

Project Title: INFO 3450 G2 Submission

Team Building for Entrepreneurial Ventures

Team Number: 201_U_09

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1) Contextual Interview Report:

Introduction

For our investigation process, we interviewed 4 students who were founders/co-founders of startups or companies. Our goal was to better understand how these founders currently recruit people to join their team, as well as the motivations and frustrations behind this process. We recruited Cornell students passionate about entrepreneurship with their own companies already in place. The primary procedure we used was contextual interviews, to get at the underlying goals and “why” behind their current process for recruiting team members. Contextual interviews were also good because they were conducted in the environments that participants felt most comfortable and related to their workflow (e.g. entrepreneurial spaces like Gates Hall).

In general, the participants were Cornell students studying in or adjacent to the technology space. All of these students have their own companies.

Participant 1 (“Roosevelt”) is a 2nd-year law student and former IRL undergraduate at Cornell. He built a company that utilizes AI/ML and the blockchain for legal work, and is actively seeking contract/freelance employees with technical talent. Currently, his team consists of himself and two developers.

Participant 2 (“Bill”) is a junior studying computer science at Cornell. His company provides a way for people to inexpensively access newspaper articles on a pay-per-article

basis. Though he is not actively recruiting now, he expects that when his company grows and needs more manpower down the line, he'll have to seek out both people with technical skills, but also business and design skills. His team is currently 4 people, 3 developers and one business person.

Participant 3 ("Tyler") is a junior studying information science at Cornell. His company provides software that turns design into industry-standard Swift code. He founded it with 2 friends and was previously seeking interns with technical and design skills. His team consisted of the 3 founders and 2 interns they hired.

Participant 4 ("Greg") is currently majoring in hotel and management at Cornell. Has been interested in Cornell's hotel program ever since he was a young kid. This participant travels quite a bit and on one of his trips, he stayed with an AirBNB host who gave him suggestions on where to go and activities to do in the area. Since he enjoyed this experience, he went on another trip with Airbnb, but on this trip he found that the host was pretty much nonexistent, and this trip was not as fun. So he proposed an idea in which hosts and travelers are paired based off of interests (like tinder for Airbnb). Sam currently has a team of two but at his largest he was at five. He is seeking to hire people of all skill sets, but will definitely be looking for a business lead in the near future.

Procedure:

The contextual interviews took place mostly on the weekend or after 5 on weekdays, since students are busy during the day. They were held in places where the participants like to work, such as Gates Hall or their own bedroom.

Informed consent was obtained by having participants read through a physical copy of the informed consent form and signing it.

During the interview, we asked generative questions relating to how participants recruit for and evaluate good candidates to join their teams. We asked questions such as *“how do you currently recruit for team members now?”* and *“do you prefer online or offline ways of recruiting team members? why?”* to better understand their current process. In addition to asking them what they liked and disliked about that process, we asked other questions like *“what are you looking for in a team member?”* to get at their goals for finding teammates, and questions like *“(1) can you tell me about what it’s currently like working with a team?”* *“(2) what do you like about it?”* *“(3) what do you dislike about it?”* to gauge their current sentiments and potential frustrations.

We asked participants to answer each question honestly and in as much detail as possible, unless they didn’t want to answer the question. Sessions generally took 35 minutes (we changed our informed consent agreement to reflect the added time necessary). We ended

with a wrap-up, where we asked if there was anything else they wanted to share with us, and thanked them for their time.

2) Data Analysis

IDs:

- 1. Interview w/ Bill**
- 2. Interview w/ Tyler**
- 3. Interview w/ Roosevelt**
- 4. Interview w/ Greg**

Activity Notes – ID: 1

Interviewer would prefer to meet people in person to develop a better relationship. Meeting in person is not necessarily a requirement, but a factor that helps in the hiring process.	Trust is a key requirement for a new team member.
Potential team members should demonstrate passion for whatever they will be working on.	Teams will be looking for people with technical, business, AND design skills.

Teams may use this at the beginning of their journey as well as later on once they need to hire more	Startups have the opportunity to deeply assess a few candidates rather than focusing on volume.
Team chemistry/fit is often more important than the technical skills that a person brings.	Hiring people organically/via connections is time-intensive and limited in scope.
It is more difficult to manage a team of friends than “outside” hires.	

Activity Notes – ID: 2

Though skill is an element to consider, the way a person meshes with the other team members is even more important.	Focus is a quality to look for in team members.
Team member co-location makes people more accountable	College entrepreneurial teams want to foster fun, friendly work environments, and this starts with the people hired.

Potential new members must be open to conflicting/new ideas.	Founders are extremely busy and the hiring process can be time-intensive.
First-degree connections are a good way to recruit quality candidates.	Team members should feel comfortable contributing to their projects.
Founders themselves may have a varying level of understanding of the technical problem.	Founders looking to add to their team must be open to the suggestions/changes that their new members bring.

Activity Notes – ID: 3

Founders may not necessarily have an excellent idea of what concrete skills they are looking for in a team member.	Face-to-face is important, even if it's only over a Skype video call.
There are a variety of variables to consider when hiring (qualifications, price, timeline).	Sometimes startups are looking for temporary help on a problem rather than a full-time solution.

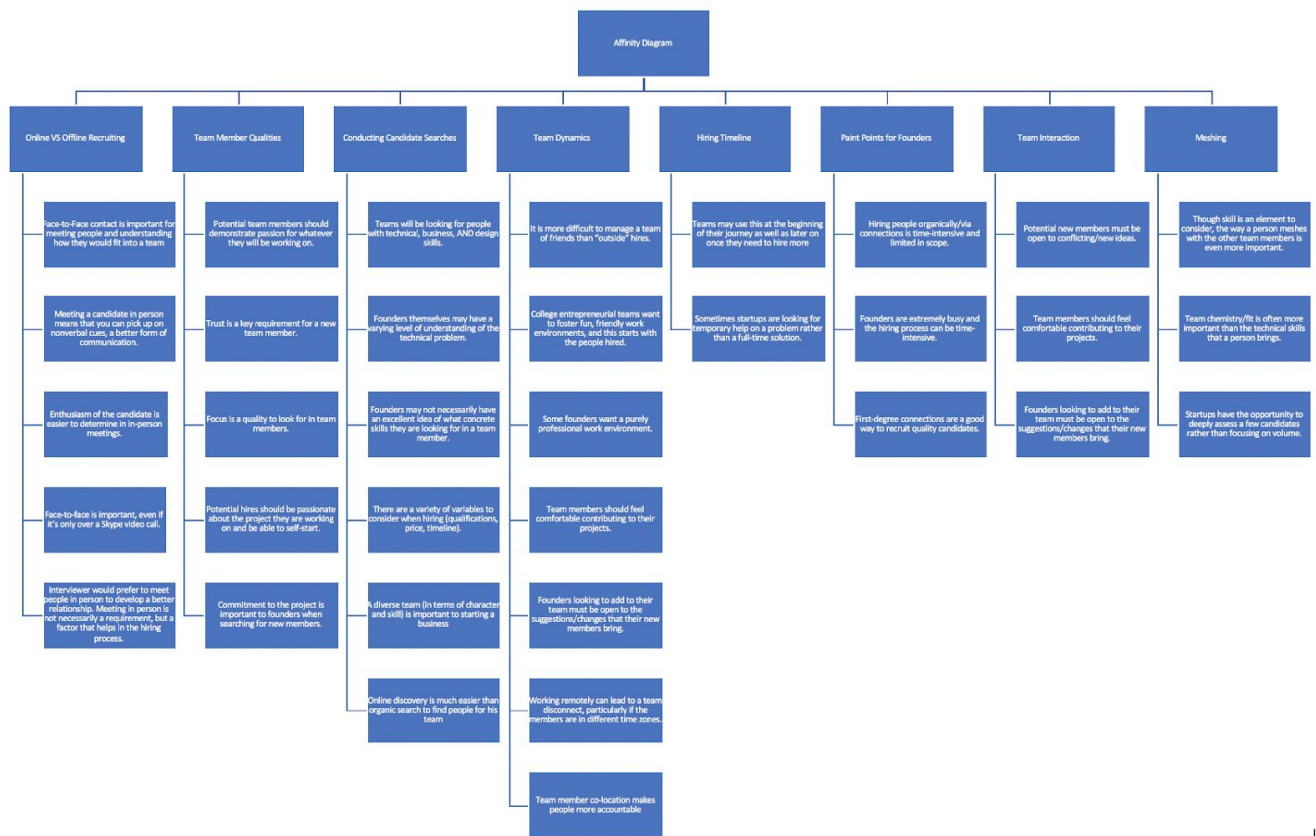
Working remotely can lead to a team disconnect, particularly if the members are in different time zones.	Some founders want a purely professional work environment.
Potential hires should be passionate about the project they are working on and be able to self-start.	

Activity Notes – ID: 4

Face-to-Face contact is important for meeting people and understanding how they would fit into a team	Online discovery is much easier than organic search to find people for his team
Meeting a candidate in person means that you can pick up on nonverbal cues, a better form of communication.	Enthusiasm of the candidate is easier to determine in in-person meetings.
A diverse team (in terms of character and skill) is important to starting a business.	New team members provide alternative viewpoints and perspectives

Commitment to the project is important to founders when searching for new members	Startups may use this tool initially, but there may also be a need for it later down the road as they expand.
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Affinity Diagram:



Theme Narratives

- Offline, rather than online, recruiting gives founders a better, fuller understanding of candidates; however, offline recruiting is extremely time intensive.**

In many of our interviews, we found that founders deeply value trust, passion, and commitment in the individuals they recruit. Interviewees explained that evaluating these candidate qualities in-person is much easier than through a written application. Thus, founders generally rely on prior relationships, organic search methods via mutual friends, and in-person meetings to evaluate candidates on these metrics. Though these methods accomplish the task at hand, they are extremely time-intensive. Our interviewees preferred offline recruiting, but recognized its scalability and time limitations.

Examples:

1. *“[I] would say it (offline recruiting) is the best way to find people you can trust. You know how good they are at what they do and if you hired via an online board, you’re gambling... But as you get into hiring a lot of people, that would be a bottleneck.”*
2. *“We were looking into... we put a job posting on StartUp Tree as well as, like, AngelList, but we were mostly focused on people we knew, like, in our network... we didn’t have to have an awkward barrier, we already knew each other.”*
3. *“There’s all these digital technologies... but I think there’s still like, I don’t know if it’s the vibe or the person being in the room, but you take the person more seriously.”*

2. **Founders consider team chemistry and fit as one of the most important elements when considering a candidate.**

Founders told us that team chemistry and fit enormously matter to them, often much more than the specific technical skills that an applicant may bring to the table. From our interviews, we deduced that this stems from two factors. First, the fact that startup teams are small by definition. Thus, a new member can heavily influence the team dynamic. Second, founders may not necessarily know what *specific* skills they are looking for in a candidate. This is often because founders are seeking candidates that fill in their skill gaps (they are seeking to hire a candidate *because* they do not have knowledge about the particular problem).

Examples:

1. *Observation: One interviewee was notably vague when discussing the technical side of his venture, often jumbling the terms with other tech buzzwords like Machine Learning and Blockchain.*
 2. *“I really like working with other people on the team. We’re all very close friends.”*
 3. *“Currently just seeking technical talent. I’m handling the business side of things.”*
- 3. Different teams have different ideas of what the team-dynamic should be, ranging from fun, friendly work environments to purely professional ones.**
- Stereotypical startup workplace culture dictates a fun, friendly work environment. However, upon conducting interviews, we recognized that this may not be the case for *all*

startups. Some founders want to foster a purely professional workplace culture, and thus their candidate search is impacted accordingly. Furthermore, this also impacts which positions candidates may end up applying to, depending on their ideal workplace environment.

Examples:

1. *“Sometimes it can be too many fun and games, rather than being extremely serious. That’s not to say that there aren’t times when we are extremely serious... It’s just more difficult to give commanding orders to your friends than to someone that you’re less close to.”*
 2. *“When we were in the meetings, I tried to make it more fun... so it’s not like work or a job.”*
 3. *“The relationship is usually very professional, and I get the work completed on time.”*
4. **Teams may use this tool when they are just starting out *or* later on down the road as they seek to expand.**

Though startups may be looking for new team members in their earliest stages, they may need a recruitment tool later down the road as well. Some of the founders that we spoke to recruited their entire team at the very beginning, while others completed some product development and minimum viable product research before hiring additional help. This is a function of the cost consideration that founders must take into account when weighing team expansion.

Examples:

1. *“What we did was that we, first us three, were the primary people working on it as the cofounders.. Like we met for 6 hours per day for three times at eHub every week throughout the semester... And then winter break we actually ended up hiring two interns and we made my living room in Queens, NYC into an office space.”*
2. *[Q: What kind of team members are you currently looking for?] “Currently none, but as development gets further down the line and need extra manpower, we will be searching for additional developers.”*

5. Founders find that their teams are more productive and easier to manage if all members are co-located.

Several founders expressed how much co-location of team members helps with productivity and management. Several interviewees experienced team disconnect when team members worked remotely, particularly if team members were in different time zones. Furthermore, interviewees determined that team members are far more accountable and productive if they are co-located since communication must be far more transparent and honest.

Examples:

1. *[Q: Can you tell us what is it like working with your team?] “It is tricky because of the time-zone difference and hard to hold them accountable being so far away.”*
2. *“We preferred online as in no remote people on our team... And I guess we wanted offline people, we didn’t want, like, people working remotely... A lot of times we were like ‘okay we’ll have a couple remote days’ but then we decided to just, like, everyone needs to come to my living room, my house, Monday through Friday.”*

Persona

1. Background



Max is currently a 20-year-old junior in college. He is currently working on an app that would be very useful to college students.

Max has skills in leadership. He is also able to solve problems that people may have. These are the skills one needs in order to be a successful entrepreneur.

Max cares about making certain aspects of life easier for people. He also cares about his work; he believes in working hard to get to where he wants to be in life.

Max cares about his connection to people. He believes that people with chemistry work better with each other. He also cares about hard work, if one does not work hard, they'll get nowhere in what they are trying to achieve. Max also cares about trust. He wants to be able to trust people he works with. Max believes that people who work well with each other is better than people who have complex technical skills.

Max has had many past experiences that has lead him to the person he is today. In the past he has had opportunities to be a leader.

2. Goals

Max has many different goals he has set for himself in life. His long term goals are creating a successful company that solves problems people have. He wants people to be happy with the product that he and his team create.

His short term goals are to graduate college on time. He would also like to grow his team so that he can achieve his long term goals.

In the end, Max would like to learn a lot from his experiences in working in a team. He want to feel satisfied with his work, and that he had done the best he could in achieving a successful company.

3. Activities

In order to achieve his goals, he must be able to meet people who he has a connection with. They must be committed to his goals and in sync with his thought processes. He meets with people he already has personal connections with in order to find team members. Having a connection with them is the main qualification, but he would also like them to be a team player, and to be good at what they do.

Successes – He has already had success with adding a few people to his team, mainly through people he's friends with. These close friends tend to be hard workers, and they care about the idea he has as a whole.

Frustrations – One of Max's many frustrations is trying to get a good amount of team members. Sometimes he finds people that want to be part of a team, but aren't totally committed to his idea. He also finds this whole process to be very time intensive. He finds it hard to manage a team of friends than outside hires. Time management is also a difficulty.

Reasons for persona

All entrepreneurs interviewed have leadership as one of their greatest skills. Many of the interviewees have the same type of successes and frustrations when it comes to team building. It's hard for them to set up meetings due to time restrictions. All people interviewed agree that interpersonal connections are more important than technical skills. Another aspect that was similar across the board was that all the entrepreneurs wanted to find people that would be committed to their project/idea. These people would have to be hard working.

Requirements

1.

Contextual

Category Name: Speed and Accessibility

Title: Useful in short bursts

Description: The solution should be quickly accessible, without the user having to dedicate large amounts of time to any one session. Can test by measuring how long the average session is.

Rationale: The persona Max has trouble managing time, in addition one of the theme narratives is that the recruitment is time intensive. Since our persona is a busy founder while also juggling college responsibilities, it makes sense to have an app that respects these time sensibilities.

2.

Functional

Category Name: Customization

Title: Filter Cultural Values

Description: Founders should be able to specify their team culture (fun, work-at-home, competitive, etc.). Metric of evaluation is the number of distinct categories/groupings teams can divide into.

Rationale: One of the theme narratives was that different teams have different ideas of what the team-dynamic should be, ranging from fun, friendly work environments to purely professional ones.

3.

Functional

Category Name: Customization

Title: Filter Cultural Values

Description: Job seekers should be able to identify companies by these different cultural values. Metric of evaluation is the number of diverse categories job seekers can use for filtering companies.

Rationale: One of the theme narratives was that different teams have different ideas of what the team-dynamic should be, ranging from fun, friendly work environments to purely professional ones.

4.

Contextual

Category Name: Online-Offline

Title: Creating face to face opportunities

Description: The solution shouldn't replace the opportunity to engage with interpersonal recruitment, but rather serve as a bridge to it.

Rationale: Our persona prefers offline means of finding team members. Furthermore, one of our theme narratives is that offline recruiting gives founders a better understanding of candidates.

5.

Functional

Category Name: Candidate Qualifications

Title: Showcasing Variety of Skills

Description: Job candidates should be able to showcase both technical and nontechnical skills.

This is testable by measuring the number of inputs candidates give themselves, and following up by asking users if there were any other skills they wanted to represent that they couldn't.

Rationale: One of the the themes was that teams look for candidates with a variety of skills (not only technical), though founders may not know exactly what skills they need.

6.

Contextual

Category Name: Timing of Usage

Title: Flexibility regarding company stage

Description: The solution should be dynamic enough to be of assistance to teams when they are just starting out as well as later on. Testable by measuring engagement rate by stage of company.

Rationale: A theme was that teams may use this tool when they are just starting out and later on down the road as they seek to expand. Additionally our persona represents an early stage college founder, so the app should be helpful during the starting stage. From our data we also know that later stage companies also have this problem so we want our solution to be helpful to both the persona as well as more edge case uses.

7.

Contextual

Category Name: Accessibility

Title: Fitting Persona Demographic

Description: The solution format should cater to a young adult (college age to early 30s). This can be done by interviewing this demographic on the look and feel of our solution.

Rationale: Our persona is a college-age student, and based on our interviews and data we concluded that users are of a young adult age range.

8.

Functional

Category Name: Candidate Qualifications

Title: Showcasing Work History

Description: Job candidates should be able to describe themselves so as to assess culture fit.

This can be tested based on interviews with candidates afterwards asking if they felt they were able to sufficiently express themselves.

Rationale: One of the the themes was that teams look for candidates who are a strong fit culturally, we wanted to give both the recruiters and candidates a way to express their cultural values.

9.

Functional

Category Name: Location

Title: Filter by location

Description: Employers and job candidates should be able to filter the either by the location from where they are based. This can be measured through the number of locations generated, as well as how often location filters are used.

Rationale: One of the the themes was that teams look for candidates who are local, as they prefer in-person interactions. By giving teams the option to filter by location, they can select candidates/employees close to them and create more personable human interactions.

10.

Functional

Category Name: Team Chemistry

Title: Testing team chemistry

Description: The solution should have a way for employers to test the potential team chemistry a candidate has with the team (ideas could include giving them a sample task, video call with the rest of the team, etc.). This can be tested by interviewing employers post interview on their satisfaction with the solution, and if they feel they were able to properly gauge team dynamics.

Rationale: One of the the themes was that founders consider team chemistry and fit as one of the most important elements when considering a candidate, in addition our persona weighs heavily on team chemistry when making hiring decisions. We knew it would be important for teams to gauge these dynamics before fully committing to hiring decisions.

Team Member Contributions:

We all worked on this project together in person over the break. We all worked together on each part, and designated each person a section to proofread and make sure meets project requirements. In order to complete this assignment, we each conducted an interview and took notes on an interview. We then each compiled a list of activity notes and met together to discuss how to arrange the affinity diagram. **Constantin** handled synthesizing the theme narratives from the affinity diagram headers. We then discussed the important elements to include in the Contextual Interview Report and each pulled details from our I2 assignments. **Michael** led this effort and managed the editing of our interview reports. Once these elements were complete, we moved on to the creating the persona, drawing heavily from our interviews, I2 analysis, and the affinity diagram to

build a complete picture of an example user in our target audience. **Ben** sourced ideas from the team and summarized all of them in the persona. Finally, we created the user requirements. **Hamed** ensured that all of our requirements were specific, testable and achievable as well as had a good mix of both functional and contextual requirements.