

## Experiencing recruitment and selection

by Jon Billsberry

Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd, Chichester 2007, ISBN 0470057300, £24.99

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### Introduction

This book is a collection of 53 personal accounts of recruitment and selection collected over a two year period from the perspective of both the recruiter and applicant. The stories contained within the book highlight the extremely complicated nature of recruitment and selection and the impact that even well intentioned and well thought out processes can have on the subsequent perceptions and behaviour of the recruitment team, members of the employing organisation and the applicant. Each story is grouped into one of three categories depending on the underlying paradigm: psychometric (based on the perspective of the employer), social process (based on the perspective of the applicant) and person-organisation fit (based on the perspective of both). The author describes each 'paradigm', though the distinction between them is at times blurred and appears somewhat forced. This does not however detract from the impact of the accounts within, but instead emphasises the importance and interconnectedness of all the different players in the game that is recruitment and selection.

By focusing solely on people's own realities of recruitment and selection the book takes a different stance from the more traditional textbooks in the area with their focus on job analyses, selection criteria and statistical measurement to name but a few. The argument for this, from the point of view of the author, is that selectors very rarely use many of the scientific methods advocated in the literature and when they do, they tend to be a supplement to the interview rather than a full-blown selection intervention. Billsberry's main

interest in conducting this research is in trying to understand the experience of people on both sides of the transaction and the subsequent consequence of these experiences.

### Target audience

Targeted at undergraduate and postgraduate students in organisational psychology, organisational behaviour, management studies and HRM, as well as personnel or HR managers and occupational psychologists, each chapter consists of a short introduction to the issue being addressed followed by a number of stories that add richness and context to the areas under discussion. Each chapter then concludes with suggested activities and questions to provoke thought and some ideas for further reading on the subject, making it a useful tool to aid further discussion around the issues.

In addition to its targeted student audience this book should be cited as essential reading for anyone linked to or involved in any form of recruitment and selection, particularly those with very little background in this area. Indeed, as the case studies highlight, selectors are often managers and rarely experts in the field. They are often thrown in at the deep end to recruit new employees with very little knowledge of best practice or the impact the process will have on those experiencing it. The book highlights the damage that that can be caused by lack of knowledge, structure and professionalism, inappropriate questioning techniques, market forces and political interference and may help those in this position to avoid some of the pitfalls encountered in the stories outlined.

It is important to note however, and the author quite rightly acknowledges, that this book is 'unlikely to stand as a recruitment and selection textbook in its own right. It is more likely that it will be used in conjunction with textbooks to highlight and illustrate particular issues'. The reviewer would go one step further than this and state that it is essential for practitioners and students alike to supplement their knowledge with the more traditional focus on job analysis, selection criteria methods of assessment, best practice and reliability and validity.

### **Part 1: Selector's perspective**

Moving onto the content of the book, Part 1 covers the psychometric paradigm and is concerned with recruitment and selection from the perspective of the selector. The stories contained within this section highlight to the reader the responsibility and power that the recruiting organisation holds when deciding who should be employed and who should not in addition to the difficulties that selectors face when a decision has been made to recruit. The importance of professionalism is brought to light and the stories highlight the fact that during periods of recruitment and selection the organisation is on show and perceptions of the organisation can affect the attitudes and decision making of potential new recruits. Two chapters are also given over to the interview and given that this is still the most preferred method of assessment it is essential reading for anyone taking part in this process. The stories highlight how interviewers' prejudices can unfairly influence decision-making and how poor interview design can limit the information obtained from candidates and result in the organisation being viewed in a negative light.

### **Part 2: Candidate's perspective**

Part 2 of the book looks at the process from the perspective of the candidate and covers issues such as internal versus external vacancy filling; motivations for seeking new employment and the impact of failure on internal candidates, managers, selectors and colleagues. The issue of fairness in recruitment and selection is also

explored in this section, though in reality this is a common theme of the entire book. The author discusses fairness as a paradox of recruitment and selection describing it as a 'discriminatory process in which one of the main goals is to discriminate between people to discover who best meets the selection criteria and who does not. It must discriminate between candidates but must do so in a 'fair' way.' The stories contained within this chapter focus, in the main, on the discriminatory practices faced by women but the author points out that 'the issues illustrated could easily apply to other forms of discrimination'. While the reader can clearly make inferences from the stories and begin to think about and question some of the issues other groups may face, it would have been nice to have read more stories with regard to this. If anything this was somewhat lacking in the book. In fairness, however, the author is limited by his subject group.

### **Part 3: Person-organisation fit**

The final section of the book, Part 3, looks at the process from the perspective of both applicant and selector and focuses on the person-organisation fit. Stories show the various ways in which organisational fit is assessed during recruitment and selection and the consequences of fit and misfit on those recruited. In one story the individual describes how everyone working in the company has a say in the selection decision with the main selection criteria seeming to be 'would I want to go to the pub with this person?' The stories contained within this chapter also serve to demonstrate how internal politics can interfere with effective recruitment and selection.

The final chapter in this section focuses on the Prison Services Assessment Centre. The assessment process adopted here is extremely thorough and job specific, resulting in high face and content validity. While the case study highlights many aspects of good selection it is not without its flaws and, as the author points out, is subject to some of the paradoxes of selection. The more rigorous a selection process is, the more people feel aggrieved by it.

### Summary

On the whole, the book makes for interesting reading and is likely to both shock and amuse the reader at times with the accounts given. While there are some positive accounts in the book, these are few and far between and the text reads more as a 'what not to do' than anything else. For those currently involved in recruitment and selection it also forces the reader to reflect upon their own practices and ask questions about how they may be improved.

The book is well structured and easy to read, though as mentioned previously it should not be read in isolation without a fuller understanding of best practice. Fortunately, the author provides a full and comprehensive reference section at the end of each chapter and points the reader to useful literature. The 'Thinking On' section also asks provocative questions that will encourage further thought around the key issues.

### Disability issues

The one criticism of the book comes when considered in light of employment and disability as there is very little reference made to such issues. It is likely that this is a result of the subject group rather than an intentional omission on the part of the author. Billberry's storytellers are all managers studying management and business administration at the Open University and submission of personal account was done so on a voluntary basis which may have limited the topics the author was able to include. This is not to say, however, that the book has no use for those working in this field. The majority of the accounts provided

identify some form of discrimination of one form or another on the grounds, for example, of physical appearance, sexual orientation, gender and even tone of voice. Indeed at the end of many of the stories, there is a sense that the storyteller felt they were treated unfairly. As a result of this, clear inferences can be made about groups other than those referenced. In the main however, the accounts provided are from what could be seen as advantaged groups and one can imagine that the accounts of disadvantaged applicants could make up an entire textbook in its own right. Some of the issues are likely to be similar to those outlined in the text, though the author quite rightly comments that if recruitment and selection processes are as fair and even-handed as they can be 'those who already have privileged places in society are advantaged in the recruitment and selection process.'

Anyone involved in recruitment and selection should ensure that they have full knowledge of discrimination and employment law and ensure that their approach is in line with this. Billsberry also alerts the reader to various bodies (e.g., Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) who have set out positive guidelines on how recruitment and selection should be conducted to ensure fairness to all groups. For those involved in this area, such guidelines are essential reading and may act as best practice principles. It is the opinion of the reviewer that some understanding of how recruitment and selection is experienced by various groups and the consequence of this experience is also important. Experiencing Recruitment and Selection provides a useful starting point from which to gain this understanding.