

SHL.

# Innovation Rising: The Six Shifts Creating Exceptional Candidate Experiences



This paper has been written by **Sam Whiteman** at SHL in conjunction with research conducted by **Mervyn Dinnen** and **Matt Alder** of Two Heads Consulting.

The business outcomes to be gained from a transformational candidate experience are clear, but starting that transformation can be intimidating.

For this paper we studied the current state of candidate experience, but importantly looked for inspiration from consumer experiences.

Six shifts emerged as natural opportunities for the candidate experience, and the good news is that the capabilities needed for this upgrade are well within reach.

# The State of Candidate Experience

The first real experience that a new employee has of their future employer is as a candidate, and it's hugely important. Recent research from 14,000 job seekers found 86%<sup>1</sup> saying that the way they are treated during the application and interview stages will impact their decision on whether to join.

## They are vocal about their experience too...

Data from Glassdoor shows that 72%<sup>2</sup> will share details of a bad candidate experience online, and that 55%<sup>3</sup> will avoid applying to companies with negative online reviews.

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However, we found that opportunity exists when companies deliver a strong candidate experience. For example, IBM found that two-thirds of candidates will share positive experiences, even if they don't get the role, showing that every candidate is as important in the recruiting process as those getting an offer. Satisfied candidates are more than twice as likely<sup>4</sup> to recommend an organization irrespective of whether they receive an offer.

## The stakes are high, but the opportunity is clear....

The biggest frustrations for candidates are usually over a lack of feedback and lengthy processes, often resulting in them not knowing whether they are still in the hiring process or even being considered.

These problems imply a lack of information and communication to manage expectations - at a time when digital technology allows candidates to be much more in control of their job search. Their experiences as consumers have raised expectations of seamless, intuitive, informed experiences as candidates.

**x2**  
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“People want their 9-5 to look like 5-9, and their 5-to-9 lives are full of seamless, effortless experiences, largely enabled by digital technologies”<sup>5</sup>

Gartner’s Chief of Research, Brian Kropp.

# Experience can change minds...

Research from LinkedIn has shown us that while 83% of candidates say they would change a previously positive impression of an organization if they have a negative interview experience, **87%<sup>6</sup> say that a positive interview experience would change their minds over a company or role that they had previously doubted.<sup>7</sup>**

## The bar continues to rise on what makes a good candidate experience...

For 10 years the Talent Board has overseen the Candidate Experience Awards (the CandE's), based on surveys from hundreds of thousands of job candidates. Those organizations that win CandE awards in one year don't find it simple to hold on to the award in subsequent years. The bar for a great experience keeps rising each year as consumers' expectations rise, as does the median candidate experience.

Talent Board President, Kevin Grossman, said in a recent interview that **the companies that rank consistently highly tend to be those that communicate more often, and more consistently, from first to last touchpoint.**

This opportunity places candidate experience at the top of the Talent Acquisition agenda - in fact a poll of 100 TA leaders in March 2021<sup>8</sup> found candidate experience to be the area they are most looking to improve. With many predicting a growing talent and skills shortage over the next few years, it is imperative that Talent Acquisition teams look to differentiate with a more intuitive, consumer-style approach to their candidate experience.

From our extensive research for this report we have identified six shifts that are currently driving great consumer experiences, and which we believe will drive future innovation in candidate experience, to help meet, and exceed, their evolving expectations.

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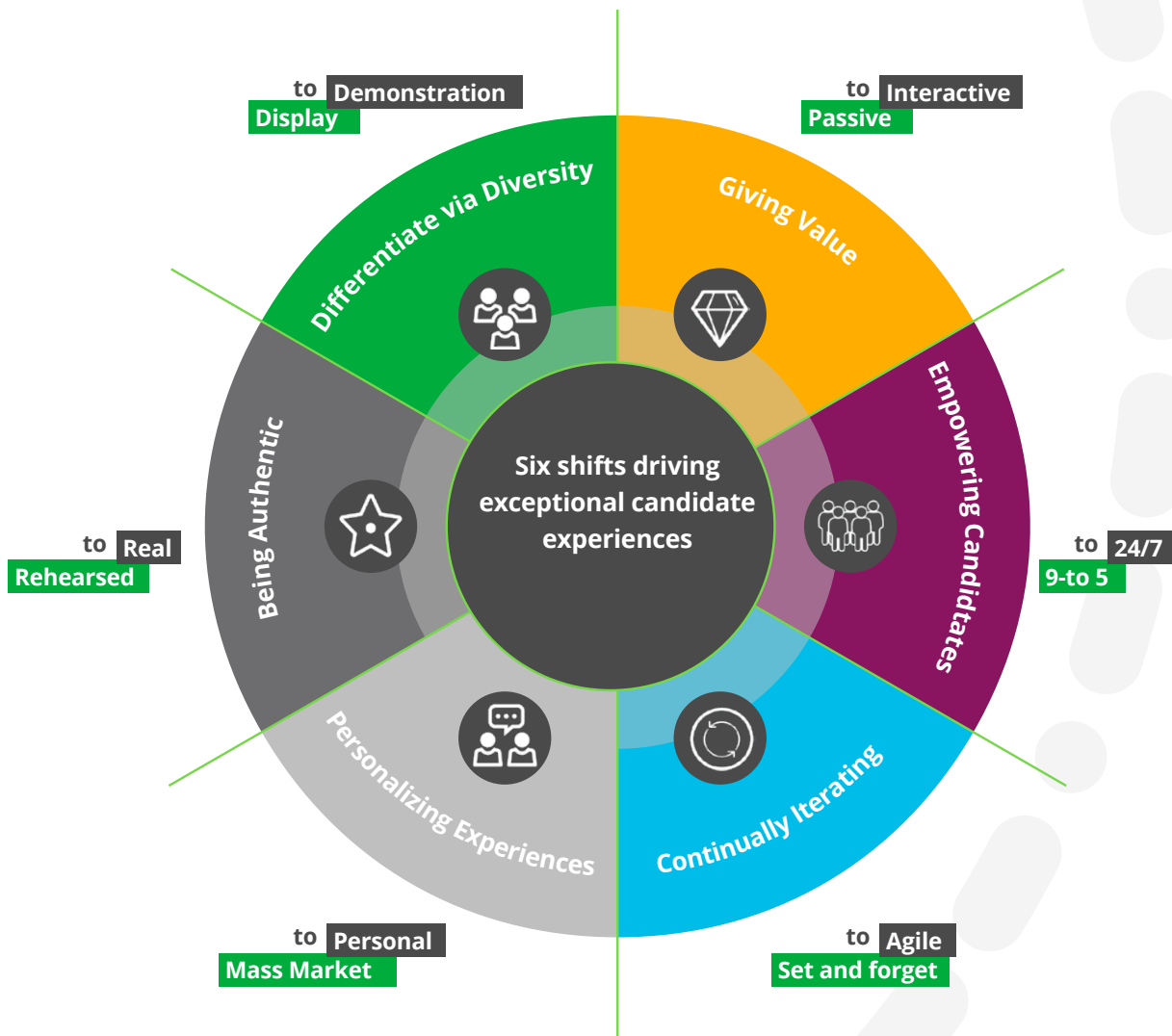


# Six Shifts Delivering World Class Candidate Experiences

While the idea of developing a consumer-grade candidate experience could be intimidating, technology is already enabling a significant evolution here. The expanding capabilities of talent acquisition technology platforms means the gap between customer experience and candidate experience is already starting to close. This enables progressive employers

to take lessons already learned by consumer marketing and technology teams and apply them to their candidate experience strategies.

There are six clear shifts that we are now seeing, which all smart recruiting teams will be making over the next 18 months.



## Giving Value

to **Interactive**  
**Passive**

Recruiting experiences have, thankfully, moved beyond being seen as “tasks with deadlines” and now include some sort of “download” of information about the organization. But in the future, static information and one-way communication might not be as engaging as we need experiences to be.

**The shift here is towards experiences where the candidate can “lean in to learn”** – about themselves, about their career options, and about their fit to a specific role. Feedback is also critical here, and the level provided should reflect the amount of time and effort the candidate puts into the assessment process.

This creates something of value for the candidate, and it’s important to all applicants whether they are offered a job or not.



## Empowering Candidates

to **24/7**  
**9-to 5**

Recruiting processes have historically been dictated by the hours a recruiter is working from their desk, often with minimal regard to the candidate’s schedule and needs. However, **technology is now moving the recruitment experience towards asynchronous tasks** (be they assessments, self-scheduling, video interviews or realistic job previews), a reality that improves the experience for everyone.

Designing a recruiting experience with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous tasks is not just better for the candidate, by giving them a level of control of the process, but it also makes the recruitment process quicker and improves both the recruiter and hiring manager experience at the same time.

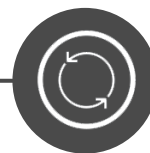


## Continually Iterate

to **Agile**  
**Set and forget**

Improving the candidate experience has traditionally been a single, time-limited project or initiative. However, candidate experiences are dozens of different touchpoints, or micro-experiences, so we see a more immediate opportunity to experiment, innovate and improve.

Simple multivariate (aka A/B) testing with salary ranges or job titles can inflect better results in conversion, a great example of small iterations which can make a difference. The availability of analytics means that **the number and location of experiments and iterations like this can easily expand** to impact a better candidate experience.



## Personalizing Experiences

to **Personal**  
**Mass Market**

While consumer experiences are now hypertargeted, many candidate experiences are still driven by generic and mass-targeted communications.

Job applications are highly personal to candidates. They each have their own hopes and expectations; they apply as individuals and expect an experience that acknowledges their specific application and their strengths.

While time-poor recruiters aren't scaled to deliver the personal, "white glove" experience to hundreds of candidates, recent innovation in technology and automation means that the size of the recruiting team is no longer a barrier to scaling this critical touchpoint. Automating the feedback process means **that all applicants can expect a personal response to their personal application.**



## Being Authentic

to **Real**  
**Rehearsed**

Generating content that aligns to your employer brand has quickly turned from a differentiator to table stakes. So where to next? Nielsen has found that 92%<sup>9</sup> of consumers trust user-generated content more than they trust traditional advertising. **Candidates are starting to look beyond overly produced employer brand videos; they want the real picture.**

Authenticity is crucial, and genuine content from hiring managers and existing employees (even without perfect lighting and resolution) is likely to yield better results in the future. Perhaps quantity will win out over quality?



## Differentiate via Diversity

to **Demonstration**  
**Display**

The issue of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has made its way from the CHRO priority list to the CEO's, but **simple links to statements of policy might not be enough to persuade candidates that it is reflected on the job.**

67% of all job seekers<sup>10</sup> see a diverse workforce as an important factor when evaluating companies and offers, so being passive about DEI is not an option.

Highlighting the rigor of the application process to treat all candidates fairly, and exposing more candidates to that process, is critical to being proactive with DEI communications.





# Summary

Delivering a first class candidate experience has been at the top of Talent Acquisition and HR agendas for several years now, but as we have found during the research for this report, it remains elusive for many organizations.

While most know the benefits of a great experience - from attracting the best talent to building a reputation for being a great place to work, and the potential upside that consumer-facing brands can get from positive candidate advocacy - it is often identifying the starting point for developing a positive experience that companies find most difficult.

While exploring the six shifts that form the basis of our report, it became apparent that the technology we need to execute is more available than many are led to believe, and there aren't internal hurdles to justify further investment.

**“Our hope is that the transformation of candidate experience is not a business case, but rather business as usual.”**

Becoming business as usual means overcoming any perceived difficulty of starting to experiment. Organizations can understand which shift is the best starting point for them and then build towards developing a great candidate experience incrementally.

A great candidate experience is made up of many micro-experiences, so the Talent Acquisition team can use the technology they already have to start slowly experimenting as they begin to find the right blend of personalization, feedback, authenticity, value, and empowerment that will drive a truly exceptional experience that candidates will share and recommend.



# Inspiration on the Six Shifts from Consumer Experiences

## User-Generated Content at Aldi



User-generated content can really stir creativity, which is why Aldi tapped consumers for their best, in their home bar photo contest.<sup>16</sup>

They ran a competition for the chance to win a year's supply of shopping vouchers. To enter, all users had to do was to like the Facebook post and share a photo of their DIY home bar using the #AldisBarHunt hashtag.

The result was over 11,000 comments, 1,900 shares, and 12,000 reactions. That, and tons of photos to use in future promotional messages

## to Real Rehearsed



Sweden<sup>17</sup> earned more than 9 billion media impressions (and a Lion Award in Cannes) with the launch of their "Call a Swede" tourism campaign.

Instead of advertising with the usual picturesque imagery, they created The Swedish Number, an actual phone number where anyone could call and be connected to random Swedes who had signed up to be de facto ambassadors, who were given no scripting or training. Even the Prime Minister answered calls.

## Personalization Rehearsed at Cadbury



Cadbury marketers achieved a 20x uplift on click-through rates and reached 17 million Facebook timelines when they were one of the first global brands to innovate in personalization, using personalized video in 2014 to launch initiatives in India, Australia and the UK.<sup>15</sup>

*“We are giving a boost to our approach to product innovation. We believe that personalization can enhance the overall product experience – particularly in gifting”, said Josep Hernandez, Senior Director Global Communications Planning and Media, Mondelez International. “*

to **Agile**

**Set and forget**

Netflix CEO, Reed Hastings, wanted to set expectations with a candidate for a VP of Product role... *“leaders like Steve Jobs have a sense of style and what customers seek, but I don’t. We need **consumer science** to get there”.*<sup>12</sup> Now replace consumer science with **candidate** science, and perhaps continuous innovation isn’t only for the organizations like Netflix.

Netflix A/B testing with only title image selection (what used to be a DVD cover) resulted in up to 30%<sup>13</sup> more engagement.

*“Broadly, Netflix’s A/B testing philosophy is about building incrementally, using data to drive decisions, and failing fast. When we have a complex area of testing such as image selection, we seek to prove out the hypothesis in incremental steps with increasing rigor and sophistication” –Netflix Blog<sup>14</sup>*

to **Interactive**

**Passive**

In 2019 L’Oreal saw engagement time double and conversion rates triple after launching Modiface<sup>11</sup>, an Augmented Reality application that lets users try on make-up using just the camera on their mobile device.

# Candidate Experience Analytics at SHL

SHL has led the way on interpreting large amounts of data on human potential to make quality hiring decisions in a fair manner. In any given week we are likely to assess more than **half a million** candidates across 100+ countries in more than 40 languages. This data on potential, readiness and fit has created the world's largest dataset on human potential.

This dataset is now growing even *faster*.

SHL's platform is now synthesizing hundreds of data points during a single candidate's experience using large amounts of computer power, machine learning and advanced analytics. These insights can power an agile approach to candidate experience, no matter what the role.



# How SHL is Enabling the Six Shifts?

## Objective and Fair Assessment

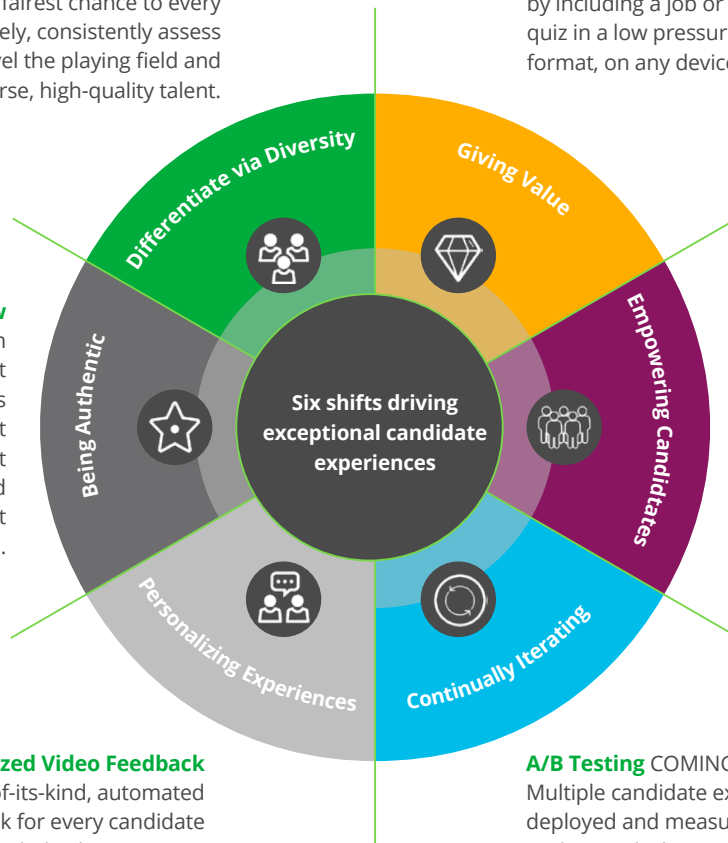
Our portfolio of assessments and interview technology is backed by 40 years of SHL's unbiased and unrivaled science that ensures you provide the fairest chance to every candidate. Objectively, consistently assess every candidate to level the playing field and bring in diverse, high-quality talent.

## Job Fit Quiz

Reduce the chances that candidates' expectations are not met and increase win-win selection decisions by including a job or culture fit quiz in a low pressure, informative format, on any device.

## Realistic Job Preview

Let candidates hear from existing employees about how they approach their roles and what they like about them. These may be different messages from scripted employer brand videos, but often they are more impactful.



## Smart Interview On Demand

SHL's Smart Interview On Demand puts your candidates in control to schedule and record their interview anywhere and at any time. Instantly share interview recording with hiring managers who can easily review candidates as per their convenience to find the best talent.

## Personalized Video Feedback

SHL Video Feedback is first-of-its-kind, automated and personalized feedback for every candidate delivered in an engaging, branded video. Win over thousands of new advocates – both among new hires and those you don't ultimately take on.

## A/B Testing COMING SOON

Multiple candidate experiences can be deployed and measured in short sprints, to understand what combination of workflow, tasks and branded content is best to drive the outcome that you're looking for. These outcomes could be an increase in conversion or engagement, or reduced time to completion.

# Authors

## **Sam Whiteman**

Sam leads SHL's Talent Acquisition Solutions. He has over ten years of experience at SHL in building solutions to transform talent within organizations across the globe. He is regularly featured in industry conferences, publications and podcasts. He is based in San Francisco, California.

## **Mervyn Dinnen**

Mervyn is an HR & Talent analyst and researcher, partnering with HR and Recruitment technology businesses to report on the emerging trends impacting hiring, retention, development and engagement. He is recognised as a Global HR Technology influencer, has co-authored the books 'Exceptional Talent' and the forthcoming 'Digital Talent', and is an international keynote speaker on Recruitment and HR trends.

## **Matt Alder**

Matt Alder is a strategic consultant focusing on all aspects of HR technology, recruitment marketing and employer branding. He is a globally recognised talent acquisition thought leader and HR Technology influencer. Matt is the host of the popular Recruiting Future Podcast ([www.recruitingfuture.com](http://www.recruitingfuture.com)) and is a co-author of the book 'Exceptional Talent' and the forthcoming book 'Digital Talent'. He speaks internationally on recruiting technology and the future of work.

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