

Recruitment and Selection

Key concepts and terms

- Biodata
- Person specification
- Recruitment process outsourcing (RPO)
- Selection
- Knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs)
- Recruitment
- Role profile

Learning outcomes

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also know about:

- Defining requirements
- Analysing recruitment strengths and weaknesses
- Identifying sources of candidates
- Online recruitment
- Using recruitment consultants
- References and offers
- Recruitment planning
- Analysing the requirement
- Advertising
- Using agencies and job centres
- Selection methods

Introduction

Recruitment is the process of finding and engaging the people the organization needs. Selection is that part of the recruitment process concerned with deciding which applicants or candidates should be appointed to jobs.

The recruitment and selection process

The four stages of recruitment and selection are as follows.

Recruitment and selection stages

1. Defining requirements – preparing role profiles and person specifications; deciding terms and conditions of employment.
2. Planning recruitment campaigns.
3. Attracting candidates – reviewing and evaluating alternative sources of applicants, inside and outside the company: advertising, e-recruiting, agencies and consultants.
4. Selecting candidates – sifting applications, interviewing, testing, assessing candidates, assessment centres, offering employment, obtaining references; preparing contracts of employment.

Defining requirements

The number and categories of people required may be set out in formal human resource or workforce plans from which are derived detailed recruitment plans. More typically, requirements are expressed in the form of ad hoc demands for people because of the creation of new posts, expansion into new activities or areas, or the need for a replacement. These short-term demands may put HR under pressure to deliver candidates quickly.

Requirements are set out in the form of job descriptions or role profiles and person specifications. These provide the information required to draft advertisements, post vacancies on the internet, brief agencies or recruitment consultants, and assess candidates by means of interviews and selection tests.

Role profiles for recruitment purposes

Role profiles, as described in Chapter 26, define the overall purpose of the role, its reporting relationships and the key result areas. They may also include a list of the competencies required. These will be technical competencies (knowledge and skills) and any specific behavioural competencies attached to the role. The latter would be selected from the organization's competency framework and modified as required to fit the demands made on role holders. For recruiting purposes, the profile is extended to include information on terms and conditions (pay, benefits and hours of work), special requirements such as mobility, travelling or unsocial hours, and learning, development and career opportunities. The recruitment role profile provides the basis for a person specification.

Person specification

A person specification, also known as a recruitment or job specification, defines the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required to carry out the role and the education, training, qualifications and experience needed to acquire the necessary KSAs. A person specification can be set out under the following headings:

Person specification headings

- Knowledge – what the individual needs to know to carry out the role.
- Skills and abilities – what the individual has to be able to do to carry out the role.
- Behavioural competencies – the types of behaviour required for successful performance of the role. These should be role-specific, ideally based on an analysis of employees who are carrying out their roles effectively. The behaviours should also be linked to the core values and competency framework of the organization to help in ensuring that candidates will fit and support the organization's culture. As reported by Purcell *et al* (2003), companies such as Selfridges take great care to develop specifications that define the behaviours required and to use selection techniques that provide for cultural fit between the individual and the organization.
- Qualifications and training – the professional, technical or academic qualifications required or the training that the candidate should have undertaken.
- Experience – the types of achievements and activities that would be likely to predict success.
- Specific demands – anything that the role holder will be expected to achieve in specified areas, eg develop new markets or products, improve sales, productivity or levels of customer service, introduce new systems or processes.
- Special requirements – travelling, unsocial hours, mobility, etc.

Alternatively, one or other of the traditional but well-tested classification schemes developed as the framework for interviews could be used.

Table 31.1 Person specification classification schemes

Seven-point plan (Rodger, 1952)	Five-fold grading scheme (Munro-Fraser, 1954)
1. <i>physical make-up</i> – health, physique, appearance, bearing and speech	1. <i>impact on others</i> – physical make-up, appearance, speech and manner
2. <i>attainments</i> – education, qualifications, experience	2. <i>acquired qualifications</i> – education, vocational training, work experience
3. <i>general intelligence</i> – fundamental intellectual capacity	3. <i>innate abilities</i> – natural quickness of comprehension and aptitude for learning
4. <i>special aptitudes</i> – mechanical, manual dexterity, facility in the use of words or figures	4. <i>motivation</i> – the kinds of goals set by the individual, his or her consistency and determination in following them up, and success in achieving them
5. <i>interests</i> – intellectual, practical, constructional, physically active, social, artistic	5. <i>adjustment</i> – emotional stability, ability to stand up to stress and ability to get on with people
6. <i>disposition</i> – acceptability, influence over others, steadiness, dependability, self-reliance	
7. <i>circumstances</i> – availability, mobility, etc	

The biggest danger to be avoided at this stage is that of overstating the requirements. Perhaps it is natural to go for the best, but setting an unrealistically high level for candidates increases the problems of attracting applicants and results in dissatisfaction among recruits when they find their talents are not being used. Understating requirements can, of course, be equally dangerous, but it happens less frequently.

The competencies defined in the role profile form a fundamental feature of the selection process which, rightly, becomes more of a person-based than a job-based approach. They are used as the basis for structured interviews (see Chapter 32) and provide guidance on which selection techniques such as psychological testing or assessment centres are most likely to be useful.

The advantages of a competency-based approach have been summarized by Wood and Payne (1998) as follows:

- it increases the accuracy of predictions about suitability;
- it facilitates a closer match between the person's attributes and the demands of the job;
- it helps to prevent interviewers making 'snap' judgements;
- it can underpin the whole range of recruitment techniques – application forms, interviews, tests and assessment centres.

An example of the key competencies parts of a person specification for an HR recruitment specialist is given in Figure 31.1.

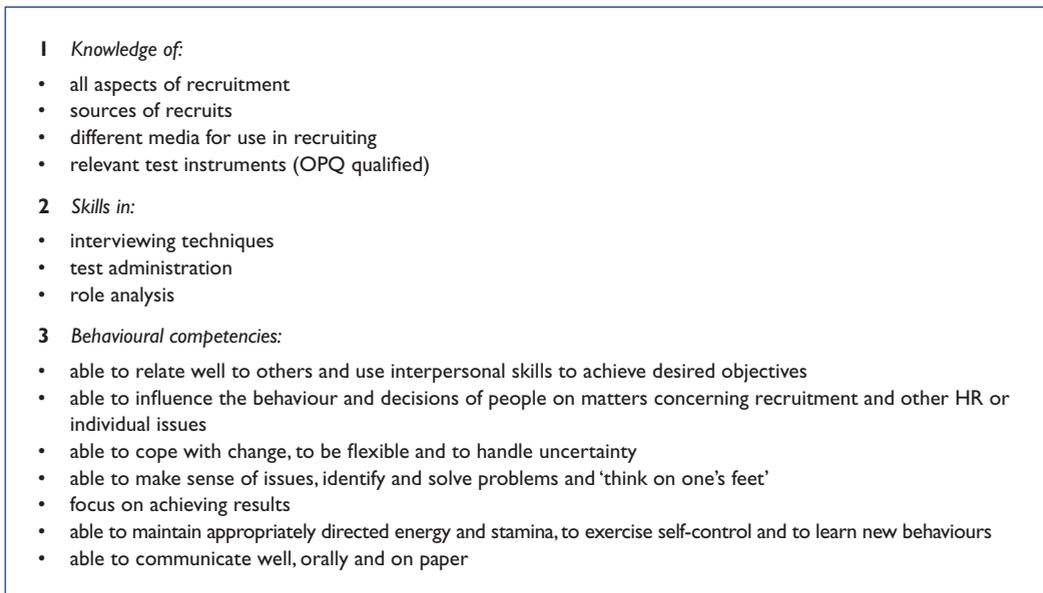


Figure 31.1 Competency-based person specification for a recruitment specialist

Recruitment planning

A recruitment plan will cover:

- the number and types of employees required to cater for expansion or new developments and make up for any deficits;
- the likely sources of candidates;
- plans for tapping alternative sources;
- how the recruitment programme will be conducted.

Attracting candidates

The first step in attracting candidates is to analyse recruitment strengths and weaknesses. The outcome of this analysis can be used to develop an employee value proposition and employer brand.

Analyse recruitment strengths and weaknesses

Attracting candidates is primarily a matter of identifying, evaluating and using the most appropriate sources of applicants. However, in cases where difficulties in attracting or retaining candidates are being met or anticipated, it may be necessary to carry out a preliminary study of the factors that are likely to attract or repel candidates – the strengths and weakness of the organization as an employer. The study could make use of an attitude survey to obtain the views of existing employees.

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses should cover such matters as the national or local reputation of the organization, pay, employee benefits and working conditions, the intrinsic interest of the job, security of employment, opportunities for education and training, career prospects, and the location of the office or plant. These need to be compared with the competition so that a list of what are, in effect, selling points, can be drawn up as in a marketing exercise, in which the preferences of potential customers are compared with the features of the product so that those aspects that are likely to provide the most appeal to the customers can be emphasized. The analysis can show where the organization needs to improve as an employer if it is to attract more or better candidates and to retain those selected.

Candidates are, in a sense, selling themselves, but they are also buying what the organization has to offer. If, in the latter sense, the labour market is a buyer's market, then the company that is selling itself to candidates must study their wants and needs in relation to what it can provide. The study can be used to develop an employee value proposition and an employee brand incorporating the features set out above and described in Chapter 30. They can help in the preparation of a better image of the organization for use on corporate websites and in advertisements, brochures or interviews.

Analyse the requirement

First it is necessary to establish how many jobs have to be filled and by when. Then turn to an existing role profile and person specification or, if not available or out of date, draw up new ones that set out information on responsibilities and competency requirements. This information can be analysed to determine the required education, qualifications and experience.

The next step is to consider where suitable candidates are likely to come from; the companies, jobs or education establishments they are in; and the parts of the country where they can be found. Next, define the terms and conditions of the job (pay and benefits).

Finally, refer to the analysis of strengths and weaknesses to assess what is likely to attract good candidates to the job or the organization so the most can be made of these factors when advertising the vacancy or reaching potential applicants in other ways. Consider also what might put them off, for example the location of the job, so that objections can be anticipated. Analyse previous successes or failures to establish what does or does not work.

Identify sources of candidates

First, consideration should be given to internal candidates. It may also be worth trying to persuade former employees to return to the organization or obtain suggestions from existing employees (referrals). If these approaches do not work the main sources of candidates are advertising, online recruiting, agencies and job centres, consultants, recruitment process outsourcing providers and direct approaches to educational establishments.

The 2008 CIPD survey of recruitment, retention and turnover found that 78 per cent used recruitment agencies, 75 per cent used their own corporate website, 75 per cent used local newspaper advertisements and 62 per cent used specialist journals (CIPD, 2008a).

There is usually a choice between different methods or combinations of them. The criteria to use when making the choice are, 1) the likelihood that it will produce good candidates, 2) the speed with which the choice enables recruitment to be completed, and 3) the costs involved, bearing in mind that there may be direct advertising costs or consultants' fees.

Advertising

Advertising has traditionally been the most obvious method of attracting candidates and it is still important, although many organizations are outsourcing recruitment to agencies or consultants or using online recruitment, as was revealed in the CIPD (2008a) survey. A conventional advertisement will have the following aims.

Aims of an advertisement

- Generate candidates – attract a sufficient number of good candidates at minimum cost.
- Attract attention – it must compete for the attention of potential candidates against other employees.
- Create and maintain interest – it has to communicate in an attractive and interesting way information about the job, the company and the terms and conditions of employment.
- Stimulate action – the message needs to be conveyed in a way that will prompt a sufficient number of replies from candidates with the right qualifications for the job.

To achieve these aims, it is necessary to carry out the actions set out below.

Decide on whether or not to use an advertising agency

When planning a campaign or recruiting key people, there is much to be said for using an advertising agency. An agency can provide expertise in producing eye-catching headlines and writing good copy. It can devise an attractive house style that promotes the employer brand and prepare layouts that make the most of the text, the logo and any 'white space' round the advertisement. Moreover, it can advise on ways of achieving visual impact by the use of illustrations and special typographical features. Finally, an agency can advise on media, help in response analysis and take up the burden of preparing and placing advertisements.

The following steps should be taken when choosing an advertising agency:

- check its experience in handling recruitment advertising;
- see examples of its work;
- check with clients on the level of service provided;
- meet the staff who will work on the advertisements;
- check the fee structure;
- discuss methods of working.

Write the copy

A recruitment advertisement should start with a compelling headline and then contain information on the following.

Information in a recruitment advertisement

- The organization.
- The job.
- The person required – qualifications, experience, etc.
- The pay and benefits offered.
- The location.
- The action to be taken.

The headline is all important. The simplest and most obvious approach is to set out the job title in bold type. To gain attention, it is advisable to quote the rate of pay and key benefits such

as a company car. Applicants are suspicious of clauses such as ‘salary will be commensurate with age and experience’ or ‘salary negotiable’. This often means either that the salary is so low that the company is afraid to reveal it, or that pay policies are so incoherent that the company has no idea what to offer until someone tells them what he or she wants.

The name of the company should be given. Do not use box numbers – if you want to be anonymous, use a consultant. Add any selling points, such as growth or diversification, and any other areas of interest to potential candidates, such as career prospects. The essential features of the job should be conveyed by giving a brief description of what the job holder will do and, as far as space permits, the scope and scale of activities. Create interest in the job but do not oversell it.

The qualifications and experience required should be stated as factually as possible. There is no point in overstating requirements and seldom any point in specifying exactly how much experience is wanted. This will vary from candidate to candidate and the other details about the job and the rate of pay should provide them with enough information about the sort of experience required. Be careful about including a string of personal qualities such as drive, determination, and initiative. These have no real meaning to candidates. Phrases such as ‘proven track record’ and ‘successful experience’ are equally meaningless. No one will admit to not having either of them.

The advertisement should end with information on how the candidate should apply. ‘Brief but comprehensive details’ is a good phrase. Candidates can be asked to write or e-mail their response, but useful alternatives are to ask them to telephone or to come along for an informal chat at a suitable venue.

Remember the anti-discrimination legislation. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate in an advertisement by favouring either sex, the only exceptions being a few jobs that can be done only by one sex. Advertisements must therefore avoid sexist job titles such as ‘salesman’ or ‘stewardess’. They must use a neutral title such as ‘sales representative’, or amplify the description to cover both sexes by stating ‘steward or stewardess’. It is accepted, however, that certain job titles are unisex and therefore non-discriminatory. These include director, manager, executive and officer. It is best to avoid any reference to the sex of the candidate by using neutral or unisex titles and referring only to the ‘candidate’ or the ‘applicant’. Otherwise you must specify ‘man or woman’ or ‘he or she’.

The Race Relations Act 1976 has similar provisions, making unlawful an advertisement that discriminates against any particular race. As long as race is never mentioned or even implied in an advertisement, you should have no problem in keeping within the law.

The Age Discrimination Regulations 2006 make it unlawful to discriminate against employees on account of their age. Age limits should therefore not be included in advertisements and the wording should not indicate that people below or above a certain age are not wanted.

Design the advertisement

The main types of advertisement are:

- Classified/run-on, in which copy is run on, with no white space in or around the advertisement and no paragraph spacing or indentation. They are cheap but suitable only for junior or routine jobs.
- Classified/semi-display, in which the headings can be set in capitals, paragraphs can be indented and white space is allowed round the advertisement. They are fairly cheap and semi-display can be much more effective than run-on advertisements.
- Full display, which are bordered and in which any typeface and illustrations can be used. They can be expensive but obviously make the most impact for managerial, technical and professional jobs.

Plan the media

An advertising agency can advise on the choice of media (press, radio, television) and its cost. *British Rates and Data (BRAD)* can be consulted to give the costs of advertising in particular media.

The so-called 'quality papers' are best for managerial and professional jobs. Local papers are best for recruiting sales and office staff and manual workers. Professional and trade journals can reach specialists directly, but results can be erratic and it may be advisable to use them to supplement a national campaign.

Avoid Saturdays and be cautious about repeating advertisements in the same medium. Diminishing returns can set in rapidly.

Evaluate the response

Measure response to provide guidance on the relative cost-effectiveness of different media. Cost per reply is the best ratio.

Online recruitment

Online or e-recruitment uses the internet to advertise or 'post' vacancies, provide information about jobs and the organization and enable e-mail communication to take place between employers and candidates. The latter can apply for jobs online and can e-mail application forms and their CVs to employers or agencies. Tests can be completed online.

Some organizations are using Web 2.0 technologies to search for recruits online through social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Websites such as LinkedIn, which provide personal profiles, can be consulted. Other organizations are providing 'blogs' from existing

employees covering their experiences in working for the organization. The main types of online recruitment sites are corporate websites, commercial job boards and agency sites.

Corporate websites

These may simply list vacancies and contact details. A more elaborate approach would consist of a dedicated website area that gives details of vacancies, person specifications, benefits and how to apply for jobs by for example completing online application forms and tests. Such areas may be linked directly to an organization's home page so that general browsers can access them. An intranet link may be available to enable internal staff to access the website. Some organizations outsource the management of their website to recruitment consultants and specialized web agencies.

Commercial job boards

These are operated by specialized firms such as Monster.co.uk and Fish4jobs.com and consist of large databanks of vacancies. Companies pay to have their jobs listed on the sites. Information about vacancies may reproduce an advertisement so that the site is simply an additional form of communication. Alternatively, some vacancies are only found online. Links may be provided to the organization's website.

Agency sites

These are run by established recruitment agencies. Candidates register online but may be expected to discuss their details in person before they are forwarded to a prospective employer.

Advantages and disadvantages of online recruiting

The advantages of online recruiting are that it can reach a wider range of possible applicants, and it is quicker and cheaper than traditional methods of advertising. More details of jobs and firms can be supplied on the site and CVs can be matched and applications can be submitted electronically. The disadvantages are that it may produce too many irrelevant or poor applications and it is still not the first choice of many job seekers.

Making the best use of online recruiting

- Consider using it in conjunction with other recruitment methods to maximize response.
- Keep the content of the site up-to-date.

- Ensure the site is accessible directly or through search engines.
- Provide contact numbers for those with technical problems.
- Take care over the wording of online copy – the criteria for good copy in conventional advertisements apply.

Using agencies and job centres

Most private agencies deal with secretarial and office staff. They are usually quick and effective but quite expensive. Agencies can charge a fee of 15 per cent or more of the first year's salary for finding someone. It can be cheaper to advertise or use the internet, especially when the company is in a buyer's market. Shop around to find the agency that suits the organization's needs at a reasonable cost.

Agencies should be briefed carefully on what is wanted. They produce unsuitable candidates from time to time but the risk is reduced if they are clear about your requirements.

The job centres operated by the government are mainly useful for manual and clerical workers and sales or call centre assistants.

Using recruitment consultants

Recruitment consultants generally advertise, interview and produce a short-list. They provide expertise and reduce workload. The organization can be anonymous if it wishes. Most recruitment consultants charge a fee based on a percentage of the basic salary for the job, usually ranging from 15 to 20 per cent.

The following steps should be taken when choosing a recruitment consultant:

- check reputation with other users;
- look at the advertisements of the various firms to obtain an idea of the quality of a consultancy and the type and level of jobs with which it deals;
- check on special expertise;
- meet the consultant who will work on the assignment to assess his or her quality;
- compare fees, although the differences are likely to be small and the other considerations are usually more important.

When using recruitment consultants it is necessary to:

- agree terms of reference;
- brief them on the organization, where the job fits in, why the appointment is to be made, terms and conditions and any special requirements;
- give them every assistance in defining the job and the person specification, including any special demands that will be made of the successful candidate in the shape of what he or she will be expected to achieve – they will do much better if they have comprehensive knowledge of what is required and what type of person is most likely to fit well into the organization;
- check carefully the proposed programme and the draft text of the advertisement;
- clarify the arrangements for interviewing and short-listing;
- clarify the basis on which fees and expenses will be charged;
- ensure that arrangements are made to deal directly with the consultant who will handle the assignment.

Using executive search consultants

Use an executive search consultant, or ‘head hunter’ for senior jobs where there are only a limited number of suitable people and a direct lead to them is wanted. They are not cheap. Head hunters charge a fee of 30 to 50 per cent or so of the first year’s salary, but they can be quite cost-effective.

Executive search consultants first approach their own contacts in the industry or profession concerned. The good ones have an extensive range of contacts and their own data bank. They will also have researchers who will identify suitable people who may fit the specification or can provide a lead to someone else who may be suitable. The more numerous the contacts, the better the executive search consultant.

When a number of potentially suitable and interested people have been assembled, a fairly relaxed and informal meeting takes place and the consultant forwards a short-list with full reports on candidates to the client.

There are some good and some not so good executive search consultants. Do not use one unless a reliable recommendation is obtained.

Recruitment process outsourcing

‘Recruitment process outsourcing’ (RPO) is the term used when an organization commissions a provider to take responsibility for the end-to-end delivery of the recruitment process covering all vacancies or a selection of them. This involves liaising with hiring managers to define requirements and specifications, deciding on the best ways to attract candidates, processing

applications, and setting up and facilitating interviews. Some companies do not hand over all recruitment, using RPO only for high-volume vacancies and retaining responsibility for senior and specialist jobs.

The advantages of RPO are that it can save time, bring outside expertise to bear on recruitment problems and free up HR for more value-adding activities. The disadvantage is the perception by some HR people and line managers that the provider is too remote to deal with the real issues and that there is a danger of losing control.

Educational and training establishments

Many jobs can, of course, be filled by school leavers. For some organizations the major source of recruits for training schemes will be universities and training establishments, as well as schools. Graduate recruitment is a major annual exercise for some companies, which go to great efforts to produce glossy brochures, visit campuses on the 'milk run' and use elaborate sifting and selection procedures to vet candidates, including 'biodata' and assessment centres, as described later in this chapter.

Processing applications

When the vacancy or vacancies have been advertised and a fair number of replies received, the typical sequence of steps required to process applications is as follows:

1. List the applications on a control sheet setting out name, date application received and actions taken (reject, hold, interview, short-list, offer).
2. Send a standard acknowledgement letter to each applicant unless an instant decision can be made to interview or reject.
3. The applicant may be asked to complete and return an application form by post or by e-mail to supplement a letter or CV. This ensures that all applicants are considered on the same basis – it can be very difficult to plough through a pile of letters, often ill-written and badly organized. Even CVs may be difficult to sift although their quality is likely to be higher if the applicant has been receiving advice from an 'outplacement' consultant, ie one who specializes in finding people jobs. However, to save time, trouble, expense and irritation, many recruiters prefer to make a decision on the initial letter plus CV where it is quite clear that an applicant meets or does not meet the specification, rather than ask for a form. For more senior jobs it is generally advisable to ask for a CV.
4. Compare the applications with the key criteria in the person specification and sort them initially into three categories: possible, marginal and unsuitable.
5. Scrutinize the possibles again to draw up a short-list for interview. This scrutiny could be carried out by the HR or recruitment specialist, and the manager. The numbers on the

short-list should ideally be between four and eight. Fewer than four leaves relatively little choice (although such a limitation may be forced on you if an insufficient number of good applications have been received). More than eight will mean that too much time is spent on interviewing and there is a danger of diminishing returns setting in.

6. Draw up an interviewing programme. The time you should allow for the interview will vary according to the complexity of the job. For a fairly routine job, 30 minutes or so should suffice. For a more senior job, 60 minutes or more is required. It is best not to schedule too many interviews in a day – if you try to carry out more than five or six exacting interviews you will quickly run out of steam and do neither the interviewee nor your company any justice. It is advisable to leave about 15 minutes between interviews to write up notes and prepare for the next one.
7. Invite the candidates to interview, using a standard letter where large numbers are involved. At this stage, candidates should be asked to complete an application form, if they have not already done so. There is much to be said at this stage for sending candidates more details of the organization and the job so that you do not have to spend too much time going through this information at the interview.
8. Review the remaining possibles and marginals and decide if any are to be held in reserve. Send reserves a standard ‘holding’ letter and send the others a standard rejection letter. The latter should thank candidates for the interest shown and inform them briefly, but not too brusquely, that they have not been successful. A typical reject letter might read as follows:

Since writing to you on... we have given careful consideration to your application for the above position. I regret to inform you, however, that we have decided not to ask you to attend for an interview. We should like to thank you for the interest you have shown.

Biodata

A highly structured method of sifting applications is provided by the use of biodata. These are items of biographical data that are criterion-based (ie they relate to established criteria in such terms as qualifications and experience that indicate that individuals are likely to be suitable). These are objectively scored and, by measurements of past achievements, predict future behaviour.

The items of biodata consist of demographic details (sex, age and family circumstances), education and professional qualifications, previous employment history and work experience, positions of responsibility outside work, leisure interests and career/job motivation. These items are weighted according to their relative importance as predictors, and a range of scores is allocated to each one. The biodata questionnaire (essentially a detailed application form) obtains information on each item, which is then scored.

Biodata are most useful when a large number of applicants are received for a limited number of posts. Cut-off scores can then be determined, based on previous experience. These scores would indicate who should be accepted for the next stage of the selection process and who should be rejected, but they would allow for some possible candidates to be held until the final cut-off score can be fixed after the first batch of applicants have been screened.

Biodata criteria and predictors are selected by job and functional analysis, which produces a list of competences. The validity of these items as predictors and the weighting to be given to them are established by analysing the biodata of existing employees who are grouped into high or low performers. Weights are allocated to items according to the discriminating power of the response.

Biodata questionnaires and scoring keys are usually developed for specific jobs in an organization. Their validity compares reasonably well with other selection instruments but they need to be developed and validated with great care and they are only applicable when large groups of applicants have to be screened.

Application forms

Application forms set out the information on a candidate in a standardized format. They provide a structured basis for drawing up short-lists, the interview itself and for the subsequent actions in offering an appointment and in setting up personnel records. An example of a form is given in Figure 31.2.

The following suggestions have been made by Pioro and Baum (2005) on how to use application forms more effectively:

- Decide what the criteria for selection are and how these will be assessed by use of the application form.
- Keep questions clear, relevant and non-discriminatory.
- Ask for only the bare minimum of personal details.
- Widen your pool of applicants by offering different options and guidance for completing and viewing application forms.

Selection methods

The aim of selection is to assess the suitability of candidates by predicting the extent to which they will be able to carry out a role successfully. It involves deciding on the degree to which the characteristics of applicants in terms of their competencies, experience, qualifications, education and training match the person specification. It also involves using this assessment to make a choice between candidates.

APPLICATION FORM						
Surname:			First name:			
Address:						
Tel: (home)		Tel: (work)		E-Mail: (personal)		
Position applied for:						
Education						
Dates		Name of secondary school, college or university	Main subjects taken	Qualifications		
From	To					
Specialized training recieved						
Other qualifications and skills (including languages, keyboard skills, current driving licence, etc)						
Employment history (give details of all positions held since completing full-time education; start with your present or most recent position and work back)						
Dates		Name of employer, address and nature of business including any service in the armed forces	Position and summary of main duties	Starting and leaving rate of pay	Reasons for leaving or wanting to leave	
From	To					
Add any coments you wish to make to support your application						
I confirm that the information given on this application form is correct						
Signature of applicant _____ Date _____						

Figure 31.2 Example of application form (compressed)

The so-called ‘classic trio’ of selection methods consists of application forms, interviews and references. But to these should be added selection tests and assessment centres. Application forms were described earlier and the various types of interviews and assessment centres are described below, as is the dubious technique of graphology. The use of references is considered in the next section of this chapter. Interviewing techniques and psychological tests are dealt with separately in Chapters 32 and 33.

Individual interviews

The individual interview is the most familiar method of selection. It involves face-to-face discussion and provides the best opportunity for the establishment of close contact – rapport – between the interviewer and the candidate. A structured interview, as described in Chapter 32, is one that is built around a set of predetermined questions that may be related to the competencies required as set out in the person specification or typical situations faced by holders of the role for which the candidate is being considered. If only one interviewer is used, there is more scope for a biased or superficial decision, and this is one reason for using a second interviewer or an interviewing panel.

Interviewing panels

Two or more people gathered together to interview one candidate may be described as an ‘interviewing panel’. The most typical situation is that in which an HR specialist and line managers see the candidate at the same time. This has the advantage of enabling information to be shared and reducing overlaps. The interviewers can discuss their joint impressions of the candidate’s behaviour at the interview and modify or enlarge any superficial judgements.

Selection boards or panels

Selection boards are more formal and, usually, larger interviewing panels convened because there are a number of parties interested in the selection decision. Their only advantage is that they enable a number of different people to have a look at the applicants and compare notes on the spot. The disadvantages are that the questions tend to be unplanned and delivered at random, the prejudices of a dominating member of the board can overwhelm the judgements of the other members, and the candidates are unable to do justice to themselves because they are seldom allowed to expand. Selection boards tend to favour the confident and articulate candidate, but in doing so they may miss the underlying weaknesses of a superficially impressive individual. They can also underestimate the qualities of those who happen to be less effective in front of a formidable board, although they would be fully competent in the less formal or less artificial situations that would face them in the job.

Assessment centres

Assessment centres assemble a group of candidates and use a range of assessment techniques over a concentrated period (one or two days) with the aim of providing a more comprehensive and balanced view of the suitability of individual members of the group.

Because an assessment centre gives the opportunity to observe actual behaviour in work-related situations, some 'reality' scenarios from the company may be used. Assessment centres are based on an understanding of the competencies they are trying to investigate and use systematic methods for measuring the degree to which each applicant fulfils them. The main characteristics of assessment centres are that:

- exercises are used to capture and simulate the key dimensions of the job. These may include one-to-one role-plays and group exercises; it is assumed that performance in these simulations predicts behaviour on the job;
- candidates are interviewed and tested;
- performance is measured in several dimensions in terms of the competencies required to achieve the target level of performance in a particular job or at a particular level in the organization;
- several candidates or participants are assessed together to allow interaction and to make the experience more open and participative;
- several trained assessors or observers are used to increase the objectivity of assessments.

Assessment centres provide opportunities for indicating the extent to which candidates match the culture of the organization. This will be established by observation of their behaviour in different but typical situations, and the range of the tests and structured interviews that are part of the proceedings. Assessment centres also give candidates a better feel for the organization and its values so that they can decide for themselves whether or not they are likely to fit.

The case for assessment centres is that they obtain much more information about candidates than conventional interviews, even when these are supplemented by tests. But research by Schmidt and Hunter (1998) has shown that, on their own, the ability of assessment centres to predict how well someone will perform (predictive validity) is lower than that of intelligence tests combined with structured interviews. Assessment centres are expensive and time-consuming and their use tends to be restricted to large organizations for managerial positions or for graduates.

Graphology

Graphology is a method of drawing conclusions from a candidate's handwriting about his or her personality as a basis for making predictions about future performance in a role. The use of graphology as a selection aid is extensive in France and some other European countries but

uncommon in the UK. A number of validity studies have shown that it is a very poor predictor of job performance. Schmidt and Hunter (1998) analysed a number of research projects on the effectiveness of graphology and concluded that whatever limited information about personality or job performance there is in handwriting samples comes from the content and not the characteristics of the handwriting. Variations in handwriting are caused by genetic differences between individuals in fine motor coordination of the finger muscles, not their personality.

Choice of selection methods

There is a choice to be made between the selection methods. The most important criterion is the predictive validity of the method or combination of methods as measured by its predictive validity coefficient – perfect validity is 1.0; no validity is 0.0.

The meta-analysis of the validity of different selection methods conducted by Schmidt and Hunter (1998), which covered 85 years of research findings, produced the following predictive validity coefficients:

Intelligence tests and structured interviews	.63
Intelligence tests and unstructured interviews	.55
Assessment centres and structured interviews	.53
Intelligence tests only	.51
Structured interviews only	.51
Unstructured interviews only	.38
Assessment centres only	.37
Graphology only	.02

Robertson and Smith (2001) added personality assessments to this list, with a validity coefficient of .37

Schmidt and Hunter (1998) established that the reason why intelligence (general mental ability or GMA) is such a good predictor of job performance is because ‘more intelligent people acquire job knowledge more rapidly and acquire more of it and it is this knowledge of how to perform the job that causes their job performance to be higher’. Their research clearly indicates that the combination of structured interviews (as described in Chapter 32) and intelligence tests is the most effective in terms of predictive validity.

Dealing with recruitment problems

Every experienced HR professional who is responsible for recruitment and selection will occasionally come across a vacancy that is particularly difficult to fill. In this situation any compromise that involves appointing someone who does not meet the specification must be avoided. To deal with the problem constructively it is necessary to take the following actions.

Dealing with recruitment problems

- Ensure that all the possible sources of candidates have been used.
- Consider any ways in which the advertisement or website entry could be made more attractive.
- Check that the person specification is realistic – that the requirements have not been overstated.
- Consider whether it might be necessary to improve the package offered to candidates – check market rates to ensure that the level of pay and benefits are competitive.
- In discussion with the line manager, examine the possibility of reshaping the role to increase its attractiveness.
- If the worst comes to the worst, and again in discussion with the manager, consider alternative ways of carrying out the work involved with existing staff.

References and offers

After the interviewing and testing procedure has been completed, a provisional decision to make an offer by telephone or in writing can be made. This is normally ‘subject to satisfactory references’ and the candidate should, of course, be told that these will be taken up. If there is more than one eligible candidate for a job it may be advisable to hold one or two people in reserve. Applicants often withdraw, especially those whose only purpose in applying for the job was to carry out a ‘test marketing’ operation, or to obtain a lever with which to persuade their present employers to value them more highly.

Checking applications

It is a sad fact that applicants all too often misinform their prospective employers about their education, qualifications and employment record. This was confirmed by a survey carried out by the CIPD (2008a), which found that 25 per cent of employers had to withdraw their offers because applicants had lied or misrepresented their application. It is always advisable to check with universities, professional institutes and previous employers that the facts given by applicants are correct. Other checks can be made such as:

- interview questions about actual (not hypothetical) experiences, with deep probing to ascertain the extent of the individual’s personal involvement, decision making and contribution;

- detailed application forms with open-ended questions about specific learning related to the skills, knowledge and competencies required for the vacancies under consideration;
- occupational health screening;
- identity check;
- electoral register check;
- credit reference agency check (especially appropriate for positions in the financial services sector);
- confirmation of previous employment with HM Revenue & Customs or through the Department of Work & Pensions;
- Criminal Records Bureau check;
- Companies House check (for directors); and
- fraud prevention check, including Cifas staff fraud database check (to prevent an employer unwittingly employing people previously dismissed for fraud somewhere else). Cifas is a not-for-profit fraud prevention service.

References

The main purpose of a reference is to obtain in confidence factual information about a prospective employee. This information is straightforward and essential. It is simply necessary to confirm the nature of the previous job, the period of time in employment, the reason for leaving (if relevant), the salary or rate of pay and, possibly, the attendance record.

Opinions about character, competence, performance and suitability are unreliable. Referees are reluctant to commit themselves and they are not in any position to assess suitability – only the prospective employer can do that. Personal referees are, of course, entirely useless. All they prove is that the applicant has at least one or two friends.

A written request for a reference could simply ask the previous employer to confirm the candidate's employment record. More precise answers may be obtained if a standard form is provided for the employer to complete. The questions asked on this form should be limited to the following:

- What was the period of employment?
- What was the job title?
- What work was carried out?
- What was the rate of pay or salary?

- How many days absence over the last 12 months?
- Would you re-employ (if not, why not)?

The last question is important, if it is answered honestly or at all.

Telephone references may save time and may be more reliable. They can be used as an alternative or in addition to written references. Ask factual questions only and keep a record of the conversation.

References – legal aspects

The key legal points that should be considered when asking for or giving references are:

- Once the decision has been made to make an offer, the letter should state that ‘this is a provisional offer subject to the receipt of satisfactory references’.
- It has been generally held that there is no common law duty on an employer to provide references for a serving or past employee unless there is a term to that effect in the employment contract. But it has been ruled (*Spring v. Guardian Assurance 1994*) that there might be a moral duty to provide a reference where it is ‘natural practice’ to require a reference from a previous employer before offering employment, and where the employee could not expect to enter that type of employment without a reference.
- If a reference contains a false or unsubstantiated statement that damages the reputation of the individual, action for damages may result.
- It is possible to succeed in a claim for damages if it can be shown that the reference provided was negligent because reasonable care had not been taken in preparing it, which includes ensuring that it is factually correct.

Confirming the offer

The final stage in the selection procedure is to confirm the offer of employment after satisfactory references have been obtained, and the applicant has passed the medical examination required for pension and life assurance purposes or because a certain standard of physical fitness is required for the work. The contract of employment should also be prepared at this stage.

Contracts of employment

The basic information that should be included in a written contract of employment varies according to the level of the job.

Follow-up

It is essential to follow up newly engaged employees to ensure that they have settled in and to check on how well they are doing. If there are any problems it is much better to identify them at an early stage rather than allowing them to fester.

Following up is also important as a means of checking on the selection procedure. If by any chance a mistake has been made, it is useful to find out how it happened so that the procedure can be improved. Misfits can be attributed to a number of causes, for example inadequate person specification, poor sourcing of candidates, weak advertising, poor interviewing techniques, inappropriate or invalidated tests, or prejudice on the part of the selector.

Recruitment and selection – key learning points

Defining requirements

Requirements are set out in the form of job descriptions or role profiles and person specifications. These provide the information required to draft advertisements, post vacancies on the internet, brief agencies or recruitment consultants and assess candidates by means of interviews and selection tests.

Recruitment planning

A recruitment plan will cover:

- the number and types of employees required to cater for expansion or new developments and make up for any deficits;
- the likely sources of candidates;
- plans for tapping alternative sources;
- how the recruitment programme will be conducted.

Analysing recruitment strengths and weaknesses

The analysis should cover such matters as the national or local reputation of the

organization, pay, employee benefits and working conditions, the intrinsic interest of the job, security of employment, opportunities for education and training, career prospects, and the location of the office or plant.

Analysing the requirement

- Establish how many jobs have to be filled and by when.
- Set out information on responsibilities and competency requirements.
- Consider where suitable candidates are likely to come from.
- Define the terms and conditions of the job (pay and benefits).
- Consider what is likely to attract good candidates.

Identifying sources of candidates

Initially, consideration should be given to internal candidates. An attempt can be made to persuade former employees to return to the organization or obtain suggestions from existing employees

Recruitment and selection – key learning points (continued)

(referrals). If these approaches do not work, the main sources of candidates are advertising, online recruiting, agencies and job centres, consultants, recruitment process outsourcing providers and direct approaches to educational establishments.

Advertising

Advertising has traditionally been the most obvious method of attracting candidates and it is still important, although many organizations are outsourcing recruitment to agencies or consultants or using online recruitment. The information in a recruitment advertisement should include:

- the organization;
- the job;
- the person required – qualifications, experience, etc;
- the pay and benefits offered;
- the location;
- the action to be taken.

Online recruitment

Online or e-recruitment uses the internet to advertise or 'post' vacancies, provide information about jobs and the organization and enable e-mail communication to take place between employers and candidates. The latter can apply for jobs online and can e-mail application forms and their CVs to employers or agencies. Tests can be completed online.

Using agencies and job centres

Agencies should be briefed carefully on what is wanted. They produce unsuitable candidates from time to time but the risk is reduced if they are clear about your requirements. The job centres operated by the government are mainly useful for manual and clerical workers and sales or call centre assistants.

Using recruitment consultants

Recruitment consultants generally advertise, interview and produce a short-list. They provide expertise and reduce workload.

Selection methods

The aim is to assess the suitability of candidates by predicting the extent to which they will be able to carry out a role successfully. It involves deciding on the degree to which the characteristics of applicants match the person specification and using this assessment to make a choice between candidates.

References and offers

After the interviewing and testing procedure has been completed, a provisional decision to make an offer by telephone or in writing can be made. This is normally 'subject to satisfactory references'. It is essential to check the information provided by candidates on qualifications and their work experience.

Questions

1. What is the difference between recruitment and selection?
2. What are the three 'classic' methods of recruitment and selection and what other approaches are available?
3. From the customer services director: 'We are proposing to open a new call centre on Wearside. We need 50 call centre operators and five supervisors by the end of the year and we want to expand to 200 operators and 18 supervisors by the following year. How do you propose that we should do this?'
4. From the HR director: 'Can you let me have any research evidence that indicates what the most successful approach to recruiting graduates, or combination of approaches, is likely to be?'
5. From the HR director: 'What are the advantages and disadvantages of internet recruiting?'
6. From the HR director: 'I have read that the amount of CV fraud is considerable and rising. What can we do to combat this?'

References

- CIPD (2008a) *Survey of Recruitment, Retention and Turnover*, CIPD, London
- Munro-Fraser, J (1954) *A Handbook of Employment Interviewing*, Macdonald and Evans, London
- Pioro, I and Baum, N (2005) How to design better job application forms, *People Management*, 16 June, pp 42–3
- Purcell, J, Kinnie, K, Hutchinson, S, Rayton, B and Swart, J (2003) *People and Performance: How people management impacts on organisational performance*, CIPD, London
- Robertson, I T and Smith, M (2001) Personnel selection, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 74 (4), pp 441–72
- Rodger, A (1952) *The Seven-point Plan*, National Institute of Industrial Psychology, London
- Schmidt, F L and Hunter, J E (1998) The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings, *Psychological Bulletin*, 124 (2), pp 262–74
- Wood, R and Payne, T (1998) *Competency-based Recruitment and Selection*, Wiley, Chichester