



# Cultural Fit: A Client Story

## The Case

Recently, Leap Solutions was retained to recruit a CFO for an existing client. The client has been with us since 2005 and the current CFO was retiring. Leap has assisted in every hire including the President/CEO. This in depth involvement allows us to fully understand the culture of the organization and quickly assess candidates for the organizational cultural fit. Cultural fit refers to an organization's employment brand that attracts and retains top talent and how the applicant's values and aspirations are compatible with the organization's values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

To commence the search, we engaged a small team of board members and the President/CEO as the "Search Committee" to support the interview process and make the final selection. We received a lot of applications especially in light of the job market. Vetting through the resumes was the easy task knowing the technical and cultural dynamics of the organization. What resumes quickly piqued our interest were shared and discussed with the client. There was a difference in opinion among the search committee about the applicants. The search committee focused on technical skills and education; whereas, we focused on both the technical and cultural aspects of the client organization.



### Cultural vs. technical fit

The cultural knowledge comes from two sources: one is being intimate with the organization and having a clear understanding of or experience with the culture, and the other asking the right questions of the organization to define the cultural fit. So often, recruiting firms drive for placement with technical skills and forget to consider the cultural fit. Some recruiters might even say that placement is primary (the money side of the transaction) when in fact sustainability, technical capabilities and fit is the ultimate goal for a strong hire.

Much has been written, and with good reason, about the cost of a hire and the impact of a bad hire, which results in only having to rehire again. Sometimes it is because the company is not clear on the position's technical requirements, but the most common reason is because the person does not fit into the culture.

### Selecting for cultural fit

The search committee had their favorite applicants and even made comments about the leaders of the hiring race. We, of course, kept emphasizing the selection process, evaluation criteria and while early leading candidates can emerge, we must see the process through to the end. Finally, when the field was narrowed to the top two candidates, both candidates clearly were technically capable of performing the duties of this position. One candidate had a broader skill set with larger companies, while the other had significant technical skills with smaller companies. After the final face to face interviews, the candidate with the perceived disadvantage because of smaller company technical skills became the top candidate because of their cultural fit. Remember, while both had incredible technical skills, the candidate that had both the technical capabilities and cultural fit was a clear choice at the end of the process. It is important to recognize that cultural fit is a key differentiator in the selection process. Individuals selected on with cultural fit in mind tend to contribute faster, perform better, and have longer tenure with the company.

The search committee at the end of the process said, "Wow, we would have never guessed this candidate would have come all the way through the process just from their resume and the first phone screen. We clearly made a great hire by allowing the process to work and focusing on both the technical and cultural fit aspect of the candidates."

In the workplace, intellectual capital, along with individual and organizational qualities, represents a competitive value proposition for a company. As the employment market enters a hopeful economic upturn, top talent may be more difficult to secure. A tight talent market often can lead hiring managers to make decisions under strict deadlines and not incorporate the cultural fit throughout the hiring process.

## Best hiring practices for determining cultural fit

1. Ensure a clear and well defined job description focused on the technical aspects of the job is ready before the position is posted.
2. What is the organizational culture? What is expected of a candidate in regards to the cultural fit?
3. With whom does this position interact? Is there a broad or narrow spectrum of interaction with others?
4. In regards to the organizational culture, what specific values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are acceptable and desirable for employees?
5. How might this hire change the organizational culture, if desired?
6. Are you hiring to find an exact fit to the previous position holder or do you want something different for the position?
7. Does your hiring process support discovery for technical and cultural fit? Ask and probe with a lot of questions and be sure to test the answers with more questions to understand both the technical and cultural aspects. Don't be fooled by a person that interviews well, drill to the core.
8. Consider the various avenues to obtain perspective and input regarding candidates. Use committees, search teams or stakeholders to participate in the interview process. Work together to discover and uncover areas that might be overlooked. The variety of interactions can lead to important information and observations as you never know when a candidate might let their guard down, which might raise a red flag. One cautionary note, make sure the interview questions are vetted and approved to avoid misleading or illegal questions.
9. Thoroughly understand and state the organizational culture before vetting resumes. This will help you keep the "sleepers" in the process and discard the obvious candidates not meeting all the requirements.
10. Take your time and ensure a great hire. The cost of a bad hire is high and can send the wrong message within the organization. Making a good hire the first time not only saves considerable costs, but has a direct impact on staff morale, productivity, and performance.

For more information on understanding and hiring for organizational cultural fit, contact Leap Solutions Group at 707.527.0969 or email us at [leap@leapsolutions.com](mailto:leap@leapsolutions.com).