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Combating Hiring Mistakes: the Importance of the Job Benchmark



Introduction

By Christina Owczarski, Vice President of Talent Operations, Mimeo

Behavioral science studies tell us that we make judgments on people about their intelligence, trustworthiness, smartness and status within a mere few seconds of meeting them. These “gut” decisions prove to be the least successful in predicting career success. Being mindful about your own biases is the first step to becoming a good hiring manager or people leader. If you want to be a great hiring manager, you need to know how to assess someone’s fit for a job despite your personal biases and follow a structured approach to the interview and assessment process.

The main goal of recruiting for any competitive company is the need to identify qualified candidates and, of course, as quickly as possible. What makes a process both efficient

and effective is that it includes behavioral, functional and leadership needs matched with individual motivational drivers, behaviors and communication styles. At Mimeo, we start our hiring process by identifying and understanding the driving needs and motivations for role through job descriptions followed by structured interviews and behavioral assessments.

Job Benchmarking gives people-leaders the tools to become great hiring managers through providing structure to the hiring process and insight into the key indicators for performance success. In this report, you’ll find a real-life example of how Eleven Fifty Coding Academy implemented job benchmarks to improve their hiring process.

Job Benchmarks: Not Everyone Will Enjoy Being a Programmer

By Ellie Sheffield and Lou Russell, Russell Martin & Associates, a Moser company

In today's world, there hardly seems to be time to complete daily work tasks, let alone set aside time to create a detailed hiring plan. With the average cost of hiring mistakes due to time and productivity lost ranging from 3 to 15 times the salary value of the employee, creating effective hiring strategies is important.

More than 30% of job applicants in today's workforce have applied for over 50 jobs in their search. It is unlikely that all 50 positions they have applied for appropriately fit their abilities. This is when having a Job Benchmark can quickly separate the appropriate applicants from those desperate for a position regardless of fit.

Assessing candidate-job match is crucial to ensuring job success. Just one non-performing employee can decrease team productivity by 30%.

This impacts team morale and costs businesses money. If an employee is appropriately matched to his or her job, this worker has higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction and the team is

1 non-performing employee=

**30% team
productivity loss**

more productive. The focus of this article is to clarify the importance of using a Job Benchmark to improve the success of matching employees to jobs to drive business success.

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The Job Benchmark

The goal of the Job Benchmark is to create a hiring standard so those hired are strategically matched to fit the position and the culture of the company. This Job Benchmark can also be used after hiring to build an Onboarding Process, Career Development and Succession Plan. The benchmark is formed based on Key Accountabilities chosen by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

Key Accountabilities are the 3-5 measurable activities critical to each job to drive business success. These Key Accountabilities rank, define, and weigh the most important deliverables of the position. After determining Key Accountabilities, the SMEs take an online job assessment describing the job being benchmarked. The integration of the different SME's job assessments for the specified position creates the Job Benchmark. This comprehensive benchmark

includes the knowledge, hard skills, behavior, motivation, personal skills and acumen needed to be a superior performer for this specific job.

What's included in a job benchmark:

- Knowledge
- Hard Skills
- Behavior
- Motivation
- Personal Skills
- Acumen

When creating the Job Benchmark, it is best to avoid comparison to a single standout performer. It is important to recognize that not even star performers are perfect. Generating the Job Benchmark from SMEs allows you to create a more thorough benchmark for the ideal candidate. The Job Benchmark drives accountability, provides performance clarity and eliminates bias that could exist when matching to Top Performers.

Issues of Bias

It is hard to deny that bias is present during the hiring process. It's tempting to hire the applicant with great interviewing skills or an extensive resume. Falling prey to the biases of social skills and past experiences rarely translate to successful performance on the job. In fact, one study done at Michigan State found that only 14% of hires made on the basis of a positive interview became successful employees.

86% of hires did not meet job standards

Put another way, 86% of hires that had a great interview did not meet job standards. Although an applicant can seem like a great

fit in an interview, it may be due to compatible communication styles and personality traits with the interviewer, not job fit. Combining the Job Benchmark with structured interviews and a resume will mitigate these biases and objectify the decision-making process. Each candidate is compared to the Job Benchmark via an online assessment. Comparisons with the job are made using the Job Talent Comparison Report. This report clarifies the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, comparing them to the Job Benchmark. When combined with a structured interview and resume review, this more complete analysis allows for an accurate depiction of the potential success of the new hire in your workplace.

Case Study

Recently, Russell Martin & Associates worked closely with Eleven Fifty Coding Academy, a local non-profit training organization, to create a Job Benchmark to predict what whether an individual has what it takes to be a successful entry-level computer coder/programmer. This Job Benchmark was not for hiring but for

predicting aptitude as a future programmer. To create a compliant and accurate Job Benchmark to predict career success required identifying the differences between Job Benchmarks created by leaders, instructors, apprentices and external (to the Academy) coders.

The leaders were represented by a group of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) from various size profit and non-profit companies who attended a half-day facilitated session to create the Key Accountabilities for an entry-level programmer.

In this session, they discussed and prioritized the characteristics of the “go-to” coder in their organization. They used this prioritization to define the Key Accountabilities. Finally, each CIO completed an online assessment then each assessment was automatically combined into a single Job Benchmark by the tool. To test the validity of the CIOs' (Leaders) Job Benchmark, three other groups were asked to create Job Benchmarks for the same position: Successful Programmers (External), Programmers in Training (Apprentice) and

Programmer Instructors from the Academy (Instructors).

A chart is shown on the next page to point out the similarities and differences between the perceptions of each group of SMEs for the ideal coder. The color-coded boxes point out specific traits across SMEs. There is both overlap and differences between perceptions.

Notice the top three job competencies chosen by each group for this entry-level programmer. There are similarities among the responses, but the Leaders value different competencies as their top three than the other SMEs.

In thinking about an IT leader's job, it makes sense that they would be looking for an employee who can hold themselves accountable, work well with others and be resilient. The CIO of an organization has the insight to recognize that coding ability is extremely important, but equally as important is the ability to work with a team.



Eleven Fifty Academy

		Instructor	Instructor	Apprentice	External
Top 3 Job Competendes	1	Personal Accountability	Problem Solving	Continuous Learning	Problem Solving
	2	Teamwork	Continuous Learning	Problem Solving	Personal Accountability
	3	Resiliency	Futuristic Thinking	Goal Achievement	Self-Management
Top 3 Organizational Rewards/ Culture Hierarchy	1	Theoretical	Theoretical	Theoretical	Theoretical
	2	Traditional	Individualistic	Individualistic	Utilitarian
	3	Utilitarian	Utilitarian	Utilitarian	Traditional
Top Job Reward		Theoretical	Theoretical	Theoretical	Theoretical
Top 4 Behavioral Hierarchy	1	Organized Workplace	Follow Up & Follow Through	Follow Up & Follow Through	Competitiveness
	2	Following Policy	Following Policy	Following Policy	Urgency
	3	Analysis of Data	Organized Workplace	Organized Workplace	Follow Up & Follow Through
	4	Follow Up & Follow Through	Analysis of Data	Analysis of Data	Organized Workplace

The competencies chosen by the Apprentices are very different. The Apprentice values continuous learning, problem solving and goal achievement. These are all important focuses for someone who is looking to advance in a coding career. These Apprentices do not share the view of the CIO regarding the prioritization of teamwork and resilience.

Next, look at the Organizational Rewards/ Culture Hierarchy section. Understanding the rewards mindset of a potential new hire is

crucial in determining whether they would be a good fit for a job. This measures what motivates a person and how it relates to the rewards culture of both the organization and the position itself. For Eleven Fifty Coding Academy, this determines what drives a coder and whether that drive matches how the career rewards that employee. Matching a person’s passion to a position is key to engaging an employee.

The SMEs agreed that Theoretical (values

reward knowledge, furthering education, and intellectual growth) perspective is the most highly regarded among coders. Imagine hiring someone to be a coder who most valued Social (an inherent caring for people; helping others) rewards. This programmer might find helping others so important that their own work could be neglected or late.

Finally, the Behavioral Hierarchy category shows the most crucial behavioral traits for a coder. There is significant overlap between

characteristics again, even though different traits are prioritized by different groups of SMEs. The Leader cohort believes that an organized workplace, following policy, careful analysis of data and follow through are crucial traits for a programmer to have. In contrast, the Externals, chosen from top technology companies in Indianapolis, prioritized competitiveness and urgency. These are recognized experts in the field (and not novice coders), so competitiveness and urgency are more important to them. Notice that the Instructor and the Apprentice groups view the behavioral hierarchy in the same order of importance. Instructors are also top performers in the field. This congruence can be noticed between many of the categories, implying that coding Instructors and Apprentices share similar values when it comes to coding competencies and abilities, different than the Leader and External viewpoints.

Taking into consideration the Job Benchmark created by each group of SMEs, the leaders of Eleven Fifty Coding Academy chose the benchmark created by the CIOs as the Job Benchmark for predicting entry level coder

success in a business setting. The CIO Job Benchmark was chosen because leaders of organizations understand the importance of demonstrating teamwork and resiliency to ensure a strategic partnership between the IT department and the organization as a whole. Although the perspectives of the Instructor, Apprentice, and External roles give insight into the goals and values of a coder, they lack the high-level understanding of business alignment needed to ensure compliance and success within the organization as a whole.

The categories shown in the table above are a snapshot of all that is assessed on the Job Benchmark and Job Talent Comparison Report. The full reports provide additional information on values, competencies, feedback methods and rewards for the specific position. Understanding the results of these reports and comparing different benchmarks between SMEs to validate was integral to creating a useful tool to predict job success in a programming career for Eleven Fifty Coding Academy.

Job Benchmark in the Hiring Process

The Eleven Fifty Coding Academy example is not about hiring, but predicting career success. For many of our customer organizations, this tool has a significant financial return when making final hiring decisions.

For example, a local manufacturing firm was hiring for a critical sales management position and had narrowed their list down to the final two potential new hires. The President, who was making the final decision, was set on one candidate after the interviews had been completed. Since this position was critical to the strategic goals of the business, he agreed to participate in the process to build a Job Benchmark and assess each candidate. The Job Talent Comparison Report clearly showed that the other candidate was the best fit for the job. The President valued the assessment results (since they were based on his own Job

Benchmark) over his personal bias and hired the second candidate.

The Sales Manager has worked out well and has been there for over three years.

At Russell Martin & Associates (RMA), we use the Job Benchmark and Job Talent Comparison in our hiring decisions. On an ongoing basis, we look for exceptional facilitators for our online and live workshops. In the past, bias prevented us from making good choices, and we experienced expensive turnover in this position. We created a Job Benchmark from five of our top facilitators and tested it against some of our others who were less successful. Using the Job Benchmark, we have successfully hired and retained four talented, customer oriented team members in the last year.

We have turned away twice as many applicants in this hiring process, likely people who previously we might have hired. It is important to note that we are hiring to the RMA Facilitator job, not just a good facilitator. All the individuals who were turned away by us were successful facilitators in the industry. RMA has specific requirements for how our training is delivered and managed

and this difference is why selections were made. In each case, we also gave feedback to the candidates that we did not choose, clearly detailing the gaps in the report that triggered our decision. It's not personal and it's not an insult – the individuals just didn't fit our specific job. If a person does not match your organization's Job Benchmark, it does not mean that they are ineffective at the role, but that they are not a good fit for this specific job and company.

In summary, the Job Benchmark process is critical to combat bias and streamline effort when determining the requirements for a specific position at a specific organization. The Job Talent Comparison Report is used with the resume and interview to increase the likelihood of a great hire. Hiring occurs with 'eyes wide open': the

hiring manager knows not only what strengths the new employee will have but also what needs development. The Job Talent Comparison Report compares up to five candidates at one time, making it a helpful tool for comparing new-hire candidates or determining appropriate fit for succession planning purposes.

We recommend and use the highly compliant and vetted TriMetrix® HD by TTI Success Insights® as the online tool set for hiring. This suite of tools provides the assessments needed to build the Job Benchmark, Job Talent Comparison Reports and Coaching Reports for future onboarding. To learn more about using these tools at your company, please contact info@russellmartin.com.

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