Amberjack's Model for Identifying Potential

Part 1 - Research

Introduction

In a constantly changing world with no certainty, yesterday cannot always predict tomorrow. With past-experience becoming an increasingly restrictive method of measuring the likelihood of a candidate's success, how do you ensure that the talent you hire is future-fit?

The answer lies in Potential. In an era marked by development and advancement, measuring a candidate's Potential enables you to identify individuals who will succeed at whatever tomorrow brings.

Historically, assessing candidates has relied on past-experience and attainment as the crucial component. We believe Potential should be the primary consideration instead.

Yet, the ISE's March 2022 poll highlighted that only 33% of employers are confident of their knowledge to understand candidate potential, and less than half (47%) were confident that they have enough knowledge of what is meant by 'potential'. It is increasingly clear organisations need help understanding, and assessing, potential.

Amberjack's mission, to enable a world where people are hired on their Potential, helping to remove barriers, is the next step for more diverse, more successful, more resilient, organisations.

We have spent many years developing our approach to identifying Potential to make it easily achievable, even in high-volume situations.

Background

Here at Amberjack, we were keen to develop a model for Potential-based hiring due to a number of factors.

Most importantly, we saw the practices and processes used throughout the market, and what we saw, particularly in the Early Talent arena, was that selection processes tend to favour those who

have access to certain past experiences, often through privilege. This is likely why we experienced an increase in clients asking for an alternative method, something up to date.

As the world of work rapidly changes, what resulted in success yesterday, won't necessarily result in success today, much less tomorrow, and just because someone hasn't had an opportunity to do something in the past, it doesn't mean that they wouldn't excel at it.

Traditionally, with working practices established and controlled by majority groups, individuals of the same profile have had a greater chance of 'succeeding' than others. Using past performance as an indicator of future performance compounds those historical inequalities.

These are the reasons why we decided to focus on hiring for Potential. Our vision is for a world which removes barriers and increases diversity by welcoming talent based on potential to succeed, grow, and develop. Organisations with diversity of thought, behaviour, and a future-fit workforce, are more likely to be resilient and continue to thrive even in difficult times.

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What Do We Mean by Potential?

There are three types of Potential that matter. By identifying these in your candidates, we help you find the people who can make your organisation more resilient and future focussed. These three different areas all need to be considered when understanding an individual's overall potential:

Mastery Potential
The ability to master the role you are hired into

Growth Potential
The ability to grow, progress, and master the next role in the organisational hierarchy within the same job family.

Turn Potential
The ability to 'take turns'. This is not just about increasing your seniority, but also overseeing different areas within the business. Turn Potential is often what is meant when people talk about High Potential or Leadership Potential when looking at Early Talent.

By gaining a deep understanding of these areas, and the behaviours and abilities that influence them, we have been able to create our model for the Identification of Potential.

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Our Model for Identifying Potential (and the Research Behind It)

Using the available academic literature on Potential, over 5 years of application data, insights from our clients, and the thoughts of professionals in the changing world of work, we identified 4 key pillars which define a candidate with the potential to succeed and grow. This model is the foundation for our work and enables us to turn the concept of Potential into something which is identifiable and measurable.

It is defined by its four key pillars.

Digital Mindset

With increasing automation in the workplace, it is important to identify individuals who have a natural inclination to utilising technology, leveraging it to think creatively, implementing technical solutions, automating, and digitalising.

Interviews with visionaries such as Ade McCormack, and inspiration from the works of futurologists like Ray Kurzweil, have revealed that excellence is not always about technical knowledge. The natural inclination towards technical solutions, automation, and digitalisation are important indicators of potential.

With Peterson et al.'s (2018) Learning Model for Digital Affordances highlighting the different affordances offered by technology; Functional (operation), Perceptual (interpretation), and Adaptive (adaption and innovation), it is clear that prior knowledge of technology is not necessarily the only way to assess an individual's strength in this area. Having a solution-based mindset and being able to explore new ideas is crucial to establishing a candidate's potential and Digital Mindset.

Grit

As recent economic upheavals have highlighted, and many organisations are now noticing, resilience is key.

When the only certainty is that uncertainty is likely, and the pace of change is ever accelerating, individuals need to be able to adjust and apply their skills seamlessly from one situation to the next. People's ability to grow stronger through that change and remain determined is a predictor of success. The key components of Grit are drive, agility, and resilience.

Church and Silzer (2014) have identified resilience and emotional self-control as foundational personality characteristics that reliably predict leadership success and an individual's ability to deal with and influence others. Being able to identify this talent early on is critical, and is directly linked to future sustainability and business survival.

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Creative Force

With automation suited to logic-driven, linear tasks, or tasks that are traditionally 'left-brain', the added human value comes from 'right-brain' holistic and creative thinking. Those with high levels of Potential have the confidence to implement new ideas and solutions. The creativity involved in Creative Force differs from Digital Mindset in its process-driven and future-thinking nature, rather than the pure utilisation of creative digital solutions.

This future-orientated, self-driven behaviour, where an individual aims to bring change to their situation, is found to be a trait of employees who are more effective at their jobs (Bindl and Parker, 2011). Creativity is the basis behind innovation; innovators identify opportunities for success and challenge existing frameworks, as posited by Kirton's Adaptation-Innovation Theory (1989). In this way, our Creative Force pillar recognises candidates with the potential to add new ideas and approaches. Candidates with high levels of Potential enable significant change, challenge ineffective processes, and drive positive development (Howard, 2013).

Applied Intellect

The basis for Applied Intellect is made up of three core characteristics; Social and Emotional Intelligence, Learning Agility, and Cognitive Ability.

Self-awareness and regulation are essential for continual improvement and progression. This is where Social and Emotional Intelligence becomes an important characteristic of individuals with high levels of potential. Self-management of activity and emotional wellbeing is crucial, especially in the hybrid working world; individuals need to be accountable for outcomes and less closely monitored. Social awareness and relationship management are essential for communication and effective group interactions whether they are physical, virtual, oral, or written.

Learning agility is the second key part of Applied Intellect. Learning agility, and the continual development this enables, has been found to more accurately predict long-term potential than past performance. Potential is about growth and persistent improvement, this is why "an individual's current skill-set is of secondary importance to their ability to learn new knowledge, skills, and behaviours that will equip them to respond to future challenges" (Mitchinson and Morris, 2012).

Finally, cognitive ability, the general mental capability involving reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, comprehension, and learning from experience (Gottfredson, 1997; Plomin & von Stumm, 2018), helps identify an individual's capacity to apply their knowledge and intellect to a variety of situations. The flexibility and adaptability required to apply the learnings of one scenario to another is an important factor in a candidate's potential to succeed within an organisation.

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Using the Model to Assess for Different Types of Potential

With a strong foundation in our Model for Identifying Potential, we can assess potential in candidates using our blended assessment to look at a candidate's behaviours, situational judgement and applied intellect.

The Behavioural and Situational Judgement items tap into all areas of our model. The Applied Intellect items require candidates to draw conclusions from verbal and numerical challenges. Candidates answer the 'so what's' in an applied and relevant business setting (capturing evidence for the Cognitive Ability area of Applied Intellect). The assessment is rounded off with short video responses, reviewed by an assessor, assessing elements such as self-awareness and learning agility, which are harder to assess in more automated responses.

As our Assessment for Identifying Potential has been blended to include different types of assessment methods from first principles, you can gather the evidence across all pillars of the model in one assessment, providing a realistic view of the whole person, rather than capturing evidence across multiple stitched together, or staged instruments.

At Amberjack, at client request, we have also adapted our model for Identifying Potential for different working contexts. In addition to our main model, and the assessment to measure it, we have developed the Customer Service Potential Assessment, and Technical Potential Assessment. Further discussions to develop other sector-specific with clients are underway.

Part 2 - The Success of Potential

Now we have provided an understanding of Amberjack's Model for the Identification of Potential, you are equipped for our deep dive into the results.

In part two, we will look at how you can assess for and identify those with the greatest potential, bringing this to life with case studies and the great results clients have already achieved using this model.

See part two to discover the success of our Model for Identifying Potential.

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