

# ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

## EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT & SELECTION - MA 204-1

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE SUBJECT

At the end of the course, Individuals will examine the principles of organizational psychology; apply them within companies; critically reflect emotional behavior within companies *and* their impact on the development of this.

### 6. EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

- 6.1 Developing the Position Description and Selection Criteria
- 6.2 Attracting Applications and Selecting Applicants for Interview
- 6.3 The Interviewing Process
- 6.4 Referees
- 6.5 Making the Decision

Recruitment and selection is an important, time-consuming and expensive process. Effective and non-discriminatory selection of staff used of human resources, and reduces the chance of costly errors. It is essential to good administrative and educational practice.

Selections of positions within any company are based on the principles of appointment on merit and the provision of equal employment opportunity. The appointment of staff must be made on the basis of the individual capacity of the person having particular regard to the knowledge, skills, qualifications, experience and potential for future development of that person in their employment.

Selection on the basis of merit means that the grounds for the decision must directly relate to the inherent requirements of the position and prevents those decisions being made on unjustified discriminatory grounds such as:

- Race, Colour, National or Ethnic Origin, Nationality
- Sex or Gender, Sexual Preference,
- Marital Status, Pregnancy, Status as a Parent or a Carrier
- Religious or political belief or activity, industrial activity
- Age, physical features, disability, medical record
- Personal association with a person who is identified by reference to any of the listed attributes

Various anti-discrimination legislation at both State and Federal level also dictate that certain behaviours, gestures, comments and practices, etc are unlawful in the employment environment, including the selection process. Failure to adhere to legislative requirements could lead to individuals seeking remedies through various tribunals. This, **study outline** has been produced in order to assist those staff involved in the recruitment and selection of staff.

## 6.1 Developing the Position Description and Selection Criteria

Prior to deciding whether to fill a position following a resignation, retirement or other departure or if a new position is to be created, it is important to assess the need for a position and its requirements. Identify the tasks which are required and the objectives which are to be achieved. This should be done in consultation with School/Section strategic and management plans.

While initially the filling of a vacant position may appear to be imperative, a review of current staffing arrangements could result in a restructure of other current positions providing career development opportunities for existing staff and a more effective use of resources. A review of the 'old' position description will also ensure that any changes in requirements are identified and incorporated into a new position description.

### **The Position Description**

The position description is a written statement of the primary tasks, functions, responsibilities, interactions and qualifications and experience attaching to a specific position. In general terms, a position description should:

- Provide a clear and concise description of the whole position so that its purpose is clearly understood
- Describe each major task clearly in a separate sentence
- Determine how much direction and supervision is required to conduct the functions of the position and the interaction with other positions in the University to achieve a given result, and
- Provide a context for understanding the objectives of the position by defining and clarifying its responsibilities, supervision, relationships and qualifications and skills required to perform the duties of the position

### **Selection Criteria**

Once the tasks of a position have been identified, the next important step is to consider what knowledge, skills, experience, and qualifications the ideal candidate should possess to successfully fulfill the functions of the position. It is usual to distinguish between what is **essential** and what is **desirable**. Essential criteria are the knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications a candidate **must** possess. Desirable criteria are the knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications which would be a 'bonus'.

Desirable criteria are particularly helpful in helping to distinguish between candidates who meet all of the essential criteria. It is critical to the success of the selection process that appropriate selection criteria are established at the beginning of the process: it defines the type of candidate we are looking for. It is against the criteria that all subsequent information and evidence must be sought, questioned and evaluated.

### **Developing Selection Criteria**

Well developed criteria assist in attracting the right candidates and provide the means to properly distinguish between candidates. In this respect they should:

- ☞ Relate directly to the tasks and functions required of the position
- ☞ Be capable of measurement at a level appropriate to the position
- ☞ Be fair and objective

In developing selection criteria it is helpful to:

- ✓ Refer to each of the primary tasks of the position and consider which skills, etc. are required to perform each task
- ✓ Determine what level of skills etc. is necessary to perform each task
- ✓ Determine how you would measure whether a candidate has the necessary skills, etc.
- ✓ Test whether the selection criteria are capable of measurement

Academic position descriptions must include an essential selection criterion that states “demonstrated ability to meet and continue to meet the Performance Expectations for the relevant Academic Level and/or Field of Research. An equivalent statement must be made in the list of duties/accountabilities that the appointee is expected to meet or exceed the relevant performance expectations on a continuing basis. Experience has shown that the common mistakes in developing selection criteria occur where:

- ☛ The criteria do not relate to all of the primary tasks required of the position
- ☛ The measurement is too low in which case most candidates will satisfy them
- ☛ The measurement is too high in which case it may create incorrect expectations of what the position entails and attract candidates who are ‘over qualified’ for the position and deter appropriately qualified candidates from applying
- ☛ The wrong measurement is used. For example, a selection criteria may ask for ‘a minimum of 5 years’ supervisory experience’ when a more useful measurement would be ‘a demonstrated ability to supervise staff’

### **Discriminatory Selection Criteria**

Discriminatory language or statements concerning gender, race, cultural background must not be used. The golden rule is that criteria should be fair, objective, measurable and directly relevant to the inherent requirements of the position.

*Example: it would be **inappropriate** for the University to require a staff member to hold a driver’s license if there were no essential functions requiring driving.*

*Example: it would be **appropriate** for the University to require that the successful candidate for a Switchboard Operator demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in the English language.*

### **Classifying the Position**

In drafting position descriptions care must be given to specifying the level of knowledge, experience or training having regard to the responsibilities of the position. The classification of the position will be determined having regard to the Minimum Standards for Academic Levels and the Professional Staff Position Classification Criteria.

### **Minimum Standards for Academic Levels**

A Job and Performance Expectations within provide a **reference point** (ARP) for both applicants and decision-makers in recruitment, appointment, and probation. In creating

Position Descriptions, selection criteria must reflect the Performance Expectations of the company for the Academic Level, workload allocation and Field of Research (*if there is one listed*).

### **Professional Staff Position Classification Criteria**

All professional staff positions are classified in accordance with the **Higher Education Officer (HEO)** Levels 1-10 classification structure which was established and implemented on a national basis in 1993. Most classifications structure is supported by the nationally-developed DWM classification descriptions for each of the **Higher Education Officer (HEO)** levels, which set out matters such as typical duties and prerequisite educational requirements which can be expected or required by the University for appointments at the various **Higher Education Officer (HEO)** levels.

Professional staff positions are graded by Human Resources with reference to the DWM classification descriptions and to the enhanced Classification Descriptors for each of occupational streams. These enhanced descriptors represent an expansion of the DWM classification descriptions in terms of the typical duties and activities which staff can be expected to perform.

### **6.2 Attracting Applications And Selecting Applicants For Interview**

**Drafting Advertisements** - The purpose of advertising is to bring the vacancy to the attention of the greatest number of suitable applicants in a way that encourages them to apply. In drafting the advertisement consideration should be given to:

- What publications will be read by the target group
- Whether the position should be advertised locally, nationally, or internationally
- How the advertisement can be written to attract the attention of suitable applicants
- Whether you need to take special measures to attract applications from disadvantaged or under-represented groups, e.g. Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders, Women, or People with disabilities

#### **Draft advertisements should contain the following details:**

- 1) School or Section
- 2) Position title
- 3) Period/nature of Appointment
- 4) Summary of primary tasks – the summary should be clear and concise and reflect the position description
- 5) Skills, experience and qualifications required of applicants – this should reflect the selection criteria
- 6) Classification and Salary

- 7) Name and telephone number of the contact officer. NOTE: the contact officer should have an understanding of the requirements of the position and should normally be the immediate supervisor of the position.
- 8) Closing date for the receipt of applications

### **Dealing with Enquiries**

The contact officer should have an understanding of the requirements of the position and would normally be the immediate supervisor of the position. It is important that all staff who have contact with potential applicants interact with them in a discreet, professional and non-discriminatory manner. The following guidelines are provided:

- ✓ Respond in an informed, courteous and helpful manner, which will give a good impression of the company.
- ✓ Encourage enquirers to study the position description and selection criteria
- ✓ Be careful to avoid discriminatory comments or questions. Do not ask personal questions like “*are you married?*” or “*do you have children?*”

### **Shortlisting**

The purpose of shortlisting is to select from the applications received a smaller group who appear to meet the selection criteria at the highest levels. The first step in shortlisting is to assess if applicants appear to meet the essential criteria. Applications should then be considered against the desirable criteria. It is not necessary that every applicant who appears to meet all the essential criteria be interviewed. Ideally the number of candidates invited for interview should be 3 or 4.

At least two members of the selection committee must be involved in the shortlisting process, however any member of the committee has the right to review the applications received and make a reasoned request to the Chair for the inclusion of any other applicant(s).

### **Shortlisting Internal Candidates**

Encourage staff to apply for positions for developmental and career purposes, internal candidates should only be invited for interview on merit and should not be invited to interview as a token or goodwill gesture.

### **6.3 The Interviewing Process**

The interview provides the opportunity to meet with a candidate and to exchange information. The selection committee will obtain information and evidence which will assist in making a judgment about the candidates' suitability for the position. At the same time, candidates will be obtaining further information about the position and the company, which in turn will allow them to make an informed decision as to whether they in fact 'want the job'.

The interview is part of a total selection process which aims to uncover as much relevant information and evidence as possible upon which to make a decision. It can be

a costly error to mistake a candidate's 'performance' at interview for evidence of a candidate's capacity to do the job.

### **Physical Structure of the Interview**

In preparing for the interview, the following factors are important to consider:

- ☞ Whether the interview room will be clean, tidy and have adequate lighting & access to the room
- ☞ Seating arrangements to allow for easy access and to make candidates feel at ease
- ☞ Glasses of water for candidates and selection committee members
- ☞ Actions to ensure that there are no interruptions
- ☞ How much time will be adequate for each interview
- ☞ Whether each selection committee member understands the position and the selection criteria
- ☞ Arrangements to ensure that each selection committee member has a copy of the agenda, the position description and a copy of the written applications of shortlisted candidates

### **The Role of the Chair**

While all committee members should be actively involved in the interview process, the Chair has ultimate responsibility for controlling the overall proceedings. This includes the following responsibilities:

- 1) Outlining to candidates how the interview will be conducted
- 2) Ensuring that the interview maintains its basic structure and that selection criteria are systematically examined
- 3) Ensuring that all aspects of the selection process are conducted fairly and without bias
- 4) Confirming all written evidence of qualifications, experience, etc
- 5) Raising any issues which require clarification or queries relating to referee reports during interview (if reports have been obtained in advance)
- 6) Concluding the interview by allowing the candidate to seek or present any further relevant information which may or may not have been covered in the interview
- 7) Advising the candidates when they are likely to be notified of the final decision and of any likely delays
- 8) Co-ordinating discussion of all available information to ensure the best selection decision is made on the basis of the relative merit of each applicant according to the selection criteria
- 9) Preparing the minutes & Signing the minutes

## Putting the Candidate at Ease

People respond in different ways to interviews. Some are expert at presenting themselves confidently at an interview, while others may be shy at 'selling themselves'. The majority of candidates do not present themselves as they will in their normal work situation. It is important to remember that the aim of the interview is to uncover as much information and evidence as possible about a candidate's ability to do a job, not to evaluate how well they 'perform' at an interview. **Most candidates will reveal more information about themselves if they are at ease.** To put a candidate at ease, the following may help:

- a) Ensure that selection committee members are well briefed and are at ease
- b) Candidates should be welcomed and introduced to members of the selection committee and advised of each member's relationship to the position and their role on the committee
- c) Begin by asking straightforward questions such as recent work history or educational achievements
- d) Portray a sense of interest in the candidate, e.g. look at the candidate and do not look out of windows or fix your gaze on pictures on walls etc.
- e) Provide the candidate with some verbal or visual feedback in response to their answers, e.g. smile or nod at the candidate. Follow up on answers in a way which portrays that you are interested in what the candidate is saying and that you have read their written application

## Preparing Key Questions

The fundamental purpose of questions is to obtain information and evidence which will assist in making a reasoned judgement of a candidate's suitability for a position against the selection criteria. A series of questions related to the requirements of the position, based on the previously defined selection criteria, should be agreed to before interviews commence. These core questions should be asked of all candidates, however this does not preclude follow up questions. **'Gut' feelings can be a good thing, but make sure you use questions to test the validity of your feelings.**

- 1) In asking questions, the aim is to get the candidate to do the answering. Avoid talking too much and be careful that you are not in fact answering your own questions. In preparing key questions, it is helpful to: determine whether the question fits a selection criterion
- 2) Determine what range of responses you are looking for
- 3) Test the questions by answering them yourself
- 4) Keep the questions short and clear to encourage the candidate to do most of the talking & avoid asking multiple questions at a time

## Types of questions

There are a range of types of questions which should be considered:

- a) Opening questions - this type of question asks **"why", "how" "explain"**. They encourage the candidate to do the talking. It is recommended that 80% of questions be 'open' questions.

- b) Closed questions – this type of question will often result in a **‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer**, e.g. Do you like teaching? If you had in fact wanted to find out more about a candidate’s attitude to teaching you could have asked “What do you like/dislike about teaching?” A closed question can be useful if you find that answers to other questions have been ambiguous or when you want a direct answer.
- c) Probing or follow-up questions– these are usually a series of questions which are used to **gain a fuller set of information**, e.g. first question “Could you tell me what supervisory experience you have had?” First follow up question “How many staff did you supervise?” Second follow up question “As a supervisor, did you engage in performance management?’ etc. It depends, of course, on what type of information you are after and the responses of the candidate to the questions.
- d) Hypothetical questions – this type of question is usually of limited use. They can be used to **get attitudes on subjects** e.g. “How would you handle a staff member who is not performing adequately?” Beware that you may get a ‘model’ answer which does not reflect how the candidate would in fact behave.
- e) Critical incident – this type of question will ask the candidate to provide an example of **a past incident**, in order to assess responses to future events, e.g. *“Can you give me an example of how you have handled a staff member who was not performing adequately?”* A follow-up question could be to ask *“Would you handle a similar situation in the same way?”* The answer to the first question should be capable of being checked with a referee. The answer to the second question will give you an insight as to whether the candidate has a fuller understanding of the issues and has gained experience and knowledge.

### **Inappropriate Questions**

Of vital importance to the process is ensuring selection committee members do not ask questions which may be considered discriminatory. For example:

- ☠ “Are you married?”
- ☠ “Do you have a family?”
- ☠ “Who collects the children after school?”

This type of questioning is inappropriate and may result in a claim of discrimination.

It is also important not to make assumptions. Not only can they lead to discriminatory questions, they can be wrong and miss the point. **For example, it is wrong to assume that a woman or man with children will not be prepared to work outside of normal working hours.** Similarly, a person without children may have commitments outside of normal working hours.

If the selection committee wishes to assess the suitability of a candidate for appointment to a particular position which may involve work outside of normal hours, the committee could ask “Is there anything which would preclude you from working the

hours of duty outlined?” This style of question would normally be asked towards the end of the interview. The committee will have already established the credentials of the candidate, the candidate will have been made aware of the working conditions and is then in a position to assess the impact on their own life. The question should be asked of all candidates.

### **Dealing with Prior Knowledge and Hearsay**

Sometimes a member of a selection committee knows one or more of the candidates for a position. He/she may have information or knowledge which is additional to, or different from, the information contained in the application and/or referee reports. This information may affect his/her judgment of the candidate.

In general, only such information should be disclosed to the selection committee as relates to the selection criteria, and is capable of being verified. Information that is not relevant to the candidate’s ability to do the job should **not** be disclosed. It is important that the committee member does not use such irrelevant and prejudicial information in making his/her decision.

If there are any relevant concerns about the ability of the candidate to perform a job, the candidate should be given the opportunity to address the concerns at the interview and referees should be checked. If a member of a selection committee wishes to have additional information included in the selection process, they should raise the matters with the Chair of the committee, and seek ways of verifying it before the committee meets. A member of a selection committee must withdraw from membership of the committee if they believe that they have information about a candidate which will, or may, preclude them from making an objective judgment.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Where there may be a possible conflict of interest, selection committee members need to alert the Chair as early as possible in the process. Family and other close personal relationships as well as business relationships must be declared. The Chair and the committee member must be satisfied that there is in fact no conflict of interest which will preclude a member from participating in the decision making process. Your Human Resource HR Advisor can give guidance where there is uncertainty as to what may constitute a conflict of interest.

#### **6.4 Referees**

Referee Reports - Referee reports are an important part in the selection process in obtaining or checking information. A referee report can provide valuable information and evidence as to a candidate’s performance in a previous employment situation which may assist in predicting a candidate’s likely future performance. Referees who have recent knowledge of an applicant, who have been or are a supervisor and who are not a ‘personal friend’ of a candidate are usually the most valuable sources of information. It is important to note, however, that referee reports should not be relied upon solely as the reason for a particular decision.

Referee reports may have a number of limitations, including:

- a) Candidates usually name referees who they believe will provide positive comments
- b) Referees will not always have a detailed understanding of the company's work environment
- c) Referees may have an interest in either keeping a valued employee or in losing an under-performing employee
- d) The ability of referees to provide an objective reference may vary
- e) Referees may only report on positive aspects of an employee's performance and not report on any weaknesses

### **Written Referee Reports**

Written reports are usually obtained after shortlisting, and before interviews, to assist the selection committee in making a decision. A report which is obtained before interviews provides the opportunity to investigate particular matters which may be identified in the referee report with a candidate during the interview. In order that the same range and type of information is obtained for each candidate the position description and selection criteria must be provided to referees requesting comment on the candidate's suitability for the position. Written referee reports are requested by Human Resources. After having interviewed a candidate, the selection committee may find it useful to seek an additional verbal report from the referee.

### **Verbal Referee Reports**

Verbal reports are usually sought following interview. This provides a means of checking matters raised during the interview and/or to directly ask the referee questions which may have not been addressed in the written report. It is good practice to check if the referee would like a copy of the position description and selection criteria before providing the reference.

Before contacting a referee for a verbal report, it is useful to write down the questions which you would like to ask. Ask questions which relate to the selection criteria and which will give you factual information and evidence. Focus on strengths as well as weaknesses. A very useful question can be to ask the referee whether he/she would re-hire the candidate. A negative response may require some further probing.

### **Where a Selection committee Member is Also a Referee**

It is possible that a candidate may nominate a selection committee member as a referee. In most cases, such a member has a detailed knowledge of a candidate's skills and ability and the information will be very useful to the committee as a whole. It is important, however, that the committee member does not act as an advocate for the candidate. It may also be useful to obtain an additional referee report

## **6.5 Making The Decision**

A Matter of Judgment - A decision on which candidate to appoint will be made on merit. This is always a matter of judgment made by members of the selection committee who will need to carefully consider all the information and evidence

obtained with regard to shortlisted candidates. The sources for such information and evidence will include the written application, information obtained from the candidate at interview, written and /or verbal referee reports, formal qualifications, and results of tests if these have been conducted.

### **Process**

It is helpful to first identify any interviewee whom the selection committee regard as 'not appointable'. This will narrow the field down to the 'appointable' candidates. Consider each of these remaining candidates' strengths and weaknesses against the selection criteria. Some committees prefer to do this by giving each candidate a mark against each of the criteria and by weighting the criteria. This can be useful, but remember that it is only a tool in helping the decision making process.

### **Weight Given to Potential**

All candidates who are offered a position at the University must meet the essential criteria at a base level. Future potential may validly be used by a selection committee as an aspect in making their judgment about the most meritorious candidate. The committee will need to take into account the length of the appointment and how quickly they believe a candidate with higher potential will exceed another candidate who has "more runs on the board". They will also need to be clear on what evidence they base such a judgment.

### **Making the Offer**

If a decision is made to make an offer the selection committee should reach agreement on the following:

- a) Commencing salary, which should be within the advertised range and commensurate with the applicant's relevant qualifications, skills and experience
- b) Starting date
- c) Probationary period
- d) Any conditions which must be met during a probationary period

It is usual for the selection committee to consider the eventuality that a preferred candidate does not accept the offer. The committee will either identify the second candidate who is to be offered the position together with the conditions of offer, or will agree to reconvene in the case of the preferred candidate not accepting the offer. A candidate should not be offered the position until after Human Resources has endorsed the selection committee minutes and the preferred candidate has completed a Pre-Employment Health Report form. Human Resources will prepare the written offer to be sent to the preferred candidate.

### **Post-Interview Counseling**

Internal candidates may request post-interview counseling from the Chair of the selection committee. Such discussions should concentrate firstly on the specific reasons for non-selection in relation to the selection criteria and secondly on an indication of strengths and weaknesses and how the latter might be improved.