



White Papers

In a series of interesting reports, various members of the Ulysses Consulting team tackle a number of relevant topics from the core of the unique world that is headhunting.

In a comprehensive, crystal-clear style, we provide a personal view on some of the recent tendencies in recruitment. Candidates, clients, and everyone who has ever been of will ever be in contact with headhunting will thoroughly enjoy these educational essays.



The 10 basic principles of CV screening

Whether you are a hiring manager or a recruiter, or you are somewhere in between; when you are involved in a recruitment process, the first thing you see of a candidate is generally the curriculum vitae. Every person has his/her own way of reading a cv and coming to a conclusion on the possible fit of the candidate for a particular function, yet there are some basic principles that can apply to just about any cv. The information in this document is a combination of experiences of recruiters and HR managers, scientific research and some plain old “common sense”.

1) A curriculum vitae is an image

A cv is only an image of a person’s skills and experiences, but it will never give you the full view on what a person can do and what he/she wants to do. Keep in mind that a well written cv not always corresponds to a great candidate and vice versa. So when reading a cv, you need to be both critical and fair in your judgement.

2) What is a good cv?

A good cv is a document that fits the person it is supposed to represent. A good cv will give you some (most) necessary information on a candidate, without being exhaustive. A good cv should already answer some questions you may have for a candidate, yet at the same time form the basis of questions you hadn’t thought of yet.

3) Checking for technical skills

When you are looking for a technically oriented candidate, first list your “must haves” skills and “nice to have” skills and compare that list to the information on the cv. The

chance of a candidate possessing all required skills is next to non-existent, so prioritise your needs and grade a candidate accordingly.

Grading technical skills, the questions you need to ask when reading the cv:

- Did the person follow particular training?
- Has the person obtained a certification?
- Did the person actually use this skill in a job or project?
- Are the skills graded in some way and does he/she rate this skill as “good” or “very good”?

4) Checking for management skills

Are you looking for a manager, or a technical person with some management skills? Then the modus operandi is the same as above: list your “must haves” and “nice to haves” and compare your requirements list to the information found in the cv.

Grading management skills, the questions you need to ask when reading the cv:

- Has the person lead a team before and is it mentioned how many people were in the team? How many of these team members were direct reports and how many were dotted line reports?
- Has the person obtained an education (e.g. MBA) or is he/she certified in a certain methodology (e.g. PMI, Prince 2)? Also beware of the level of certification: a foundation certificate is fairly easy to acquire, while a practitioner’s certification takes more skill and experience to obtain.
- Has the person taken any specific leadership or management training courses?
- Has the candidate been responsible for the budget of his/her projects?
- Is the length of the project that the candidate managed realistic? (Look out for very short projects or excessively long projects)
- Are the details of the projects and the responsibilities of the candidate clearly defined? (Experienced and skilled managers will give more details regarding their accomplishments than someone who tries to impress you with a job title.)

5) Checking for a clear career path

One of the most important things to watch out for is a clear career path. The way the career of the candidate evolved may tell you a lot about this person. Make sure that:

- **There are no large gaps between different jobs.** Significant gaps of 2 to 3 months can occur in the beginning and near the end of a career, but should not appear when someone’s career is at its height.
- **The candidate is not a job-hopper.** If a candidate changes jobs every year, you might ask yourself why he/she would do that. This does not apply off course for professional consultants who often go from one 6-month contract to the next contract; in which case regular change is quite common. Yet if you are looking for a short term solution, a job-hopper might be a better fit than a candidate looking for stability in his next job.
- **The different functions of the candidate are somewhat related.** Example: it is quite normal for an IT professional to go from developer to analyst, to architect, to Project Manager. But if he goes back from Project Manager, to being a developer or he goes into sales for a year, be sure to ask the candidate why these sudden changes happened.

6) Checking for education

These days, the educational background of a candidate will be a smaller determining factor than it has been in the past. People with all different kinds of background find their way into IT. Especially when the candidate has over 5 years of professional experience, the

education of the candidate will be less relevant. **What happened in the professional life of the candidate in the last 5 years is the most relevant of all.** Yet there are some things you should keep an eye out for when checking education:

- Just like when a logical career path was discussed (see item 5), a clear education path is important. **Has the person finished his/her education?** Has the candidate changed directions more than once during his college career?
- **Is the school where the candidate graduated a reliable institution?** This is more important than ever with the high influx of higher educated immigrants. A college degree from India is still not always at the same level of college degrees in Europe. Also beware of a degree/diploma/qualification from completely unknown colleges and if necessary Google to find more information on the school or college in question. It's still a very common practice to sell so called MBA degrees over the internet. Just make sure you don't waste time talking to someone with a "bought" diploma from a ghost-university.

7) Checking for the less obvious

You may assume that if people put something on their cv, they believe it is relevant for you to know. Therefore also have a closer look at the things that don't immediately relate to the job content. For instance, has the person mentioned his/her hobbies, does he or she play sports or is your candidate member of a socio-cultural group? What a person does in his/her spare time can be very relevant, because it tells you something more about the personality of that person.

8) Things that should act as a warning

There are several things you might find in a cv that can act as a warning, but according to a survey of recruitment specialists, these are two most common "warning signs":

- **Typing errors:** 1 error is acceptable (we are all human anyway), but 3 or more errors indicate either a problem with the language in which the candidate has written the cv or could also mean that this candidate lacks an eye for detail.
- Be very cautious when a candidate has adapted the cv in such a way that the job requirements you listed in the job opening, can be literally found in the cv. It's ok if a candidate writes "I could be a good match for your open position of...since I have already done...". This choice of words clearly indicates that the candidate is him or herself matching the skills to the requirements AND wants you to know why he/she is making the link. It's an entirely other situation when performed tasks in previous jobs look very much like the job description you issued. It could be that the candidate has changed his/her cv to influence you into inviting him/her for an interview

So, highlighting experiences or skills is ok. Having the candidate make the link between the job description and his/her experiences is ok too (that's what a motivational letter is for). But a cv that almost literally is a copy/paste of the job description issued, should give you at least some reason for concern.

9) A cv isn't always reliable...

People always try to make an impact with their cv. So cv's are often "upgraded" or "enhanced", things are omitted, sometimes people even put complete lies in their cv. This is a fact supported by scientific research. Some of the most optimistic reports state that **about 30% of all cv's contain at least one significant lie.** If you spot something that doesn't quite fit, be sure to dig deeper into it during an interview (if you decide to interview this person at all).

The most common lie made in cv's tend to be related to the candidate's education qualifications. Other common cv lies include:

- Stretching employment dates to cover any gaps in actual employment (see item 5, "Checking for a clear career path")
- Enhancing job titles
- Embellishing duties and achievements of a particular job
- Inventing employers
- Exaggerating their language skills ("good" or "very good" instead of "average")
- Exaggerating technical skills and knowledge

10) You have a good cv, now what?

So, after reading a cv, you are now convinced that the candidate is worthy of further time and attention. Your next obvious step is to schedule an interview, but don't forget to prepare for this interview. Read the cv thoroughly once again and prepare the list of questions you would like to ask. A good preparation is key for a successful, informative interview.

Good luck!

About the author:

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Vadim has a master in Organisational Psychology and HR Management. His previous assignments include missions at Randstad, Adecco and Titans Consulting (IT consultancy) as recruiter and at Kluwer Education as Project Support Officer. Furthermore, in 2007, Vadim re-organized and fully re-staffed the IT Recruitment department at Fortis.

Vadim combines his knowledge of HR with a passion for IT (with an ITIL certification as a testament of this passion). He is also very active on online networks such as LinkedIn, where he founded the users Group for Alumni of the University of Ghent.



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