

Wioleta Mikołajczewska

Faculty of Engineering Sciences, Gdańsk School of Higher Education

Staff selection matter and components

Abstract

The goal of this article is to show the matter of employee selection and the main components thereof, i.e. recruitment and selection. The most important asset of an organization is found in its staff, their competences, attitudes, and motivation. It turns out the key to success lies not in IT but rather in proper selection of staff because this translates to the human potential the organization has at their disposal.

Keywords: staff selection, recruitment, selection, competence interview.

1. Introduction

Seeing the importance of employee knowledge and skills in achieving success on such a competitive market as can be observed nowadays is definitely one of the most important challenges that a modern company must face. The experience of companies operating in a developed market economy shows that the focus on developing human capital is becoming a fixed property among them. This is why special attention is put on proper staff selection because “proper staffing results in the potential a company will have, the capabilities for its development and improvement, as well as how its efficiency of operation and cooperation of people will develop” (Borkowska, 1985, p. 324).

Gaining employees is composed of a number of tasks that serve to provide an optimal number of competent employees whose work would efficiently serve the organization to reach its goals. It is a double-sided process because it is based on making informed decisions both on the side of the management of the organization and the prospective employee. The candidate considers whether the job posting meets their expectations while the organization decides on the candidate meeting their goals and requirements. The proper process of staff selection ought to be based on the following rules (Ludwiczynski, 2007, pp. 197–198):

- planning — making choices based on staffing and development plans that take into account planned personnel changes (promotions, moves, degradations, etc.);
- systemic character — associating the selection with release of staffing reserves, assessments, motivating or employee training and development;
- openness and competitiveness — considering more than one candidate for a posting;
- objectivism — clearly defined selection criteria;
- methodical character and consistency — applying methods and criteria that would allow professional profiles of individual candidates to be compared;

- honesty and neutrality — checking the compliance of the candidates against their actual competences and qualifications;
- versatility — using all the available recruitment methods as well as research methods for the suitability of candidates;
- professionalism — wide employ of in-house specialists responsible for staffing as well as using specialized outside companies, as needed.

The main goal of employment processes is to staff the vacancies with proper people. The term “proper person” can be understood in a variety of ways and therefore it is justified to differentiate between two approaches — based on subjective and objective premises.

Subjective selection is based on staffing a position with a person which has been pinpointed earlier. The person making the choice cares for the position to be staffed by one of their close friends, or even a family member. Therefore, it is a choice based on acquaintances. In this case, the subject-matter related features of the candidate may be marginalized. The rationale behind subjective selection can be: introducing one’s “own” people into the company, as well as making material and non-material gains out of the process. An example of subjective approach in staffing is placing fellow political party members in the best paying and influential positions in public institutions.

If a company wishes to staff a position with the most competent among the candidates available on the market, we are dealing with **objective** selection. In order to reach the desired goal, the job market needs to be penetrated, potential candidates reached, presented with the offer, and afterwards the most promising candidate needs to be selected and presented with a contract to sign. After this, onboarding can begin. Objective selection is divided into four phases: recruitment, selection, contract, and onboarding (Pawlak, 2011, pp. 195–196).

To summarize the matter of employee selection, we can state that the selection results in the human capital available to the organization as well as knowledge of what this capital brings into the company. Also, we get to know what potential for development and application in the future this capital brings. Proper selection allows to reach two main goals (Karney, 1998, p. 122):

- the goal of the organization — selecting people that will do their job to the highest standards, eliminating those candidates that cannot be employed because of their professional condition;
- individual goal — assigning work to an individual who will feel self-fulfillment, satisfaction, and development.

As B. Tracy (2001, p. 15) says: “as much as 95% of a company’s success derives from people selected to fill the posts. If the choice was good, normally the rest also functions well, and if the choice was bad, nothing works well”.

2. Recruitment

The first stage of staffing is **recruitment** of candidates. It is based on the organization communicating with the internal or external job market in order to interest potential candidates in filling the vacancies (Łudwicyński, 2007, p. 198).

Recruitment in itself is not a finance-intensive process but may be financially intensive in its consequences for the organization, e.g. in high employee fluctuation if improper people are recruited. Quality of the potential candidates can vary. If unemployment rate is high, people are eager to apply for work. If, on the other hand, unemployment falls, we will be facing the opposite trend (Belker, & Topchlik, 2006, p. 73). In order to limit the problem, we need to adopt a planning approach to recruitment, thanks to which we will be able to systematically review the staffing needs of the company and satisfy those needs to the highest degree.

Depending on the available resources, recruitment can be conducted in-house or outsourced to a specialist recruiting agency. The starting points should be in the analysis of staffing needs. The analysis is important in its potential to establish how many people to hire, what qualifications they need to show, and what personality traits they need to exhibit. The next step is developing the candidate profile based on the job description. Only then can we proceed to searching for candidates with the use of available methods.

Staffing the vacancies with in-company people is called **internal recruitment**. In the process of employee selection the company's own personnel ought not to be omitted; just the opposite, this should be the source that needs to be considered primarily. The internal candidate knows the company and its internal relations, has adapted to its culture, so there is no need for long onboarding (Berkowski, 2008, p. 18). From the economical point of view as well as for motivational reasons it is better to promote staff than to recruit, hire, and train outside candidates. Through such activities, the employees get the message that the company management open career paths. On the other hand, such decisions can impair the morale of other staff who also wished for themselves to be promoted. The need to recruit for a job at a lower level may need to arise then. It may also turn out that the promoted person will achieve lower results in their new position. Such an approach ought to therefore be approached with caution, tact, and discreteness (Lanz, 1995, p. 15). External recruitment, on the other hand, carries the risk of the new person not meeting the company standards. This risk is independent of the selection criteria applied by the company because the employer is not aware of the potential of the candidate (Kwiecień, 2001). The possibility to be promoted always motivates people to work more efficiently because they feel noticed and appreciated. Using internal recruitment is possible and efficient when employee evaluation is performed regularly and systematically. Only then can it be decidedly said which person is indeed involved in the development of the company and who possesses the potential for new capabilities that could be put to good use on a higher position.

The main advantages and disadvantages of internal recruitment are as follows (Berkowski, 2008, p. 19):

A. Advantages:

- increases the motivation of staff;
- staff feel appreciated and closely bonded with the organization;
- the candidate is known to the organization — it is evident what can be expected of them;
- lower risk of employing a badly-suited person;

- the candidate knows the organization and its relations, which translates to shorter onboarding;
- costs of recruiting and adaptation are lower;
- building career paths and planning of succession are easier.

B. Disadvantages:

- promoting an employee starts a “domino effect”, with a series of cascading promotions to opening vacancies;
- no fresh and innovative perception on the activity of the company;
- inclination of the insiders to copy bad habits or patterns of acting;
- increased risk of forming of cliques or informal groups;
- the promoted person often has issues with changing of their attitude towards colleagues if they are promoted to be their superiors;
- the risk of appearing jealousy among those who were omitted in the recruitment process as well as worsening of atmosphere.

If a decision is made to recruit internally, a proper method needs to be implemented, such as one of the below:

- internal recommendation;
- using staff reserves;
- using a successor list;
- internal announcements;
- closed process.

With internal recruitment, we show care for our staff’s development and work satisfaction. At the same time we assure the future group of experienced and loyal specialists.

A rapidly-developing company often needs their staffing deficiencies filled, as well as suffers from lack of new ideas and solutions. Such situation is a starting point for using the external sources of staff candidates, and **external recruiting**. Other rationale for this type of recruiting are the need to import qualifications that are lacking in the organization or the need to recruit for newly-opened positions (Pawlak, 2011, p. 202). If the economic situation of the company allows for recruiting from the external candidate market, employees often see it as the improvement of the company’s standing, end to “tightening the belt”, and a signal of the company’s development. If the company’s situation is financially challenging, costs need to be cut, and staffing needs to be frozen or reduced, and then external recruitment is perceived as a sign of disloyalty.

The main advantages and disadvantages of external recruitment are as follows (Berkowski, 2008, p. 19):

A. Advantages:

- no routine behaviors present in organizations, which brings a chance for novel activity;
- lower chances of repeating the mistakes of the “old” staff;
- an external manager receives more respect than someone who used to be a well-known subordinate;
- an externally recruited person is not entangled in informal relations of negative character to the company.

B. Disadvantages:

- high recruiting costs;
- higher complication and time consumption of candidate competence verification;
- higher risk of making mistakes in employee selection;
- longer onboarding and larger difficulties in adapting to formal and informal structures;
- threat of lowering of the current staff's motivation.

In case of external recruitment, the following methods can be implemented:

- announcements in press, online, in social media;
- the Career page on the company's website;
- employee recommendations;
- job agencies;
- specialized recruitment agencies;
- liaising with schools and universities;
- spontaneous requests;
- job fairs;
- open days.

The choice of internal versus external recruitment can be influenced by a number of factors. First is the effort that needs to be put into finding the best candidate. If the company's staff do not have the necessary qualifications for the vacant post, external candidates need to be sought. If the external source of candidates is of poor quality, one of the current staff ought to be retrained and moved to the vacant position.

Another factor is the level of the vacant position. Higher-level positions dictate that search be started among the company's own current personnel. Only if this search fails, a candidate from outside the organization should be considered. With executive positions, the main focus should be placed on external candidates.

An important factor to consider when selecting the source of candidates is the phase of the organizations development. In the phase of development, normally family members and friends are hired. Growth stage — when the internal source of candidates is not yet fully shaped — calls for mainly external recruitment. Stability is characterized by filling vacancies with in-house transfers. In the withdrawal phase, lowering of staff member count is conducted (Kalinowski, 2008 p. 134).

3. Selection

Recruitment finishes with the preparation of a job candidate list. The second stage of objective choosing of candidates is **selection**, a process of evaluating the suitability of the candidates to work, which aims at choosing the top one (Von der Linde, & Schustereit, 2009, p. 33).

With a high number of candidates, initial selection should precede proper selection. Initial selection is often based on the screening of applications with the goal of preparing a shortlist. Efficient screening requires the defining of up to a few clear selection criteria and is often based on reading through the submissions for specific keywords (Wood, & Payne, 2006, pp. 82–83).

Proper selection is based on assessing the suitability of the candidates to the offered post and choosing one of them that will be most suited from the viewpoint of the requirements and expectations of the employer.

In the process of evaluating the candidate's suitability, three situations may arise that determine the final decision:

1. The competences of the candidate are in accordance with the expectations and requirements of the company.
2. The competences of the candidate surpass the expectations and requirements of the company.
3. The competences of the candidate are lower than the expectations and requirements of the company.

In the first case, the decision to employ the candidate can be taken. The second situation means that the candidate is too good. In this case, they will not get a position that matches their skills, will not be able to realize their potential, and will not be satisfied with their salary. Therefore, the decision to hire such a person ought to be negative. The third situation is not completely unambiguous. The candidate does not meet all the criteria set by the company, such as a defined education level or experience, but may have other features that do not exclude them from being hired. However, in this situation, additional training of the candidate needs to be taken into account (Pawlak, 2011, pp. 212–213).

The selection process is a multi-stage one at which methods specific to the stage are used. Example stages of candidate selection are presented in Figure 1.

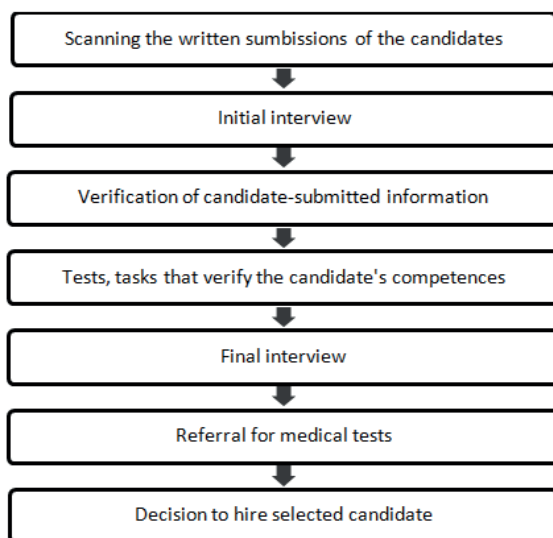


Fig. 1. Candidate selection stages

Source: own work.

In order to select the candidate with the highest professional usefulness, one of two strategies can be employed — positive or negative. The choice of strategy is of

key importance in order to draw the further actions within the selection process. It has bearing on whether the recruiter will drive at eliminating the candidates with profiles not matching the ideal or whether they will focus on selecting the features that will result in success on the offered post. When deciding on the strategy, it is necessary to have vast knowledge about the offered post — its character and the features that are necessary on the position so as to succeed. The choice is not easy as people show different behaviors in different situations (Suchar, 2009, pp. 69–71). The comparison of selection strategies can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Selection strategies

| Positive strategy | Negative strategy |
|--|---|
| Choosing fitting candidates | Rejecting unfit candidates |
| Protects from rejecting promising candidates | Protects from hiring a bad candidate |
| Qualitative criteria mostly used | Quantitative and formal criteria mostly used |
| Increases the possibility of hiring the best candidate | Minimizes the risk of hiring a bad candidate |
| Needs higher skills | Requires the use of simpler methods, safer to use |

Source: own work, from: *Rekrutacja i selekcja personelu* (pp. 69–70), M. Suchar 2009, Warszawa: C.H. Beck.

In order to properly select a candidate for a vacant position one needs to select methods that are used in the selection process. The choice is affected by a number of factors, mainly the type and requirements of the vacancy, cost of the method, and time to complete the selection process. The most widely used selection methods are:

- a) document analysis;
- b) competence interview;
- c) references;
- d) tests:
 - psychological, e.g. intellectual capabilities, personality tests;
 - professional knowledge;
 - professional skills, e.g. sample works, simulations;
- e) assessment center.

Selection can be a long and complicated process. It often combines different methods and techniques and candidates undergo a few stages of the process. For these reasons, one of three strategies of candidate selection needs to be decided upon (Kawka, & Listwan, 2006, p. 94):

1. *Play-off* — after each stage, a group of candidates whose professional features ranked the lowest is eliminated.
2. *Compensation strategy* — the decision on the best candidate is taken after all the selection stages have been complete where the sum of points earned at all the stages is calculated.

3. *Mixed (hybrid) strategy* — compensation strategy is used to a specific point and afterwards the play-offs begin, or the reverse.

Before the final decision is made, all the pros and cons of the final candidate from the perspective of the organization need to be considered. What is important is that the information about the final results reach all the candidates that participated in the selection process. In most companies, the HR department contacts the candidates. It is also good practice to send the rejected candidates thank-you letters for their time spent in the process as well as inform them this way about lack of vacancies that meet their profile. Such behavior is beneficial to the image of the company.

4. Competence interview

The most popular and widely-used method of candidate assessment is a competence interview. Preparing the right questions that will be asked during the interview allows to get to know the candidates better and to select the right one. Such an interview ought not to be a loose conversation which — instead of assessing the competences — only allows to check how amiable the candidate is. In order for the competence interview to be efficient, it needs to be based on behavioral indicators, easily observable behaviors that reflect the competences of the candidate. For this reason, the competence interview is also called a behavioral interview.

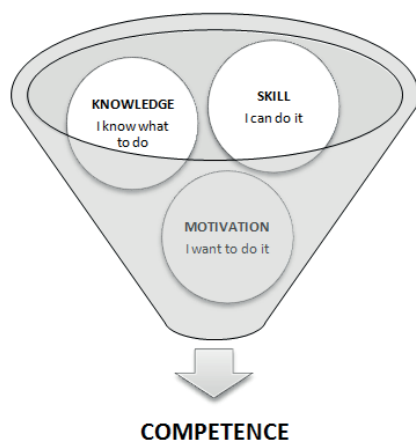


Fig. 2. Competence components

Source: own work.

The starting point for the preparation of a competence interview is defining what competences at what level are needed for the vacancy to be filled. A competence, as a compound of an employee's knowledge, skills, and motivation (see Fig. 2) can be described as specific behaviors. Having in mind examples of behaviors that form competences which are desirable on the vacancy, we can proceed with defining questions that will help in verifying the behavior of the candidates. A behavioral interview focuses not so much on the achievements of the candidate but rather on the way to achieving these goals (Duda, 2011, pp. 84–85).

Behavioral questions ought to be constructed with the use of the STAR model:

- presenting the **situation** or event;
- defining the **target**;
- describing the reaction of the candidate and the **action** they have undertaken;
- describing the **result** of the situation and the candidate's assessment of the event.

The chief rule of competence interviews is asking open questions and avoiding closed questions whenever possible. The latter suggest the possible and expected answers. Also, hypothetical questions should be avoided, which do not relate to specific events from the candidate's past but instead verify their knowledge or opinions.

Table 2 presents several examples of competence questions, divided into groups that enable to verify specific competences and behaviors of the candidate.

Table 2. Example competence questions

| Competence or behavior to be verified | Example questions |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Initiative, readiness to act | Can you provide an example project that was your initiative? What was it? What was its result? Were you satisfied with the result? |
| Communication | Please give us a situation in which you had to present something to a group without preparing. What difficulties did you encounter? How did you handle this situation? |
| Creativity | Please describe the last situation in which you encountered a problem requiring creativity and non-standard approach. How did this idea occur to you? Why do you think this was a non-typical idea? |
| Goal orientation | Please give us an important professional goal that you set for yourself and describe how you achieved it. What difficulties did you encounter? How did you handle this problem? Are you satisfied with the result? |
| Customer orientation | Please describe a situation in which you needed to handle a disturbed customer. How did you behave? How did this situation end up? How do you assess your behavior? |
| Decision-making | Please describe a situation in which you needed to make a decision while not having complete information on the matter. How did you judge the information to suffice? How did you handle this situation? What decision did you make and what was the result? |
| Problem solving | Please describe a situation in which you were to analyze information and make recommendations based on this analysis. How did you approach this process? Were your recommendations accepted and implemented? If not, why? Can you describe a situation in which you needed to solve a difficult problem? How did you handle this situation? What was the result? What would you have done differently? |
| Interpersonal skills | Please describe a conflict between yourself and another employee and how was this conflict resolved. What was the result of the situation? What do you think about the situation now? |
| Teamwork | Please describe a situation where you had to work in a team without good interpersonal relations. What happened? What role did you assume in the team? How did this situation end? |

| Competence or behavior to be verified | Example questions |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Planning and time management skills | Please describe a situation in which you had to perform multiple tasks at the same time. What were the tasks and how did you handle their execution? What was the result of these tasks? |
| Stress-handling skills | Please describe the most stressing professional situation. How did you handle this situation? What was the result? Are you satisfied with the result? |
| Adaptation skills | Please describe a situation in which you needed to adapt to a situation outside of your control. How did you handle the situation? What was the result of the situation? |

Source: own work, from: *Wywiad behawioralny. Jak poznać charakter kandydata?*, K. Zyzik, 2015, *Personel i Zarządzanie*, 9, pp. 71–72.

The key to succeed in a behavioral interview is not to use ready-made questions but to prepare good questions. Examples can, naturally, be followed but in each case they need to be adapted to the specific recruitment process and vacancy. The final effect of the interview is important, which is receiving complete and valuable answers of the candidate which in turn serve to assess their behaviors that are desirable on the vacancy.

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Istota i składowe doboru pracowników

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie istoty doboru pracowników i jego głównych składowych, czyli rekrutacji i selekcji. Najważniejszym zasobem każdej organizacji są jej pracownicy, ich kompetencje, postawy i motywacja. Okazuje się, że kluczem do sukcesu nie jest technologia informatyczna a właściwy dobór kadr, gdyż od niego zależy jakim potencjałem ludzkim organizacja dysponuje.

Słowa kluczowe: dobór pracowników, rekrutacja, selekcja, wywiad kompetencyjny.

