

Beneath the Surface: How to Identify an IT Candidate's Untapped Potential

UP ON THE BLOG



Beneath the Surface: How to Identify an IT Candidate's Untapped Potential



Hiring the right person in the IT sector has never been straightforward. You can run a solid process, see a CV that ticks every box, and still end up picking the wrong person. It is frustrating, and it is common.

A lot of that comes from how we filter people at the start. We rely on the obvious markers, such as job titles, degrees, and years in the field. They help narrow the list, but they also shut the door on candidates who could have been the **best long-term fit**.

Now that two thirds of organisations are facing severe skill shortages, it's becoming increasingly obvious that the way we assess talent needs to change. Looking at past roles, certifications, and experience isn't enough. We need to examine potential.

This guide is about noticing the hidden signals of potential. Looking past the surface, so you don't miss the people who could make the biggest difference to your team.



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In this Blog you will discover:

→ Why traditional hiring fails:

Two-thirds of organisations face severe skill shortages, yet most still filter candidates using outdated markers like degrees and job titles that exclude high-potential talent.

→ The hidden cost of surface-level hiring:

Poor hiring decisions cost up to 200% of an employee's annual salary when factoring in turnover, lost productivity, and training expenses.

→ Five critical indicators of untapped potential:

Learn to assess adaptability, problem-solving under pressure, cultural intelligence, curiosity, and resilience through behavioural interviews and practical scenarios.

→ Skills-based assessment strategies:

Discover why 90% of companies see better results when hiring for demonstrated skills over formal qualifications, and how to implement practical testing methods.

→ Advanced interview techniques:

Master behavioural questioning using the STAR method, panel interview strategies, and future-focused questions that reveal how candidates learn and adapt.

The Hidden Cost of Surface-Level Hiring



While churn issues aren't exclusively an issue of poor hiring, it's clear that companies are struggling to make informed decisions.

For instance, consider that around **53% of employees leave new jobs** due to unmet expectations, and approximately **30% abandon a business within the first 90 days**.

The wrong hire costs more than most teams expect. It is not just the recruiter's fee or the time spent on interviews. It is the months of slow progress, the extra strain on colleagues, and the work that needs to be redone.

Recruitment industry and HR experts suggest that the total cost of replacing someone can be anywhere from 100% to 200% of their annual salary. Add the basic expenses of recruitment to the price of managers conducting interviews and reviewing applications, the cost of training and onboarding,



and the expense of lost productivity, and it's easy to see how things start to get expensive quickly.

When you hire employees based only on what's easy to measure, like degrees, exact job history, or familiar systems experiences, your chances of hiring someone who won't last grow significantly.

Beyond the CV: Key Indicators of Untapped Potential



CVs and cover letters are helpful, but they are dated. They're records of the past that show where someone has worked and what tools they've used. Very rarely do they provide a clear view of a person's actual skills, characteristics, and future potential.

So, what should IT leaders be looking at instead?

Adaptability and Learning Agility

Roles change quickly these days. Skills have an average half-life of only about five years, and that's shrinking even further with the rise of AI, automation, and new tech. That makes adaptability more important than ever.

Ask IT candidates to describe a time they were asked to take on something unfamiliar, maybe a system they'd never used, or a project outside their usual scope.

Pay attention to how they approached it. Did they **seek training**? Ask **questions**? Learn by **trial and error**? The strongest answers show a clear process for getting up to speed and a willingness to step into discomfort.



Beyond the CV: Key Indicators of Untapped Potential

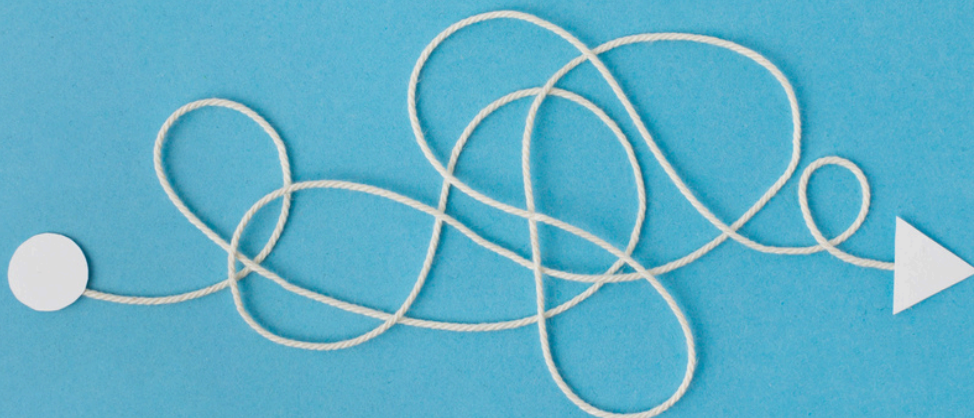
Problem-Solving Under Pressure

Today's IT employees will encounter challenges, many of which they have never faced before. What matters now is how equipped they are to handle them.

This is often easiest to see through behavioural questions. Please select a problem relevant to your industry and ask them to walk you through their thought process.

- ❓ What did they notice first?
- ❓ How did they decide what to do next?
- ❓ Who did they involve?

Scenario-based tasks can also help. Give them a short brief overview and a time limit, then observe how they break it down. You're not just looking for the "right" solution; you're looking for how they think.



Beyond the CV: Key Indicators of Untapped Potential

Cultural Intelligence and Soft Skills

Soft skills are harder to measure, but they're often the difference between someone who strengthens a team and someone who disrupts it. People Management research shows that **67% of employers** now consider them more important than formal qualifications.

You can usually test an IT candidate's soft skills well during group interviews or panel discussions. Observe how they listen, whether they interrupt, and how they adjust their tone to different individuals. Ask for examples of working with colleagues from different backgrounds or in other locations.



Curiosity and Initiative

Curiosity can be easily overlooked if you rush through interviews. Allow the candidate to ask questions. Strong signs include questions about your challenges, success measures, or what the first few months will look like.

This matters because **curiosity often predicts long-term adaptability**. People who ask good questions now are more likely to keep learning after they join.

Another thing to watch for? Initiative.

Look for clear examples that candidates are willing to act on their curiosity and explore new opportunities. For instance, did they decide to pursue an AI course just because they knew it might be helpful to a future employer?

Beyond the CV: Key Indicators of Untapped Potential

Resilience

Resilience and adaptability often go hand-in-hand. Although it's essential for IT employers to prioritise the well-being of their team members today, it's also worthwhile to determine whether a new employee can adapt to the challenges that arise.

In behavioural interviews, ask candidates about a time they faced a professional setback. Let them explain the situation, how they reacted, and what they did afterwards.

The best answers don't avoid the issues; they **acknowledge them** and show how they **contributed to growth**.



The Skills-Based Assessment Revolution



For years, many job ads in the IT sector opened with the same line: “Degree required.” In some cases, it’s fair; the role genuinely needs the academic grounding. In many others, it’s just a filter. Quick to apply, easy to defend, but it excludes a whole group of people who might be able to do the job just as well, or even better.

The shift toward skills-based hiring changes that. Instead of asking “**Where did you study?**” it starts with “**Can you do the work?**”. The logic is straightforward: a strong portfolio or practical demonstration conveys more about job readiness than a line on a CV.

Practical testing doesn’t need to involve full-day exams or assessments. If you’re hiring in sales, you might ask a candidate to prepare a short pitch based on a mock client brief. For a technical role, it could be a small repair task or code challenge drawn from real work your team has handled.



These give you more than a yes-or-no; they reveal how a person thinks, works under pressure, and explain their choices.



The Skills-Based Assessment Revolution



Transferable skills matter here, too. Someone from an adjacent industry may not be familiar with your exact systems, but if they've solved similar problems elsewhere, the learning curve can be relatively short. This is where “new-collar” workers, those with specialised skills gained through alternative pathways, often shine. They bring capability without the constraints of a narrow career path, and they're usually more adaptable as a result.



Leveraging Professional Recruiters for Deeper Insights



Skill-based assessments can help you make stronger decisions, but few things are more valuable than having the right support through the hiring process.

Specialist IT recruiters, like Constant Recruitment, see things most hiring managers miss. It's not because they have some secret checklist; it's because they **spend every day talking to IT candidates, tracking industry shifts, and watching how careers unfold**. Over time, they **learn what potential looks like** before it's obvious on paper.

Find a recruitment company with genuine experience in your industry and ask about their processes.

How do they probe for adaptability, cultural fit, or leadership potential in non-managerial roles?

The answers will tell you whether they're looking deeper than the surface.

Remember, when working with recruiters, the best results come from long-term partnerships. When a recruiter understands your culture, team dynamics, and business goals, they can filter candidates accordingly.



Interview Strategies That Reveal Hidden Potential

One final thing to master when assessing candidates for potential in the IT is the interview.

Most interviews stay on the safe path. They assess experience, verify skills, and touch on cultural fit. All useful, but it means the real signs of potential can slip by. A few small changes in approach can bring those qualities to the forefront.

We've already mentioned behavioural interview questions. These are great for diving into a person's true abilities and skills. Listen for responses using the "STAR" method, outlining the **situation**, **task**, **action**, and **result**. Once they've told their story, ask what they'd do differently if they faced it again. Or how the experience shaped the way they approach similar work now.

For deeper insights, try some future-focused questions.



"If you were leading this project in a year, what would you change?"

forces them to **think forward, not just back.**



Panel interview strategies are also useful. Having more than one interviewer in the room changes what you see. A technical lead will notice different things than a team manager. HR might pick up on culture fit where others don't. The conversation afterwards, comparing notes, is often where the clearest picture forms.

Hiring for Long-Term Potential, Not Just Short-Term Fit



Start small. Look at the last few people you hired. How did you find them? What made you say yes? Are they doing the job you hoped for, or something different? That quick review will tell you more than a dozen reports.

Pick one thing to change right away. Add a short skills test. Swap one interview question for something that digs into how they learn. Ask a recruiter to walk you through how they judge potential, not just experience.

Keep track of what happens. How long does it take to fill the role? How is the new hire doing six months in? Whether the team feels the fit is right. Simple measures, written down, make it easier to see what works.

Adjusting your hiring process now, with a focus on **potential** rather than **short-term gap-filling**, could give you the edge you need to stay ahead in the recruitment market in the future.



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Our extensive network and expertise in the field enable us to connect you with the right people and opportunities to achieve your goals. At Constant Recruitment, we pride ourselves on delivering exceptional service and going above and beyond to exceed your expectations.

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At Constant Recruitment, we are passionate about connecting talented IT professionals with leading organisations across the UK. The right talent can transform organisations and drive innovation and growth, and we are dedicated to matching the right talent with the right opportunity.

Our founder, **Rachel Constant-Taylor**, started in recruitment in 2006, the same year her youngest daughter was born. With a background in the IT industry since leaving school, moving into **IT recruitment** was a natural fit for her, combining her real-world knowledge of working in Tech companies with her love of people. She saw an opportunity in 2012 to create a unique recruitment agency of her own that delivered exceptional service and expertise.



What makes us unique is our commitment to delivering a personalised recruitment experience for both our clients and candidates. We understand that every individual and business is unique, and we work closely with each of our clients and candidates to understand their distinctive needs and goals. This allows us to provide tailored solutions that meet their specific requirements, helping them to succeed in a competitive market.

We recruit better than our competitors by providing a seamless and effective recruitment process that consistently supports both our candidates and clients. **We value honesty, integrity, and hard work.**

Taking a pride in our ability to connect the right talent with the right opportunity. We are committed to delivering the highest standards of service and expertise.

To our clients we are the trusted partner for all recruitment needs

