



Innovative IT Staffing Solutions



*New Hire Training Programs can
produce qualified IT Staff at
discount rates*

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Introduction

According to the National Association of Computer Consulting Businesses' recent IT Employment Index¹, the mid-year 2006 IT employment rate remains strong:

“Strong demand is leading to shortages of IT professionals with certain skill sets in some geographic areas. Consequently, IT staffing companies who can find the right talent on a just-in-time basis for their clients are reporting that business is brisk.” -- NACCB

As one might expect, the continued demand for qualified IT Staff has resulted in greater competition for resources and upward pricing pressure on salaries and consulting rates.

Firms seeking to grow in this environment must be open to innovative approaches to recruiting that hold the potential to deliver qualified staff at or below market rates. This is true for firms seeking to hire full-time employees or engage consultants.

This document outlines a recruiting approach for IT staffing that features in-house resource development, and which holds the promise of obtaining fully qualified staff at below market rates.

Challenges

In addition to the usual Supply and Demand forces, there are other factors that make it difficult and/or expensive to recruit IT Staff *with exactly the skills* that a firm requires.

Timeliness: The Search for “Ideal” Candidates

The ideal candidate for a position will be both motivated and capable of immediate productivity in their role or function. The hiring organization will develop profiles of the “ideal” candidates that characterize the skills, capabilities, and experience that individuals should have to be successful in the target role. Since finding “ideal candidates” is rare in reality, necessary

¹ http://www.naccb.org/employment-index/june2006_it_release.pdf



compromises are typically made in terms of any particular candidate's qualifications. Even so, the time required to recruit strongly qualified staff can be extensive, and can even jeopardize other goals and objectives. This factor becomes acute as the number of required resources grows.

Complex Skill Sets: A Needle in the Haystack

The wide variety of technologies and tools employed in modern software development *dramatically decrease* the likelihood that any candidate for a position will be immediately productive in the target role/position. For example, project needs might dictate that a qualified candidate should know Oracle 9, Java 1.5, Java Server Pages 2.0, and IBM's Rational Application Developer for Websphere™. The odds of recruiting a team with exactly those qualifications are slim to none.

Cost Control: Sometimes You Get What You Pay For

It is reasonable to expect the cost of resources to rise commensurate with their experience and qualifications. The more specialized the qualifications for a position, the more an organization can expect to pay for them.

Conflicting Goals

Each of the challenges in the previous section can be perceived as conflicting dimensions in pursuit of the same goal. Consider that:

- **Timeliness:** Generally we want to build or augment a team as quickly as possible. However, the speed with which a position can be filled, or a team formed is at odds with the goal of finding "ideal" candidates.
- **Complex Skill Sets:** Generally, we seek to find candidates with as close to the target skill set as possible. Engaging staff with precise qualifications is at odds with both the goals of Timeliness and Cost Control.
- **Cost Control:** Keeping costs in control is at odds with getting the most qualified people as quickly as possible.

Internal Resource Development

An alternative solution to the challenges of recruiting qualified staff while controlling costs involves the integration of Training into the staffing process. This approach involves:

- Deliberately recruiting "High Potential, Lacking Skills or Experience" (HPLSE)² candidates
- Designing and delivering a custom technical training program that renders new staff capable at the "fully qualified" level
- Mentoring new staff through their initial assignments

This approach embodies several inherent advantages:

- It allow positions to be filled and teams assembled quickly
- New staff are made proficient with *exactly* the technologies the firm or project requires

² That is, those we believe can be trained up to be ideal for their role.



- Costs can be contained because “HPLSE”³ resources cost considerably less in the marketplace
- New staff members are motivated to master and apply their new skills

Common Themes and Variations

With considerable experience in the design and delivery of New Hire Training programs, we know there are a number of ways that this idea can be implemented to address a company’s staffing needs. In all cases, the length of the training period and technologies instructed are highly situational, and are thus not addressed here. Before we describe variations, let’s look at what most programs have in common:

- Most frequently, *training is carried out at the hiring firm’s facilities*, ideally, at their own home-office. This provides for corporate cultural immersion as well as opportunities for short lectures by “distinguished” speakers within the firm.
- Technical training is *augmented with company knowledge* such as organizational structure, IT Infrastructure, lines of business, customers, etc.
- A *needs-driven curriculum*. That is, agreement across the stakeholder community as to what technologies, tools, and skills must be included in the program. This is a simple task, when staff are associated with a single project, but can be challenging when a least-common-denominator must be found across multiple projects.
- The program typically incorporates an Integrated Case Study. That is, a “hands-on” programming problem that is *relevant to the training and hiring firm’s domain*.

Differences between hiring organizations and their needs lead to different design and delivery scenarios including:

- **Employee Training:** In some cases, the target staff are already employees of the organization. Although everything we have been discussing remains relevant, this type of training is termed a Re-Skilling Program.
- **New Hires:** This involves the in-house training of HPLSE staff that have been deliberately hired without the full complement of desired skills. The purpose of the training program is to bridge the skill gaps necessary to render the employees productive in their new roles and functions.
- **Consultant Training:** This involves hiring HPSE consultants and training them in-house. This runs counter to conventional thinking about resources, but *this is what makes it innovative*. Consider:

³ High Potential, Lacking Skills or Experience.



- There is typically less overhead involved in bringing on consulting staff than there is in hiring full-time employees. Indeed, the time required to engage and/or release a consultant is less than that for an employee.
- There is a perception that training consultants is risky because they have no loyalty to the company. This can be mitigated with “Right To Hire” and other incentive programs.
- It is possible to build the cost of the training into the hourly rate charged by the Consulting firm, and *still save money* when compared to the market rate of a fully qualified resource. Furthermore, amortizing the cost of training across a number of consultants for the term of the contract makes even more attractive *since training costs are not explicitly budgeted*.

Thus, we note that engaging consultants positively addresses all three of the goals (Timeliness, Complex Skill Sets, and Cost Control) we discussed earlier.

Conclusion

New Hire training programs can provide an attractive alternative means to meet the challenges of obtaining qualified staff in a timely and cost effective manner. Programs can be designed for employees or consultants, and can be structured to amortize the cost over an extended period.

Affinity IT, LLC

Affinity IT, LLC provides Web Application Development Training and Software Consulting Services. For over a decade, we have worked with Clients and other Training Vendors to be the provider of choice for New Hire Programs, Re-Skilling Initiatives, Technical Training, and Project Management.

More information about our products and services can be found at www.affinity-it.com.

About The Author

Joe Fisher is the President of Affinity IT, LLC. Mr. Fisher holds Undergraduate and Graduate Degrees in Computer Science. A “hands-on” practitioner, when he is not instructing he can typically be found designing and implementing Web Applications or authoring Training Materials. Joe can be reached at: jwfisher@affinity-it.com.