

SELECTING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR CERN

– Tell us a little about CERN, its recruitment process and related challenges, and what you invited Thriving Talent to help you with?

CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, is one of the world's largest and most respected centres for scientific research. We typically hire around 120-150 professionals of different backgrounds and nationalities per year, with some job openings attracting up to 700 candidates from all around the world.

Before 2012, our recruitment process relied almost entirely on panel interviews. The implementation of the CERN competency model in 2010 enabled us to harmonise behavioural and technical competencies, however interview preparation was limited due to hiring managers' busy schedules and lack of a clear, common framework for their role in the interview process. This often resulted in **different assessment criteria** being applied during the panel interview process.

This **lack of preparation and consistency** made it challenging to hire the right person and provide a professional interview experience, and stood in the way of **our aspiration to be an employer of choice**. We realised that we needed to **build internal capacity** – to train our hiring managers and staff supporting panel interviews in the area of evidence-based interview skills.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA COOK Deputy Group Leader Talent Acquisition, CERN



To help us reach this goal, CERN invited Thriving Talent to develop a training programme that would change the way we managed the panel interview process.

Due to our **complex and multi-disciplinary environment**, there were several requirements for the programme to be successful. We needed a programme that would:

- be **informative, factual and systematic** to convince our scientific and technical audience;
- cover the required concepts in **only one business day**;
- contain a **perfect balance of theory and practice**;
- include **practical role play**;
- provide **concrete, applicable frameworks** to be implemented **immediately**;
- enable **substantial behavioural change**, convincing busy and tech-oriented staff to invest more time to prepare for the interview process.

Thriving Talent took the time to understand the CERN environment and adapt the training design to our specific needs. They helped us develop an **effective learning journey** built over three phases – **pre-course, course and post-course** – completed with **useful tools and resources**.

The training is designed in a very clear and structured way. The pre-work helped us prepare for it and set our minds onto what we were about to learn and the SONRU video interview helped us empathise with the candidate's experience. And the pace with which Natalie delivered the training was just perfect.

The training was very useful, and I feel much more confident than before for the upcoming selection processes that I will be part of.

I was impressed by the professionalism of those running this training session. I left feeling they all genuinely cared about the subject and about helping us to do our best.



The tailored training design was thorough, with a strong emphasis on experiential learning. Overall, the programme has been extremely popular with our demanding CERN audience.

– What are the key features of the course and how do you think they have benefited CERN's hiring process?

Over the last 6 years Thriving Talent helped to train over 400 hiring managers and selection panel members across the Organization, and participants have regularly commented on the quality of the content and documentation, as well as the optimal delivery pace and energy of the trainers. In fact, according to feedback, 100% of participants assess the TT trainers as effective or very effective.

The three-phased learning journey of the course is definitely one of its key features. The pre-course work helps the hiring managers better understand the essential skills for an effective recruitment process, while the post-course phase provides additional resources to ensure that the knowledge gained during the training is fully retained and integrated into their role. The pre-course video-quizzes and Implicit Association Tests are designed to raise self-awareness and identify biases, to test knowledge on interview best practices and theory, and much more. Moreover, the pre-course work also provides the opportunity for participants to experience a pre-screening video interview, while the training itself has a practical panel interview simulation and role-play.

This engaging approach not only guarantees deep understanding, but also ensures that the newly obtained skills are transferable to other work situations such as meetings, performance appraisals, and different recruitment programmes. Moreover, the course has evolved over time to integrate participant feedback and weave in new topics, for example, focus on inclusion and diversity.

Given the broad range of profiles CERN hires, and the number of countries from which candidates originate, it is crucial to get the pre-screening and

shortlisting right, so that a high quality pool of candidates is invited to attend a selection day in Switzerland. Thanks to the training programme, today interview panel members work as a team. They know that defining **clear, measurable assessment criteria** and **interview frameworks** for equal and fair treatment of candidates is key to hiring the right person and ensuring a positive candidate experience. The resulting **quality of hiring decisions** is positive for **both hiring managers and selected candidates**.

– March 2019 marks a 6 year anniversary for the “Selecting the Right Person for CERN” training programme. What impact do you think it had on CERN’s recruitment process and inclusion and diversity strategy?

More than **500 selection boards** (corresponding to approximately **2000 individual candidates**) have been held since “Selecting the Right Person for CERN” training programme was implemented, and its positive impact is evident from the experience of the panel members and candidates alike.

100% of the participants **are satisfied** with the training, with **over 70%** assessing the training value as **very high or beyond expectations**. The resulting dedication and commitment of hiring managers to collaborate in the design of a consistent, fair and objective interview process is tangible. It has created a **common interview approach across the Organization**, which in turn helps CERN be an **employer of choice**.

Hiring managers report how the tools and tips acquired during the course have helped them in deep and objective assessment of candidates. For example, **100%** of participants found the **role play exercise** of the training useful, with the overwhelming majority (**almost 95%**) assessing this as **“very useful”**. **Over 90%** of staff trained told us that the additional **course resources** were of **high quality and relevance**.

Overall, there is now a stronger commitment to **make the interview day a memorable and enjoyable experience** for all candidates. In addition, the programme has built much needed awareness amongst panel members of the unconscious biases that can cloud objectivity during the recruitment process, and has been **instrumental in driving CERN’s inclusion and diversity efforts**.

– And the last question: If you had to define your experience with Thriving Talent in a couple of sentences, what would you say?

I’d say that TT are highly professional and customer-focused, **truly dedicated to understand the needs and contexts of their clients** in designing their training programmes. In addition, their **personable approach**, their **openness to feedback**, and their readiness to **constantly review and improve the course** content have made it a great pleasure to work alongside the team.

**How
can we help
your talent
to thrive?**

