

The less you require, the more you get...

This Piece is about role profiles and will be closely followed by another about the language of inclusivity. The two are not easily linked, but nevertheless, span the issues around organisational infrastructure and the practices that live each day in conversations, calls and meetings – the interactions that make a business a business. The process of creating a role profile, a job description, a specification of responsibilities and attributes required of an individual to fulfil the demands of the space they inhabit in the structure is mostly dull and painful. Traditionally it takes hours of interviews with people doing the job, people who interact with those doing the job, with those who manage the person in the job, and with senior people who should care about these things. This teaches you huge amounts about culture, the currency

in an organisation, the rewards received, and difficulties faced by incumbents and everyone they are connected to. Then you take all of that and condense it down to the essence – or at least that is what you should do. The problem is stuff sneaks in, sensible looking stuff like 'A' levels and a degree or expertise in power point, like 'full time' or previous experience in retail and the essence is easily lost. Creating a role profile should be a drilling and stripping process not a building project. A process of repeatably asking yourself if the thing you have just included is really needed, as opposed to 'what have we missed?'. Perhaps the 'Degree level qualification' sits quietly and sensibly on your list because everyone has one, and therefore it would seem strange to say it wasn't needed. How would you justify its removal?



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Yet the question should be, can you justify its inclusion and on what grounds? Does a degree level qualification suggest discipline, commitment and a depth and breadth of understanding of a topic? Does it represent a way of measuring someone's ability to and willingness to learn? Is it about some notion of intellectual capacity? If one or any of these things are required in the role – how might someone demonstrate their prowess and how might we move beyond conventional assumptions? It is the identification of the essence of the requirement that is needed. The skilfulness to identify the skill.

In Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's work on decision making they talk about 'representativeness' – where we, as human beings, look favourably on and attribute skill and potential to people who most closely reflect our internal representations of a person in the role, embodied in simple, unhelpful phrases such as, 'He looks like a leader' or 'from a consultancy background'. This reminded me of a relatively senior person in a professional services firm who apparently could spot 'the ones with drive' by how fast they walked down the corridor. (That was pre-pandemic, I wonder what object measurement he is relying on now?). There are many holes 'representativeness' will have you falling in if you choose not to curb this completely natural, but hugely unhelpful, inclination. And a good, stripped to its bone's role profile that distils simply the essence can help with this.

After you have interrogated every qualification, skill, requirement, sentence, and word that you have included in your role profile, as well as all the assumptions lying underneath them, you should get someone else to interrogate it too. (I can recommend someone, if needed.)

It is a truth that the less you require, the more you get.

If you have opened the doors to having a skilled and diverse workforce through recruiting and promoting for skills not conventional requirements, how do we move to language? Carlo Rovelli, renowned theoretical physicist, and writer, says 'We are not entities, we are relations.' There are no things, only happenings and those happenings occur in the workplace and in life through language. Therefore, to have a diverse workforce that operates inclusively we all need to learn more about how to discuss, debate and decide in a truly participatory way. Please join us in our next Piece, The Languages of Inclusivity ●

