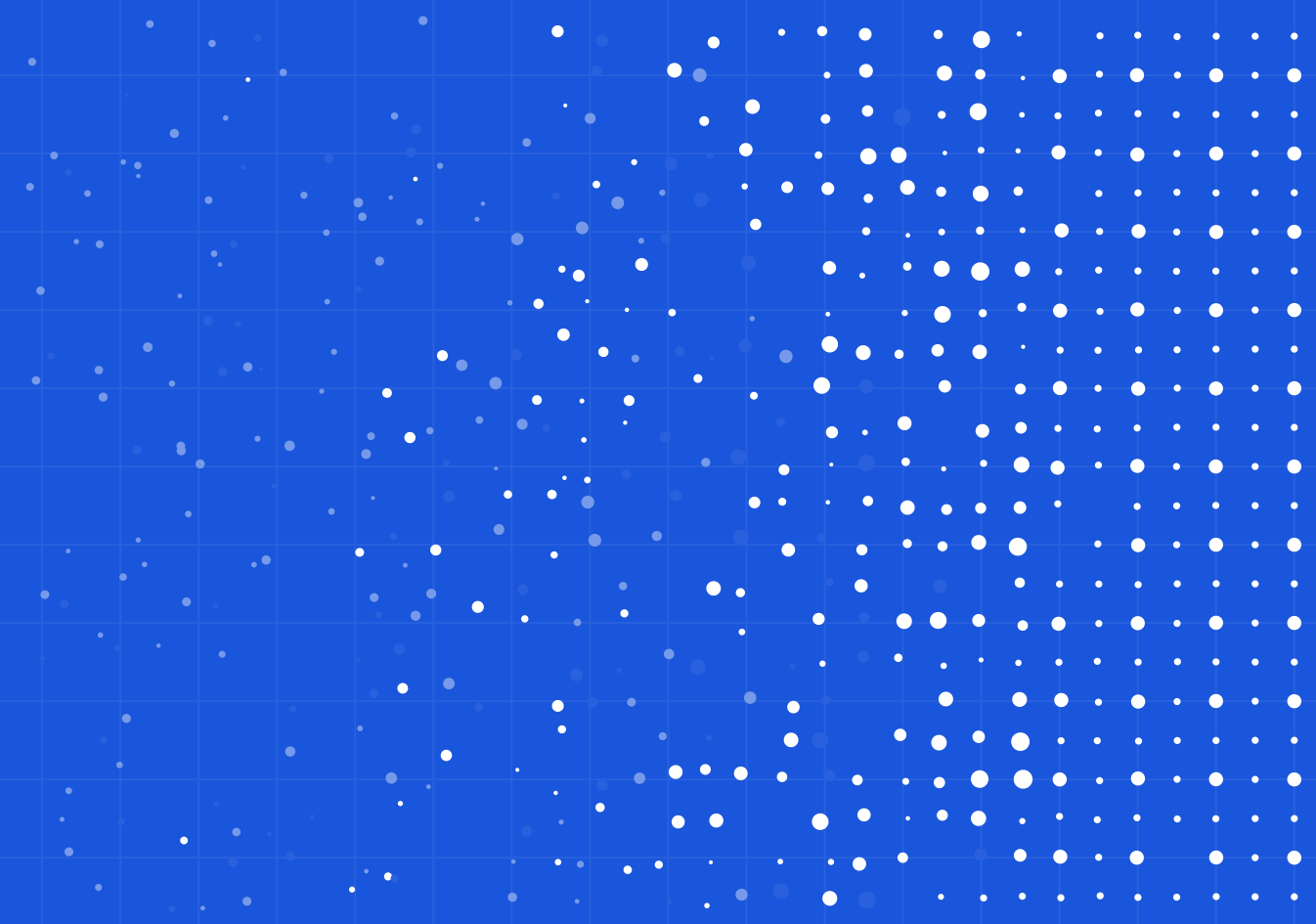



IMPRESSION

EVIDENCE

From impression to evidence

Why most hiring decisions rest on signals that feel right but predict little, and what organisations that hire well do differently.

The whole paper, on one page.

01	People decisions are the biggest bets a company makes.		Page 3
02	A wrong hire does not stay in one seat.		Page 4
03	Most of those bets ride on impressions.		Page 5
04	The same candidate gets different verdicts.		Page 6
05	Impressions predict less than they feel.		Page 7
06	AI is making impressions cheaper to fake.		Page 8
07	Impression and evidence are easy to tell apart.		Page 9
08	Organisations that hire well decide on evidence.		Page 10
09	Evidence compounds. Impressions evaporate.		Page 11
10	Talent intelligence should pass five tests.		Page 12
11	Five questions before you say yes.		Page 13

01 THE STAKES

Your biggest bets are people.

One leader shapes the work of hundreds. Yet in many organisations, a hire is examined less carefully than a purchase.



Buying a machine

A capital decision

A written case for why



Options compared on the same terms



Criteria agreed before choosing



Sign-off with reasons on record



A review after the first year



Standard practice in most finance teams.



Hiring the person who runs it

A people decision

A written case for why



Options compared on the same terms



Criteria agreed before choosing



Sign-off with reasons on record



A review after the first year



Often skipped, or done from memory.

82%

of the time, companies fail to choose the candidate with the right talent for a manager role.

70%

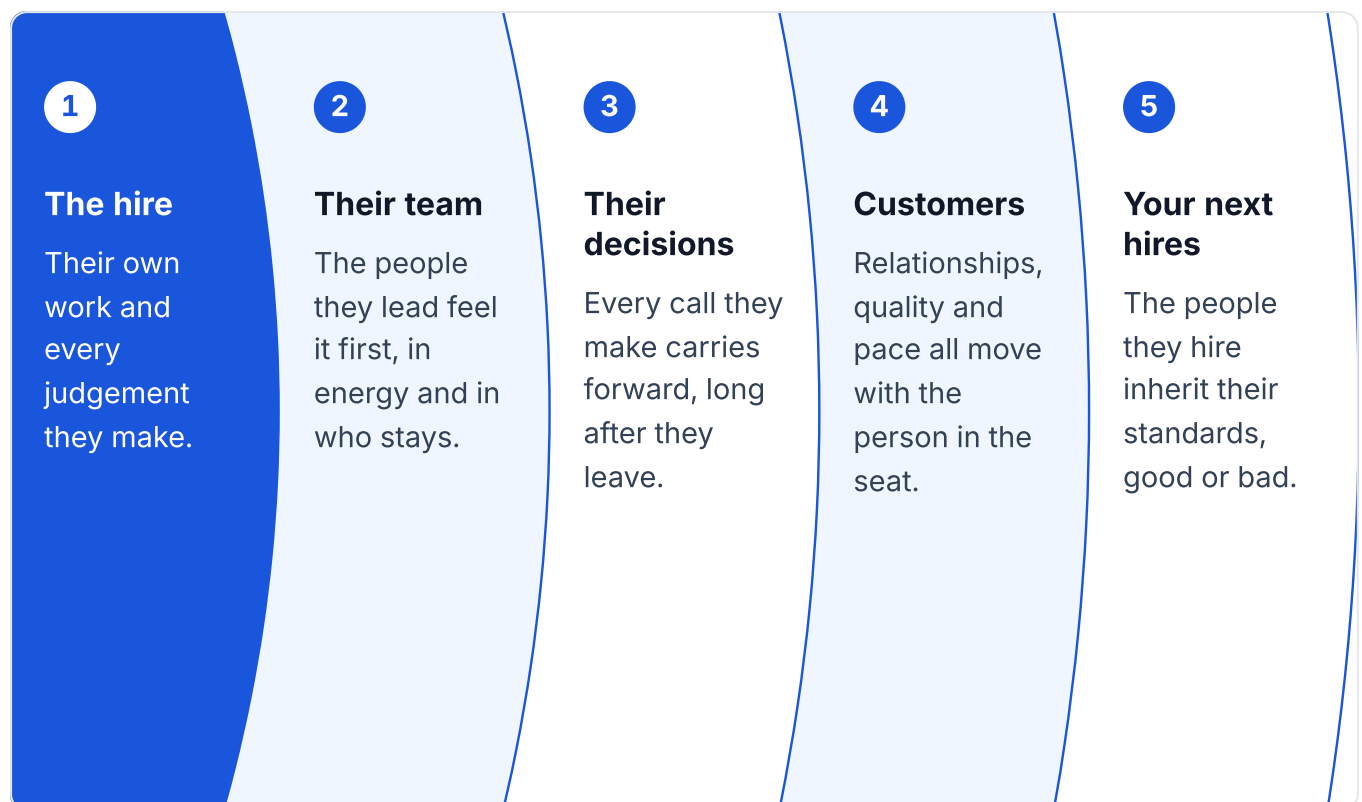
At least this much of the variance in team engagement is explained by the manager alone.

Source: Gallup, Beck and Harter, "Why Great Managers Are So Rare".

02 THE COST

A wrong hire does not stay in one seat.

The salary is the visible part. The real cost spreads outward, through everyone and everything the person touches.



Closest to the decision

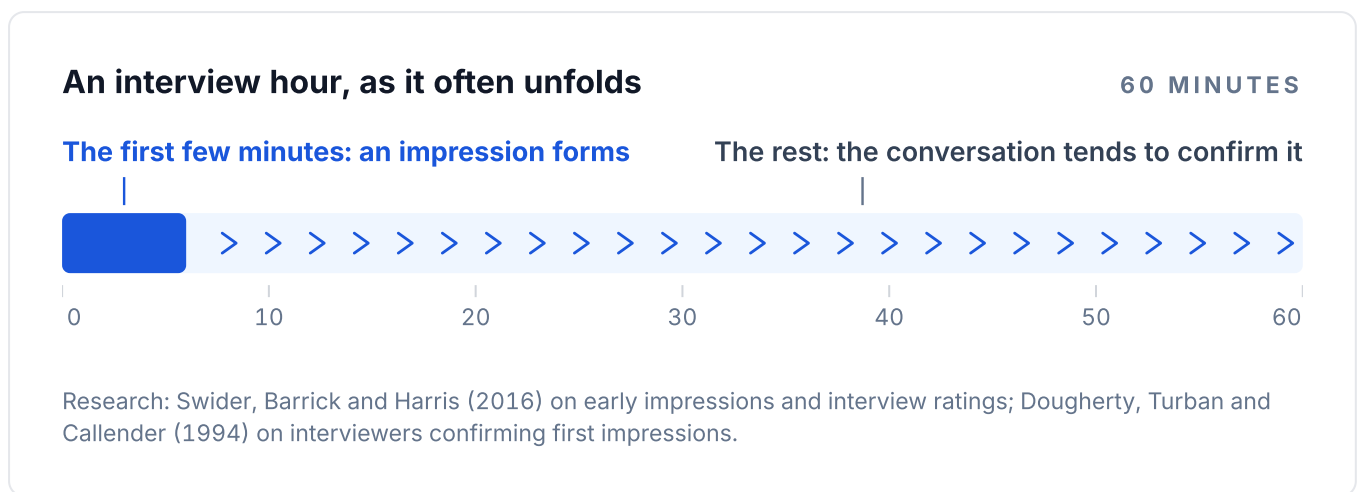
Felt furthest away, and for longest

The real price is not the salary. It is the time it takes to notice, and everything decided in between.

03 THE HABIT

Most of those bets ride on impressions.

Nobody sets out to hire on gut feel. But under time pressure, a few familiar shortcuts quietly take over the decision.



Five shortcuts, and what they really tell you

The CV
TELLS YOU
Where someone has been, not what they actually did there.

Confidence
TELLS YOU
How someone presents, not how they perform.

Chemistry
TELLS YOU
Often, how similar someone is to the interviewer.

Years in role
TELLS YOU
Time served, not skill gained.

One great answer
TELLS YOU
A single high point colours every other rating. Known as the halo effect.

None of these are wrong to notice.
They are wrong to decide on.

04 THE NOISE

Same candidate. Different verdicts.

Judgement varies far more than people expect, from one person to the next and even from one day to the next. Researchers call this noise.

One candidate, five interviewers

ILLUSTRATION

Unstructured: each interviewer, their own questions

A spread of more than six points



Structured: agreed criteria, scored independently

Tighter, and easier to discuss



A real noise audit

An insurance company asked its underwriters to price the same cases.

Expected difference  10%

Typical difference found  55%

Difference between two underwriters, as a share of the average premium.

Kahneman, Sibony and Sunstein, Noise, 2021

Noise is not about bad people. It is what happens when judgement has **no structure**.

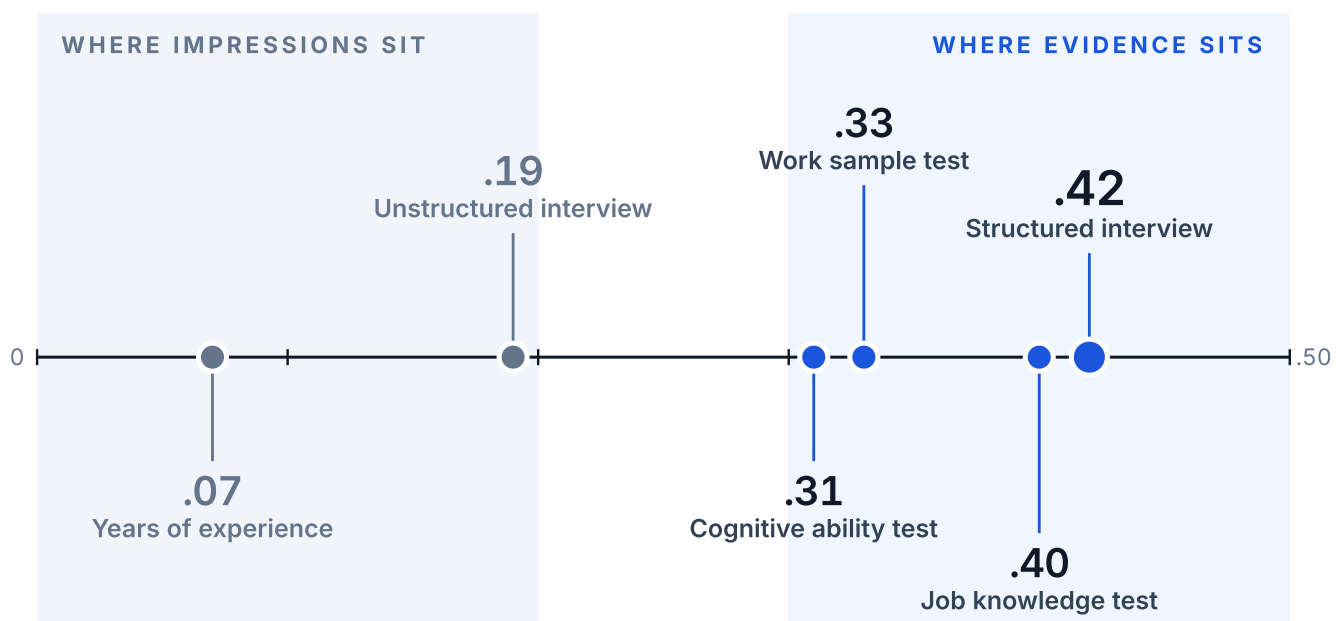
05 THE RESEARCH

Impressions predict less than they feel.

When researchers compare hiring methods with how people later perform in the job, the most familiar habits sit near the bottom.

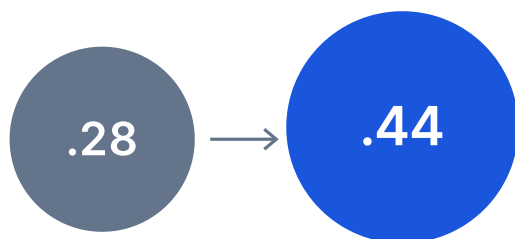
How well each method predicts job performance

Further right is better. Zero means the method tells you nothing about future performance.



Source: Sackett, Zhang, Berry and Lievens, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2022. Average validity for each method.

Same information, combined two ways



Judged as a whole

A consistent rule

Over 50% better prediction from weighing the same evidence the same way every time.

Kuncel, Klieger, Connelly and Ones, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2013



Break up the problem, evaluate the aspects independently, and then, and only then, use your intuition.

Daniel Kahneman Nobel laureate in economics

06 THE NEW RISK

AI is making impressions cheaper to fake.

The signals hiring has leaned on for decades used to take real effort to produce. That is no longer true.

	THEN	NOW
The CV	A well-written CV signalled care and effort.	It may only signal a good prompt.
The interview answer	A polished answer suggested real experience.	Answers can be rehearsed with AI the night before.
The person	A video call confirmed who you were talking to.	Stand-ins and fake profiles are a growing risk.

39%

of candidates said they used AI during the application process.

6%

admitted to interview fraud: posing as someone else, or having someone pose as them.

1 in 4

candidate profiles worldwide will be fake by 2028, Gartner predicts.

Source: Gartner candidate surveys and predictions, 2025.

When the surface can be manufactured, only evidence of **real work** keeps its value.

07 WHAT COUNTS

Impression or evidence?

Know the difference.

A simple test: would two people, looking at it separately, reach the same reading? If not, it is probably an impression.



SOUNDS LIKE
An impression



SOUNDS LIKE
Evidence



"She seemed very sharp."



"She solved the case and explained every trade-off she made."



"Great CV. Top-tier company."



"She led a turnaround. Here is what she changed, and what happened."



"Strong presence in the room."



"He gave two specific examples of handling a difficult stakeholder."



"Everyone liked him."



"Four of five interviewers rated him above the bar, separately."



"Fifteen years in the industry."



"He has done this exact job, at this scale, twice."



"Feels like a culture fit."



"She showed the three behaviours we agreed matter for this team."

Illustrative examples.

Impressions describe how you felt.
Evidence describes what they did.

08 THE SHIFT

Organisations that hire well decide on evidence.

They do not hire slower or spend more. They change four habits.



The same four shifts hold for one senior appointment or for hundreds of frontline hires. **Only the depth changes.**

09 THE RECORD

Evidence compounds. Impressions evaporate.

A decision with written reasons can be checked, taught and improved. A decision made on feel leaves nothing behind to learn from.

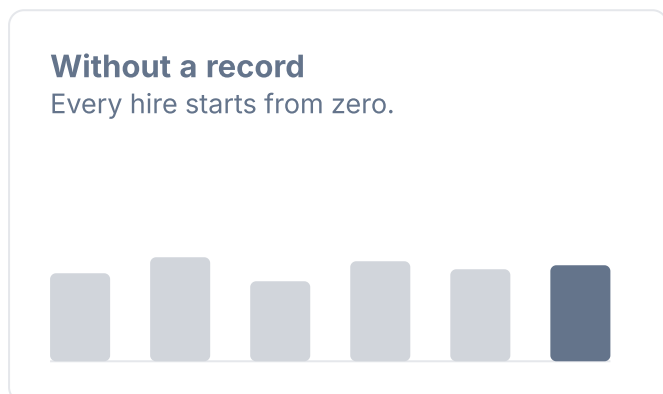


Illustration of the idea, not measured data.



10 INTELLIGENCE

What talent intelligence should actually mean.

Technology can scale evidence, or it can scale impressions faster.
Five tests to put to any approach, human or machine.

- | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|
| 01 |  | It measures what predicts
Built on methods with research behind them, not on signals that are simply easy to count. | ASK
What is this actually measuring? |
| 02 |  | It shows its reasons
Every rating can be traced back to evidence a person can read and question. | ASK
Can it explain this rating? |
| 03 |  | People make the call
It informs judgement. It never replaces the decision, or the person accountable for it. | ASK
Who signs the decision? |
| 04 |  | It is consistent
The same evidence is weighed the same way, for every candidate. | ASK
Would two people be judged alike? |
| 05 |  | It learns from outcomes
Decisions are checked against how people actually perform, and the approach improves. | ASK
How does it know it was right? |

If it cannot explain why it rated someone, it is only a faster impression.

11 BEFORE YOU SAY YES

Five questions for your next important hire.

If any answer is unclear, the decision is still resting on an impression.

1

What did we agree success looks like, before we met them?

If the answer came after the interviews, the role was shaped around the candidate.

2

What have we seen them actually do, not just say?

Real examples and real work count. A good story is not the same thing.

3

Did each of us decide before hearing the others?

Independent views first. Otherwise you have one opinion, repeated.

4

What would make this the wrong choice?

Naming the risk out loud is the cheapest check there is.

5

Could we explain this decision in a year's time?

If the reasons are not written down today, they will not exist tomorrow.

Every organisation is the sum of its people decisions. They deserve evidence.

ABOUT SVECTOR

SVECTOR works on decision intelligence for the choices organisations make about people: who to hire, who to promote and who to trust with what matters most.

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