

rethinking **data trends**

The missing piece in our hiring equation

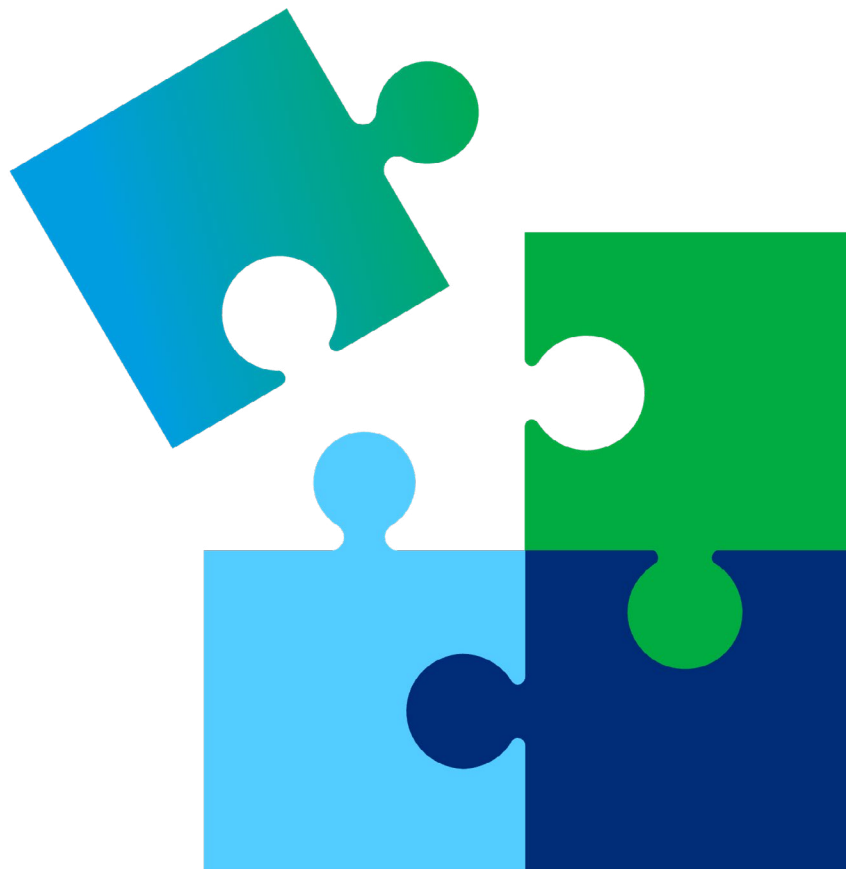


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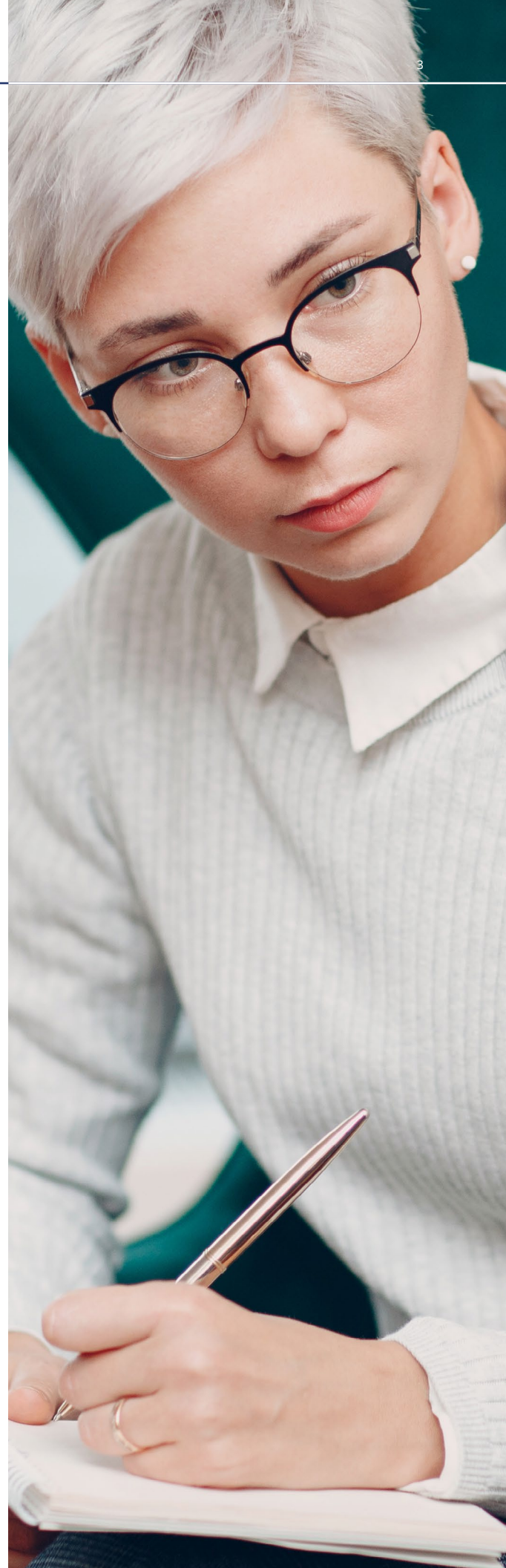
The talent paradox

In the relentless pursuit of top talent, we as business and talent leaders often find ourselves caught in a paradox.

Despite continuous investments in technology, process, and teams designed to help us find just the right talent to propel our businesses forward and give us that competitive edge, we always seem to be struggling to catch up.

Less than half of the C-Suite has confidence they can meet their customer demands with their current talent model, and investors are reaching a breaking point as well, with 70% of asset managers citing people sustainability (turnover, talent pipeline strength, and even employer brand) as a critical component to making informed investment decisions.¹

[1- Mercer's 2024 Global Talent Trends Report](#)



In search of *fit*

Let's face it: our hiring practices are stuck in a rut.

We pour immense resources—time, effort, and oh-so-much money—into finding the “perfect talent” for our organizations only to have it all go to waste. We pay to attract a flood of applicants, filling our talent pipelines to the brim, then we discard most of them, claiming they simply don’t “fit.” Next, we invest even more time, money, and energy on scrutinizing the few candidates that manage to eek their way through the funnel to further evaluate their fit. We put them through countless interviews, assessments of all shapes and sizes (skills assessments, personality assessments, gamified assessments), job simulations and mock exercises, and more. We inspect candidates every which way we can to make sure they’re a fit. But fit for what?

Fit for our terrible job descriptions that aren’t consistent, accurate or liked by pretty much anyone? Or, fit for the laundry list of requirements the hiring manager quickly copied from another company or team because they felt “good enough” to get the process started? Or are we looking for someone to fit into a static list of deliverables and priorities that are almost certain to shift as soon as someone is hired?



The problem we face isn't that we aren't getting to know enough about the individual candidate.

The problem is we're not placing the same level of scrutiny on what we believe they're a fit for.



While we meticulously inspect candidates through our various methods, we overlook a crucial element: the environment in which these candidates will operate and exist. We assess candidates scientifically, but don't apply that same scientific lens to understanding how a candidate will perform with one leader versus another, or one team versus another. We objectively measure a candidate's skills and even their preferences, but not how those attributes will complement, or detract from the existing team. We scrutinize a candidate's past experience at other organizations, but we don't scrutinize how they might impact our own organization based on our own unique set of business conditions.

A candidate who thrives in one environment may flounder in another, and this is not solely due to their individual attributes. The mindset and experiences of their managers and leaders play a significant role in unlocking their potential, as does the team they're surrounded by, the goals they're directed to attain, and the values of the business itself.

The truth is, both sides of the equation matter—the individual and their environment.

Yet, in most cases, we don't apply the same science and rigor to understanding our organizational environments as we do to evaluating individual talent.

Not just a talent acquisition problem

This lack of understanding around how environmental factors impact our talent extends beyond just the talent we're trying to acquire, and into the talent we've already paid to get. This is the talent that, once onboard, is left to navigate their own career paths, uncertain of where their true potential could actually be unlocked. This is the talent that, when they aren't able to successfully find growth and development inside your organization, will quickly leave your organization for another because it feels easier to get ahead.

It's another area of talent waste that we can't seem to get under control.

It's not that we haven't tried. Once again, we've invested in technology and processes to serve up open jobs, projects, gigs, learning opportunities, and mentors to our employees. We've paid to make sure we know what skills an employee is likely to have, how proficient they are, and even what motivates and interests them. But what we haven't been able to deliver - to managers or employees - is accurate guidance on which environments can help unlock an individual's potential.

Maybe an employee has the foundational skills and the motivations to pursue a new career path. Which leader is best suited to develop that employee? Which team would most benefit from their existing capabilities while helping to nurture their growth? Which teams would operate so differently it would alienate the employee and make them want to leave? Which teams and roles could help bridge the gap between where the employee is today and where they want to go in the future?

Better yet, imagine a sales leader is falling short of their goals for the year and they need to act quickly. There are plenty of eager new hires across the business development team that want a shot contributing to the team's sales quota, but their lack of experience on the sales floor makes it impossible to tell which will contribute the most. Who can step up and learn the fastest in this environment? Which senior seller should they shadow to get up to speed quickly? Which team lead will be the best at unlocking their capabilities?

These questions are impossible to answer if we're only looking at the individual, and not also examining the environment they'll be part of just as closely.

It's time to change our assumptions

This data gap has existed for so long that it's starting to feel normal, and that's where the real danger lies. With a blind spot like this, we're essentially all guessing at what talent will fit where in our businesses, just hoping that we get it right. We're gambling with our biggest investment – our human capital – and far too often, we're getting it wrong.

Despite our investment in skills-based hiring,

50%

of CHROs are still anxious about skills shortages.¹

1 in 3

executives are confident they have the talent model to capture growth this year.¹

It's clear that the wasteful approach to talent isn't working and it's having an impact on business outcomes.

We're missing out on talent that could catapult our business forward, while gambling on the talent we do hire – misunderstanding their potential, placing them in the wrong environments that stifle what they're capable of, and leaving them to figure out what's next mostly on their own.

Then we struggle with engagement, costly errors and mistakes, and regrettable attrition that we have to explain to our leaders and investors. And what good answer do we have? That we're clinging to a decades-old promise that simply inspecting candidates is enough to predict success in a business environment that's shifting more rapidly than we've ever seen before?



It's time to shift our focus from volume to value.

What if we began to ask not just if a candidate is a fit, but how and where they fit best within our organization?



What if we put talent into a garden, instead of a funnel?

What would happen if we started looking at the talent picture differently? Not just uncovering who the candidate is and what they're capable of, but what conditions will make it possible for them to reach their potential, and to contribute the most to our teams and businesses.

In a garden, some regions get a lot of sun, while others get more shade. Some areas of soil will have different Ph levels and nutrient density than others, while some spots will get more rain, more wind and more exposure to pests than others. This is a lot like our business environments where there's nuance across teams, leaders, projects and priorities that can impact the conditions for growth.



Rather than forcing talent into a funnel where the goal is to limit the output at the bottom, what if we put talent into a garden, where the goal is to maximize the output of every talent investment?

Understanding the seeds you have, and what kind of plants they can become is fine, but you'll never get the desired yield from your garden unless you also understand what kind of sunlight, water, and nutrients each plant needs to thrive AND you know where to place them to best get those things in the right doses.

Simply understanding our candidates, no matter how deeply we go, is still only half the equation. For talent to truly flourish, we need to understand both the talent we have, and the conditions under which they will thrive. Then we have to compare that to the conditions that exist in our own business, and within each pocket of our organization, so we can plant the right talent in the right place and nurture it to full bloom.

Talent sustainability is possible

Imagine if you were able to validate every dollar you invested in your talent strategy and get the most from every candidate you paid to attract. You would be able to assess a candidate not just against the job or team they applied for (which is often a complete guess for the candidate and not something you can expect them to get right), but across your entire organization to pinpoint every area where they could add value because they'd be in an environment that would bring out their best, maximize their potential, and bring the biggest impact to the business.

What if you could do the same for your own employees? Not losing them to the competition because it's easier to find a leapfrog moment for their career outside your organization than in. Not letting talent go stale and grow restless but arming them with the same insights around the conditions that will help them thrive as you give to leaders. Guiding them on where and how they can grow, develop and thrive inside your organization. Showing them how they can get ahead without leaving.

This is the essence of creating sustainable talent pipelines—focusing on value rather than volume.

By assessing both talent and their environments, we can make the most of every candidate, look for where they're most likely to get what they need to thrive, and place them there for maximum yield.

And once we hire that candidate, we continue to assess not only them, but the environment and how it's changing, so we can continuously find ways to help every employee thrive, add more value to the organization, and stay longer.

And what's even better, when we start measuring the environments we've created, we gain control over more of the equation. We can identify barriers that hinder talent success and take action to address them. For instance, if a manager struggles to develop some workers but not others, we can investigate the environmental factors at play. Are they receiving the right support? Is there a disconnect in values? There are any number of conditions that might be influencing these outcomes, all of which can be addressed, but only if we measure them.



That's the key to unlocking longevity and to making talent more sustainable.

Rethinking the approach to talent assessment



If we want to build sustainable talent pipelines, we have to look at the full picture of talent—the individual + their environment.

The team at HireGains is pioneering this approach. After years of leveraging data to develop high-performing sports teams, CTO Christian Hughes sought to apply similar principles in the business world. Partnering with progressive talent leader Tessa James and seasoned HR tech revenue leader Scott Fowle, they developed an **omni-directional assessment**.

Going beyond role fit, HireGains evaluates individual talent alongside environmental factors like team dynamics and leadership styles, and continues to evaluate these over time, enabling you to adjust your talent strategy as the individuals and environments inside your organization evolve. The result? A personalized, data-driven map that reveals how to unlock the

most value from the talent within your organization. This approach transcends traditional talent acquisition and management siloes, bridging the two and allowing you to focus holistically on talent as a critical asset.

It's time to stop flying blind in your hiring practices. Instead, embrace a new paradigm that values both the individual and their environment, ensuring that you not only attract the right talent but also unlock the conditions under which they'll thrive.

The future of talent sustainability lies in understanding the full picture—because when you do, everyone wins.

About us



Tara Cooper

HR Technology Analyst & Advisor

Tara is a 15-year veteran of the HR technology industry with a passion for innovative and disruptive tech. With expertise in go-to-market strategy, product marketing, and sales enablement, Tara is a leading HR Tech Analyst at Mercer where she works to uncover and share industry trends and insights with HR tech buyers and vendors.

Before joining Mercer, Tara played a key role in building and executing go-to-market strategies for brands like HireVue, SmashFly, Fetcher and Beamery, where helping organizations find and retain talent was a top priority. She also served as a strategic advisor to early-stage work tech founders, guiding them through the industry landscape and positioning their offerings to meet the evolving needs of HR.

Tara holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Michigan. She resides just outside Ann Arbor, where you can find her engrossed in an audiobook, hiking with her family, or doting on her Pomeranian rescue dog.



Jess Von Bank

Global Leader of HR Transformation & Technology Advisory

Jess Von Bank is a 20-year industry veteran and impassioned evangelist of the modern experience of work and the future of talent. As both a former recruiting practitioner and an expert in bringing workforce solutions to market, Jess looks to broaden executive mindset to better design and deliver digital-first cultures that exceed the expectations of talent and the needs of the business.

Jess is a global thought leader on HR transformation, digital experience, and workforce technology. She offers specialized expertise in recruiting, talent strategy, employer branding, DEI&B, brand building, and storytelling. She also runs the Now of Work, Mercer's global community for HR and work tech.

Jess is the President of Diverse Daisies, a nonprofit to enrich and empower girls. She lives in Minneapolis, where she races for free swag and raises her three daughters.

About us

About Mercer

Mercer designs and deploys innovative digital strategies to transform how HR delivers value to an organization and how people experience work. We fuel the success of digital transformation programs by offering market-leading advice, human-centered consulting, knowledge, research, and tools to enterprises and solution providers. We believe workforce technology should make work smarter, not get in the way. We help organizations evolve from technology implementation to holistic digital deployment. Turn your challenges into successful solutions by partnering with the most experienced and passionate bench of HR thought leaders who deliver on vision, strategy, design, deployment, and continuous innovation

For more information, please visit www.mercer.com.

About HireGains

In the world of sports, you don't see bad athletes, just poor configurations of players where strengths aren't optimized or players aren't well suited to their environment. Corporate teams aren't that different. There are team configurations that aren't optimized, environments that aren't well-suited for all the employees within them, and leaders that have the wrong team members assigned to their roster. It's easy to label this bad hiring, but at the heart, this is a configuration issue caused by a gap in our assessment data. And it leads to all kinds of costly distractions – from lost productivity, to increased attrition, to the need to continuously flood talent pipelines with more volume that keeps costing more money.

HireGains uses science to alleviate this talent waste, helping you make the most of your existing team while reducing the volume and spend it takes to uncover new talent. With a proven background in elite sports performance, where every player's strengths are identified and maximized, our omnidirectional talent assessment measures individual, team and organizational alignment on a continuous cycle, giving you real-time insights into who you should hire, promote or assign to a project based on all of the individual and environmental factors that predict success.

A player trade, adjustment to the lineup, or ushering in of a new coach can make all the difference in a sports team's performance – and every one of those moves is based on data. HireGains delivers the data that makes those moves possible within your own organization, helping you maximize the potential of every employee, every new hire, and every candidate you encounter. This is how you move away from talent waste and begin to embrace talent sustainability.

For more information, please visit www.hiregains.com