TALOGY

HIRING FUTURE-READY EARLY TALENT

Executive summary

Early talent, lasting impact

Insights for effective early careers selection

With new jobs being created, individuals moving to different occupations, exits from the labor force, and a retiring population, it is imperative to attract employees in the early stages of their careers to keep your talent pipeline flowing. Establishing a clear and effective strategy for hiring early career talent is essential for professional organizations.

As technology rapidly advances and the move to hybrid work continues, the skills required for success in early career roles have shifted. Candidates who are a good fit for a role and an organization are in high demand in a highly competitive job market. As the demographics of the workforce continues to change – Gen Z will make up 27% of the workers by 2025[1] – it is important to consider what will attract early career talent to organizations and professional roles.

To address these challenges, we explored the perspectives of candidates, current employees, and hiring managers for early career professional roles to provide a well-rounded understanding of the wants and needs of the early talent market. This research report highlights our findings across three critical areas:

1. **Early careers success criteria:** Defining the key competencies and skills required to succeed in these roles.
2. **Early talent attraction:** Attracting early talent in an increasingly competitive environment.
3. **Early talent assessment:** Assessing early talent in a relevant and engaging manner.

1 The Economist (2024, May 8). Is America Inc's war for talent over? www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/gen-z-don-t-want-to-work-for-you-here-s-how-to-change-their-mind

Research insights

Challenges in early career professional recruitment

1 Fit

Achieving the right fit for not only the specific role, but for the team and organizational culture.

2 Experience

In a talent pool with limited professional backgrounds, it is challenging to evaluate and compare candidates.

3 Size of applicant pool/market competition

Managers may not receive enough applicants, or if they do, the majority do not align with the requirements.

4 Salary expectations

High expectations for salary and benefits do not align with offer.

Addressing the challenges

Talent strategies for early career success

1 Define the key competencies and skills required

With lack of professional experience, organizations may look to a skills-based hiring strategy to assess candidates with a focus on capabilities rather than education or experience. It is vital to ensure that the competencies being used in recruitment measure the behaviors needed for success in an evolving world of work. It is equally important that early talent professionals understand what is expected of them as they start out in their careers and navigate a complex job market.

Key findings

The top three most important competencies for early careers professional success:

1 Problem solving
2 Communication
3 Teamwork

Early career professionals (current employees in these roles) and managers rated the same top three competencies as most important although in a slightly different order.

There is consensus that interpersonal and problem-solving skills are essential for these roles. **Teamwork** and **Communication** are ranked in the top three most important across the globe. This aligns with other research, which shows that effective teamwork, solving problems and communication tend to be seen as very important across regions, roles and industries.

With the continued rapid change in the world of work, it is important to consider what competencies and skills will be required in the future of work. Recent secondary research[2] aligns with the insights from our study, ranking the following as the most important competencies for the future:

1 **Communication**
2 **Teamwork**
3 **Cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem solving)**
4 **Adaptability**

2 **Communication** – Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Chaka (2020)
Teamwork – Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Kowal et al. (2022)
Creativity – Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Kowal et al. (2022), Chaka (2020)
Cognitive skills – Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), Chaka (2020), World Economic Forum (2023)

Things to know

- While rated highly in importance by employees, with both Learning Agility and Personal Development featuring in the top 10, did not feature prominently in the manager's ranking. This may suggest that managers are focused more on what early career professionals are going to bring to their role right now and may not be thinking as much about the evolution of their roles over time.
- While the specific skills required for success may undergo significant change in the years to come, it's clear that there are competencies that have remained relatively stable over time, including communication and collaboration, that can provide early career professionals with a solid basis to expand upon. Competencies that are on the rise like critical thinking, creativity, learning agility, and adaptability are likely to further increase in importance.

Making insights actionable

Assess a broad range of competencies, across social and cognitive skills, and adaptability:

- Incorporate a blend of soft skills, cognitive skills, and competencies that will help people to navigate a changing work environment in the assessment process. A well-rounded evaluation across these core areas is likely to predict success in a broad range of professional roles.

Consider both current and future needs:

- Think about both the competencies and skills needed for success in the role right now and also what might be needed in the future. Ideally, early career hires would remain with the organization and evolve to take on greater responsibilities.

Focus on trainability, not just immediate success:

- Given the changing nature of work and technology, as well as the difficulty of finding sufficient time and resources for training, focus on criteria that indicate whether a candidate will have successful training outcomes.

2 Attract early career professionals in a competitive environment

Once the competencies and skills required for the role have been identified, the next challenge to overcome is attracting a talent pool that possesses those qualities. While organizations assess candidates for job-fit, candidates also evaluate the organization during the hiring process to determine if it's right for them. We know from research that in the earliest stages of the hiring process, candidates primarily consider whether the organization has good alignment with their priorities, before turning their attention to whether the role itself is a good fit in later stages of the process.

Key findings

Top factors important to early career professionals when applying to an organization:

- 91% Salary benefits
- 77% Fit between interests and the role requirements
- 63% Opportunities for development
- 55% Location
- 54% Flexible working

Universally, compensation was considered a top factor. Alignment of personal interests to the role and opportunities for growth was prioritized alongside work location and flexibility.

Top factors that stop early careers professionals from applying:

- 73% Other people's bad experiences
- 70% Lack of information about the salary
- 64% Lack of information about the job role
- 51% Lack of flexibility in work arrangement

While these largely correspond with the factors that would attract an individual to an organization, reputation clearly also plays a key role in influencing job choice decisions. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure both accepted and rejected applicants come away with a positive impression of the organization.

Making insights actionable

Showcase commitment to developmental opportunities early:

- Provide immediate feedback and development insights within the selection process. Follow this up with a clear onboarding and ongoing development plan – make this accessible to potential applicants.

Provide a realistic job preview at all stages of the process:

- From the job description through to the interview, provide candidates with realistic insight into what the job entails. Take the opportunity to utilize each assessment phase to communicate with candidates about what to expect.

Measure fit early and objectively:

- If possible, assess for culture or values fit early in the selection process, before you have met the candidate face- to-face. This could be done with a culture fit assessment.

Have a clear and fair flexible working policy:

- It's clear that early career professionals expect some level of flexibility in their roles. Make sure you have a clearly outlined policy that's visible to them at the application stage.

Be transparent about salary:

- Publish transparent salary bands to ensure neither you nor the candidate waste time in a selection process where expectations are misaligned.

Make a positive impression:

- Highlight features that can help to set your organization apart. Do this in an authentic way, as negative perceptions could result if applicants perceive dishonesty.

3 Assess early career professionals in a relevant and engaging way

After successfully attracting early talent to apply, it's important to keep them engaged during the recruitment process to avoid unwanted attrition. Additionally, negative experiences with the assessment process can damage an organization's reputation as a good employer and deter future applicants from applying.

Key findings

Early career professionals perspective

Recruitment assessment likes and dislikes:

LIKES	DISLIKES
Simple and straightforward	Length/repetitive or generic questions
Personal connection	Impersonal
Opportunity to demonstrate skills	Inability to express oneself completely
Role clarity	Not job related
Engagement and challenge	Stress inducing
Feedback	
Organizational preview	

The top five most important assessment features rated by early careers job seekers and employees:

1. Feels relevant to the role
2. Gives realistic insight into the job tasks
3. Fairness for all candidates
4. Receiving feedback
5. Short completion time

Managers perspective

Most important early talent assessment criteria:

- **Psychometric properties** – is the assessment valid, reliable, and fair?
- **Cost** – what is the price and is it cost effective?
- **Ease of use** – is it user friendly and easy to deploy?
- **Customizable**

There is generally alignment between applicants' and managers' preferences. Both groups prioritize a simple and straightforward assessment experience, emphasizing psychometric properties like validity and fairness. Interestingly, the candidate experience wasn't a priority for managers, whereas it is relevant to many of the themes in the candidates' responses. This presents an opportunity for employers looking to improve their assessment process.

Making insights actionable

Keep the process simple:

- Ensure that assessments are easy and convenient for candidates to complete. Give clear instructions about the assessment's objectives and expectations of them throughout the process.

Create an engaging experience:

- While length is an important factor, it's also key to keep the assessment experience engaging for candidates. Mixing up assessment formats and including gamified elements can help reduce feelings of monotony, especially when candidates complete many assessments during their job search.

Make the assessment relevant:

- Ensure the assessment accurately reflects the tasks they might encounter in the role and the organizational culture and values. Incorporating behavioral simulations, such as situational judgment tests, is an effective method for achieving this.

Maintain personal connection:

- Early career professionals dislike assessments that are impersonal and lack a human touch. Aim to provide opportunities for them to engage in real conversations with interviewers, potential colleagues, and other candidates. This can also help to reduce nerves, especially for early career professionals who are new to the job market.

Give feedback about their performance:

- Where possible, provide constructive feedback to early career professionals after assessments. Offering specific development tips gives candidates valuable insights and helps them prepare for future applications.

Request feedback about the assessment process:

- Ask candidates to share their thoughts and experiences with the assessment process. Consider adding a section with questions or an option to leave open text feedback that can be completed after the assessment.

Research recommendations

Matching the right person to the right role is equally important for early-career professionals as it is for organizations.

When targeting early career professionals starting their career journey, it is crucial to consider their priorities and motivations, going beyond job-specific skills to how they will fit, learn, and grow within the business.

Defining the right skills and competencies for a role and designing a selection and assessment process that engages and informs is key when competing in this talent pool. Employing the right strategies to attract, engage and assess candidates can ensure long-term job and organizational success.

Top five ways to enhance your early career hiring process:

1. Consider both current and future needs when defining job requirements
2. Give a realistic job preview throughout
3. Showcase what your organization can offer applicants
4. Aim for a simple and engaging assessment experience
5. Include personal interaction with candidates

Learn more how Talogy can help you attract, engage and select the right early careers talent.

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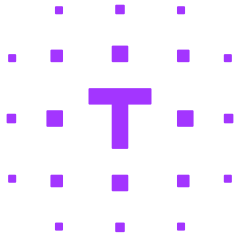

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