

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

BY AZ AHMED

I've read and heard numerous concerns from interim and permanent candidates regarding the state of the recruitment sector in recent years. There are many legitimate reasons why candidates feel disenchanted with recruiting organisations. Comments have ranged from badly designed, generic job descriptions to being given no feedback on why they have been unsuccessful in their application - aside from a standard response.

This is worrying as candidates should be highly valued in a market that has decreasing pools of experienced professionals in many sectors and areas and a simultaneous ever increasing need for competent and visionary leaders. So how can organisations give candidates the best possible experience?

Here are five considerations:

1. Consultancy Support

Organisations recruiting without support from specialist consultancies has been highlighted as a poor decision by many, including [Alex Butler](#) (interim CDIO), [citing on LinkedIn](#) '[not utilising] recruitment agency or headhunter support, which, for a senior leadership position in a competitive market like this appears odd.'

The value of recruitment consultancies is often underestimated. The collective knowledge of candidates alone at a consultancy is priceless. Building a good understanding of candidates' strengths and suitability for roles takes considerable time. Consultants possess expert industry knowledge, an extensive network and, through many conversations with senior leaders, have a unique insight into their challenges.

2. Partnership Working

Considering the value of consultancies, it is important for organisations to not only appoint consultancies to recruit to roles but, more significantly, to work closely with them as partners. Working together allows consultancies to offer impartial advice to help shape interim and permanent opportunities ensuring they are attractive to candidates and create an engaging and fair process.

A joint approach allows the recruiting organisation to gain better value from the consultancy, who should understand how a role might be challenging to appoint and advise accordingly. For example, broadening the geographical scope by considering different sectors or introducing greater flexibility around working from home.

There can be a one-way relationship with recruiting organisations briefing consultancies on roles but not being open to the advice they are given. Ultimately this is detrimental to both, resulting in either not being able to find a candidate or the wrong one being appointed. There can be significant recruitment costs to any role, so strong partnership working can lead to better outcomes and increased retention.

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3. Ethical Behaviour

On paper, consultancies provide an independent route to overseeing a recruitment process; they are unfortunately far from blameless in perpetuating bad behaviour. I've heard alarming stories from candidates of being put forward for roles without their consent, not being told why they're unsuccessful and even being charged administration fees!

There are some underhanded, unscrupulous and unethical practices at work. Recruiting organisations need to pick consultancies that operate ethically, whose focus is not limited to finding the right candidate for the role but treating all candidates fairly. This is not difficult to achieve through giving a clear briefing on the role and hiring organisation, keeping them apprised of their progress, and providing honest feedback. Identifying a professional consultancy with a legacy of appointing credible candidates and stellar feedback from the wider candidate community - with a strong commitment to mirroring the values of the recruiting organisation is the foundation to finding the right partner.

Two key action points which come up often from candidates are:

1. Identifying Organisational Needs

Organisations must clearly define the requirements and expectations for an incoming interim or permanent candidate, which involves assessing the skills, experience, and knowledge needed to contribute effectively. This most applies to newly created roles where the purpose hasn't been strictly defined.

Interim roles can particularly be undefined, which, for example, with a programme or transformation role is to be expected. However, to gain the best candidate, it is worthwhile to invest the time to outline the key objectives and goals and the type of personality which will fit into your organisation.

2. Creating a Compelling Job Description

A well-crafted job description is essential in attracting suitable candidates. It should outline the institution's mission, the scope of responsibilities, and the desired qualifications and experience. It should emphasise key skills such as adaptability, strong communication skills, and the ability to foster collaboration relationships. Ensuring the description is revised to reflect up-to-date responsibilities for the role is essential.

These are some of my early thoughts on the recruitment market and, in particular, partnership working, I plan to expand on this with further articles. I'd love to hear your thoughts; please get in touch to discuss more.



Az Ahmed is a Senior Consultant with over eight years supporting the public sector in local and central government as well as higher education. He is guided by his desire to help individuals join the interim sector and to support the higher education institutions in appointing credible, transformational leaders who drive forward change.

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