



Here are some ways candidates can assess an employer from afar. Photo by: [Charles Deluvio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

BARCELONA — With interview processes going virtual as a result of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), candidates have fewer opportunities to connect with potential colleagues and get a sense of an organization's work culture.

In the past, candidates might have had the opportunity to visit the office and meet team members several times before deciding whether to accept a job offer. And while sites such as Glassdoor can help candidates get an impression of an employer, these can “skew to the extremes” as the people posting tend to be those who were really happy or unhappy in their job, Jennifer Bangoura, a career and workforce development expert, suggested.

The good news is there are a number of other ways that a candidate can assess, even from afar, if a role or employer is a good fit. Here's what the experts recommended.

Know what you are looking for in an employer

Before applying for a position, job seekers should take some time to reflect on what they are actually looking for in an employer, Julia Lemmer, leadership and career coach at [Hanaco Consulting](#), explained. This includes thinking about the style of leadership, professional opportunities, work culture, and flexibility they are expecting from a job, she said.

Quote:

“You have to ask good questions to get real answers.”
— Jennifer Bangoura, a career and workforce development expert

Then, while reading job descriptions, it is key to think about whether they can comply with what the organization is asking for, as well as whether it matches their own expectations.

The choice of wording in a job description can, in some cases, say a lot about a role and the organization's leadership style, Lemmer added. Does the role require someone who can deliver consistently, for example, or does the tone imply that they are looking to hire someone who can grow as part of a long-term, collaborative relationship?

Do your research

A job seeker's first contact with an employer is often the organization's website or social media. Founder of [Centered Career](#) Caroline Korda Poole advised job seekers to look carefully at the tone of the marketing messages and media that the organization is sharing and ask themselves whether it resonates. Check out the organization's Instagram account to see whether it looks, at least on the surface, like a place you would want to work and follow the leaders on Twitter to get a sense of their priorities, she said.

Through this type of online research and reaching out to their network, over time job seekers should narrow their list down to just five to 10 organizations that they really care about, Poole said.

Use your network

Textbox:

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If you are already working in the sector, it's likely that you have contacts or even second degree connections who can provide you with insights on many employers. In the early stages of the job search and before the interview is when job seekers should be contacting these people, the experts agreed.

Bangoura suggested that by reaching out to lateral contacts, as opposed to just those higher up, job seekers can get a more authentic perspective of what it's actually like to work somewhere.

But “you have to ask good questions to get real answers,” she said, so make sure you are well-versed in what the organization does and then ask questions relevant to the individual's work. Don't reach out to someone in a huge organization and ask them about a project they are not involved in, she cautioned.

While it may be difficult for people to be completely candid, most people will have been in a similar position and will be happy to help, Bangoura said. Ask them what some of their best opportunities have been, as well as their hardest days, and what they wish they had known before joining, she suggested. Be conscious, however, that one individual's experience might not reflect that of the wider company.

Look at turnover

LinkedIn can be a great tool in any job search, including in showing how long people stick around at an organization and if there are opportunities for movement internally, Poole said.

“If it's two years in and out for pretty much everyone or certain kinds of roles ... then you can be assured you're going to be chewed up and spat out in that position,” she said.

On the other hand, if there is very little movement at certain levels, it can indicate there will be limited opportunities to move up. Typically, at high prestige organizations such as United Nations agencies, foundations, think tanks, and implementing agencies, there's not much movement among staff in mid-to-senior level positions, Poole explained.

“They're going to stay parked in those positions, if they're happy, for decades,” she said. Candidates need to consider how this might impact their own professional growth and goals.

Notice how the employer communicates

Take note of how an organization responds throughout the application process and whether their communications are timely and personal, Lemmer said.

Then, during the virtual interview process, consider what additional efforts they have made to help you as a candidate learn more about the organization from afar — are you only interviewing and meeting one or two members of staff or are they facilitating introductions to the team you will be working with?

Poole added that it's important that remote interviews are done by video chat to allow candidates to notice the tone and facial expressions of the interviewer as they respond. She also highlighted that this is the time that candidates can and would be expected to ask questions directly.

According to Poole, one great question for candidates to put to the interviewer is whether employees have the ability to do what makes sense. The response can indicate if it's a highly bureaucratic place to work or if employees are trusted and empowered to find solutions, she explained.

Lemmer suggested that during the interview is also when candidates can ask what the organization would contribute to their professional development and what challenges they might encounter in the role. And, given the current situation, candidates might also be interested to know how the organization's culture has changed as a result of remote working and what the onboarding process would be like, she added.