Analysis on "Why?" and "Where" Recruitment Process Sometimes Fails Organizations: A Focus on Shortlisting/Screening.

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Abstract:

The main aim of this study is to analyze the complexity of a recruitment process that causes process biases in the choice of a candidate and suggest a possible approach that can ease one of the critical steps, that is shortlisting or screening, in a recruitment process cycle, to hire a suitable candidate. This process, if not carefully worked out, shall lead to poor decision-making by the Human Resource Management (HRM) team of recruitment in the screening of suitable candidates for interviews. The data sources were collected from existing literature and body of knowledge through desk surveys as well as interviews with recruiters in various organizations and business firms. A Qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study. The method used in collecting the information was Structured and unstructured questionnaires. Judgmental sampling technique was adopted in order to have a true representative of the population. The organizations "**NC**" (a regulatory body in the Republic of South Sudan), **"NP"** a government corporation as well as company "**JN**" which is an Internet Services Provider (ISP), and organization "**ARD-Af**" which is an upcoming civil society organization in South Sudan were chosen as samples for the study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has decided to make use of an Excel sheet for the data analysis. The professional attainment of the respondents and their degree of awareness towards shortlisting methods applied in the recruitment process have been highlighted.

Keywords: recruitment, bias, questionnaire, survey, judgment, data analysis, screening, shortlisting, nepotism, HRM, organization, and samples.

INTRODUCTION

HRM Department is very important in an organization structure. It ensures that the organization recruits suitable candidates for a job, and officials are given appropriate remunerations commensurate to their time, effort, and expertise (Szalados, 2021). The Department further guides an organization on matters of compliance with the legal instruments of the organization and the country of operation. It is within the HRM Department that job needs are identified, capacity-building programs are initiated and performance appraisals are conducted, counseling of officials with mental and other challenges is done among others, to guarantee safety in the workplace and fair treatment when it comes to disciplinary measures (Radin, et al., 2019). These are crucial exercises to improve productivity in an organization, reduce time and resource waste, limit turnover, and sustain operations in terms of workforce stability and retention. Recruitment is guided by the needs of the organization in terms of increasing demand for labor resulting from huge or increasing work activities that can't be done by the existing workforce or venturing into new business

areas that require new skills, level of competition in the economy, the numbers of laborers, criteria to attract the much-needed talent, etc. (Tahir, et al., 2020 & Geetha and Bhanu, 2018). This is to ensure that the rightful and best candidates are sourced and selected for the job.

Shortlisting or candidate screening for interviews is one of the critical recruitment processes that requires a high level of attention to identify and select suitable candidates, among the applicants, for the next step in the process i.e. interviews. It is a necessary recruitment step aimed at assessing the relevance of the applicants to the job and identifying the most qualified applicants from among the applicants for interviews (Gamage, 2014). In some cases, this process is paid less attention, especially in the private sector where company owners (sole proprietors and other CEOs) decide to offer jobs without all due screening processes. This makes it quite difficult to measure the development progress of the employee in terms of skills and knowledge and at the same time, challenging to develop a capacity-building program for the employee. It is at this recruitment step that suitable applicants that closely match the job offer (requirements) can be selected for an interview and subsequently yield a positive result where at least a competent candidate shall be selected for a job after the interviews.

Therefore, the HRM team identifies job needs and recruits, terminates, maintains order amongst the workforce, manages relationships among employees and with the organization including clients, and aligns individual employee values and goals with that of the organization as well as creates a balance between employee work-life and live conditions (Ralph, 2023). Recruitment is generally very necessary and essential in an organization because it categorically sets processes for selecting the best candidates suitable for the job offer.

In the interest of confidentiality and non-exposure of the organizations cited or analyzed, some of which are government entities, letters are used in this script to represent the organizations.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Recruitment is a complex process that is done in various steps/stages. Each stage matters in selecting a suitable candidate. Job applicants' Shortlisting is one of the tedious and critical steps of the whole process of recruitment. The challenge is that most organizations tend to ignore this step and rush to interview almost every applicant. This reduces the chances of selecting the right candidate for a job. The greatest problem lies in sorting and shortlisting the applicants' CVs and files while filtering out candidates who don't match the job criteria or job requirements. Biases normally happen at this stage where the faith of recruiters performing this task is tested in terms of ethics (partiality and integrity). Mistakes normally happen here (at this step of the recruitment process). Where recruiters fail to screen CVs and attached files effectively resulting in the unfair decision of sending less talented candidates for interviews which may subsequently lead to the risk of losing out potential and suitable candidates for a position.

The most common challenges facing recruiters or organizations during the recruitment process are majorly those described by Tochukwu Christian Nwokwu; These include:

> *"brain drain and lack of qualified people in the local pool, nepotism, and favoritism, political interference, change in the business model of the organization, unavailability of human resources planning, costs associated with recruitment, use of information technology in advertising, high labor turnover, unemployment, geographical locations of jobs and the geographical locations of the candidates applying for the jobs, and lack of skills and expertise in the labor market: for example; when a company discovers the fact or when the incumbent*

fails to perform, the company is then forced to re-advertise the job and this is costly both in terms of time and money" (Nwokwu, T. C. 2020).

These are common problems affecting recruiters in the developing world and they tend to negatively impact the outcome of recruitment, sometimes with a lot of bias or poor screening.

OBJECTIVE OF THE ANALYSIS

The research objective is to understand screening (shortlisting) tools that risk offering jobs to less suitable candidates and suggest a simple mechanism that can ease the shortlisting process and produce reliable results.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

This paper contains terminologies that are commonly used by organizations when it comes to recruitment or human resource management. The use of the terminologies in this paper refers to the meanings established hereunder:

- **Recruitment;** process of looking for and hiring candidates for a specific position or job opening with an organization.
- **Shortlisting;** the process of reviewing job applications through established criteria and selecting the applicants that meet the job condition/requirements and are suitable for interviews.
- **Organization;** a group of individuals or entities who decide and organize themselves to work together to achieve a common goal and or objectives.
- **HRM;** An approach or strategic technique employed by organizations for personnel management in terms of organizing, coordinating, and managing their performance to meet their set mini-goals or objectives and accomplish overall institutional mission, goals, and objectives.
- **HRM Team;** personnel recruited by an organization to oversee the workforce in terms of their recruitment, welfare, job needs, discipline, termination etc.
- **Recruiters;** those personnel charged with various steps during the recruitment process including application receivers and pre-screeners, 'shortlisters', interviewers, and appointment decision-makers within or outside of an organization.
- **Candidate;** an individual who has expressed interest, in writing, in a job offer by an organization.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANALYSIS

The study shall contribute to the existing body of knowledge in HRM. It shall unlock some of the challenges recruiters face during the recruitment process, organizations' sufferings resulting from poor recruitment or screening process, and suggest a better approach to reduce biases during recruitment, especially during the shortlisting step/stage which is one of the critical steps in the recruitment process.

EXISTING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE ON CANDIDATE SCREENING AS ONE OF THE STEPS IN RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Organizations normally establish a human resources management (HRM) department for the purposes of effective hiring, personnel management, and termination. The recruitment process is complex and is done through multiple steps that require keen attention to the job to be done and the requirements to attract and retain suitable candidates. This is the reason for establishing a Unit or Department of competent HRM team to handle the recruitment process for the organization and enhance performance, productivity, and

or competition (Anwar, & Abdullah, 2021).

Shortlisting or screening is one of the fundamental exercises or steps in the recruitment process where the pre-screening of suitable candidates is based on his/her application details (CV and academic credentials). The applicant credentials are analyzed comparative to the job offer or requirements (Ifeanyichukwu, & Haido, 2024). It is the immediate step taken the receive all applications by the recruiting team or HRM team. It is majorly concerned with identifying and selecting the most suitable and eligible candidates for the job offer who shall be recommended for interview. As discovered in the study of Ifeanyichukwu, & Haido in the works of Nwizu (2002), that this exercise requires test-tools to be used for selecting suitable applicants. Nwizu identified two test-tools including competitive and non-competitive tests. The competitive test is for a formal process of assessment while the non-competitive test is an informal assessment tool that is often applied for internal staff screening, especially, when recruitment is done internally or a job post is primarily or allows internal staff to apply (Ifeanyichukwu, & Haido, 2024).

Shortlisting in a general context is an exercise of sorting and eliminating applicants whose application credentials are assessed as unfit for the job offer and organizational needs. In the works of Shokan (1995) outlined Ifeanyichukwu, & Haido, (2024), some considerations and tools must be put in place to conduct screening or shortlisting. These include establishing an application registry (covering documents submitted by an applicant). Then, the application review must consider looking into the content of the application letter, curriculum vitae, reference or background checks, and feedback information. Other considerations during the shortlisting exercise include interviews, psychological tests, aptitude tests as well as medical and physical fitness examinations, etc. in the findings of Ifeanyichukwu, & Haido, (2024), Akinwale (1999) viewed that staff screening should be more concerned with the processing of applications to determine suitable candidate or make an appropriate choice and that it should be based on the job advertisement content. It is at this stage (step) that the probability of selecting and hiring the right candidate for the job, who shall positively impact the organization's performance in terms of enhancing efficiency and productivity, is identified and processed for further tests. (Gamage, 2014).

COMMON RECRUITMENT PROCESS CYCLE

In the recent past, most institutions have adopted a six or eight-step process of recruitment including Preparing, Sourcing, Screening/Shortlisting, Selecting, Hiring, and Onboarding. Other added skill assessment and background checks are additional steps in the process, although, in the previous steps, skill assessment and background checks are part of the Selecting step.

Examples of the "6-step" recruitment cycle:
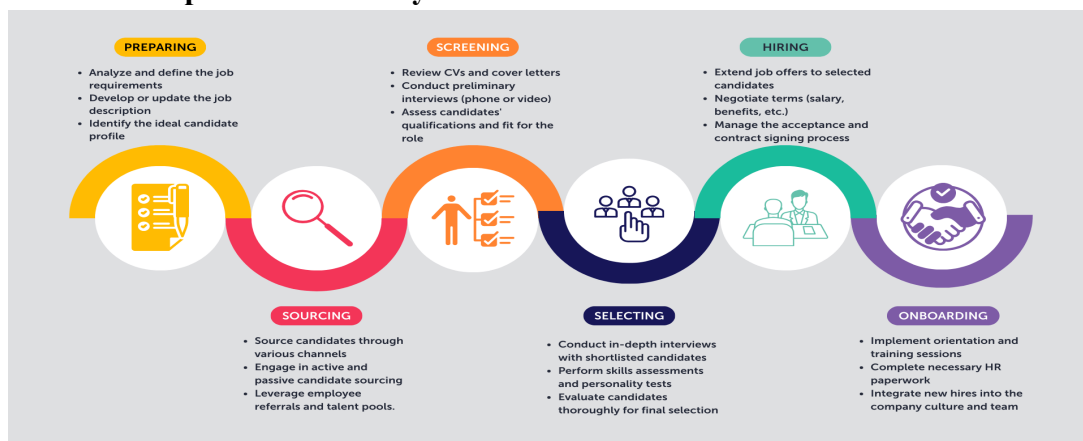
Source: Anja Zojceska. (2018).
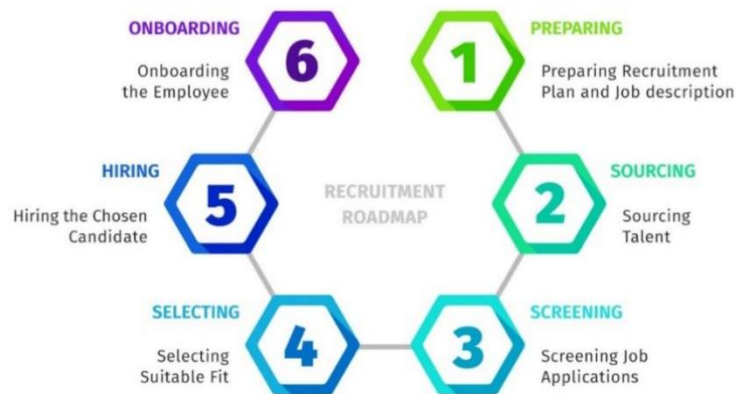
Source: HR University (n.d)

Delimiting the recruitment steps in the traditional "six-step" process:

Step 1: Job Preparation

Defining the job and its requirements in terms of skills and knowledge needed and the experience levels of the suitable candidate. All other Job details including positioning within the organization structure and proposed remuneration, budget availability or plan for the job, urgency of the job, approvals etc. must be prepared.

Step 2: Sourcing;

Advertising (could be internal or external or both) through print and other forms of media to source the right talent for the job. All requirements, application procedures, position status within the organization structure, deadline for application etc must be clearly stated in the job advert/announcement. Additional information sources about the organization should be included when necessary.

Step 3: Shortlisting/Screening;

Reviewing the applications and eliminating the un-eligible applicants and recommending those who met the minimum and maximum requirements for the job for interviews (CV content to be thoroughly analyzed and compared to attached supporting documents including reference checks. Conducting interviews to recommend further those who pass the interview test (could be oral, written or both)

Step 4: Selecting;

Decide on the few recommended candidates who passed the interviews and identify the best candidates to be offered the job. Consider the job requirements and other additional factors such as the candidate's conduct, acceptance of remuneration package, work experience in the relevant job, understanding of the job and organization, value addition he/she shall bring into the organization, hobbies, etc.

Step 5: Hiring;

Communicate the offer to the successful candidate selected for the job and issue an offer letter. Negotiate and develop a binding contract that can be signed by both the recruiting organization and the successful candidate offered the job.
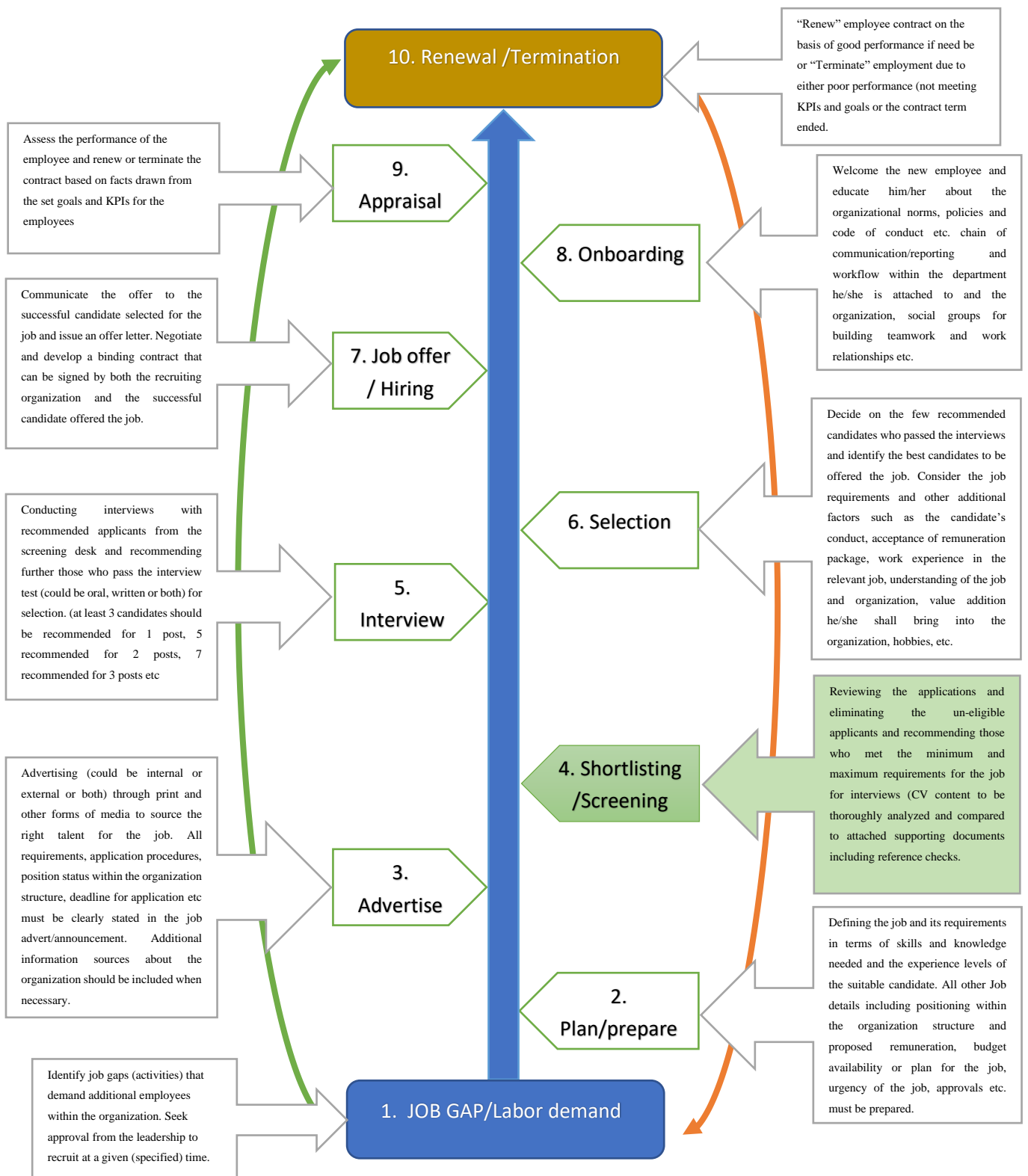
Step 6: Onboarding;

Welcome the new employee and educate him/her about the organizational norms, policies and code of conduct etc. chain of communication/reporting and workflow within the department he/she is attached to and the organization, social groups for building teamwork and work relationships etc.

WHY? & WHERE RECRUITMENT PROCESS SOMETIMES FAIL ORGANIZATIONS?

Recruitment today, especially in most developing countries including South Sudan where the economy is weakly performing, inflation rates are high, unemployment is as well too high, productivity is very low and investments in socioeconomic overheads that support a thriving private sector are lacking; most job seekers rely on government jobs or relatives and friends offered jobs where the conventional processes of recruitments are often skipped. Nepotism becomes part of the recruitment process in such situations causing increasing Job mismatch, and performance and productivity fall victim or are compromised, these further risk failure of institutions and organizations (Nwokwu, T. C., 2020). Currently in South Sudan, whenever a job offer is posted, even if for a single position, recruiters end up receiving hundreds or thousands of applications. Since applications are prescreened and shortlisted manually, biases occur due to laziness in taking up the task. Sometimes blanket interviews for everybody are done.

A case of two of the government Agencies "NC" and "NP" where thousands of applications were received by an outsourced recruitment firm for limited job posts i.e. at an average scale of 1:50. for example, "Agency "NC" announced 90 job postings and received through a third-party recruitment firm over 4,000 applications. This exposes the scale of unemployment rates in the country. The process became unclearly phased down, and screening/shortlisting and interviews became challenging and exhausting, often leading to bias. In some institutions like "NP", job mismatch is publicly observed and talked about by leaders of the country. At the fourth step of the recruitment cycle (Shortlisting/Screening), critical attention is required to the job requirements while screening. This is where recruiters gets it wrong if less focus in exerted on matching the applicants' credentials with the job requirements. Also, in the case where recruiters have self-interests or succumb to external influences during the screening exercise, often the desire to do the right thing is compromised and in such situations, 'screeners' get bias in recommending the rightful candidates for interviews. Now, if the choice was wrongly done, the next step (Interviews) shall handle these less qualified candidates during the interview and often yield two things (1) non-successful candidate (subjecting extra costs on re-advertising) or (2) passing of literally poor candidate to get the job offer. This will, again, mean two things for the organization (1) the organization will have to spend more on the candidate trainings to fit into the task or (2) risk low productivity (poor performance).

10. Renewal /Termination

"Renew" employee contract on the basis of good performance if need be or "Terminate" employment due to either poor performance (not meeting KPIs and goals or the contract term ended.

Assess the performance of the employee and renew or terminate the contract based on facts drawn from the set goals and KPIs for the employees

9. Appraisal

8. Onboarding

Welcome the new employee and educate him/her about the organizational norms, policies and code of conduct etc. chain of communication/reporting and workflow within the department he/she is attached to and the organization, social groups for building teamwork and work relationships etc.

Communicate the offer to the successful candidate selected for the job and issue an offer letter. Negotiate and develop a binding contract that can be signed by both the recruiting organization and the successful candidate offered the job.

7. Job offer / Hiring

6. Selection

Decide on the few recommended candidates who passed the interviews and identify the best candidates to be offered the job. Consider the job requirements and other additional factors such as the candidate's conduct, acceptance of remuneration package, work experience in the relevant job, understanding of the job and organization, value addition he/she shall bring into the organization, hobbies, etc.

Conducting interviews with recommended applicants from the screening desk and recommending further those who pass the interview test (could be oral, written or both) for selection. (at least 3 candidates should be recommended for 1 post, 5 recommended for 2 posts, 7 recommended for 3 posts etc

5. Interview

4. Shortlisting /Screening

Reviewing the applications and eliminating the un-eligible applicants and recommending those who met the minimum and maximum requirements for the job for interviews (CV content to be thoroughly analyzed and compared to attached supporting documents including reference checks.

Advertising (could be internal or external or both) through print and other forms of media to source the right talent for the job. All requirements, application procedures, position status within the organization structure, deadline for application etc must be clearly stated in the job advert/announcement. Additional information sources about the organization should be included when necessary.

3. Advertise

2. Plan/prepare

Defining the job and its requirements in terms of skills and knowledge needed and the experience levels of the suitable candidate. All other Job details including positioning within the organization structure and proposed remuneration, budget availability or plan for the job, urgency of the job, approvals etc. must be prepared.

Identify job gaps (activities) that demand additional employees within the organization. Seek approval from the leadership to recruit at a given (specified) time.

1. JOB GAP/Labor demand

A SIMPLIFIED 10-STEP RECRUITMENT CYCLE (10-SRC)

This model (10-SRC) has ensured that the recruitment cycle start with what (?) the problem is then followed by how (?) it can be addressed and who (?) is required to fulfil the gab and for how long(?). it also separates the interview exercise from the Screening/Shortlisting step. This is simply because interviews can be conducted by a separate panel (could be external members or mixed) not including all members doing applications shortlisting/screening exercise and it produces a separate outcome which leads to decision making on successful candidate to be offered the job. While, Screening/Shortlisting exercise do identify applicants that met the minimum requirements for the Job (it could be done by the HRM Team of the organization) internally. These two steps need to be treated separately under different teams to produce a comparative analysis and reduce bias in selecting the rightful candidate for the job advertised. The last step of the cycle in the 10-SRC determines suitability of the employee during or after end of the contract. Whether the organization still need the continuation of the activities performed by the employee or not, whether the employee has been performing to the expectation (according to the set goals and KPIs) or not, whether new terms need to be included into the contract (if to be continued) or not and whether the employment has to be terminated and closed or source for another skilled employee to continue the tasks. This takes the organization to the initial step 1 of identifying needs and thereafter proceed with the next steps in the recruitment cycle. This analysis is concerned with step 4 *(highlighted in the 10-SRC).*

A SIMPLIFIED SHORTLISTING PROCESS (SHORTLISTING EASE MODEL (SEM))

This Model (as presented by other scholars the likes of TP Thebe, G van der Waldt etal) acknowledges the selection criteria categorization in to facets of Critical or Essential Position Requirements and Desirable or Added Advantage Requirements of the Job.

Example: Requirements for an ICT Manager's Position: -

1. **Essential criteria (*example*):**
A. Master's Degree in Engineering in Telecom, ICT, Electronics, Computer science or any related field.
B. 8 years in ICT Broadcasting or Postal sector
C. At least 5 years in management position
D. Must be between 35-55 year

2. **Desirable criteria (*example*):**
A. Regional or International exposure (worked in Int. organizations on ICT related activities, participated in Int./Regional ICT forums and activities, having participated in Int./Regional research related to ICT amongst others)
B. Certified Engineer with proof of certification
C. Proof of a particular project management

The Model gives weightage of 70% and 30% for "Essential" and "Desirable" category requirements respectively. To apply the model, scores in each criteria item must be based on its importance on a score card between "1 – 5"

Example;

Rating Scale i.e. 1 – 5 scores

Score	Classification
5	Excellent
4	Very good

3	Good
2	Fair
1	poor

The cumulative Ranking (Score) sheet.

Applicant name	Essential criteria (from the job specs) (Rate from **1 – 5** scores)				Total Score (Criteria I)	Weightage (70%)	Desirable criteria (from the job specs) (Rate from **1 – 5** scores)			Total Scores (Criteria II)	Weightage (30%)	Cumulative Weightage (100%)	Ranking 1-5	Remarks (Recommended/Not Recommended)
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**			**A**	**B**	**C**					
1														
2														
3														

Note/conditions for applying the model:
- Rating MUST be done based on critical discussions amongst panel members and on consensus.
- Part I (Essential criteria) scores MUST be computed at 70%.
- Part II (Desirable Criteria) scores MUST be computed at 30%.
- Least rating score is 1 (not zero), denoting that the applicant did not meet or insufficiently met the particular criteria.
- The three (3) higher performing candidates should be selected for interviews for 1 post offer, 5 high performing candidates to be selected for 2 posts offer etc. i.e. only if the posts

How to apply the model:
1. Applicants must be ranked based on the content and quality of their written applications in accordance to the laid criteria characterized in the two categories i.e. "Essential" and "Desirable" requirements of the post.
2. The HR Committee or Panel must rate or discuss how each candidate met the criteria and agree on the scores to be awarded to the applicant.
3. The scores are to be summed up and computed on the basis of weightage, as indicated in the model sheet, to come up with the total scores and weightage.
4. A percentage threshold must be agreed upon by the HR Committee, Panelists for a successful candidate to be shortlisted for interviews, say a cumulative weightage of Minimum 60% and Maximum 70% for a pre-selected applicant to be considered for interviews

CONCLUSION:
The purpose of this article is to report on findings obtained through a literature survey and an empirical investigation conducted among respondents within the Institutions surveyed and observed. The focus was on developing an appropriate response mechanism to address the selection and recruitment challenges

identified in this analysis. The Shortlisting Model is designed in consideration of strategic/policy, tactical/technical, and operational perspectives of a Job posting/requirements. The model could be utilized as a measuring and qualifying tool to evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment and selection processes in small and middle-level private and public Agencies. This model can help build an organization that exhibits suitable values, competencies, capabilities, and personnel strengths. The model could support government Agencies and Small to Medium Businesses/Enterprises in identifying the right employees to meet their mandate and strategic objectives successfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important for the management of organizations or HRM Departments in particular to pay keen attention to the Shortlisting/Screening step of the recruitment cycle to be sure of the talent identification for the next steps/processes leading to rightful candidate selection. Also, careful attention has to be paid to possible bias during the screening exercise, identify such risks and establish strict rules and mitigation mechanisms for the 'screeners' to follow. If necessary, engage a third party to do the screening for the organization and a mix of internal and external panel members for the interviews.

FURTHER STUDIES

More studies are needed to understand the level of biases in recruitment processes (the whole 10-steps) within organizations of various sectors to help suggest suitably practical approaches to managing recruitment processes. Biases occur in almost all steps of the recruitment cycle and it is important to understand them to be able to propose remedies for organizations to effectively manage them to secure the right candidate for a job.

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