



PRESALES HIRING SURVEY

A global report into technology PreSales leaders hiring methods and beliefs



ABOUT US

For a PreSales leader there are few things more satisfying than making an inspired hire.

We've spent years perfecting the art and science of recruiting search and candidate assessment, specifically for PreSales. We've built up a pretty large network too!

Established in 2014, Bright Dynamics was the first PreSales specialist recruiting and search firm in EMEA. We take a craft approach to recruiting, effectively understanding what you're looking for, where to search, and how to attract the best and brightest talent.

Our main objective is to help you increase the quality of hire into your teams. With this in mind, we partnered with [Sova Assessments](#) to build the PreSales profession's first unified competency model and **PreSales Assess**, a range of bespoke candidate assessment tools designed to provide you with insight into candidates' underlying traits, abilities, motivational drivers, and cultural fit. **PreSales Assess** compounds the effectiveness of your existing assessment process, maintaining the interview as a cornerstone.

Planning to hire? Book an informal call with us [here](#) | Learn more about our PreSales competency model and test out **PreSales Assess** [here](#)

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Hiring well is core to the success of any PreSales organisation and any PreSales leader's role.

Yet, understanding candidates underlying abilities and attributes is complex. PreSales leaders have the unenviable task of assessing hard skills, soft skills, and motivation, working from a scarce candidate pool, often with limited time.

This survey was conducted to gain insights into what PreSales leaders practice and believe around:

- Which job components and characteristics lead to high performance on their teams?
- How do they go about assessing those components and characteristics during the hiring process?
- How do they measure the effectiveness of the hiring process itself and improve it?

We believe this survey provides clear answers to these questions, as well as some surprises, such as:

- The majority of hiring managers feel they do not have sufficient support and training to interview effectively, yet still base their hiring decisions mostly on their own intuition.
- Whether this intuition is reliable is hard to ascertain as over 70% of organisations do not measure the quality of hire.
- Discovery is a highly coveted skill, but unlike the demo is not generally measured in its own right during the hiring process.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

For this report, we surveyed PreSales managers, directors, and VPs from the Enterprise Software domain, most respondents work at tier-one or best-of-breed SaaS “scale-up” vendors. **103** managers from EMEA, North America, and APAC responded in full.

The study also included 17 conversations with PreSales leaders, discussing in-depth the topics arising from the survey results, alongside a general conversation around PreSales hiring. These conversations can be found [here](#).

Respondent profile

Seniority

- 42% 1st line manager
- 49% 2nd line manager+
- 9% Other

Reporting lines from 1 to ~900 team members.

The average number of employee reports (direct or indirect): 27

WHAT DO PRESALES LEADERS LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING?

BROAD LEVEL

Question

When assessing a candidate for a PreSales role, what importance rating do you generally give to the following components, out of ten?

Motivation 9.32

Cultural fit 8.59

Soft skills 8.56

Hard Skills 6.05

103 respondents were surveyed and asked to give a rating out of 10.

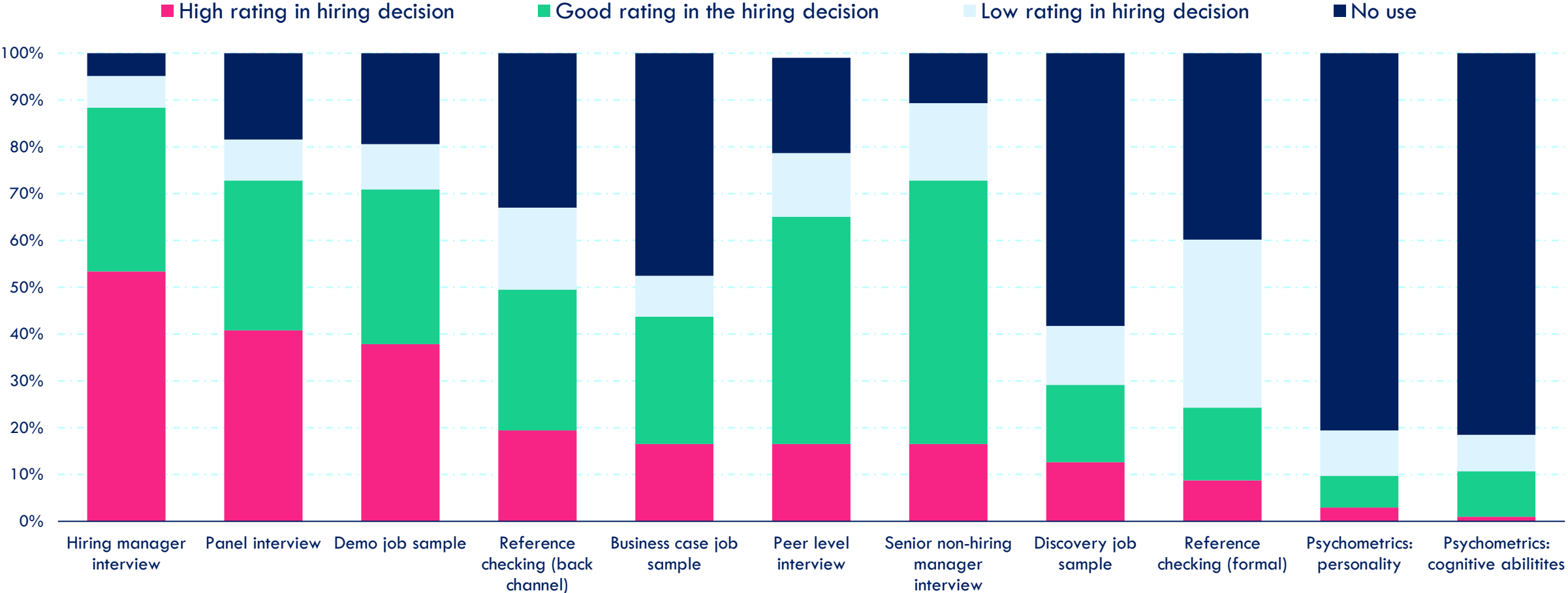
WHAT PRESALES LEADERS VALUE WHEN HIRING

Job component ratings



103 respondents were surveyed and asked to give a rating out of 10.

PRESALES LEADERS' USE OF AND CONFIDENCE IN CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT METHODS



RECOMMENDATION ONE

Intentionally assess the ability to partner effectively with account teams

Why? Partnering effectively with sales counterparts is the **highest-rated job component** of all, **95%** rated it as **8/10** important or more. Despite this, candidate assessments often fail to evaluate the ability to partner effectively with sales beyond a few general interview questions. Even when the interview process involves an Account Executive (AE) or sales leader, these interviews tend to focus on the candidate's overall job suitability from the sales team's perspective, rather than homing in on their ability to partner well with sales, especially in challenging or emotionally charged situations.

How? Psychometric assessments can assess how a candidate tends to balance assertiveness and diplomacy, sales acumen, and preferences when collaborating. Additionally, increased structure via competency-based interview questions with probes will also be effective, an example follows.

Better still, to simulate real life, you can include an AE on the hiring team, primed to speak with the candidate before the demo stage in a mildly challenging way. Alternatively, the AE can join the demo panel and add some unexpected challenges to assess the candidate's ability to handle objections and directness in a more pressured environment.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Incorporate a discovery component into the assessment process

Why? Discovery skills are rated **8/10** or higher in importance by **75%** of PreSales leaders for job success, the **4th** highest rated ability, yet these skills are rarely assessed formally in the interview process.

How? To assess discovery abilities without adding an extra interview stage we recommend providing a demo brief that is purposefully light on detail and offers each candidate a “*prep call*” before the demo stage panel interview. This simulates real-world situations and assesses candidates' initiative and questioning skills.

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION TO ASSESS PARTNERING WITH SALES COUNTERPART

Broad Question

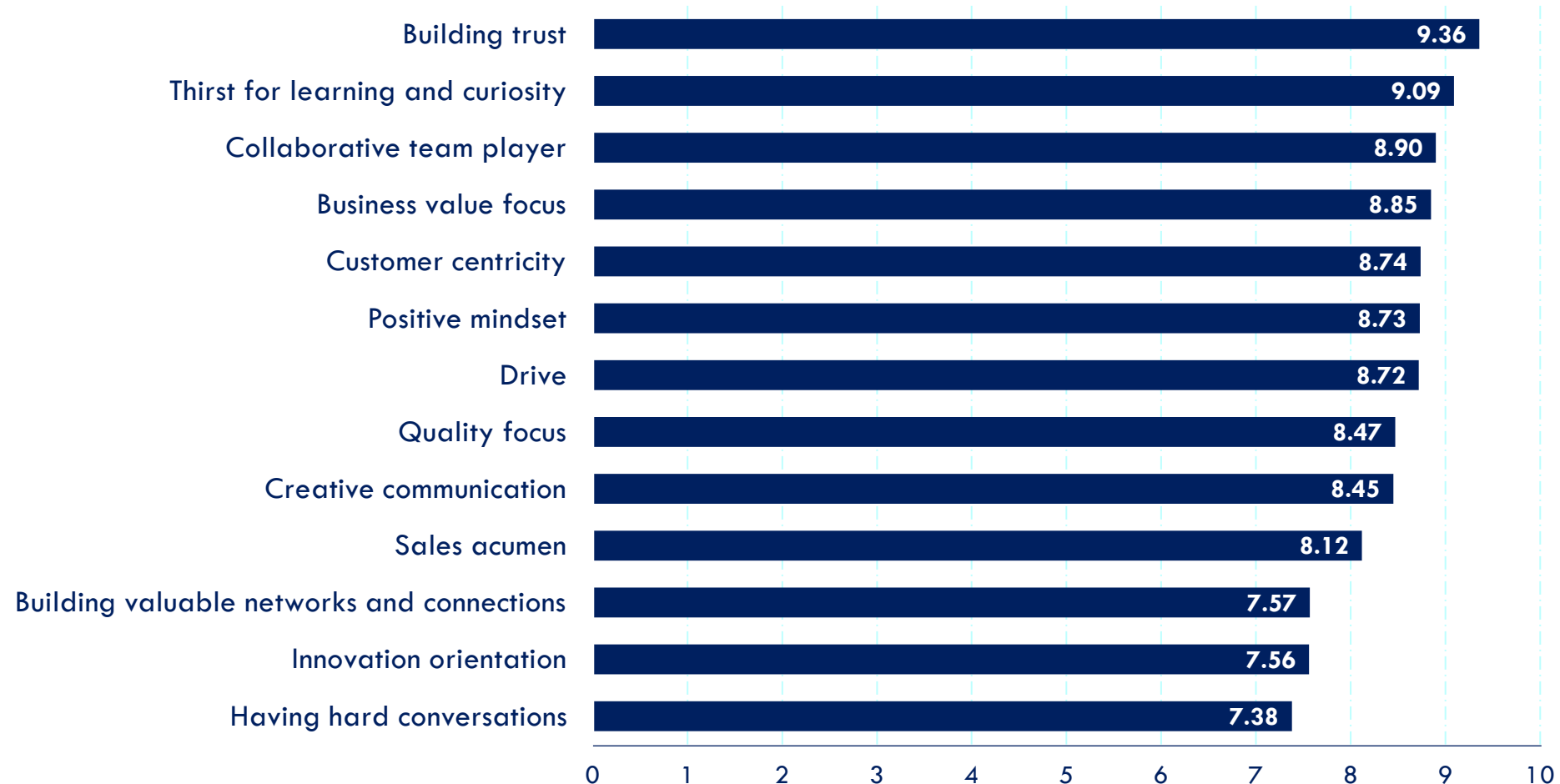
Can you describe a PreSales engagement you've worked on where the collaboration across the account team has been especially effective?

Probing questions

- *What was the situation and who was involved?*
- *Why was the collaboration so effective?*
- *What was your role in ensuring that the collaboration was so effective?*
- *What learnings did you take from the scenario?*
- *What was the impact of your actions on the end result of the opportunity?*

WHAT PRESALES LEADERS VALUE WHEN HIRING

Competency ratings



103 respondents were surveyed and asked to give a rating out of 10.

HIRE FOR ABILITY, TRAIN FOR SKILL

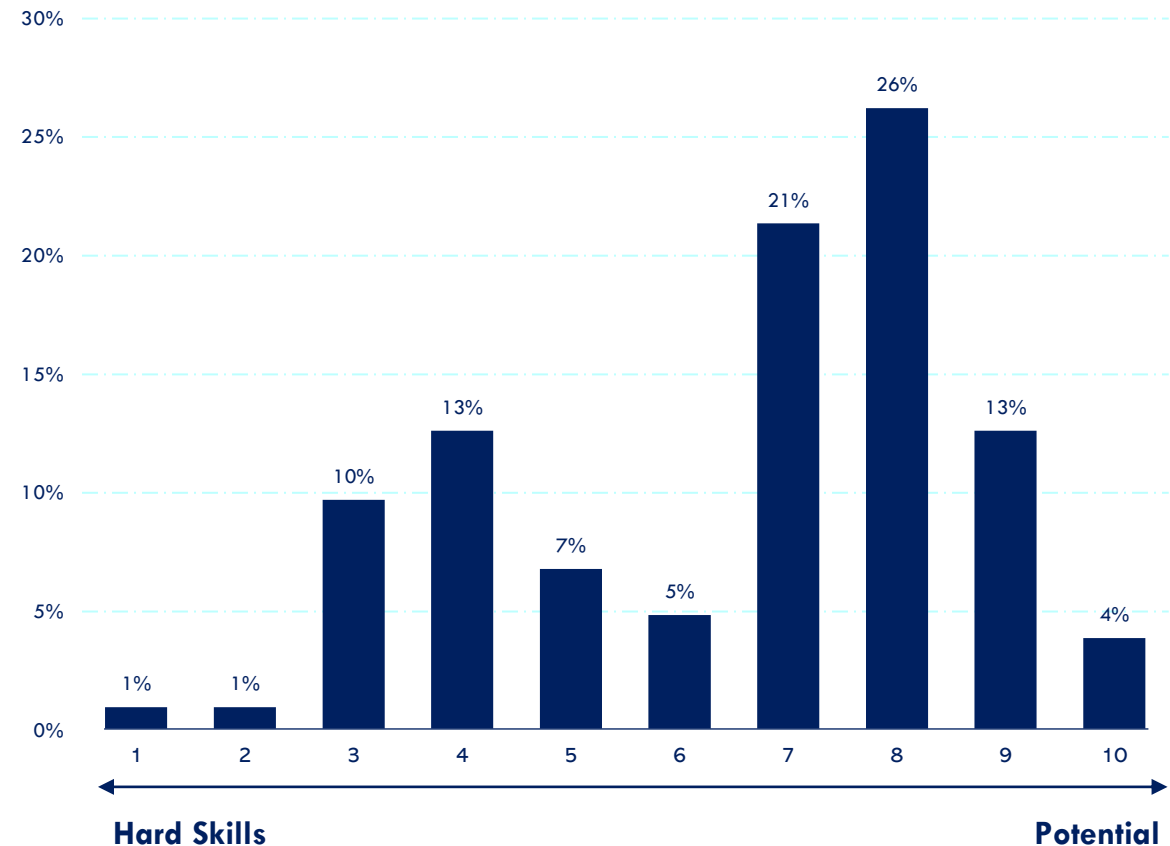
64% of the hiring managers gave a **7/10** or more weighting to "high ceiling of ability" over "hard skills".

Takeaway

Underlying abilities and attributes significantly trump hard skills.

Question

Generally speaking, when assessing PreSales candidates for your team(s), if trading off, how strongly do you rate "hard skills to hit the ground running" against "lower hard skills, with a high ceiling of potential"?



CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Question

Before initiating the hiring process, do you have a formally defined matrix of skills and competencies to measure?

Yes: **50%**

Somewhat: **39%**

No: **11%**

Question

During the hiring process are members of the hiring team given clear indications of what candidate skills and competencies are to be measured?

Yes: **46%**

Somewhat: **48%**

No: **6%**

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Increase guidance and structure to members of the hiring team

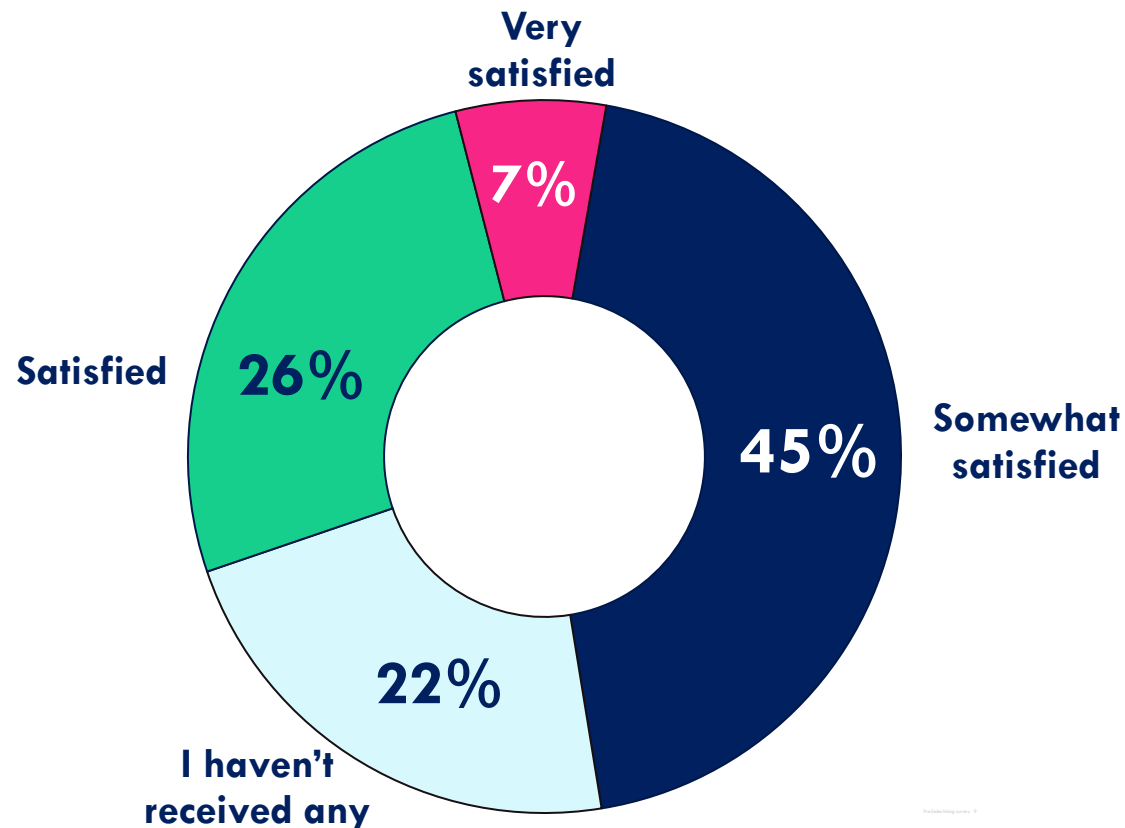
Why? Only **50%** of hiring teams start with a well-defined skills and competencies matrix. Including a matrix invariably leads to improved outcomes with the matrix serving as a common point of reference amongst the hiring team. Additionally, dividing evaluation elements between interviewers allows for the collective time spent with each candidate to be used best, with limited repeated questions. Both result in improved evaluation and a consequent reduced risk of miss-hire. What's more, candidates appreciate a structured, rigorous process, improving candidate experience reduces drop-outs and rejected offers.

How? For every hire, a well-considered, PreSales-specific competency matrix should be a minimum requirement. The matrix is distributed amongst the hiring team, with each member assigned specific competencies to focus on, alongside the overall picture. There is though a balance to be struck between introducing useful rigour and not creating a hiring process that is too rigid and impersonal, providing guidance to interviewers to keep them on track without constraining their autonomy or individuality.

To improve quality of hire metrics, it's also helpful to contrast expectations at the point of hire around the selected candidates' perceived capabilities versus reality after six months of tenure, allowing you to examine your assessment process' effectiveness across different competencies and interviewers. This allows for continuous improvement of the hiring process.

INTERVIEW TRAINING

Question *How satisfied are you with the level of interview training and assessment support you have received over your career?*



Only **33%** of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with how much interview training they have received.

Takeaway

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance"

Benjamin

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Provide more PreSales-specific hiring training and mentoring

Why? **65%** of PreSales leaders are either not satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the interviewing training they have received, **1 in 5** have never received any training across their career. At the same time, PreSales managers reported the one-to-one hiring manager interview as their highest-rated assessment method, **58% rated their use of intuition as 8/10** influential or more.

Finally, **73%** do not measure the quality of hire. Hiring successfully is crucial to effective PreSales leadership, humans are complex and it's hard to assess well. However, according to the survey results, managers are expected to make effective hiring decisions in spite of limited training, strong use of “gut feel” and limited feedback mechanisms or accountability built into the hiring process.

How? We believe that PreSales leadership should take ultimate responsibility for providing support and training to hiring managers, rather than relying on the HR or TA functions, whose incentives and capacity may not be aligned. One approach is to introduce a mandatory “certified-to-hire” accreditation for PreSales managers, including PreSales-specific interview training and support documentation. Training video content creation can help scale this.

Additionally, managers who have a track record of effective hiring can act as mentors for other managers, especially those who are new to the role. Finally, utilizing quality of hire metrics can enhance feedback mechanisms, promote learning, and encourage accountability.

RELIANCE ON INTUITION

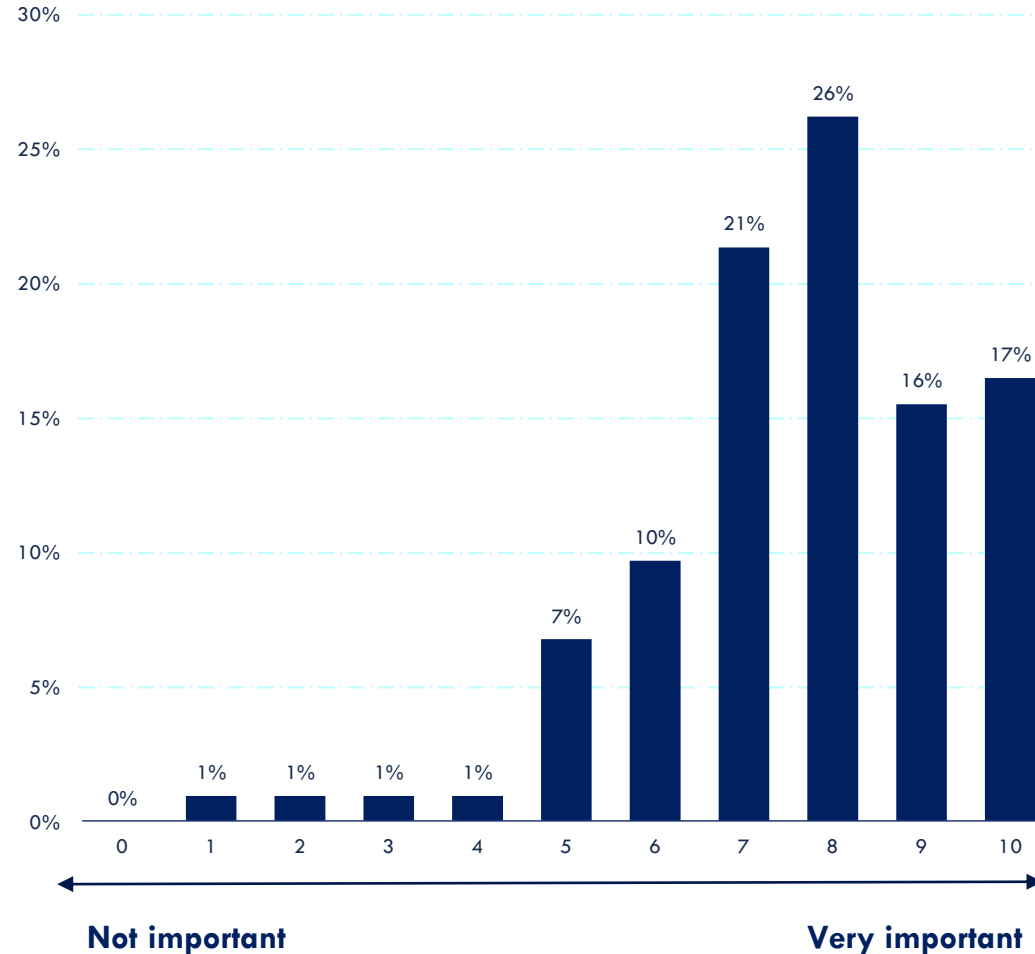
58% rate intuition at **8/10** important or more.

Takeaway

Whether you agree with it or not, managers are generally **“going with their gut instincts”**.

Question

How important is intuition in the hiring process?



RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Create an environment of informed intuition

Why? The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of PreSales managers rely heavily on intuition in the hiring process. Specifically, **89%** rate their use of intuition at **6/10** or higher. At the same time, only **33%** of managers are satisfied or very satisfied with how much interview training they have received. As a result of this reliance on personal intuition, the hiring manager one-to-one interviews are still the most trusted assessment method (rated as strong or good by **88%**).

We believe the optimal balance to aim for is one of “informed intuition”, with a structured hiring process that includes the use of data as well as tailored training and quality of hire monitoring to improve decision-making.

How? Establish structure as the best context for intuition to operate in. Clearly define which soft and hard skills are to be measured, by whom and how, and equally, by whom and how will candidate motivation and cultural fit be measured. This approach leads to a well-thought-through competency matrix.

Define whether you are hiring for long-term potential, or for immediate impact. Which skills and competencies are critical for success and which are nice-to-haves? Use a variety of candidate assessment methods, psychometrics can be used to raise red or yellow flags, which can be followed up in interviews (it should be noted psychometrics were not well rated in this survey), structured interviews and job samples each provide different and useful perspectives in building an overall picture of the candidate’s hard skills, motivation, and underlying attributes.

Six months into a hire’s tenure review interviewer ratings at the point of hire, on a competency-by-competency basis, through quality of hire measurements, which can uncover intuition blind spots. Improve hiring manager interview skills through PreSales-specific training and support from PreSales hiring mentors (those who score best in quality of hire metrics).

MEASURING QUALITY OF HIRE

Quality of hire is measured by less than **1/3** of hiring teams

Takeaway

“If you don’t measure it, you can’t improve it”

When quality of hire reviews don’t happen for every hire, neither effective, nor ineffective hiring approaches are identified or acted on.

Question

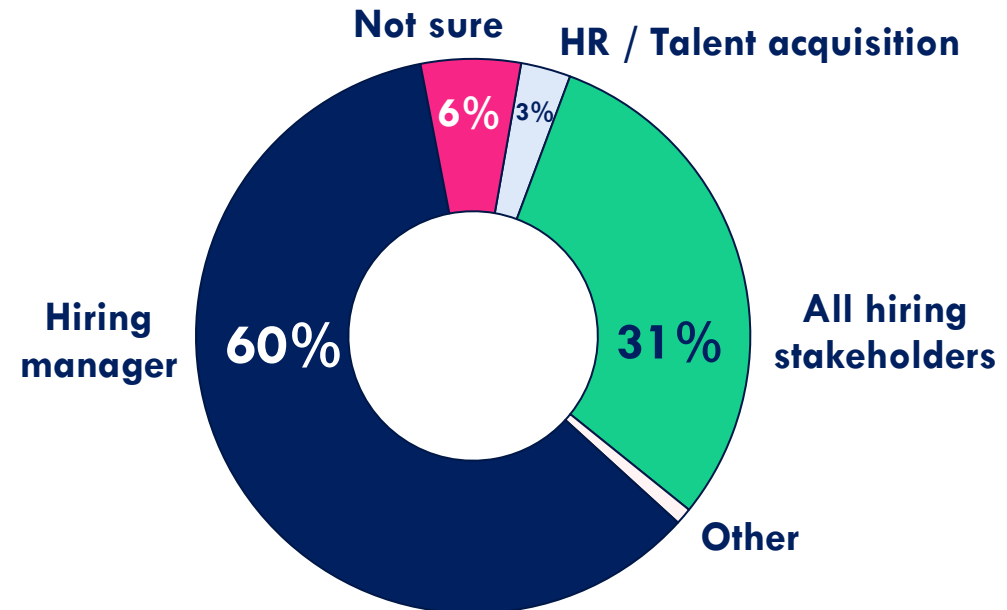
Do you have structured quality of hire metrics at your organisation?

No 73%

Yes 27%

Question

Who is responsible for the quality of hire?



ASSESSMENT PROCESS REVIEWS AND IMPROVEMENT

While only **27%** will review quality of hire, **65%** of respondents will review the overall hiring process.

Takeaway

We believe it is of limited value to evaluate the hiring process if the most important element of its output, quality of hire is not measured itself.

Question

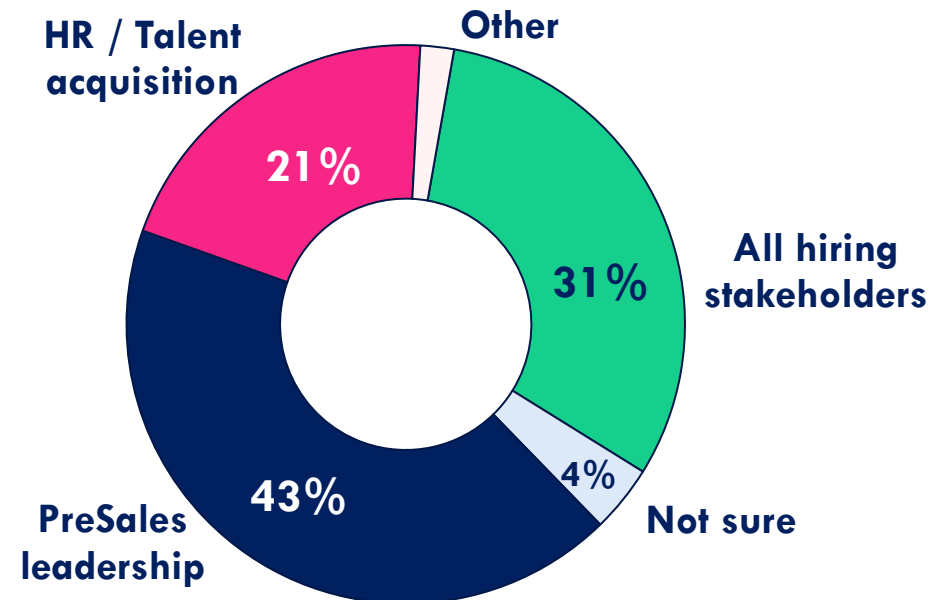
Is the assessment process periodically reviewed and evaluated?

Yes 65%

No 35%

Question

Who is responsible for the design and improvement of the interview process at your organisation?



RECOMMENDATION SIX

Measure the quality of hire with a simple, PreSales-specific rating system

Why? 73% of hiring teams do not measure the quality of hire... The old adage “*If you don’t measure it, you can’t improve it*”, seems applicable here. When a company decides not to look back and measure the quality of each hire after the fact, differing assessment methods cannot be evaluated. Additionally, hiring managers and members of the hiring team don’t have a feedback mechanism, naturally resulting in reduced accountability. Measuring quality of hire allows PreSales leadership to:

- Evaluate assessment predictions and hiring decisions made at point of each hire, across each competency measured and each member of the hiring team. Providing more depth of understanding than a simple good hire / bad hire approach.
- Identify hiring manager capabilities and limitations, provide support to those underperforming in hiring outcomes, and allow high performers to become mentors and more involved in making the assessment process even better.
- Identify blind spots and weaknesses in the interview process from bias or ineffective interviewing.
- Identify the best sources of hire, emphasising quality, for example, internal transfer vs employee referral vs talent acquisition sourced vs external agency sourced.

How? To illustrate as an analogy, in order to reduce bias and improve future decision-making, stock market investors don’t just look at their returns following an investment. They will record in depth their investment hypothesis and intuitions at the point of making an investment decision, to then review these after a given period and analyse the decision-making process itself with hindsight. Similarly, for hiring, we advocate this simple, cost-free approach:

- At the point of hire ensure that a record is made of the hiring teams’ hypotheses of the new hire’s abilities and potential across all major competencies or job components, via scoring. Most modern ATS systems have this functionality.
- Next to these ratings include a 6-month column and a 12-month column to record actual performance across these competencies. This approach goes beyond the simple “good hire” / “miss-hire” approach and over a number of hires can highlight clearly where the hiring process is effective and where there are blind spots, biases, or inaccuracies.

DIFFICULTY IN RECRUITING PRESALES TALENT

75% of PreSales managers rated the difficulty in finding the right **7/10** difficulty or above.

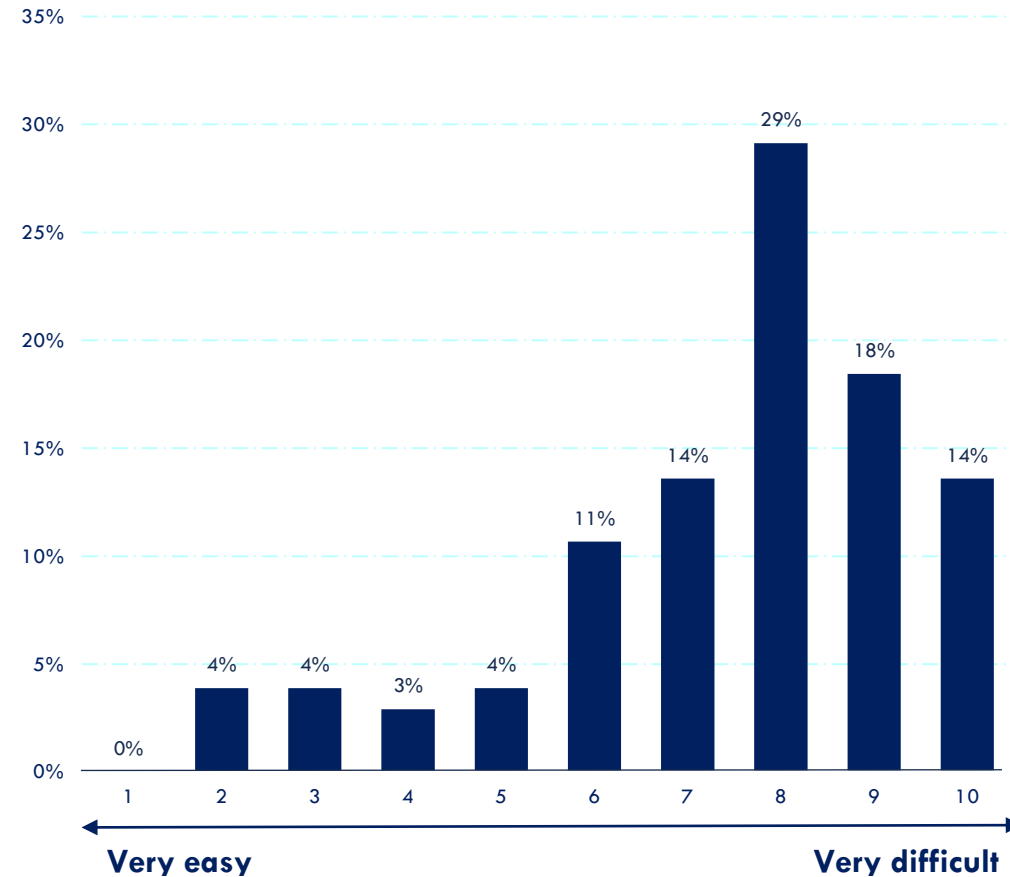
Takeaway

The “war for talent” in PreSales is a constant.*

**most responses were submitted late 2022*

Question

How difficult is it for you to find a quality pool of candidates to select from in a timely manner?



RECOMMENDATION RECAP

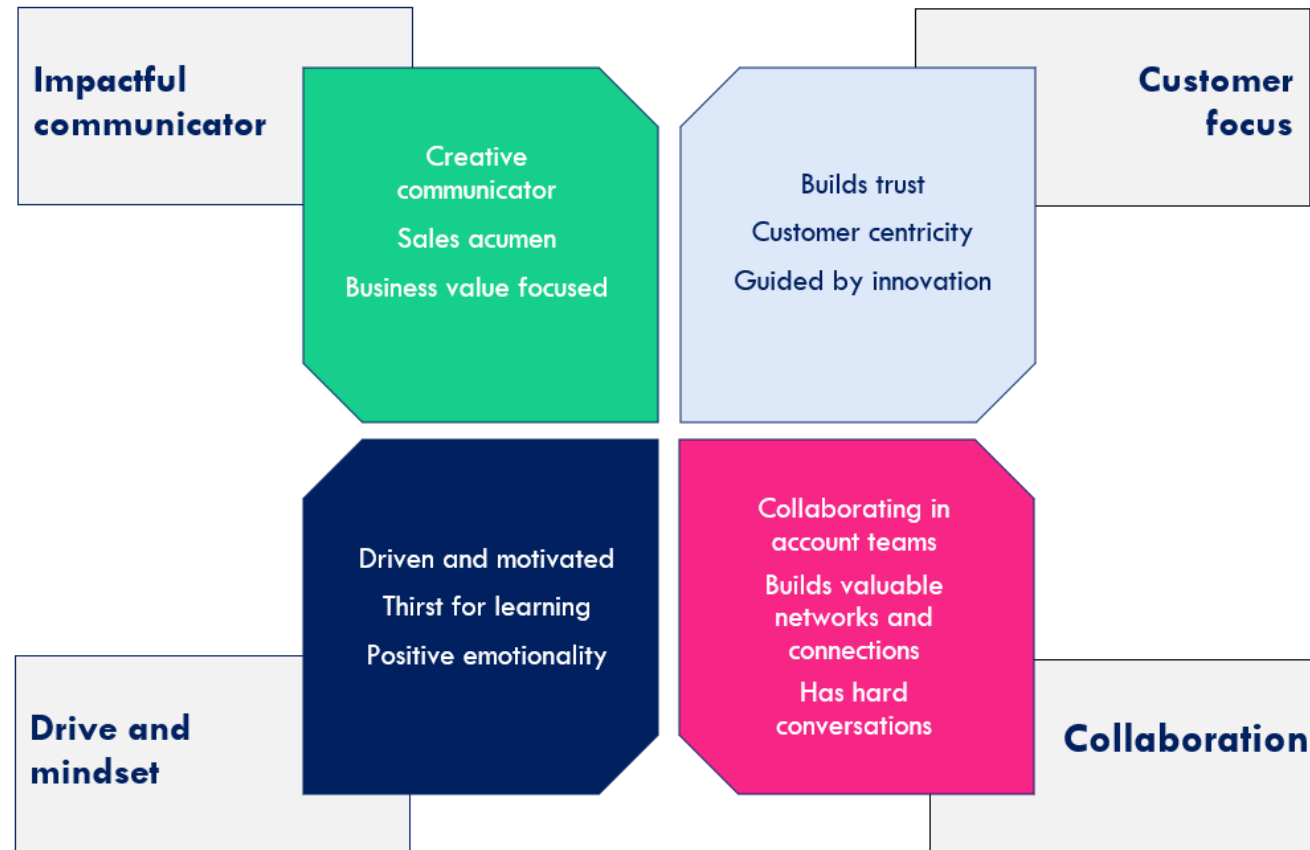
Based on the survey results, we believe that hiring can be improved by implementing the following:

- Measuring the **ability to partner well with AEs**, this appears an important blind spot.
- When not already occurring, providing at least broad guidance to the hiring team regarding **what is being measured, by whom, and how**. Without the interviewing process becoming too rigid or impersonal.
- Providing more **PreSales-specific interview training and mentoring** to hiring managers.
- Measuring the **quality of hire** with a simple PreSales-specific rating system.
- Incorporating **a discovery job sample** into the hiring process.
- Increasing awareness that **intuition** - especially hiring managers' reliance on their own "gut feel" – is generally **the major driving force in decision-making**. Taking actions to create more "informed intuition" through structure, training, and support.

Appendix one

PreSales Competency Model

The competencies surveyed on page 10 are based on our proprietary PreSales Assess competency model, download a full list of competency descriptions [here](#).



Appendix two

WHAT DO PRESALES LEADERS LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING?



QUESTION

Which **additional competencies** are important for you when assessing PreSales candidates?

Appendix three

PRESALES LEADERS' USE OF AND CONFIDENCE IN CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT METHODS

Additional job samples adopted by respondents

"I strongly encourage candidates to schedule a dry run for ahead of panel demo. This has proven to be a strong indicator in candidate motivation and SC discovery best practices/experience."

"We typically have a few people show up for a mock demo scenario which is the single biggest driver of the hiring decision. Many people have rocked the interview and bombed the presentation."

"Interviews with AEs. Low overall as AEs have proven to be ineffective at assessing SCs"

"We have a process that relies on human interaction to sense cultural fit and adaptability"

"Short technical co-exercise(1hr max)"

Appendix four

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Question *If you have a matrix of skills and competencies to measure against, how are they measured? (open responses)*

- *“Evidence-based example usage”*
- *“Check the validity of anecdotes”*
- *“Scorecard for a specific position”*
- *“Based on a 1-5 grading scheme”*
- *“Informal and subjective rather than a ranking system”*
- *“Behavioural questions examples from previous experience”*
- *“Scoresheets distributed to all interviewers”*
- *“Soft skills, demo experience, motivation level”*
- *“There's a matrix for presentation criteria during the mock demo”*
- *“I have a complete role-based competency matrix”*
- *“There is no clear definition of what “soft skills” are, but more is given to the personal interpretation of the interviewer.”*
- *“Based on the agreed criteria in curiosity, empathy, engagement, team focus, and commercial focus.”*
- *“We have a tool with a ranking system (1-4) and freeform comments”*
- *“We have a competency rubric, but it doesn't require actual scoring against it.”*
- *“The most important thing is to measure a growth mindset: that a candidate is moving through their life with the intention of how their next experience is going to teach them something to further realize their purpose or ideal life role. They must see their life as a journey.”*

THANK YOU

We appreciate you taking the time to read this report.

If you have any questions or observations about the report, or PreSales hiring and assessment in general we'd love to hear from you.

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