

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MAIN ROADS TOOWOOMBA DISTRICT, 2001

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This paper is a report submitted for assessment in the unit 51373 Human Resource Acquisition and provides an interesting and detailed evaluation of recruitment and selection processes with a regional government department. While it is based on observations within the particular organisation, the arguments do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of that organisation.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the recruitment and selection processes of the Department of Main Roads (DMR) are analysed and recommendations for their improvement are given. The main areas of the selection process that are addressed are the selection interview and the orientation process. The findings indicated that the processes adopted by the DMR were well thought out, in close alignment with current theories, and soundly integrated with the needs of the DMR in its capacity as a government organisation. However, despite the professionalism with which the DMR approaches these processes, there were a number of areas for improvement. In the selection interview it is recommended that a realistic job preview be included to increase both the accuracy of the person — job fit, and the loyalty of employees. The main recommendations offered in the orientation process were concerned with using the orientation to decrease the stresses associated with the transition into a new workplace. It is recommended that this be done through a meeting between the new employee and their supervisor so that the supervisor can openly explain the steps the employee could take to satisfy the expectations of their new employer.

Keywords: recruitment; selection; interview; orientation; induction.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Aim

The purpose in writing this report is to examine the recruitment and selection processes used by the Department of Main Roads (DMR) and to make recommendations to improve those processes.

1.2 Sources of Information

The information used in this report has been gleaned from an interview between myself and the Toowoomba district Human Resource Manager, for the DMR. The interview was conducted on Monday the 2nd of April 2001. Originally, two interviews were scheduled, however, after one interview it was decided that the majority of data

that was needed had been collected. The second interview was cancelled after being assured that any follow up questions could be posed through the use of email or over the telephone. I have included a copy of the questions as Appendix 1.

1.3 Methodology and Scope

The questions asked were concerned with the recruitment and selection processes practised by the DMR. These processes were then compared with current theories of best practice in the areas of recruitment and selection. The analysis revealed that the recruitment and selection processes used by the DMR are based on sound theory that has been well thought out and successfully integrated to meet the needs of the organisation. However, the status of the DMR as a government organisation is reflected in the type of needs that drive their policies. One such need evidenced by the DMR is seen in its desire to be open and honest regarding all processes relating to employment. To integrate this into the recruitment and selection processes the policies directing the employment practices are based on equity and merit. That is, all applicants should be given an equal opportunity, with the final decision being founded solely on merit. These policy decisions are settled at a government level and, as such, are beyond the scope of the report. The report is directed at the actual processes involved in the recruitment and selection of employees within the DMR and aims to offer recommendations that will increase their effectiveness.

In analysing the recruitment and selection practices of the DMR the areas that revealed opportunities for the most improvement were the selection interview and the orientation processes. In each of these areas the current practices are more than adequate and any recommendations should be seen as a way to improve already excellent processes, not as criticisms of the current methods. This is further established in the body of the report through revealing the benefits associated with the current practices of the DMR before suggesting improvements. The first process discussed is that of the selection interview.

2. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Interview Structure

The DMR uses interviews as its most common selection technique. Cascio (1998) argues that the selection interview can be an unreliable method of selecting applicants. The reasons for this unreliability can be seen in the lack of preparation given to most interviews (Schuler & Jackson 1996). This lack of preparation allows the selection decision to be biased by information or characteristics that are not related to the performance of the job. These biases can take the form of first impressions, the degree to which the applicant matches the stereotypes formed by the interviewer before the interview, and even the amount of silence or nonverbal cues present in the interview (Cascio 1998). The DMR overcomes these biases through the use of semi-structured interviews, an objective scoring system, and an interview panel. The degree to which these interview techniques overcome the biases associated with selection interviews is explored in the following paragraphs, while the final paragraph is concerned with the use of realistic job previews as a means of improving the selection interview.

Semi-structured interviews have a positive impact on the selection processes of the DMR. Cascio (1998) believes that the use of structured or semi-structured interviews can greatly increase the reliability of the interview process. The use of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewers to set predetermined questions that will enable them to gain information directly related to the job criteria (Schuler & Jackson 1996). The semi-structured interview also allows scope for the interviewers to follow up on any information offered by the interviewee. In addition, using the same questions for all applicants provides a means of comparing all the interviewees on the same criteria (Nankervis, Compton & McCarthy 1996) as the responses made by the applicants can be analysed directly for content. Finally, failure to use a type of structured interview would contradict the policy of equity upheld by the DMR, as asking applicants different questions could be construed as failing to treat people equally. There are, however, some drawbacks to the use of structured interviews.

The use of structured interviews may result in the interview being dominated by the interviewer and, as a consequence, the interviewee may feel overwhelmed and unable to perform their best (Nankervis et al. 1996). The DMR recognises this as a potential problem and to compensate for this they provide the applicant with a copy of the questions that are going to be asked in the interview before they enter. This allows the interviewee time to prepare their answers in an environment that is not as intimidating as an interview situation, resulting in better performance. Thus, the use of semi-structured interviews, with the applicant being forewarned of the questions is seen as the type of interview most compatible with the needs of the DMR. Moreover, the use of standardised questions allows the answers to be rated by the interviewers.

Within the DMR this rating is done through a five point scoring system. The interviewers are instructed to rate the answers of the applicant according to how well they believe the respondent demonstrated knowledge or suitability to the job criteria. The answers can range from one, being not suitable or knowledgeable, to five, indicating excellent suitability or knowledge. Cascio (1998) states that standardised scoring systems help compare applicants in an objective manner, further eliminating the biases associated with selection interviews. The final technique used by the DMR to reduce bias is the use of more than one interviewer in the form of an interview panel.

The DMR uses the selection panel to ensure that more than one person is used to select the applicant. The advantages of having a panel conduct the interview is that it increases the likelihood of impartiality and allows for a more diverse range of opinions to be taken into consideration (Nankervis et al. 1996). However, the disadvantages of the panel interview include the increased cost of conducting the interview and the probability that the interviewee will feel intimidated by the interviewers. As mentioned above, the DMR is sensitive to the issue of intimidation and thus forewarns the applicant of the questions to reduce their anxiety. Furthermore, the number of interviewers is limited to a maximum of four people, with restrictions governing issues ranging from the behaviour of the interviewers to the manner in which the furniture is laid out. This is designed to reduce the discomfort of the interviewee. To control the costs of the interview the panel may be compromised of only two people for lower level jobs, although two interviewers is deemed to be the least number, as any less would open the way for bias and challenge the principles

equity and merit. However, despite the well-thought out structure of the interviews used by the DMR, there is room for improvement.

The use of realistic job previews (RJP) could further enhance the interview processes of the DMR. An RJP is used to provide the applicant with a more realistic perception of the job (Miner 1992) and is most beneficial when focused on the intrinsic aspects of the work, rather than the factual processes (Cascio 1998). RJP's can be administered before the selection interview in the form of written booklets, videos, or job visits (Miner 1992). While no research has been conducted on the effectiveness of RJP in government organisations, it has been demonstrated that the use of RJP's can have positive results across many different vocational settings (McCormick & Ilgen 1992). The benefits of RJP are mainly seen in a decrease of employee turnover and an increase in job satisfaction (Cascio 1998; McCormick & Ilgen 1992; Miner 1992). However, Cascio (1998) makes the point that the effectiveness of RJP is dependent on job complexity, that is, the more complex the job, the greater the effect RJP are likely to have. Thus, the use RJP is seen as being more important for applicants applying for higher level jobs. Cascio (1998) goes on to point out that organisations that do not have a problem with turnover can still benefit from using RJP. This is because prospective recruits see organisations that utilise RJP as more caring and trustworthy (Cascio 1998). If the RJP were to be administered before the selection interview it would allow the interviewers to ask and answer questions that stem from the RJP, as well as providing the applicant with more knowledge about the job. Therefore, the exposure of higher level job applicants to a RJP that focuses on providing an accurate portrayal of the intrinsic aspects of the job through the use of a written booklet, video, or job visit that is conducted prior to the interview would be a beneficial addition to the interview structure currently used by the DMR.

2.2 Orientation

The main benefit that organisations receive from a well-prepared orientation program is an increase in employee commitment (Society for the Advancement of Education 2001). This is evidenced by lower turnover, higher productivity, increased morale, and lower training costs (Nankervis, Compton & McCarthy 1996). A well-prepared orientation program is able to increase employee commitment through communicating an understanding of the goals and culture of the organisation and providing opportunity for informal contact that can lead to new relationships (Society for the Advancement of Education 2001). Other aspects of effective orientation programs include confirming the applicant's decision to accept the job (Kennedy 2001), making the new employee feel welcome, helping them to settle in and feel comfortable as soon as possible (American Management Association 2001) and, finally, to prepare them for the challenges they will face as a new member of any particular organisation (Wanous & Reichers 2000). The following paragraphs will outline the orientation program used by the DMR and analyse the degree to which it applies the above methods to achieve the goal of increasing employee commitment.

The orientation program conducted by the DMR is divided into two main segments. These segments are workplace health and safety (WHS) and other general induction issues. The WHS orientation consists of a tour that is used to point out exits and other facts relevant to emergency evacuation procedures, whereas the general induction covers areas that relate to the department's purpose, policies, and any legal

obligations — such as sexual harassment. The information involved in the general induction is communicated through the use of a hypertext markup language (HTML) computer program. The use of the computer as a method of orientation has positive and negative results.

The main benefit to be gained from the HTML orientation program is financial. The new incumbents can proceed at their own pace without direct supervision, saving the organisation the cost of paying people to teach them information on a face-to-face basis. Furthermore, the individuals can learn at a speed with which they are comfortable, preventing an overload of information. Thus, the benefits associated with a computer-based orientation are related to the costs involved and the ability to match the flow of information to the learning ability of the new employee. However, the reliance on a computer-based program ignores many of the other benefits that can be drawn from a well-planned orientation program.

The computer orientation program does an effective job of communicating a factual understanding of the goals and culture of the organisation, however, it fails to provide opportunity for informal contact with other staff members. It also misses the chance to formally confirm the applicant's decision to accept the job, make them feel welcome, or prepare them for the challenges they will face as a new member of the organisation. This is likely to prevent the DMR from gaining the full amount of employee commitment possible from the use of orientation procedures. The next paragraph explores some ways to overcome these limitations.

The addition of a brief, formalised introduction of the new staff member to the other employees would aid in making the orientation process more effective (Kennedy 2001; Wanous & Reichers 2000). The introduction could briefly praise the inductee's previous accomplishments and inform the new employee of the professional nature of the organisation and opportunities available to them. It would also be suitable for this introduction to be followed by an informal morning tea that is designed to celebrate and welcome the arrival of the new staff member. If this were done in conjunction with the computer orientation program it would provide the opportunity to formally confirm the applicant's decision to accept the job, as well as permitting informal contact with other staff members and making the new incumbent feel welcome. It is also important to prepare the new employee for the challenges they are likely to face in the next few months in their new job.

Wanous and Reichers (2000) state that in addition to requiring help in establishing relationships and the need for factual information, new employees also need assistance in managing the stress and anxiety that is associated with the new job experience. Newcomers to an organisation should be made aware of feelings they are likely to have and how these feelings compare to those experienced by other people (Wanous & Reichers 2000). It is also beneficial to inform them of the types of goals they should be setting and the actions that would be of greatest aid to them in their transition period (Wanous & Reichers 2000). Kennedy (2001) suggests a specific means whereby this can be accomplished. This proposal involves the new employee's supervisor explaining the behaviours that they see as the most desirable. This would make the new staff member aware of any unspoken rules, what is required of them, and how they can please those in authority in an open and above-board manner. If this aspect of personal communication by the new employee's supervisor was

incorporated into the orientation processes used by the DMR it would lessen the stresses associated with transition into a new job.

3. CONCLUSION

This report has examined the recruitment and selection processes used by the DMR and compared them with current theories of best practice. The analysis revealed that the recruitment and selection processes used by the DMR are based on sound theory that has been well thought out and successfully integrated to meet the needs of the organisation. However, despite the professionalism with which the DMR approaches the tasks of recruitment and selection there were a number of practices that could be added to these processes that would improve their effectiveness.

In analysing the recruitment and selection practices of the DMR it was found that the areas which revealed the greatest opportunities for improvement were the selection interview, and orientation processes. With regard to the selection interview it was mentioned that there is evidence to suggest that the selection interview is an unreliable method of selecting personnel because of the way in which personal biases can lead people to make decisions based on factors unrelated to the job requirements. Furthermore, the DMR is aware of these possible biases and controls them through the use of semi-structured interviews, an objective scoring system, and selection panel. While the care the DMR takes to ensure the selection interview is used to greatest effect is excellent, evidence was presented to show that it could be improved by the inclusion of a RJP. A RJP in the form of a booklet, video, or job visit would help the applicant and the interview panel make a better decision about whom the most suitable person for the job is. This would reduce turnover and absenteeism while improving employee loyalty.

The final area discussed in the report is the orientation process. The orientation of new employees at the DMR is mainly conducted through the use of a HTML program. While this has the advantages of low cost and allowing employees to work through the information at their own pace, it prevents the new staff member from being given a specific opportunity to establish relationships with other employees. Nor does it allow a formal opportunity for the manager to confirm the new employee's decision to join the company and make the person feel welcome. One method of rectifying this is through the addition of a brief meeting where the manager can address these issues in front of the new employee and his co-workers, followed by an informal morning tea designed to celebrate the new member's arrival. Another aspect of the orientation process currently neglected by the DMR is the use of techniques to alleviate stresses related to the new job. In the report it was suggested this might be overcome by the new employee's manager verbalising unwritten rules and helping the new incumbent to identify actions that are seen as important in the workplace and to set goals that will increase their effectiveness. Furthermore, a section in the HTML program concerned with feelings and emotions associated with a new job and the normality of these feelings, combined with stress reduction techniques, would further add to the overall effectiveness of the orientation process.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) It is recommended that a realistic job preview be included in the selection interview process for higher-level jobs in the form of a written booklet, video, or job visit.
 - a) The DMR should implement this recommendation as soon as possible, as the benefits of a realistic job preview are seen as a valid means of improving the selection process and employee loyalty.
 - b) The feasibility of this recommendation is not in question as the means of constructing a realistic job preview are well within the capabilities of the DMR.
- 2) Hold a formal introduction and welcome meeting for new employees where their decision to accept the job is confirmed.
 - a) It is suggested this recommendation be acted upon as soon as possible due to the lack of difficulty involved in its implementation, the benefits possible and the small amount of cost involved.
 - b) The simple nature and small cost involved in the implementation ensures the feasibility of this recommendation.
- 3) Have a morning tea that celebrates the arrival of a new staff member.
 - a) Again, the simplistic nature of this recommendation allows it to be implemented immediately into the orientation processes of the DMR.
 - b) This recommendation is feasible as informal parties are often held to farewell employees and the same processes could be used to hold a party to welcome new employees.
- 4) As part of the orientation processes, arrange a meeting between the new employee and their immediate manager to help the new staff member identify actions and goals that will help them become more effective and learn how best to fit into the organisation.
 - a) This recommendation should be enacted as soon as possible to help new employees reduce the stress associated with the transition into a new job.
 - b) This recommendation can be implemented through a meeting between new staff members and their immediate supervisor and, as such, is seen as being within the capabilities of the DMR.
- 5) Include a section in the HTML orientation program that deals with the feelings and emotions of new employees and also highlights stress reduction techniques.
 - a) The inclusion of these issues would help the new employee recognise the stresses associated with working in a new environment and help them to deal with them — resulting in a more effective employee.
 - b) The use of the HTML program by the DMR indicates a familiarity with means whereby they would be able to include a section on stress reduction within their existing program.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Would you please outline, in chronological order, the recruitment and selection processes that you use when hiring new employees?
2. Is a job analysis conducted every time a position becomes available?
3. How is the job analysis conducted and by whom?
4. Is the Government Gazette and other newspapers the only means by which you recruit applicants?
5. Do you ever use employment consultants?
6. What is the main reason for their use?
7. Who is responsible for the promotion of vacancies in the newspaper advertisements?
8. What is included in the job advertisement?
9. To what extent do you favour internal or external recruitment?
10. Are there any other selection techniques you use besides the interview and written application?
11. Who is included in the selection panel?
12. Do you ever make use of realistic job previews?
13. Where do you conduct your interviews?
14. Explain the orientation procedure for me.
15. So apart from the health and safety tour, the orientation is all done through the HTML program?
16. What part of the recruitment process do you see as the most important?
17. How many people are employed in the DMR?
18. What is the budget of the HR department where you work?
19. Is there any aspect to the recruitment or selection process that you would like to see changed?
20. How would you improve any aspect of the recruitment and selection processes?
21. How do you see the recruitment and selection processes that you use being aligned with the strategic needs of the DMR?