Paper PM06

Statistical Programming – Hiring Mission Made Possible

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ABSTRACT

Finding candidates in Clinical and Statistical Programming with the right skills and experience, who are a good fit for your team, is not an easy task. Therefore, when you need to hire >100 permanent programmers, at different pay grades, during a short period of time, the mission becomes almost impossible.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to share some of the things that we learnt last year while leading a major, global, recruitment effort in Clinical & Statistical Programming at Janssen R&D. When we recruited >100 permanent Clinical & Statistical Programmers worldwide in under 12 months. Feedback that we hope will help others to build upon our success when undertaking their next recruitment activities. Especially, if they are on the scale of our recruitment effort.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INVESTING IN FUTURE TALENT & SUCCESS (GIFTS)

GIFTS was a major global recruitment effort involving multiple functions within Janssen's Global Development organization that was used by Clinical & Statistical Programming to better deliver our pipeline and save money by:

- Re-balancing our workforce, i.e., Contractor vs. Permanent.
- Continuing to strengthen and increase our global footprint. Which is/was very US focused.
- Establishing a new programming "Hub" in India.
- Investing in future talent, i.e., recruiting more programmers at the beginning of their careers.
- Recruiting the best talent at numerous pay grades within our function.

Therefore, having received senior management permission to recruit >100 permanent Clinical & Statistical Programmers it was our role to make it happen.

THE CHALLENGE

Recruiting >100 permanent programmers in a single calendar year represented a huge challenge for our Clinical & Statistical Programming function. Where recruitment was traditionally driven by Therapeutic Area. With headcount awarded to specific projects and/or portfolios, and vacancies typically advertised in the same location as the project lead. An approach which could result in two project teams in different Therapeutic Areas recruiting at the same time, in the same country/region, for the same candidate profile, using two different advertisements, and therefore duplicating effort.

A less than ideal situation but one which is/was completely understandable given the size of Janssen R&D and our team of approx. 800 permanent and contract Clinical & Statistical Programmers.

So, how did we solve this challenge?

OUR SOLUTION

We used an existing tool (i.e., MS Teams) but on a scale that had not been done within Clinical & Statistical Programming before. Utilizing channels and features (e.g., planner, posts, Wikis/ OneNote etc.) that allowed us to collaborate across regions and provide everyone who was involved in the initiative with an accurate, and complete overview of the current recruitment status.

A solution that enabled us to identify and overcome bottlenecks in our processes; collaborate to solve problems; define, and share new standard ways of working; and (most importantly) mobilize help from colleagues in all our existing offices in BE, NL, CH, CN, US…etc. So that we could utilize a "Hub and Spoke" model to achieve our recruitment goal. Where "Hubs" were existing offices/countries with a Clinical & Statistical Programming presence; and a "Spoke" would link applicants from a new country (or a country without a Clinical & Statistical Programming office presence) to one Hub site. As our primary focus was identifying top talent. We were less concerned where that talent was physically located.

This "Hub and Spoke" approach allowed us to:

- Maximize the advantages of our existing global footprint.
- Empower our Hub teams to drive recruitment at their site, make smart hiring decisions, and then own those decisions. As in most cases the successful candidate would be managed by someone from these Hubs.
- Process candidates faster, as the interview teams were in the same time zone as the candidates.
- Ensure consistency. So that we could compare candidates within a country regarding pay grade and compensation.

While MS Teams made our global recruitment efforts far more transparent than ever before. Something our Clinical & Statistical Programming Leadership Team greatly appreciated as it gave them access to the real-time recruitment data and status information that they craved and therefore the ability to adapt and refine their recruitment plans (as and when needed) depending on the market.

It also helped us to make our recruitment and onboarding experience more standard, and more efficient than ever before. So that our new recruits could complete their onboarding training and be ready for work as soon as possible.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

How candidates applied for our vacancies and how their applications were processed followed our usual, standard process. Except for two key differences, i.e.

- Instead of creating a requisition (i.e., Job Advert) for each vacancy, requisitions (i.e., Job Adverts) were used to advertise multiple vacancies at the same pay grade in the same region.
- Talent Acquisition routed all applications to two Points of Contact (POC), i.e.
    1. for Clinical Programming (CP), for roles/vacancies specializing in CDISC SDTM production.
    2. for Statistical Programming (SP), for roles/vacancies involved in CDISC ADaM and Table, Listing & Figure (TLF) production.

POCs who were then responsible for:

- Assigning each applicant to the Recruitment Lead at one of our recruitment Hubs.
- Adding the information that we would need to process and track their application using our MS Team.

This was done so that the Recruitment Lead at each Hub could:

- Review the job description to understand the work to be performed on the job and the skills, qualifications and competencies required for the job.
- Review the candidates CV and identify previous experience and results that would indicate their potential and ability to do the job.
- Make the decision whether to invite a candidate for interview.

And everyone at every stage of the process could clearly see which applicant was assigned to whom and where their application was in the process.

PREPARING AND PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

The Recruitment Lead at each Hub would then:

- Select their interview team with diversity, equity, and inclusion principles in mind. Ensuring that their interview team is knowledgeable about the role, has a common understanding of what success looks like, understands their role in the interview, and represents diverse backgrounds, experiences, and styles.
- Work with Talent Acquisition to schedule the interview.
- Create an agenda. That includes behaviour-based interview questions and questions that will test the candidate's technical competency and experience for the pay grade that they have applied for.
- Organize a panel-style interview. With representation from multiple Therapeutic Areas. So that we could ensure that we were interviewing for Janssen R&D and not a particular Therapeutic Area. Plus, making most effective use of everyone's time.

BEHAVIOURABLE-BASED INTERVIEW
Our hiring process reflects and reinforces our Credo and our Purpose. Therefore, our policy is to only ask job related questions, that are aligned to our Credo, our Leadership Imperatives, and that cover technical skills. Not personal questions.

The STAR method is a structured manner of asking behavioral-based questions that focus on the specific details of the Situation, Task, Action, and Result of the candidate's past work experiences. Behavioral based questions ask the candidate to:

- Situation: identify a specific situational event they've experienced.
- Task: describe the task(s) they worked to address the situation.
- Results: share the outcome of their actions

An example of a STAR question would be *"Tell me about a time when your manager gave you a challenging project to complete (**Situation**). What was the goal of the project (**Task**), what steps did you take to reach your goal (**Actions**), and what was the outcome (**Result**)?"*

Questions, or more specifically answers, that helped our interview teams to gain a clear perspective of how the candidate has performed in the past and how successful they may be in our role. Regarding project management, resolving conflict, working in virtual teams, managing competing priorities and/or other situations that might be pertinent to the role.

UNCONCIOUS BIAS
Our unconscious mind often influences the way we respond to the information around us before we can even think about it. Therefore, it was extremely important for our Recruitment Leads and their hiring teams to make more inclusive hiring decisions and recognise and address their unconscious biases. Like:

- Affinity Bias: When we unconsciously prefer candidates who seem familiar or are like us in some way.
- Availability Bias: When we unconsciously make judgments or assumptions based on the data which is most memorable, most recent, or most easily accessible.
- Confirmation Bias: When we unconsciously look for and inevitably find evidence that supports our already held beliefs and opinions, and somehow miss, ignore, or simply overlook any evidence to the contrary.
- Halo and Horn Bias: When we unconsciously evaluate someone based on a positive (Halo) or negative (Horn) general impression, or a single trait we like or dislike.
- Implicit Stereotyping: When we unconsciously evaluate other people based on stereotypes.

So that we could continue to bring new ideas and different perspectives into our business and optimize our team's capacity.

This was one of several topics that we chose to specifically highlight within our MS Team by adding a "Useful Information" channel that contained specific resources and training materials that would help our interview teams and instil best practices.

DEBRIEF MEETING
Following the interview, the "Hub" Recruitment Lead would schedule a debrief meeting with the interview team to discuss everyone's rating of the candidate. So that the team could quickly come to a hiring decision about each candidate and make them an offer a.s.a.p. as time-considerations were often crucial. Especially when candidates had other offers to consider.

Something that was so much easier for us to achieve by using a "Hub and Spoke" approach and keeping hiring teams local (i.e., in the same time zone).

HIRING PLAN
Candidates were hired based on their fit with Janssen, our Credo, our Leadership Imperatives, and their technical prowess. Decisions regarding project assignments were delayed until after each candidate had accepted their job offer. A process that enabled us to:

- ensure that people were allocated to projects and Therapeutic Areas equitably, based on the needs of the business.
- adhere to the business case (i.e., hiring plan) that had been approved by senior management.
- assign people to projects where they could maximize the value of their skills and experiences, have most impact/success, and achieve their career goals.

A small but very significant change to our usual hiring practice that took a potentially difficult and time-consuming decision off the critical path to hiring. So that we had the time and space to get it right.

CONCLUSION

Using MS Teams for this recruitment effort allowed us to:

- Take advantage of our existing footprint and truly recruit globally.
- Use a "Hub and Spoke" model but centralize all our recruitment information in one place.
- Design a process flow that Recruitment Leads and their hiring teams wanted to use, and which was simple and easy to keep up to date.
- Share the workload, as "many hands make light work".
- Successfully manage and track our project to conclusion.
- Provide our leadership with the real-time information and status that they needed when they needed it.
- Share the right information with the right people by using a mixture of public and private channels.
- Improve our communications and greatly reduce the need/want to send Emails.
- Better understand the global recruitment market, as we had faster access to more detailed/specific recruitment data.
- Quickly adapt our recruitment plans as and when needed.
- Organize ourselves far more efficiently than ever before. E.g., centralize onboarding activities so that we could offer an improved onboarding experience that enabled our new recruits to be ready for work faster.
- Re-enforce good hiring practices RE: behavioral-based interviews, unconscious bias, and the need for diversity.
- Instill a real sense of teamwork and collaboration within and between our hiring teams at each Hub.

And achieve this unprecedented recruitment target for our function.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks to all our colleagues who helped to make this global recruitment effort so successful. It was a huge team effort.

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