

WANT ENGAGED EMPLOYEES? HIRE ENGAGED EMPLOYEES

Considerations For Hiring To Shape Your Company Culture



THE SHORTCUT



There's a lot to be said for growing your own vegetables in the backyard. They're fresh, it's organic, gardening is fun, a sense of accomplishment.

On the other hand, there's a lot to be said for going to the corner grocery store and buying them, too.



So it may be with your company culture. Businesses—rightfully—spend much time and effort trying to **cultivate an environment of passion, purpose and engagement** for their employees, founded on a set of core values. It's necessary work; there are no shortcuts.

Except maybe one: You can make a point of hiring engaged, committed employees in the first place, and go from there.



Because building a vibrant culture doesn't begin with who's already within your four walls. It begins with whom you choose to bring into those four walls.

Sounds simple enough. Is it?

YES, YOU CAN SELECT FOR CULTURAL FIT

Nothing in employee engagement happens by accident.

With a careful, deliberate effort, you can identify and **hire candidates whose talents and attributes far transcend their resumes** and are a ready match for your business and its core values. Without that effort, your company culture and employee experience will build themselves—not necessarily to your liking.

This guide is designed to help you choose the right people for the right places. In the following pages, we'll discuss a number of considerations for hiring for cultural fit. One of them will be whether "hiring for cultural fit" is even an accurate description of the selection process.

(Spoiler: It probably isn't. More on that later.)



DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

Of course it does, and that's true even when leaving aside the well-known and well-documented positive effects of a robust culture.¹

Consider the question from another angle. You can use a turnover calculator or seek out other sources of information for determining the horrendous financial cost of backfilling misguided hires.² But what about the **effect bad hires can have on your company culture?**

No one likes working with people who are obviously poor fits for their companies, and no one likes companies that continually hire people who are obviously poor fits. Morale and productivity take a beating.³

It's a lot easier to erode a successful culture than it is to build one.

So yes, it's totally worth the effort. Let's take a look.



¹Gallup. How Employee Engagement Drives Growth. 2013. <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

²HR Exchange Network. What's the Real Cost of a Bad Hire? 2014. <https://www.hrexchangenetwork.com/hr-talent-aquisition/articles/what-s-the-real-cost-of-a-bad-hire>

³Society for Human Resource Management. Morale, Productivity Suffer From Bad Hires. 2015. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/morale-productivity-bad-hires.aspx>

THE FACE OF YOUR COMPANY

**Old saying alert:
People don't quit their jobs; they quit their managers. But it's none the less valid for being old.**

If you work for a company with a tremendous culture, but have the misfortune of reporting to a bad manager, sorry: **You work in a bad culture.** So far as you're concerned, that manager is the face of your company.

Every employee influences every other employee in the workplace, but your managers and leaders have far and away the greatest effect. That's why they're your most important hires, and require the most attention in the selection process.

But here's what makes that challenging. **Research by Gallup⁴ suggests that only 10 percent of employees have the necessary talent**—not traits, talent—to be effective leaders, so they're not likely to stroll into the office one morning. You'll need to seek them out.



The list of attributes to look for when hiring leaders is a long one, but in a cultural context here are two factors we suggest you zero in on:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

EQ concerns understanding individuals, in terms of relationship dynamics and also of communications. **Communication is critical, particularly in large organizations,** since goals are cascaded from the highest levels down. Managers with higher EQ scores will intuitively understand how their teams work, and how to best communicate with them.



FACTOR C

Command and control is rapidly fading in today's matrixed environment. **Recently developed at MIT, Factor C measures the dynamics of working in a group setting.**⁵ In short, it can be viewed as EQ for teams. Effective leaders in the future will need to possess elevated social perceptions to facilitate participation and collaboration within the group dynamic.



⁵MIT Center for Collective Intelligence. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/330/6004/686>

HIRING FOR NOW, AND NOT RIGHT NOW

Examine a typical business and you'll find that many, if not most, of the people holding leadership positions were not hired in as leaders.

It's a standard process: Excel at a task, get promoted to manage other people doing that task. Sometimes this works, and as you likely know... sometimes it doesn't.

When hiring, realize there's a good chance a candidate will fill multiple roles during his or her time with the company.

So even if you're not hiring for a leadership position, **assume that you are**, and look for attributes that will reliably serve your company and its culture regardless of role.



We believe these two factors are particularly important:

GENERAL MENTALITY ABILITY

Or, the extent to which people can apply their cognitive skills to problem solving. We've moved from a manufacturing to a service-oriented economy, so more and more problems deal with people, and they're more and more complicated. Good problem-solving abilities is a **skill set that will help any employee in any role.**

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

This isn't a skill, but a personality factor. When you consider whom you want working for your company—and whom you'd like to work with—in every case you'll want someone who always shows up and **does what he says he's going to do.**

If you can construct a workforce consisting of employees who are good problem-solvers with high degrees of reliability and trustworthiness, you'll be well on your way to having an outstanding corporate culture.



YOU ARE BIASED

It's OK. Everyone is when it comes to hiring.⁶
It's human nature. The key is recognizing it
and taking steps to guard against it.

On the face of it, a homogeneous culture can be a very good thing. Everyone on the same page, rowing the same direction. In time, it may not be such a good thing. **It's known as the Attraction/Selection/Attrition (ASA) model.**⁷

It proceeds like this. All your candidates will have researched your company, and will be attracted to organizations they believe resemble themselves. Your candidate slate will therefore already contain a degree of homogeneity. Then come the interviews, and **people are attracted to people who remind us of...us.** We're slanted towards candidates who look to be fine companions at company happy hours, and not necessarily towards those who may possess the talents and attributes the company actually needs.

This can become a big problem.



⁶Rivera, Lauren A. Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms. 2012. American Sociological Review. <http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/journals/ASR/Dec12ASRFeature.pdf>
⁷5researchnet.com. Attraction-Selection-Attrition. <http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/industrial-organizational-psychology/organizational-development/attraction-selection-attrition/>

HOW TO KILL YOUR OWN CULTURE

Hiring “people like me” is tricky business, because you can end up with a company full of like-minded and like-skilled people.

Those who aren't like-minded eventually feel uncomfortable and leave, creating more openings for...you guessed it. You may get the culture you think you want, but **there's a thin line between a homogeneous atmosphere and a suffocating one.** That's how you can kill your own culture.

This ASA model can be a particular problem for startup companies.⁸ In the early days, when certain skill sets and personalities are needed, employees are hired on that basis. The culture starts strong, but begins to weaken when the company moves past the startup stage. **The skills that served so well the first few years are not the skills needed for the challenges of a maturing company.**

One day you wake up to discover that you've got more than enough cats. What you really needed all along were more cat herders. How can you get around the risks of the ASA model?

**Old saying #2:
The people make the place.
They can unmake it, too.**



THE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

To determine how a candidate will fit with your organization, you'll have to ask.

Preferably without being too transparent, because stock questions bring stock answers.

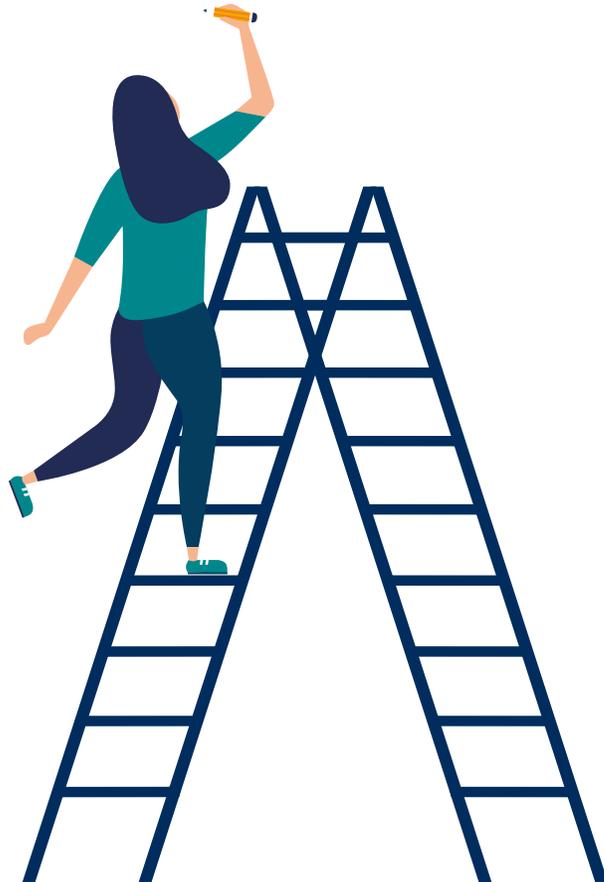
There are a couple of methods. If your candidate list is short, and your interviewer is skilled, you can engage your finalist in an open-ended conversation having little to do with the resume, **but a lot to do with how they've preferred to work.** Otherwise, when you're looking at multiple candidates, we think a more structured interview is the way to go.

We recommend a panel of interviewers, asking all candidates the same carefully prepared questions: questions specifically designed to elicit the sort of **information on which to judge a cultural fit.**

**Old saying #3:
Hire for attitude, train for
skills. Works for culture, too.**



There are countless ways to construct such questions, but a few guidelines:



Focus on what they have done, not on what they say they would do

Delve into the perceived positives and negatives of the culture they're leaving

Ask how former managers and coworkers would describe them

Get as specific as possible: "Tell me about a time when..."

With all applicants facing the same questions from the same interviewers, you'll have apples-to-apples comparisons, as well as multiple viewpoints on a candidate's suitability for your culture. (This assumes a vision of the culture has been articulated and is shared by all employees.) Interviewers will usually be future team members, but **consider bringing in members of teams your candidate would frequently interact with.**

And no need to stop there: Consider video conferencing with colleagues in other offices, or even other countries. The more organizationally and geographically diverse takes you can gather, the better.

You can also go **beyond talk**. If possible, bring the candidate into the office for an all-day "job sample."

Whatever the tactics, always keep in mind that **you're not hiring attractive personalities. You're hiring habits and values and beliefs.** This is a critical distinction. Personalities complement and are secondary to these attributes; not the other way around.



HIRING FOR CULTURAL UN-FIT

We've used the term "cultural fit" a few times in this guide, but it's probably not the best descriptor.

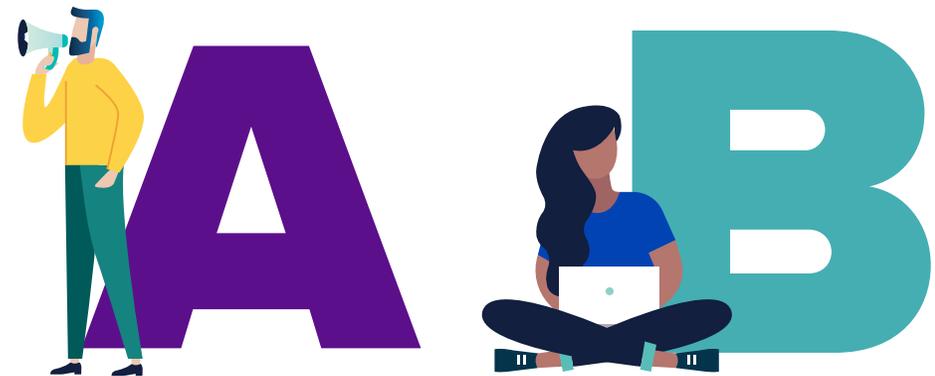
It's falling out of favor, not only due to the risk of overdoing a culture, but because it can also be associated with the idea of excluding certain candidates, which is not somewhere HR departments need to go. A better way to view the process might be "cultural add," or "cultural contribution" or values compatibility.

In fact, you may frequently find yourself hiring for cultural un-fit.

If a company is top-heavy with Type As, it's likely time to balance it out with more Type Bs.

If you have a staff of wildly creative people producing great work—but not always on time or budget—the task will be finding leaders skilled at effectively channeling such talents.

We prefer the idea of hiring to shape your culture—less about maintaining the culture you have, and more about developing the culture you'll need to have.



THE SHAPE OF CULTURES TO COME

Culture is continually evolving within an organization.

The best leaders will have an awareness of current culture competencies, and those the company will need to shape its future opportunities and challenges. The hiring process should then evolve from merely filling slots into a strategic and intentional tool to reinforce strengths and develop new ones. Here are a few questions for HR practitioners to consider as they look to shape future culture:

What culture competencies do we need to embrace new strategies or face up to emerging threats?

What core competencies should be reinforced with the new hire?

What new competencies should be selected for with the new hire?

Are there potential conflicts between current employees who don't have the new culture competency and the new hire who does?

If so, what attributes should be selected to help the transition?



An example. A company recognizes that historically it's been too risk-averse. To shift this mindset, it develops a selection process for identifying candidates capable of bringing a spirit of innovation.



Interview questions would be designed to discover how applicants approached past situations in ways that align with core competencies—to maintain a connection to the current culture—and then ways that demonstrate the desired new competency of innovation—to begin the shift.

Some questions would concern, for example, **an openness to change and new experiences; attributes associated with innovation.**

Then, since the new hire's attributes may come into conflict with the more conservative current employees, qualities to aid in the transition—such as the leadership and evergreen factors previously discussed—should be considered to help foster a collegial approach and concern for others' perspectives.

To be sure, hiring the right talent is just the first step. **To fully shape your culture, the onboarding, acclimation and socialization processes that follow will also need attention.**

But hiring the right talent, for now and the future, is the most important step.

A POWERFUL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

We've focused on potential employees meshing with your culture, but it's a two-way street.

A thriving, vibrant company culture is a **potent marketing and recruiting tool** that you can showcase during the hiring process.

If you build it, they will come? Yes, but if they come, you will build it. The soundest approach to cultural fit is to hire the best talent you can, and then surround them with an environment **they won't ever want to leave.**

Our last old saying: Compensation will bring people in the door, but the culture is what makes them stay.



BUILD A CULTURE OF PASSION AND PURPOSE

Maritz Motivation takes a holistic approach to helping businesses build cultures that attract, engage and retain employees and unlock the hidden potential of your workforce. Leveraging our unmatched experience in behavioral and decision sciences, Maritz Motivation offers a broad range of professional services and an award-winning technology platform that create value for companies in over 100 countries around the globe.

For more information, visit [MaritzMotivation.com](https://www.maritzmotivation.com).