

by Felicity Wolfenden

Honest Recruitment

Unless we were born into extreme good fortune, most of us will need (want?) to hold down a job at some point in our lives. If we are lucky, we will work for organisations that we feel reflect our beliefs and the role itself suits our skills and preferences which means that we a) enjoy what we do, and b) undertake tasks that come more naturally to us. Individuals who are *not* suited to a particular role are likely to be a burden and drain on the organisation. In contrast, there are numerous research studies documenting the positive psychological and performance related effects if someone is well suited to the role and the organisation.

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Too often however, this ideal situation is hampered by the fact that the recruitment process can so often feel like an act, with both parties in extreme selling mode. We know that just as a candidate might say whatever is necessary to **get** a job, the Hiring Manager may also overlook things that aren't 'quite right' in order to **fill** one.



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Indeed, we are taught through school that to succeed we need to study the test and ensure that we are making it as easy as possible for those marking our work to give us points (e.g. by putting work in a specific order, and clearly written). We have this all the way through our qualifications, and then there is often no one to teach us that this is not the same way we should be going about an interview for a job. The goal is not to adapt ourselves to fit the organisation, yes the goal is to sell ourselves, but not at the expense of being our authentic selves.

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Looking in the Mirror

From an individual's perspective, being 'well-suited' to the role and organisation can be determined by four main criteria;

1. The role fulfils our basic needs (sufficient salary, satisfactory hours and working location)
2. The role utilises our strengths while allowing some development opportunities
3. The role satisfies our interests, likes and dislikes
4. The organisation aligns with our values.

We will often know what we need from a role to fulfil the first criteria, but how do we know what will satisfy the other three?

For some people, this will involve taking an honest look in the mirror. Carefully considering what our strengths and development areas are. One option is to ask colleagues or those around us for feedback, thinking about previous projects / work that we have done and evaluating the outcome and / or our feelings about the work. For this method to be effective we have to be prepared to be extremely honest with ourselves - a process that may involve many iterations, and involve the discovery of strengths or weaknesses that surprise us as we experience new things. Looking in the mirror can therefore be a little bit painful!

An even better option is to utilise one of the many self-report psychometric assessments designed to highlight strengths and development areas, and in some cases likes and dislikes and even what motivates us – all of which can help individuals to identify their personal values. These tools remove the guess work from simple introspection, and help put words to feelings that might seem more abstract.

It is only by looking in the mirror that we can begin to understand what we're looking for, and also what to seek out in any potential employment. Being honest with ourselves in the long term will mean that we are more suited the roles we fulfil, with all the benefits that brings to ourselves and our employers.

A Job, or *The* Job? It's About Alignment of Values

Being aware of what we are looking for, or personal values, strengths, interest areas, likes and dislikes will help us to choose the role that aligns with as many of these as possible.

Aside from actors, no one (should) want a role where they have to pretend to be someone else the entire time as that would be exhausting. Just as we want a role that plays to our strengths, we also need an organisation that is aligned with our values. There will of course always be a degree of compromise needed. Finding a role that suits the unedited version of ourselves is highly unlikely, but we are looking to keep this compromise to a minimum. This is the ability to be 'Constructively Authentic' in the role, and my colleague, Mike Thackray explores this in more detail.

Many organisations now publish their values along with company vision on their website. For the candidate, this is a good place to start in understanding whether there is good alignment with personal values. We're so busy trying to sell ourselves to the Hiring Manager that we can often forget that a recruitment process is a two-way street. The organisation also needs to sell the role and company to us, so the espoused values are likely to be somewhat 'polished'.

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If we are consciously trying to sell ourselves or think about the sort of person we need to project, then what does this tell us about our inherent suitability for the role? When you take into consideration the amount of time each of us spends at work, we really need to ask how comfortable it will be to 'adapt' to a way of working, or a set of values over a long period of time. Pressing realities often dictate the need to accept sub-optimal roles at times in our lives, but where possible we should look to avoid this, and a good analysis of our core values can go a long way towards ensuring a lasting fit.

The Downside of Hope

From the organisation's perspective, the pressure to fill can push us to accept, and forgive, and perhaps worst of all – believe that things will change. Too often do we see recruiting managers accept that whilst the candidate in front of them isn't *completely* suited to us, they buy into the fact that they can adapt and change. Unfortunately, if the differences are too far apart, they likely won't. An individual's underlying preferences and personality is surprisingly stable. Hoping that someone can adapt is appropriate when it's a minor tweak, but expecting someone who has come from, and thrived in, a fluid, flat structure to suddenly fit in with a hierarchical one? We'd be setting ourselves up for failure if we based our recruitment decisions on such hope.

Suppressing our Natural Instincts to Sell

Whilst it goes against all our instincts, the more honest an organisation is about its culture and working practices (whilst obviously seeking to improve and develop that culture) the more they attract the sort of people who are seeking, and are likely to fit in with that culture. Honest conversations about what to expect, and some insights in how to handle it may well be seen as a selling point by some. Most seasoned applicants are wise to the over-selling card, and therefore a degree of honesty can also go a long way in building trust with future colleagues.

As much as it is the individuals' responsibility to consider whether they can be their authentic self if they were to be successful, the organisation also has a key role to play in ensuring the right person-organisation fit. For an organisation of any size, recruiting against the values rather than the job spec may be beneficial here, as there is much greater scope for individuals to 'craft' the role to suit them.

There are a number of methods which we can use in recruitment to determine whether someone is the right fit for the organisation, from psychometric assessments to interviews, individual assessments to group assessments. The organisation can use any combination of these methods to determine whether the candidate's values are aligned with the organisational values, and whether it is a good person-organisation fit.

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Summary

Recruiting individuals who are able to be their authentic self, rather than having to pretend to be someone else in an organisation comes down to the success of the recruitment process, and whether methods utilised reveal similarities in values between the organisation and the candidate. Both sides should be honest with what they are actually looking for, and how they expect to work to manage expectations ahead of time. Specifically, below are some top tips for organisations and individuals:

Top Tips for Organisations

- 1 **Don't fill just to fill. Look for the right candidate who will be able to fit in with the organisational values**
- 2 **Don't over sell, but don't under sell either... find the right balance**
- 3 **Don't utilise a recruitment process just because it's always been done that way. Examine whether there are any better selection methods available and use a range of methods that demonstrate different things.**

Top Tips for Individuals

- 1 **Seek to understand your own personal values, strengths, interest areas, likes and dislikes before applying for roles**
 - Consider utilising a coach, or personality assessment to get more insight into yourself if you are able to
- 2 **Remember who you are during the recruitment process – would you have to change to fit into the role?**
- 3 **Be curious and seek to understand what it is really like to work there, and in that role. Balance finding the right job, with just finding any job.**

We'd love to hear your thoughts on the topic of an honest recruitment process! To discuss these topics in more detail, or to find out how OE Cam can help, please do get in touch.



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Felicity is a Business Psychologist with expertise in applying psychological principles and psychometric tools to improve organisational and team effectiveness. She is passionate about empowering individuals and teams to utilise their unique and collective strengths while accepting and working on their development areas. Felicity has a particular interest in personality interactions and decision-making processes for both individuals and teams.

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