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If Hiring for Experience Doesn't Work, How Do You Hire for Skills?

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If Hiring for Experience Doesn't Work, How Do You Hire for Skills?

By Dawn Gibson, TALiNT Partners Features and News Editor

We've known for decades that past experience is an extremely poor indicator of whether a candidate will be a successful hire – yet it continues to carry undue weight in determining if an applicant will get to interview.

Part of the difficulty of challenging this out-dated approach is working out precisely how a company can hire differently, successfully. How do you recruit effectively for skills, attitude, potential and cultural fit? What factors are key to predicting success and what does that success look like? How does technology fit in? Is it time to get rid of hiring managers completely?

Leading talent intelligence company TALiNT Partners invited some of the UK's top experts in talent acquisition and management, recruiting and RPO to provide insights to these questions during a Zoom webinar and panel discussion on Tuesday 8th September. Moderated by TALiNT Partners' Managing Director Ken Brotherston, participants included:
• Peter Gold, Manager Recruiting Solutions EMEA at international talent acquisition and management company Cornerstone OnDemand
• Louise Shaw, Director, Resourcing Transformation at RPO provider Omni RMS
• Mark Thomas, Talent Acquisition & Development Director at global life science business Abcam.
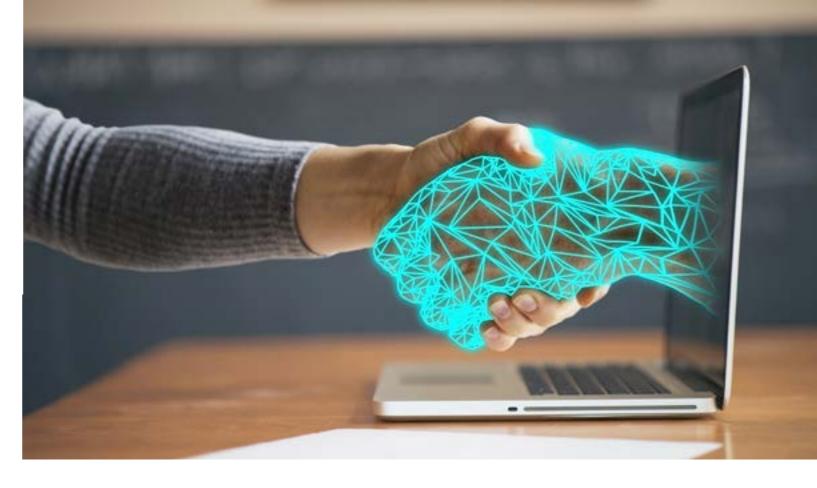
The new approach to hiring

Effective talent teams are pivoting from buying talent to building talent, placing more emphasis on a candidate's work ethic, values, potential and emotional intelligence, as well as expertise and knowledge.

The starting point for this approach is pro-active job analysis. Instead of waiting until a vacancy materialises, future-focused talent acquisition and management professionals are conducting upfront analysis to pinpoint the competencies and skills required for high performance in roles throughout their organisations. They may consider a team's overall cognitive diversity, demographic diversity, learning potential and capabilities, along with qualifications and experience.

Webinar participants agreed it was important to utilise a diverse range of hiring assessment interventions, not just in terms of method (for example, psychometric profiling or skills tests) but also relying on different groups of people to assess the same competencies to reduce the potential for bias.

Technology versus the human touch

How much should companies trust computers to predict on-the-job performance?

Our increasing reliance on HR technology – from gamification to AI, robotics to machine learning and video interviews – has been dramatically accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic as the majority of employers have been forced to adapt to a completely remote recruitment process.

Many companies plan to continue to invest heavily in HR tech, not only to automate the time-consuming, repetitive tasks inherent with high volume recruitment but, just as importantly, to increase diversity and inclusion.

However, it's a mistake to view software as a 'silver bullet' to whittle down candidate lists and bypass human bias. Participants agreed that it is more useful to view technology as an adjunct to the human touch, helping TA teams to determine strengths and weaknesses within the process, and guiding them to ask better questions, rather than providing the answers.

Over-reliance on technology can also needlessly complicate the situation. For example, effectively measuring retention can start with something as simple as keeping track of new recruits to see if they are still with an organisation after two years, and whether they had received a pay rise in that time – no AI required.

Shall we get rid of the hiring manager?

Involvement of hiring or line managers is arguably the most problematic aspect of adopting a new approach. While some have a good understanding of the value of talent acquisition teams and are keen to cooperate,

many are under-trained in assessment and just want to hire the same way they always have. As one talent acquisition expert pointed out, it doesn't matter if an organisation implements job analysis and a highly effective assessment process if hiring decisions ultimately come down to an informal chat over a cup of tea, a beer, or – worst of all – a game of golf.

A partial solution is for companies to commit to ongoing, regular 'bite-sized' assessment training for all staff who play a role in hiring.

Another is to reduce the role of the hiring manager – if not cutting them out of the decision-making altogether, then bringing them into the process at the point where the field has been narrowed down to two or three candidates.

A HR executive said her company had adopted this strategy to streamline volume hiring for entry level roles, and it was proving highly effective. Candidates initially go through an online application and video assessment process, from which the three most promising are selected by the talent acquisition team and put forward to a line manager for interview. On average, line managers employed one person for every two they see.

However, another participant pointed out that this strategy is not well suited for niche hiring, as sometimes the only person with the right credentials to assess the candidate's skills is the line manager.

Ensuring a quality candidate experience is also a

big concern: most people are understandably reluctant to take on a new job without meeting their line manager first. Equally, the process will not work if the hiring manager refuses to buy-in to the new way of doing things.

Conclusion

Predicting performance in a role will never be an exact science, even if a company has the best talent team, cooperative hiring managers, and an unlimited technology budget. Even with best practice, there will always be a significant margin for error.
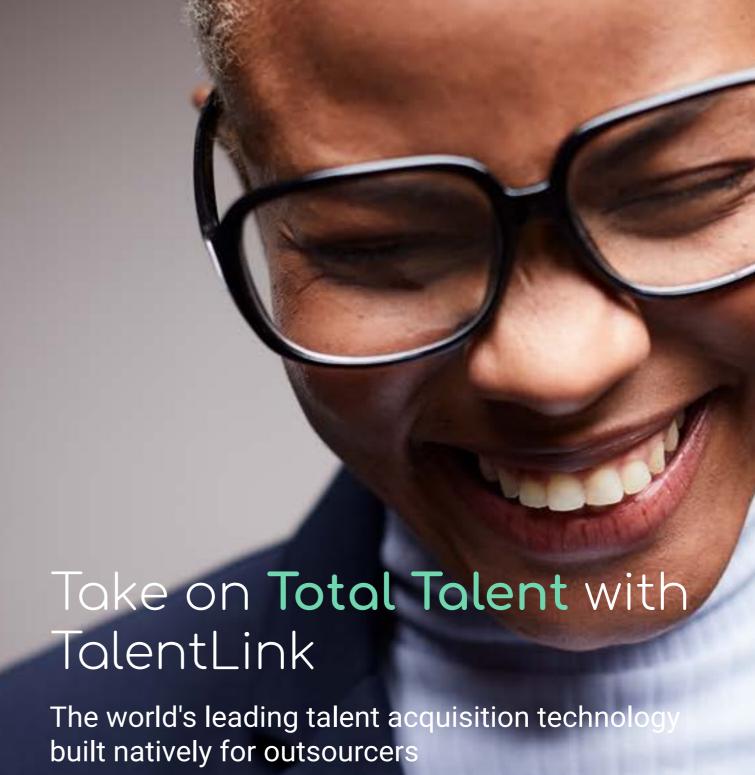
However, companies can pivot from experience-based to skills-based hiring by adopting six key strategies:

1. Pro-active job analysis to assess integral competencies and skills before vacancies arise

2. Diverse hiring assessment processes focused on work ethic, value, potential and inter-personal skills

3. Utilising HR technology as an adjunct to talent acquisition and management decision-making

4. Ongoing, regular assessment training for hiring managers

5. Developing and maintaining buy-in from hiring managers
6. Ensuring candidate experience remains a priority at every stage

The shake-up of the labour market prompted by Covid-19 could be the catalyst for many companies to reconsider their hiring process and whether it is fit for purpose. A shift towards a more holistic, strategic approach can only benefit both organisations and candidates.

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