Synergy of Holistic and Skills-Based Assessment Practices: A Compelling Case for Employers

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In today's dynamic and competitive landscape, employers are constantly seeking ways to identify and select top talent.[1] Arguably, traditional assessment methods that solely focus on academic achievements or qualifications often fail to capture the full potential and suitability of candidates.[2,3] As a response, the integration of holistic assessment and skills-based practices could serve as a powerful strategy to assess individuals more comprehensively and accurately. This narrative aims to explore the relationship between holistic assessment and skills-based practices, and their significance in talent management, hoping to encourage employers to combine and adopt these approaches.

Holistic assessments involve evaluating a candidate's skills, knowledge, personality traits, values, and potential for growth. They go beyond a mere examination of technical competencies and delves into the individual's overall suitability for a particular role and organization. The concept of holistic assessment practice has its roots in educational theory and the recognition that traditional assessment methods often fail to capture the full range of an individual's abilities and potential.[4,5] Although pinpointing a specific origin or a single individual credited with the development of holistic assessment practice is challenging, its emergence can be traced back to several influential educational philosophies and movements.

YEAR UP ASSESSMENT PROJECT

As a part of its PROMISE Center initiative, AIR has collaborated with *Year Up Inc.,* to design and assemble an assessment suite that will measure program participants' **workforce and career readiness (WCR)** skills. Adopting the philosophy of holistic and skills-based assessment practices, these WCR skills are a compilation of technological skills, communication skills, personality attributes, behavioral tendencies, and practical skills (such as problem solving and decision making).

By considering cognitive, dispositional, behavioral, and practical skills, Year Up will obtain **a more complete picture of an individual's skills enabling them to enhance participant success** in the program and subsequently in the workforce.

The relationship between holistic assessment and skills-based practices is symbiotic and complementary. Holistic assessments typically aim to provide a complete picture of an individual's abilities, competencies, and potential. By focusing on skills, these assessments ensure that the evaluation goes beyond theoretical knowledge and considers practical skills that are essential for success in various domains, benefitting both workers and employers alike (see American Institutes for Research, 2023,[6] for detailed discussion on skills-based hiring). This comprehensive evaluation ***minimizes the risk of false negatives***[7] (i.e., overlooking exceptional candidates who are likely high performers but don't appear so from their educational qualifications).

The ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world contexts is a strong indicator of future performance. Integrating holistic assessments into skills-based hiring, therefore, *enhances the ability of the assessments to predict how well a candidate will perform on the job (i.e., **predictive validity of talent evaluation**)*. By focusing on practical skills, employers gain insights into a candidate's potential for success in job-related tasks, problem solving, and decision making, enabling organizations to make more informed hiring decisions resulting in better matches between candidates and job requirements.[7,8]

Holistic and skills-based assessment practices also ***promote equity and inclusivity.*** By considering multiple dimensions of individuals' abilities and strengths, we reduce reliance on a single measure of success and take into account diverse backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles, ensuring a fair and unbiased evaluation process.[7]

The philosophy of holistic assessment practice aligns with the realities of the modern world, where success often depends on a combination of technical expertise and a diverse set of nontechnical skills.[9,10] The featured image (Exhibit 1) shows how technical skills and nontechnical skills should be seamlessly intertwined. The modern workforce demands a blend of both these types of skills.

Exhibit 1. Holistic and Skills-Based Assessment Practices

In addition to strong subject knowledge, employers seek candidates who possess strong communication skills, critical thinking abilities, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Holistic and skills-based assessment practices ensure that these essential nontechnical skills are evaluated alongside technical competence, enabling employers to ***identify individuals who can thrive in dynamic and rapidly changing work environments.***

Lastly, holistic and skills-based assessment practices also ***support personal and professional development***. By receiving feedback on a wide range of attributes, individuals are empowered to recognize their strengths and areas for improvement. This self-awareness fosters a growth mindset and enables individuals to set realistic goals for personal and professional development, ultimately leading to greater success and fulfillment in their lives. (Please see Exhibit 1.)

In conclusion, holistic and skills-based assessment practices are of paramount importance in today's educational and professional realms. By providing a comprehensive evaluation that encompasses a wide range of attributes and skills, they enable a more accurate and fair assessment of individuals' capabilities and potential. They support personal growth, foster inclusivity, and equip individuals with the skills needed to succeed in the complex and ever-changing world we live in!

If your organization wants to adopt holistic and skills-based assessment practices but does not know where to start, reach out to the **Human Capital Solutions hub** at AIR. We would be happy to guide you through the process of adopting this philosophy for your hiring system.

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