

Hiring for cultural fit: Everything you need to know

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Hiring individuals for your organisation is not just about finding the right person who brings about results. It also involves finding the right person who fits into the culture of the organisation. According to research, 98% of employers and 97% of professionals agree that cultural fit between professionals and employers is essential. 81% of hiring managers believe that candidates are less likely to leave when working for an organisation where they are a good cultural fit and 85% believe that they will perform better at their job. Research also goes on to say that 73% of professionals have left a job because of poor cultural fit and 82% of professionals have worked for an organisation where they disliked the company culture.

Cultural fit is quickly becoming very popular among HR professionals, not just as a subject of discussion, but also as a concrete, credible substitute for the ‘gut feel element’ in hiring.

What is Cultural Fit?

There are two key areas that human resources consider when evaluating candidates for employment, these are Cultural fit and functional fit. Cultural fit is defined as the likelihood that a job candidate will be able to conform and adapt to the core values and collective behaviours that make up an organisation. Cultural fit is usually assessed in interviews through how the candidate answers open-ended questions like “Can you describe your ideal work environment for me?” The interviewer through the responses can decide whether or not the candidate will be able to thrive within the company’s culture. In large organisations, the interviewer’s subjective assessment can be further validated by making use of data gathered from more formal personality profile tests.

The concept of Culture also fit involves screening potential candidates to determine what type of cultural impact they would have on the organisation. This is based on the alignment of values, beliefs, and behaviours between the employee and employer. According to researcher Lauren Rivera in the popular New York Times article, *Guess Who Doesn’t Fit In at Work*, “The original idea [behind fit] was that if companies hired individuals whose personalities and values - and not just their skills - meshed with an organisation’s strategy, workers would feel more attached to their jobs, work harder and stay longer.”

Why is cultural fit important?

Research has found that 81% of hiring managers believe that candidates are less likely to leave when working for an organisation where they are a good cultural fit and 85% believe that they will perform better at their job. The following are reasons why cultural fit is essential in the workplace:

1. Staff Retention

Employees who are happy and pleased at work not only perform better, but they are also more likely to stay with the company for a longer amount of time, improving retention and productivity while lowering recruiting expenses, according to a scientific study. Given that we spend most of our time at work, it is essential for employees to feel happy and connected in the place they work. When employees are unhappy you are likely to encounter issues with staff retention and in some cases issues of presenteeism and absenteeism.

Cultural fit is the most important aspect of retaining employees. When employees do not align with the values of your organisation they will not be satisfied with their jobs, and this has the potential of creating a toxic work environment. In such cases, staff are likely to leave. A study by Amy L Kristof-Brown, Ryan D Zimmerman & Erin C Johnson (2005) on the subject revealed that employees who fit well with their organisation, coworkers, and supervisor had greater job satisfaction, were more likely to remain with their organisation, and showed superior job performance.

2. Employee Engagement

When employee's views align with those of the organisation for which they work, they are more likely to be loyal, work hard, and go above and beyond. People who work in professions that are a good fit for them are more self-assured and competent. Employee involvement at this level is crucial to a company's success.

3. Performance and Productivity

When the company culture is strong, and employees align with the values and goals of the organisation, employees are likely to be generally more productive. Poor company culture and employee cultural fit drain the performance and productivity of the organisation.

4. Cohesion

A team that works together and shares the same core values and goals functions better than a team with

disjointed priorities. In teams where the team members are committed and share the same values, professional and personal differences are much easier to resolve.

5. Communication

When values are aligned, employees naturally find it easier to communicate. Company culture is a powerful driver of business success. It is the key to employee engagement, performance and productivity. Employees who identify more with their company are happier, experience greater job satisfaction, are more committed, perform better and are more likely to stay with their organisation. That is why cultural fit is essential.

How to hire for cultural fit

Research shows that human capital has a direct impact on an organisation's financial performance. The people within an organisation can provide a competitive advantage—or a disadvantage. Therefore, making the proper hiring decisions is critical. According to Richard Boyd (Associate Director at Robert Walters), “Employers should not assume that finding someone who is a good cultural fit simply means recruiting professionals who are similar to their current staff. Finding new candidates who are a great cultural fit does not mean sacrificing diversity, but rather finding professionals from a range of backgrounds who share the values of your organisation. “

In an article by Forbes Magazine they highlight the following as key aspects to consider when hiring for Culture Fit:

1. Define your Culture

When hiring for Cultural Fit, it is essential as an organisation to first define your culture and the ideal qualities the ideal hire might possess. You need to think about your purpose, beliefs and behaviours, look beyond the jurisdictions of the role and focus instead on how this hire might also fit in with the ‘family’. Are there certain unique characteristics belonging to your family that may impact the person required to fill your next position?

2. Exploring individuals personality

Nowadays, most hiring processes include psychometric tests and competency assessments but some neglect the personality aspect. The recruiter needs to ensure they make use of the right tools when assessing personality as not all personality tests are accurate.

They can also be quite overwhelming for a professional who is passionate about working for you and concerned about selecting the wrong answer to an impossible question. They are at times misrepresented.

Aligning personalities during the hiring process does not only require online testing but rather an understanding of the characteristics, behaviours and cognitions of your employees, present and prospective and utilising them to ensure you have a great culture. Hence it is essential to make sure you consult a registered psychologist when considering making use of personality assessments when hiring for cultural fit.

3. Emotional intelligence

Another key aspect to consider is Emotional Intelligence, also known as Emotional Quotient or EQ. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to understand, use and manage your emotions in a positive way to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathise with others and defuse conflict. EQ is one of the most critical parts of the hiring process when recruiting especially for cultural fit.

Professionals may form a poor opinion of an idea at times based on data or a gut feeling but have to accept that they may not be a change catalyst and the wealth they are generating does not belong to them. They have to be trustworthy, able to communicate and often, manage conflict.

4. Cultural Fit vs Mirror image hiring

While Cultural Fit should play a pivotal role in the hiring process, assuming the candidate is qualified and competent, it should not offer a smokescreen for Mirror-Image hiring. Mirror image hiring is defined as the process in which the hiring manager recruits an individual based on their almost identical characteristics which can often be their qualities, thought-process, beliefs, education or culture.

There is an essential distinction between cultural fit and mirror image hiring. When hiring a professional based on their ability to fit perfectly into your organisation, you do so in an attempt to create a

successful workplace culture. You can best believe that the individual is aligned with your principles and is working towards the same goals as the organisation. Mirror-Image Hiring while not exclusive to, can often relate to a physical likeness, with many recruiting a ‘mirror-image professional. This not only hinders physical diversity efforts but a diversity of thought, key not just for an inclusive culture, but commercial success.

5. Competency vs qualifications

When hiring it is important to find individuals who are both competent and aligned to the organisation’s values and goals. You can use a meritocratic approach to find the most skilled, qualified and competent person for the job who is also able to fit perfectly into the culture of your organisation. Equally, you could find a perfect Cultural Fit hire who lacks in qualifications but has a desire to learn.

When hiring you do not have to sacrifice skill-set to make a Cultural Fit hire and equally, you do not have to hire the same type of person over and over again to ensure you find the right profile. They are not mutually exclusive so long as you stay open-minded and challenge your concept of the ideal hire.

According to Brent Gleeson (*the founder and CEO of TakingPoint Leadership, former Navy SEAL, globally recognized speaker, award-winning entrepreneur and the bestselling author of TakingPoint*), you can also incorporate fun ways to assess an individual’s personality to see if they fit with the organisation. He gives the following example as one fun assessment that you can make use of “Take them on a tour of the office. Let them sit in on a meeting or have them join you for a team lunch. Assess their comfort levels in different environments. If collaboration is a critical part of the company culture, ask them questions about how they like to work. Ask for specific examples and experiences.” Gleeson also goes on to say that it is important to ensure that you ask the right questions in the interview that are not related to one’s technical experience:

Why do you believe you are the best candidate to work here, outside of your technical expertise?

- *From what you have seen, how would you describe this company’s culture?*
- *How would you describe the culture of your previous workplace? How well do you believe you fit in?*
- *What’s most important to you about an ideal workplace environment?*

Case Study: Belron-Automotive

Here is a case study of an organisation that hires for culture fit and how they do it:

Belron makes use of the online platform Talent Rocket which allows them to search for candidates based on a specified cultural fit. Their recruitment process involves an assessment centre which includes a presentation, competency-based interview and a role play or group discussion, as well as online questionnaires which assess personality preferences. Candidates are also allowed to come into the business and meet current employees and are encouraged to meet staff from across all levels of the business. Successful applicants who secure a role with the company are given feedback on why they were selected to ensure that they join the organisation with confidence and a sense of belonging.

Cons for hiring for cultural fit

Hiring for cultural fit is meant to result in a diverse and effective workforce; however, when this isn't done effectively, it can do more harm than good to your organisation. According to SHRM, if hiring managers define culture fit in terms of personality traits, favouring certain job candidates because they "are friendly" or "have a good attitude," those managers hamper their organisation's ability to innovate because of its standardized workforce. They go further to indicate that "I'll know the right candidate when I meet him," they'll say. Or, "We didn't click. I don't think that candidate will fit our culture." Statements like these indicate that the hiring decision is based on a subjective assessment more than on the candidate's ability to deliver results.

While hiring for cultural fit can save organisations money in recruiting costs, it can also have the opposite effect when it's implemented poorly. If your organisation doesn't have a good understanding of the *reality* of its culture – which means how the company culture appears to employees, rather than what's outlined in your values and mission statement – you might find that your employees aren't as great a fit as you thought they would be.

Hiring an employee simply because they have similar values to your organisation is like hiring the same person repeatedly – cutting out a lot of the opportunity for diversity that creates a balanced and efficient company culture in the first place. In the age of technology, with so much information at our fingertips, it's easy for candidates to research your organisation to understand its values, and then imitate the qualities they believe you're looking for in the interview.

Conclusion

No matter how effective your organisation's recruitment tactics are, there's never a guarantee an employee will live up to expectations – even if they seem to be the perfect cultural fit. When hiring it is important to have balance. The ideal scenario would be a candidate who fits the culture and possesses the essential abilities. Unfortunately, finding and securing those people may be difficult. As a result, each candidate search is unique and necessitates an experienced team with a thorough grasp of the job description, required soft skills, team composition, and long-term objectives.

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