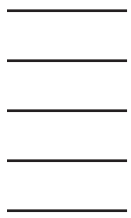
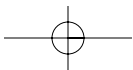
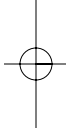
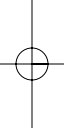
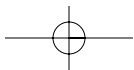
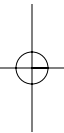
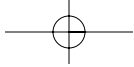


PART I



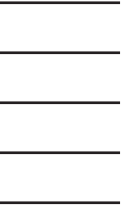
Introduction





1

The Challenge of Hiring in Higher Education



HIGHER EDUCATION has been singularly successful at convincing our constituents that education is the engine of both individual and societal success. The support provided to institutions of higher education for research and teaching is based on an implied contract with society as a whole and with legislative bodies, granting agencies, and donors for extremely high-quality outcomes. Far more than in most organizations, the quality of these outcomes depends on the quality of the people who are hired and retained. Faculty, whether in the classroom or in the laboratory, provide the inspiration, creativity, and dedication that are the heart and soul of colleges and universities. Staff provide the support to both faculty and students that often makes the difference between excellence and mediocrity. And administrators can provide the vision, direction, and resources to make the work of faculty, staff, and students possible.

Yet as you probably already know from your own experience—whether hiring or being hired—conducting hiring in higher education involves some special challenges. Colleges and universities often have complex and sometimes bureaucratic procedures for hiring compared with hiring in many business enterprises. Moreover, many jobs in higher

education are highly specific; whereas a private business may be able to hire a salesperson with pharmaceutical experience to sell air conditioners, it's impossible to hire an experienced sociologist for a molecular biology position. And it's often more difficult to correct hiring errors in a higher education institution. Make no mistake, private enterprises accumulate deadwood, and people do move from one institution to another in higher education. But in many schools, hiring and firing of staff is based on a civil service system, a tenure system, or procedures set by a governing board, so it's fair to assume that hiring decisions, once made, cannot be unmade lightly.

At the same time, hiring in higher education has certain advantages over hiring in private industry. When hiring faculty and administrators, decision makers have access to a verifiable record of research and administrative achievements that is simply not available for virtually any private sector hire. Well-enshrined hiring procedures, such as use of search committees and job talks, help reduce impulsive hiring decisions. Moreover, the culture of rigor and quality that exists in most higher education settings creates a climate conducive to hiring top-quality candidates. But as with most things in life, the devil is in the details of putting these theoretical advantages to work for you. If it's your job to read through vitae for thirty candidates, or if the search committee you are participating in or chairing either has its mind made up or too many issues about which to bicker and fight, you might appreciate the quality obtainable from the process in theory but regret its application in practice.

This book is intended to help you make high-quality hires in three fundamental ways. First, the foundation of our approach to hiring, whether in higher education or in the private sector, is grounded in performance. We want to provide you with ways to identify the most important aspects of performance and then develop effective ways to match these essential aspects of performance with candidates' abilities and skills.

Second, our approach to gathering reliable information about performance and using this information to make valid decisions about hiring is based on research, which we present here in practical application. Research in psychology and decision making, as well as years of applied research in many areas, can provide guidance on what information to gather, how to

gather it (and not gather it), and how to use it in making hiring decisions that can make substantial differences in the proportion of good hiring decisions you and your colleagues make.

Third, our approach is intended to help you navigate some of the unique aspects of hiring in higher education. An academic vita, for example, contains far more information than most business résumés. How can you make use of that information effectively, and what pitfalls must you avoid? Search committees are also relatively unique to academia, and pose both opportunities and challenges for enhancing the success of hiring. Yet job interviews in academia and in industry are more similar than they are different. The interviews you conduct can benefit from accumulated research and practice on effective and ineffective interviewing, so you can change the interview process from one of the least valid predictors of performance to one of the most valid.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PERFORMANCE-BASED HIRING

Academics are accustomed to thinking about theories, models, and frameworks, so we hope that readers will be encouraged to know that the principles and practices described in this book are grounded in nearly a century's worth of theory and empirical research, as well as practical experience. What we describe are neither random observations, personal opinions, nor cookbook approaches to hiring. Rather, our approach is based on three fundamental principles that form a framework for effective hiring:

- Performance orientation
- Systematic information gathering
- Rational, realistic decision making

Performance Orientation

The most fundamental principle underlying effective hiring is performance orientation. This principle recognizes that organizations, including educational institutions, exist to perform work toward a purpose.

Every organizational decision should be based on contribution to performance, and hiring is no exception.

Consider, for example, a decision to make a major purchase of computer systems for a new instructional lab. Computers and their associated software can be purchased for many purposes from word-processing to e-mail and Web access to high-speed numerical computations. The way computers are configured can make them more or less effective for the various possible uses, so an effective purchase decision needs to be based on an analysis of intended uses. Whether the cases for the computers are ivory, matte black, or neon blue is not a performance-relevant factor, even though you may have a personal penchant for raspberry red. Having a flat-panel display or the latest and fastest processor may or may not be performance-relevant, even though both may have prestige value when showing off the new lab to alumni or potential students.

Simply knowing that you need fifty new computers for a new lab is not enough. You need to know for what purposes those computers will be used, both now and during their effective lifetime. Only then can you determine memory and processor requirements, what type of software should be bundled with them, and whether you need laptop computers or desktop units.

We're not suggesting that candidates for assistant professor or administrative assistant can be configured like computers. What is critical about the analogy is the importance of understanding and deciding about performance needs *before* ever beginning to evaluate which candidates might fit those needs.

In the next chapter you will learn how to develop some practical performance objectives for your own work unit (whether that unit is your own lab, a department, or a larger academic unit) and then use this information to understand what performances you require from someone you hire. This approach will draw on your experience and will free you from relying on more typical ways of developing hiring standards, such as job descriptions that may be outdated or inaccurate. The result is a clearer picture of what you're looking for as you recruit and evaluate candidates. This avoids the equivalent of purchasing a supercomputer to send e-mail. It also avoids the common problem of arguing about candidates before deciding about priorities.

Performance orientation is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective hiring. To be successful, performance orientation must be carried out via systematic information gathering and then implemented through effective decisions.

Systematic Information Gathering

Organizational processes need to be systematic in order to be effective, and that applies as much to hiring as it does to other processes on campus. Researchers conducting clinical trials of a new drug don't just decide one day to increase dosages, add a new drug to subjects' regimens, or move half of the control group to a treatment arm. Nor do effective instructors decide one semester to drop part of their curriculum or change from lectures to case studies on a whim, any more than administrators schedule classes by simply telling all the faculty and students to show up for the first day of classes on September 1 and figure out when and where they will meet for the rest of the term.

Instead, these decisions are driven by systematic collection and analysis of reliable and relevant information. Effective hiring also depends upon reliable information. The first type of information concerns the nature of work that needs to be done to meet the goals of the program area. Vague, outdated, or misguided performance objectives make it difficult or impossible to conduct performance-focused hiring. The second type of information concerns characteristics of applicants. Effective hiring demands hiring tools that provide you with reliable, valid, job-related information about applicants' qualifications; we will have much to say about this in Chapter Five.

Rational, Realistic Decision Making

Making rational, realistic decisions about who to hire is the third fundamental principle of an effective hiring system. A *rational* decision process is based on the best information possible, gathered systematically. A *realistic* decision process acknowledges that even with the best information gathering, decisions have to be made with limited and incomplete information (Simon, 1976). Hiring decisions are probabilistic estimates of what particular individuals may do sometime in the future. As such, the outcomes of such decisions are even more uncertain than decisions

about complex physical systems, such as the weather. In addition to being complex, human behavior is characterized by two factors that add complexity not seen in physical systems:

1. *Cognition and learning.* People can learn to do things in the future that they cannot do today. As a consequence, two people with similar knowledge, skills, or abilities may turn out to have much different levels of job performance at some arbitrary point in the future. And at some other point even further in the future, the rank ordering of these individuals may change once again. As a result, even correct information will more accurately predict an applicant's initial job performance than it will performance over a longer period (Hulin, Henry, & Noon, 1990).

2. *Choice and motivation.* A person may have excellent analytical and interpersonal skills, for example, but choose not to apply those skills with as much diligence as another individual with more modest skills and abilities. Or the person may decide to quit and apply those skills at another employer. In part these motivational patterns may be predictable from differences in disposition, but to a large extent they result from less predictable reactions to such work characteristics as the type of work, level of challenge, quality of supervision, support from coworkers, and amount and form of compensation (Levin & Rosse, 2001; Rosse & Hulin, 1985).

Humans' ability to change means that no matter how much you might want to, you cannot predict a candidate's future performance with the same precision that astronomers can predict solar eclipses. In fact, attempting to do so can lead to serious mistakes in decision making, and these mistakes are compounded in the long-term hires made in academic institutions. The methods we present for making hiring decisions are effective precisely because they recognize the future-oriented, probabilistic nature of hiring decisions.

HIRING APPROACHES TO AVOID

Many hiring processes pay lip service to performance, without tying all aspects of the hiring process closely to performance. There are many patterns of non-performance-based hiring that can be observed in private

industry. We call one such pattern *warm-body hiring*, from a comment one manager made that he often found himself hiring “anyone with a warm body and the ability to pass a drug test.” Although it might seem that this kind of hiring without regard to qualifications would not exist in higher education, one can occasionally see examples in which unit heads, frustrated by shortages of applicants with the qualities they would like, give up and engage in what one administrator referred to as “lottery hiring”—hiring almost randomly in the hopes of getting an occasional winner.

We have also seen warm-body hiring at work in faculty and administrator hires. One of our own doctoral students was invited to an on-site “interview” for a faculty position that lasted only two hours, including a fifteen-minute presentation of her research. She quite literally spent more time flying to and from the campus than she did interacting with her potential colleagues. We also recall a search for a senior administrative position that resulted in a dark horse candidate being offered the job with minimal vetting because of a stalemate over the front-runners. It should not be surprising that after a tumultuous few years this individual left the job, to the relief of many.

Generally, though, dysfunctional hiring patterns such as these are rare in higher education because of the long established traditions of hiring procedures. Yet these same traditions and procedures mean that higher education institutions are at least as prone to another kind of non-performance-based hiring, which we call *ritual hiring*. In ritual hiring, organizations or individuals continue to use well-worn procedures without evaluating whether the procedures predict performance—or actually favor lower-performing candidates. These non-performance-based hiring rituals can be far more insidious than warm-body hiring. When an employer conducts warm-body hiring, it knows it is not devoting the resources to effective selection and is more likely to proceed accordingly. But hiring rituals give everyone involved the warm illusion of thorough selection, even though the time and energy expended may in fact produce no better results than a warm-body approach—and at times, worse results.

What kinds of rituals are we talking about? As one example, extensive research demonstrates that the venerable unstructured selection interview predicts performance little better than chance; yet interviews can readily be

structured around performance criteria to vastly increase their predictive power. The job talk for an academic position can be a highly predictive performance test or a predetermined ritual, depending on how it is structured and evaluated. Meetings of search committees and decision processes of selection committees are rituals that can frequently lead to the wrong candidate being chosen for the job for the wrong reasons. Despite their popularity, research shows that panel interviews often have much lower validity than individual interviews, although their validity can be greatly enhanced by managing how the group determines performance standards and asks questions.

Performance-based hiring is thus an antidote to ritual hiring. The first time you implement performance-based hiring, you can sweep away long-standing impediments to effective hiring and modify others to aid in predicting performance. As you continue to implement a performance-based approach, you can establish new practices and habits that help institutionalize an ongoing commitment to hiring for performance.

Every hire you make can have a substantive impact on the quality of higher education at your institution. A dean at a large research university once told us that his legacy to the quality of higher education twenty, thirty, and forty years from now resulted from the quality of hiring he did today. By using a hiring process grounded in performance, based on research, and built on effective practices, you can make sure that your hires continue to leave a positive legacy for future generations of students and scholars.