How we respond to the new demands of the working world with agile personnel selection

Personnel selection at interpool Personal Gmbh

Recruiting new talents is becoming increasingly difficult due to scarcity, and employers are looking for ways to position themselves attractively for upcoming generations in the competition for talents. From the candidate's point of view, being valued, wanted and truly needed is becoming more and more important. However, the VUCA world does not make the selection of the right talents any easier: It is characterized by the challenge of having to review and readjust goals in ever shorter cycles. The "classic diagnostics" are increasingly reaching their limits.

At interpool, we meet these challenges with the help of agile personnel selection. It offers an answer to questions such as: How do I find suitable employees when I cannot yet say which competencies will be in demand for the position in a few years? How do I assess applicants with different cultural backgrounds? How do I fill positions and roles whose requirements are not yet known to me due to ongoing digitization? How do I bring more diversity into my company?

What is agile personnel selection?

The transfer of agile principles to recruiting is not just about making the selection process itself fast and agile, e.g., replacing waterfalls with iterations, retrospectives more often, or simply more feedback. Agile personnel selection must be understood as a methodology that, on the one hand, becomes more open to unexpected solutions in the diagnostic process and, on the other hand, can be described as a feature of a candidate experience that is more connectable with the lifeworld of millennials and digital natives.

With agile personnel selection, we want to:
- Identify suitable applicants, even if the requirement profiles are not sufficiently precise,
- recognize applicants who will perform their tasks well (differently), even in the case of culturally different behavioral patterns,
- be perceived by applicants as open, flexible, capable of learning and thus more attractive.

How does this work?

What steps have we taken at interpool to make our selection process more agile?

The requirements profile as a user story

The "classic personnel selection" assumes a model of fit, i.e. that the applicant:s possess the personal characteristics required for the target position, which we would like to recognize through defined behavioral descriptions. As a result, this approach inevitably leads to us limiting ourselves in our selection process by what we could already imagine in advance in terms of suitability characteristics and representative behaviors. Applicants who confront or

even surprise us in the selection process with approaches that do not meet our predefined expectations cannot be evaluated or positively assessed in this process.

A diagnosis based on user stories allows us to examine the performance dimensions of the target position in a structured way without committing ourselves to a specific competency profile. We can specify and adjust our expectations in the user stories by explaining their meaning ("Why are these goals and functions important to stakeholders?") on the one hand, and giving examples ("What might ways of achieving this goal look like?") on the other. Perhaps there are other - perhaps even better - ways to achieve our goals than with the competencies we usually emphasize. In doing so, we open ourselves up to new ways and approaches. With the user story, we focus on the "where to" and "what for" of a target position, not on the "how" and the "with what".

Self-reflection of the observers as a methodical approach
Theoretically, we as recruiters and HR professionals are aware of the perception errors (unconscious bias). But do they find their way into the diagnostic process? Are they noticed, reflected upon and included? In an agile-inspired personnel selection, we rely on a conscious reflection and thus integration of our subjective perceptions and emotions in order to be able to evaluate as objectively as possible. What did the applicant's behavior trigger in me as an observer? What of it points to the expression of her solution competence for the target position - and what of it is rather a resonance of my own personal and cultural imprints, without relevance for the position to be filled? In agile personnel selection, our gut feeling and our intuitive, subjective attributions become an observation that we have to document descriptively and interpret afterwards, just like any other observation.

Candidate Experience: Transparency, Flexibility and Change of Perspective
Probably everyone can imagine how uncomfortable it is from an applicant's point of view to go into an interview not knowing exactly what my counterparts are looking for and wondering whether you are the right person for the position.

When applicant:ins come to us, we want to be transparent in our diagnostic goals with the help of transparency. The danger that applicants will behave in a socially desirable manner is minimized by the fact that we search for solution options with an open mind and do not have a prefabricated model answer in mind. The job interview becomes a job interview - it is not information asymmetry but equality that leads to an authentic dialog. Candidates with a different background than ours are given the opportunity to understand our goals and describe their approach. Here are two sample questions:
   a) Please describe a situation in which you last convinced your team of an idea.
   b) In the target position, you will often bring ideas to the development department that they don't like or at least don't prioritize. How do you deal with such a situation and what result do you try to achieve? Can you give me an example from your previous position?

In question b), we realistically describe the situation the person in the position is facing and leave it open how they deal with it.

While flexibility implies that we proceed in a structured way and generate sufficient diagnostic material for each user story. However, we must be open to adapting the questions to the candidate if we do not reach our goal with the planned questions. We also need to give candidates second chances, e.g. by giving them the opportunity to repeat a task after receiving feedback, in order to check their ability to learn and adapt.

When changing perspectives, we want to try not to stop at our first intuitive assessment, but to consciously try to understand the candidate's logic and perspective. Few word contributions in a group discussion can mean many things, e.g. shyness, lack of language skills, it can hide cluelessness, express care and conscientiousness, it can stand for calmness and balance, it can be due to the desire for efficiency or make visible a slow pace of thinking and working. In order to learn more about the reasons, we need to give the participants the opportunity to explain the logic of their behavior to us through e.g. self-reflection elements, feedback or targeted questioning.

Summary

Even for an agile procedure, the greatest possible objectivity, reliability and validity are are mandatory quality criteria. It is also valid here that the results of the procedure should depend exclusively on the suitability of the applicants and not on other factors such as personal preferences of the observers. Agile personnel selection is a shift in emphasis that should enable us to better deal with the demands of the VUCA world and the diversity of applicants. Because if diversity is used competently and consciously, it can help us to deal flexibly, innovatively and resiliently with new, unexpected and contradictory environmental expectations.

Literature: Tim Riedel, Agile Personalauswahl - inkl. Arbeitshilfen online (2017), Haufe Lexware, Planegg, ISBN: 9783648096000