

# The Four Levels of Fit

## How can you tell you've found the right employee for the job?



By Michael Gravelle

**NOT LONG AGO** I was talking to a recruiter about a placement she was working on. It was tough going. Her client had emphasized that he wanted someone who “really fit in.” But when asked how he’d measure this, he said “I’ll know it when I see it.”

When conducting job interviews, it’s easy enough to judge candidates by their technical knowledge, education and skill sets, but that final element—fit—is harder to pin down. Yet, it is this elusive quality that will have the biggest impact on success or failure.

But how do you measure fit? The closest I’ve come is by breaking it down into four different levels: job fit, boss fit, team fit and culture fit.

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First, determining whether an employee is the right fit for the job means more than simply matching knowledge and skills. Last summer I had the opportunity to work with the Certified Management Accountants of Canada. The participants were employed across many industries and, while they agreed that they were all hiring from the same talent pool in terms of knowledge and skills, the jobs varied markedly in terms of fit.

Each job had its own personality. And this personality had little to do with reconciling accounts or tracking key performance indicators. Some companies wanted their accountants to be conservative and compliant while others wanted them to be more flexible and proactive. A person successful in one role would struggle in the other. Unlike skills, which can be trained, personality factors are engrained and difficult to change.

Second, you have to match the employee with their potential boss. A study published by the HR metrics firm, The Saratoga Institute, cited relationships with bosses as one of the top reasons people left their jobs. For example, Hugh Secord, vice president, HR for Securicor Canada, remembers an instance where “the company defined its culture as being entrepreneurial and hired an indepen-

dent and creative manager. But his boss was very hands-on. The new manager felt micromanaged and left within a few months.”

Third is team fit, which is often a double-edged sword. While no one would dispute the benefits of a cohesive, tightly knit team, some companies take this to the extreme. They hire clones with similar interests and cultural backgrounds, prone to group-think. One department manager once told me that he couldn’t possibly hire a woman, because it would throw his all-male team into disarray, forcing them to constantly be on their best behaviour.

Sometimes it is good to challenge the status quo and hire someone who does not fit. The sales VP for a telecommunications company I worked with recognized that this had happened. He had a team of account managers who were technically efficient and bonded well but were stuck in a pre-competition mindset. To shake things up, he hired an aggressive account manager who did not fit. Although the new recruit was not loved by everyone, the team followed her lead and became more proactive—a calculated risk that paid off.

Fourth is culture fit, which Cindy Hillaby, HR vice president for CAA, says “can take up to two years at senior levels.” To measure cultural fit she cites a comprehensive hiring process that includes behavioural job descriptions, personality assessments and 360-degree interviewing. A corporation’s culture is influenced by many factors, including senior executive philosophy, location of parent company, industry, level of competitiveness or regulation.

When hiring, it’s also important to be up front and candid about existing culture, not only with interviewees, but with yourself—describe the true nature of the organization’s corporate culture. Every company says it is dynamic, fast-paced and entrepreneurial, but that might not be the actual picture day-to-day.

Examining fit through these four levels makes it easier to measure, especially when using practical tools such as panel interviews, behavioural interviewing and personality assessments. Given the importance of fit in an organization, it’s safer to rely on these measures than just, “I’ll know it when I see it.” 🔄

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