

“Why Hiring for *Culture Fit* is Costing you Time & Money”

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As a Talent Strategist and Executive Recruiter, my clients rely on me to effectively assess “cultural fit” when making hiring recommendations and designing talent strategies. However, I think this is a slippery slope depending upon how the company chooses to define both *culture* and *fit*. Doesn’t the word “*fit*” imply that we should make hiring decisions based upon an individual’s ability to seamlessly integrate into our current system? Shouldn’t we first consider whether that system is something we wish to perpetuate? Also, is it possible that the best candidate may not think or behave just like “us”? Maybe they shouldn’t “*fit*”? If everyone in an organization must think and act like me, doesn’t that limit my opportunities for change, growth, innovation and reimagination?

Now, let us discuss culture. Based upon hundreds of conversations and a lot of late-night reading, I have landed on two definitions for culture. The first is: “*the collective guidelines for acceptable behavior within an organization, which often dictates the success or failure of its constituents*”. Admittedly, this is a pretty sterile and somewhat negative way to describe culture. However, I believe this definition is somewhat valid because one of the primary reasons that companies terminate employees (or conversely, employees leave companies) is due to the perceived lack of “culture fit”. Many organizations strive to hire people that can quickly integrate into their existing culture because they assume this mitigates the risk of failure. After all, hiring mistakes are radically expensive (not to mention demoralizing).

I found a more progressive and positive definition for culture in Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary: “*the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively*”. This description enables us to view culture as an *opportunity* and something that can be *enhanced* by diverse perspectives and behaviors. In my mind, organizational culture is comprised of several factors including decision making hierarchies, behavioral norms, collective outcomes, language/ communication, and most importantly - *shared values*. **Therefore, we should strive for values alignment versus culture fit!**

Most of us agree (at least verbally) that we should strive for diversity of thought and embrace healthy conflict that allows us to challenge the status quo. However, I think we are justified in our desire to hire in alignment with core values.

How can we effectively assess values when making critical talent decisions?

1. **Start by collectively defining your organizational values (or “cultural tenants”).** It is important to note this cannot be accomplished by gathering your leadership team in a conference room. Involve your people (all levels and functions should be represented)! Consider asking the following questions:
 - a. *Why* do we do what we do?
 - b. What do we care about/ what do we value?
 - c. What do we want and what won’t we tolerate?

- d. How will we be remembered (how will we make a larger impact on our employees, our customers, our communities)?
 - e. How might we enhance our culture, and what obstacles are preventing this?
 - f. How will we actively demonstrate our values each day?
2. **Create a values-based human capital structure.** Consider whether the people, processes, and systems within each stage of your employee lifecycle are effectively aligned to your values and goals:
- i. **Attracting/ Sourcing** (are we proactively building an employment brand and talent pipeline in alignment with our core values/ goals?)
 - ii. **Recruiting** (are we assessing and hiring in alignment with our values/ goals?)
 - iii. **Onboarding** (is our initial employment experience aligned to our values/ goals?)
 - iv. **Developing/ Motivating** (are we proactively developing and motivating our people in alignment with our values/ goals?)
 - v. **Promoting** (are we promoting people that embody our values/ goals?)
 - vi. **Retaining** (are we retaining people in alignment with our values/ goals?)
 - vii. **Off-boarding/ Exiting** (are we brave enough to exit employees that are not aligned with our values/ goals **AND** are we behaving in alignment with our values/ goals when exiting employees, despite the cause?)

3. **Review, Renew, Recommit.**

I met the most effective and inspiring coach when I was first promoted into leadership, Dr. Vance Caesar. Vance taught me many things I will never forget including “*review, renew, recommit*”. It seems so obvious. However, this is consistently overlooked by so many great leaders. Have you ever been part of a heart-warming team building retreat that ended in high fives and big promises to “never forget”? Typically, we return to our busy schedules and those valuable and inspiring lessons fade away a lot faster than we intended. As leaders, we must challenge ourselves to find creative ways to keep those important lessons (and our core values) front of mind. We must seek opportunities to integrate our core values into our everyday lives. This is a critical step in sustaining and protecting an innovative and diverse culture.