

# The Value of Hiring for Team Fit

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**W**hen assessing job candidates, hiring managers are often analytical in matching the candidate to the requirements of the job. These managers also tend to have a strong intuitive sense of what sort of person will best fit the organization. However, when it comes to matching candidates to a specific existing team for which they are being considered, hiring managers generally treat this as something of an afterthought; an analytical approach to getting team fit right is rare. But when success hinges on the tight integration of the new hire with an existing group, the ability to assess team fit in a disciplined way is invaluable.

Team fit is more important for some organizations than for others. For companies such as Procter & Gamble and Chevron, with long traditions of hiring college graduates who then remain with the company for many years, neither fit to the entry-level job nor fit with the initial team is as important as organizational fit. These kinds of companies look to hire capable people with the competencies to adapt and learn how to succeed in many jobs, with many teams, over many years.

When hiring for jobs in which the new person will be mainly an individual contributor (as is the case with many sales, legal, and accounting jobs), team fit again should be a secondary factor. In these instances it is probably not worth making the investment in a special analysis of team fit.

However, in many jobs—such as working in a programming team, a product development team, or a leadership team—results are not just the sum of individual work but depend on the collective effort of a group of individuals. When one person's work is dependent on that of other people or when a group of people with varying knowledge, skills, and expertise is needed, team fit can be a critical factor. In these cases having a great team is more important than having great individual employees. This is where hiring for team fit becomes critical.

One thing that hiring managers who want to focus on team fit can do is to look for team players—good listeners who are flexible and get along with a variety of people. The generic competencies of team players are a good starting point as hiring criteria for team fit, but hiring managers can go much further. Namely, they can analyze the team using a framework based on values, competencies, and personalities. Such a group-level analytical framework can provide insights that will result in better hires.

## SIMILAR VALUES

Management consultants tend to advise organizations to assemble teams with members who have a diversity of skills, expertise, and perspectives. This, however, is not always the best course of action. In some areas, organizations should look to hire for similarity. One such area is values.

A group-based analytical framework can put some structure into understanding values. One such framework is the Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI), developed by Hogan Assessment Systems. MVPI is a personality inventory that reveals a person's core values, goals, and interests. Results indicate which type of position, job, and environment will be most motivating and satisfying for individual employees. The MVPI identifies people's core values—what people want rather than how they typically behave—in ten areas:

- Recognition: responsiveness to attention, approval, and praise
- Power: desire for success, accomplishment, status, and control
- Hedonism: orientation toward fun, pleasure, and enjoyment
- Altruism: desire to help others and contribute to society
- Affiliation: desire for and enjoyment of social interaction
- Tradition: dedication, strong personal beliefs, and obligation
- Security: need for predictability, structure, and order
- Commerce: interest in money, profits, investment, and business opportunities
- Aesthetics: need for self-expression and concern for the look, feel, and design of work products
- Science: quest for knowledge, research, technology, and data

When it comes to values, birds of a feather flock together, and people who find their core values at odds with those of other members of the team

are likely to quit the team. People whose core values diverge too much don't gel into a team, conflict gets personal, and turnover becomes a problem. The group is also less effective because members disagree philosophically and often lack the trust needed for productive dialogue and debate.

David Winsborough, a New Zealand-based organizational performance consultant, points out that team members with similar values get up to speed faster because the commonality of values makes for fewer disagreements and misunderstandings. Winsborough's work shows that team members whose values are more congruent report better team performance—so, at least in the perception of the team members, the team is working better. Members of teams with congruent values also enjoy being part of the team more than do members of teams whose values are divergent. In addition, conflict tends to be more productive in teams with congruent values; it is more focused on substantive, technical, or professional differences and is less likely to cause interpersonal friction.

Of course, when it comes to people there are always situations where the right thing to do is precisely the opposite of normal best practice. When a team is stuck or needs to adapt to disruptive change, then hiring someone with a contrary set of values may be the best approach. Bringing new values to a team can introduce the tension that's needed to move forward.

However, whether you are hiring for shared values to get a smoothly running team or for divergent values to shake things up, the message remains the same: analysis of team values is an important tool in recruiting when teamwork is a key driver of performance.

## DIFFERENT STROKES

Dave Crisp, president and CEO of Crisp Strategies, which specializes in

developing better leadership and people management practices, has noted that lists of competencies required for a leader almost invariably exceed what one could possibly find in any single individual. However, rather than tossing out the overly long competency model, Crisp views it another way—all the competencies are needed, but because they are too much for one individual, one must look across the team. In this case the right thing to do is to hire for difference so that together the team members will cover the full list of competencies.

Hiring for team fit in terms of competencies is fairly straightforward and easy for hiring managers: simply identify the competencies the team should have, check which ones the team is weak in, then hire to fill the gaps. If a team working internationally is short on cross-cultural awareness, for instance, then hiring for that competency should be an important criterion. However, unless the recruiting department takes the time to do an analysis of the competencies present on the team there will be no way of knowing which competencies are most needed. Cross-cultural awareness may appear on the job description but so will a dozen other competencies and characteristics, and without a team analysis the importance of supplying that particular competency to that particular team will be missed.

Some hiring managers look not only for competencies but also for personality traits. It can be helpful to have a diversity of personalities on a team. You want dominant people to lead the *forming* stage of team development; extroverts to inspire the energetic *storming* phase, in which different ideas compete for consideration; people high in patience to help the team through the difficult *norming* phase, in which team members adjust their behavior to one another as they develop work habits that make teamwork seem more fluid and natural; and people high in conformity to get on with the work in the *performing* stage, in which team members

find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively.

There are dozens of tools for assessing personality traits such as dominance and conformity. The key in team staffing is to rely on tools that are supported by research and are appropriate for use in the workplace, such as the California Psychological Inventory, the Hogan Personality Inventory, the NEO Personality Inventory, and the Drake P3. These assessment tools can help hiring managers effectively match the behavioral tendencies of individuals with the behavioral requirements of specific positions and team roles.

## WHAT TO DO

Hiring managers should have access to and experience with tools that assess values, competencies, and personality traits. They should assess where teamwork is critical in their organizations so they will know when they need to deploy these tools to hire for team fit.

The extra analysis required to assess team fit is not necessary for all hires. However, there will be cases where such analysis is every bit as important as fit to job or fit to organization. The key is to identify those positions that are part of a true team effort, where effectiveness is more than the sum of the individual contributions. When a work group's effectiveness depends on a mix of skills, expertise, and perspectives and the team members depend on one another, team fit should be part of the staffing decisions. ✍

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