

## EFFECTIVE RECRUITING INTERVIEW: DIALOGUE WITH UNCERTAINTY

Nowadays the educational model of the MBA, which kept the first place among management education programmes for many years, becomes more and more controversial because the demands of modern companies are changing materially. The reality of an international economy is such that managers of the future will need to be able to act in unknown and unpredictable situations, which owing to their novelty are lacking in the portfolio of study cases.

The appearance of new situations is connected with the state of the contemporary world – rapid development of technology, quick market changes and rise of cross cultural influences. The branches of one company can be located in different places of the world while people of different nationalities, brought up under the influence of various cultures and with different levels of education can work in one office. The problem of self education appears, also problems of initiative and creativity become very meaningful in such frameworks. Therefore people who can think in a creative and innovative manner are needed: Such people will not lose interest when they face unpredictable situations.

From our point of view, Russia nowadays possesses one of these unique possibilities. Events of its recent historical period were such that economical and political situations were changing with the speed of light, forcing Russians to develop actively their business skills, ability to adaptation and stress-stability. Therefore, in comparison with a “defended” situation Russian business has much more experience working with situations of uncertainty. We think that it is a special chance for development by means of connecting Russian and European experience, new methods and business techniques, first of all in the sphere of human resources.

Companies which are keeping pace with life and think of their future need something more than simply hiring a person who easily adapts to circumstances. We suppose that it is sensible to say good-bye to the illusion that a targeted position will 100 percent correspond with all that the candidate knows and is able to do when developing a recruiting policy for the company. Just as there are no people who can completely match all the requirements of the company. Much more probable the motivation of a candidate will be key to achieve success in the supposed position.

According to this point of view, functional tasks on one side and the portfolio of a candidate’s skills on the other side are sensible to consider as elements of garden architecture: they should be groomed until they reach the required size, need care and they certainly will change as time passes, the firm grows and the candidate develops. Diversity of requirements and skills is a creative platform for the further development of an employee in the firm, and also with the firm, so the recruiting interview can serve as a starting point of this development. Thus, the right definition of a candidate’s motivation is exactly one of the most important tasks for a recruiting interview.

### **Success motivation: how does your portrait look like?**

**What size would you pick to imagine a painted portrait of our candidates? In what manner and size would they like to be portrayed themselves?**

These two strange questions should a manager ask himself before the interview with potential employees starts. For what purpose it should be done will be illustrated with the historical example.

Madame Pompadour, who is known as a maitresse of the French king Louis XV, is an impressive example of an employee who made a stellar career. She influenced French politics for more than 10 years. This woman possessed many qualities which are necessary for the successful manager: behavior flexibility, creative approach, quick learning of new things, good orientation in unknown environment. Exactly these skills are essential for the employee for a successful career in a company.

One portrait of Madame Pompadour was painted by Francois Boucher, on canvas and the size is exactly 202×157 sm. This portrait occupies a big part of the wall in the New Pinacothèque

in Munich. Madame Pompadour is portrayed in manner, which was frequently used in portraits of statesmen and quite unusual for the woman portrait of that time.

Using contemporary business language, this is the record height gained by a top manager in circumstances of extreme uncertainty. The size of the canvas with the portrait of Madame Pompadour is nothing but the symbol of her own interest in power, managing, and influencing an organization, which is the French court in this example. This woman persistently searched the possibility to be closer to the king and reach her aim. For the surprise to the “organization”, which is the French court, instead of “being discharged” as other fleeting mistresses, after three weeks of “being employed”, this woman became a person of first importance of French policy for 10 years, in full sense Madame Pompadour (durer(fr.) – “last, go on”). Thanks to her talent, intuition and easy-learning Madame Pompadour successfully adapted to changing atmospheres of intrigues and unwritten laws. She grew inside the “firm”-court - her own micro cultures, for example, theatres where all court circles tried to take part in performances. She demonstrated almost inexhaustible vitality reserve, endurance and intellect, having raised and spread far away from French boundaries the status of her “firm”, so that till nowadays the French court of Louis XV in Pompadour times take important parts in history and culture. This woman obviously strived for obtaining the largest canvas for her portrait, demonstrating her special approach to work in the company.

### **Key moment: right appreciation of candidate’s personality**

So, in the process of a recruiting interview, a manager who talks to the candidate must clearly define how the “canvas” for the candidate should look like and what size it will be from the point of view of the company and from the candidate’s own point of view. In other words – how this potential employee appreciates himself and how he will be appraised by the company. The interview with a promising employee is similar to searching “Madame Pompadour” – a powerful creative personality, who promises not only occupying high manager positions, but also is able to motivate and lead other employees and, probably, change for the better the strategy and principles of the company.

Besides of searching talented managers who can reach key positions in the future, we shouldn’t forget about development of possibilities of other specialists. Such employees are not interested in a manager career, but want to develop “inside” – to take over highly specialized tasks required today.

Therefore, long before the interview with a potential employee, a manager must appreciate the climate of a company’s inside culture and clearly define the following:

- If the company wants to supply its “Madame Pompadours”, in other words managers with good prospects, with sufficient freedom and at the same time with conditions for their talents to develop inside the company?
- Do we agree with the fact that they can on their own initiative search and take over tasks initially not intended for them, and not only fulfil their direct tasks but also try to enlarge the spectrum of their functional tasks?
- Or will we strictly follow a controlled hierarchy with detailed descriptions of tasks which are set, without any exceptions for extremely creative personalities with ideas for innovation?
- Which personal characteristics do people who are necessary for our company need to possess, if they are not “Madame Pompadours”?
- Do we have the right to define a standard of command, administrative and social requirements for candidates when they are employed?
- How should we motivate specialists to adapt to our company regulations, which are required by our corporate culture and to other employees?

The answers to these questions will influence the selection criteria for interview candidates. It seems to us particularly important to develop the manager’s intuition which allows to define correctly deep personal qualities of the candidate. For searching people who will really meet the

agreed criteria, a manager will need not only evaluate a candidate's professional skills but also ad verbum "look inside", to understand the potential abilities of a person.

The definition of a candidate's professional skills is the part of the recruiting interview connected with the smallest risk for the company. Mismatching of company culture and personal qualities of the candidate can have more unpleasant consequences. In order to disclose deep qualities of a candidate's personality, a manager has to do the step from the safe territory of a standard scenario interview with fixed questions to the use of nonstandard scripts which will allow the interlocutors to be more open and which will save the candidate from a dangerous "enemy" – the fear to give a "wrong answer".

### **Asymmetric information and internal values**

When a candidate comes to an interview he usually has certain expectations – he supposes that the manager has read his resume very attentively and that he finds it interesting so the candidate is ready to answer to some provocative questions. In reality all frequently happens in another way.

The reality of interviewee manager can be: he or she has gone through several frustrating meetings, the secretary is on holidays, the assistant forgot to print out the next candidate's resume and the colleague suggests to join him for the job interview at 7 p.m. while he wanted to get on his way home. In addition he has mixed up resumes and confuses the candidate with someone else.

The candidate's reality: instead of being calm, focused and attentive he could be:

- He read piles of scientific literature, each night studied books and papers on professional topics and immediately before the interview has rehearsed his speech.
- If the candidate is a woman she can be nervous because she had to put on a skirt which is too short for the interview with the employer since she forgot to pick up the proper one from the dry cleaner (it happened one time with one of the authors, but she got the job nevertheless )
- He spent big sums of money for books like "How to win a job among 200 candidates"
- Sits totally exhausted in his chair in front of the manager without success trying to remember the first phrase of his "presentation".

Thus in the beginning of the interview (and in the worst case till the end of the interview) interlocutors can base themselves on completely different realities. The discrepancy between information possessed by each side and their assumptions about future situations can be very considerable – this phenomenon in economy and psychology is called "asymmetric information".

One of the effective methods of working with asymmetric information can be the usage of metaphors of different fields: music, theatre, painting (an example of metaphor "Madame Pompadour" was shown in the beginning of the article). The source of metaphors in the outside world is truly inexhaustible. Metaphors allow the

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manager to collect information about deep personal values of the candidate, explain his or her motivation about many questions which are essential for making career in the company.

**A theatre metaphor which can be used for determination of a candidate's attitude towards the subject of authority, initiative and responsibility is the play "Prince Frederick of Hamburg"(1809-1811) by Heinrich von Kleist. Prince Frederick of Hamburg, being the head of the cavalry troop, began the battle against the army of the enemy – the Swedes – in defiance of the demand of his general who had forbidden him to start the battle. Prince Frederick won the battle. Question to the candidate: what would you do in the general's place? And in place of prince Frederick?**

## **Interview as an instrument for structuring individual compensation**

Nevertheless, a lot of western companies go “along the way of smallest resistance” till nowadays and use obsolete work contracts. This facilitates the organization process but does not take into account the importance of individual motivation of employees. Russian companies can make use of unpleasant western experience and actively use own variants of individual employee compensation.

Such an approach can bring much value, monetary and non monetary to the firm and the candidate:

- firstly, this helps to narrow the gap between a standardized list of functions and the real tasks which the candidate takes over assuming office;
- it allows to individualize pricing the professional services of the candidate;
- finally, this approach can define monetary (salary) and non monetary compensation (e.g. language training, raising the level of one's skills etc) for the candidate. The employer can combine information which he has received during the interview and suggest a package of proposals about future

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positions which is selected individually for each candidate considering deep individual and professional qualities of the candidate. Certainly common standards of compensation are necessary. However, an individual approach taking into account special skills of employees allows raising their motivation considerably which is an essential capital of the company and a factor of its successful development.

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© Tatjana Schmied-Woerle, Zurich and Anna Vladislavovna Tsareva, St. Petersburg  
Contact: [t.schmied-woerle@vetrofinance.ch](mailto:t.schmied-woerle@vetrofinance.ch); [art-comm@soc.pu.ru](mailto:art-comm@soc.pu.ru)