

The Single Point of Failure (SPOF) in hiring senior level executives

(in fact just about anyone...)

Please consider the following scenario;

A senior executive hands in their notice, their Manager goes through a range of feelings from surprise and shock, anger and disappointment. They spend the first few days or even weeks encouraging their reportee to stay and/or negotiating their exit date, talking with their own boss and key stakeholders, managing internal communications, all whilst the clock is ticking to their exit date. In the US that might be as short as one week in the UK more like three to six months.

If the executive remains resolute to leave, at some point the manager reconciles themselves to the fact and that this date is looming fast.

In haste and in times of stress we tend to centralise activity, micro-execute on actions and internalise the issues. After all who wants to air their dirty laundry? We fear the phrase “people join companies and leave bosses”.

Bosses may take it upon themselves to write **a job description** from scratch, liaise with HR and ask for a previous template to be adapted, ask an executive search partner to create one on their behalf or resort to ChatGPT to do their homework for them and tinker around the edges.

In order to add some science and structure to a process, a panel of interviewers is selected, the job description is circulated and a series of interviews arranged.

Sound all too familiar?

With so many moving parts and participants involved there are many things that could derail a good outcome but, in my opinion, the SPOF is the method by which the job description is created. From this, all other things will flow.

The resulting document will be:

- a reflection of the working practice of the business and the leadership style of the hiring manager
- a critical sales and marketing document circulated to the candidate market
- an accurate tool to not only describe the position but also encourage relevant candidate's interest in it
- engage and align the interview panel and provide the necessary structure on which to base your interviews and selection process

Without proper consideration and subsequent interview panel engagement the following issues tend to permeate:

- the hiring manager is seen by colleagues and candidates to be too autocratic
- the role is considered to be the same as it was. It will not be the same, especially if the individual has been in post for a year or more or there has been a shift in market

dynamics, business strategy or changes to key stakeholders and colleagues. To assume anything different is naïve

- panel members will have a different view of the role with varying degrees of accuracy. Some should align and some should conflict
- panel members will have a different view of the competencies required to perform the role and a different value attributed to them
- panel members will inevitably have a different style, subjective opinions of what good looks like and varying degrees of interviewing capability
- interview questions will vary, become more conversational in style making accurate comparisons impossible
- panel members will not feel invested, sufficiently briefed and not as duty bound to fulfil their responsibilities as a critical interviewer
- there is a higher risk of political judgement affecting the process and quality of feedback

Where I have seen it best, is when the hiring manager;

- prepares in good time and has a plan for succession
- considers the internal or external hiring process in the context of the;
 - current and medium-term future business plan
 - dynamics of the marketplace
 - organisational structure (consisting of complimentary and conflicting competencies)
- engages with key stakeholders (where possible), above, beside and below the position to be hired to discuss and agree the specifics of the position and the competencies required to perform it well
- produces a collaborative, well thought through, current and relevant description of the:
 - company
 - context of the role
 - team organisation
 - accountabilities and responsibilities
 - experiences and qualifications considered to be pre-requisite or desirable
 - competencies



Davidson Butler is a privately owned and independently owned executive search firm.

I am James Isaacs, founder and Managing Director and am privileged to be able to share my own personal thoughts and opinions without fear of reprisal from bosses, owners or hopefully too many overtly influential or potentially offended clients.

I will be honest and do my best to be fair and reasonable. On occasion this might be controversial and on others I can be receptive to opinion, challenge and reserve the right to change my mind. I aim to practice what I preach and welcome reminding when I don't.

My intention is to encourage reflection and consideration and influence key decision makers on the way in which we interact, assess and treat people as we go about looking to recruit or be recruited.