

Screening for Cultural Fit

You are looking for a rainmaker; a selling savior who can help you open a new territory or market and drive revenue for your company. You've retained the [best recruiter available](#), and she has scoured [LinkedIn](#) and called her network to bring you a handful of excellent candidates – great resumes, stellar work experience, Ivy League educations. Their credentials on paper say that any one of these candidates can do the job, and your competition is eyeing these same candidates. But before you make a hiring decision, how do you determine which candidate will mesh with your organization? How do you screen for cultural fit?

Is it better to hire based on fit rather than expertise? Quoting from [an article in Fortune](#) magazine:

"Cultural fit is incredibly important on a candidate's abilities to use his skills," says Nancy Rothbard, an associate professor of management at The Wharton School. "You have a positive effect through skills, but culture completely cancels that out."

Cultural fit can cover a variety of characteristics, but ultimately, Rothbard and others say, the question hiring managers should be looking to answer is, does this candidate's values align with those of the company, be they work-life balance, corporate mission or how to handle a customer phone call.

According to Rothbard's research, poor cultural fit can completely negate any positive career experience or skills a candidate brings to a job. Some candidates she surveyed had to be retrained for jobs they had done for years to accommodate how their new role had to be performed within the new corporate culture. Tasks can be taught, experience can be acquired, but cultural fit is hard to transfer to the wrong job candidate. And the higher the position in the company, the harder it is to assess fit. According to John Challenger, CEO of outplacement firm Challenger, and Gray & Christmas:

"At higher levels, you need to conduct multiple interviews across the chain, with employers and employees. What kind of connection do you feel to the candidate? Does this person seem like one of us?"

Surprisingly, job interviews are an exceedingly poor way of assessing cultural fitness. During an interview, a candidate will tailor his or her responses to suit the interviewer, and the more experienced the candidate, the better he or she is able to adapt to the interview.

More interviews by different company stakeholders can help provide a better assessment for fit. The use of psychometric tests also is a good way to gauge cultural fit and is gaining in popularity, particularly in Europe. Many companies also are posting more insight about the company culture in their job descriptions, e.g. long hours, independent work, extensive travel, etc., so candidates will

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weed themselves out before the evaluation process.