EBOOK

The guide to making better hires with talent optimization

A talent optimization approach to hiring

Making the right hire is critical to your organization's success. Turnover can cost your organization anywhere from 50% to 200%, [depending](#) on whether a hire is entry-level or a seasoned executive.

When you take a talent optimization approach to hiring, you increase your odds of placing the right people in open roles. It's all about following a step-by-step recipe with the goal of aligning your talent strategy with your business strategy.

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 job description needs to speak to both the behavioral requirements and the skill set needed for success in the role. The best way to determine this is by working with multiple stakeholders to define what the position requires, then translating that information into a job posting.

Follow this three-step process to define and communicate job requirements:

1. 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 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. Define the job.

Ask stakeholders to focus on objective job characteristics. Use 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?

Be sure to review responses collectively to get a well-rounded perspective of what the ideal candidate would be like. Before publishing your job description, ensure all stakeholders are in agreement with the role as outlined.

3. Create a compelling job advertisement.

Your job ad should be customized to your organization and the position available. Include the job tasks and activities stakeholders deemed necessary for the role as well as behavioral styles, adaptability, and other characteristics required for success.

When creating a job posting, consider your word choice. Do the words you're using reflect your company culture and core values? For example, if you use words like "team-oriented" or "collaborative," candidates will get the perception that your business values these traits. However, if you're looking for someone independent and assertive, they may not resonate with this type of company culture.

Similarly, pay attention to gendered wording and exclusive language. 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 to do that:

1. Assemble the interview team.

Interviews should never be conducted solo or in a silo. Create 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, reduce redundancy by outlining exactly what each member of the interview team should cover with the candidate.

2. Collect objective data about candidates.

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

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

You can collect this additional information through behavioral, cognitive, skills, or values assessments you administer after the initial screening.

3. Prioritize which candidates to interview.

After you've collected your data, rank candidates based on how well they fit the job requirements and your company culture. Regardless of how well a candidate's experience matches your job requirements, if they're not a behavioral or cognitive fit for the role, you may want to strike them from your interview list.

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

4. Conduct candidate interviews.

Use the information you've collected about each applicant to guide the questions you ask. For example, if a position requires highly repetitive tasks and a candidate's behavioral style suggests they may prefer more variety, 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, you'll also want to interview for cultural fit (explained more in depth below).

Predict new team dynamics.

In the hiring process, it's important to consider how team dynamics will change with the addition of a new team member. If you 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. 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.

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 you'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.

Consider the current team dynamic and the behavioral style of the candidate. Would the candidate add to the existing dynamic or clash with it? For example, if you have a highly collaborative team and your 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. Consider how each person might enhance—or disrupt—the team's work and 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 team is wired to protect against risk and you'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. 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 to interview against your culture, your organizational culture needs to be designed, documented, and communicated.

Each member of your interview team should be prepared to evaluate candidates based on their embodiment of your organization's core values, guiding principles, and rewarded behaviors.

To take it one step further, you can add a person on the interview team whose sole purpose is to evaluate culture fit at the deepest level.

2. Set candidate expectations regarding culture.

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

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

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