



Does It Make Sense to Hire and Develop Based on the Same Competencies?

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Rationale: If you hire for certain competencies in a specific position, does it make sense to provide training and/or developmental assignments based on the same competencies for the same position? Or, is that a redundant effort and therefore a poor use of resources? My position is that it does make sense. Here are some reasons why.

Reason 1: If it is important enough to hire for, it is important enough to develop for.

Suppose you identify the five most job-related competencies for success in a job, create a structured interview around them, and hire accordingly. We recognize the apparent paradox in saying that you should still develop the same people for those competencies. But the alternative seems odder: Develop for competencies that are not job-related?

Reason 2: Development and selection may focus on different aspects of competencies.

Competencies need to be defined for them to be meaningful. For example, below is a sample definition for "Teamwork." It is unlikely that all aspects of this definition would be addressed in interviews.

- Place team priorities above own personal agenda;
- Consider others' opinions on matters that affect the team;
- Challenge proposed actions in a way that facilitates constructive discussion;
- Support team decisions, even if different from own opinion;
- Proactively inform others about developments relevant to the team;
- Openly express opinion, even when different from that of others.

Furthermore, most interviews probably don't involve or reflect well-defined competencies. Therefore, which aspects of the competency get addressed would be unclear and constantly changing, across candidates, interviewers, etc. Unless a structured interview is well constructed, different aspects of the competency would likely be covered, even from one execution of the interview to the next.

Reason 3: Development might not need a large investment.

The issue might be different if the question was, "Should we invest thousands of dollars and a full day of time into a class on teamwork for twenty people?" But class work is only one way to develop a competency, and not necessarily the best way. Providing on-the-job developmental assignments is more likely to be more relevant.

For example, one way to develop teamwork skills in someone is to assign him/her to a project team, and make part of the assignment to implement actions that are not his/her preferred approach, but that of others. This would provide someone with experience in doing things other peoples' ways. In probably the majority of cases, carefully constructed developmental assignments are better training mechanisms than classes.

Reason 4: It is desirable to develop people on their strengths.

Conventional wisdom for many years has said that people should be developed in areas they are weak. But that is no longer being viewed as the only good way to go. It is now more accepted to develop people in areas where they are already strong, because that is where true greatness is likely to occur. Breakthrough thinking and truly noteworthy results may be most likely here.

Reason 5: Selection is not perfect.

Much selection and development is ineffective. Research on selection interviews has historically shown traditional interviews to be woefully poor at identifying high performers. Structured and behavioral interviews have been shown to be much more effective, but still a long way from perfect. Therefore, we can't meaningfully assume that selecting for certain

competencies guarantees their presence.

For example, a research study involving behavior-based interviewing and insurance salespeople showed a correlation between interview ratings and actual sales performance of .61 (with a 1.00 being maximum). That is one of the highest validity coefficients ever recorded in a credible selection study. But that still leaves more unknown than known. Unstructured interviews fare much more poorly, with correlations much closer to zero.

Reason 6: Reinforcement is always helpful.

Let's suppose that when someone is hired, he or she is strong in multiple aspects of a competency. If it is never attended to again, those skills may diminish, to be replaced by other skills that are constantly reinforced. For example, if a person is hired partially based on his/her predisposition toward innovating, but innovation is neither developed, reinforced, asked for, nor rewarded (possibly even being stifled based on the organization's non-readiness for change) that predisposition toward innovating will subside in favor of whatever the organization does reinforce.

Are there exceptions?

Certainly. Many things take years of experience, and thus must be selected for rather than trained for, if the company needs those skills now. Technical skills may pose exceptions. You might not hire someone with a wealth of knowledge of employment law and then provide training on exactly that body of knowledge. There are probably many other exceptions as well. But, these do not reduce the soundness of the original point.

What about other systems?

Yes, they should focus on the same competencies as well. By systems, we mean both the formal and informal systems. This can refer to 360 systems, reward systems, organizational culture, what managers talk about as important, etc. They should all point people the same way if those are the behaviors we want people doing.

Imagine hiring people in a function based largely on their customer focus orientation, and then developing them in customer-focused areas. If the manager were to emphasize and recognize fast, efficient execution at the expense of customer focus and quality, that would be sending people mixed messages and imposing confusion.

At the end of the day.

The above logic is intended as a guideline, not as a bureaucratic rule. For example, the relationship of a selection or training mechanism to the core competencies may be indirect, but still important. The key point though is that selection and development should not divide and conquer, so each separately addresses a piece of the larger performance puzzle. Rather they should work together to reinforce and solidify the most critical competencies.