



## Passing the test

Are your assessments fit for  
today's emerging talents?

**SOVA**

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# Introduction

**Graduates have provided organisations with an important source of talent for many, many years. In that time, there have been significant innovations in recruitment, particularly in the way organisations use technology to simplify the process and screen high volumes of applicants quicker. Increasingly this needs to include hiring for graduates, internships and apprentices in an integrated way.**

But, for the most part, the models used to select emerging talent have remained limited, confining themselves to a narrow band of universities and an equally narrow definition of applicants' potential for success. There has also been a tendency to focus on increasing process efficiency rather than on attempting to improve the experience for candidates and recruiters alike.

At Sova Assessment, we think it is time to challenge outdated selection practices: to recognise all kinds of talent and not just the chosen few; to value the person over the process; and to use technology as an enabler, not a disabler.

**It is our belief that the assessment process should:**

- 1** Employ selection methods that are fair for all.
- 2** Focus on creating a positive experience for candidates, including those who are not successful.
- 3** Be smooth, insightful and engaging for the organisation and the applicant.
- 4** Be specifically designed for the digital world, not a transposition of legacy assessment methods and tests.

## Who are we?

Sova Assessment is a group of organisational psychologists, product developers and technology experts. Combining leading-edge assessment and digital technology, we design precise, personalised and engaging emerging talent assessment solutions for organisations such as Santander, John Lewis, Zurich, Jaguar Land Rover and Atos.

# Testing times

Selecting future talent has always been a key challenge for organisations. Get it right and you reap the rewards of a motivated talent pipeline, with the right skills and potential, and a proven willingness to learn. Get it wrong and you've wasted significant time and resources, and damaged the future prospects not only of your organisation but your own professional career as well.

Although the challenge is constant, what it consists of has changed over time. Key trends currently affecting student recruitment include:

## Lack of diversity & social mobility

Ensuring balance and diversity is now a priority for many organisations, as they recognise the importance of hiring people from different backgrounds and removing the barriers that have historically stood in their way. This represents a new challenge that traditional processes and methods can struggle to meet.

## Fragmented & disjointed processes

Many organisations use different suppliers and technologies for different elements of attraction and selection. But all too often this creates a disjointed experience for the applicant and prevents the organisation from gaining a unified view of their hiring process.

## Pressure on budgets & resources

With an average cost per hire of £3,383, student recruitment represents a huge investment for any organisation, and it is therefore critical that the selection process balances efficiency, speed, cost and precision. This adds to the pressures faced by today's recruitment teams, the majority of whom have to manage the selection not just of graduates but of apprentices as well.

## Convergence of employer & consumer brand

Gone are the days of long protracted hiring processes where candidates are made to jump through hoop after cumbersome hoop. Now that organisations recognise how closely their employer and consumer brand are interlinked, they are increasingly looking for a more candidate-centric and friendly hiring process. One of the key challenges here is how to reject large numbers of people without damaging your reputation and brand.

## Loss of faith in selection criteria

How do you choose between candidates with little or no work experience? The traditional response has been to impose arbitrary entry requirements, and select people based on academic attainment and performance on narrow spectrum tests. But surely there must be a better way of evaluating people at the beginning of their careers – a broader approach that measures the whole person and gives a true assessment of their future potential.

# How does your organisation measure up?

When it comes to assessing emerging talent, is your organisation still using traditional models that are not fit for purpose in the digital age? These questions will help you decide:

## 1. Is your assessment process designed for mobile?

First of all, the facts:

- In 2016, there were over 4.7 billion mobile phone subscribers (an incredible 63% of the global population) and, since 2014, mobile internet traffic has outperformed desktop.
- Research by Glassdoor shows that 89% of applicants are using their mobiles in the hiring process.
- 20% of millennials ONLY use a mobile to surf the web.
- 70% of 'high potentials' are more attracted to an organisation if it offers a mobile experience (IBM).

Clearly, your assessment process needs to work as well, if not better, on a mobile device as it does anywhere else. The problem here is that traditional assessments can never be optimised for mobile use because they simply were not designed with mobiles in mind. Either they were intended for larger screens, in which case they can be content-heavy, or, worse still, they have been transposed online from paper-based assessments and do not suit a digital environment at all.

Assessments designed from a truly mobile-first perspective combine shorter, more challenging questions with sophisticated adaptive scoring techniques, saving candidates time and preventing unnecessary scrolling issues.

## 2. Do you know what you're looking for and does your recruitment process help you find it?

It is impossible to assess people effectively for a role without first understanding the demands that the role will place on them and the factors that will contribute to their success. How long has it been since you conducted a robust job analysis? Jobs and organisations continuously evolve – and, thanks to modern technology, they are evolving faster than ever – so it's important to revisit the building blocks of each role on a regular basis. Only then, once you have clearly established what you are looking for, will you be able to design an assessment process that helps you make the right hiring decisions.

The effectiveness of the assessment may also be hampered by an over-reliance on ability tests. These tests, a staple of traditional processes, provide a very narrow filter, which can result in highly suitable candidates being unfairly screened out. For more accurate hiring decisions, what is needed is a process that assesses candidates in a more rounded, 'whole-person' way, measuring areas such as resilience, communicating with others, teamwork, creativity or problem-solving.

## 3. What does your recruitment process feel like from the applicant's perspective?

Candidates are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their job searches. According to research by TalentBoard (2015, EMEA Candidate Experience Research Report), 76% now use multiple channels to conduct their own due diligence about hiring organisations before making a connection. The question is: are organisations responding with increasing sophistication of their own? Here, the results are mixed. In the same piece of research, over 48% of respondents claimed they received no feedback whatsoever from the hiring organisation and 52% were not given the opportunity to provide feedback themselves.



Nevertheless, the quality of the candidate experience is an increasingly pressing issue for organisations everywhere. As more and more recognise the interdependence of their employer and consumer brands, there is a growing realisation that poor candidate experiences can have a serious negative impact on company reputation, not just in terms of talent attraction but from a commercial perspective as well. Most candidates, after all, are also consumers.

Is your company's reputation being damaged or enhanced by your selection process? Core elements that make up a more candidate-centric approach include good communication, two-way feedback and transparency about the job and organisational culture. So take a walk through your assessment solution. Does it:

- Provide clear communications about the assessments themselves and why you're asking candidates to complete them?
- Provide feedback to all your applicants, whether successful or not?
- Provide information about what it's like to work at your organisation, your culture and values? Have you embedded a realistic job preview into your process?

#### 4. How fair is your hiring process?

Diversity and social mobility are key issues for organisations, as they seek to ensure they have fair and inclusive processes for identifying and developing talent. But recruitment practices, if they are not carefully managed, can be open to many kinds of bias that unfairly discriminate against certain people based on age, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Cognitive ability tests, measuring verbal, numerical or abstract reasoning skills, have long been a staple part of graduate recruitment, and research consistently shows them to be a strong predictor of future performance. However, this form of testing has also been strongly criticised for potentially having an adverse impact on candidates due to their gender or ethnicity. Many ability tests deemed acceptable in a strictly legal sense are still some distance away from achieving the 100% fairness that organisations are striving for.

Interviews and assessment centres are also problematic, as assessors are prone to making assumptions based on their own unconscious biases, for example considering a candidate more suitable for a role because they went to a particular university or share a previous employer. The fact that many assessment centres are paper-based means this issue can often be hidden, as organisations miss the opportunity to use the data they capture to identify where the inclusiveness of assessor judgements can be improved.

#### 5. Is your process built around your business needs, or the 'boxed' solutions of your suppliers?

In an ideal world, every organisation would have customised assessments that matched the specific requirements of the roles they were hiring for and that provided candidates with a great experience that was fully aligned with the company's brand.

Of course, we do not live in an ideal world and many organisations find themselves having to compromise on customisation, opting instead to buy in a variety of generic, off-the-shelf solutions for reasons of practicality or to avoid prohibitive costs. In the long term, however, this creates additional challenges, quite apart from the fact that the assessment solution does not fully match the business's needs. For example, it can be very difficult to gain a unified view of your data when the process is made up of discrete technologies and suppliers that are not capable of 'speaking' to each other.

Thankfully, however, recent technological advances mean that compromise is no longer necessary. It is now possible to build robust, fully customised assessments that not only provide personalised and engaging candidate journeys but also do so at an affordable cost. So if your current assessment solutions have been shaped by the demands of your technology and your suppliers, rather than by the needs of your business and your candidates, then something needs to change.

# What does a leading-edge digital assessment look like?

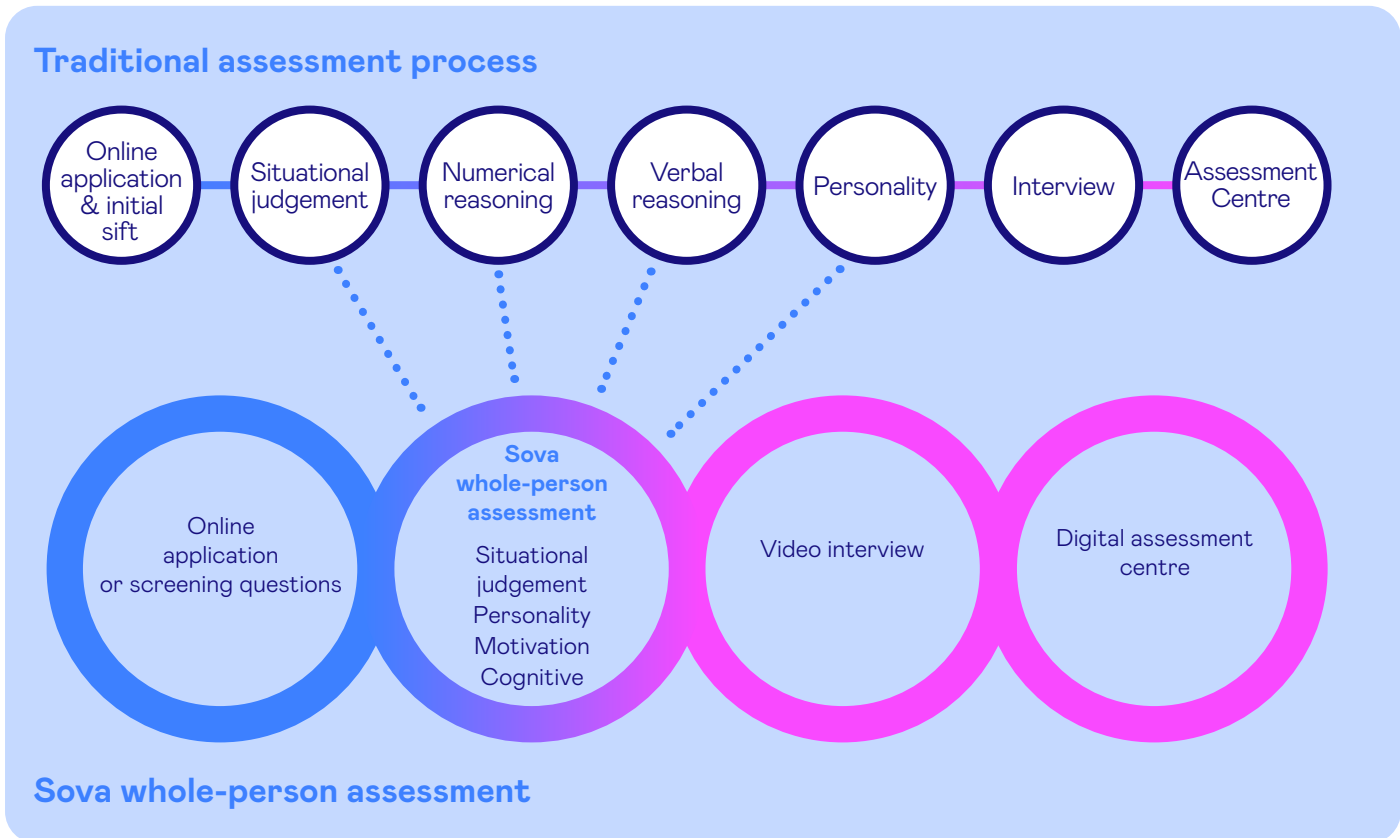
If traditional assessment processes for emerging talent no longer make the grade, how do you balance precision, candidate experience and digital technology to hire the best for your organisation?

## A single blended solution

Sova Assessment adopts an 'ask less, learn more' approach, which involves combining personality, ability, motivation and situational judgement questions into one precise and personalised assessment, rather than inviting candidates to complete a series of long, off-the-shelf tests. This has benefits for both organisations and candidates. For organisations, it provides an early 'whole-person' view of every applicant. For candidates, it means a shorter, seamless assessment process that also gives them valuable insight into the job and organisation they are applying for.

**Ask less, learn more.**

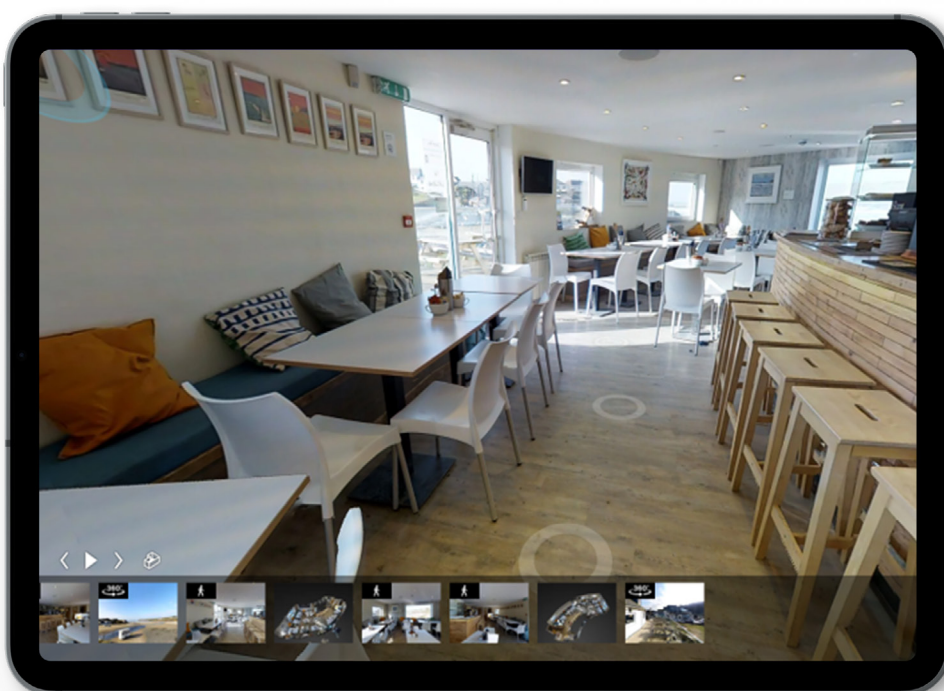
Rather than inviting candidates to complete a series of long, separate and generic off-the-shelf assessments, we combine personality, ability, motivation and situational judgment questions into one highly condensed and personalised assessment.



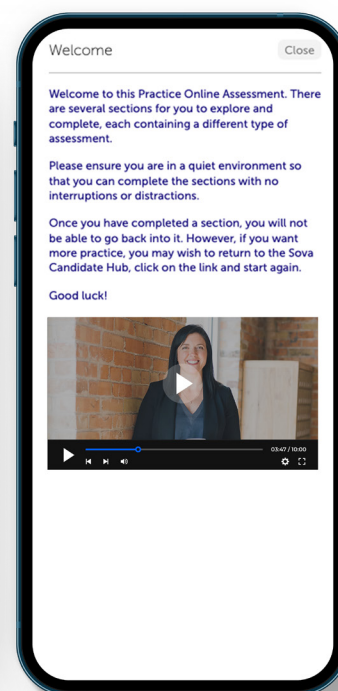
## Informative and engaging

We make it easy for organisations to integrate tailored candidate communications and realistic job previews into their assessment process. This means you can offer candidates a friendly welcome and provide them with information on the job, the organisation and anything else they may need to know. Branded videos and media are often used to bring this information to life.

Interactive background image



Video-based welcome message



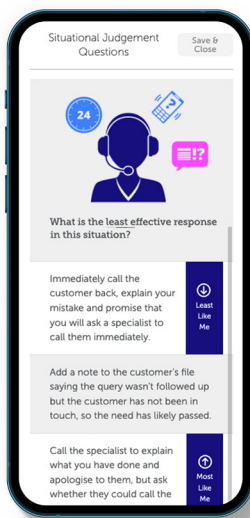


## Personalised assessment content

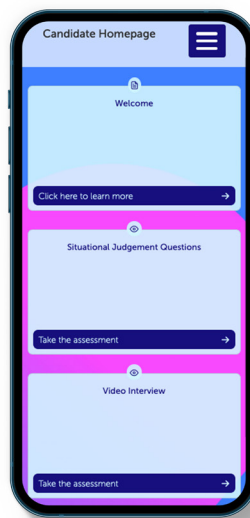
Sova assessments are not off-the-shelf but are instead built individually around each job and tailored to the organisation and hiring process.

One advantage of this approach is that assessments only contain questions and item formats that measure the specific competencies needed for the role, making each assessment shorter yet more precise.

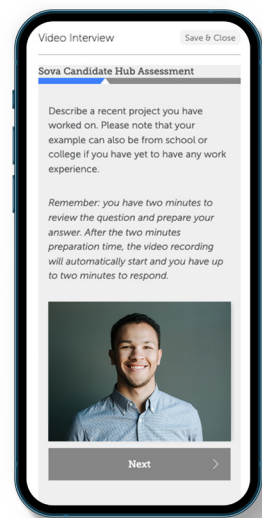
It also makes it possible to personalise the assessment, incorporating the organisation's branding, tone of voice and key messages so that it looks and feels like a truly integrated part of the process and not something that has been crowbarred in from elsewhere.



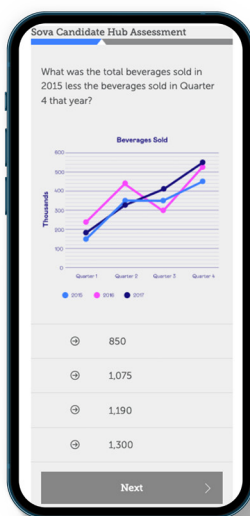
Situational Judgement



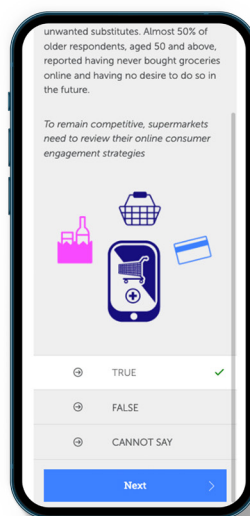
Candidate Homepage



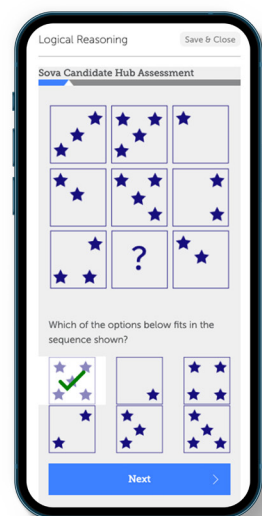
Video Recording



Numerical Reasoning



Verbal Reasoning



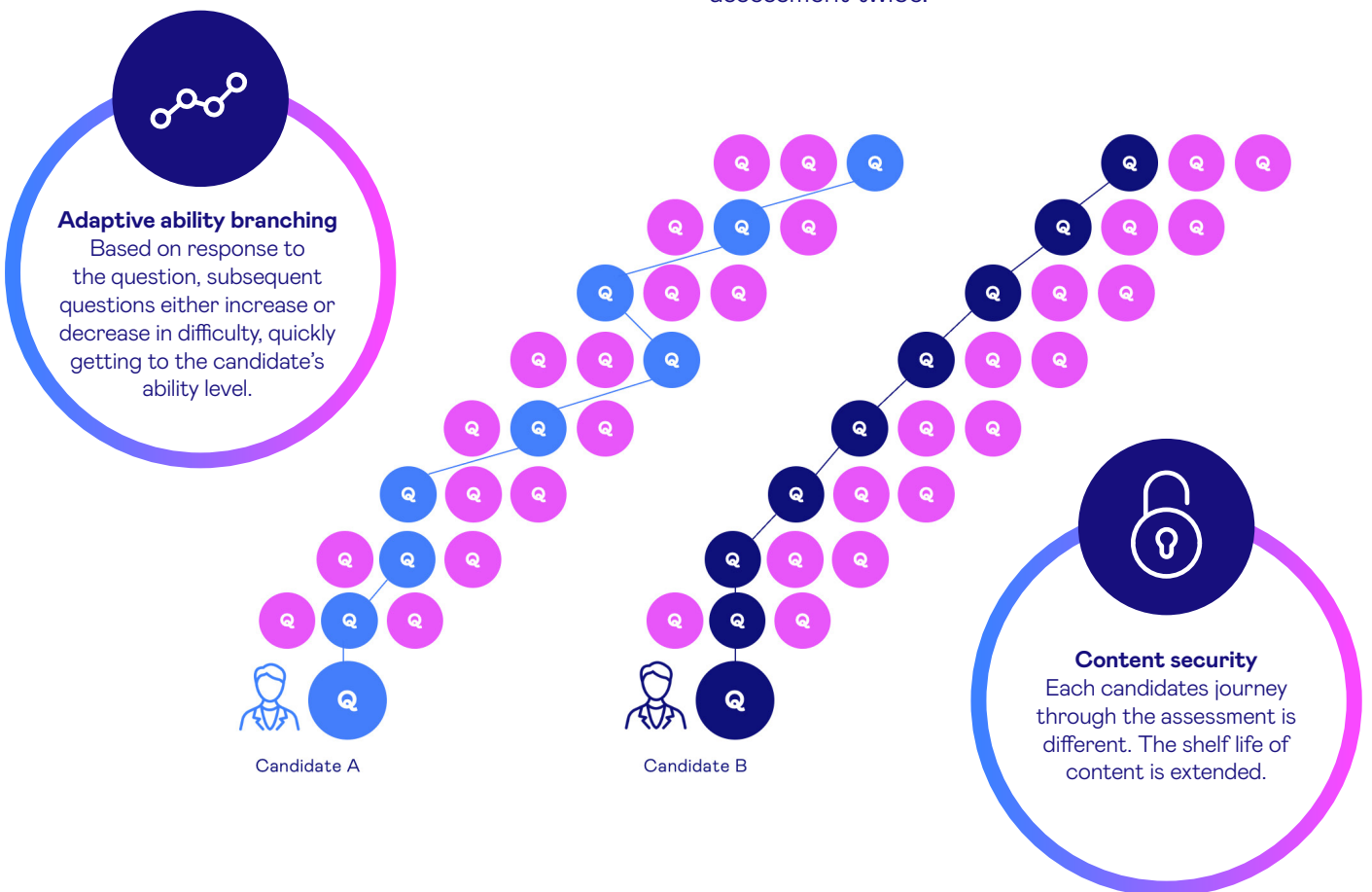
Logical Reasoning

## Adaptive branching technology

The tests and questionnaires candidates complete have traditionally been linear, with everyone starting at the same point and progressing to the end, usually through a series of increasingly challenging questions. This approach has its disadvantages. By failing to distinguish between people of different ability, for example, it forces high performers to waste their time on questions that are far too easy. It also increases the likelihood that candidates will encounter the same test multiple times, which can undermine the security and reliability of the process.

However, thanks to adaptive branching technology, it is now possible to design tests and questionnaires that are not linear but instead create a unique test pathway for each candidate, responding to the answers they give and choosing subsequent questions accordingly. For ability tests, this might involve fast-tracking high performers onto the items that will truly challenge them. For situational judgement questionnaires, it means you can design much more realistic scenarios, where the test evolves according to your responses – just as in real life, your decisions have consequences.

Because candidates determine their own test pathway, it also makes cheating more difficult, as candidates are highly unlikely to complete the same assessment twice.



## Addressing diversity

Fairness in assessment is a key issue. While tests are meant to distinguish between candidates, it is vital that they do not do so on the basis of age, gender, background or ethnicity, as this can unnecessarily limit the pool of talent organisations have to choose from.

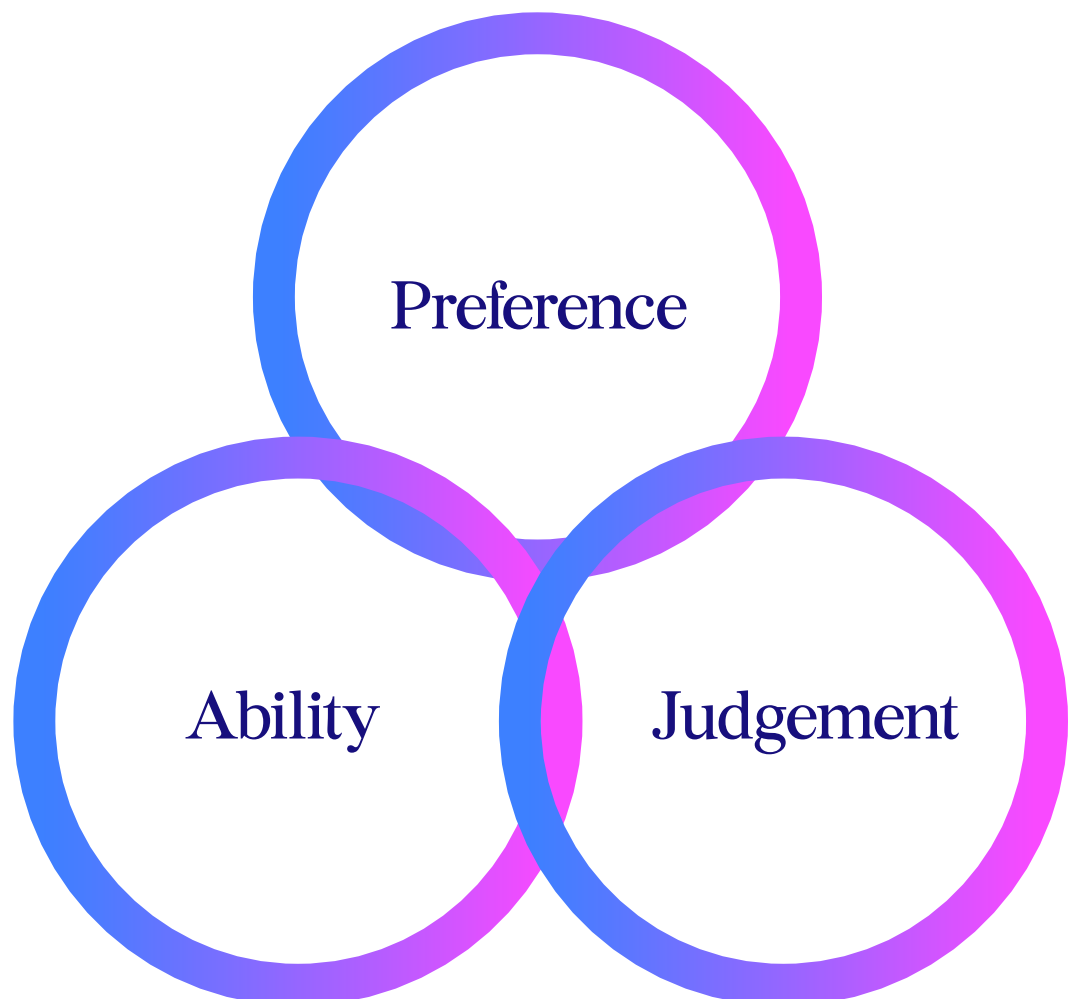
One way to mitigate against this adverse impact is to reduce the reliance on ability tests, instead combining situational judgement, behavioural style and cognitive elements to provide a more rounded view of the candidate.

Santander used this approach to assess their graduates, interns and apprentices and achieved a 50:50 gender balance throughout the recruitment process with negligible adverse impact.

## Two-way feedback

In order to leave candidates with a good impression of the selection process, it is important to ensure they get something back for all the time and effort they invest in it, whether they are successful or not. However, with most employers receiving thousands of applications, it is not easy to provide meaningful and timely feedback to every single candidate.

Sova Assessment's inbuilt candidate feedback mechanism means that all candidates receive automated, personalised feedback reports. It is also possible to make the feedback two-way by integrating a mechanism into the process that asks applicants to share their views.



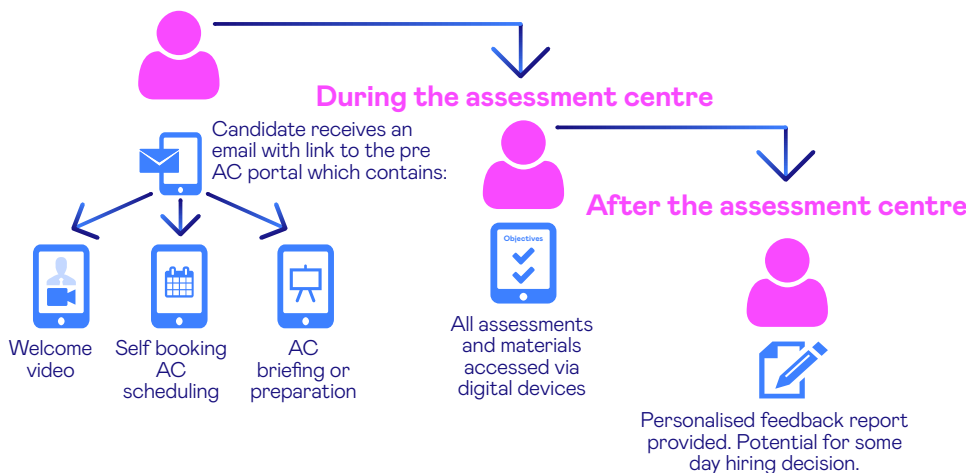
## Digital interviews and assessment centres

There are a number of challenges associated with traditional interviews and assessment centres, including:

- Heavy reliance on paper, and lots of it!
- Potential for bias on the part of the interviewer and assessor.
- Poor compliance in terms of accurate data collection.
- Difficulties interrogating assessment centre data and tracking progress.
- Problems updating the process when circumstances change, for example if a candidate fails to turn up.
- Need for multiple assessors to complete their inputs on time and accurately.

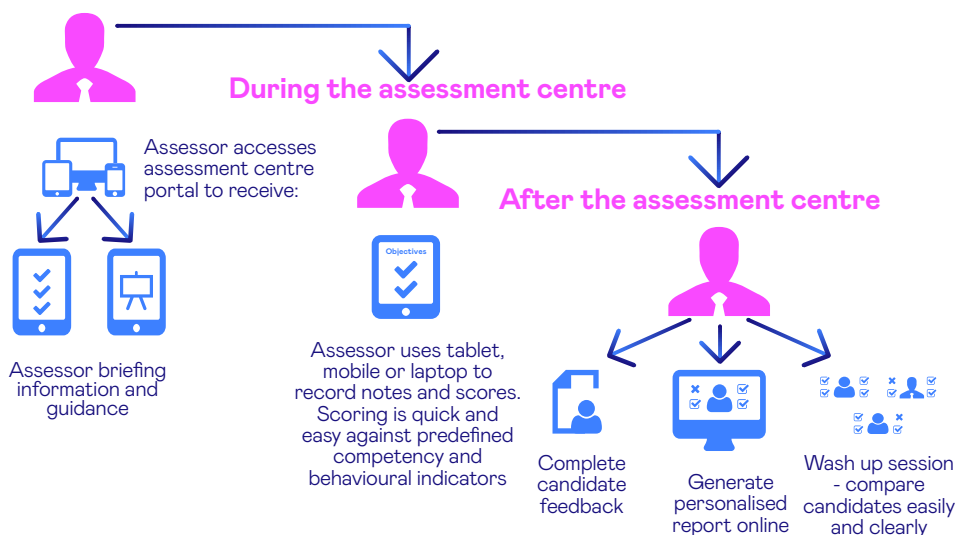
For **candidates** it means a slick, on-brand digital experience to match the rest of the hiring process. This includes personalised pre-assessment centre communications, which are sent out automatically.

### Before the assessment centre



For **recruiters** it means better assessor briefing and guidance, more efficient and accurate scoring, and faster, more consistent reporting and wash-up sessions.

### Before the assessment centre



# Client story: bringing precision and personalisation to graduate recruitment at Santander

## The objective

In early 2016, Santander was looking for a new assessment solution for volume hiring for their Emerging Talent programme. Their existing psychometric assessments were four years old, delivered via a lengthy two-stage process, and didn't assess candidates against the new Santander behaviours. They wanted a solution that provided a more precise assessment of suitability by assessing candidates against both the role requirements and Santander's new behaviour framework, as well as providing a more engaging candidate experience. They also wanted an assessment optimised for mobile devices, as they wanted to create a fully mobile-enabled, end-to-end application process in early 2017.

## The solution

We designed and delivered a bespoke, blended online assessment for each role, combining cognitive ability and situational judgement questions relevant to the individual role and key behaviours. Each assessment is mobile-optimised so candidates can complete their assessment on any device and in any location of their choice.

To provide a seamless recruitment experience for both the recruiter and candidate, we integrated the Sova assessments with Santander's applicant tracking system, Lumesse TalentLink. This makes the assessment process simpler and more automated for the recruiter, and easier for candidates, as they don't need to remember multiple logins or links to complete the various stages of their application.

Santander can access the candidates' assessment results at any time, including an 'overall suitability score' and a full breakdown by competency. They can also generate personalised candidate reports that give objective feedback on the key behavioural areas measured, ensuring the assessment process is open, fair and meaningful for the candidates.

## The results

- Better quality of candidate and **enhanced pass rate** at assessment centre.
- Lower candidate dropout, with **completion rates of over 80%**.
- Time it takes candidates to complete the assessment stage **reduced from two weeks to one and half days**.
- Improved diversity, with **50:50 gender balance** achieved throughout the recruitment process and negligible adverse impact.

“

We were looking for an assessment solution that would provide better quality screening, whilst also delivering a seamless, engaging and more candidate-centric experience.

**Hema Bakhshi, Resourcing Strategy & Innovation Lead, HR, Santander UK**

## How we can help

At Sova Assessment, our aim is to remake traditional assessment for the ultramodern digital world. We have already helped Santander, Zurich, Atos, GE, and other leading organisations create assessment solutions that are more personalised, more engaging and more precise. To find out how we can help you digitise your assessment process, and book a free personalised demo, please get in touch.