

Where the CV reaches its limits

“How much leadership experience do you have?” This question often catches my clients off guard in job interview training. They begin to count, scan their CV – and suddenly realise how much they cannot immediately recall. There is, however, a simple remedy.

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Most of my coachees mention only their line management experience. They frequently overlook their extensive project leadership responsibilities – as well as the nine months during which they deputised for a supervisor who was absent due to an accident. Not to mention functional leadership, military leadership or voluntary leadership roles in associations and clubs.

What is the underlying problem? The question is usually narrowed down to line management, while other forms of leadership remain invisible. Moreover, experience is scattered across different periods and areas of life in a CV and must first be mentally assembled.

A performance record as the solution

We tend to perceive our careers as chronological processes and present them accordingly in our CVs. This is helpful for orientation – but for a substantive evaluation, we need to structure the information thematically. This is where a so-called performance record proves useful. It compels us to consider our experience not in temporal order, but in terms of competencies – and suddenly what we truly bring to the table becomes visible.

The idea first occurred to me when, as a headhunter, I was searching for a "Team Leader in Portfolio Management". One of the requirements was at least ten years' experience leading specialist teams. I sat there with a pile of CVs, looking for leadership experience and adding

up years.

I remember thinking how convenient it would be if candidates relieved me of this task. Later, I encountered this concept in the literature under the term “performance record”: a thematic analysis of a CV aligned with the requirements of a specific role.

Application as investment selling

I recommend comparing a job application with investment selling rather than product selling, as I described in my article “Sell yourself well – talk about your weaknesses.” There is an interesting parallel here: the RFP – Request for Proposal.

Purchasers – for instance in IT infrastructure projects – circulate detailed questionnaires. Providers respond point by point along the stated requirements. That is precisely what you do with a performance record: you demonstrate in a structured manner what you have to offer.

This leaves you with three application documents serving distinct purposes: the CV as a concise brochure outlining your career path, the cover letter as your proposal, and the performance record as an annex showing how thoroughly you meet the requirements.

Many of my clients regularly prepare a performance record. And I often hear them say: “I may attach it to the application – but I primarily create it for myself. It helps me recognise what I bring to the role.”

I would wager that these candidates no longer need to start counting when asked about their leadership experience. They know.

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