



Talent, Skill, Competency, and Alignment

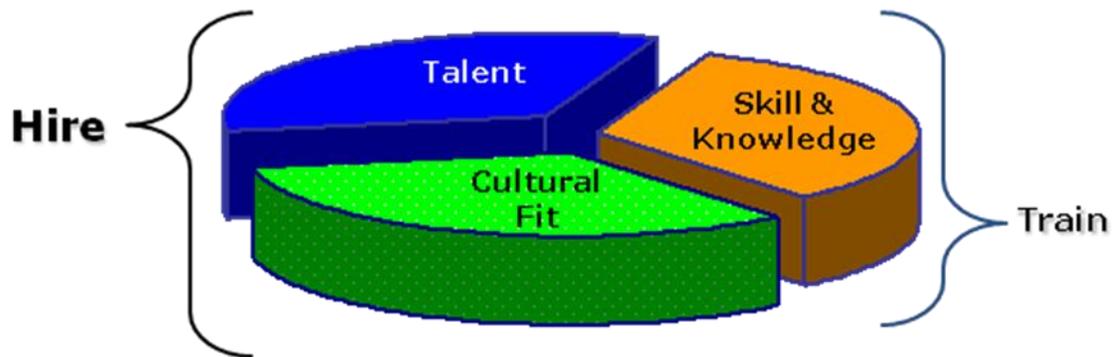


Increase Your Odds
of Success with
Leadership Alignment

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Talent, Skill, Competency, and Alignment

When it comes to hiring for management positions, only 1/3 of the best fit criteria come from skills and knowledge that can be assessed through the resume. The remaining 2/3 is made up of talent and cultural fit with the business or department. When the cultural fit or talent is out of alignment, everything seems to become difficult; when the fit is in alignment everything is easier.



Because the terms Talent, Skill, and Competency are often confused, misused, and abused, it is best to define them carefully before using them.

Talent is best defined as *the natural and spontaneous patterns of thought, feelings, behaviors, and actions that contribute to a person's ability to perform at a defined level of excellence.* Talent is an innate ability that a person can enhance but only to a certain degree.

In contrast, **Skill** is defined as *a developed, learned, or acquired ability.* Skill is developed over the years through **Practice Discipline**, the focus and dedication to practice a skill repeatedly until it is mastered. Skills are most easily mastered when they are based on a natural talent and when the person has a drive to master them.

A person's overall **Competency** or total capability is *the combination of both Talent (innate ability) and Skills (learned ability).*

Take the ability to be structured and detail-oriented. If a person is naturally spontaneous and tends to live their life without any real structure, there are tools such as time management and prioritization disciplines that will help them improve their organizational skills, but the natural hardwiring of structure is difficult to inject, especially later in life. There will be improvement but never to the level of excellence of someone who is hardwired that way. Unfortunately, people can spend a lot of time and money trying to develop a talent that they don't have; regardless of their efforts, they will never perform at the level of a person who has the talent naturally.

The competency of "Business Acumen" may best be described as the combination of the talent to see and predict business patterns with the skill of financial literacy or understanding of a business model or industry. The evidence of Open-Book Management cultures illustrates that everyone can learn about "the numbers" and that their personal efforts contribute to the success of an entire organization. However, not everyone has the unique natural talent to "see the patterns" quickly and instinctively.

Some specific examples:

Jack Stack CEO of SRC corporation in Springfield Mo., has the unique natural talent and developed skill to see patterns in financial statements. What's interesting is that while participating in his favorite pastime (fishing) he also has an ability to recognize the bait patterns that the fish are feeding on, which makes him successful in competitive bass fishing. He has obviously transferred this pattern recognition ability to his hobby - fishing tournaments.

Michael Milken has had the ability to multiply four-digit numbers in his head since grade school but he can't safely navigate driving a car down the road because he can't concentrate on the road without having his focus shift away from driving the car. One strong talent doesn't carry over to other areas.

Baseball players are another example of people who develop talent into specific, marketable skills. Virtually everyone can stand beside home plate with a baseball bat in their hand and swing it in an accelerating motion across the plate. It clearly is not a difficult skill for even a non-athlete. Now let's add a baseball being thrown by a pitcher across the plate at 90+ miles per hour. It's actually possible (but highly unlikely) for anyone to swing the bat as hard as they can and connect with the ball and drive it into the outfield. Done with enough force, applied at the right moment within the perfect swing plane, it's even possible for an untrained person to "hit a home run."

So it's not a question of if someone can physically do it. It is a question of how well they do it and how often. Hitting a round ball with a round bat while both objects are moving - that my friends, is a very difficult thing for even a talented athlete. The final challenge is to hit the ball to the exact location so as to get a base hit and avoid the defensive alignment of the players in the field. How often does that happen? The best professional players only achieve that 33% of the time over their careers. When a task is extremely difficult, it requires high competency (both talent and skill) to accomplish.

Changing Hardwiring

Once a person has matured as an adult, it's not that it's impossible to change; it's just that it requires enormous effort, repetition, and time to establish a new pattern of hardwired behavior. In other words, what's at stake must be meaningful enough or compelling enough to cause a person to get so far out of their comfort and confidence zone that they will change. In corporate America, it is odd how we believe that we can fundamentally change people to become something they are naturally not.

You don't teach leadership, you teach people how to enhance the leadership ability they already have.

Those who have more natural talent, acquired skill, and developed capability at the earliest age are most often the ones who will improve the most with training. People who start with natural talent will grow exponentially and there will be a greater return on investment for the coaching effort.

A person with no natural talent surely has the ability to improve. However, their dedicated efforts will eventually hit a point of diminishing returns when their performance is compared to others with more natural ability.

If throughout your life, you have never been naturally good at something (with repeated efforts), it's not that you can't improve; it's just that it's unlikely. One must recognize that there is a far greater ROI achieved when working with someone who has the natural talent to begin with.

Is it likely that there are some things that we are best designed to do?

Like the land use concept of "highest and best use", there is probably a best fit for everyone in some endeavor, a role where their natural ability (**T**alent) aligns with their passion (**D**rive) and focus (**P**ractice discipline). The real questions are: what is it and where is it for each and every person? How many people today have the perfect alignment of:

- Their natural spontaneous ability (**T**alent)
- Their passion and desire (**D**rive)
- Their focus and curiosity to learn and grow (**P**ractice discipline)

Research has shown that about 16% of the population has this alignment. It's possible that many people are not exposed to opportunities early enough in their life to create that alignment. It's also possible that many people cannot make a career out of what they do best, or have a passion for. Finally, it's also possible that some people get trapped in a professional career and can't make the transition to what they are best aligned to do.

When people have this alignment, when their talents are used to develop their skills with focus and discipline, they become extremely good at what they do. When people match their natural, hardwired talents with the professional role that is the "best fit" for them, they are far more likely to add value, become successful and ultimately feel gratified and fulfilled every day.



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