

Looking Beyond the Job Description:

Embracing Roles with Fuzzy Edges

by FELICITY WOLFENDEN

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, economic shifts, and changing societal norms, businesses must adapt to new ways of operating in order to stay relevant and continue to attract top talent. With increased uncertainty and need for swift adaptation to stay leaders in their fields, do organisations need to review the 'basics' and start hiring for the new way of doing things?

An area that is receiving an increasing amount of attention is the idea of moving away from traditional job descriptions towards creating more fluid and dynamic roles (1). Will the future of work include a skills-based hiring approach that brings a renewed focus on adaptability? To answer this question, this article will explore what skills-based hiring is, and how it could be used.



Letting go of the traditional job description

For years, the conventional job description has been a staple of recruitment, neatly outlining specific roles, responsibilities, and qualifications. However, these rigid descriptions no longer capture the multifaceted nature of modern work environments and the non-linear career choices that more and more individuals are making.

Traditional nine-to-five office jobs are no longer the sole definition of a successful career. Individuals are increasingly opting for freelance, remote work or gig economy and entrepreneurship roles as viable paths to success. As my colleague Alexandra points out, this trend is driven by the desire for autonomy, work-life balance, and the opportunity to pursue passions and interests. As technology enables greater connectivity and access to global markets, non-traditional career choices offer unprecedented flexibility and the potential for diverse income streams. This evolution reflects a broader shift in how individuals define and create fulfilling careers, reshaping the traditional career trajectory and contributing to the dynamic and complex nature of the modern job market.

The pursuit of passions and interests can lead individuals to take more 'squiggly' career paths to get to a certain point. Gone are the days of individuals sitting in one organisation for 20+ years and gradually working their way up the ranks. With the boom of social media and normalisation of instant gratification, we have become more willing to walk away from an existing role if our needs aren't being met. Consequently, CVs are likely to boast a variety of short-term employment listings, reflecting the pursuit of diverse experiences and passions.

Enter 'skills-based hiring' — an approach that places skills and competencies at the forefront of the recruitment process (2). Rather than pigeonholing candidates into predefined roles, this strategy allows for a more nuanced assessment of candidates' abilities and potential contributions.

In a world where technological innovations drive change at an unprecedented pace, it's no longer feasible to rely solely on the traditional job description to identify suitable candidates. The complex challenges of today's business landscape requires a workforce that possesses both adaptable skills and the ability to collaborate effectively across diverse domains. Skills-based hiring acknowledges the dynamic nature of work and offers a solution that aligns with the needs of the modern organisation.

Skills-based hiring is not about disregarding experience or expertise. Instead, it acknowledges that skills are transferable and adaptable to various contexts. For instance, a candidate with exceptional problem-solving skills could excel in roles ranging from project management to customer service. By placing a greater emphasis on skills, organisations can tap into a broader talent pool and increase the chances of finding individuals who possess the right capabilities for the job, regardless of their previous job titles.

This approach also encourages candidates to showcase their unique strengths and potential contributions. When candidates are evaluated based on their skills rather than fitting a predetermined mould, diversity of thought and experience are naturally embraced. This not only enhances creativity and innovation, but also contributes to a more inclusive work environment that values individuality and diverse perspectives.

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The rise of fluid, fuzzy roles

An essential aspect of this approach is the willingness to redefine roles based on skill sets (3). Rather than confining employees to rigid job descriptions, organisations can create roles with fluid, fuzzy edges that allow for growth and adaptation. This flexibility encourages employees to develop new skills, explore their interests, and take on responsibilities that align with their strengths. In turn, this nurtures a culture of learning, collaboration, and innovation - key ingredients for future success.

By encouraging employees to step outside the boundaries of their defined roles, organisations foster a sense of ownership and empowerment. Employees are more likely to take initiative, propose innovative solutions, and seek out opportunities for professional development when they're not confined to a predefined box. This not only benefits individual growth but also contributes to the overall agility and resilience of the organisation.

Central to this shift is the adoption of skills-based approaches. Rather than relying solely on a predetermined job description, the emphasis shifts to understanding the core objectives and outcomes of the role. Fuzzy edged roles are created collaboratively with input from both hiring managers and prospective candidates which promotes flexibility and allows candidates to shape their contributions based on their strengths.

Furthermore, focusing on individuals' strengths encourages them to leverage their innate talents and develop new skills that complement their strengths. This approach encourages individuals to foster a growth mindset, wherein employees are empowered to embrace challenges, learn from failures, and continuously improve. As organisations recognise and harness the unique strengths of their workforce, they create a positive feedback loop of development and achievement.

The benefits of a strengths-based approach

While skills frameworks provide a foundation, it's important to leave ample space for candidates to make their own impact. A skills-based approach has the potential to significantly impact employee engagement and job satisfaction. When employees feel that their strengths are valued and utilised, they experience a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in their roles. This, in turn, contributes to higher levels of motivation, productivity, and overall well-being.

In the age of automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the dynamics of work are changing rapidly. Rather than fearing displacement, organisations can leverage technology to enhance productivity and creativity. Collaborating with automation tools could allow employees to offload repetitive tasks, freeing up their time for higher-value activities that require human ingenuity. Skills-based hiring would ensure that employees possess the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to work synergistically with technology.

As organisations integrate automation and AI into their workflows, employees will increasingly be called upon to collaborate with these tools. This requires not only technical skills but also the ability to adapt to changing technologies and integrate them seamlessly into their work. Skills-based hiring, with its focus on adaptability and cognitive skills, ensures that employees are well-equipped to thrive in this evolving landscape.

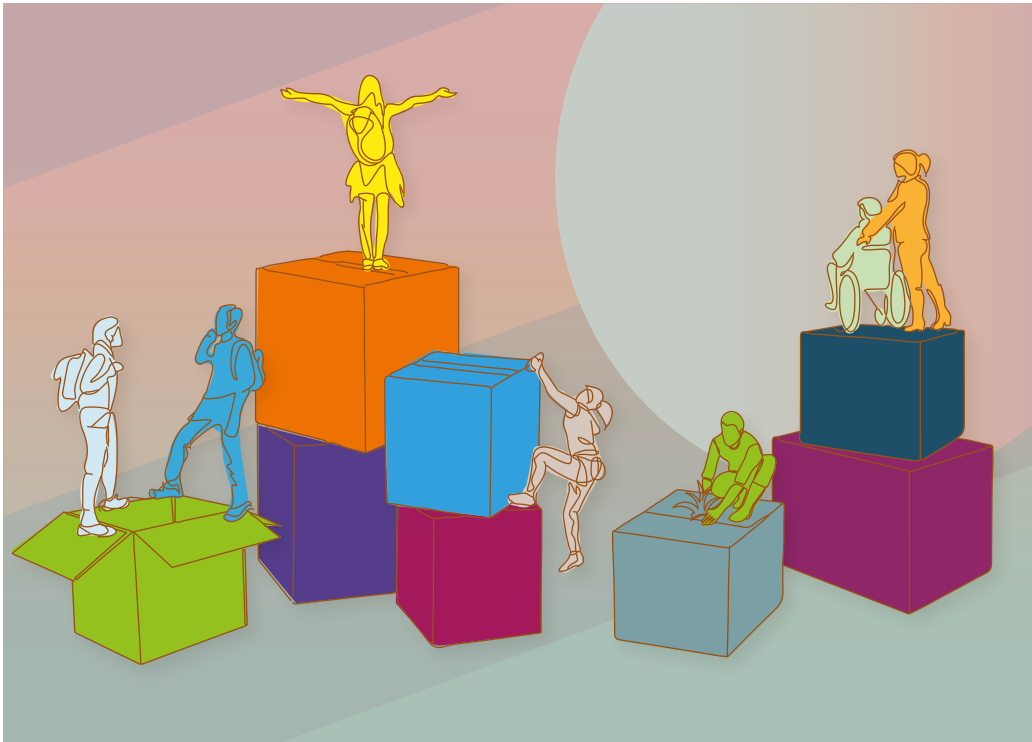


In it together

The psychological contract between employees and the organisation is built on mutual expectations and trust. In a skills-based hiring model, it's crucial to communicate clearly about the organisation's expectations, the role's objectives, and the autonomy that candidates will have to contribute in ways that align with their strengths. Transparency from the outset helps establish a strong foundation for a positive psychological contract, fostering employee engagement and commitment.

To attract candidates to roles during recruitment, organisations should emphasise the opportunity for candidates to make a meaningful impact and contribute their unique strengths. Highlighting the organisation's commitment to fostering individual growth, collaboration, and innovation will appeal to candidates who are motivated by personal development and the chance to align their strengths with the organisation's goals.

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A skills-based approach reduces bias in recruitment by focusing on skills and competencies rather than predetermined qualifications or experience. By emphasising individual strengths and diverse skill sets, organisations create opportunities for a more inclusive workforce. Additionally, skills assessments and interactive interviews provide candidates with the chance to showcase their capabilities first-hand, minimising biases that can arise from unconscious assumptions.

In a skills-based model, clear lines of accountability are crucial to ensure that objectives are met and responsibilities are well-defined. While candidates have the flexibility to shape their roles, it's important to establish regular check-ins, performance reviews, and ongoing feedback mechanisms. This maintains alignment with organisational goals while allowing for the fluidity needed to leverage strengths effectively.

Putting it into practice

To successfully transition to a skills-based approach, organisations need to invest in:

- **Skills Analysis:** Identify the skills needed for current and future roles within your organisation and update your skills framework accordingly. Consider the skills that enable employees to excel in a rapidly changing environment.
- **Learning and Development:** Invest in continuous learning and development programmes to upskill and reskill employees. This ensures that they remain equipped to tackle emerging challenges.
- **Talent Pipeline Development:** Create and cultivate a pipeline of talent by focusing on the development and growth of employees. This can lead to a more engaged and loyal workforce.
- **Communication and Transparency:** Clearly communicate your organisation's shift towards skill-based hiring and flexible roles. This transparency helps candidates and employees understand your forward-looking approach.
- **Feedback:** Facilitate regular check-ins with individuals, and create a feedback culture.

As the world continues to evolve, the ability to hire for skills and build-in flexibility will remain key to thriving in the years to come. This shift not only ensures the continued relevance of organisations but also empowers employees to contribute their best, adapt to change, and embrace the challenges and opportunities of the ever-changing world of work. Organisations that embrace this move towards skills-based hiring will be better equipped to navigate uncertainty, adapt to changing circumstances, and foster a culture of innovation.

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