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RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES IN MANAGING/EFFECTING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment, as a human resource management function, is one of the activities that impact most critically on the performance of an organisation. While it is understood and accepted that poor recruitment decisions continue to affect organisational performance and limit goal achievement, it is taking a long time for public service agencies in many jurisdictions to identify and implement new, effective hiring strategies. In some areas, existing laws inhibit change; in others, the inhibiting factor is managerial inertia. This paper discusses some of the strategies that organisations can and do employ to ensure the existence of the best possible pool of qualified applicants from which they can fill vacancies as and when required. It will identify the advantages of each of the strategies, highlight the drawbacks of its use and offer suggestions for ensuring its utility.

INTRODUCTION

Acquiring and retaining high-quality talent is critical to an organisation's success. As the job market becomes increasingly competitive and the available skills grow more diverse, recruiters need to be more selective in their choices, since poor recruiting decisions can produce long-term negative effects, among them high training and development costs to minimise the incidence of poor performance and high turnover which, in turn, impact staff morale, the production of high quality goods and services and the retention of organisational memory. At worst, the organisation can fail to achieve its objectives thereby losing its competitive edge and its share of the market. Traditionally, Public Service organisations have had little need to worry about market share and increasing competition since they operate in a monopolistic environment. But in recent time, the emphasis on New Public Management/ Public Sector Management approaches has forced public organisations to pay closer attention to their service delivery as consumers have begun to expect and demand more for their tax dollars. As societies become more critical and litigious, public service organisations must seek all possible avenues for improving their output and providing the satisfaction their clients require and deserve. The provision of high-quality goods and services begins with the recruitment process.

Recruitment is described as "the set of activities and processes used to legally obtain a organisation can select each other in their own best short and long term interests".[1] In other words, the recruitment process provides the organisation with a pool of potentially qualified job candidates from which judicious selection can be made to fill vacancies. Successful recruitment begins with proper employment planning and forecasting. In this phase of the staffing process, an organisation formulates plans to fill or eliminate future job openings based on an analysis of future needs, the talent available within and outside of the organisation, and the current and anticipated resources that can be expended to attract and retain such talent. Organisations seeking recruits for base-level entry positions often require minimum qualifications and experience. These applicants are usually recent high school or university/ technical college graduates many of whom have not yet made clear decisions about future careers or are contemplating engaging in advanced academic activity. At the middle levels, senior administrative, technical and junior executive positions are often filled internally. The push for scarce, high-quality talent, often recruited from external sources, has usually been at the senior executive levels. Most organisations utilise both mechanisms to effect recruitment to all levels.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Successful recruitment involves the several processes of:

1. development of a policy on recruitment and retention and the systems that vie life to the policy[1]
2. needs assessment to determine the current and future human resource requirements of the organisation. If the activity is to be effective, the human resource requirements for each job category and functional division/unit of the organisation must be assessed and a priority assigned;
3. identification, within and outside the organisation, of the potential human resource pool and the likely competition for the knowledge and skills resident within it;
4. job analysis and job evaluation to identify the individual aspects of each job and calculate its relative worth;
5. assessment of qualifications profiles, drawn from job descriptions that identify responsibilities and required skills, abilities, knowledge and experience;
6. determination of the organisation's ability to pay salaries and benefits within a defined period;

Documenting the organisation's policy on recruitment, the criteria to be utilised and all house selection as it is when selection is made from external sources. Documentation satisfies the requirement of procedural transparency and leaves a trail that can easily be followed for audit and other purposes. Of special importance is documentation that is in conformity with Freedom of Information legislation (where such legislation exists), such as:

- criteria and procedures for the initial screening of applicants;
- criteria for generating long and short lists;
- criteria and procedures for the selection of interview panels;
- interview questions;
- interview scores and panelists' comments;
- results of tests (where administered);
- results of reference checks.

POSTING VACANCIES

As indicated earlier, job posting refers to the practice of publicising an open job to employees (often by literally posting it on bulletin boards) and listing its attributes, such as criteria of knowledge, qualification, skill and experience.[2] The purpose of posting vacancies is to bring to the attention of all interested persons (inside or out of the organisation) the jobs that are to be filled.

Before posting a vacancy, management needs to decide whether:

- it intends to retain the job in its present form and with its present title, remuneration and status;
- selected attributes of the job, for example, skill or experience, will change;
- there are sufficient qualified, potential applicants serving in other positions within the organisation who may be potential candidates for that job;
- the existing organisational policy on recruitment is still applicable (for example, whether referrals, by staff members, of friends and family are still an acceptable way of filling vacancies)
- the organisations stand to benefit more, in the long-term, from recruiting applicants from external sources.

Also necessary is the availability of a functional human resource information system that supports recruitment. An effective computerised system[3] would:

- flag imminent vacancies throughout the organisation to ensure that the recruitment process is timely;
- ensure that no candidates are lost but, instead, move through the process and are kept informed of their status;
- ensure that good candidates whose applications are pending are kept in touch to maintain their interest in the organisation;
- assist in analysing hiring, transfer and exit trends and provide other data that are helpful in planning, evaluating and auditing the recruitment process;
- identify any adverse impacts of the recruitment process on vulnerable groups (for example minorities, especially where Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action legislation exists)[4]

An organisation needs to analyse the benefits and disadvantages of recruiting its personnel through internal or external sources and, where the latter is selected, whether formal or informal systems should be used.

Recruiting from internal sources

There are sound reasons for recruiting from sources within the organisation:

- The ability of the recruit is known so it is easy to assess potential for the next level. By contrast, assessments of external recruits are based on less reliable sources, such as references, and relatively brief encounters, such as interviews.
- *"Insiders"* know the organisation, its strengths and weaknesses, its culture and, most of all, its people.
- Promotions from within build motivation and a sense of commitment to the organisation. Skilled and ambitious employees are more likely to become involved in developmental activities if they believe that these activities will lead to promotion.
- Internal recruitment is cheaper and quicker than advertising in various media and interviewing *"outsiders"*. Time spent in training and socialisation is also reduced.
- At the same time, several disadvantages exist:
- Sometimes it is difficult to find the "right" candidate within and the organisation may settle for an employee who possesses a less than ideal mix of competencies.
- If the vacancies are being caused by rapid expansion of the organisation there may be an insufficient supply of qualified individuals above the entry level. This may result in people being promoted before they are ready, or not being allowed to stay in a position long enough to learn how to do the job well.
- Infighting, inbreeding, and a shortage of varied perspectives and interests may reduce organisational flexibility and growth, and resistance to change by those who have an interest in maintaining the status quo may present long term problems.
- In times of rapid growth and during transitions, the organisation may promote from within into managerial positions, regardless of the qualifications of incumbents.

Recruiting from external sources

External recruiting methods can be grouped into two classes: informal and formal. *Informal recruiting methods* tap a smaller market than formal methods. These methods may include rehiring former employees and choosing from among those "walk-in" applicants whose unsolicited résumés had been retained on file. The use of referrals also constitutes an informal hiring method. Because they are relatively inexpensive to use and can be implemented quickly, informal recruiting methods are commonly used for hiring clerical and other base-level recruits who are more likely than other groups to have submitted unsolicited applications. Former students who participated in internship programmes may also be easily and cheaply accessed.

Formal methods of external recruiting entail searching the labour market more widely for candidates with no previous connection to the organisation. These methods have traditionally included newspaper/magazine/journal advertising, the use of employment agencies and executive search firms, and college recruitment. More often, now, job/career fairs and e-Recruiting are reaching the job seeker market. Posting vacancies externally through the various arms of the media[5] or via employment agencies reaches a wider audience and may turn up a greater number of potential candidates from which the organisation can choose. Recruiting firms/employment agencies are gaining in popularity, especially in the search for management level/executive talent. Recruiting via this medium is expensive, whether the organisation uses a contingency firm or has one on retainer. Of course, it is possible to for an organisation to reduce the risks and high costs of recruitment by maintaining a small cadre of full-time, permanent employees and meeting an unexpected and temporary need for staff through the use of *ad hoc* and short-term contract workers who come to the position already trained.

ON-LINE APPLICATIONS/RECRUITING ON THE INTERNET

Using the Internet is faster and cheaper than many traditional methods of recruiting. Jobs can be posted on Internet sites for a modest amount (less than in the print media), remain there for periods of thirty or sixty days or more - at no additional cost - and are available twenty-four hours a day. Candidates can view detailed information about the job and the organisation and then respond electronically. Most homes and workplaces are now using computerized equipment for communication; the Internet is rapidly becoming the method of choice for accessing and sharing information. The prevalence of e-advertising has made it easier. The Internet speeds up the hiring process in three basis stages:

Faster posting of jobs

- The wait for a suitable date and a prominent place in the print media is eliminated. The time lag that exists between the submission of information to the media house and its appearance in print disappears. On the internet, the advertisement appears immediately and can be kept alive for as long as the recruiter requires it.

Faster applicant response

- Jobs posted on the Internet and requiring responses via the same medium receive responses on the same day.

Faster processing of résumés

- An applicant sending a résumé electronically can immediately have the application processed, receive an acknowledgement, be screened electronically, and have details of the application and résumé dispatched to several managers at the same time.[6]

On-line recruiting also provides access to passive job seekers, that is, individuals who already have a job but would apply for what appears a better one that is advertised on the Internet. These job seekers may be of a better quality since they are not desperate for a job change as are the active job seekers who may be frustrated, disgruntled workers looking for a new position. Companies that are likely to advertise on-line usually have a website that allows potential candidates to learn about the company before deciding whether to apply, thus lowering the incidence time-wasting through the submission of unsuitable applications. The website can be used as a tool to encourage potential job seekers to build an interest in joining the organisation.

Internet recruiting is not all positive, though; there are drawbacks for unwary users:

- Some applicants still place great value on face-to-face interactions in the hiring process. Such applicants are likely to ignore jobs posted, impersonally, on-line.
- Companies are overwhelmed by the volume of résumés posted on the Internet. This can, in fact, lengthen the short-listing process. If the screening process is not well done, the quantity of applications/résumés logged-on may be more of a hindrance to the process that an aid to selection.
- Job seekers who demand confidentiality in the recruitment process may be reluctant to use the Internet as a job search mechanism.[7]
- For effectiveness in the use of the strategy of e-Recruiting,

companies are advised to: ~;

- thoroughly assess the service level provided by Job Sites to ensure that they maintain the level they claim to provide;
- enhance the Corporate Web Site as a tool to encourage potential job seekers to become interested in joining the company;
- take advantage of the fact that Internet job advertisements have no space limitations so recruiters can use longer job descriptions to fully describe the company, job requirements and working conditions offered;
- use valid Search Engines that will sort candidates effectively, but will not discriminate against any persons or groups;
- encourage employees to e-mail job advertisements to friends;
- design and implement a successful e-Recruitment strategy.[8]

COLLEGE RECRUITMENT

College recruiting – sending an employer's representatives to college campuses to pre-screen applicants and create an applicant pool from that college's graduating class – is an important source of management trainees, promotable [entry-level] candidates, and professional and technical employees.[9] To get the best out of this hiring strategy, the organisation and its career opportunities must be made to stand out. Human resource professionals are aware that few college students and potential graduates know where their careers will take them over the next fifteen to twenty years. Therefore many of the criteria used by students to select the first job may be quite arbitrary.[10]

College recruitment offers an opportunity for recruiters to select the potential employees with the personal, technical and professional competencies they require in their organisation. The personal competencies identified may include, inter alia, a positive work ethic, strong interpersonal skills, leadership capacity and an ability to function well in a work team. The opportunity to discuss a student's current strengths and potential future value to an organisation cannot be replicated in any other setting. Two major advantages of this strategy are the **cost**, and the **convenience**. Unfortunately, suitable candidates become available only at certain times of the year, which may not always suit the needs of the hiring organisation. Another major disadvantage is the lack of experience and the inflated expectations of new graduates and the cost of hiring graduates for entry-level positions that may not require a college degree.[11] To make college recruiting effective, the recruiting organisation must first determine how many and which schools should be targeted. It may prove cost-effective to do intensive recruiting in a few, carefully-selected institutions, establishing a presence and building the organisation's reputation among students and faculty. Timely and frequent dissemination of literature, the offer of internships and the award of prizes for academic and/or social prowess help to advertise the organisation as a preferred place of employment. Subsequent invitations to the organisation's offices, made to students identified as potential employees, may serve to solidify the firm's image.[12]

Public service organizations are usually unable to compete financially with their private Sector counterparts and are therefore less likely to pay competitive salaries. However, most public service agencies provide their employees with a wealth and range of experiences that are available nowhere else. It is for that reason that many college graduates use the Public Service as an employer of first resort to gain the experiences that will make them marketable in the short term. There may also be questions about the legality of the on-line application form.[13] If this strategy were to be employed, public service recruiters must first decide on the criteria that should guide the process. The Public Service is seldom immediately seen as an attractive employer, mainly because salaries are uncompetitive. Except for those students who have a commitment to public service, the top ten percent of college graduates will select the Private Sector as the employer of choice, partly because of the prestige value but primarily because of the remuneration package and because the recruiters may have been more successful in marketing their company.[14] College recruitment is relatively expensive[15] and time consuming for the recruiting company. The process involves screening the candidate, that is, determining whether he/she is worthy of further consideration and marketing the company as a preferred place of employment. An alternate strategy for college recruitment is the career planning workshop. These activities are usually associated with adolescent school leavers. They do not immediately produce ready candidates for the job market but provide the opportunity for an organisation to present itself as an employer worthy of consideration.

Job fairs

The concept of a job fair is to bring those interested in finding a job into those companies who are searching for applicants.[16] Job fairs are open fora at which employers can exhibit the best their companies have to offer so that job seekers can make informed choices. They are considered one of the most effective ways for job seekers to land jobs. At the job fair, employers have a large pool of candidates on which to draw, while job seekers have the opportunity to shop around for dozens – sometimes hundreds – of employers, all in one place.[17] Notwithstanding the fact that the atmosphere at the fair is more relaxed than at an interview, employers are still on the lookout for qualified, potential employees who have interest, dedication and initiative.

Maintaining fairness/equity in the recruitment process

It is often difficult to ensure and maintain fairness/equity in the recruitment process although, in every jurisdiction, there are laws that protect individuals and vulnerable groups from the negative impact of discriminatory practices. Where necessary, systems detailed procedures and processes exist or must be established to minimize the discrimination.[18] Each country designates/identifies a group or groups for special notice; women, visible minorities and the disabled are usual targets. The Government of Canada, in articulating its "*Employment Equity Act and Regulations*", identified four designated groups as employment equity targets: *women, Aboriginal people, members of visible minority groups, persons with disabilities.* In the legislation, managers' responsibilities for employment equity are stated as:

- Ensuring effective overall performance and continuous progress of the employment equity goals within the operation;
- Achieving, fostering and maintaining a representative workforce;
- Showing leadership in employment equity and demonstrating commitment to it by ensuring that discrimination and stereotyping are not tolerated; and
- Informing and educating employees in the organisation about employment equity and diversity.[19]

It is the goal of every jurisdiction to minimise or eliminate any instance of obvious discrimination against individuals or groups. In discussing policies on employment equity, Carleton University explains: "Employment equity policies and programs are about fairness in the workplace, not about reverse discrimination. Fairness is achieved when no one is denied employment opportunity and no one benefits for reasons unrelated to ability. Employment equity programs attempt to change the composition of the work force so that employees better reflect the community. The facts (both historical and current) show that members of the four designated groups [mentioned above] face discrimination, enjoy less access to educational programs and training, and are often denied employment and promotions even when they have the necessary skills and experience."[20]

The University's policies give special attention, inter alia, to the existence of systemic barriers[21] and instances of *intentional discrimination*[22] in the process of recruitment. Service Commissions were enshrined in the Independence Constitutions of the territories of the Commonwealth Caribbean and given inter alia, the power to recruit/appoint persons into the Public Service and, in so doing, reduce the influence of politicians on the staffing process.[23] To this end, entry into the Public Service follows the procedures of:

- application on prescribed forms;
- selection on the basis of seniority of application;[24]
- application of age limits for entry into certain defined grades/classes;[25]
- the use of written examinations and/or competitive interviews

as the basis for permanent appointment to certain grades/classes.

The rules established by the Commissions enforce compliance in an attempt to minimise or eliminate the possibility of bias in staffing on the basis of race/ethnicity, creed, age, social status or physical disability.

CONCLUSION

In all the public service jurisdictions, new approaches to recruitment are being used. In many territories, the strategies are manual but, as automated methods become more pervasive, those mechanisms that support its use will assume greater popularity. Whatever the strategies selected for use, the objective is to recruit the most qualified, committed individuals into the organisations and ensure that the provision of government services to the public is timely and effective, that the goods are of consistent high quality and that the organisations achieve the objectives for which they have been established.

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