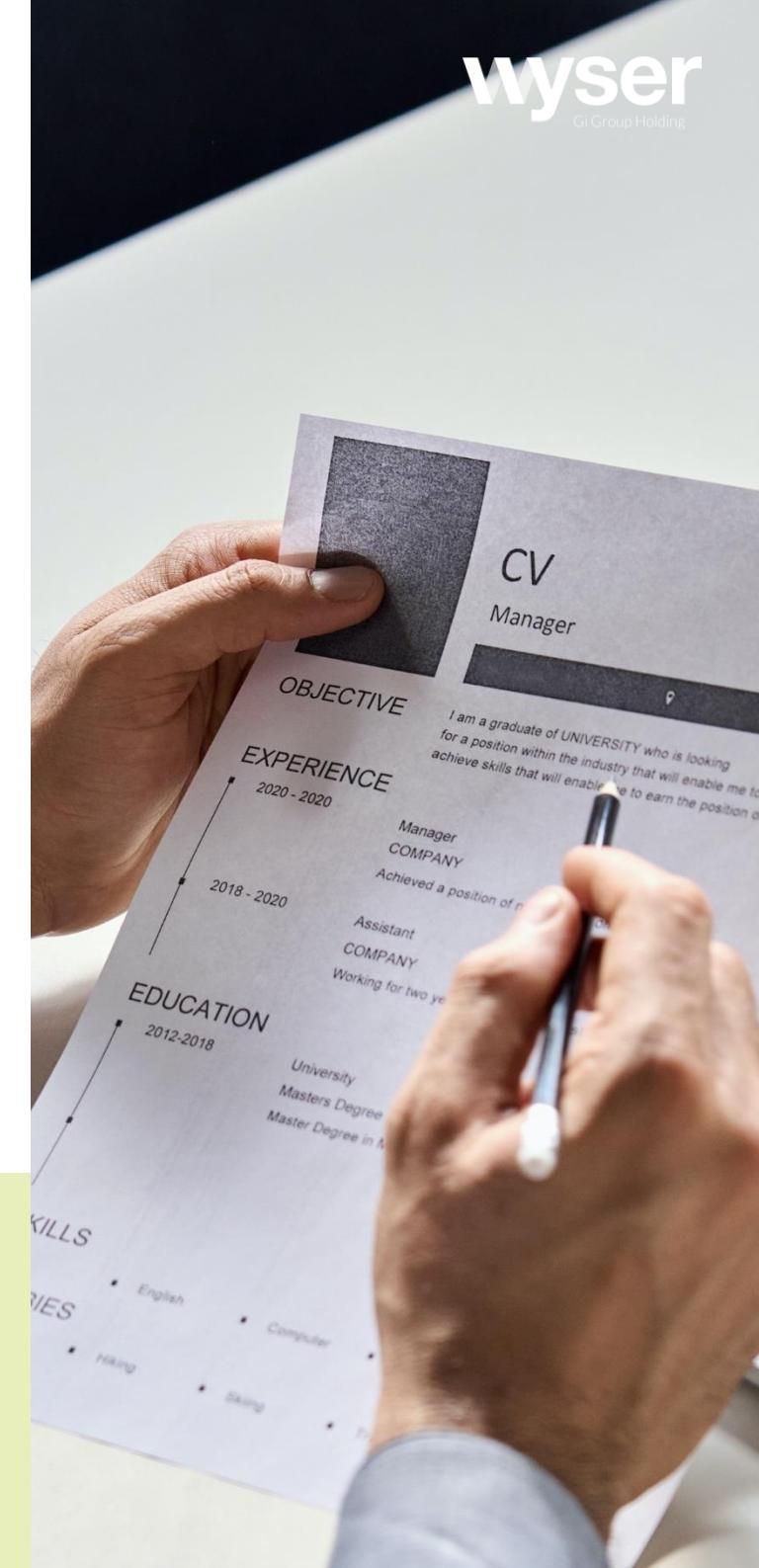
Filtering soft skills in recruitment is definitely the way to solve the paradox. But just how can we **measure soft skills without slowing down the search and selection process?**

Whilst for hard skills we have developed over the years a range of tools to assign meaningful values to hard skills (think years experience, certifications obtained, standards achieved, and other KPIs), we are not so well versed in just how to do that for the soft skill set.

Yet, if our aim is indeed to take a holistic approach in hiring, and increasingly experience is showing us the benefits of this approach, then we need to **find the tools by which we can assign meaningful values to the soft skills too**, allowing us to make fair and accurate comparisons between potential candidates. How do we, for example, measure and compare skills such as curiosity or risk-taking?

“Only 26% of employees report feeling ‘highly valued’ at work with 33% of people even feeling undervalued! So with a staggering 43% of workers willing to leave their companies for a 10% salary increase, retaining the right employees is crucial.”

Source: Thomas International





For some years now, Wyser has adopted the use of the **HPTI assessment (High Potential Trait Indicator)**, proprietary to **Thomas International**, a leading global talent assessment platform provider. This evaluation has proved **indispensable**, particularly during the pandemic **when face-to-face interviews were impractical**. The assessment helped us to provide more qualitative conversations, to get to know candidates on a more personal level, thus achieving a better match with the companies' culture, goals and purposes. The HPTI assessment measures the **six key elements** of an individual's personality that are considered vital in influencing their ability to sustain a high-standard in a work environment. The aim is to **define whether the person might suit a senior leadership role**. Subsequently, HPTI assessment results will assist in identifying self-motivated and self-disciplined individuals, evaluate their ability to cope under pressure and resilience, describe their tendency to use tried-and-tested methods or seek out new practices. Furthermore, it will assess their ability to deal with risk and confrontation, reaction to complexity and contradictory information and – last but not least – identify those best suited for a target-driven environment.

The **personality traits** measured by the HPTI assessment are **conscientiousness, adjustment, curiosity, risk approach, ambiguity acceptance** and **competitiveness**. Potential scores range from low, through to moderate, optimal and excessive.

Identifying the perfect skill set of an individual and assessing candidates for their "fit" within that role and specific company will never be an exact science. Nonetheless, the advantage of this assessment is that it provides additional and important information to assess **the candidate's compatibility to the future role and company culture**. It helps to identify those soft skills that would complement and add value to the role.



For example, a candidate for sales manager position within a team of highly competitive and outgoing members may not achieve a desirable score for competitiveness, but may be found to be highly curious. In a traditional interview setting, the candidate's **apparent mismatch** (not so competitive) may have resulted in them being written-off as a good fit, yet the curiosity and openness to new ideas could bring a skill set that was absent in the team, adding to the innovation and growth of the collective group results. It depends on the organization's context. Including **personality assessments** in selection methodology will help us to make this reflection about who has the most advantageous profile of traits for a particular role in a specific situation.

At Wyser, in the search and selection of candidates for middle and senior management leadership positions, the HPTI assessment is leveraged as a standard step in our methodology, producing **significant added value** for candidates and clients **and increasing the likelihood of candidate suitability**. Through this, as partners we are not only able to identify the right candidate for the role, but in turn multiply the probability of placement that complements needs, increases business impact and – in the end – **increase employee retention**. For us, a **holistic approach is at the core of a successful search and selection process**. We firmly believe that the HPTI assessment provides improved communication between candidates and clients; it represents a very powerful tool to open conversations and get to know each other from the soft side. At the same time, it provides valuable information for the company to plan an individual's training and therefore keep them engaged, positive and motivated in their new role and company culture, from the very beginning.

In the following section we consider each one of the HPTI personality traits and evaluate how different scores can potentially play out in the workplace.

Six traits measured in the HPTI assessment provide deep insights into a candidate during the search and selection process.

Let's take a closer look.

Conscientiousness

is closely related to **self-discipline**. Individuals with a high level of conscientiousness have strong motivation and are determined to achieve goals. Those with a lower level of conscientiousness are less deadline and control-oriented but, conversely, may be more open to change and new ideas. Conscientious senior leaders are therefore **detail-oriented and control-oriented** at every step, careful to ensure that the work is done to the highest standards. However, sometimes they may seem **overly practice-oriented** and therefore unable to appropriately evaluate out-of-the-box ideas. Leaders with low conscientiousness may therefore **neglect details and have difficulty in setting goals** but, on the other hand, are **flexible and open**.

Adjustment

is related to how people react emotionally to stress and external pressure. A high level of this trait implies less stress and a better ability to **cope with tension**. Those with a low level of adjustment may have **negative thoughts and spread their emotional energy**, tending to worry excessively about others' opinions. This is a key item in relation to those in **high-level positions where minimising pressure is crucial**. Sometimes, however, too high a bar in terms of adaptation can appear as overconfidence or coldness and be mistaken for a lack of empathy.



Curiosity

describes people's relationship to **change and innovation**. High-scoring people generally seek **new ways and approaches** but may at times have a tendency to disregard past experiences and 'reinvent the wheel'. The less curious, on the other hand, prefer **tried-and-tested approaches** and have little permeability to new ideas, which can create a bias that negatively affects the work. Today, leaders are **agents of change** and therefore need to constantly evaluate and infuse their teams with **new information and ideas**. Nonetheless, it is important that changes are well thought out and have clear objectives, otherwise the risk is to destabilise teams.

Risk Approach

is the **ability to act and react in challenging situations**. High scorers quickly **assess risks and options** and act accordingly. Those with a low risk appetite tend to **avoid challenges** and find alternative ways forward. Leaders must sometimes take risks, but the **risk must be calculated and considered**, never pursued on an emotional basis. It is clear, therefore, that risk approach varies across companies and roles.



Ambiguity Acceptance

means being able to **cope where the context is characterised by complex, but above all, ambiguous if not contradictory information**. Such a characteristic is especially valuable for higher levels of seniority, when complexity and potential conflicts become more and more important. People with high scores will **accept and give their best in these situations**. On the other hand, people with lower scores will be more suitable for companies **where procedures and guidelines are explicit and well defined**.

Competitiveness

expresses **the desire to win and excel**. Highly competitive individuals need their achievements to be **publicly appreciated**. They are therefore willing to constantly raise the level of performance.

Conversely, a low level of competitiveness results in a **lower need for recognition, yet a higher degree of collaboration**. In the former case, the risk is of excessive individualism while positive competitiveness is put at the service of the group.

The perfect score?

There is one point of reflection that must be considered carefully and which is evident from the way the different traits have been described above. At Wyser we are quick to observe that a high score does not necessarily signify "good" and low score is not synonymous with "bad". Of course, 'optimal' scores are generally suitable for most senior leadership roles, but 'low' or 'excessive' scores whilst they may be unsuitable in some contexts very well may be highly effective in others.

It is therefore important to **define the characteristics of the candidate** to be chosen in relation to the company as a whole, as well as the team which they would manage and be part of.



A recap of the the six HPTI traits to evaluate within a holistic hiring approach:



Conscientiousness

People with high levels of Conscientiousness tend to be focused on goals and how to reach them. They will usually be self-motivated. Those with lower levels of this trait tend to be relaxed and easy-going, taking things as they come.



Ambiguity Acceptance

People with high levels of Ambiguity Acceptance thrive in uncertain situations and enjoy complexity. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer high levels of clarity and direct solutions to problems.



Adjustment

People with high levels of Adjustment are calm under pressure and rarely experience stress or negative emotions. Those with lower levels of this trait can have more intense emotional reactions to stress and pressure.



Risk Approach

People with high levels of Risk Approach are keen to solve interpersonal issues proactively, not being afraid of confrontation. Those with lower levels of this trait tend to be more agreeable and avoid conflict with others.



Curiosity

People with high levels of Curiosity often like novelty, learning and variety in the world around them. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer conventional approaches and trusted methods.



Competitiveness

People with high levels of Competitiveness are motivated by power and influence, always wanting to win. Those with lower levels of this trait prefer non-competitive environments that focus on group cooperation.



At Wyser, we understand that there is rarely a **single solution to any one business challenge**. Working closely with our clients and candidates in search and selection, we **find the very best match** leveraging the HPTI assessment, alongside other tools, to ensure the hard and soft skills – which represent an individual’s “complete package” – are **perfectly aligned with the client’s management and team culture requirements**.