



The Cambridge Perspective

Volume 19 Issue 1

Create a Functional Hiring Committee



Many organizations, from global businesses and public institutions to diverse, complex operations find it useful and sometimes even necessary to utilize a group selection process. As an executive search firm, we have experience working with committees, and have seen examples of both effective and ineffective ones.

A functional and effective Selection/Hiring Committee understands the organization's vision and the position mandate, communicates well and works together efficiently to find the candidate who will best fit their culture and be successful in the role. Some of the common pitfalls for committees include poor communication, bureaucracy, political conflicts, lack of follow through, and other issues.

To avoid falling into these traps, there are measures that can be taken to help promote an effective, efficient selection process:

Membership & Decision Making

The first and most important steps in the establishment of a Selection/Hiring Committee is designating a Chair and delegating member

responsibilities. The Chair should act as a point person to lead and oversee the process, deal with member concerns, and work with external groups. A method of dealing with standoffs should be agreed upon, up-front, and the group should seek to achieve a consensus when a unanimous decision cannot be obtained.

Additional team members should be added as necessary, limiting the group to a manageable size (preferably no more than eight) but include only those who have a stake in the process or some knowledge to contribute to avoid bloating the team needlessly. The incumbent may or may not be involved in the process, depending on political issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

Be sure to agree upon each member's responsibilities throughout each stage of the search, and outline a process for making changes and settling disagreements. Some of the roles and expectations of the members will include publicizing the search, recruiting candidates, developing evaluation criteria, interviewing candidates and assisting in the final selection.

Be certain that committee members have adequate time to commit to the process, as well as sufficient administrative support to avoid overwhelming members with too many duties and creating bottlenecks.

External Partners

If you already have a trusted search firm, we highly recommend that you work with them, as they are better positioned to understand your needs, know your team members, and have established networks of candidates and sources in your particular industry. Bring them in early, as they can also provide useful advice on candidate identification, assessment, compensation issues, etc. In addition, confidentiality can be compromised during a Request for Proposals process, as some of your sensitive company information would have to be shared with external search firms.

If you do not have a trusted search partner, it may be necessary to review a number of firms, selecting the one that is most knowledgeable about your business, the challenges your company faces and the specific attributes that will make your selection successful in their new role.



Obtain agreement in advance on key project deliverables, including project timing, a communication schedule, and monitoring of performance objectives - and always obtain a candidate replacement 'guarantee'. In

addition to the role requirements, be sure you discuss the position compensation range, company benefits and other important details to avoid large gaps between the client's and the candidate's expectations at the offer stage. This will also eliminate confusion, delays and misunderstandings.

Communication

Select a member of the group to be the point person for communication between internal and external partners. It usually makes sense to designate the Human Resources liaison for this role, as they are well positioned to know most of the individuals, and understand the organization's hiring objectives and legal requirements.

Your search firm should be responsible for communicating with candidates throughout the process, including scheduling and obtaining feedback from interviews, as well as notifying candidates of closure.

It is imperative that the group works together to meet agreed upon deadlines. Block off dates well in advance for planning meetings, status updates and candidate interviews, and be certain that all members are available. Adhere to appointments, be prompt, and try to limit the number and length of interviews that candidates are asked to attend, to demonstrate that you respect their time.

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Assessment Criteria

The hiring or reporting manager and Human Resources contact should play leading roles in determining the assessment criteria, as they understand the specific needs and issues of the role and organization. Other members may also add input once the primary criteria are decided upon.

Since the success of the search depends on finding the right individual, it is imperative that the group provides constructive feedback on candidate interviews, including both positive and negative points, to allow the search partner to refine their search. The better the information you provide, the more likely you are to get the right candidates.

Interviewing

The group will also have to decide what interview format works best for their needs. For smaller groups, it may be possible to have individuals interviewed one-on-one in consecutive interviews, but for larger groups, we recommend a panel format to minimize the amount of time spent interviewing.

In order to maximize information gathering, you should agree upon the areas that will be explored during initial and subsequent interviews, including the specific questions that will be asked. Ensure that behavioral issues and functional competencies are addressed by the appropriate individuals, i.e. a technical expert for technical areas. Take care to be consistent in the interview format and questioning to avoid any unintentional bias. Your executive search partner can provide advice and assistance in crafting a list of questions, highlight areas for investigation, and even act as facilitator to keep the interviews moving forward and avoid redundancy.

It is imperative that members know their roles to avoid stepping on each other's toes or appearing disorganized in front of candidates. You want to maximize the amount of information received, so try to avoid repetition or straying off topic. It is not uncommon for individuals to grandstand in a group; therefore, members should be reminded to avoid this trap in advance.

Remember to let candidates do most of the talking. Open-ended questions will help

expose their thought processes, as well as their presentation abilities. Don't miss opportunities to dig deeper, to better understand how the candidate will fit into your organization's culture and environment.

Finally, don't assume that candidates are fully motivated to join your organization, no matter how well respected it is! Quite often, the in-demand executives and 'industry stars' recruited for interviews are not unhappy with their current roles, but may be lured away under the right circumstances. This is where it is important to understand that, in addition to investigating the candidates, you are selling them on your opportunity. Be sure to promote the benefits of the organization, the interesting challenges of the role, future potential, executive development, etc. or you could unintentionally lose the interest of your favored candidate.

Selection & Negotiation

Candidate assessment is the area most likely to cause disagreement; therefore, it may be helpful to use an overview tool, such as Cambridge's Candidate Matrix® that allows the group to compare candidates across requirements and weight individual criteria to create an "overall value". The Candidate Matrix also highlights candidates who stand out in specific important skill or knowledge areas, and reduces the likelihood of members getting distracted by less important issues.

Stay focused on how the candidate will work with your key team members and fit into your organization's unique culture, keeping both short and long-term objectives in mind. It may be impossible to come to a unanimous selection, so be prepared to come to a consensus on the final candidate.

Your organization may also wish to obtain external psychological assessments or personality profile testing for finalist candidates, to gain further insight into management style or assess how they will work with your management team. This should be agreed upon in advance, in order to prepare candidates for the additional time commitment.

Once your finalist has been selected, your search partner should undertake complete reference checks, including educational qualifications. The

search firm often will have a better understanding of the candidate's motivations for accepting or rejecting an offer, and are seen by candidates as an objective intermediary. They can provide important insights and advice during these negotiations, and can assist in creating an attractive employment contract that both the candidate and organization can agree upon. After all the hard work of identifying, recruiting and selecting the best candidate, it's imperative that you don't lose their interest at the last moment!

Follow Up for Future Success

At the end of the process, all candidates should be thanked for their participation and notified of closure in writing by the search firm. The Selection Committee/Group should meet to measure the success of the project and identify opportunities to make improvements in future, developing "best practices" guidelines to assist future committees in selecting the right individual for the organization.

Finding and attracting the best talent in the market is a difficult task, but obtaining unanimous agreement or even a consensus on "the right individual" for your organization can be an even greater challenge. With proper planning, organization and communication, you can significantly improve your chances of success while reducing the time necessary to achieve it.

Cambridge Management Planning offers a full suite of services including Executive Search, Director Search, Interim Management, Executive Coaching and Career Transition services. Call one of our partners for more information:

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**“If everyone is moving forward together,
then success takes care of itself.”**

-- Henry Ford

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