

# A simple guide for selection decisions in recruitment



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**New recruitment consultants sometimes find it hard to confidently judge whether a candidate is right for a job. Stephen Walton, principal psychologist with Fenchurch Corporate Psychology, offers a useful guide to help deal with the problem.**

Exploring the many “how to” texts on recruitment reveals a confusing array of criteria upon which to base selection decisions. Different authors advise recruiters to focus on the competence that candidates demonstrate, the competencies they possess or on a mix of the knowledge, skills, aptitudes, abilities, attitudes, values or other characteristics that underpin competencies (often referred to as KSA’s, KSAV’s, KSAA’s, KSAO’s, etc). The absence of clear guidance in selecting the right person for a job prompts this article, which aims to provide a simple guide to assist new consultants with their selection decisions. The guide also introduces the idea of managing risk when there are degrees of fit between a candidate and a job.

## **BROAD INDICATORS OF FIT**

As shown in *Figure 1*, the broad indicators of fit between a candidate and a job can be usefully understood in terms of what motivates a person, what a person must know and be skilled and experienced at doing, and what physical and mental attributes are required for successful job performance.

### **Knowledge, Skills and Experience (KSE)**

It will be obvious to all that work related knowledge and the skill that can develop in any work activity are often central to determining a candidate’s suitability for a job. In addition, focussing on experience, which develops and hones knowledge and skills and provides an understanding of context so that candidates may apply their knowledge and skills appropriately in different situations, will inform a consultant’s judgement about the fit between a person and a job.

### **Motivation**

Put simply, motivation is the drive that people experience to satisfy their various needs. It is the anticipation of fulfilling certain needs that motivates a candidate to pursue a particular job, while achieving satisfaction of one’s needs at work promises greater employee productivity and tenure. Selecting a candidate with the right motivation means ensuring that there is a good fit between their needs and the satisfactions that a job delivers.

### **Physical and Mental Attributes**

Every job has a physical dimension although in practice a candidate’s physical capacity for work is often of greater concern when recruiting for blue-collar jobs than white-collar roles. Nevertheless, when a client specifies a physical job requirement or in circumstances where disabled candidates are involved, consultants should be prepared to incorporate the physical selection criteria for a job into their decision-making.

It is worth noting that when dealing with disabilities, consultants might find that the physical (or mental) criteria for selection vary based on the “reasonable adjustment” that employers are obliged to consider making to a job or workplace under anti-discrimination legislation.

Jobs can also be performed more or less successfully based upon the mental (intellectual and personality) characteristics of employees. The fact that people have different innate intellectual capacities means that some candidates are naturally more capable of learning new things or solving certain types of problems. A consultant would therefore find it useful to match the intellectual demands of a job to the ability of candidates in order to arrive at an accurate selection decision.

Similarly, jobs can have different requirements in terms of a person’s personality and the individual beliefs and unique emotion, thought and behaviour patterns they will display. Recognising, for instance, that jobs operate within an organisational culture that values certain beliefs and ways of behaving above others means that there are personality characteristics that will represent a better fit with a job. This will have implications for the consultant’s selection decision.

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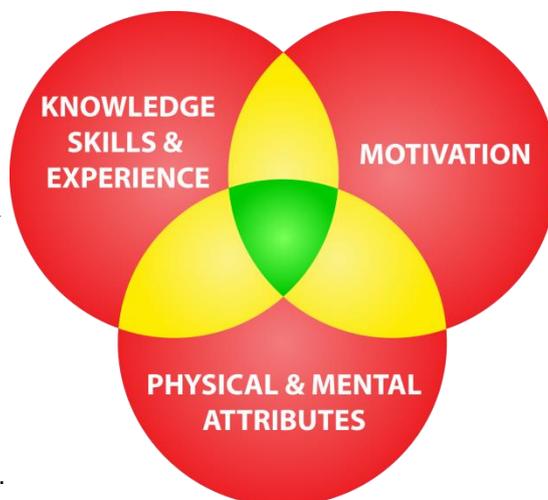
## STEPS INVOLVED IN THE SELECTION DECISION

Arriving at an accurate decision occurs by a number of steps. In the normal course of selection a recruiter would consult with their client to define the type and level of KSE, motivation and physical and mental attributes required to perform a job successfully. These criteria constitute the benchmark against which the selection decision is made. Next, the consultant would employ various means, such as behavioural interviewing, reference checking, psychometric assessment and so on to obtain the evidence upon which to base their selection decision. Finally, the consultant would compare the evidence obtained about a candidate against the selection criteria.

Some recruiters might choose to simply run their eye over the evidence while others will use rigorous rating systems to facilitate a comparison between the evidence and the selection criteria. Regardless of the approach, the selection decision will be based on the answers to questions about each of the broad indicators of fit. For example, "Does the candidate possess all, some or none of the KSE required to perform a job? Is there a strong, adequate or weak alignment between what the candidate wants from a job and what the job delivers? Is there an acceptable degree of fit between the physical and mental demands of a job and what a candidate will bring to the role?"

In answering these questions it can be the case that a less than "perfect" degree of fit is indicated. A candidate might not, for example, possess all of the knowledge, the most up to date skills or directly relevant experience in respect of the various job requirements. Whatever the mismatch is between the candidate and a job, the deficit represents an element of risk to an employer. However, under certain conditions such as a candidate-short labour market or where leaving a position vacant too long presents its own difficulties, some employers may be prepared to compensate for a candidate's deficiencies through on-the-job training, closer supervision or

Figure 1: Walton's Selection Risk Guide©



restructuring a role. Such accommodations will have the effect of modifying the criteria for selection and a consultant should aim to shape their judgment about the suitability of candidates accordingly.

Ultimately, the consultant will judge whether or not, on balance, a match is achieved between the evidence about a candidate and the selection criteria for each of the broad indicators of fit. At this point, a consultant might refer to the *Selection Risk Guide*© to obtain an overall picture of a candidate's suitability.

## MAKING DECISIONS USING THE SELECTION RISK GUIDE

The *Selection Risk Guide*© is colour coded, like traffic lights, to indicate how a consultant should proceed with their selection decision based on the degree of candidate/job fit and the risk that a candidate might represent to a prospective employer.

Working from the centre of the model, a candidate will fall into the *green* sector if the consultant judges that they meet the criteria for selection in each of the three broad indicators of fit. The green area of the model represents best fit and the least potential risk to an employer. A consultant should feel confident about making a positive recommendation when a candidate is judged to fall "in the green".

Where a candidate is judged to match a job in relation to any two of the broad indicators of fit, they will fall into one of the *yellow* sectors of the model. For example, the intersection of *Motivation* and *Physical & Mental Attributes* indicates that a candidate is appropriately motivated and possesses the physical capability as well as the mental resources to do a job well. What they lack is the right KSE, which represents a risk to an employer. In this situation, the consultant might conclude that the candidate is not suitable for the job or, they could choose to make a cautious recommendation if they know that an employer is able to compensate for the candidate's KSE deficit. Experience suggests that the absence of some knowledge and skills is generally the least risky deficit for an employer to manage.

A candidate who is judged to meet the criteria for selection in only one of the broad indicators of fit will fall into a *red* sector of the model. For example, a candidate falling into the red *KSE* sector will possess the knowledge, skills and experience to do a job but will lack the required mental attributes or a physical compatibility with the job. In addition, there is an absence of the right motivation, which would typically lead to patchy work performance and reduced tenure in a job. Together, these shortcomings represent a substantial risk to an employer and such candidates would not normally be recommended.

It almost goes without saying that a candidate who fails to meet the criteria for selection in all three of the broad indicators of fit is clearly unsuitable for a job.

## CONCLUSION

By concentrating on the three broad indicators of fit, a new consultant can be assured of making a selection decision that is more likely to deliver the right candidate for a job. The *Selection Risk Guide*© also provides a structure for conversations about candidates with prospective employers and it will assist a new consultant to classify the type of risk that a candidate might represent, which in turn would allow the client to make an informed hiring decision.