

# Polyglot VS. Problem Solver

whitepaper



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# Intro

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**On Wednesday 9th September, we hosted the Trusted Tech Talks webinar "Polyglot vs Problem Solver", with Dmitry Kmita, Software Engineering Manager at Moonpig.**

Trusted Tech Talks specialise in hosting technology and digital events, webinars, and roundtables across topics including Software Development, Cyber Security, DevOps, Product, and Digital Transformation as well as more general business topics including legislation changes, IR35, and D&I.

"Polyglot vs. Problem Solver" was an exploratory webinar lead by Dmitry Kmita, who presented and aimed to answer questions around:

- What companies look for when hiring development engineers
- Defining Polyglots and their advantages and disadvantages
- Managing developers and adapting to change
- How to differentiate polyglots and problem solvers

Dmitry is currently Software Engineering Manager at Moonpig, but has previously worked within large companies including BookingGo and RentalCars, In total he has 12 years experience in engineering, with 5 of those being in engineering leadership and management.

He generously shared his experiences and knowledge, delivering insights and advice, which are covered in the following whitepaper. Alternatively you can rewatch the full webinar now on our website by clicking the button below.





# Polyglots vs. Problem Solver: An Investigation

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On the surface, a polyglot is an engineer that can understand and use different programming languages, but in reality it is much more complex, especially in the wider context of solving business problems. Below is an exploration of some of the most common questions around what a polyglot is and how they can impact a business.

## What makes a polyglot?

A polyglot attitude is great for engineers first entering and exploring the world of IT, because it keeps engineers motivated, allows them to try new technologies, and also enables them to gain a high level understanding on how the world of IT works. By gaining a wide breadth of knowledge across the industry, it helps to build confidence, so that engineers are ready to take that next step from just knowing the technology, to knowing how they can use it to solve problems.

There is no tick box exercise to becoming a polyglot. A polyglot mindset is created through the determination to learn as much as possible across a wide variety of technologies and languages, whilst a problem solver is more likely to want to learn new technologies in order to solve a specific problem. What this means is that engineers should focus more on the outcome of their knowledge, rather than the amount of it. It's also fundamental to be adaptable, not just to new tech and languages, but also to the way in which problems can be solved.

## Disadvantages of being a polyglot

Whilst a polyglot mindset can be beneficial when first exploring the IT world, it can become a bottleneck later in a career. This is because there is only so much information that you can learn to a proficient level. Therefore a polyglot would find it difficult to truly be a specialist in anything specific which, in a saturated market of developers, could be a disadvantage.

Companies tend to see specialists as more valuable than polyglot generalists. Plus, it is often more beneficial to the engineer to find a language they are passionate about as this keeps them motivated and driven. Plus they'll always be able to find a market no matter what their specialism, because the world is now so technological and connected.



# Managing Passionate Developers

Many developers will find themselves wanting to work on new, exciting, and emerging technologies, but in a business environment this isn't always possible. Companies will be working towards specific deadlines, and on specific projects that may require certain languages. This means that developers won't always have the freedom to use new tech.

Whilst it's important, as a manager, to encourage and enable growth through learning, it's also important to make sure that employees aren't wasting time or burning energy, exploring technology that they won't be able to actually utilise. It's important to remember that technology is being used to solve problems and only certain types of tech or programming languages will be suitable for certain projects. That being said, it's important to encourage developers to expand their horizons and knowledge in order for their own personal development. It's about striking that balance.



Helpfully, managers can provide personalised roadmaps. There are many frameworks businesses can opt to use, however one example is the stretch objective framework.

This framework includes daily tasks and targets that are company oriented as well as stretch and dream targets, which are personal. By including this range of objectives, businesses can accelerate delivery whilst also enabling individual growth.

It works on a sliding scale. between 0.5 and 1.0.

0.5 is the daily target  
0.7 is the stretch target  
and 1.0 is the dream target

This appeases both the desire for business and personal growth.

## Advertising Engineering Roles

A big red flag when applying for an engineering role is when a company expects a developer to know everything, e.g. asking for someone with experience in architecture, frontend, backend, devops and fullstack engineering. What this demonstrates is that a business doesn't really know what it wants, or that there has been a big communication failure between hiring manager and recruiter. In reality, no company should need everything.

It's only really likely that a job spec could ever realistically ask for these things in the case of a start up company, who are hiring generalists to all pitch in and help with lots of different tasks. Otherwise, it doesn't reflect well on the focus or knowledge of the business.



# What Companies Consider When Hiring Engineers

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When a company is hiring for an engineer, they are likely to go through a common thought process, which starts with two very simple questions; why are we hiring and who do we want to hire?

## Why?

A company could be hiring for a number of reasons, including:

- Project Specific (this is often when contractors are hired to cope with peaks in demand)
- Domain Growth (requirement of more engineers, teams, and leaders to cope with business growth and expansion)
- Increase Delivery Pace (companies may want to speed up product and project delivery by increasing the number of engineers working on it)

## Who?

There are three core things that most hiring managers will specify as requirements for a job role, which can include:

- Seniority (are they looking for a Junior, Senior, or Manager?)
- Programming Language (do they need proficiency in a specific language?)
- Experience (do they need experience in a specific sector or industry?)

## Traits of a Great Candidate

Once these specifications are formalised and interviews commence, hiring managers will look out for indicators of the following things.

### ***Sustainable Long-Term Value***

Hiring Managers will assess how much value a candidate can bring to the business and how they will help the business solve customer problems (and subsequently make money for the business.) Simply, a candidate needs to demonstrate how they can make a sustainable impact in the business, even if that's not directly related to revenue. This means being able to solve customer problems in the right way, with speed and efficiency, so this can be replicated over time. An engineer's value is summed up very simply as profit - cost, so they should be able to work efficiently and always add value.

### ***Culture***

Culture is really important and is built by the people in the company. Therefore hiring managers will consider whether the candidate will have a positive impact on that culture, and whether they would enjoy that culture.





### **Growth**

Part of a manager's role is to provide a clear, transparent career progression journey for employees. For this to happen a candidate needs to have a clear vision of where they want to go, including any specific tech they want to learn. Polyglots are most likely to continuously change their focus, and want to learn completely new skills, therefore making it difficult for managers to support their growth. Again, roadmaps can help guide the growth process.

### **Risk**

Candidates can look great on their CV, but hiring managers really need to delve deeper into the hiring risk of each individual. A highly academic developer might sound perfect and their technical knowledge may be impressive, but the question you should really be asking is "how likely is it that this candidate might over-complicate a simple task in order to utilise their knowledge rather than just solving the actual business problem? If they are likely to overcomplicate a task, this will cost the business time, money and resources, whereas a Junior Developer might be more likely to focus on building a maintainable, simple piece of software that just focuses on problem solving.

### **Diversity of Thought**

Having a team of developers who are diverse in thought is important in terms of knowing different aspects of software and having experience using different technologies. For a polyglot however, being one person with lots of different knowledge can be confusing and can distract from solving the actual business problem. This is why it is important to have an attitude that is open to discussion, sharing experience and knowledge and taking other ideas on board. Polyglots tend to be strongly opinionated due to their expansive knowledge, so here it is fundamental that these polyglots have the right attitude and can use this knowledge in the right way.

### **Self-Efficiency**

Self-efficiency in developers is about more than just being able to work independently, it's also about being pragmatic, transparent, and having the ability to receive and action feedback.

### **Sustainability**

If a company is hiring it tends to be because there is a real demand for resource, therefore companies need to make sure every hire is a sustainable resource; someone who will evolve with the business, who will maintain focus, and work well with the company long-term.

### **Fun**

Companies don't want to hire robots, they want to hire people. The best candidates are those who know how to work, but also how to have fun.







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