



CLEARING THE HIRING HURDLES: ENSURING TRIPLE FITS

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Abstract

This concept paper discusses the dire need to hire right talent in a competitive environment, and the difficulties organizations have to face in doing so. The author proposes hiring to be considered as match-making and to ensure triple fits, namely task-talent fit, person-position fit and individual-institution fit. The rationale for each fit with requisites from HR professionals and organizations are also discussed. Citing previous work done locally, the author cautions the decision makers on the rush and urgency that might undermine the accuracy. The paper also argues for the need to use right tools such as a well-designed assessment center to assess the triple fits in the proper manner.

Key Words : Hiring, task-talent fit, person-position fir, individual institutional fit

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive world, people have become a cutting edge factor. Is it just any people or *right* people? Hiring right person to the right job is important in order to achieve right results. I would compare hiring to matchmaking. As much as two people get connected together through matchmaking, recruiting right people needs committed attention. There are triple matches needed to be fulfilled in ensuring the right hiring to take place. Let's see what they are with emphasis on the Sri Lankan context.

Dessler (2008) notes that the 'workforce, how it is organized and managed, is an increasingly important source of competitive advantage'. The old adage "people are your most important asset" is wrong (Collins, 2001). He claims that rather than "people", it is the "right people" that make up the best asset of an organization. Crucial challenge is *how*.

Right Hiring

As Hacker (1998) observes, a poor hiring decision can cost as much as five times the employee's salary. Quoting the US Department of Labour, she estimates that a bad hiring decision equals 30 per cent of the employee's first year's earning potential. In Sri Lanka too, I have personally



come across several situations, where companies had to pay badly in the wake of wrong person being on-board.

It is pertinent to mention what Ogilvy (1988), as an advertising tycoon, had to say with respect to hiring: "If each of us hires people who are smaller than we are, we shall become a company of dwarfs, but if each of us hires people who are bigger than we are, we will become a company of giants". In order to hire people with potential, the hiring process has to be professionally designed and executed.

Matchmaking in Focus

As we are aware, matchmaking is commonly referred as the process of matching two people together, usually for the purpose of marriage. The word is also used in the context of sports and business.

In the case of business, terms such as "Business to Business (B2B)" matchmaking, Investor Matchmaking, Business Speed Dating and Brokerage Event are used. In essence, real meeting between business people is in focus. Take a trade fair organization for an example. It uses matchmaking for value creation in providing a meeting point.

A "job" can be defined as "a set of closely related activities carried out for pay" (Dessler, 2008).

A person is required to perform a job according to the expectations. Ensuring proper fit is of utmost importance (Sekiguchi, 2004). Hence, hiring is one of the critical people functions of any organization (Collins, 2001). In the traditional jargon, it is known as recruitment and selection. Recruitment deals with getting enough applicants as a potential pool. Selection deals with picking the best from the pool. That's where the matchmaking becomes significant.

Triple Fits

I would argue that there are triple fits you need to ensure in selecting the right candidate to a job. For me, they are T – T fit, P – P fit and I – I fit. Let's discuss what they are.

T – T Fit

This is the first fit that a recruiter would look into. It stands for matching Tasks with Talent. Any key task requires specific talent. Take a sales job for an example. Tasks associated with meeting customers require the talent of caring communication. Talent is now more often used as a bundled word for knowledge, attitude and skills. Ulrich et al (2009) referred to it as a combination of competence, commitment and contribution. Whichever the way you describe, there is a dire need of it.



There is an acute gap between *required* talent and raw talent. The market is abundant with raw talent, especially with school leavers. Are they geared to a demanding job in a target-driven environment? Sadly, the answer is no. We teach complex subject matter but not how to gain confidence. Job-orientation in the academic courses has been recognized as important only of late. That is the way to overcome talent drought.

In the global scenario, we have often heard about “winning the war for talent”. According to Michaels *et al* (2008), it is a term coined by Steven Hankin of McKinsey way back in 1997. As their book describes, there is an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees. They stress the need to have a set of superior Human Resource processes, but a mindset that emphasizes the importance of talent to the success of organizations.

Screening of applicants using Curriculum Vitae (CV) / application forms is one key action in this respect (Cushway, 2001). Effective screening of applicants using CVs or an application form is considered to lead to effective selection. As Dharmasiri *et al* (2008) observe, considerable improvements are required in the local scenario with respect to the rush and urgency as opposed to accuracy.

P–P Fit

What I mean here is the fit between Person and the Position. As observed by Searle (2003), this is a traditional foundation for employee selection. In fact, it goes beyond the talent level. Overall fit with regards to the personality of the individual and the key expectation of the position he/she is supposed to hold.

Let's be clear about personality. The term originates from the Latin word, *persona*, which means a mask (www.wikipedia.org). In ancient Latin theatres, a mask was used to represent a character. In other words, it is what you show to the world, by way of your words and deeds. As Robbins & Judge (2007) describe it, personality is the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others.

There are a variety of ways of looking at personality. It is the particular combination of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral response patterns of an individual. Researchers tend to define it as enduring, distinctive thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that characterize the way an individual adapts to the world. The key highlight here is the adaptation. From the womb to the tomb, it is a journey of adaptation, with constant interaction with the surroundings.

The point I want to make here is simple. Different personalities suit different positions. An outgoing, talkative and a friendly person would be more suited for a sales position, whereas a quiet, thinking and analytical person would be better in handling a laboratory position.

Key challenges for HR practitioners is to determine what type of a personality is associated with a candidate and also what type of a personality is ideally required by a specific position.



Well-developed tools associated with psychometric testing can be very handy in this context.

I – I Fit

The final fit is between the Individual and the Institution. Essentially it checks the fit between the prospective candidate and the “surroundings”. It can be the culture, climate or the overall style of management. As I have seen many times high performers in one setup would end up being lousy performers in another setup. This is sad but significant, in ensuring the long term wellbeing of people.

First key element here is the culture. Organizational or corporate culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been articulated but shape the ways in which people behave and things get done. In a more detailed manner, Schein (2010) defines culture as follows:

“A pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration- that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein, 2010: 7)

Stemming from culture, there appears the more visible element, climate. It refers to those aspects of the environment that are consciously perceived by organizational members. Hence, climate is something people see, hear and feel. That is why we see a difference when we enter a hospital, police station or a restaurant. In summary, climate is what we see and feel when we enter an organization, whereas, culture is something much deeper as bedrock.

What is important here is the need of prospective candidate to appreciate the institutional culture. What one can do in a multi-national corporation might not be possible in a family-owned business. Same gulf exists between private and public sectors. I have seen people who opted to work in non-governmental charity organizations have a higher sense of humanity with committed service in mind. It might be the same with a brilliant management trainee joining a rapidly expanding global network. The obvious sign is the need to ensure Individual – Institutional match.

Ensuring Triple Fits

A properly designed assessment centre can be one solid way to ensure all three fits. It typically employs a variety of techniques and multiple observers in a closed setting to evaluate candidates. Key challenge is to design the centre to cover all three matches. Peters *et al.* (1998) state that the interview remains the main method of assessing the fit.. Maurer (2006) shows how situational interviews can be used to assess engineering applicant’s fit to work group, Job and organizational requirements. The question is whether it is adequate.



T –T match is the easiest to assess, provided you identify what talent is exactly required by the task. A process where candidates are given a set of questions to answer, situations to analyze or activities to perform would give a clear idea about where the candidate would stand.

P - P match can be done by a more in depth analysis using personality-type diagnosing instruments such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). One challenge is to clearly identify what type of personality is required for the position. A sad local scene is that companies heavily investing on psychometric testing, without getting the best use of the results obtained.

I – I match can be found by a good set of interview questions that would assess the attitude of candidates. Particularly, referring to “what-if” scenarios show-casing organizations’ real issues would be a smart move. Case study analysis can also be handy to find the right fit.

Conclusion

Sri Lankan organizations can enhance their hiring professionalism by way of ensuring the triple fits. Such an endeavour requires clarity and commitment. Dharmasiri et al (2008) observe that effective testing of applicants has to be strengthened with the creative selection of suitable methods. They also state that preparation for job interviews is of high importance which goes much beyond the reading of a CV few minutes prior.

Ensuring the triple fits with regard to hiring will pave the way not only for higher organizational performance but also for better employee satisfaction.

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