EBOOK

The consultant's guide to making better hires

A talent optimization approach to hiring

As a consultant, you're a trusted source of information for your clients. They look to you for help with their organizational issues—including resolving people problems.

What if you had a data-driven process you could walk your clients through to help them make better hires? What kind of value would that provide to your clients?

That's what a talent optimization approach to hiring is: A data-driven approach to making the right hire. This process increases your clients' odds of placing the right people in open roles.

There are four activities that comprise the hire aptitude of talent optimization:

1. Define and communicate job requirements.
2. Equip your leaders to land top talent.
3. Predict new team dynamics.
4. Determine candidate cultural fit.

Let's look at each in practice.

Define and communicate job requirements.

To attract the right candidate, your client's job descriptions need to speak to both the behavioral requirements and the skill set needed for success in a role. The best way to determine this is by having your client work with multiple stakeholders to define what the position requires, so they can translate that information into a job posting.

Have your clients follow this three-step process to define and communicate job requirements:

1. Work to solicit stakeholder input.

One of the reasons hiring managers put the wrong people in roles is they didn't understand the job requirements. It's best for your client to solicit the input of a variety of stakeholders, including the hiring manager, other senior leaders in the department, team members who will interact with this person, and any incumbents.

2. Help them define the job.

Your client should ask stakeholders to focus on objective job characteristics. These can be determined using questions such as:

- What are the most important and frequent activities?
- What behavioral style and temperament is most naturally suited to do this type of work?
- How quickly will the successful individual need to learn new information and skills?
- How flexible and adaptable will the person need to be in this role?
- What specific knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed?

Have your client review responses with key stakeholders to get a well-rounded perspective of what the ideal candidate would be like. Before publishing their job description, they should ensure all stakeholders are in agreement with the role as outlined.

3. Create a compelling job advertisement.

Help your client customize their job ad to their organization and the position available. Have them include the job tasks and activities stakeholders deemed necessary for the role, as well as behavioral styles, adaptability, and other characteristics required for success.

Remind your client to consider word choice. Do the words they're using reflect their company's culture and core values? For example, if they use words like "team-oriented" or "collaborative," candidates will get the perception that the business values these traits. However, if they're looking for someone independent and assertive, they may be unintentionally turning ideal candidates away.

Similarly, pay close attention to gendered wording and exclusive language in your client's job ad. The use of words traditionally associated with masculinity (i.e., leader, dominant, competitive) can unintentionally impact whether or not women apply for a role.

Equip your leaders to land top talent.

It’s critical to train hiring managers to use people data in the hiring process to make smart, objective hiring decisions. Here’s how you can support them in doing that:

1. Help them assemble an interview team.

Interviews should never be conducted solo or in a silo. Help your client establish an interview team that’s composed of the hiring manager, teammates who will work with the new hire, an incumbent (if available), and an impartial employee who can interview for culture fit. Once the team is assembled, help your client avoid redundancy by outlining exactly what each member of the interview team should cover with the candidate.

2. Have them collect objective data about candidates.

When recruiting candidates, taking a talent optimization approach means going beyond the traditional resume and work history. Ideally, your client should make an effort to gather the following data from their candidates:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Education
- Behavioral profile
- Cognitive ability
- Values

They can collect this additional information through behavioral, cognitive, skills, or values assessments administered after the initial screening. (Note: If you’re not already a PI Certified Partner, you can grow your business with a high-margin subscription offer by partnering with PI. Learn more here.)

3. Assist in prioritizing which candidates to interview.

After your client has collected data about their job applicants, help them rank candidates based on how well they fit the job requirements and your client's company culture. If a candidate is not a behavioral or cognitive fit for the role, help your client weigh the pros and cons of making that hire.

This ranking process allows your client to focus their time on the candidates who have the strongest likelihood of being a good fit for the role, the team, and the organization. Having your client use people data to create an interview shortlist also reduces unintentional hiring biases, leveling the playing field for all candidates.

4. Give guidance in conducting candidate interviews.

Have your client use the information they collected about each applicant to guide the questions they ask. For example, if a position requires highly repetitive tasks and a candidate's behavioral style suggests they may prefer more variety, advise your client to ask questions around the discrepancy. A sample question might be: Tell me about a position where you worked on repetitive tasks. What were they? How did you approach them?

During this time, your client should also interview for cultural fit (explained more in depth below).

Predict new team dynamics.

In the hiring process, it's important for your client to consider how team dynamics will change with the addition of a new team member. If they hire a new employee whose personality doesn't mesh with the existing team, it can cause tension and conflict—ultimately leading to lower performance.

1. Help them understand how a candidate compares to existing team members.

Taking a talent optimization approach to hiring means taking a data-driven look at candidates and considering how they match up to the available role, the existing team, and the organization's culture.

Ask your client: Is the candidate wired to behave the same as the rest of the team? Or is there something about their personality that might clash with others on the team? For example, if they're introducing a process-oriented individual to a marketing team that's predominantly driven to move quickly, conflict may arise.

2. Predict changes to current team dynamics.

Adding a new team member creates a new team. This new addition can create changes in how work is assigned or completed, how processes are developed and enforced, and how communication is delivered and received.

Help your client look at the current team dynamic as compared to the behavioral style of the candidate. Ask them: Would the candidate add to the existing dynamic or clash with it? For example, if your client has a highly collaborative team and the candidate is independent and assertive, that could create issues.

3. Make an informed decision.

Just because a candidate isn't perfectly aligned with the existing dynamic on the team doesn't mean they're not a good candidate. Support your client in thinking through how each person might enhance—or disrupt—the team's work so they can make an informed decision.

For example, if the team in question moves quickly to get product out the door but often forgets minor details, it could benefit from the addition of a person who's more process-oriented and can help formulate and implement a system to help alleviate those errors of action while simultaneously allowing the team to continue moving quickly.

On the other hand, if your client's team is wired to protect against risk and they're trying to launch a new product, a new hire with the same risk-averse wiring would likely not move the needle any more than the existing team and only exacerbate the problem.

Determine candidate cultural fit.

World-class companies design the cultures they need to execute their business strategies. This is why ensuring a candidate's cultural fit with the organization is of the utmost importance.

1. Your client should ensure candidate fit with the organization.

Evaluating a candidate's cultural fit needs to be explicit and purposeful. It can't be based on gut feelings and subjective decision making. In order for your client to interview against their company's culture, their organizational culture needs to be designed, documented, and communicated.

Each member of your client's interview team should be prepared to evaluate candidates based on their embodiment of the organization's core values, guiding principles, and rewarded behaviors. To take it one step further, your client can add a person on the interview team whose sole purpose is to evaluate culture fit at the deepest level.

2. Make sure your client sets candidate expectations regarding culture.

A strong and positive company culture can be a selling point when it comes to getting candidates to accept an offer.

In addition to being a factor in a candidate's decision to take the offer, when your client interviews against their cultural standards, it sets the expectation that upholding the company culture is expected and rewarded.

Interested in learning more about talent optimization?

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