

Coronavirus, your companies and your people

“When the context of work changes, the skills which are valued change, so some people shine while others fall flat on their face.” – Allon Shavet

Some formerly “average-seeming” people shine in a crisis; some top performers crack under pressure or just under the change in circumstances. You can learn whether candidates you are thinking of hiring will shine or crack. It’s the people who shine in a crisis that can become leaders and give others the confidence that they, too, can handle the crisis.

Some of your portfolio companies may have to hire rapidly, and others may have to furlough workers. How do you decide who to get or keep, and who to pass on or let go? There aren’t many people who have gone from managing by walking around to managing by zooming around. If you’re not zooming around (or doing something else consciously) to get the information you used to get in the ordinary course of activities, then you’re probably not getting the data. You also lose the peripheral activities. Nothing happens because you run into somebody and there are a lot of people for whom peripheral activities are an important part of the mix.

Your fortunate portfolio companies – A 60-minute solution for companies wanting to hire

If some of your portfolio companies are thinking of hiring aggressively, there are quick and easy-to-administer tools that assess motivation, coping, and intelligence. Right now, the situation even at companies that are prospering is probably well-described as “fluid.” Companies need people – especially at and near the top – who are resilient, resourceful, and adaptively responsive to changing circumstances. It’s pretty clear that we won’t be returning to the *status quo ante*, and that we won’t be living with COVID-19 in just the ways we are today. In fact, we don’t really know what is going to happen (and anyone who thinks they do is probably wrong). We need leaders who can continuously make sense of an evolving and unfamiliar situation, and who make good decisions. These people are in my terms, “active copers” and they thrive and perform well in both stable and changing conditions alike.

When you are hiring, you can learn a great deal about someone’s coping capability in just 60-minutes. You can learn:

- Whether the person has the cognitive capacity to add value in the role – and whether he or she can develop the necessary capacity to handle even bigger roles
- Whether the person has the coping to handle the expected and the unexpected; whether he or she greets complexity with an open mind or shuts it out
- What motivates the person, whether those motives aligned with the role
- Under what future conditions the person will need to be replaced or require supplementary expertise/capability

If you are fortunate enough to be in a situation to hire in some of your companies, it is worth adding some quick and cost-effective ways to hire right.

Your less fortunate portfolio companies – a 60-minute solution for companies retrenching on staff

Maybe, like most of us, you are dealing with some companies in trouble. If it's one line of business that is suffering among several, then you likely will get reduce the headcount within that business. But if demand has dropped across the business, you can make choices based less on technical skills and more on the capabilities of people to cope with the downturn and to find the opportunities to capitalize on going forward.

Since funds and time are short, focus on tools that let you sort people quickly. The same 60-minute assessment described above can do the trick. It can help you learn about a person's mental capabilities for the job they have now (which might be very different from what they needed to do when you hired them), their inherent resourcefulness, resiliency and flexibility, and their motivations. You know some of this because you know the people, but you can learn much more with just a 60-minute assessment.

In the long run, much more thorough knowledge for a larger investment

What are you learning during this pandemic about the people who work for you? Maybe the crisis is showing you dimensions of people you wished you knew more about – and perhaps you've contemplated that in the future you'd like in general to be more knowledgeable about each person's resourcefulness, resilience and responsiveness. In the future, when the pressure is off a bit, you can thoroughly assess people for how they'll perform in circumstances that aren't exactly like the ones you have envisioned or that anyone has ever see before. You can open your eyes to the true capability of potential employees by fully assessing their coping, motivation, and intelligence in advance of making a hiring decision (this is more than a 60-minute exercise, but well worth doing for important positions). You can determine who, among seemingly equally qualified candidates, has the underlying creativity, flexibility, and resourcefulness needed to apply their intelligence and motivation in expected and unexpected circumstances.

Taking action

Sometimes, it is wise to wait and not take action. When the challenging and changing winds are buffeting your boat, it's more likely a time to take action. If things are bad, make them less bad (and lay the groundwork for future good). If things are good, make them better (and lay the groundwork for an even grander future). If you'd like to take action on quickly assessing some of your key people as you make changes – with a very big impact on your understanding and quite likely on the choices you make – then contact me and I can provide much more information on the quick assessment mentioned above.

Good luck to you and your companies in these challenging times.