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# How to brief a recruitment plan *with a skills matrix*

Too many hires start from a recycled job description and a vague sense that the team is stretched. A skills matrix replaces that with precision: it shows the gaps you cannot close internally, the exact level a new hire must bring, and whether you even need to recruit at all, or just develop someone already there. This is how to turn the matrix into a sharp, evidence-based recruitment brief.



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**Reading time** 12 min · **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework · **Updated** May 2026

## THE SHORT ANSWER

To brief a recruitment plan with a skills matrix, compare the best capability you can field internally against what the role needs, on each key skill. Where the team already reaches the required level, develop or redeploy rather than hire; where it cannot, that gap defines the hire, and the size of the gap sets the level to recruit for. In short: **the matrix turns a vague vacancy into a precise brief, the exact skills and levels a hire must bring, and tells you first whether you need to recruit at all.**

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Check internal first.** Before opening a vacancy, scan the matrix for someone who already has, or could quickly develop, the skills.
- **The gap defines the hire.** Where the team cannot reach the required level, that shortfall is exactly what the new hire must bring.
- **Gap size sets the level.** A small gap may need a practitioner to coach up; a large one needs an expert to lead the capability.
- **Write the brief from the deficit.** Start the job description from the matrix's identified gap, not a recycled template.
- **Recruit on evidence.** A data-grounded brief improves hire quality and shortens time-to-hire.

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## Recruit from the gap, *not a template*

Most recruitment begins in the wrong place: a job description copied from last time and a feeling that the team needs more hands. A skills matrix begins from evidence instead, the specific gap between what the role requires and the best the team can already field, so the brief describes exactly the capability you are missing, and you only recruit for what you genuinely cannot supply from within.

### Check internal capability first

Before opening any vacancy, the matrix lets you ask the cheaper question first: **do we already have this?** Scanning capability across the whole team often surfaces someone with the prerequisite skills who was invisible through normal management lines, the person in one team who could move into a newly created role in another. Internal mobility and development are faster and cheaper than external hiring, so a matrix-led plan always exhausts the internal option before writing a job advert.

### The gap defines the hire

Where internal capability genuinely cannot reach the required level, that **shortfall is the hire**. A critical skill with no internal coverage above a basic level, plus a real business need in the coming months, is a data-grounded hiring priority, not a hunch. And crucially, the gap defines not just *that* you hire but *what* you hire for: the brief is the specific skills, and the levels, the team is short of, expressed in the same terms you score everyone else.

## Gap size sets the level to recruit

How big the gap is tells you **what calibre of hire** you need, the minimum viable proficiency. A small gap, the team is one level short, may only need a capable practitioner who can be coached up internally. A large gap on a critical skill, with no internal depth at all, needs an expert who can lead and build the capability. Reading gap size this way stops you over-hiring an expensive expert for a coachable gap, or under-hiring a junior for a role that needs leadership from day one.

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— WHY IT MATTERS NOW

## Vague briefs make *poor hires*

A recruitment brief built on a recycled template and gut feel leads to mis-hires, wasted spend, and roles that do not fix the actual gap. A matrix-led brief is precise, evidenced, and far more likely to bring in exactly the capability the team needs.

81%

VIA SKILLPANEL,  
2024

of US employers used skills-based hiring in 2024, recruiting against capability rather than credentials alone.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable workforce skills data, so most recruitment briefs are written without a clear gap picture.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to change, which makes hiring for the right gap critical.

A mis-hire is one of the most expensive mistakes a team makes: months of cost and disruption to bring in someone who turns out not to close the gap, because the gap was never precisely defined. A skills matrix attacks the root cause by grounding recruitment in **evidence rather than instinct**. It prevents needless hires by surfacing internal capability first, defines the brief from the real deficit so the advert describes the right skills at the right level, and gives the hiring manager and recruiter a shared, data-grounded picture instead of competing impressions of what the team needs. The result is fewer, better-targeted hires, made faster, that actually fix the gap.

## Four recruitment questions the matrix answers

A skills matrix turns the four questions every recruitment decision rests on from guesswork into evidence. Each sharpens the plan and the brief.

### ANSWERS 01

#### Do we need to hire?

By revealing internal capability and near-ready people, the matrix shows whether a gap can be closed by development or mobility before you open a vacancy at all.

### ANSWERS 02

#### What for, exactly?

The gap between required and internal-best, skill by skill, defines precisely the capability a hire must bring, the basis of a sharp brief.

### ANSWERS 03

#### At what level?

The size of the gap sets the minimum viable proficiency: a practitioner to coach up for a small gap, an expert to lead for a large one.

### ANSWERS 04

#### How urgent?

A critical skill with thin internal cover and a near-term need is a clear priority, so the matrix helps sequence which roles to recruit first.

Together these turn recruitment from a reactive scramble into a **deliberate, evidenced plan**. Instead of "we're stretched, let's hire", the conversation becomes "this is the gap, we can't close it internally, here is the level we need and by when". That precision is what produces a sharp job description, a focused search, a confident hiring decision, and a new starter who closes the gap that prompted the hire, rather than an expensive addition who turns out not to fit the need.

## The 0 to 5 capability framework

A recruitment brief needs a scale precise enough to state the level a hire must bring. This framework, developed by Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith, lets you express both the team's internal best and the role's requirement as the same levels, so the gap between them is exact, and so is the brief.

- 0

**No skill required or desired** EXCLUDED

Not needed for the role. In a recruitment brief, it keeps the spec focused on the skills the role genuinely requires, rather than a wish-list.
- 1

**In training / Trainee** WEIGHTING 25%

Up to 75% trained. If the best internal level on a key skill is only Level 1 and the role needs 3, that is a clear hiring gap, the team cannot yet field it.
- 2

**Developing capabilities** WEIGHTING 50%

More than 75% trained. An internal best of Level 2 against a need for 3 is a one-level gap, often closable by development, so consider before recruiting externally.
- 3

**Capable** WEIGHTING 75% · USUAL TARGET

Works unsupervised. If someone internal is already here on the role's key skills, you may not need to hire at all, redeployment or development can cover it.
- 4

**Subject Matter Expert / Trainer** WEIGHTING 100%

Expert who can train others. When a role needs to lead and build a capability the team lacks, this is the level to recruit for, an expert, not a practitioner.
- 5

**Strategic ownership / Leadership** WEIGHTING 100%

Sets direction and standards. A senior hire brief, where you are recruiting someone to own a capability or function strategically, not just perform it.

### Internal best versus required = the brief

For each key skill, take the **best level anyone internal can field** and compare it to the level the role requires. Where internal best meets or exceeds the requirement, no hire is needed, develop or redeploy. Where it falls short, the gap is the hiring brief, and its size sets the level: a one-level gap suggests a practitioner to coach up; a two or three-level gap with no internal depth needs an expert to lead. The weightings let you express both as percentages to compare cleanly.

**A worked example.** Three skills, three different decisions:

Major-donor fundraising internal best **L1** vs need **L4** → **hire an expert**

Digital marketing internal best **L2** vs need **L3** → develop, do not hire

Service delivery internal best **L4** vs need **L3** → covered – no action.

— SEE THE BRIEF

## The gap that becomes the *hire*

Here is a team's capability set out for a recruitment decision: for each key skill, the filled dot is the best the team can field internally, and the ringed dot is what the role requires. The line between them is the gap. A long line on a critical skill is a hire; a short one is a development job; no gap means no action. The picture is the brief.



WHAT THE HIRING MANAGER READS HERE

- **Major-donor fundraising is the hire.** The widest gap, with no internal depth, and tagged HIRE. This defines the role: recruit an expert who can lead the capability, because there is no one to coach up to it in time.
- **Data and bid writing follow.** Also wide gaps tagged for hiring or serious development. Sequence them by how critical and urgent each is, rather than opening every vacancy at once.
- **Digital marketing is a develop, not a hire.** Only one level short, tagged DEVELOP. Coaching an existing person is faster and cheaper than recruiting, so this should not become a vacancy.
- **Service delivery is covered.** Internal best already exceeds the requirement, no action. Spotting this stops a needless hire and frees budget for the gaps that genuinely need it.

— DOING IT

## Five steps to a matrix-led recruitment brief

Turning the matrix into a recruitment plan is quick and makes every hire sharper. These five steps keep the brief evidenced, internal-first and

precise.

## 1 **Define what the role requires**

Set out the key skills the role needs and the level for each, on the same scale you score the team. Be specific and honest about what is genuinely required, not a wish-list, since every line here becomes a criterion you will recruit and assess against.

## 2 **Find the best you can field internally**

For each required skill, read the matrix for the highest level anyone in the team has, and for people who are close and could develop. This is the cheaper option, so look hard before deciding to recruit; internal mobility often hides in plain sight.

## 3 **Decide develop, redeploy or hire**

Compare internal best to the requirement for each skill. Where it meets the need, redeploy or develop. Where it falls short and cannot be closed in time, that is a hire, and the gap, skill by skill, is exactly what the new role must bring.

## 4 **Set the level from the gap size**

Let the size of each gap set the calibre of hire: a one-level gap may need a capable practitioner to coach up; a large gap with no internal depth needs an expert to lead. This minimum viable proficiency keeps you from over or under-hiring.

## 5

### Write the brief from the deficit

Build the job description and person specification straight from the identified gaps and levels, not a recycled template. A recruiter can then match candidates to the specific proficiencies needed, improving hire quality and shortening time-to-hire.

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#### — AVOID THESE

## Six mistakes in recruitment briefs

#### MISTAKE 01

##### Recycling the old JD

Last time's job description rarely fits this gap. Build the brief from the matrix's identified deficit.

#### MISTAKE 02

##### Skipping the internal scan

Hiring externally for a skill you already have wastes money. Check internal capability and mobility first.

#### MISTAKE 03

##### Hiring a coachable gap

Recruiting an expert for a one-level gap is over-hiring. Develop where the team is nearly there.

#### MISTAKE 04

##### Under-hiring a leadership gap

A junior cannot build a capability the team lacks. Match the level to the size of the gap.

#### MISTAKE 05

##### A vague wish-list spec

Listing every desirable skill blurs the search. Brief the specific gaps and levels the role must fill.

#### MISTAKE 06

##### Opening every vacancy at once

Not all gaps are equally urgent. Sequence hires by how critical and time-sensitive each gap is.

The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes the hiring brief *fall out of the gaps*.

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template just makes recruitment planning easier: with current and required levels in place, the gaps and the best you can field internally are calculated for you, so you can see at a glance which gaps are covered, which to develop, and which genuinely need a hire, and brief that hire precisely on the skills and levels the team is missing.



*The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix shows internal capability against required levels, the basis for deciding develop, redeploy or hire, and for briefing each hire on the exact gap, all on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.*

<p>TRY IT FREE</p> <p><b>£0</b></p> <p>The online 5x5 builder maps a small team in your browser, with no sign-up. See the gaps behind a hire.</p>	<p>MOST POPULAR</p> <p><b>£199</b></p> <p>The full Excel template: current and required levels, calculated gaps and analytics, up to 30 people and 30 skills. One-off, yours forever.</p>	<p>WHEN YOU ARE READY</p> <p><b>£1</b></p> <p>Upgrade to PulseAI in your first year for a living, web and mobile version with AI skill suggestions and reminders.</p>
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— COMMON QUESTIONS

## Quick *answers*

### **Q How do I use a skills matrix to plan recruitment?**

Define what the role requires on each key skill, find the best level the team can field internally, and compare. Where internal capability meets the need, develop or redeploy; where it cannot, that gap is the hire. The size of the gap sets the level to recruit, and the gaps become the job description.

### **Q How does it tell me whether to hire or develop?**

By comparing internal best to the required level. If someone is already at or near the requirement, developing or redeploying them is faster and cheaper than hiring. If no one is close and the need is real and near-term, that is a genuine hiring gap. The matrix makes the cheaper internal option visible first.

### **Q How do I know what level to recruit at?**

Let the size of the gap decide. A one-level gap can often be filled by a capable practitioner who is coached up internally. A large gap on a critical skill with no internal depth needs an expert who can lead and build the capability. This minimum viable proficiency keeps you from over-hiring or under-hiring.

## Q How does it improve the job description?

It lets you write the brief from the actual deficit rather than a recycled template. The specific skills and levels the team is short of become the person specification, so the advert describes precisely the capability you need and a recruiter can match candidates to those proficiencies, improving hire quality and speed.

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## Q Can it stop unnecessary hires?

Yes, and this is one of its biggest savings. By surfacing internal capability and near-ready people before a vacancy is opened, the matrix often reveals that a gap can be closed through development or internal mobility, avoiding an expensive external hire altogether and reserving budget for the gaps that genuinely require one.

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## Q How do I prioritise which roles to recruit first?

By how critical and how urgent each gap is. A critical skill with thin or no internal cover and a near-term business need is the priority; a less critical gap, or one with developing internal cover, can wait or be filled internally. Reading the matrix this way sequences your hiring rather than opening every vacancy at once.

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### — ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Alex is the creator of the Upleashed capability framework that powers Skills Matrix Template, the award-winning Excel skills matrix. A Chartered Manager with an MBA, an LLM and a doctorate in business administration, he has spent more than two decades helping operations, HR and quality teams turn capability from a gut feel into something they can measure, manage and prove.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex J. Martin-Smith".

Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith

### — SOURCES

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World Economic Forum. (2025). *The future of jobs report 2025*. World Economic Forum.

## Hire for the gap, *nothing else*.

You now have the recruitment method. The quickest way to start is to set what your next role requires, read the best your team can field internally, and look at the gap. A wide gap with no internal depth is your hire, briefed precisely; a narrow one is a development job that saves you a vacancy.

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