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How MSTS hires talent that matches their company values

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David Adiutori

Senior Director Software Engineering

David is a Senior Director of Software Engineering at MSTS. He is one of 3 engineering directors that MSTS has globally. There are more than 600 employees globally in 4 offices - Kansas City, Netherlands, Melbourne, San Jose (Costa Rica).

"As we changed as an organization that is more product-focused, we started to focus on 3 key areas when assessing new hires: entrepreneurial spirit, emotional intelligence and technical skill.

"We are really good at identifying entrepreneurial spirit and emotional intelligence, but sometimes there is a bad hire because of lack of necessary technical skills."

About MSTS

- From 1978 to today, MSTS innovated every step of the way with internal accelerators, technology investments and a desire to help businesses reach their full potential. Each year, we help our customers enter new markets, expand their footprint, and globalize their opportunities.

"We've been in business for around 40 years. We started as a fuel card, in order to make purchases for small fleets and grew from there. We've been around for quite a while now, we've seen it all and continue to grow as an organization."

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Challenges that come with fast-paced growth

"We continued to grow our engineering by double digits during the last 3 to 4 years. With that type of growth it only scales so far, you have to work on your processes, mature them. You need to work smarter, otherwise you are spending a lot of time on less valuable interviewing and recruiting, you make some bad hires. Then attrition and turnover become a costly event for an organization. We want to reduce it as much as we can."

Over the last 5 years MSTS started to shift from an engineering culture that was focused on meeting business requirements by the product teams to a product-focused approach. That started with Dan Zimmerman, Chief Product and Information Officer who joined and transformed MSTS's focus as an organization.

MSTS had to adjust their company culture to match their new focus

As MSTS changed as an organization that is more product-focused, hiring managers started to focus on 3 key areas: entrepreneurial spirit, emotional intelligence, technical skill.

"In our interviewing process we were looking for individuals that act like an owner, are challenging the status quo, looking for innovative ways to solve problems and have the necessary technical aptitude to do their job well."

Some of those qualities you can find during interviewing - you can hear the stories candidates share. It's more about storytelling. You can assess their emotional intelligence that way as well - is this person selfless? How are they working with others? are they a good team player? What kinds of pronouns do they use (rather I's or we's)?

"We've got really good at identifying candidates who are the right culture fit during interviews but when we've got to the technical aspect, we have been relying on candidates ability to speak about their skills and abilities, but there was nothing quantitative about it. "

MSTS started with the usual approach - whiteboard exercises. They were ok as an short term solution, but it was inconsistent and dependent on the hiring manager (they had different ways of going through interviews).

When we said "did we make good hires based on their skillset" it was hard to be 100% confident. We could only say "I think so, but I'm not sure". Because of that, we ended up having some bad hires.

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Looking for a way to optimize tech hiring processes

MSTS started to look at how to optimize this process. Firstly, hiring managers from the Australian office crafted a technical assessment. It was a good start, but it lacked the necessary skills coverage to be rolled out across the whole organization as well as it needed a certain maintenance and overhead.

"Talking to a recruiter here, she mentioned that our parent company World Fuel Services is using Codility and they introduced it to us. We looked at other players in the market too but we gave Codility a shot and what we liked is that it's so comprehensive, it's not just a set of features.

I really liked how scoring works, tests are good (thorough) and comprehensive. Similarity checks are great too. Lastly, I like that if a solution gets out into the wild, the task gets retired and you make it unavailable."

The last component that was important to MSTS is that as it is been around for so long - there are solutions that have been used both for 30 years as well as 3 months which means that there are countless frameworks and languages used, countless tools involved.

"We are not looking for specialists in particular languages, we are looking for polyglots. The questions we are asking are: Do you know software engineering? Do you have a will to learn? Are you willing to learn new languages and frameworks as a part of it? If yes - awesome! We will teach you all about the job-specific skills."
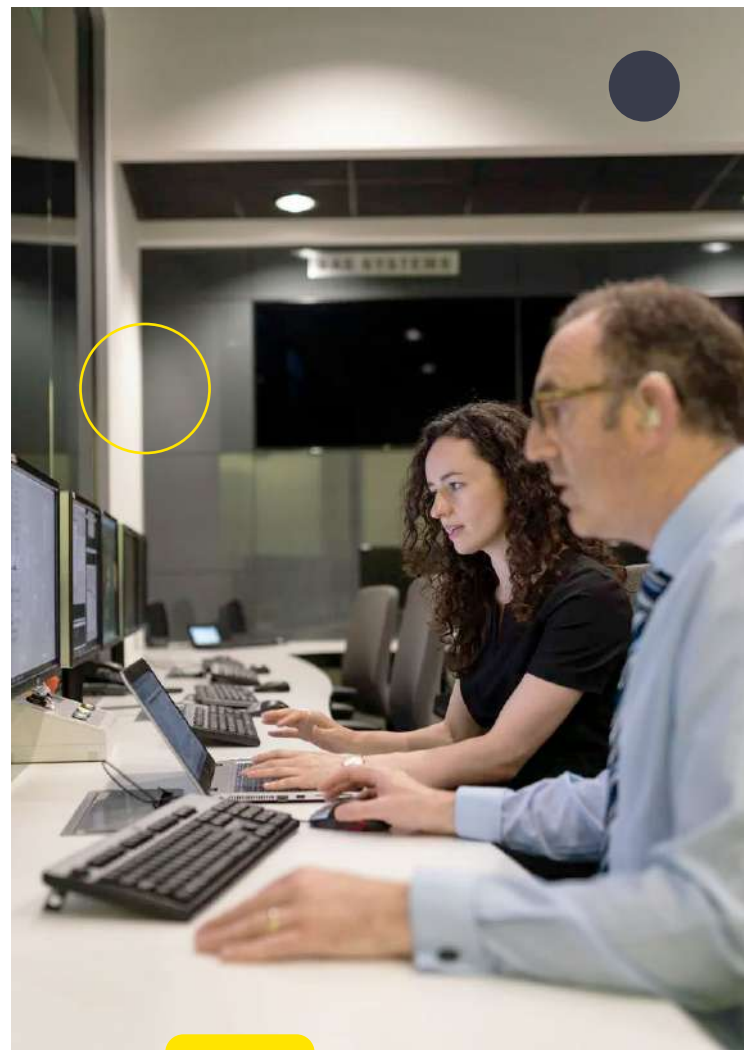
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What changed after implementing Codility?

As a tool overall MSTS really liked that assessments enable multiple languages to be used which gives candidates the opportunity to use the language that they are fluent in. Assessments are consistent which is a win for hiring managers - that's great because it means that we evaluate all the candidates fairly.

"Overall it's a very positive experience. I think the availability of consistent feedback is great, feedback from candidates is great as well - we reach out to them to understand their experience. The expanding of assessments has been good - we don't change tests much because we want to keep the consistency but we dipped into a few of them and tested them, like vue.js tests."

Except for Software Engineers, MSTS is also looking for Test Engineers - we are using your Selenium tasks to screen candidates for this role. We've really noticed how they evolve and improve over time - it's great that we provided feedback to your support group about those tasks and we've been listened to and it was implemented.

"In some cases we had some cultural fits, they did well on a whiteboard exercise but they lacked technical skills, they didn't pass the tests so those were good non-hires."

How Codility helps to make informed hiring decisions

There was a singular case where MSTS was looking for a Test Engineer. There were 63 candidates who applied, 16 of them were interviewed but it took as long as 194 days to end up hiring one candidate. The rest were just not qualified.

"That saved us a lot of bad hires, we were desperate to fill the position" Says David. "If not for Codility, we would probably pull the trigger earlier on and hire someone who is not as skilled as we need them to be. While it's really important to fill positions rather quickly to help the team, still, a bad hire is a bad hire."

Another area where Codility helps MSTS is assessing candidates that don't have much experience - early-career engineers. It's really hard to assess their experience because they don't have much of it - whatever they learned in

school is different than challenges they face in their first jobs.

We had a case where I probably would've passed on an individual because I didn't get the sense that this candidate would know what they are doing but they scored amazing on the assessment, finished the assessment with the fastest time and this hire ended up being a great employee."

Codility also helps MSTS to assess the seniority of candidates - sometimes candidates have a good talk but they apply to a senior position and their coding doesn't indicate that they are senior enough for the position MSTS looks for.

Right now the attrition rate is at about 16% annually which is pretty low for a tech company like MSTS.

"Codility assessment makes it really easy to see how well candidates scored - how long did it take to finish it, how elegant their solution was, how did they develop it."

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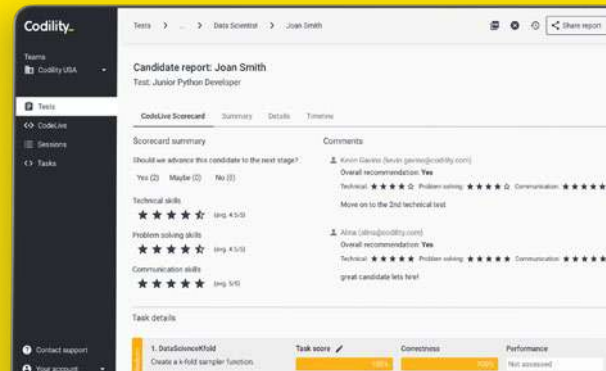
What changed the most in tech hiring during recent years?

"Firstly, a shift from an employer market to an employee market happened. There are more open positions than there are candidates on the market here. We are on a minus unemployment and it's a challenge for us because there is a lot of competition.

Secondly, I think there is a cycle right now that happened last time in the 90s. Technology is moving very quickly and you have some folks that have been working in tech for so long that they are not keeping up and earlier career candidates are sometimes more capable and dynamic with learning. With that comes a large spike in compensation.

Lastly, is the remote work situation. We are competing with companies that hire full-remote developers and we need to adjust to the market needs so we stay competitive with those companies."

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# What are the trends that you are the most excited about?

Cloud Computing.

There are a lot of candidates that we talk to that are excited about it, we talk about it internally a lot and it's really exciting. It's changing so rapidly, it's changing team member skill sets, it enables the ability to build new solutions.

We're doing a lot of it here at MSTS. I'm really excited about the hiring and recruiting aspects, for our team members to be able to develop those skill sets and not be a laggard and having to deal with on-prem boxes or data centers etc.

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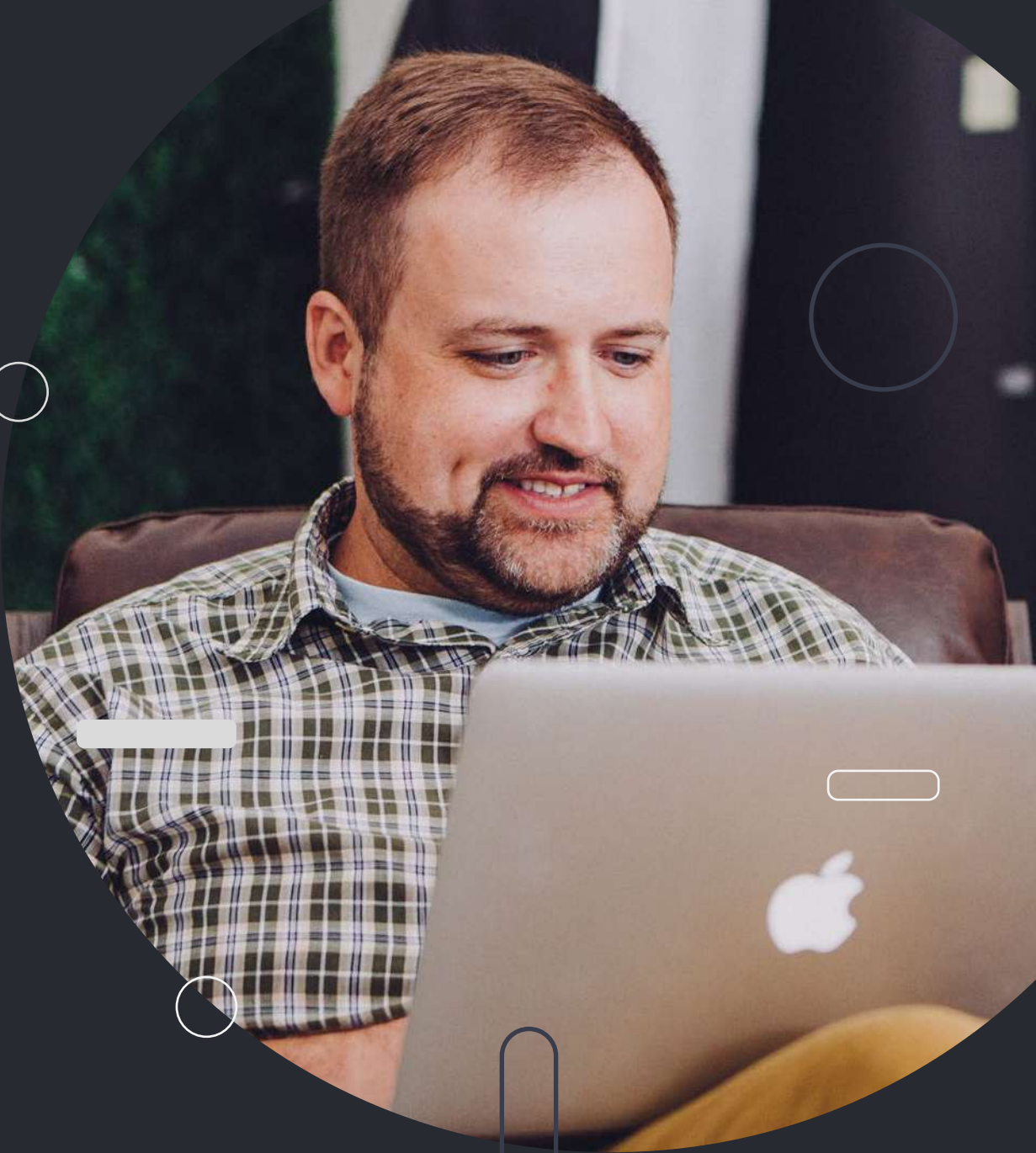
You'll find more guides, case studies, and datasheets to help you refactor your tech recruiting on the resources section of our website

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