



the importance of CULTURAL FIT

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MAKING A BAD hiring decision can be expensive in both time and financial cost, as John Hackett explains.

When looking to recruit a new employee, our clients will always convey to us a list of specific skills and experience that they seek. Increasingly, they are also focusing on a prospective employee's personality traits, work style and their individual attitudes to factors such as teamwork, risk taking and flexibility in working hours.

Research shows that while it is still important to identify a future employee based on their skills and experience, also assessing the cultural fit between an individual and the organisation is a valuable strategy that can help produce better outcomes in hiring decisions. In fact, there is strong evidence to suggest that cultural fit has a direct effect on an organisation's success and profitability.

So what is cultural fit? The culture of an organisation comprises individual personalities and experiences of employees and the resulting behaviours formed by them as a group. It includes work methods employed, the team orientation of an organisation and its management style. Cultural fit is the compatibility between individual and organisational values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

An increasing number of employers are realising that even though a candidate's knowledge, work experience and skills are important in ensuring their initial success, in reality these factors do become outdated as responsibilities and work content change and as the individual develops their skills and expertise on the job. On the other hand, an individual's values, beliefs and attitudes are difficult to change and it is equally true that work cultures do not tend to change significantly over time. As such, cultural fit is very hard to foster between an individual and an organisation - the fit between them is either there or it isn't. We've all heard the expression "they were like a square peg in a round hole". As a result, the level of cultural fit between a potential employee and an organisation can be a good determiner of whether the hiring decision will be a longer term success.

Poor cultural fit can result in low morale, decreased productivity, high staff turnover and dissatisfied clients and this can often be attributed to underlying flaws in the initial hiring process. In order to minimise these risks, employers need to begin with a detailed understanding of the position being filled, take the time to understand and identify the culture within their organisation and use appropriate tools to assess cultural fit when recruiting new employees.

Before employers begin the hiring process they should firstly think

about the kind of person who would succeed in the role, taking into consideration factors such as level of autonomy and teamwork required, whether the position requires a leader or a follower when interacting in a group situation, the level of decision-making power in the role, the kind of person who has succeeded (or failed) in this role in the past, etc. This will help them to determine the type of employee personality traits that will succeed in the specific position.

Employers equally need to assess, understand and agree on the culture of their organisation. This can be achieved by observing employees on the job – looking at how they interact with each other including management, considering how conflicts are resolved, how people express or don't express their emotions, how the physical work space is set up and presented, etc. Employers should ask employees for their input. Consider questions such as "How would you describe this organisation to others?", "What would you like to change?", "What kind of person would not succeed in this workplace?" and "What do you like the most about this organisation?"

Any job advertising needs to present a thorough, honest and realistic description of the organisation and the available position. This will help attract suitable candidates from the outset. By immediately revealing the organisation's culture and the particular dynamics of the role available, it allows candidates to make better informed decisions about whether they would be suitable for the position.

When interviewing potential employees, employers need to screen for cultural fit. Instead of just relying on "first impressions", prepare a list of appropriate motivational and behavioural questions that will focus on revealing cultural fit; for example, ask candidates what they would find desirable and undesirable in an ideal job and organisation, etc. Compare the candidate's answers with the profile you have already established on your organisation to determine how you are tracking in achieving a suitable fit. Also, consider panel interviews made up of colleagues and supervisors who can provide their input and other points of view.

Reference checking is also a crucial step in the process and the same questions you would ask of a candidate can be directed to a referee to re-confirm your view of the candidate's perceived cultural fit. As well, if appropriate, trial work periods on a temporary basis and pre-employment social get-togethers with staff can assist in the screening process.

If you would like any further assistance or advice regarding engaging temporary staff or would like to know about the temporary recruitment services we can provide, please contact Event Recruitment on (02) 9279 2019 for a discussion with one of our consultants.