

Hiring for Culture

Why considering candidates' personal fit with company culture is critical to sustainable success.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

Every business, as indeed the whole economy, is ultimately made up of human beings – individuals acting and reacting in ways that build success or failure. And, thus, it is people who make up the true strength (or weakness) of any company.

Having the right set of people for the enterprise, who interact in productive ways and not counterproductive ways, is mission critical. It requires building a positive culture that matches the values and goals of the company, and this in turn requires employees who work well within and bolster that culture.

This process begins with recruitment: Hiring is a key moment in constructing the culture of any organization. New employees bring their personalities, emotions, and habits with them, just as much as their skills and experience, and inevitably influence the company environment.

Traditional recruitment and hiring practices focus heavily on candidates' technical skills and knowledge, providing insight into how they'd fit into the company's *processes*. Too often, however, companies neglect to evaluate the people skills that help them interact successfully – missing how candidates would fit into the company's *culture*.

Personnel lacking a specific competency or knowledge can be trained, and even habitual behaviors can be revised to some degree. But to change an employee's

personality is likely to prove next to impossible. Teaching someone to be more of a team player or to have more competitive drive, for example, is much less straightforward than training them on tools or procedures.

Failing to recognize this leads to an all-too-common scenario: A company finds a prospective employee with the right expertise for a job and proven success elsewhere. The hiring managers snap them up – only to discover that their personal style clashes with the company. This kind of mis-hire due to lack of cultural fit wastes a lot of energy, time and money. It is better to foresee possible troubles in fit than to correct them afterward with much effort.

Truly agile organizations should focus more on the skills that help people interact, and less on technical skills. This is the first value of the Agile Manifesto: *"Individuals and interactions over processes and tools."* In order to transform an enterprise towards greater business agility, a paradigm shift in recruitment is crucial. This means recognizing that the human component is the most important factor in such transformation, and that interpersonal interactions constitute the most powerful energy an organization can harness to master future challenges.

"Individuals and interactions over processes and tools." -Agile Manifesto



To this end, we argue for proactively developing processes to bring in employees who will positively interact with and contribute to a successful environment. First and foremost, this means working to hire individuals who will fit and succeed within the organizational culture (culture fit). Second, and more difficultly, this can mean striving to bring in individuals who will help stretch that culture in positive directions (culture add).

While it is impossible to prescribe a one-size-fits-all solution, and hiring is fraught with significant variables and unknowns, this white paper presents research to

help enterprises revise recruitment to support the transformation towards greater agility. The paper examines frameworks for assessing organizational culture and for determining cultural goals, as well as tools that facilitate hiring for culture. These can equip enterprises to build environments that embody their values and contribute to sustainable success.

Our goal is to move from hiring resources to hiring personalities and finally to hiring people.

ASSESSING PERSONAL FIT

A central tenet of hiring for culture is that people have certain intrinsic motivations and character traits that are essentially unchanging.

Based on research into human desires, psychologist and author Professor Steven Reiss (Reiss, 2002) argued that all people are driven by their own unique mix of 16 basic motivations in life. According to Reiss, these are;

1. **Power** tells us whether an individual craves leadership or responsibility or would rather work in a service capacity.
2. **Independence** reveals how a person forms their relationships regarding autonomy or in association with other people.
3. **Curiosity** reveals the importance of 'knowledge' in a person's life, and why they want to acquire knowledge.
4. **Acceptance** shows who, or what a person uses to construct a positive self-image.
5. The strength of the basic desire of **Order** shows how much structure or flexibility a person needs in their life.
6. **Saving** has its evolutionary origin in the storing of supplies. The strength of this basic desire shows how important it is emotionally for a person to have possessions.
7. **Honor** reveals whether an individual seeks to remain true to their principles or is goal oriented.
8. **Idealism** considers the altruistic element of morality and reveals the importance of responsibility with respect to fairness and social justice.
9. **Social Contact** shows the importance of social acquaintances. Here, the quantity of contacts is significant.
10. **Family** reveals how strong the desire to care for others is (with regard to a person's own children).
11. **Status** is the desire either to be 'conspicuously different' from others in an elitist sense, or to be ordinary and like everyone else.
12. **Vengeance** is chiefly about comparing oneself to others. It includes on the one hand aggression and retaliation, and harmony and conflict-avoidance on the other.
13. **Romance** reveals the importance of sensuality in an individual's life. Besides sex, this desire includes all other aspects of sensuality, e.g. design, art, and beauty.
14. **Eating** seeks to determine the importance of eating in a person's life. How much does the pleasure of eating well contribute to a satisfying life?
15. **Physical Activity** reveals the importance of physical activity (at work or playing sport) for a satisfying life.
16. **Tranquility** can also be described as emotional stability. It identifies the importance of stable emotional relations for a satisfying life.

Everyone prioritizes these values differently. Their unique mix informs their individual personality.

Understanding candidates' characters is an essential part of evaluating their personal fit for a position. It allows us to choose the right person, rather than trying to *change* the wrong one – or, conversely, to match the candidate to the right role, team or situation.

If the company matches employees' values, they will deliver performance from within, drawing on their implicit as well as explicit knowledge and essentially getting to act in ways that come naturally for them (Reiss et al, 2017).

Good personal-cultural fit also creates an environment in which employees feel safe to give their best. People feel most comfortable and accepted in an atmosphere that matches their intrinsic characteristics, and they deliver their best results when they feel comfortable and accepted.

In this way, we can “*stop thinking about people working for companies and start making companies work for people*” in the words of Tim O’Reilly – all the while ensuring that employees do work for companies in their most effective way possible.

“Stop thinking about people working for companies and start making companies work for people” -Tim O’Reilly

ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Hiring for culture is much more than just assessing people, recruitment and on boarding. It also means understanding our organizational culture.

Let’s begin by defining culture – what it is, and what it is not.

Essentially, culture is the unspoken rules, assumptions and attitudes of a group. It is by nature shared and implicit. In other words, it’s not the collection of individual traits of group members and it’s not necessarily the written rules or code of conduct, either.

Culture can easily become self-reinforcing and resistant to change, as described by long-time University of Maryland Industrial and Organizational Psychology program head Benjamin Schneider (Groysberg et al, 218). The process is this: People are attracted to organizations that reflect their own characteristics; organizations are more likely to pick people that seem to fit in there; and those that don’t fit tend to leave.

Thus, we can move faster and faster from hiring *resources* to hiring *personalities* and finally to hiring *people*.

The list below describes recruitment and onboarding changes that support the transformation towards more agile businesses.

| Move away from | Move towards |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Technology | People |
| Hierarchy | Relationship Network |
| Employee | Partner |
| Repair | Prevention |
| Fear of failure | Psychological safety |
| One-size-fits-all | Individuality |
| A workplace | A workplace “for me” |
| Uniformity | Diversity |

At the same time, culture is far from static. It constantly evolves through the evolution of group membership and the complex pattern of actions and reactions that make up intra-group exchanges. It’s influenced by leadership and frontline employees, and as such is not simply controlled by top-down management. It is *shaped* and *influenced*, rather than *set* or *decreed* by *policy*.

In order to hire for culture, leaders must evaluate their organization’s culture and determine what cultural evolution best supports the company’s goals. This allows hiring managers to strive to hire personnel who fit into the existing and/or desired culture.

In the Harvard Business Review (Jan/Feb 2018), authors Boris Groysberg, Jeremiah Lee, Jesse Price and J. Yo-Jud Cheng offer a useful framework for assessing culture. They classify organizational cultures into eight styles that fall along two scales. One of the scales rates an organization’s attitude toward human interactions from highly independent (focus on autonomy and

contest) to highly interdependent (focus on integration and group effort). The other rates the organization's response to change from those that focus on stability (*predictability and status quo preservation*) to those that emphasize adaptability (*innovation and diversity*).

Refer to the graphic for the eight styles of culture, each with their own pros and cons suited to different situations and outcomes.

Any organization's culture and leadership may combine more than one of the styles. The authors caution that while each style has advantages and disadvantages, the *combination* of styles in an organization can be positive or negative: Some combinations have the potential to conflict in ways that create confusion among staff, while others have the potential to reinforce one another to the point of stifling development.

Consequently, by using this framework, managers can:

- recognize and interpret their corporate cultural frame by evaluating its intentional and unintentional impact.
- determine which subcultures affect the performance score within the groups
- distinguish dissimilarities among legacy cultures during amalgamations and acquisitions.
- Promptly orientate new executives to the cultural framework that they are engaging in.
- Draft an inspiring culture and document the necessary transformations for it.
- Conceive the chances of an individual in lining up and contributing positive cultural changes



Caring: Focus on relationships and mutual trust.



Purpose: Focus on shared ideals and assist in achieving a greater purpose.



Learning: Focus on creativity and innovation.



Enjoyment: Focus on playfulness and spontaneity.



Results: Outcome-oriented.



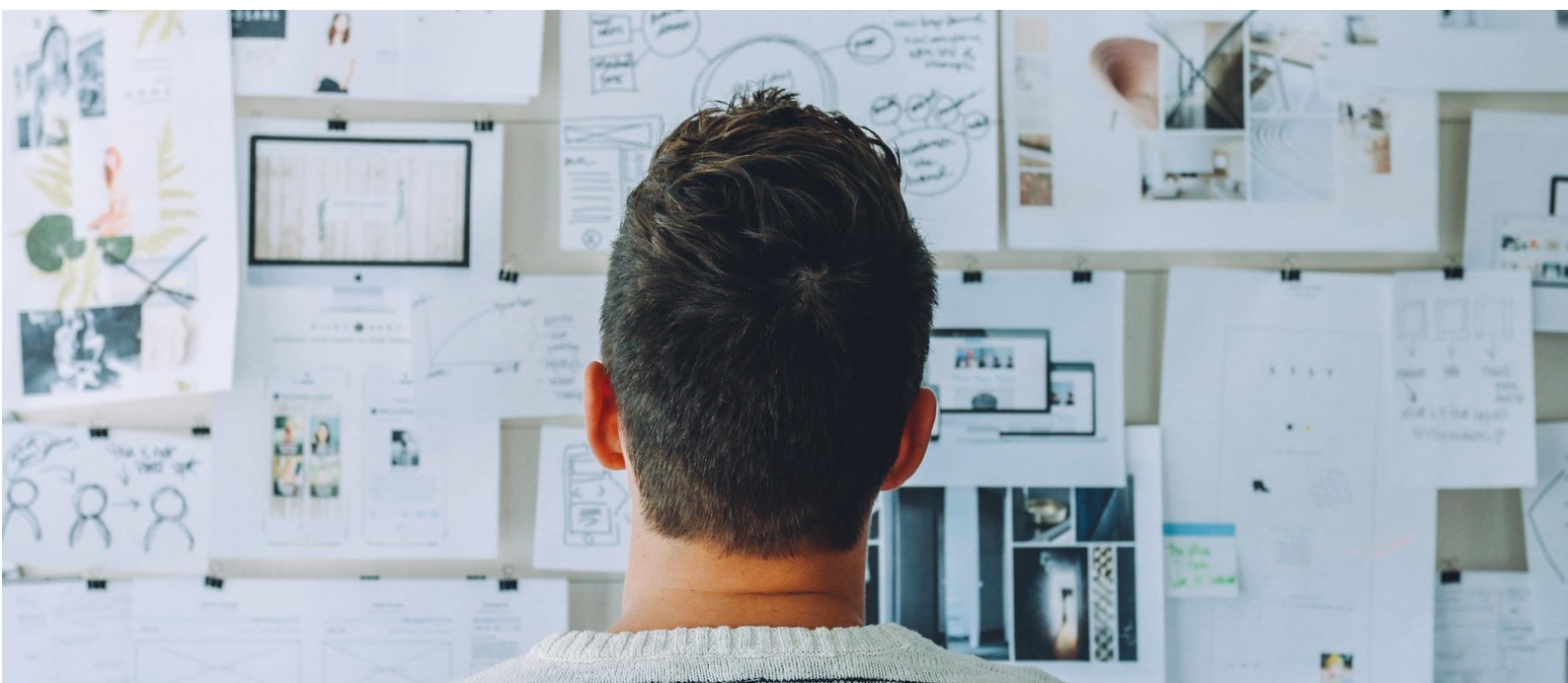
Authority: Competitive and focused on control and confidence.



Safety: Focus on advance planning and risk consciousness.



Order: Methodical; people play by the rules and strive to fit in.



CULTURE FIT AND CULTURE ADD

With a firm handle on current and desired organizational culture, leaders can proceed to hiring for culture. As mentioned above, this comprises two possible goals:

1. Minimize hiring mistakes and maximize success and productivity by hiring employees who fit with company culture – “**culture fit**”.
2. Shape a constructive company culture and drive growth by hiring employees who add to the company culture, including influencing its evolution in desired directions – “**culture add**”.

Hiring for *culture fit* means hiring people who reflect and share the core attitudes and values that make up the existing company culture (Grant, 2017). As discussed, this can help ensure both that employees work productively within the company and that they feel safe and accepted there.

However, critics warn that focusing exclusively on culture fit can stunt organizations, filling them with too many people who think the same. Besides limiting agility and potentially creating a destructive echo chamber, some even contend this can lead to discrimination against some candidates.

In fact, such discrimination would mean a misapplication of the hiring for fit concept – people with given organizational values (say, collaboration) can and should be found from widely varying backgrounds and experiences. The risks of over-homogeneity of style and groupthink, though, are very real and can be addressed via *culture add* (Maurer, 2018).

HOW TO HIRE FOR CULTURE

Now let’s delve into practices and tools that enable hiring for culture, whether culture fit or culture add.

To begin, leaders and recruiters need to address some high-level questions. These include:

- What values and attitudes make up the company’s (or team’s, department’s, etc.) current culture(s)? In assessing this, it may be useful to refer to the eight cultural styles defined above.
- Do the culture(s) identified support the company’s purpose and objectives?

Hiring for culture add means hiring people who will bring a wider diversity of values to the company – stretching and enriching the culture. Leadership may identify values the company culture is lacking and try to shape the culture in positive directions by hiring for culture add.

SHRM quotes Credera’s director of talent acquisition on how culture adds strengthen culture and support growth:

“Culture adds seed a resilient culture by challenging groupthink that can come from just hiring for fit ... If you want your company to continue to grow and evolve, your culture must grow and evolve along with it.” - Alex Moore, Director of Talent Acquisition, Credera

This said, it’s important to note that *culture add* can be challenging to execute; building culture is an arduous and long-term endeavor, not something that happens overnight.

So, what should hiring teams focus on, culture fit or add? The right mix will depend on the specifics of the organization and circumstances. But Wharton professor and organizational psychologist Adam Grant (Grant, 2017) argues that *fit* is most important during the start-up phase of an enterprise, while expanding companies will need to think past “fit.”

- What subcultures exist within the company?
- Are there cultural weaknesses that should be addressed?
- What cultural values and attitudes should the company look to add in order to maximize agility and sustainability?
- What underlying values and traits will allow candidates to succeed in this company? Which will allow them to fit into the current culture and/or shape the culture in positive directions?

Before even writing job descriptions for open positions, key stakeholders should address these topics. The answers will then inform recruitment and hiring. Furthermore, they can help craft a culture story or message to include in job descriptions – simultaneously better informing potential candidates and better honing the candidate pool (Mercer, 2017).

Next, hiring managers can craft a list of internal questions for use in evaluating individual candidates' personal fit. These may include:

- Can this candidate succeed in this company, job, team, or situation?
- If so, *why* will they succeed here?
- Does this candidate have the inner potential to succeed and grow here?
- Will they develop in this environment?

RECRUITMENT TRAINING

The recruitment process doesn't occur in a vacuum. Besides outside influences that impact it, internal distractions can detract from its success. After all, managers' and teams' core responsibility is to achieve their business objectives. Recruitment often takes a backseat, especially when pressure is high or deadlines are tight. In many instances, hiring managers/teams consider recruitment a burden and stressor.

To counteract this, HR and leadership should provide recruitment training that highlights its importance and emphasizes hiring for cultural goals. These programs should establish a shared process and standardized interview techniques.

HIRING FOR PEOPLE SKILLS

Once the hiring team establishes what values and traits it's looking for in a new hire, it needs to determine how to assess those attributes among candidates. At the same time, it's important that the team take certain measures to minimize or negate unconscious biases.

Let's take a look at some of the tools and techniques that support hiring for culture.

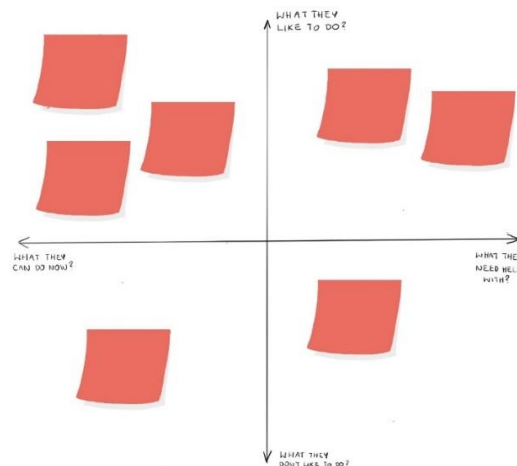
First, and most fundamental, is interview technique. Leading thinkers (Zappos insights, accessed 2019) in the field promote the use of structured interviews, rather than unstructured ones. They argue that unstructured interviews are not evidence-based and that unconscious biases tend to permeate the process, which can lead to bad hiring choices. For this reason,

successful hiring for culture employs a structured and standardized interview process.

To assess the personality and values of a candidate, employers can use tools like the Emotional Culture Deck designed by New Zealand leadership firm, riders & elephants. This tool allows candidates to express how they would like to feel at work (what emotions make them successful) and how they don't want to feel at work (what a toxic culture looks for them). Their answers can spark a conversation about candidates' values.

To assess candidates' unique personalities, employers can also use the Reiss Motivation Profile (RMP) – a diagnostic tool that examines each individual's unique mix of the 16 human motivations defined by Steven Reiss and described above. Unlike some personality assessment instruments on the market, the RMP addresses the individual's personal "why," i.e. the underlying origin of their behavior. This allows for a matching of culture and intrinsic underlying values, recognizing that outside motivation of an individual works best if it matches their intrinsic values. If, on the other hand, an incentive is set that conflicts with the individual's intrinsic values, it will at best fail to motivate and at worst demotivate the person.

Another tool is "Career Forecast" by Jason Tice (Tice, 2018). This exercise asks candidates to sort the role expectations on two axes: Along the vertical axis, they place the tasks and responsibilities they like closer to the top, and the ones they dislike closer to the bottom. Along the horizontal axis, to the left, they put the tasks and responsibilities they already know how to do. To the right, they put those they don't know how to do and need help with. This generates a two-dimensional understanding of the person's preferences and current skills, illuminating what kind of support and environment they would need if they joined the company. Below is a sample output from this exercise.



Career Forecast Matrix

In all of these evaluations, there is no right or wrong answer. Rather, each should offer a way to have an honest conversation about employee and employer values, attitudes and expectations.

Other tools worth considering include Weirdly, a web-based platform for assessing candidates' people skills and alignment with company values via a customised quiz, and software tools like Koru, Pymetrics and Plum.

CONCLUSION

This whitepaper is a research-based contribution to the ongoing and important conversation around recruitment within the business agile community. It is intended to jumpstart discussion about, and to support changes within, the current hiring processes.

Recruitment is the first step in the employee journey. This is the moment when the future employee starts building their understanding of the company's culture, as well as the moment when the company decides who they invite to co-create their culture.

From the moment a person is hired, they start contributing to the culture by adding their individual values, personality and behaviors. Therefore, when designing the recruitment process, organizations need to start putting more emphasis on people skills, culture, personalities, emotions, goals and values. Building on the findings from this whitepaper, companies can finally start making recruitment more human and humane.

While we recommend a high-level approach and guiding principles, as well as presenting sample tools

Each of these tools offers the benefit of reducing the influence of human biases, relying instead on artificial intelligence to predict the outcome of hiring a given candidate. AI will play an increasingly important role in assessing candidates' people skills, according to LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report, and some companies, including Citibank, are already relying on it.

and techniques, we understand that every company is different and operates in a different context. Therefore, we do not attempt to recommend one solution that can work for everyone. Rather, we emphasize certain concepts and questions that can lead to organizational self-reflection and a better pinpointing of organizational identity. This in turn can yield higher employee engagement and improved overall culture.

Industries are changing at an unprecedented speed, creating constant demand for new skills and new ways of working. Furthermore, the rising complexity of business is further widening the skill gap, requiring the up-skilling or re-skilling of entire workforces, as well as a war for talent.

With change being the new default for business, we must provide organizations with the tools to master transformation through a focus on its most important building block – people.

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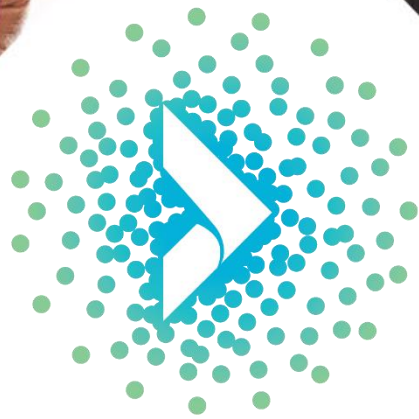
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