WeCrut3.com

Hiring Talent:
The Tough Job of Staffing
Knowledge Work Positions
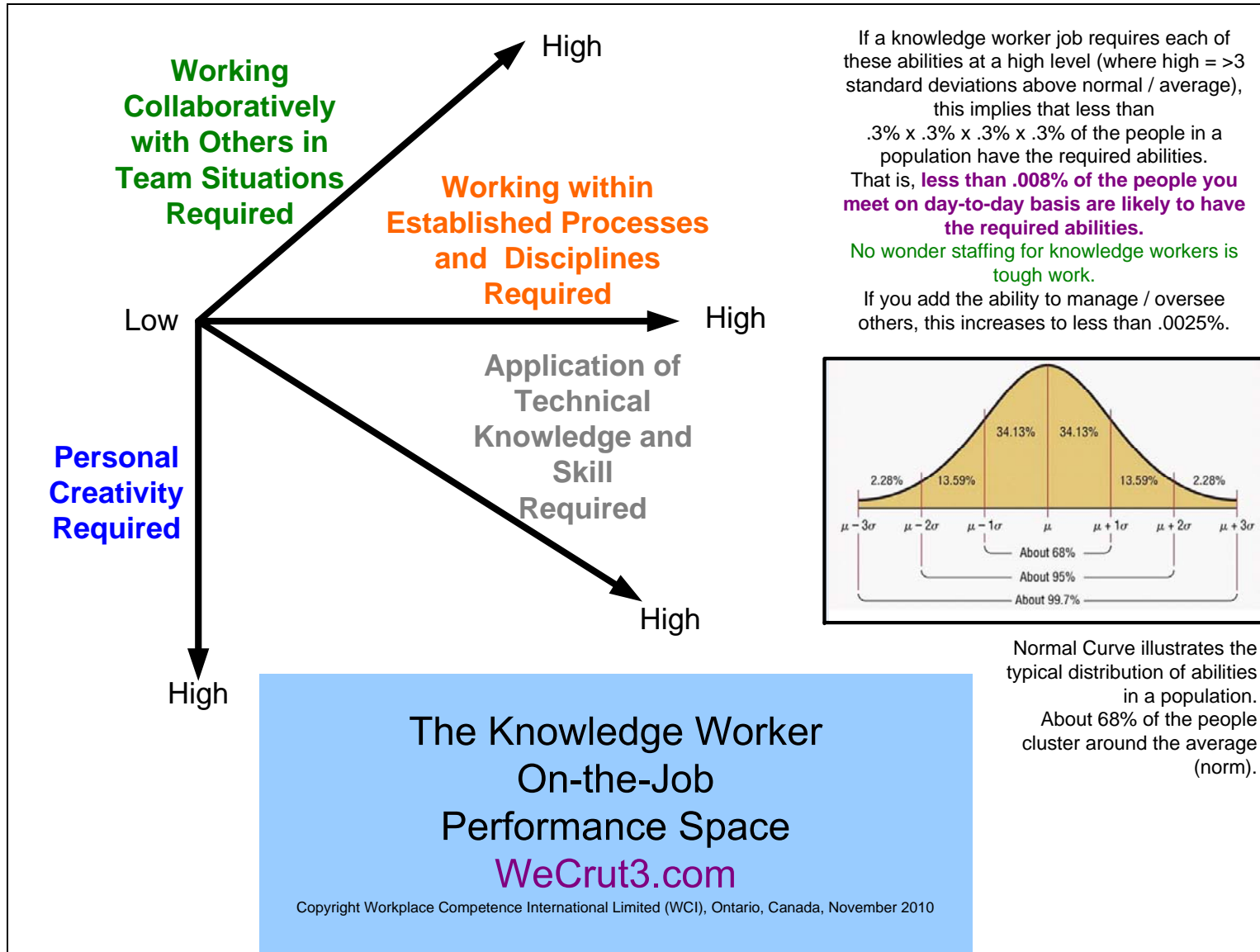
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High

High

If a knowledge worker job requires each of these abilities at a high level (where high = >3 standard deviations above normal / average), this implies that less than .3% x .3% x .3% x .3% of the people in a population have the required abilities. That is, **less than .008% of the people you meet on day-to-day basis are likely to have the required abilities.** No wonder staffing for knowledge workers is tough work. If you add the ability to manage / oversee others, this increases to less than .0025%.

Normal Curve illustrates the typical distribution of abilities in a population. About 68% of the people cluster around the average (norm).

The Knowledge Worker
On-the-Job
Performance Space
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The Shifting Market Place for Talent

Today, politicians. economists, and social pundits all talk about the knowledge-based economy. High value-added manufacturing is touted as the way to bring economic prosperity to our society's future, particularly in light of global competition driven by cheap wages in other parts of the world. What does this mean for those individuals in an organization who have responsibility for hiring the talent needed to make these organizations run? Is it realistic to suppose the staffing techniques that worked in the past 30 years will work for highly trained knowledge workers?

The Baby Boom Generation dominated the talent market place in the last 30 years. Although there is a great deal of reluctance to say it, the reality is that there where more jobs than people. Organizations lived in a world where they could always find the talent they needed. Competitive pressure for talent did occur at times. But it was the result of a mis-alignment between the educational institutions and the talent market place. Universities and community colleges tend to lag behind change in commerce and manufacturing.

Will be recruiting skills and approaches that worked when baby boomers made up the largest part of the workforce do the job now that they are retiring, and the structure of our economies is changing? Here at WeCrut3.com, we do not think so. They will work for jobs that require lower level or general skills. But they will not be adequate for the highly trained knowledge workers who will create our future prosperity as a society.

What Competencies are Required in a Knowledge Worker?

WeCrut3.com specializes in providing staffing services for knowledge workers and managers. For us, effective staffing begins with recruiting, moves on through efficient on-boarding, and culminates in metric based performance management. We offer services in all three areas. Here though, we are focusing on the way that recruiting will have to change to deal with these new realities.

When we talk to clients about what they want in a talented knowledge worker, they invariably mention the following things.

1. The person must have required **technical skills, knowledge** and **experience** to do the job.

2. Sometimes, the person must be a **creative**. Our clients want creative IT professionals, design engineers, life sciences researchers and product designers. Personal creativity is essential in start ups, break outs, and turn arounds. High value added manufacturing, which more and more means custom manufacturing, or rapidly change manufacturing, demands it as well. The creativity required is far beyond that of the average knowledge worker.

An aside note.

Paradoxically, some of the industries that talk most about innovation in their public presentations – transaction based financial services, public utilities, government services, … have the least real demand for creativity in their staff. They need individuals who can work according to established processes. They have some need for creativity in their work flow designers and IT professionals. But even there, more and more they are choosing to "out-source" this requirement, or purchase process change with they acquired packaged automated computer applications.

3. In many cases, our clients require these creative individuals to do their personal creative work within **established professional processes** and **team disciplines**. They do not have tolerance for personal creativity that is so individual that the person has difficulty following professional disciplines. Most of the work they undertake requires team work because of its volume and the speed with which the enterprise must move. Once again, our clients often require these skills at levels that are far above the average level.

4. In most of these organizations, especially those where design work produces new products, the effort required generally exceed the ability of a single individual. The ability to collaborate in a creative team is crucial.

Working in a creative team is different from working in most team. In well established organizations, the underlying stability in processes and work flows shapes and mediates team work. It is a lot easier to relate to some one as a team member when their role and place in the work flow is well defined and stable.
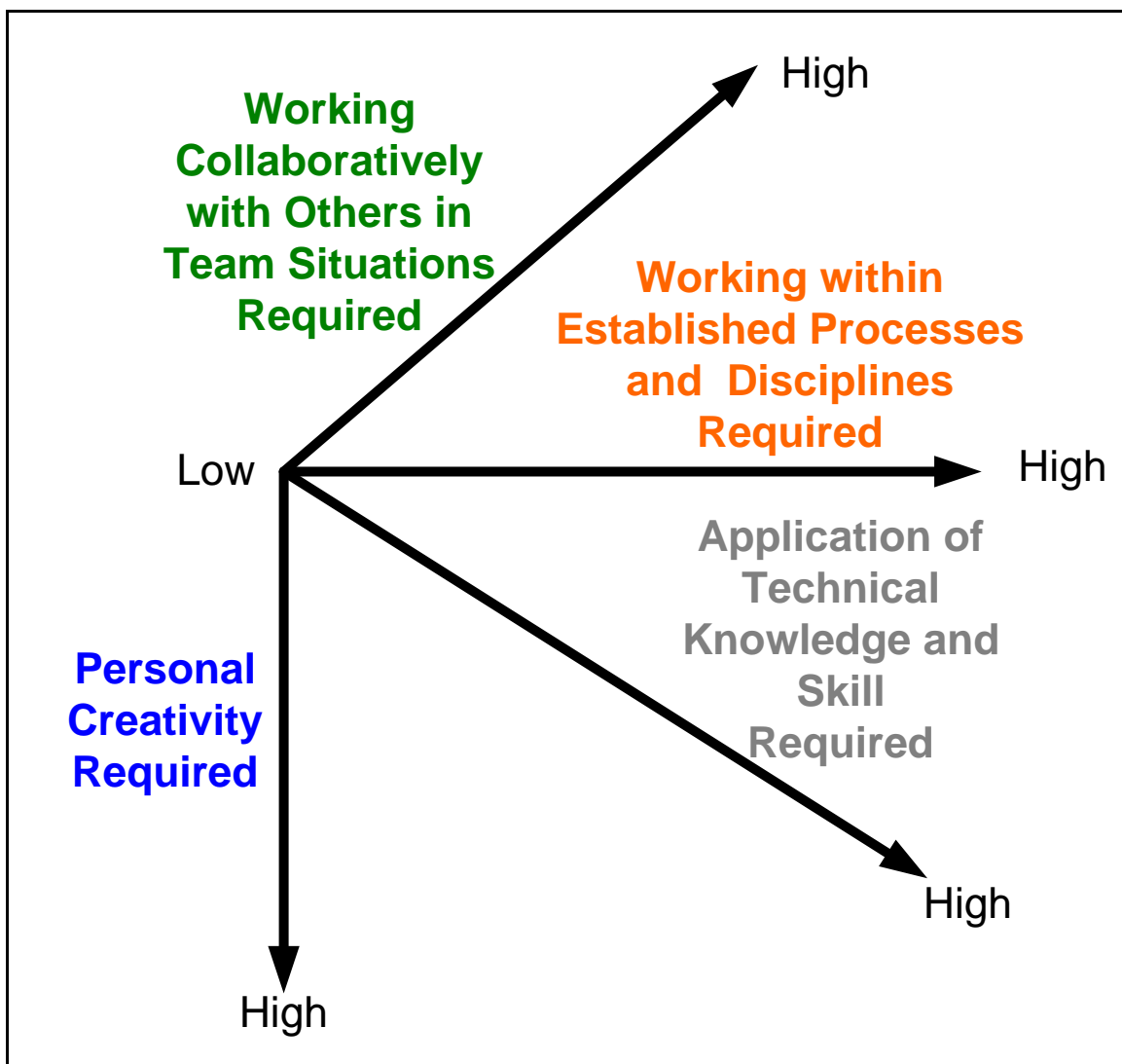
Creative teams are more complex than this. The people in them are creating new products some of the time. They are following established professional disciples while they are doing so. But they are also creating new ways of doing things – new processes that reflect and support the adaption and the use of the new products they are designing. The interpersonal work, and the underlying cognitive complexity, needed to keep all of this straight and productive, is far beyond average.

The Knowledge Worker Job Requirements Space

Let's depict these ideas in a single schematic. The schematic depicts these ideas from the perspective of an employer. It addresses these ideas from the perspective of what is required to do a particular job. Notice a number of things about it.

- Each area is independent of the others. That a person may be able to meet the personal creativity requirements of a job, but not the other three (and so on…).

- In each case, the job requirements range from low to high. In most of the knowledge work jobs in start up, turnarounds, transformation and high value added engineering, these requirements will be on the high end, as compared to knowledge work jobs in more established transaction oriented service and traditional manufacturing organizations.

Working Collaboratively with Others in Team Situations Required — High

Working within Established Processes and Disciplines Required

Low — High

Application of Technical Knowledge and Skill Required — High

Personal Creativity Required — High

Many of these jobs are done under stress conditions. Start ups, transformation and turn arounds are inherently in a state of stress. Many high value

manufacturers face intense competitive pressure. They constantly need to improve – to change their processes and their products to remain high value to their clients. The knowledge workers in these environments need to be able to cope with this stress, even thrive on it.

These jobs often require individuals who are above average – more capable than the average knowledge worker – in each of these four areas. Clients talk about individuals who are mature – demonstrate mature judgment when they describe such people. Such people know when to lead and when to follow when they work in teams. They know when to discipline themselves to follow an established way of doing things, and when to strike into new ways that turn out to make contributions to the work of the team. They know how to inject humor into situations to relieve stress and to defuse inevitable interpersonal tension. They are flexible, self assured individuals who can admit failure, learn from it and move onto incorporating the result into their next success. They are talented people, not just technically, but in most aspects of their lives.

> Another aside.
> At WeCrut3.com we think of these jobs as talent jobs and these individuals as talent workers. Their personalities have many of the characteristics that popular culture associates with artists, without having some of the "social lack of discipline" that we often admire in artists. In

Adding a Managerial Component

In addition, a knowledge worker job may have a managerial component. When they do, the job requires individual who have the ability to oversee others who are talent work. Skills. That means hiring, inspiring, performance managing and developing other people in such a way that two objectives are met. First, the group achieves its performance targets. Second, the people in the group in capability on both the individual level and as a group.

Schematically, these requirements can be depicted as follows. For now, managerial component has been kept out.

WeCrut3.com uses this schematic to sort out the relevant importance of each of these competency areas. It also uses it to clarify the precise level of ability needed in each of these areas.
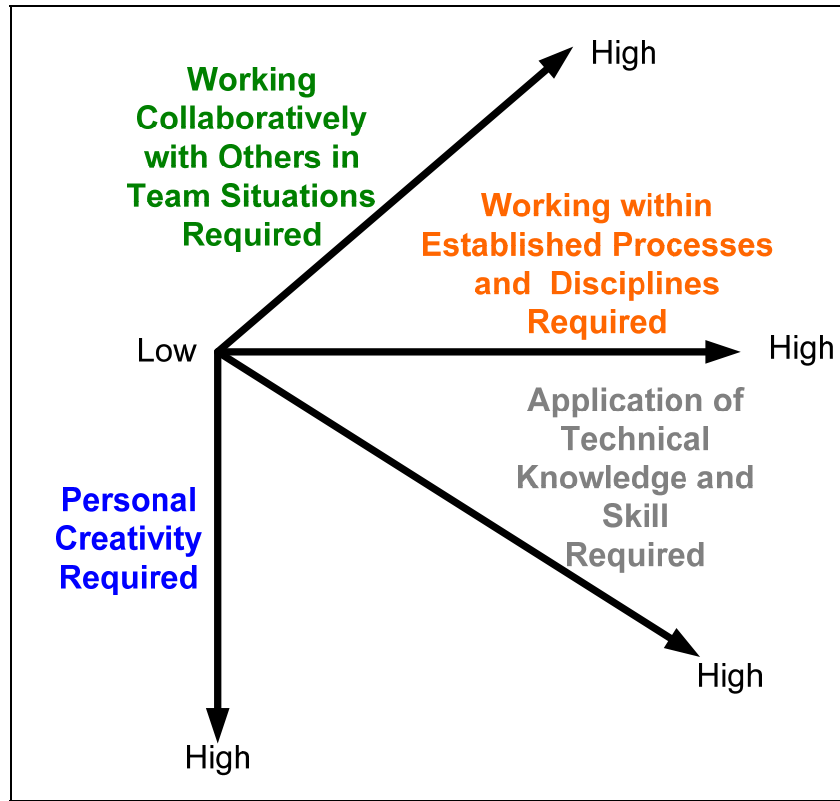
Step One: Dealing with "Application of Technical Knowledge and Skill Required"

Relatively speaking, technical skill is easy to deal with in staffing situations. A person either has it or does not. Resumes provide reasonable w career history that illustrates the acquisition and application of technical skills. Simple approaches serve to verify that a candidate knowledge worker has the level required.

We find that clients do not have a lot of difficulty describing the technical skills they need. They can often point to specific pieces of work that illustrate the level of technical skill required. Or they can direct us to conversations with individuals who already have the required type and level of skills.

Our preference is to ask questions which get us to metrics. We ask client individuals to tell us what they will look for - what measures they would use to judge whether or not a person is performed at the technical level. We find that well-intentioned individuals quickly catch on to this idea, even if they have never thought of doing so before. "I'll know it when I see it" rapidly changes to "I'll know that this person is doing a job when I see x, q and y".

At WeCrut3.com, we start off by looking for evidence that the person has the required technical skills. We read resumes to make a first assessment of this. Today, it is no longer possible to treat a resume as an indication of a candidate's personal form of expression. Too many people use professional resume writers. Therefore, we simply treat resumes as evidence of facts. We no longer make assessments of personality or expressive capability of a candidate based on their resume format presentation.

In our conversations with candidates with reasonably applicable resumes, we ask questions to verify these historical facts about the demonstration of the technical ability. However, we don't assume that staffing experts by the right people to assess the specific level of technical ability that candidate has. Instead, when we get to the short / final list candidate stage, we will ask candidates to demonstrate their technical abilities to individuals who do have the capability of judging. Those demonstrations can take one of the following forms.

1. Candidates may share a portfolio of past work, and discuss the components of it with relevant potential peers and superiors.

2. Candidates may participate in problem solving sessions, either as individuals or as members of a pre-briefed interaction group.

WeCrut3.com's approach stresses performance fit. We want to make sure that the performance capability of the candidate matches the performance requirements of the job. We do not want to either under or over hire. Both bring performance difficulties once a candidate is on-the-job.

Step Two: The Interaction Among the Remaining Three Requirements

At WeCrut3.com, we do not consider the remaining three requirements in isolation, one from the others. Instead, we have a conversation with clients that deals with all three together. In order to do so, we use the tables on the following pages. They translate the three non-technical parts of the previous schematic into working frameworks which shape and guide the required conversations.

The first table, "What Kind of Knowledge Worker Do you Need? ; Sorting Out Interacting Performance Fit Requirements" simply demonstrates the fact the more performance requirements a client has, the more difficult it is likely to be to find appropriate candidates. Although this is intuitively obvious to people upon reflection, clients often engage in "requirements overkill" in the early stages of staffing. Everyone wants the perfect candidate, and the perfect candidate can do every thing exceptionally well.

Good performance occurs when a candidate's abilities are a good fit for the performance requirements of the job. It is not too difficult to sort out what is required by referring this table, and the subsequence one in tandem. By focusing

on performance metrics, the real requirements of a specific job quickly become clear. Consequently, the staffing process can focus on these specific requirements.

This dialogue generates the insights that WeCrut3.com needs to prepare the "What would you do in this situation" mini-cases that it uses in the staffing process.

What Kind of Knowledge Worker Do You Need?
Sorting out Interacting Performance Fit Requirements

		Working within Establishes Processes and Disciplines Required			
		Yes		No	
		Personal Creativity Required		Personal Creativity Required	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Working Collaboratively with Others in Team Situations Required	Yes	Mature, process disciplined, interpersonally collaborative / capable, and personally creative individual	Mature, process disciplined, interpersonally collaborative / capable individual	Interpersonally collaborative / capable, and personally creative individual	Interpersonally collaborative / capable individual
	No	Process disciplined, personally creative, individual contributor	Mature, process disciplined individual	Personally creative, individual contributor	Individual contributor

What Kind of Knowledge Worker Do You Need?
Sorting out Interacting Performance Fit Requirements
Generic Performance Metrics

		Working within Establishes Processes and Disciplines Required			
		Yes		**No**	
		Personal Creativity Required		**Personal Creativity Required**	
		Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Working Collaboratively with Others in Team Situations Required	**Yes**	Has followed and worked according to established processes and guidelines Has worked well with others, both on assigned teams and in general; others report positively on working interactions with this person, both under day to day and stress conditions Has made 1 or more new personal contributions which have moved the product or process design work substantially forward, as judged by superiors and peers	Has followed and worked according to established processes and guidelines Has worked well with others, both on assigned teams and in general; others report positively on working interactions with this person, both under day to day and stress conditions	Has worked well with others, both on assigned teams and in general; others report positively on working interactions with this person, both under day to day and stress conditions Has made 1 or more new personal contributions which have moved the product or process design work substantially forward, as judged by superiors and peers Has made new personal contributions in a way that is highly valued by others with whom the person	Has worked well with others, both on assigned teams and in general; others report positively on working interactions with this person, both under day to day and stress conditions

		Working within Establishes Processes and Disciplines Required			
		Yes		No	
		Personal Creativity Required		Personal Creativity Required	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
		Has made new personal contributions in a way that is highly valued by others with whom the person works Works with others in a way that encourages others as they make their new personal contributions		works Works with others in a way that encourages others as they make their new personal contributions	
	No	Has followed and worked according to established processes and guidelines Has made 1 or more new personal contributions which have moved the product or process design work substantially forward, as judged by superiors and peers	Has followed and worked according to established processes and guidelines	Has made 1 or more new personal contributions which have moved the product or process design work substantially forward, as judged by superiors and peers	