

THE HIRING STANDARD

*An evidenced-based hiring framework built
for CDMOs and CROs*

PART 4: THE EVIDENCE-BASED HIRING OPERATING MODEL

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Welcome to The Hiring Standard

Part 4: The Evidence-Based Hiring Operating Model

In previous parts of this series, we established that execution is the product in pharma outsourcing. Predictability under pressure is a leadership outcome, not a systems feature.

We also examined why experienced organisations still mis-hire. Not because they lack capability, but because instinct, chemistry and conversational interviews distort decision quality. And we clarified that hiring risk is not uniform across operating models.

In CDMOs, risk concentrates around keystone roles such as Site Head or Quality leadership that sit directly inside the control system. When those roles destabilise, execution destabilises quickly.

In CROs, risk multiplies differently. Distributed delivery models amplify inconsistency across regions, programs and sponsor interfaces. No single failure collapses the system, but variability compounds and sponsor confidence erodes.

However, recognising risk is only the starting point.

Even when organisations understand the stakes, most hiring processes are still designed to feel thorough rather than to be predictive. Panels feel rigorous. Conversations feel insightful. Stakeholder alignment feels responsible.

But activity is not evidence.

What most companies call a hiring process is actually a sequence of opinions.

If hiring is truly an execution stability system, it requires the same discipline applied to any critical operating function: defined outcomes, known failure modes, structured evaluation and repeatable decision logic.

In this chapter, we introduce the evidence-based hiring operating model: a system designed to replace opinion-led hiring with structured evaluation that forces capability to reveal itself before the decision is made.



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Part 4: The Evidence-Based Hiring Operating Model

What “Evidence-Based” actually means (and what it doesn’t).

Firstly, let’s understand what evidence-based hiring is **not**:

- More interviews
- More stakeholders
- More “culture fit” conversations
- More resume screening
- More opinion

Evidence-based hiring **is**:

- Structured evaluation tied to outcomes
- Independent scoring
- Calibration against failure modes
- Work samples that simulate real pressure
- Feedback loops that improve the model over time

An evidence-based model integrates four sources of truth:

1. SELECTION SCIENCE

Validated research on what predicts performance.

2. ORGANISATIONAL DATA

Your own retention patterns, quality metrics, sponsor feedback, and execution stability indicators.

3. OPERATOR JUDGMENT

Experienced leaders who understand the operating system, failure modes, and what “good” actually looks like under stress.

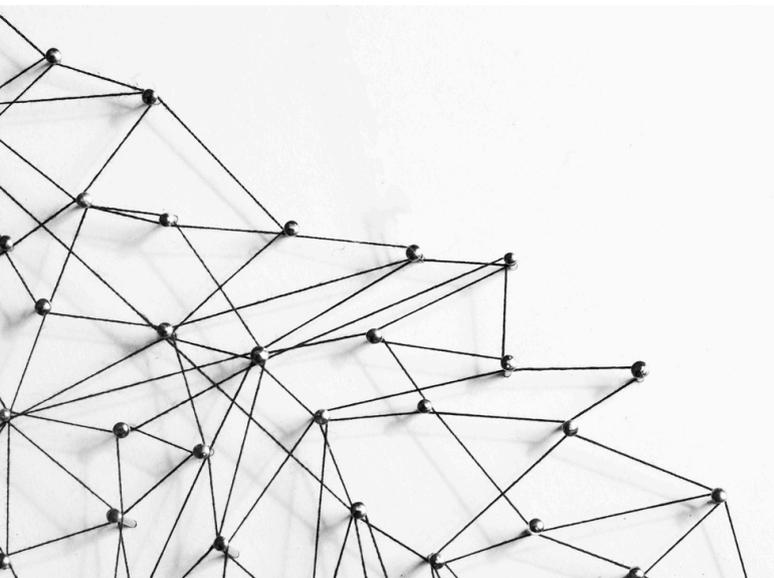
4. STAKEHOLDER CONTEXT

Board expectations, sponsor pressures, growth plans, and risk tolerance.

Most companies use only one input: stakeholder opinion.

That is not evidence-based but instead consensus-based.

And consensus is not predictive.



The Model: Six Components That Create Predictability

1. Outcome Definition

Before the first interview, define the role as a 12-month contract.

Remove responsibilities and create outcomes.

CDMO examples:

- Reduce deviation cycle time by X%
- Stabilise CAPA aging below threshold
- Improve batch release predictability
- Achieve inspection readiness in Y days
- Stabilise sponsor governance intensity

CRO examples:

- Improve enrolment performance variance
- Reduce late-stage escalation frequency
- Stabilize sponsor governance cadence
- Improve program timeline recovery success rate
- Increase retention of top project leadership

If outcomes are not defined, interviews default to personality and pedigree.

That is how mis-hires get hired.

2. Failure Mode Mapping

Every role has predictable failure modes. The failure modes are context-specific.

CDMO failure modes:

- Over-indexing on throughput at the expense of compliance
- Under-escalation of quality risk
- Weak investigation rigour under pressure
- Sponsor appeasement that compromises standards
- Inability to stabilise frontline teams

CRO failure modes:

- Delayed escalation to protect optics
- Poor sequencing of mitigation actions
- Inability to manage distributed regional variability
- Weak sponsor communication discipline
- Governance overload instead of execution control

If you don't define failure modes, you can't assess them and if you can't assess them, you're gambling.

The Model: Six Components That Create Predictability

3. Structured Interviews

Structured interviews are not robotic, they are disciplined.

They use:

- The same questions for all candidates
- Questions tied to outcomes and failure modes
- Behavioural evidence requirements
- Clear scoring rubrics

This reduces thin slicing and confirmation bias.

Selection science consistently demonstrates structured interviews outperform unstructured interviews in predictive validity.

That matters because most senior hiring is still unstructured.

4. Scenario Simulations

Work samples are where the truth shows up.

A work sample is not a case study presentation designed for polish.

It is a scenario designed to surface judgment, sequencing, escalation, and risk tolerance.

CDMO simulations should test:

- Deviation backlog spikes
- Inspection readiness under time compression
- Sponsor escalation with incomplete information
- Trade-off decisions between throughput and compliance

CRO simulations should test:

- Enrollment shortfall recovery
- Protocol amendment disruption
- Regional underperformance and resource reallocation
- Sponsor escalation with timeline pressure

This is where capability reveals itself.

Conversation tests narrative.
Simulation tests execution.



The Model: Six Components That Create Predictability

5. Independent Scoring

This is where most hiring processes collapse.

Panels discuss first, then score.
Which means they align.

Independent scoring requires:

- Each interviewer scores privately
- Scores are submitted before group discussion
- Discussion focuses on evidence gaps and failure modes
- The final decision is documented

This reduces social reinforcement and consensus drift.

It also creates defensibility, which matters more than people admit.



6. Calibration

Calibration is not “getting everyone aligned” but aligning evidence against outcomes.

The calibration discussion should focus on:

- Where evidence is strong
- Where evidence is missing
- Where risk tolerance differs
- Where failure modes are likely
- Whether the candidate is survivable in this context

If calibration becomes politics, you are back to thin slicing.

And thin slicing is the disease.

From Operating Model to Hiring System

CDMO Operating Model

In CDMOs, the hiring operating model must be built around control.

Control is not a personality trait, but instead, a discipline.

The best CDMO leaders demonstrate:

- Calm escalation discipline
- Investigation rigour under pressure
- Sponsor truth-telling without drama
- Operational sequencing
- Frontline stability creation

CRO Operating Model

In CROs, the hiring operating model must be built around distributed execution discipline.

The best CRO leaders demonstrate:

- Early escalation cadence
- Sequencing under uncertainty
- Regional coordination
- Sponsor communication maturity
- The ability to stabilise programs without governance bloat

Executive Search Precision Hiring Model

For keystone roles, the operating model is applied deeply:

- Failure-mode mapping is explicit
- Work samples are tailored to the site or program
- Calibration is board-level disciplined
- Decision defensibility is required

RPO Infrastructure Hiring Model

For scale events, the operating mode is installed broadly:

- Outcome definitions are standardised
- Structured interviews are deployed across managers
- Work sample libraries are created
- Scoring and calibration are trained and governed
- Quality-of-hire tracking becomes routine

The Takeaway

If you want predictable execution, you need predictable hiring.

And predictable hiring requires an operating model.

Not more interviews, not better gut instinct, not stronger relationships but a system. Because execution is engineered.

And hiring is where the engineering begins.

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We solve your current and future recruitment challenges by swiftly identifying critical talent and enhancing your in-house capabilities, while future-proofing your in-house recruitment capabilities.

At Vector, we understand that building exceptional teams isn't just about finding the right individuals—it's about harnessing the power of collective expertise and cutting-edge technology. Our flexible solutions seamlessly blend the art of human connection with the precision of the latest innovations, empowering our clients to assemble market-leading teams that drive unparalleled success.

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Our mission is to support our clients in building and developing the high performing teams needed to improve patients' lives and get cutting edge science to market faster.

Vector has built teams and organisations across the Globe, supporting leaders to create the teams required to meet their business goals.

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